



Lavrov writes Zarif, says sanctions hampers coronavirus fight **2**



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Copper projects worth over \$950m inaugurated



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Maximum pressure on Iran an 'abject failure', Foreign Ministry says

TEHRAN — Concurrent with the second anniversary of the U.S. unilateral exit from the 2015 nuclear agreement, the Iranian Foreign Ministry has said Washington's maximum pressure campaign has ended up being an "abject failure".

In a series of tweets on Friday, the Foreign Ministry wrote, "Two years ago today, the American regime, in a vain attempt, withdrew unlawfully from a multilateral

agreement 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action' (#JCPOA), endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231."

"The 'Max Pressure' campaign, which went into full gear by US withdrawal from #JCPOA, proved to be an abject failure in terms of political gains; however if its aim was to impose pain on Iranian patients & to kill kids, then it has had achieved this. #Never_Trust_Irresponsible_US" **→3**

Magnitude 5.1 quake in Tehran province kills 2, injures 33

TEHRAN — An earthquake measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale shook Tehran province early on Friday, killing two and injuring 33.

The earthquake occurred at 00:48 a.m. at a depth of 7 kilometers near the city of Damavand, 56km northeast of Tehran.

The tremor was also felt in the surrounding provinces of Qom, Alborz, Mazandaran, and Zanzan.

Esmaeil Najjar, head of the Crisis Management Organization, said a 60-year-old man in Damavand lost his life due to a brain injury.

Mansour Darajati, Tehran province's Crisis Management Department director general, told Mehr that a 21-year-old woman has also died following a cardiac arrest. Moreover, 33 people were injured, of whom four have been hospitalized, IRNA reported. **→9**

UN Security Council to address Israel's annexation plan later this month

A high-ranking Palestinian official says the UN Security Council is scheduled to convene later this month to discuss Israel's controversial plan to annex much of the occupied West Bank, and to rally international pressure on the regime to abandon the decision.

Palestinian Ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour told the official Voice of Palestine radio station on Thursday that a meeting will be held on the 20th of this month, with

the rotating President of the UN Security Council, Sven Jürgenson, and President of the UN General Assembly, Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, in attendance, Palestine's official Wafa news agency reported.

Mansour highlighted that the State of Palestine is resolved to form "a powerful and broad international front of all components of the international community to confront the [Israeli] policies of annexation." **→10**



ARTICLE

Mohammad Jafari
Tehran Times journalist

Which Arab rulers trying hard to remain in power via appeasing Israel?

Certain Arab rulers, mainly along the southern coast of the Persian Gulf, have resorted to propagating a series of fake historical fables to pave the ground better than ever to normalize relations with Israel to enjoy more supports by the Tel Aviv and its western allies, ignoring the Palestinian cause and even their own people's viewpoints.

Mohammad Ayesha, a senior journalist and analyst, has condemned approach of a new generation of Arab rulers who try hard to resume all-out relations with Israel.

"There is a significant shift in the Arab world concerning relations with Israel. Jordan and Egypt previously signed peace agreements with Tel Aviv and established public and official relations with the occupying power. However, the current situation in the Arab region is unprecedented. In the past, no one was trying to pave the way for normalization with the occupation through offending Palestinians or demonizing them, nor trying to portray the occupation as a victim that must be compensated for the years of deprivation in which it was regarded an outcast in our Arab region," Ayesha wrote in his article published by the Middle East Monitor.

The new normalization campaign, based in the Persian Gulf area, appears clearly in the Ramadan drama shows of a number of the Persian Gulf states. It cost huge budgets and is characterized this time by an attempt to change the ideological logic adopted by the public towards Palestine a matter that is unique. Historically, countries such as Jordan and Egypt attempted only to persuade people of justifications that drive them to establish relations with Tel Aviv, but never tried to change the perception of the occupation.

Rather, Jordan and Egypt continue to consider Israel as an occupying country and demanded that it abides by international resolutions. As for some the Persian Gulf countries, lies and fables are being promoted, such as, "Israel is mentioned in the Qur'an... it is the same as the Children of Israel... Palestinians sold their lands to the Jews..." **→7**

Iraqi MPs approve al-Kadhimi's cabinet, ending months of deadlock

By staff & agencies

The Iraqi parliament has approved the government of Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, ending six months of political deadlock in the Arab country.

In their Wednesday session, the lawmakers gave votes of confidence to Kadhimi's picks for the ministries of interior, defense, finance, and electricity, among others.

However, several ministerial candidates failed to get the lawmakers' approval, meaning Kadhimi will begin his term without a full government.

The parliamentarians rejected the incoming premier's picks for justice, agriculture and trade ministries.

They also postponed voting on the oil and foreign ministries as political parties failed to agree on candidates.

On April 9, Iraqi President Barham Saleh officially tasked Kadhimi with forming a government after the 53-year-old director of the country's National Intelligence Service received the endorsement of the majority of the top political figures.

"I will work tirelessly to present Iraqis with a program and cabinet that will work to serve them, protect their rights and take Iraq towards a prosperous future," Kadhimi wrote on his official Twitter page.

He will replace caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi, who stepped down last November following demonstrations against corruption, staggering youth unemployment and poor public services, which erupted in the capital Baghdad and then quickly spread to other cities.

U.S. pulling Patriot missiles from Saudi oil facilities

By staff & agencies

The United States is pulling its Patriot missile systems from Saudi soil as part of broader curbs on its military support for the Arab kingdom, a report says.

Citing unnamed U.S. officials, The Wall Street Journal reported that four Patriot surface-to-air missile batteries and dozens of military personnel will be removed from Saudi oil facilities.

The officials said the U.S. will also reduce its Navy presence in the Persian Gulf soon, adding that two jet fighter squadrons have already left the region.

The U.S. intensified its military presence in the region last year amid growing tensions with Iran. Part of the military hardware was deployed in September last year after a series of attacks

on Saudi oil facilities.

The developments come over two week after President Donald Trump said his administration will review a proposal to block Saudi crude oil shipments to the U.S. to try to save its struggling shale industry suffering from an unprecedented slump in demand and prices due to the novel coronavirus, and as fuel storage runs short.

In mid-April, Frank Fannon, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for energy resources, said the country could also impose tariffs on Saudi oil.

Trump had also warned Saudi Arabia earlier that month that he would end American military support for the kingdom if Riyadh did not end its oil price war with Russia and cut production.

In a phone call on April 2, the U.S. president

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince phones Iraqi PM Kadhimi

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has phoned Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa Kadhimi after Iraq formed a new government, reiterating the Kingdom's support for Iraq in achieving stability and security, according to an official statement.

Kadhimi, Iraq's intelligence chief and a former journalist, will head the new government. He will begin his term without a full Cabinet, however, after several ministerial candidates were rejected.

'Iraqi territory won't be used as launching ground against others'

Iraq's new Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi says his country would never allow outsiders to use the Arab country's territory for any act of aggression against others. **→10**

told Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that unless his country started cutting oil production, he would be unable to stop lawmakers from passing legislation to withdraw U.S. troops from the kingdom.

Oil issue

It was recently revealed that the United States military is in the process of removing the Patriot antimissile system it sent to Saudi Arabia following the drone strike on Aramco facilities in September, 2019. According to reports, the military personnel who were deployed to the region after the attacks are also leaving, two U.S. jet fighter squadrons have left and the U.S. military may soon decide to cut back on U.S. naval presence in the Persian Gulf, Forbes reported. **→10**



ARTICLE

Afshin Majlesi
Tehran Times journalist

Iran, quakes, and tourism

Early on Friday, an earthquake of magnitude 5.1 struck Damavand county, 56km northeast of the capital Tehran, killing two and injuring 33. It made an excuse for writing a note about the impact of natural disasters, specifically earthquakes, on tourism and cultural heritage.

Regarding Tehran, it should be reminded that the sprawling metropolis is situated on one of the world's most active seismic belts, which is thought to cause a severe earthquake in/ or near the city in the span every 150 years or so.

On a greater scale, the whole country is positioned in a region of active faults and hence high seismicity (some 80% of its land), is one of the highest-seismic-hazard areas in the world.

In terms of tourism, as you know, it's a large and unique assemblage of industrial sectors and related businesses that tightly work together both in domestic and local scenes.

Yet, tourism is a fairly vulnerable sector that could easily be affected by a wide variety of disasters, instabilities, whether being political, social, monetary, or regional ones. As you see, the latest blow to tourism could be deemed as a coronavirus outbreak.

Today, tourism is also the subject of great media attention, which could spur potential travelers to visit somewhere or trying to ban them; sometimes driven by political purposes.

Given the fact that no tourist destination is immune to such crisis points, we, here, will have a brief review of how earthquakes could pose challenges for tourism, especially for a country like Iran, a country that is very optimistic about the future of tourism due to assuming huge potentials in that regard.

Over the past couple of years, Iran has been regarding tourism as a reliable source of income and a driving force of economic development to be a substitute for its petrodollars.

Travel and tourism can generate a wide range of employment opportunities, especially for women and young people, even in villages, local communities or remote areas. **→8**



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The last supermoon of 2020

The flower supermoon rises above Howze Soltan salt lake, 85 km south of Tehran, on Thursday, May 7, 2020.

The year's final supermoon was at its most impressive, with the so-called 'Flower Moon' — named for the increased fertility of plants during early May — appearing six per cent larger than normal.

It occurs when the Moon is at its closest point to Earth in its monthly orbit. The next supermoon will occur March 28, 2021.

Russia says U.S. nuclear deal exit has deteriorated Persian Gulf security

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, has said that the United States' withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, has deteriorated security in the Persian Gulf region.

"Two years ago today #US withdrew from #JCPOA. Now we can see that this step resulted in deteriorated security in P. #Gulf, development of nuclear programme of #Iran beyond the agreed limits and desperate efforts of US to restore the status of a participant of the #IranDeal," Ulyanov tweeted on Friday.



In May 2019, exactly one year after the U.S. unilaterally quit the deal and imposed sanctions on Iran, Tehran began to gradually reduce its commitments under the JCPOA to both retaliate for Washington's departure and Europeans' failure to honor their commitments.

On January 5, Iran took a fifth and last step in reducing its commitments and said it would no longer observe any operational limitations on its nuclear industry, whether concerning the capacity and level of uranium enrichment, the volume of stockpiled uranium or research and development. However, Iran has insisted if the Europeans honor their obligations it will immediately reverse its decisions.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has said that Europe must ensure Iran's benefits from the nuclear deal if it wants the deal to survive.

President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that Iran will return to full implementation of the JCPOA if other signatories do the same.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is preparing an argument that the U.S. remains a participant in the Iran nuclear accord that President Trump has renounced, part of an intricate strategy to pressure the United Nations Security Council to extend an arms embargo on Tehran or see far more stringent sanctions reimposed on the country.

Elizabeth Warren, a former Democratic presidential candidate, has dismissed the argument by the Trump administration that the U.S. is still a party to the JCPOA, saying such an argument by the Trump administration, which has abandoned the nuclear deal with Iran, "makes no sense"

Under the JCPOA, the arms embargo against Iran expires in October.

Warren, a senator from Massachusetts, called on Pompeo to "make up" his "mind" whose department has presented a draft resolution to certain Security Council members in attempt to extend arms embargo otherwise invoke a restoration of previous UN sanctions against Iran lifted under the nuclear pact.

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

In a tweet on April, Ulyanov also said, "The US attempts to present itself as 'JCPOA participants' have no future. It is like common sense mockery. Those who invented this idea gave bad advice to US authorities. Cynical approaches must have their own limits in order not to compromise national policy to the worst extent."

In an interview with IRNA published on Sunday, the Russian diplomat also said the United States' attempt to extend arms embargo on Iran will reach nowhere.

Ulyanov added if the U.S. does not gain the UN Security Council's approval, it will try another way which will reach nowhere.

The Russian diplomat said that he believes that the U.S. officials are after annihilation of the JCPOA, however their effort seems to be fruitless.

Iran Intelligence Ministry busts two terrorist groups, confiscates their arms cache

(Press TV) — The Iranian Intelligence Ministry says it has dismantled two terrorist groups in the west and northwest of the country and confiscated a cache of arms from them.

The public relations and information department of the ministry said on Wednesday that it managed to monitor and destroy two terrorist outfits affiliated with separatist groups, who had crossed into the country from neighboring areas to carry out acts of terrorism.

According to the ministry, 16 members of the terrorist groups were arrested while two Kalashnikov assault rifles, a pistol, two grenades, seven magazines and 240 cartridges along with explosive devices were confiscated from them.

The ringleader is supported by one of the regional Arab reactionary countries, and is based in Europe, the report added, noting that some of the arrested terrorists were also involved in the assassination of defenseless people and extortion from manufacturers and traders in the west of the country.

A number of terrorists were also 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 were also martyred during the operation, it added.

Iran's Kordestan Province has seen numerous cross-border incursions by Iraq-based terrorists.

Iranian security forces have repeatedly disbanded terrorist outfits and killed their members during security operations near the western borders.

Iran urges U.S. to end unilateralism



POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has urged the United States to end its "abject unilateralism".

"JCPOA is neither the first nor the last of the multilateral achievements Trump withdrew from. The US regime has sought to secure its short-term interests at the cost of nations' long-term prosperity. The regime must END its abject unilateralism," he tweeted on Friday.

President Donald Trump officially withdrew the United States from the 2015 nuclear agreement, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA, in May 2018.

However, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is preparing an argument that the U.S. remains a participant in the Iran nuclear accord. That claim comes even as 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 claims it is still a participant in the JCPOA.

Seyed Yaser Ziaee, an international law professor, told the Tehran Times on Tuesday that "it is impossible for the U.S. to invoke the snapback mechanism because a country that is no longer a member of a treaty and has withdrawn from it, cannot refer to dispute mechanisms within it."

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 resolution," Rouhani told a cabinet meeting.

Under Resolution 2231, an arms embargo against Iran will expire on October 18.

In a tweet on May 5, Pompeo said, "What the American people should know is President Donald Trump is committed to using every tool we have to prevent the Iranians from getting more conventional arms. I am convinced that we have the capacity to do that."

In his interview with Fox New, Pompeo reiterated, "We're working with our British, our French partners, our friends, saying you all know this doesn't make sense either. I think they agree with us on that. We hope the Russians and the Chinese will see it that way, too. But make no mistake about it; we're going to use every tool we can in our diplomatic capability to ensure that that prohibition on arms sales to Iran doesn't expire in just a handful of months."

Moscow has repeatedly noted that it will oppose the extension of the arms embargo on Tehran, and Beijing isn't likely to go along with Washington's proposal either. China and Russia have veto power on the UN Security Council.

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."

Lavrov writes Zarif, says illegal sanctions hampers coronavirus fight

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — In a letter to Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Thursday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said that the United States' "illegal sanctions" against Iran hamper fight against the coronavirus outbreak.

"Russia constantly notes illegal nature of the United States' unilateral sanctions on Iran. We have always called on the United States to remove the sanctions and stop obstructing fight against the coronavirus," Lavrov stated.

The Russian diplomat also urged the European countries not to be afraid of the U.S. threats and continue interaction with Iranian partners.

"Our persistent and coordinated diplomacy with like-minded countries will bring about certain results. In his letter to heads of G20 countries, [Antonio] Guterres, the UN Secretary General, urged removal of sanctions. Michelle Bachelet, the UN high commissioner, has made criticisms regarding the human rights," Lavrov stated.

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

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

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

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



Bachelet also said on March 24 that "in a context of a global pandemic, impeding medical efforts in one country heightens the risk for all of us."

"At this crucial time, both for global public health reasons, and to support the rights and lives of millions of people in these countries, sectoral sanctions should be eased or suspended," she said in a statement.

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 May 2.

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

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

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

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

In a phone conversation with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Tuesday, President Hassan Rouhani said, "Unfortunately, the United States' illegal sanctions against the Iranian people have been tightened in the difficult situation of fighting the coronavirus and its economic consequences."

He added that Iran faces many problems in accessing medical equipment due to the sanctions.

Rouhani also said that fighting the coronavirus pandemic requires all countries' cooperation.

Abe described the U.S. sanctions on Iran as "wrong". "In this situation, all countries must put humanitarian actions on agenda," the Japanese leader noted.

Professor says U.S. sanctions harming Iranians' health

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Marvin Zonis, a professor at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, has said that the United States' sanctions harm the Iranian people's health.

"These sanctions cause harms to the Iranian people's health. There is no doubt that the people of Iran are suffering from the sanctions," Zonis told ILNA in an interview published on Wednesday.

He urged Washington to revise its policy of imposing sanctions.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said the Trump administration is promoting its "economic terrorism to medical terrorism" against Iran.

In an interview with IRNA published on April 25, Caleb Maupin, an American analyst, said that the U.S. sanctions on Iran while the country is fighting the coronavirus pandemic has revealed Washington's "inhuman" image.

Maupin said that the U.S. sanctions violate international law.

Maupin said that the U.S. sanctions have impeded Iran's access to medicine and medical equipment.

Over 70 civil society groups representing more than 40 million people urged U.S.

President Donald Trump on April 23 to issue immediate sanctions relief for numerous countries, including Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba, and North Korea, for at least the duration of the coronavirus crisis which threatens to kill thousands in the hard-hit countries.

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

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

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

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

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

A leaked intelligence brief reveals U.S. sanctions have "left Iran bereft of financial resources to mount an effective public health response," according to The Nation.

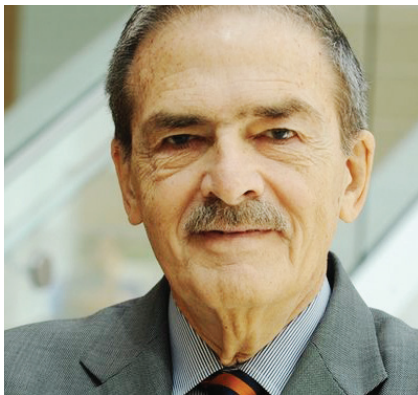
Citing the military intelligence cable, The Nation reported on April 22 that the U.S. sanctions have "badly crippled" Iran's economy as well as its ability to respond to the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The document, which dated April 3, warns that U.S. sanctions have left Iran "unable to order ventilators from abroad, which are crucial for treatment."

One segment of the briefing says "President Trump refuses to let up on choke hold."

Norman Roule, a retired CIA official who served as national intelligence manager for Iran until 2017, told The Nation that the international community should do everything it can to enable the Iranian people to obtain access to medical supplies and equipment partly because "as Iranians travel throughout the region, they will continue to disperse the virus."

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 epidemic.

Murphy also 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.

Maximum pressure on Iran an 'abject failure', Foreign Ministry says

Tehran censures U.S. JCPOA withdrawal on 2nd anniversary

1→ It added, "According to the @pewresearch 2019 global survey, majority of the western public opinions did disapprove Trump's decision to exit the #JCPOA. Its main finding: Donald Trump's Iran policy has undeniably been failed & led to the US regime's isolation."

Under the nuclear agreement, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), struck in July 2015, Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear program in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

The agreement, endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231, was signed between Iran, the United States, Britain, Germany, France, the European Union, Russia, and China. However, U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned the deal on May 8, 2018 and returned sanctions and imposed new ones.

On May 8, 2019, exactly one year after the U.S. abandoned the deal, Tehran began to partially reduce its commitments to the agreement at bi-monthly intervals.

Finally, on January 5 of this year, Iran issued a statement announcing suspension of all limits under the JCPOA.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran no longer faces limitations on the capacity of enrichment, purity of enrichment, amount of enriched material and research and development," the statement said.

The statement added that Iran will continue cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

It is noted in the statement that Iran will reverse its decision once the sanctions are removed and the country enjoys the benefits of the nuclear deal.



The Foreign Ministry says if the U.S. aim behind maximum pressure was to "impose pain on Iranian patients and to kill kids, then it has had achieved this."

U.S. Senate fails to contain Trump's Iran war powers

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The U.S. Senate on Thursday failed to override a presidential veto of a War Powers resolution that would have required the U.S. president to seek congressional authorization before taking any military action against Iran.

The vote was 49-44. A two-thirds majority would have been required for a successful override, which was not expected to happen after President Donald Trump vetoed the resolution on Wednesday, the CNN reported.

In a statement released by the White House, U.S. President Donald Trump portrayed the measure as not only an encroachment on his presidential powers but also a personal political attack.

"This was a very insulting resolution, introduced by Democrats as part of a strategy to win an election on November 3 by dividing the Republican Party," Trump said. "The few



Republicans who voted for it played right into their hands." The resolution called for "the President to terminate the

use of United States Armed Forces for hostilities against the Islamic Republic of Iran or any part of its government or military, unless explicitly authorized by a declaration of war or specific authorization for use of military force against Iran."

Its chief sponsor, Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia, described the measure as an important reassertion of congressional power to declare war, saying it was not about Trump or even the presidency.

"It's not insulting. It's our job," he said ahead of Thursday's vote, adding the measure was introduced "to stop an unnecessary war."

"Congress needed to stand up in a bipartisan way to make plain that this president should not get into a war with Iran, or any war, without a vote of Congress," said Kaine. "Congress has expressed what is the popular will."

'Calling for dialogue with Trump shows no understanding of power politics'

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Calling for negotiation with U.S. President Donald Trump shows no understanding of power politics, says Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian Parliament speaker.

"As Trump ordered counter-terrorism commander Soleimani's assassination & new sanctions on Flag of Iran, calling for negotiation w/ Trump shows no understanding abt power politics," Amir Abdollahian said via Twitter on Thursday.

"The White House is a 'LIES warehouse'," he said. "Never forget Flag of United States didn't lift Iran's medical sanction amid #CoronaCrisis."

Despite the deleterious effects of the U.S. sanctions on Iran's fight against the coronavirus outbreak, the Trump administration is not only refusing to remove its illegal sanctions on Iran, it is also blocking Tehran's efforts to get an emergency loan from the International

Monetary Fund to cope with the disease. President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday that the United States' illegal sanctions against the Iranian people have been tightened in the difficult situation of fighting the coronavirus and its economic consequences.

Rouhani said Iran faces many problems in accessing medical equipment due to the sanctions, adding that fighting the coronavirus pandemic requires all countries' cooperation.

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 May 2.

Speaking from his office in self-isolation to Croatian philosopher and author Srećko Horvat in April, Chomsky blasted

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.

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

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

Elver, an independent expert, said that it was a matter of "humanitarian and practical urgency to lift unilateral



economic sanctions immediately".

In a telephone conversation on Wednesday, the Iranian and Austrian presidents expressed opposition to the persisting U.S. sanctions, saying the bans constitute an obstacle to provision of medical supplies needed to combat the new coronavirus pandemic gripping the world.

President Rouhani and his Austrian counterpart Alexander Van der Bellen stressed the need for comprehensive international cooperation to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

Iran has gotten nothing from U.S. 'humanitarian' channel: Daily Beast

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran has not received nothing from the humanitarian channel set up by the Trump administration to get medicine and other supplies into Iran, The Daily Beast said in a report on Friday.

The following is an excerpt of the report:

The humanitarian banking channel set up by the Trump administration to get medicine and other supplies into Iran—a politically calculated show of compassion amid otherwise draconian U.S. sanctions—has not in fact processed any potentially life-saving transactions, the Swiss government confirmed to The Daily Beast.

Announced in late January and declared operational a month later, the channel, known as the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA), was supposed to ensure that "humanitarian goods continue to reach the Iranian people without diversion by the regime," as Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said on Feb. 27.

But it's not happening—at a time when, according to Johns Hopkins University, the novel coronavirus has infected an estimated 103,000 Iranians and killed at least 6,486.

"No transactions have yet been carried out. Unfortunately, this whole process has been slower than expected because of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Fabian Maienfisch, a spokesman for Switzerland's State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), which oversees the channel.

The moribund state of the channel contrasts with the fanfare with which the Trump administration announced it. To show that the "maximum pressure" sanctions campaign is not consigning Iranians to their fate during the pandemic, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on March 17, "We have an open humanitarian channel to facilitate legitimate transactions even while ensuring our maximum pressure campaign denies..."

Knowledgeable observers say the way the channel is



structured places substantial burdens in the way of companies looking to sell Iran humanitarian supplies.

Set up through the Swiss bank BCP, compliance requirements for making use of the channel are elevated by design, to provide the U.S. with an assurance that the money won't be diverted into any Iranian military or other effort. The Treasury Department boasted in February of the "enhanced due diligence" participating financial institutions will need to perform.

"The reporting requirements are overkill. If it takes three months for a company to get the paperwork in order to even use the channel, it's disingenuous for the administration to suggest it has done everything it can to ease humanitarian trade during a pandemic emergency," said Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj of Bourse & Bazaar, which tracks the Iranian economy.

Batmanghelidj was first to spot that the SHTA has not processed any transactions since a January pilot effort.

In an indication of the bureaucracy involved in the SHTA, Maienfisch told The Daily Beast, "Swiss export and trade companies that are interested in participating

are currently collecting the necessary information and documents to be submitted to SECO."

Queried by The Daily Beast, the Treasury Department declined comment beyond pointing to its Feb. 27 announcement that the SHTA channel is operational.

"It's unfortunate that the Iranian government turned down our offer of humanitarian assistance for COVID-19. Our priority has been to stand with the Iranian people—and this offer is still on the table," a State Department spokesperson said.

At least one concern critics of "maximum pressure" had about the humanitarian-trade channel appears not to have manifested. It had been unclear from the SHTA's establishment if Iran could transfer its foreign currency reserves held in other banks into BCP for the purchase of medical goods and food.

Maienfisch clarified that Iran can put money it's got outside BCP into the Swiss bank. "We are currently working on transfers to put additional funds into the SHTA with support from the U.S. side. There is nothing to clarify, as the need to regularly replenish the funds at BCP is understood and accepted by all parties involved," he said.

Maximum pressure does not formally bar food, medicine or related goods from entering Iran. But Batmanghelidj said Iran continued to face weaknesses in its medical supply chain, something the SHTA was meant to alleviate.

"Launching the Swiss channel was an admission by the Trump administration that the 'maximum pressure' sanctions do in fact restrict humanitarian trade, thereby harming ordinary Iranians," he said. "Failing to ensure the channel could actually operate while Iran confronted a global pandemic makes clear that some people in the administration just don't care about the harm they are causing."

Zarif felicitates Iraq over formation of new government

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has congratulated Iraq for succeeding to form a new government.

"Congratulations to Prime Minister @MAKadhimi, his Cabinet, the Parliament and most importantly the people of Iraq for success in forming a new Government," Zarif tweeted on Thursday.



"Iran always stands with the Iraqi people and their choice of administration," he added.

Kadhimi formally took office early Thursday after parliament approved a partial cabinet, taking the reins amid a fiscal crisis and a health pandemic.

A total of 255 of parliament's 329 members took part in the vote, which was scheduled to take place at 9:00 pm local but began well after midnight after last-minute changes to appease political parties, AFP reported.

They approved 15 ministers out of a prospective 22-seat cabinet, with seven ministries still empty.

Among the names passed were sensitive portfolios including the ministers of finance, interior, defense, health, electricity and others.

Army chief of staff Othman al-Ghanemi will become Interior Minister and the national football team's ex-coach Adnan Dirjal passed as Youth and Sports Minister.

Ali Allawi, a former minister and university professor, will take over as finance minister.

Parliament rejected Kadhimi's nominees for trade, culture, justice, agriculture and immigration, and did not vote on the sensitive oil or foreign affairs posts, delaying them for another session.

Kadhimi was nominated in April, months after his predecessor Adel Abdel Mahdi stepped down — the first time a premier has resigned before the end of his term since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003.

The new government is set to hold early elections, but Kadhimi admitted it would face a litany of other challenges: navigating an economic crisis spurred by oil price crashes and the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

"I am honored and privileged to be charged with forming the government during the transitional period and having to deal with the current crises that only exacerbated since the overthrow of the authoritarian regime in 2003," he told gathered MPs.

Iran, Russia highlight boosting ties

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali has discussed strengthening bilateral ties with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov.

In a phone conversation, the two exchanged views on bilateral and international cooperation, Iran Press reported on Friday.

The two sides discussed illegal U.S. efforts to extend arms embargo on Iran; Iran's nuclear activities and cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); baseless allegations made by Western countries about Iran's space activities; the politicization of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) affairs by the U.S.; and the fight against Coronavirus.

In the end, the two diplomats stressed that close and extensive consultations between diplomatic authorities should continue.

World Red Cross Day reminder of joint action against global threats: Tehran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — In a congratulatory message on the World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said no global threat can defeat multilateralism and collective cooperation.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi congratulated the World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day in a message on his Twitter account on Friday.



"Neither the COVID-19 pandemic, nor the growing unilateralism, nor the chain of sanctions can sound the death knell for convergence and multilateralism," he said.

"Cooperation has risen like a phoenix from the ashes of crisis," the Iranian spokesman added.

"The World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day is reminiscent of pure models for the fight against the global threats," Mousavi noted. World Red Cross Red Crescent Day is celebrated on May 8 every year.

The day is the anniversary of the birth of Henry Dunant, who was born on May 8, 1828, and was the founder of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the first Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Housing price down in Tehran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**— According to a recent report released by the planning and economic affairs department of Iran's Ministry of Transport and Urban Development, the housing price in Tehran city has dropped two percent in Farvardin, which is the first month of the Iranian calendar year (March 20-April 19).

The report put the average price of one square meter of a house at 155.4 million rials (about \$3,700) at the capital city, which was two percent lower than the average price in the last month of the previous year, IRNA reported.



As previously reported, the number of real estate deals in Iran has dropped 52 percent in the first month of this year compared to the same month in the past year.

The number of deals has also fallen 70 percent to 1,250 in the capital city, Tehran, during the mentioned month.

The number of real estate deals in the country had fallen 70 percent in the last month of the past Iranian calendar year, Esfand (ended on March 19), which was the highest drop that this sector has experienced over the past three years, according to Hesam Oqbaei, the vice-chairman of Iranian Real Estate Agencies.

"Last year, when house prices experienced a 100-percent growth, rent prices rose by as much as 30 percent. Of course, this year we anticipate that rent growth will not reach inflation and will stay below the inflation rate," according to Hesam Oqbaei, the deputy head of Tehran Real Estate Association.

The housing market is experiencing inflation and rise in prices, both in terms of rentals and sales, but the rise in prices is not going to be like the last year's sudden surge, he said on May 2.

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

Noting that the government planned to provide financial facilities for the low-class tenants last year, Oqbaei said: "Now is the time to grant financial facilities, because the transfer season has begun and it is time for the government's last year's proposal to become operational."

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

Tajikistan secures \$190m IMF loan to fight coronavirus crisis

The International Monetary Fund's executive board has approved a disbursement of \$189.5 million for Tajikistan to help it "meet urgent balance of payments and fiscal needs stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic", the IMF said on Thursday.

The Central Asian nation confirmed its first novel coronavirus cases at the end of April, by which time it had already felt the economic impact of the outbreak as the volume of remittances from Tajiks working in Russia started to fall.

"The economy is currently projected to contract by 2% this year and the overall budget deficit could rise to 7.7% of GDP," the IMF said in a statement, describing the pandemic's impact on the former Soviet republic as severe.

While the Fund's aid will provide a sizable share of the required financing, it said, "additional concessional and grant financing from the international community will be critical to close the remaining financing gap."

(Source: Reuters)

Turkey's lira hits its lowest level ever amid investor fears over sinking economy

Turkey's currency plunged to its lowest level in history Thursday, with the U.S. dollar rising against the lira to a level not seen in nearly two years after the country's banking regulator moved to restrict foreign investor access to lira-denominated transactions.

The currency has been under mounting pressure amid rising inflation, growing unemployment and slow growth — and now, the highest number of coronavirus cases in the West Asia region. Turkey's central bank has drawn down millions of dollars from its foreign currency reserves to buy lira and prop it up against the dollar, and late on Tuesday its banking regulator announced new restrictions on foreigners making lira-denominated transactions in an effort to prevent speculation and short-selling.

The move backfired: the lira has dropped for the following two days, with the dollar on Thursday gaining as much as 0.6% and momentarily buying 7.49 lira during London's morning trading hours — surpassing the currency's previous record low, when it hit an intraday bottom of 7.236 to the dollar at the peak of its August 2018 currency crisis.

For reference, this time two years ago, a dollar bought roughly 4 lira. "Seems just a matter of time before we go ripping through 7.2500 and beyond," Brad Betchel, global head of FX at Jefferies LLC, had said in an analyst note Wednesday. "Officials put on a confident face when addressing the markets but the market is starting to think the emperor has no clothes."

Turkey's economy was already under pressure before the coronavirus hit. Now, after nearly two years of a weakening currency, high debt and fast-disappearing foreign reserves, the country of 82 million is in a particularly bad place to weather a pandemic. Its unemployment rate was already nearly 14% in January, before the economy felt the impact of the coronavirus, and its massive tourism industry is on course to be decimated for the near future.

Turkey has reported 129,491 coronavirus cases and 3,520 deaths as of Wednesday, hitting what appeared to be a peak of more than 4,000 new cases per day through mid-April before the daily cases began to taper, now at a level of just over 2,000 per day.

(Source: CNBC)

Copper projects worth over \$950m inaugurated

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Four development projects worth 40 trillion rials (about \$952.3 million) were inaugurated in copper sector of Kerman Province in southeast of Iran on Thursday, Shata news reported.

As reported, President Hassan Rouhani put the projects into operation through video conference.

The projects inaugurated in Khatoon Abad Copper Complex included increasing the capacity of copper smelting in the complex, building a copper concentrate storage, construction of a sulfuric acid production plant, and an oxygen sup-

plying unit.

Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO)'s Managing Director Khodadad Gharibpour was present in the inaugural ceremony of the projects.

By putting the first project into operation, the complex's capacity of producing copper anode rises by 50 percent to 120,000 tons, and the country's copper smelting capacity rose to 400,000 tons. This project creates jobs for 120 persons.

Some 1.11 trillion rials (about \$26.4 million) plus \$118 million have been invested for this project.



The second project, which was construction of a 60,000-ton storage facility, was implemented at the cost of 158 billion rials (about \$3.7 million) plus three million euros, creating jobs for 250 people.

The third project is valued at 750 billion rials (about \$17.8 million) plus 100 million euros and the fourth one

was put into operation at the cost of 192 billion rials (about \$4.5 million) plus 31 million euros.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony via video conference, Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani released a report on the projects currently underway in the mining sector.

470m tons of minerals extracted in a year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani said 470 million tons of minerals have been extracted in the country during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), IRNA reported.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of four copper development projects in Kerman Province on Thursday, the minister said the country managed to achieve this amount of extraction despite the sanctions condition.

Earlier this month, the head of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) announced that this organization plans to put projects worth \$2.276 billion into operation during the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021).

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.

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

IMIDRO put projects worth \$3.2 billion

IRENEX hosts 5 offerings of gas condensate, fuel oil in 50 days

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Since the start of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20), Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX) has held two offerings of gas condensate and three offerings of Mazut (fuel oil) at its international ring, National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC)'s representative in IRENEX announced.

Amir-Hossein Tebyanian put the amount of offered gas condensate at 200,000 barrels and that of the fuel oil at 35,000 tons, Shana reported.

Since the U.S. withdrew from Iran's nuclear pact in May 2018, vowing to drive Iran's oil exports down to zero, the Islamic Republic has been taking various measures to counter U.S. actions and to lessen its economy's reliance on oil.

The country also sought new strategies to help its oil exports afloat, one of which is diversifying the mechanism of oil sales, like offering oil and oil products at the country's stock market.

In the past few years, Iranian think-tanks and ener-



gy experts have been repeatedly stating that the country should increase its refining capacity in order to lessen the economy's reliance on crude sales.

Great Depression-like U.S. job losses, unemployment rate expected in April



The U.S. economy likely lost a staggering 22 million jobs in April, in what would be the steepest plunge in payrolls since the Great Depression and the starkest sign yet of how the novel coronavirus pandemic is battering the world's biggest economy.

A report that is closely watched in any given month but especially so now with non-essential businesses in mandatory shutdowns nationwide to contain the coronavirus, the Labor Department's monthly employment report on Friday is also expected to show the jobless rate surging to at least 16% last month. That would shatter the post-World War Two record of 10.8% touched in November 1982.

The numbers will likely strengthen analysts' expectations of a slow recovery from the recession caused by the pandemic. It would add to a pile of bleak data on consumer spending, business investment, trade, productivity and the housing market in underscoring the devastation unleashed by lockdowns imposed by states and local governments in mid-March to slow the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the virus.

The economic crisis spells trouble for President Donald Trump's bid for a second term in the White House in November's election. After the Trump administration was criticized for its initial reaction to the pandemic, Trump is

eager to reopen the economy, despite a continued rise in COVID-19 infections and dire projections of deaths.

"Our economy is on life support now," said Erica Groshen, a former commissioner of the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics. "We will be testing the waters in the next few months to see if it can emerge safely from our policy-induced coma," added Groshen, who is now a senior extension faculty member at the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

The historic dive in April nonfarm payrolls predicted in a Reuters survey anticipates job losses in nearly all sectors of the economy, with larger layoffs in the leisure and hospitality industry - mainly restaurants and bars. It would follow the shedding of 701,000 jobs in March, which ended a record streak of employment gains dating to October 2010.

Estimates in the survey ranged to as much as a loss of 35 million. Forecasts for April's unemployment rate, which was at 4.4% in March, were as high as 22%.

There is great uncertainty surrounding last month's estimates because of the nature and speed of the job losses.

A total of 26.5 million people had filed claims for jobless benefits and 16.2 million were on unemployment rolls through the week of April 12, when the government canvassed establishments and households for payrolls and the unemployment rate.

Eligibility for unemployment benefits has been greatly expanded to include contractors and gig workers among others, overwhelming local employment offices with applications and leading to backlogs. Economists believe the numbers of people applying for unemployment aid and those continuing to receive benefits are understated.

Meanwhile, some people might be filing more than one claim, and workers whose hours have been cut because of COVID-19 can also seek unemployment benefits.

■ Great uncertainty

Some workers who have filed claims have likely since found employment, with companies like Walmart and Amazon hiring workers to meet huge demand in online shopping. Truck drivers are also in demand, while supermarkets,

pharmacies and courier companies need workers.

According to the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics, which compiles the employment report, a person has to be looking for work and available to do it to be considered unemployed.

"This means many workers who lose their job as a result of the virus will be counted as dropping out of the labor force instead of as unemployed because they are unable to search for work due to the lockdown, or because they are not available to work because they are, for example, caring for children whose school has closed," said Heidi Shierholz, a former chief economist at the Labor Department.

Furloughed workers and others who expect to return to their jobs within 6 months are counted as unemployed on temporary layoff.

A drop in the labor force participation rate, or the proportion of working-age Americans who have a job or are looking for one, could blunt some of the anticipated surge in the unemployment rate in April.

To get a clearer picture, economists will focus on a broader measure of unemployment, which includes people who want to work but have given up searching and those working part-time because they cannot find full-time employment.

April could, however, mark the trough in job losses as more small businesses access their portion of an almost \$3 trillion fiscal package, which made provisions for them to get loans that could be partially forgiven if they were used for employee salaries. The Federal Reserve has also thrown businesses credit lifelines and many states are also partially reopening.

Still, economists do not expect a quick rebound in the labor market.

"Given the expected shift in consumer behavior reflecting insecurities regarding health, wealth, income, and employment, many of these firms will not reopen or, if they do reopen, hire fewer people," said Steve Blitz, chief economist at TS Lombard in New York. "This is one reason why we see the underlying recession extending through the third quarter."

(Source: Reuters)

No power outage due to earthquake: Tavanir

ENERGY TEHRAN— Now electricity outage due to the last night earthquake has been reported in the country, an official with Iran's Power Generation and Distribution Company (known as Tavanir) announced on Friday.

Masoud Sadeqi, the director general of Distribution Supervising Department of Tavanir, also said that electricity condition is stable in the country. Mehr news agency reported citing a report by Energy Ministry.

Visiting the electricity dispatching center of the country, the official announced that the operating teams of Tehran, Alborz, and Mazandaran Provinces have been in a state of readiness after the earthquake.

An earthquake measuring 5.1 on the Richter scale shook Tehran province early on Friday.

The earthquake occurred at 00:48 a.m. at a depth of 7 kilometers near the city of Damavand, 56km northeast of Tehran.

The tremor was felt in the surrounding



provinces of Qom, Alborz, Mazandaran, and Zanjan.

Esmail Najjar, head of the Crisis Management Organization, said a 60-year-old

man lost his life and 33 people were injured, of whom four have been hospitalized. IRNA reported.

The victim from Damavand suffered brain injury while fleeing home.

Some residents in Damavand, Gilavand, Boom-e Hend, Roud-e Hend, Pardis, metropolis of Tehran and some other nearby cities spent night outdoors, fearing stronger aftershocks.

Iran sits on top of major tectonic plates and experiences frequent seismic activity. In 2003, a 6.6-magnitude quake in southeastern Iran decimated the ancient mud-brick city of Bam and killed at least 31,000 people.

The metropolis of Tehran also sits on two major faultlines.

Mehdi Zare, a renowned seismologist, says the frequent jolts across Iran are the result of "accumulated seismic energy" in the form of natural consecutive seismic events.

EU consulting on new renewable energy financing mechanism



The EU Commission has opened a four-week public consultation on draft rules to establish a new EU financing mechanism to support renewable energy projects.

The new mechanism opens a possibility for the member states to collectively benefit from renewables projects funded through tenders using an EU-wide financing mechanism.

The mechanism enables "contributing" member states to pay voluntary financial contributions into the scheme, which will be used to tender support for new renewable energy projects in all member states willing to host such projects. For the "hosting" member state, the advantage is that it receives additional local investment in renewables projects – and can therefore enjoy the benefits in terms of local employment, lower greenhouse gases emissions, improved air quality, modernisation of the energy system and reduced dependency on imports, the EU Commission states.

However, there is no direct link or negotiation between the contributing and hosting member states, since the Commission runs the process and allocates the statistics.

The mechanism, which will see the mem-

ber states working more closely to achieve their individual and collective renewable energy targets, will also allow for a more cost-effective deployment of renewables across the EU.

"This new mechanism will provide another option for Member States to contribute to our energy and climate targets, investing in locations where renewable resources are abundant and developing them makes the most sense", Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simson, said.

Ultimately, the mechanism will feed into the European Green Deal ambition of achieving EU carbon-neutrality by 2050, according to the EU Commission.

The new financing mechanism should be in place by the start of 2021.

Simson also pointed out the advantage the new mechanism will have on the economy after the COVID-19 crisis: "It is especially relevant in the context of the post-crisis recovery, where the mechanism could help stimulate the economy in hard-hit Member States, both by getting large-scale projects off the ground and by supporting local SMEs and creating jobs".

(Source: offshorewind.biz)

Oil rises as coronavirus curbs ease, setting stage for demand boost



Oil prices gained on Friday as more countries began relaxing restrictions put in place to halt the coronavirus pandemic, raising hopes that demand for crude and its products will start to pick up.

Brent crude was up by 42 cents, or 1.4%, at \$29.88 a barrel by 0447 GMT, having fallen nearly 1% on Thursday.

U.S. oil gained 45 cents, or 1.9%, to \$24.00 a barrel, after a decline of nearly 2% in the previous session.

Both contracts are heading for a second week of gains after the lows of April, when U.S. oil crashed below zero, with Brent up around 13% and WTI about 21% higher.

However, crude is still being pumped into storage, raising the prospect that any gains prompted by stronger demand will be capped. "Oil is rallying on expectations of better demand. There are green shoots there but I think the market will need to see those broaden and extend to sustain the rally," said Lachlan Shaw, head of commodities research at National Australia Bank in Melbourne.

On the supply side, North American oil companies are cutting production quicker than OPEC officials and industry analysts expected and are on track to withdraw about

1.7 million barrels per day of output by the end of June.

"The supply cuts we have seen announced, particularly in North America, are also giving the market confidence," Shaw said.

Still, U.S. crude inventories at the Cushing storage hub in Oklahoma increased by around 407,000 barrels in the week through May 5, traders said on Thursday, citing Gen-scape data.

Australia on Friday became the latest country to plan an easing of lockdown restrictions as infections from the virus slow to a trickle, aiming to relax social distancing restrictions in a three-stage process.

France, parts of the United States and countries such as Pakistan are also planning to ease the restrictions instituted to stop the spread of the world's worst health crisis in a century.

In the U.S., the biggest consumer of oil and its products, motorists are starting to take to the roads as the lockdowns ease. Gasoline supplied to the U.S. market rose to almost 6.7 million barrels per day (bpd) last week, according to estimates from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

(Source: CNBC)

Why is Russian crude so expensive?

By Viktor Katona

One of the main reasons why the coronavirus-induced price slump feels so odd is that it is accompanied by a prolonged price war that has simultaneously dropped crude differentials, in many instances to levels unseen in the past 8-10 years. The price war was started by Saudi Arabia's national oil company Saudi Aramco mid-March when it cut its April prices by \$6-7 per barrel month-on-month, in a move that was at the time perceived as Riyadh's claim to safeguard or even increase its market share come what may, a strategy that was continued with May-loading cargoes. Yet despite fears that Russia's main export grade Urals will inevitably fall victim to such an aggressive Saudi marketing strategy, Urals' allure has caught market watchers somewhat offguard.

There is no sole reason why Urals has not declined further and followed the pricing curve of Arab Medium or Arab Light. As a matter of fact, if one is to look at the dynamics of Urals pricing chronologically, the underlying reason why Urals differentials should not plummet has changed over time. This being said, outright Urals prices have bounced back from their lowest in the last 20 years – Urals Baltics went as low as \$11.59 per barrel on April 21 (see Graph 1) whilst on that same day Urals Med declined to \$12.09 per barrel. From here both the Baltic and Mediterranean outright prices rose to their current level of \$16-17 per barrel, to actual premia against Dated Brent and even Azeri Light.

But let's take a dive first into the pallid statistics of crude oil differentials. Data indicate (see Graph 2) that right after the Russia-Saudi Arabia axis broke down and the crude market went into an uncontrolled freefall, Urals differentials reacted in a way that was to be predicted by market analysts. Urals had no other option but to react on Saudi Aramco dropping April OSOs – if Urals Rotterdam averaged a \$-1.8 per barrel and Urals Med averaged a \$-1.2 per barrel discount in January-February 2020, the second half of March turned out to be a spectacular tailspin. By April 01, both the Mediterranean and



Baltic Urals stood at a \$-5.4 per barrel discount, yet instead of dropping even lower, Urals started to get off the ground.

First, amidst Chinese crude demand coming back to life, Urals was supported by the remarkably beneficial economics of China exports. In the first days of April the ICE Brent – Dubai swap differential was at a whopping \$6.20 per barrel discount which made long-haul voyages to Asia Pacific remarkably attractive for Chinese buyers. The end result of robust Chinese buying demand: a total of 19.7 MMbbls of Urals has set sail for China in April 2020, an absolute all-time high, beating the previous maximum by a whopping 7 million barrels. The total tally includes an unprecedented four VLCCs, all of which are en route to Shandong (of which three are going to Qingdao).

Mid-April Brent-Dubai differentials moved back into premium, only to decline in multi-dollar discounts during the last days of April – expect further Chinese buying runs of Urals as it happens. Evidently, Urals is by no means the only residue-heavy grade coveted by Chinese refiners, the US-produced Mars has become a hit of recent Chinese purchases. However, there seems to be an organic barrier to further US

purchases as most American output is very light, in fact too light for Chinese refiners. Potentially, Chinese demand might also be satiated by Arab Medium or Arab Heavy cargoes from Saudi Arabia, yet according to market reports there is only scant spare additional capacity for these grades, with Riyadh actively promoting Arab Light and Arab Extra Light instead.

Thus, Russian exporters could more or less avoid European demand declining, only to return to it once the window of opportunity shut down. Fuel oil cracks have been very supportive towards Urals acquisitions in Europe, penalizing other Mediterranean and Baltic crudes with a higher gasoline and kerosene yield, yet that is only half of Urals' recent differential anomaly. The other reason, one might argue a much more substantial one, is Russian producers cutting back exports in accordance with the OPEC+ agreements. Comparing April and May exports from Russia's main European ports provides a telling case in point – based on the preliminary May schedule month-on-month loadings in Primorsk have dropped by 42% and in Ust-Luga by 32%, whilst Novorossiysk will witness a hefty 60% drop.

Whilst coronavirus continues to paralyze Russia's economy (President Putin has extended the lockdown until May 11, for the third time already, and most probably will be forced to do so at least once again as new cases still do not plateau), Russian exporters have been having a hard time placing their crude barrels – domestic demand has shrunk, storage is becoming ever-rarer so the only elegant way out is to bring forward field maintenance and cut exports. The only conduit not to see a massive May throughput cut will be ESPO – in fact, May loadings from Kozmino are headed for an all-time high of 0.765mbpd. The decision to keep ESPO supplies to Asia has obviously left an imprint on the Russian grade's pricing, from a \$2 per barrel premium to Dubai it went to \$-4.70 per barrel in mid-April, only to reach its current level of a \$-2.75/-3 per barrel discount to Dubai, i.e. the differential rebound was palpably smaller than in the case of Urals.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Why this oil rally won't last

By Nick Cunningham

Oil prices have rallied as traders believe the depths of demand destruction may be coming to an end with economies beginning to reopen. But some analysts are warning that the oil price rally may be premature.

WTI prices have doubled from \$12 to \$24 in a little over a week. There is evidence that demand has bottomed out and has begun to rise from recent lows. U.S. gasoline demand has ticked up for two consecutive weeks, rising from 5.31 million barrels per day (mb/d) in mid-April to 6.66 mb/d on May 1.

On the supply side, shut ins plus the OPEC+ deal have taken enormous volumes off of the market. U.S. oil production has declined by 1.1 mb/d since the end of March, dipping below 12 mb/d at the start of May.

"While it was still at rock bottom only two weeks ago, with everyone talking about the negative WTI prices and overflowing stocks, the optimism can now be sensed everywhere," Commerzbank wrote in a note on Wednesday.



The rise in oil prices mirrors the rally in broader financial markets. The Dow Jones Industrial Average is up nearly 30 percent since mid-March. The Federal Reserve has funneled trillions of dollars into stocks and bonds.

But alongside financial market exuberance, nearly 33 million people have filed for unemployment. Small businesses everywhere are getting decimated. There is a growing chasm between financial markets and the real economy, a gap that is unsustainable.

There is something similar playing out in the oil and gas sector. Energy stocks have made huge gains since March, even as the market remains horribly depressed. And, as mentioned, oil prices have rallied, despite storage levels continuing to fill up. Sub-\$30 WTI is terrible for the oil industry no matter how you slice it, but the sharp price increases from just two weeks ago are hard to ignore.

"We believe that the current euphoria on the oil market is premature," Commerzbank warned. Pointing to the December WTI contract rallying to \$33 per barrel on Tuesday, the investment bank said there is limited upside from here.

The exuberance in natural gas markets, such as it is, may also be overdone. Nymex natural gas prices traded below \$2/MMBtu for much of 2020 so far, but rose by more than 30 percent since mid-April to a recent high of \$2.13/MMBtu on May 5. The reasons for the rally have a lot to do with shut ins in the Permian, and expected curtailments of associated gas production, plus an explosion of the Tetco gas pipeline.

"While we do believe that an increase in production declines expectations in this period justifies higher gas prices than the \$1.65/mmBtu the front of the curve showed three weeks ago, we believe summer 2020 NYMEX gas prices have overshoot," Goldman Sachs said in a note.

But the rally for crude is more glaring. "The question is not if prices would stop rising, but when," Head of Oil Markets Bjornar Tonhaugen, said in a statement. "[I]t is too early for such a recovery," Tonhaugen said. He noted that shut ins have helped ease the glut, but that there is still an imbalance. More supply curtailments will be necessary. "Oil prices will very likely fall further as we move through May until more shut-ins complete the puzzle," Tonhaugen concluded.

There will be multiple lasting scars from the current crisis that will take years to resolve. "[O]ver the previous four months inventories would have built by over 1,300mb, some non-OPEC supply will be shut-in and the OPEC+ group will have over 8mb/d of spare capacity," Standard Chartered wrote in a report. "These overhangs are likely to keep prices highly depressed."

More importantly, the global pandemic won't be over and the global economy will struggle to recover. The danger of a second wave of infections and economy-wide shutdowns is real. "Even following a gradual resumption of economic activity, demand may remain below the 2019 level for years to come," Commerzbank said.

(Source: oilprice.com)

JPMORGAN: The struggling oil market finally stabilized, but recovery will take up to 3 months

Global oil demand remains at historic lows as inventory vastly outpaces storage, but JPMorgan analysts think the worst of the commodity-market carnage is over.

The coronavirus pandemic and the ignition of a price war helped push oil futures below \$0 for the first time on April 20. Producers worked to curb supply and lift prices, and after weeks of emergency action, inventories are finally turning toward recovery.

The bank's analysts expect demand to bounce back over the next two to three months and shift oil surpluses to deficits in the second half of the year.

"While there is still a massive glut of oil that will need to be cleared before there can be any meaningful recovery in prices, we believe that the global oil market is tentatively entering an inflection phase, where rebalancing has started," the team led by Joyce Chang wrote Thursday.

Oil's recent price moves lend credence to the analysts' thesis. West Texas Intermediate crude has more than doubled from its late-April lows, and Brent crude has enjoyed a moderate rally in recent sessions.

Even if the oil market turns for the better, the coronavirus' fallout will create lasting scars, JPMorgan said. Demand won't reach pre-outbreak levels until November 2021, and the risk to own oil and gas assets "has likely been permanently elevated" due to greater uncertainty around supply and demand dynamics.

JPMorgan recommends defensive oil stocks for the near-term as months of market rebalancing is poised to fuel strong volatility. Natural gas has emerged as the bank's "obvious winner," while oil exploration and production businesses are "largely uninvestable" until oil prices match the cost of shale discovery.

(Source: Market Insider)

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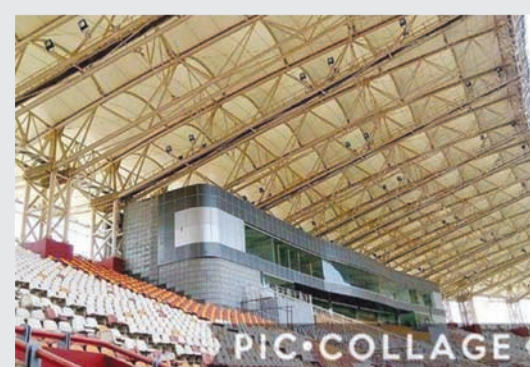


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Which Arab rulers trying hard to remain in power via appeasing Israel?

1 → the current drama shows obtained the approval of the Palestinian Authority..." These are all myths and lies that are baseless and have no explanation, except that they are used as justification for normalization with the occupation, which is a forbidden relationship that people refuse.

This campaign for normalization with the Israeli occupation is based on a number of very dangerous deceptions and fallacies. It aims at changing the facts of history and transforming the convictions of ordinary people towards the conflict in Palestine. It begins with demonizing the Palestinians on an ethnic and racial basis, aiming to portray Israelis as friends, and Palestinians as enemies. It is becoming very clear that we are facing a new wave of normalization with the Israeli occupation and those Arab countries which used to believe that the Palestinian case is a central national case, no longer believe so. There is also a new generation of Arab rulers, who want to reach power through US and Israeli consent, rather than through public approval and elections, which have become rare in the Arab region.

One positive aspect regarding the current events is that the new normalization campaign is exposed, and it does not seem to be successful. This is evident through the fact that it started years ago but is still draining huge amounts of money, and all in vain. Had electronic armies, on Twitter and other social media networks, succeeded in what they have been doing over the past five years, there would have been no need for producing Ramadan shows with such large budgets. What is certain is that the public masses in the Persian Gulf area still believe in their causes, and they are still an integral part of the nation. They still remember their history which cannot be forged, and they know that Jerusalem is at the heart of Palestine, that it is the capital of Palestine and that this holy land has a profound religious status that politics cannot alter. Therefore, a Ramadan show or a hashtag on Twitter, cannot possibly change these facts because they are solid unchanging beliefs.

A report published by Anadolu in mid-February revealed a number of attempts done by certain Arab officials to broaden relations with Israel.

Since the beginning of 2020, the pace of normalization between Israel and Arab countries has accelerated considerably on the political, military, economic, and even



sports fronts, the report read.

Tel Aviv has been keen to publicly announce secret relations with Arab countries in a bid to break with political tradition.

Current developments coincided with the announcement of the so-called "Deal of the Century" the White House unveiled late last month.

Notably, Egypt and Jordan are the only Arab countries that have public diplomatic relations with Israel.

The following are the main developments since the beginning of 2020:

Jan. 19: Israel officially announces its participation in Expo 2020 Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The exhibition will be held from Oct. 2020 until April 2021.

The UAE, for its part, did not comment on the Israeli announcement.

Jan. 28: Ambassadors of the UAE, Bahrain and Oman take part in the White House unveiling ceremony for the so-called "Deal of the Century" in Washington, D.C.

U.S. President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked them for attending the event.

Jan. 30: French website Intelligence Online announces that Morocco has received three Israeli-made aircraft.

Three Israel Aerospace Industries Heron drones were purchased for \$48 million to spy on desert areas.

Rabat neither confirmed nor denied the report.

Jan. 31: Emirati Foreign Minister Abdullah

bin Zayed Al Nahyan retweets the link to an article calling on Palestinians not to refuse the "Deal of the Century."

The article was an opinion piece published by The New York Times titled "Every Time Palestinians Say 'No,' They Lose."

Feb. 3: Netanyahu meets General Abdul Fattah Al-Burhan, the chairman of Sudan's ruling Sovereign Council, in Entebbe, Uganda where both of them agreed to "start cooperation that would lead to normalization of relations between the two countries."

The Times of Israel newspaper cited a high-ranking Sudanese military official as saying that the UAE organized the meeting.

The Sudanese official said only a "small circle" of senior officials in Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt were informed about the meeting.

The source added that al-Burhan agreed to meet Netanyahu because officials thought this would help "accelerate" the process of removing Sudan from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism.

"We agreed to begin cooperation that will lead to normalization of relations between the two countries," Netanyahu tweeted.

However, Israel said the meeting was arranged by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni.

Feb. 6: The Israeli Cycling Academy announces it has signed Moroccan bike champion Mahdi Shukri as the first Arab to join a cycling team in Israel.

The academy welcomed Shukri on Twitter, stressing he is the first Muslim Arab cyclist to join it.

Feb. 7: The Israel Hayom daily newspaper says intensive talks have been underway to hold a "historic meeting" in Cairo between Netanyahu and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman.

It said there have been discussions between Washington, Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia to arrange a summit meeting in Cairo soon.

The talks were pushed for by the US' Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who has been, according to the same daily, mediating between Israel and Saudi Arabia on the matter for several months.

It pointed out that the summit meeting would be attended by "the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia and also the leaders of the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Bahrain and Oman."

The newspaper cited senior Arab diplomatic sources who said the summit would be held "as early as the coming weeks, even before the election in Israel" slated for March.

For his part, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud denied the report, saying: "There are no plans to hold a meeting between Saudi Arabia and Israel."

Feb. 12: Israeli Arabic-speaking i24 News channel reveals that Ahmed bin Sulayem, chairman of the Dubai Diamond Exchange, will visit Israel for three days to participate in International Diamond Week in Tel Aviv. The Israeli daily of The Jerusalem Post confirmed that the visit had already taken place.

The UAE did not comment on the report. According to Anadolu, Palestinian factions in early May called on Arab societies to combat campaigns aimed at normalizing relations with Israel.

"Those campaigning for normalization are a small fraction, who don't represent the Arab nation; they are affiliated with international parties like the US," Hani al-Thawabta of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) group told a press conference in Gaza City.

He described the broadcast of TV shows promoting normalization with Israel by an Arab TV channel as a "crime against the Arab mind".

The PFLP leader was referring to TV series Exit 7 and Umm Haroun, which are being aired by the Dubai-based Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), which have drawn ire from Palestinians.

"The ethical, national and humanitarian responsibility requires all the free and honorable people to reject all forms of normalization," Hani al-Thawabta said.

Is U.S. Navy's international presence shrinking? Is Pentagon mulling over new plans to counter rivals?

An inevitable new world order, rise of new military, economic and political powers in key regions worldwide as well as the idea of vulnerability of the U.S. Navy's supercarriers in a possible military confrontation with international rival have pushed the Pentagon to come to the conclusion that it must conduct structural reforms in arrangement of its forces overseas.

Steve Cohen, an attorney at Pollock Cohen LLP in New York, and a former member of the board of directors of the United States Naval Institute, has drafted a report on the possibilities of a new approach adopted by the U.S. Navy to replace its supercarriers with the smaller but more operational warships.

"When word of a crisis breaks out in Washington, it's no accident that the first question that many people ask is, 'Where's the nearest carrier?'" former President Bill Clinton made that remark in 1993 while visiting the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt — the same ship at the center of another crisis today. But disturbingly, while the Navy has 11 carrier strike groups, only three are actually at sea.

"With its 70 planes, six to 10 cruise missile-equipped destroyer escorts, a supply ship and an attack submarine lurking beneath the surface, the carrier strike group has been the Navy's core asset for the past 75 years. It is therefore surprising that a recent story coming out of Secretary of Defense Mark Esper's office — that the Navy was considering cutting two carriers from the fleet — didn't generate more news. Moreover, the report also suggested that the two mega-warships be replaced by 65 small "corvettes," some of them unmanned," Cohen explained in his report published by The Hill.

Three concerns undoubtedly drive the secretary's trial balloon: 1) Supercarriers are incredibly expensive; 2) Reports of a new Chinese cruise missile suggest that carriers are more vulnerable to attack; and 3) World threats are changing, and carriers may not be the best platform to meet coming challenges.

It is understandable that the Department of Defense (DOD) would want to consider the savings generated by cutting two carriers. The USS Gerald Ford — the first ship in the new class of supercarriers replacing the Nimitz class of carriers that entered the fleet in 1975 — cost about \$13 billion. That includes about \$2.4 billion in cost overruns to



work out kinks in the ship's launch, landing and weapons elevator systems. Future ships in the class — currently being built, but not estimated to be fleet-ready before 2024 — cost about \$12 billion each.

The cost of these individual ships is a constant sticking point with defense planners because of the need to increase the size of the fleet. The past few presidential administrations have agreed that 355 capital ships is the minimum number the Navy needs to carry out its assigned missions. With the Navy's current inventory of only 297 battle-force ships, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that the Navy would have to spend at least \$26 billion per year just on construction for the next 30 years to reach that 355-ship goal by 2048. But that investment level is 80 percent more than what the Navy has spent over the past 30 years — and 50 percent more than it has spent over the past six years alone.

But cost isn't the only concern. There has been a rash of news stories about new Chinese anti-ship "stand-off" missiles whose range and ballistic speeds exceed the combat radius of American carrier aircraft and cruise missiles. Navy strategists worry not only that our fleet will be pushed so far from potential conflict zones as to be inconsequential, but that the carriers will themselves become inviting and vulnerable targets.

The third main issue is what roles the Navy will be expected to play, and what foes we will likely encounter. The composition of the fleet must of course emerge from those

assessments. The mix of "high-low" — large/sophisticated ships and smaller vessels — is and has always been subject to constant reassessment and debate. The general consensus is that we should plan for "near-peer" conflicts with China and Russia, and place less emphasis on the need to respond to non-state actors engaged in regional or terrorist activities. To counter such emerging threats, military planners agree that we need presence, capability and survivability/sustainability.

That is why the suggestion to replace two giant nuclear-powered carriers with a swarm of small, fast, lightly-armed frigates and corvettes — neither of which now exist in the American Navy — seems so disingenuous. The Navy's last attempt at small, fast, lightly-crewed ships with the theoretical potential to quickly swap out mission packages was the LCS. And that has proved to be a disaster. The real debate should be between building more Ford class supercarriers versus smaller, non-nuclear "lightning" carriers based on existing, in-service America-class ships.

These smaller carriers, the first of which was USS America, is an 840-foot vessel that was originally designed to transport and support Marines in amphibious and projection operations. Unlike the 1,106-foot Ford or similarly-sized Nimitz class carriers, the America cannot launch or recover traditional jet aircraft; it has no catapults or arresting wires. Instead it was designed to deploy helicopters and V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor hybrid planes. But with the introduction of the F-35B fighter/

attack jets — the Marine Corps's version of the next-generation plane that can take off and land vertically — the America class ships could have a pivotal new role. Even with the added expense of reinforcing the America's deck to withstand the extreme heat of the F-35's engines when they point downward during take-off and landing, the cost of such smaller carriers is about \$4 billion each, or one-third the cost of the Ford class ships.

An America class ship can typically house 12 F-35B's and could support up to 20 by excluding other types of aircraft. A Ford class carrier will typically deploy 44 F-35s and carry an additional 30 other aircraft at the same time. Such a trade-off, while economically appealing, is not simple. Are three smaller America class carriers deploying a total of 36 F-35Bs truly the equal of one Ford-class ship deploying 44 F-35s? Or, in the face of emerging (or multiple) threats, is it better to have more ships of lesser individual capability available?

As one retired three-star admiral — a former carrier strike group commander — said to me, "One of the things CSGs provide is deterrence. To do that, they need to be 'there' — they have to be deployed and in the area of potential hot spots. Today, with 11, the Navy still can't meet the demand of COCOMs. Going to nine will only make that worse."

Such questions of defense strategy and power projection merit broader debate. The technical issues of operating range, defensive countermeasures, staffing, maintenance and operating costs should be the province of Navy planners. But the larger questions of strategy require serious bipartisan consideration. These are questions of national purpose and security, and ought not be dominated by whatever party controls the White House or Congress at the moment.

Defense budgets are not unlimited, and are unlikely to grow dramatically in the coming years, making tough decisions even more daunting. But they must be made now, because as recent events have demonstrated, the future can ambush us at any time. And when it does, all presidents — hawks and doves alike — inevitably will ask, "Where are the carriers?"

"We had better have enough," Cohen concluded.

Dubai Expo 2020 postponement to affect UAE economy

By Zahra Mirzafarjouyan

While Expo 2020 Dubai has been postponed one year due to the coronavirus pandemic, some experts believe that the postponement will have a big impact on the UAE economy and derails at least temporarily a range of tech projects.

The outbreak of the coronavirus has caused a great deal of damage in the world, shutting down many jobs, including the exhibition industry. No one yet knows when the current pandemic will be fully brought under control, but even if this happens in short order, its impact on the world economy will surely last for a long time.

Most of the world's major exhibition centers have suspended or postponed their exhibitions since March 1. More organizers are pulling events over fears of spreading the deadly virus, with many thousands of attendees having to alter travel plans.

The biggest international event of the year, Expo 2020 Dubai which was slated to begin in October, has been postponed to 2021 due to the pandemic.

According to the latest reports, the overall coronavirus diagnosed cases rose to 16,240 in UAE while 165 people have lost their lives.

Expo 2020 Dubai was expected to attract some 25 million visitors from around the world starting from October 20 this year. There were to be more than 200 participants including nations, multilateral organizations, businesses, and educational institutions, according to the organizers. Some 192 countries had confirmed their participation.



"Many of the Expo 2020's participating countries have been significantly impacted by COVID-19 and expressed a need to postpone the opening of Expo 2020 Dubai by one year, to help them overcome this challenge," said the Expo 2020 Dubai spokesperson told Mehr News Agency.

"The BIE Executive Committee collectively agreed to recommend the postponement of Expo 2020 Dubai to 1 October 2021 — 31 March 2022. As changing the dates of an Expo requires the support of a two-thirds majority of Member States of the BIE, the Member States were called upon to vote on the Executive Committee's recommendation and they passed the recommendation with the required two-thirds majority," the official added, saying, "This binding decision to postpone for a year was announced by the BIE on 4 May. Expo and all of the participating countries are already advanced in our preparations and we will continue. With the change of dates, however, naturally, some schedules will need to be adjusted."

The deferment is expected to have a big impact on the UAE economy and likely on tech workers involved in a wide range of projects related to the fair. Expo construction costs have been estimated at around US\$7 billion so far. The postponement of the expo is likely to roil Dubai's real estate market, which has been in decline for a number of years.

In this regard, the Deputy CEO of World Free Zones Org. Abdulla Tayeb Qassem said to Mehr News Agency, "I think UAE is part of the world so it has been affected, thank God that was in the middle of the season and most big shows were done, whoever the organizers suffered a lot because of no cash flow and they had to take severe decisions to cut salaries or to make positions redundant."

"DWTC (Dubai World Trade Centre) took some measures to assure the organizers, they considered whatever they paid is a credit for next seasons," he added.

Tayeb Qassem went on to say, "But for expo 2020 it is a bit different situation, as we were expecting 20 million visitors to boost the economy, but now will not be possible, so the loss is on a long run, and some sectors will be affected more than others, especially, air transport and hotels."

Regarding the effects of coronavirus on Expo 2020 Dubai, Managing Director of United Distribution Agency in UAE Sadeh Zahedi also said to Mehr News Agency, "All arrangements have been made based on Dubai 2020 expo in the UAE. This includes property development, hospitality, transport infrastructure, entertainment, logistics, and many more. All these should be rescheduled due to this unforeseen event."

"I believe that was not a choice of decision. The government announced the expo postponed to minimize the loss to all parties," he added referring to the postponement of Expo 2020 Dubai due to coronavirus pandemic.

As Expo 2020 Dubai is to be the first World Expo ever hosted in the Middle East, Zahedi said that the coronavirus will surely affect economic activities in the United Arab Emirates, adding, "It will affect hospitality first, and then will affect retailers, entertainment, and indirectly banking, finance, infrastructure, and all other sections of economy consequently."

"UAE mainly invested in hospitality to be the first destination for tourism and alternatively trade hubs in the MENA region. Accordingly, the exhibition is a major motive for trade development. The cancellation of trade fairs would affect the economies in the region drastically," he said referring to the economic loss of not holding exhibitions in the region's economy.

Iran, quakes, and tourism

➔ **1** Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, the Islamic Republic aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

Luckily, the country ranks among countries with “low chance of natural disasters”, as measured in the World Risk Index, calculated by the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security and featured in the World Risk Report from 2011 to 2017. The report systematically considers a country’s vulnerability and its exposure to natural hazards to determine a ranking of countries around the world based on their natural disaster risks such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, storms, floods, droughts, and sea-level rise for 173 countries worldwide.

Concerning earthquake damages to cultural heritage, we will review a specimen; a high-intensity earthquake that brought down to earth the massive fortress of Bam, a UNESCO-registered site, and top tourist destinations in southeast Iran. It caused not only a significant death toll and huge economic losses, but also heavy damage to the cultural heritage.



A view of the adobe Bam Citadel before the 2003 earthquake

Located on the southern edge of the Iranian high plateau, in Kerman province, close to the Pakistan border, Bam and its Cultural Landscape has long been deemed as an outstanding example of an ancient fortified settlement, its origins can be traced back to the Achaemenid period (6th to 4th centuries BC) and even beyond.

Before the 6.6-magnitude earthquake, the Bam Citadel hosted a large number of cultural tourists from around the world per annum. However, a replica of the ensemble is being reconstructed over the past couple of years.

During the past three decades, particularly after the harsh Manjil-Rudbar earthquake, a new initiative on the reduction of earthquake risk was started in Iran to develop and expand earthquake engineering know-how. Specialized institutions, such as the International Institute of Earthquake Engineering and Seismology were established.

Meanwhile, Universities and research centers expanded their related research and educational programmers and made more contribution to increasing the knowledge required for the country’s earthquake safety.

In this line, Iran has launched projects to upgrade the emergency road network and its strategy; enhancement of citizen’s awareness; to improve the early warning system in some areas of the country.

Despite all these efforts, the matter of earthquakes remains a big challenge in Iran and elsewhere.

Qajar-era mansion to be turned into traditional residence

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Hajian mansion in north-central Semnan province is being repurposed into a traditional residence after being fully restored.

The mansion, which dates back to the Qajar era (1789–1925), has been inscribed on the National Heritage List.



To make the best use of such historical sites, they are repurposing into traditional hotels, restaurants or eco-lodge units with the aim of receiving better conservation and maintenance, CHTN quoted provincial tourism chief Mehdi Jamal as saying on Thursday.

The main population centers of Semnan province lie along the ancient Silk Road (and modern-day Imam Reza Expressway), linking Rey (Tehran) with Khorasan (Mashhad).

While few visitors spend much time in the area, driving through you can easily seek out several well-preserved caravanserais (notably Dehnamak and Ahowan), cisterns (the Cafe Abenbar in Garmsar is a special treat) and ruined mud citadels (Padeh is lumpy but fascinating).

The large, bustling cities of Semnan, Damghan and Shahrud (Bastam) all have a small selection of historic buildings and Semnan has a fine old covered bazaar.

Iran is home to abundant historical mansions, caravanserais, bathhouses, madrasas, and other massive monuments, which can buttress its budding tourism and hospitality sectors if managed appropriately and refurbished properly.

Ancient castles and fortresses in Iran: Junqan Castle

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Junqan Castle was built at the end of the thirteenth century of the lunar Hegira, by Commander As’ad II Bakhtiari with inspiration from European 1900s castles in the late Qajar dynasty. It is located in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province, western Iran.

Jonaqan or Joneqoon is a small city, situated at 38 km southwest of Shahr-e-Kord which was the residential quarter of the Khans of the Bakhtiari Tribe.



The architectural facade of this structure, namely the stone pillars are worth mentioning. Each stone pillar consists of many pieces of different shapes so that in its upper sections the pillars are triangular.

Iran’s handicraft exports hit \$427m in 11 months

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Iran exported \$427 million worth of handicrafts during the first eleven months of the past calendar year 1398 (ended March 19).

Of the figure, some \$190 million was earned via suitcase trade (allowed for customs-free and tax-free transfer) through 20 provinces, CHTN quoted deputy tourism minister Pouya Mahmoudian as saying on Wednesday.

“Some 237 million dollars worth of handicrafts, weighing 88,239 tons, were exported officially through customs during the eleven months,” she added.

Talking about handicrafts exports in Esfand (the last month of the year), the official said: “Due to the outbreak of coronavirus, suitcase exports of handicrafts were completely stopped since the month of Esfand and official exports of handicrafts experienced a steep decline.”

Last December, Mahmoudian announced that the country aimed to strengthen bonds existing between handicrafts and tourism to foster “art tourism”, noting “We are working hard to promote art tourism in Iran and now we have hotels in Iran that are fully decorated with handicrafts.”

Talking on the significance of handicrafts in the country, she noted, “Iran globally ranks first in terms of having the topmost number of world cities [and villages] of handicrafts.”

“Some 295 fields of handicrafts are currently practiced across Iran with more than



two million people engaging, majority of whom are women... Handicrafts also play an important role in the economy in our rural villages,” she said.

Iran’s handicrafts exports reached \$289

million in the year 1397, showing three percent growth year on year, based on data released by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts. Traditional ceramics, pottery vessels,

handwoven cloths as well as personal ornamentations with precious and semi-precious gemstones were exported to Iraq, Afghanistan, Germany, the U.S., the UK, and other countries.

Quake causes cracks in Tehran’s Sahebqaraniyeh Palace

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Some minor cracks have been appeared in the historical Sahebqaraniyeh Palace, which is located in northern Tehran, as an earthquake with a magnitude of 5.1 on the Richter scale occurred early on Friday 56km northeast of the city.

“So far, according to reports, only the walls of Sahebqaraniyeh Palace have suffered minor damage, but more experts should comment further to determine the extent of the damage to Tehran’s other historical buildings,” IRNA quoted deputy tourism minister Mohammad-Hassan Talebian as saying on Friday.

Back in 2018, the 19th-century palace underwent extensive restoration project



after some 2.5 years of closure.

In 2010, a crack appeared on the ceiling of its Hozkhaneh hall ... and one of its chandeliers fell down in 2013. Later in 2014, some cracks started to run on Talar-e Aineh (Mirror Hall) of the palace.

Beautifully decorated and fully-furnished interior spaces of the palace feature loads of art works including precious paintings and sculptures by Iranian and foreign artists.

The palace stands within the Niavaran Cultural-Historical Complex, which houses 19th- and 20th-century landmark buildings, museums and monuments in an area of about eleven hectares.

Over 10,000 petroglyphs identified in northwest Iran

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — More than 10,000 new ancient petroglyphs and rock-carved arts have been discovered across the northwestern plains of Meshginshahr county.

“A total of 15 fields of [ancient] petroglyphs have been found near Meshginshahr, which bear over 10,000 petroglyphs,” CHTN quoted Meshginshahr’s tourism chief Imamali Imani as saying on Wednesday.

Preliminary works are being done to register the fields on the National Cultural Heritage list, Imani said.

“There is a treasure trove of thousands of years of art, seen as an example of the oldest human habitat in the plains of Meshginshahr that helps us to look at the evolution of human life over the span of thousands of years.”

In November 2018, Imani announced that new traces of prehistoric relics and petroglyphs were detected through an archeological survey in Meshginshahr county.

“Ancient relics have been discovered in 10 new places, apart from rock arts or petroglyphs scattered in two villages

of Moradlu District,” he said.

“The discovered objects bear depictions of human beings in archery, cavalry in rhythmic and magical themes,” the official added.

There are also petroglyphs that depict mountain goats, boat anchors, shooting and scenes of war, and scenes of deer hunting in individual and collective forms, he concluded.

Amongst the most significant fields of petroglyphs in Meshkin Shahr, is Shahr-e Yeri [“city of the mouthless”]. Situated near Pirazman village, the site embraces an Iron-Age fortress, three prehistorical temples and tens of carved stones on which mouthless faces are depicted, all stretched across 400 hectares of several small hills. Shahr-e Yeri was inscribed on the list of National Heritage Sites in 1931.

The rock art can be seen in some mountainous regions across Iran where roaming life and livestock farming are prevalent typically. The rock-carved figures of animals, associated tools are regarded as good clues to help shed light on daily life in the distant past, though some figures might be symbolic.



Ancient fortress in Tehran to be demarcated

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — The historical Iraj fortress in Pishva, southeast of Tehran, is scheduled to be demarcated by the end of the current Iranian calendar year 1399 (started March 21).

Some estimate that the crumbling fortress dates from the Sassanid era (224–651), however, there are experts who believe that it belongs to the Kayanian dynasty era, a semi-mythological dynasty, which is mentioned in the Persian poet Ferdowsi’s magnum opus, the Shahnameh.

The demarcation project aims at protecting the historical site from illegal constructions within its boundaries, Tehran’s deputy tourism chief Morteza Adibzadeh said on Thursday, CHTN reported.

Iraj fortress, also known as Gabri fort



by the locals, is one of the lesser-known tourist sites of the country. It is located near the gates of the old city of Rey, now in the southeast of Tehran.

The fortress, which is one of the largest military fortresses of the ancient times, was registered on the National Cultural Heritage List in 2003.

New eco-lodges to come on stream in Lorestan

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Seven new eco-lodge units will come on stream in the western Lorestan province by the end of the current Iranian calendar year 1399 (March 20, 2021).

For the time being, six eco-lodges are active across the province and seven new ones will be added until the

year-end in collaboration with the private sector, provincial tourism chief Seyyed Amin Qasemi said, CHTN reported on Friday.

Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization said in 2018 that 2,000 eco-lodges will be constructed across the country until 2021.

Experts say each eco-lodge unit generates jobs for seven to eight people on the average so that the scheme could create 160,000 jobs.

Having a very diverse natural setting, Iran offers varied excursions to nature lovers. Sightseers may live with a nomad or rural family or enjoy an independent stay.

Magnitude 5.1 quake in Tehran province kills 2, injures 33

➔ Some residents in Damavand, Gilavand, Boom-e Hen, Rood-e Hen, Pardis, the metropolis of Tehran, and some other nearby cities spent the night outdoors, fearing stronger aftershocks.

Ali Soltanpour, an official at the National Cartographic Center, said the coincidence of the supermoon phenomenon on Thursday night could increase the risk of the earthquake.

The flower supermoon was seen in Iran on Thursday, May 7, 2020. It occurs when the Moon is at its closest point to Earth in its monthly orbit, appearing six per cent larger than normal.

Iran sits on top of major tectonic plates and experiences frequent seismic activity. In 2003, a 6.6-magnitude quake in southeastern Iran decimated the ancient mud-brick city of Bam and killed at least 31,000 people.

The metropolis of Tehran also sits on two major fault lines.

Mehdi Zare, a renowned seismologist, says the frequent jolts across Iran are the result of "accumulated seismic energy" in the form of natural consecutive seismic events.

Renowned Iranian seismologist Mehdi Zare has explained about the possibility of future quakes in Tehran, saying "We may think about a high risk scenario for the next earthquake. All assessments on deaths, injured and missing across the city of Tehran and the municipalities of the towns surrounding Tehran predict devastating damage for any quake with magnitude of 6 or greater in or around Tehran that may result in the destruction of more than 100,000 buildings."



Many citizens of Tehran spent the night out on the streets fearing a stronger quake

Planting trees will not solve the issue of climate change

In a commentary written for the journal Science, Professor Karen Holl acknowledges the benefits of planting trees but cautions against the belief that it is a solution for climate change and environmental degradation.

Along with study co-author Professor Pedro Brancalion, Professor Holl reports that the issue of climate change is too complicated for one single solution, and even millions of new trees should be looked at as one part of a "multifaceted environmental solution."

"We can't plant our way out of climate change," said Professor Holl, who is a leading expert in forest restoration at UC Santa Cruz. "It is only one piece of the puzzle." "Trees are deeply entrenched in the human psyche. It's very satisfying to go out and put a tree in the ground. It's a concrete, tangible thing to do."

However, major initiatives for planting trees like the Trillion Tree Campaign must be approached with a commitment to long-term management, explained Professor Holl.

"Planting trees is not a simple solution. It's complicated, and we need to be realistic about what we can and cannot achieve. We need to be thoughtful and plan for the long term."

While planting trees cannot reverse climate change, they still come along with many benefits. Trees improve water quality, reduce erosion and flooding, provide food and shelter for wildlife, and improve air quality.

At the same time, tree-planting has the potential to harm native ecosystems and species and reduce water availability.

The researchers recommend specific principles to guide forest enhancement initiatives, such as planning ahead to resolve conflicting land-use goals to ensure maximum effectiveness over the long term.

"Much of the land proposed for tree planting is already being used to grow



crops, harvest timber, and other subsistence activities, so tree planting initiatives need to consider how landowners will earn income," said Professor Holl. "Otherwise, activities such as agriculture or logging will just move to other lands"

Professor Holl applauds the widespread enthusiasm for "increasing forest cover," but emphasizes that it is not the same thing as planting more trees.

"The first thing we can do is keep existing forests standing, and the second is to allow trees to regenerate in areas that were formerly forests," said Professor Holl. "In many cases, trees will recover on their own—just look at the entire eastern United States that was deforested 200 years ago. Much of that has come back without actively planting trees."

"Yes, in some highly degraded lands we will need to plant trees, but that should be the last option since it is the most expensive and often is not successful. I've spent my life on this. We need to be thoughtful about how we bring the forest back."

Professor Holl explained that slowing the pace of climate change requires a comprehensive strategy that starts with burning less fossil fuel.

"Trees are a small piece of what needs to be a broader strategy," said Professor Holl. "We're better off not releasing greenhouse gases to begin with."

The research is published in the journal Science.

(Source: earth.com)

New UN initiative to reduce plastic pollution from ASEAN cities

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in partnership with the Government of Japan, on Thursday launched a new project which aims to reduce the environmental impact of cities in South East Asia by addressing plastic waste pollution in rivers and oceans.

The 'Closing the Loop' project will support governments by addressing plastic waste pollution and leakages into the marine environment. To do this, the project will leverage innovative technologies such as remote sensing, satellite and crowdsourced data applications to detect and monitor the sources and pathways of plastic waste entering rivers in urban catchment areas. Four ASEAN cities will pilot the project: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Surabaya, Indonesia; Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand and Da Nang, Viet Nam.

"Cities are on the front line in addressing plastic waste in ASEAN, which is the world's most polluting region when it comes to ocean plastics. The proliferation of plastic pollution in our oceans is a serious climate change hazard, and thanks to the strong support of the Government of Japan, this innovative new project comes at a timely moment to accelerate action on the issue," said United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana.

Fast growing cities in South East Asia are responsible for as much as 60 per cent of plastic waste leakage into the environment. 75 per cent of land-based sources of marine plastic pollution in the region originates from uncollected waste and 25 per cent from leakages in the municipal waste management systems. Plastic pollution is also transboundary – up to 95 per cent of plastic in our ocean is transported by ten major rivers, eight of which are in Asia.

The project will produce plastic waste maps and simulations for each pilot city and will train officials and stakeholders in ASEAN cities to use smart technologies to



monitor, assess, report on and sustainably manage plastic waste as well as further strengthen municipal solid waste management systems. Urban policy makers will also be provided the tools and knowhow to develop policy and investment strategies which apply a circular economy approach in managing their plastic waste streams.

The need for regional cooperation to address this critical issue was recognized by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his statement following the G20 Osaka Summit: "Marine plastic litter is another issue which cannot be resolved by some countries alone. Under such circumstances, the fact that the G20 was able to unite and share the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision, which aims to reduce additional pollution by marine plastic litter to zero by 2050, represents a major step forward towards resolving this issue."

The 'Closing the Loop' project supports local implementation of the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris and the G20 Osaka Blue Vision to tackle the proliferation of plastic litter, both of which accelerate action towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 14 (Life Below Water).

This ESCAP – Japan initiative is implemented in close collaboration with local and national governments in South East Asia, ASEAN, the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) and other partners.

(Source: moderndiplomacy.eu)

Oman sends anti-COVID-19 consignment to Iran

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Oman has dispatched a batch of sanitary and medical items to Iran to help the neighboring country in fight against coronavirus.

The consignment, weighing some 40 tons, is comprised of medical equipment and medicine for preventing and curing COVID-19, ISNA reported on Friday.

The number of people diagnosed with coronavirus in Iran reached 104,691 on Friday, of whom 6,541 have died and 83,837 recovered so far.

Over the past 24 hours, 1,556 new cases of people having the virus have been identified, Deputy Health Minister Kianoush Jahanpour said, ISNA reported.

The Central bank of Iran has allocated at least 250 million euro to import medicine and medical equipment required to fight the coronavirus.

Richard Brennan, the Regional Emergency Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Eastern Mediterranean Region, has said countries in the region and all over the world should use Iran's experience as a role model in fight against the novel coronavirus.

"Iran benefits from one of the strongest healthcare systems in the region. Iran has made notable achievements in the field of battling coronavirus," the WHO official said in a press conference in Tehran on March 7, IRNA reported.

World cannot return to 'business as usual' after Covid-19, say mayors

Mayors from many of the world's leading cities have warned there can be no return to "business as usual" in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis if humanity is to escape catastrophic climate breakdown.

City leaders representing more than 750 million people have published a "statement of principles", which commits them to putting greater equality and climate resilience at the heart of their recovery plans.

Bill de Blasio, the mayor of New York City and one of the signatories to the statement, said: "Half-measures that maintain the status quo won't move the needle or protect us from the next crisis."

"We need a new deal for these times – a massive transformation that rebuilds lives, promotes equality and prevents the next economic, health or climate crisis."

Many cities have already announced measures to support a low-carbon, sustainable recovery, from hundreds of miles of new bike lanes in Milan and Mexico City to widening pavements and pedestrianising neighbourhoods in New York and Seattle.

In London, Sadiq Khan announced plans on Wednesday to give more space to cyclists and pedestrians across the capital in an effort to encourage "green and sustainable travel" and prevent a spike in car use and pollution after the lockdown.

The move came as Transport for London modelling revealed there could be a 10-fold increase in cycling, and up to five times the amount of walking, compared with pre-coronavirus levels, if people returned to work but avoided public transport.

Khan, who is vice-chair of the C40 group, said he was determined to "build a better future" in the aftermath of the pandemic.

"Covid-19 has exposed the inequality in our society and deep flaws in our economy, which fail people from deprived communities more than anyone else," he said.

"We need to come out of this embracing a new normal and with a renewed drive to address the climate emergency."

In Greater Manchester, council leaders have unveiled plans to give more space for people walking and cycling across the region. With £5m of funding from the mayor, local authorities are planning a range of measures from extending pavements to creating one-way streets, removing through-traffic from residential neighbourhoods and building extra cycle lanes.

Last week, mayors from cities in Europe, the US and Africa held talks as part of a newly formed C40 economic task force. They agreed to coordinate efforts to map out plans to support a low-carbon, sustainable recovery from the crisis.

(Source: The Guardian)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Chirac at the UN

(September 24, 2003)

Speaking to the UN General Assembly, President Jacques Chirac of France has emphasised the importance of a multilateral approach in world affairs.

The argument over the Iraq war goes on. President Chirac said the war, **undertaken without Security Council approval**, had undermined the multilateral system. **In remarks directed at the United States**, he said **no one could act alone in the name of everyone**. No one could claim the right to use force unilaterally and pre-emptively.

Multilateralism was the key, Mr Chirac said, and it was **a modern idea suited to complex global problems**. Mr Chirac emphasised that **transferring sovereignty** to the Iraqis was essential though he set no deadline and he also talked about the gradual transfer of administrative and economic responsibilities **according to a realistic timetable**.

Mr Chirac called for **far-reaching reform** of the UN itself including the Security Council, **echoing a theme laid out by** the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and he backed Mr Annan's idea of **a high level panel** to look at the challenges facing the UN and possible reform of its institutions.

Words

undertaken without Security Council approval: which happened without the Security Council's official permission

In remarks directed at the United States: In part of his speech aimed at the United States

no one could act alone in the name of everyone: no one could act alone on behalf of everyone

Multilateralism was the key: Involving many countries was the solution

a modern idea suited to complex global problems: a new idea good for difficult world problems

transferring sovereignty: giving the power to be an independent self-governing country

according to a realistic timetable: following a practical plan

far-reaching reform: significant changes

echoing a theme laid out by: repeating an idea explained by a high level panel: a group of senior, influential people

(Source: BBC)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ◀ ▶ €

Precipitation forecast to reach above normal in next 3 months

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

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

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

بارش‌های کشور در سه ماه پیش‌رو بیش از نرمال است

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

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

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

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“hemi-”

■ **Meaning**: half

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

PHRASAL VERB

Hear from

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

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

IDIOM

Build bridges

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

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

U.S. pulling Patriot missiles from Saudi oil facilities

Trump's removal of troops from Saudi Arabia is also about oil

→ 1 This military presence was largely seen as a deterrent against Iranian aggression, and Pentagon officials explained that the changes are because Iran is no longer "an immediate threat to American strategic interests." However, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has indicated recently that the antagonism of Iran has not subsided. It seems that what has changed is America's desire or need to protect foreign oil assets.

With oil prices that are actually considered too low for the American oil industry, there is no strategic need for the U.S. to prevent a military escalation in foreign oil regions. At this moment, it is not in the U.S. strategic interest to risk American troops or commit military strength to prevent an oil price spike. Moreover, the Trump administration may be using an end to this military support as a sign to Saudi Arabia that it does not appreciate Saudi actions that have recently contributed to such low prices.

UN Security Council to address Israel's annexation plan later this month

→ 1 Moreover, Malta has expressed serious concerns over Israel's decision to annex parts of the West Bank.

The Southern European country's foreign ministry said in a statement the plan constitutes a violation of the international law and the existing global order, and undermines international efforts aimed at the so-called two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Separately, Turkey on Thursday strongly condemned Israel's plans to construct thousands of new housing units in the West Bank. According to press TV, in a statement, the Turkish Foreign Ministry described the move as a "continuation of Israel's policy of occupation and oppression."

It said the plan indicated "Israel's drive to continue usurping the rights of Palestinians through blatant illegal settlement activity."

The criticism came a day after the Israeli minister for military affairs, Naftali Bennett, granted the green light for the expansion of the Efrat settlement, located 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) south of Jerusalem al-Quds, by about 275 acres (1.11 square kilometers), when he endorsed the plan for some 7,000 new settler units in the 11,000-resident municipality, Israeli English-language daily newspaper the Jerusalem Post reported.

The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates condemned the Israeli plan later in the day.

"Such Israeli decisions constitute an utter disregard for the international law and a flagrant defiance of the international outcry against Israeli settlement construction activities and the potential annexation plan," the ministry said in a statement.

It added, "Such settlement construction approvals also constitute an act of disrespect for international warnings that increased settlement construction activities and possible annexation of parts of the West Bank would gravely threaten regional stability, and would undermine the prospects for the [so-called] two-state solution."

Russian hackers accessed emails from Merkel's constituency office

Russia's GRU military intelligence service appears to have got hold of many emails from Chancellor Angela Merkel's constituency office in a 2015 hack attack on Germany's parliament, Der Spiegel magazine reported on Friday, without citing its sources.

A spokesman for the German government had no immediate comment. There was also no immediate comment from Moscow, which has denied previous allegations of hacking abroad.

Der Spiegel said federal criminal police and the federal cyber agency had been able to partially reconstruct the attack and found that two email inboxes from Merkel's office had been targeted.

They contained email correspondence from 2012 to 2015 and Der Spiegel said the hackers appear to have managed to copy both mailboxes to another computer.

Indian train crushes home-bound migrant workers sleeping on tracks

An Indian train ran over migrant workers sleeping on the track on Friday, killing at least 14 of the group, who were apparently on their way to their home villages, the railway ministry and media said on Friday.

Tens of thousands of people have been walking home from India's key cities after losing their jobs because of a lockdown to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus since late March, al Jazeera reported. The driver tried to stop the freight train when he saw the laborers on the tracks in the western state of Maharashtra, the railway ministry said, adding it had ordered an inquiry.

Fourteen people were killed and five were injured, said a railway spokesman, CH Rakesh.

"I have just heard the sad news about labourers coming under the train, rescue work is under way," Railway Minister Piyush Goyal said on Twitter.

Putin-Trump call focuses on coronavirus, arms control, oil

U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed progress in combating the coronavirus pandemic along with arms control issues and oil prices in a phone call Thursday, the White House and the Kremlin said.

The White House said Trump spoke with Putin "to commemorate and reflect upon the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day."

The Kremlin noted in its readout of the call that the two leaders exchanged greetings ahead of the 75th anniversary of the Nazi defeat in World War II, emphasizing "the historic significance of the WWII alliance between our peoples that allowed (us) to defeat the common enemy." It said that if Russia and the U.S. follow the spirit of their wartime alliance they could score successes in dealing with such issues as ensuring strategic stability, fighting terrorism, settling regional conflicts and combating epidemics, AP reported.

The White House said the two leaders discussed "progress on defeating the coronavirus pandemic," with Trump reiterating that "the United States is working hard to care for Americans at home and is also ready to provide assistance to any country in need, including Russia."

Iraqi MPs approve al-Kadhimi's cabinet, ending months of deadlock

'Iraqi territory won't be used as launching ground against others'

→ 1 Kadhimi made the remarks while addressing a parliamentary session on Wednesday, when lawmakers approved his government and ended months of political deadlock.

Kadhimi promised to organize early and healthy elections and form a transitional government that takes the country out of the crisis and toward stability.

Prior to the vote, he said, national sovereignty must be exercised in accordance with the constitution in all aspects of the country.

He underlined the necessity to bring all armed groups and militias under control of the prime minister as the commander in chief of the armed forces, and prevent Iraq from being a battleground between regional and international forces.

He also stressed the unity of the country and voiced his readiness to work with all political parties to overcome the crisis, calling his government "a solution government, not crisis government."

Solving the ongoing disputes between the Baghdad government and the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government was also among the issues he raised in his speech.

"It is a difficult stage. The challenges that Iraq faces are great ... but they are not greater than our ability to address them," he said.



"This government came in response to a social, economic and political crisis to be a solution government, not a crisis government," he added.

Pointing to protesters' demands, he promised to fulfill them and protect freedom of expression and the right to protest.

In their Wednesday session, the Iraqi law-

makers approved Kadhimi's government, ending months of deadlock and a political crisis that hit the country's stability and economy.

The MPs gave votes of confidence to Kadhimi's picks for the ministries of interior, defense, finance, and electricity, among others. However, several ministerial candidates

failed to get the lawmakers' approval, meaning Kadhimi will begin his term without a full government.

The parliamentarians rejected the incoming premier's picks for justice, agriculture and trade ministries.

They also postponed voting on the oil and foreign ministries as political parties failed to agree on candidates.

On April 9, Iraqi President Barham Saleh officially tasked Kadhimi with forming a government after the 53-year-old director of the country's National Intelligence Service received the endorsement of the majority of the top political figures.

In a tweet on Thursday, Salih congratulated Kadhimi on the formation of his new government and reiterated support for the prime minister in carrying out his "great missions."

"We went through a difficult stage in the history of the country," he tweeted.

The Iraqi president said Kadhimi's cabinet needs to be completed immediately to help deal with the country's health, security and economic challenges.

Kadhimi emphasized the sensitivity of the moment when Iraq is facing great economic, security and health challenges and said he would work to resolve the issues.

'UAE turns Saudi into its subordinate in Libya war'

Saudi Arabia's efforts to wield influence in the West Asia (Middle East) and make itself known as the leader of Arab world (if not Muslim world) have been undermined by the United Arab Emirates' "divisive" role in the West Asia, regional experts tell Turkey's TRT World.

A clear example is the war in Libya, where Saudi Arabia directly supported the new campaign of Libyan rebel commander General Khalifa Haftar to seize control of the capital Tripoli last year, offering tens of millions to the bloody offensive.

However, despite Riyadh's financial support for Haftar, the UAE has overtaken Riyadh as the Libyan strongman's leading patron, the experts say.

"Saudi Arabia most likely holds secret resentment toward the UAE's more assertive and increasingly independent

stance, particularly in Yemen."

Saudi Arabia, along with the UAE and a coalition of its vassal states, launched a military aggression on Yemen in 2015 in a bid to reinstall the regime of former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and crush the popular Houthi Ansarullah movement.

However, over five years into the war, the kingdom has achieved neither of its objectives, and the UAE has gradually parted ways with Riyadh.

According to Press TV, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia are already in competition for the upper hand in Yemen's south, where the UAE supports a separatist movement which says it wants renewed independence for South Yemen.

On April 25, the so-called Southern Transitional Council

(STC), which represents a secessionist movement within southern Yemen backed by the UAE, declared self-administration and claimed authority over state institutions in the interim capital of Aden.

The move has sparked political competition for Saudi patronage, and all of this poses a major diplomatic challenge for the Saudis.

The Saudis, struggling with their limited military capabilities and the financial strain of the conflict, have engaged with the Houthis in backchannel talks over the last few months, an apparent recognition of their defeat in the war.

The Western-sponsored bombing campaign has plunged Yemen into what the UN says is the world's worst humanitarian crisis and killed more than 100,000 people in the impoverished state.

Ansarullah slams Saudi Arabia, UAE for using television programs to promote Israel



he leader of Yemen's popular Houthi Ansarullah movement has slammed Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for using certain television programs to promote relations with Israel and demean the Palestinian struggle against occupation.

"Those who are directly coordinated with Israel, or through intermediaries allied with Israel, are partners in their crime," Abdul-Malik Badreddin al-Houthi said in a speech on Thursday, according to Yemen's al-Masirah television network.

Al-Houthi added that colluding in crimes committed by the Israeli regime was amongst "the most dangerous" of acts.

"The evils committed by the Zionists are most the significant. This is because the scope of their crimes extends to all of humanity given the large scope of Zionist influence over major countries," he said.

"People have to avoid providing any assistance to Israel, the United States or their supporters," al-Houthi added.

■ **Riyadh's pro-Israel programming**
Al-Houthi's remarks come in response

to the airing of a string of media productions by certain Persian Gulf countries promoting ties with Israel.

The new "Umm Haroun" television series is one of such programs produced by the Dubai-based Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC).

According to Press TV, the series directed by Egypt's Ahmed Gamal el-Adl in the United Arab Emirates stars a Kuwaiti actress who plays the role of a Jewish midwife of Turkish origin living in the Persian Gulf country before settling in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Hebrew-language outlet N12 reported on Sunday that many believe Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is involved in the series as he is interested in closer relations between the kingdom and Israel.

The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas in Gaza denounced the TV series as a "political and cultural attempt to introduce the Zionist project to Persian Gulf society."

Coronavirus: WHO warns 190,000 could die in Africa in one year



As many as 190,000 people across Africa could die in the first year of the coronavirus pandemic if crucial containment measures fail, the World Health Organization (WHO) warns.

The new research also predicts a prolonged outbreak over a few years.

"It likely will smoulder in transmission hot spots," says WHO Africa head Matshidiso Moeti.

This patchier and slower pattern of transmission sets Africa apart from other regions, WHO experts say.

Other factors taken into account are the region's younger populations who have "benefitted from the control of communicable diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis", as well as lower mortality rates.

The WHO's warning comes as Africa's most populous nation, Nigeria, plus others including South Africa and Ivory Coast, have begun relaxing some of their lockdown measures.

The study finds that between 29 million and 44 million people in the WHO African region could get infected in the first year of

the pandemic. Between 83,000 and 190,000 could die in the same period, it warns.

The estimates are based on prediction modelling, and focus on 47 countries in the WHO African region with a combined population of one billion - Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti are not included.

Across the whole of the African continent more than 2,000 coronavirus deaths have been recorded by Africa's Centre for Disease Control. By comparison, 140,000 have died in Western Europe, where the virus took hold several weeks earlier.

Cases have been recorded in every African nation except Lesotho.

According to BBC, South Africa has the highest number of confirmed cases - more than 8,200 and 160 deaths - while Algeria has the most deaths - 483.

"Covid-19 could become a fixture in our lives for the next several years unless a proactive approach is taken by many governments in the region," Dr Moeti says in a WHO statement.

German counter-intel chief apologizes to Tel Aviv over wiping Israel off map

The head of Germany's Military Counterintelligence Service (MAD) has rushed to issue an extraordinary statement of apology to the Tel Aviv regime after the agency deleted the Israeli-occupied territories on a map printed in its report.

The Cologne-based intelligence agency said on Thursday that the initial draft of its 2019 annual report erroneously depicted Israel in the same color as neighboring Jordan.

"I intensively exchanged views on this mistake in a personal conversation with the responsible employees," Dr. Christof Gramm, the President of MAD wrote in an email to Israeli English-language daily newspaper the Jerusalem Post.

"I regret this incident deeply and expressly apolo-

gize," he added, noting that the agency's duties include combating anti-Semitism and extremism within the German military.

Peter Weier, a spokesman for the MAD, also said, "After the first tip, we immediately corrected this error and checked how it could have happened. Inadequate care and inadequate quality control have led to this error."

"There are currently no indications of deliberate action or a political background," he asserted.

Earlier, Germany's Defense Ministry had explained that the error was a product of a "software" problem in a post published on its Twitter page on Wednesday.

The development comes as Germany banned the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement on its soil and designated the group a "terrorist" organization

late last month, in a move long urged by Israel and the United States.

The Federal Ministry of the Interior said on April 30 that police conducted raids in Germany to detain suspected members of the anti-Israel group.

The ministry said in a statement that the ban means Hezbollah symbols should not be shown at gatherings and in publications or in the media and Hezbollah assets can be seized.

Speaking in a televised speech broadcast live from the Lebanese capital city of Beirut on Monday afternoon, the Hezbollah secretary general roundly denounced Germany's banning of his group and its designation as a terrorist organization, saying the move was taken under pressure from Israel and the U.S.

Daei nominated for Asian all-time striker

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Ali Daei, **d e s k** former captain of the Iranian national football team, has been nominated for the all-time striker in the history of Asian football by the Fox Sports Asia website.

On the 66th birthday of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), Fox Sports Asia has selected some of Asia's current heroes, future stars, and all-time legends, including nine prolific attackers with Daei from Iran among them. Fans can cast their votes and pick three from the nine introduced forwards.

Daei, who is the world's all-time leading goalscorer in the history of men's international football with 109 goals scored for the Persians, was the captain of the country's team.

As a striker he played for clubs such as Persepolis, Al-Sadd (Qatar), and German teams Arminia Bielefeld, Bayern Munich and Hertha BSC.

The list for the best strikers in the history of Asian football includes some well-known players such as Son Heung-min, the South

Korean winger of Tottenham Hotspur and Hidetoshi Nakata, the Japanese former midfielder who won the Scudetto with Roma and Copa Italia with Parma during his successful career.

Ali Daei's achievement as the leading goalscorer of the World's international football is listed in Guinness World Records. He also won the Asian Football Confederation Player of the Year award in 1999.

The Ardabil-born player, while playing at Bayern Munich in 1998-1999 season, became the first Asian player ever to feature in a UEFA Champions League match.

He started playing in Iran national team on 6 June 1993, in a friendly match against Pakistan and continued to make 149 appearances for Iran.

Daei played his last game for Iran in the 2006 World Cup.

In October 2006, Daei was appointed as the interim coach of the Saipa team while he was playing for the team. Saipa became the Persian Gulf Cup champions in Daei's first season at the helm.



After retiring as a player, he managed Naft Tehran, most importantly, Iran national Team.

Sara Khadem returns to Iran national chess team



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Sarasadat Khademalsharieh, also known as Sara Khadem, who had announced her retirement from Iran national chess team, has returned to the national team.

On January 12, Khadem published a photo on her Instagram account and said she has retired from national team.

Khadem is an Iranian chess player who

holds the titles of International Master (IM) and Woman Grandmaster (WGM).

In a meeting with Iran Chess Federation acting president Farhad Nikookhesal, Khadem said that she has decided to represent her country in the international competitions.

She is going to represent Iran at the online chess championship along with nine other women chess players.

Fenerbahce deny parting company with Sayyadmanesh



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — The Istanbul top football club Fenerbahce have denied parting ways with Iranian youngster Allahyar Sayyadmanesh.

The Turkish media had reported that Fenerbahce have terminated the 19-year-old's contract but the top-flight football team have refuted the speculations.

Sayyadmanesh has been loaned to Istanbulspor and represented the team in seven

games in the TFF 1. League but has yet to score.

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

Sayyadmanesh was a member of Iran U17 football team who qualified for the 2017 FIFA U17 World Cup quarter-final in India.

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

FIVB announces cancellation of VNL 2020

The FIVB announced the cancellation of the FIVB Volleyball Nations League (VNL) 2020 due to the ongoing global coronavirus pandemic and its impact on host cities being able to deliver safe, accessible and high-quality competitions.

The VNL 2020 was scheduled to begin on 19 May 2020 for the women's competition and 22 May 2020 for the men's event. The FIVB announced the postponement of the event in March 2020, in order to protect the health of players and all involved, and hoped to find a date later in the year.

However, given the evolving nature of the pandemic, the complexity of staging the global event, across multiple host countries, and the commitment to safeguarding participants' health, the VNL Council, the FIVB Board of Administration and the event organizers, jointly agreed to cancel this year's edition of the VNL. The FIVB is continuing to work closely with all parties to coordinate the schedule for the VNL 2021 while retaining both Italy and China as the host nations for the Finals.

FIVB President Dr Ary S. Graça F° said:

"Together with our partners, we had explored all the various options to host the VNL 2020. Part of what makes the VNL so special is that it is a truly global event enjoyed by players and specially by fans from all around the world.



But this strength also increases its risk during this current global pandemic. It would therefore be imprudent, maybe even irresponsible for us to go ahead with the event when we cannot provide players and all stakeholders with the certainty that the VNL 2020 would be safe, accessible to all and held at a high level.

"Instead, our attention now turns to VNL 2021 and making

sure it is our best ever edition. I know that our incredible athletes will be unrelenting in their efforts to prepare for the competition, and I have no doubt that next year will prove to be a very exciting year for volleyball."

In addition, both the men's and women's editions of the 2020 FIVB Volleyball Challenger Cup, originally scheduled to be hosted in Gondomar, Portugal and Zadar, Croatia between 24-28 June respectively, will not be held this year. Teams that qualified for the VNL 2020 in the 2019 edition of the Challenger Cup, the Slovenia national men's volleyball team and Canada national women's volleyball team, will retain their places for the VNL 2021.

Last year's edition of the VNL featured 16 of the world's best teams in each gender competing for the coveted VNL Champions title. Russia took first place in the men's finals in Chicago, United States and the USA took the top spot in the women's in front of huge crowds in Nanjing, China. The event also saw more digital fan engagement than ever before, with the attraction of over 550,000 new social media followers and an incredible 3.8 billion social media impressions over the course of the competition. The VNL 2021 will look to top these figures by captivating volleyball fans across the globe once again.

(Source: FIVB)

Fake crowd noise and a 41-year-old scores: Football is back in South Korea- and as wild as ever

The opening night of South Korea's K-League presented a rare-treat for football fans starved of action, with reigning champions Jeonbuk Motors facing cup champions Suwon Bluewings.

But the joy of seeing live football return - and in one of Asia's top leagues, no less - was marred by ignominious 1-0 defeat for Bluewings.

Making things worse, former Melbourne Victory playmaker Antonis was sent off with 15 minutes remaining for a reckless studs-up tackle while the match was goalless, before Taggart was substituted one minute later.

Just minutes later, 41-year-old icon Lee Dong-gook rose to head home a corner from the near post.

The veteran player - formerly of England's Middlesbrough - is the oldest in the competition and a legend of South Korean domestic football.

Jeonbuk have won the competition five of the last six years, but their 42,477-capacity Jeonju World Cup Stadium stood empty on the opening night of the season.

Fans had not been allowed to attend the match, although the club attempted to mitigate their absence by placing enormous banners reading "C_U_SOON" and "STAY STRONG" across the empty seats.

Recordings of fan noise were played in the broadcast - with drums, chants, cheers and clapping all part of the mix.

The K-League, delayed for two seasons

due to the coronavirus - has entered a new era in the competition's history. Last season, the league sold broadcast rights to just six countries, all in Asia. This year, it is 36 countries and counting. There was also a livestream on Youtube and Twitter commented by FOX FOOTBALL's Simon Hill.

BBC's live stream of the opener noted it had 23,000 concurrent viewers alone.

Of course, the return of football simply had to involve VAR controversy. There was a long delay as Suwon's Canadian defender - the competition's first Canadian, no less - Doneil Henry, handled the ball in the box twice in the space of a second. But the referee waved it away after a long look at the replay.

(Source: Fox Sports)



Azadi Stadium among world's best football grounds

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Azadi Stadium in Iran has **d e s k** squeezed into the top 25 stadiums in the world according to an online poll.

Spanish outlet MARCA have been encouraging fans to vote for what they deem to be the greatest arena for football games. The Cairo international stadium is the best football ground in the world according to the poll.

Spanish stadiums Santiago Bernabeu, Nou Camp and Athletic Bilbao's San Mames, which replaced the old version of the same ground, follow behind in second, third and fourth.

Anfield is the highest-ranked English stadium in eighth place, a place above Signal Iduna Park - another ground known for its bubbling atmosphere on European night.

Wembley and Old Trafford are just outside the top in 12th and 13th respectively, with the San Siro deemed to be the 16th best stadium in the world.

Azadi Stadium is the only stadium in Asia in top 25 stadiums. Here is the list in full at the time of writing:

1. Cairo International Stadium (Al Ahly)
2. Santiago Bernabeu (Real Madrid)
3. Nou Camp (FC Barcelona)
4. San Mames (Athletic Club)
5. Monumental de Chile (Colo Colo)
6. Wanda Metropolitano (Atletico Madrid)
7. La Bombonera (Atletico Madrid)
8. Anfield (Liverpool)
9. Signal Iduna Park (Borussia Dortmund)
10. Stade Olympique de Radès (Espérance Tunis)
11. Stade Mohamed V (Raja and Wydad Casablanca)
12. Wembley (England national team)
13. Old Trafford (Manchester United)
14. Stade Velodrome (Marseille)
15. Maracana (Flamengo and Fluminense)
16. San Siro (Inter and AC Milan)
17. Allianz Arena (Bayern Munich)
18. Azadi Stadium (Iran)
19. Celtic Park (Celtic)
20. Donbass Arena (Shakhtar Donetsk)
21. Ibrox Stadium
22. Estadio da Luz (Benfica)
23. Johan Cruyff Arena (Ajax and Netherlands national team)
24. Estadio Monumental (River Plate)
25. Estadio Azteca (Club America, Cruz Azul and Mexico national team)

Hrvoje Milic to return to Esteghlal

TASNIM — Esteghlal's Croatian defender Hrvoje Milic will return to the Iranian football club despite rumors that he was going to leave the team.

Local media had reported that the 31-year-old will not return to Iran after Esteghlal failed to respect contractual obligations.

Milic has recently announced that he will join his team. Iran football leagues have been postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Esteghlal are one of the favorite teams to win the Iran Professional League this season.

Spanish side eye Sepahan forward Mohebbi

PLDC — A La Liga outfit have shown interest in signing Sepahan striker Mohammad Mohebbi.

Vatrzhesh3.com has reported that the 21-year-old player has caught the eye of the Spanish team after his glorious performance in Iran Professional League.

He joined Sepahan last year on a three-year contract and was also invited to Iran national football team.

He has played three matches for Team Melli and scored two goals.

Mohebbi also is a member of Iran U-23 football team.

Cheshmi on Indian team Goa's radar

Indian Super League football team Goa have set their sights on signing Esteghlal defender Roozbeh Cheshmi.

The center back is also a member of Iran national football team and represented Team Melli in the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

TMIndia has now learned that the Gaurs are indeed chasing the Iranian international but the high financial expectation of the player is holding back the Indian Super League's league stage winners.

FC Goa are set to play in the AFC Champions League and need to abide by AFC laws, which mandates fielding only four foreigners. One of the four foreigners has to be from the AFC affiliated nations. With Roozbeh, the Gaurs will tick this requisite.

The 26-year-old international footballer could be worth breaking the bank for the Indian team.

(Source: TMIndia)

Foolad Arena to use VAR system next season

IRNA — Iranian football club Foolad have announced that they will be equipped with Video Assistant Referee (VAR) next season.

The Stadium could be the first Iranian stadium to use VAR next season.

"We have analyzed the situation and want to start using the [VAR] system," Foolad General Manager Saeid Azari said.

The 30,000-seat stadium, located northeast of Ahvaz, was inaugurated in January 2019.

In the VAR system, a group of referees review decisions of the head referee using video footage and headset communication.

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

There is no price for your soul but heaven; so, beware of selling it for anything else.

Imam Ali (AS)

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Note: Some of the following art exhibitions are being organized online in order to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus.

Painting



■ O Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Hamidreza Emami. The exhibit titled "Mediator" will run on <https://ogallery.net/viewing-rooms/mediator> until May 18. In addition, visiting the exhibition is possible by appointment and observing health protocols for art galleries.



■ Painter Samir Eskandarfar is showcasing her latest works at in an exhibition at Aknun Gallery. The exhibition entitled "There Is No Us" will run until May 13 at the gallery located at 9 Harir Dead End off Afshin 14 Alley, Khaqani St.



■ Paintings by Feridun Ave are on view in an exhibition at Dastan Gallery. The exhibit titled "A Season of Work" will run until May 12 on <https://dastan.gallery/exhibitions/317>.

Multimedia



■ Dozens of artists in various media are displaying their artworks in an exhibition named "1+1 Million" at Saless Gallery. Works by Mojtaba Taqvaai, Ali Bazmandegan, Yazdan Saadi, Amir Soqrati and Elaheh Adham have been selected for the exhibition, which will be held until May 22 on @twomillion_official.



■ A collection of sculptures and paintings by Erika Ebrahimi, Susan Adibi, Golnaz Qadiri, Reza Onsori, Hooman Nasiri and several other artists is on display in an exhibition at Golestan Gallery. The exhibit will be running until May 25 on <http://www.golestangallery.com>.

Florian Schneider, Kraftwerk founder and electronic music pioneer, dies at 73

BERLIN (Reuters) — Florian Schneider, co-founder of pioneering German electronic band Kraftwerk, which influenced generations of pop and dance musicians with mesmerizing tracks such as "Autobahn", has died of cancer aged 73, longtime bandmate Ralf Huetter said.

Kraftwerk have been a major influence for musicians ranging from Detroit techno star Juan Atkins to pop act the Pet Shop Boys and David Bowie, and is widely seen as among the first to popularize electronic music, with eventual commercial success.

"Kraftwerk co-founder and electric pioneer Ralf Huetter has sent us the very sad news that his friend and companion over many decades Florian Schneider has passed away from a short cancer disease just a few days after his 73rd birthday," read a statement relayed by Kraftwerk's publisher Warner Music.

Schneider and Huetter founded Kraftwerk in 1970 after meeting at a music academy in Duesseldorf, the German industrial city that they made their base, and they rapidly dispensed entirely with acoustic instruments.

The son of prominent modern architect Paul Schneider-Esleben, Schneider started out playing the flute, later customizing it with original electronic effects and applying the same techniques to violins and electric guitars.

Subsequent artists like the Pet Shop Boys credit Kraftwerk's brand of rhythmic, minimalist noise, often generated on home-made electronic instruments at "Kling-Klang", their studio-cum-laboratory in Duesseldorf, with transforming the sound of popular music, starting out less than a year after the landmark Woodstock rock festival in the United States.

Autobahn (1974) was a surprise international hit and the band's most memorable, a tone poem evoking the sonic monotony of cruising down Germany's sleek motorways with the sounds of Doppler-shifted car horns and badly-tuned radios.

Let's share our love of Iran: painter Iran Darrudi

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian surrealist painter Iran Darrudi has asked her countrymen to share their love of their homeland.

Speaking to the Iran-France Friendship Association in an online interview on last Wednesday, the 83-year-old Darrudi said, "Unfortunately, Iran and its history has been consigned to oblivion, however, we cannot deny our identity; we are Iranian and the history shows that this land has been the founder of the world's culture."

She addressed Iranians and said, "Be respectful of the Persian language and write and speak properly; we should share our common love for Iran."

The Tehran Municipality has allocated a large area to establish a museum to embrace works by the renowned Iranian surrealist painter Iran Darrudi.

Born in the northeastern Iranian city of Mashhad, Darrudi has studied at Ecole Superier des Beaux-Arts and the Ecole du Louvre in Paris and the Royal Academy of Brussels. She also received education on television direction and production at the RCA Institute in New York City.

Few years ago, she returned to her homeland and the Tehran Municipality promised her to establish a museum in the Yusefabad district to embrace the works she had brought with herself from Paris.

In addition, Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization (CHTHO) honored her with the first Eternal Tile, which was embedded on the wall of her house in Tehran in May 2017.

The idea to install the tiles on the houses of contemporary artists, literati and religious figures was initiated by the CHTHO Office for Inscription of Properties and Revitalization of Intangible and Natural Heritage.

The tile bearing the name and title of the celebrity is installed on the façade of his/her house. It also carries the year the



Painter Iran Darrudi attends the opening of Tara Behbahani's exhibition at Golestan Gallery in Tehran on October 5, 2018. (Honaronline/Ramona Mirian)

artist began to live in the house.

"Over my life, I have regularly proved that how much I love Iran, its great history and my countrymen; I was born a lover and I have honestly expressed my love of Iran and its great history," Darrudi said.

"I'm thankful for my people's affection to me and I want to know that I deserve

your love; I've been offering service fairly over all these years to acquaint my people with the contemporary art," she added.

She talked about her faith in her Iranian identity and said, "My name is Iran and by selecting this name for me, they have assigned me a great duty."

Darrudi also spoke about how she is dealing with the home quarantine during

the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Fortunately, I always take my pleasure from every moment of life. I can manage myself by myself and I can create something in solitude. I've been spending all my time in the home quarantine drawing paintings and I feel that I am among the luckiest people of the world," she concluded.

Fajr Intl. Film Festival cancels 2020 edition over coronavirus



A poster for the Fajr International Film Festival.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Fajr International Film Festival, Iran's major film event, has canceled the 38th edition over the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival's president said on Thursday.

The festival was scheduled to be held in April, however, amid the growing concern over the new virus during March, the organizers postponed it to a later time in June.

"At present, although it is possible to organize the festival semi-online as the initial arrangements, such as selecting films for the various sections of the festival, had been made, due to the fact that it is impossible for guests from around the world to attend the festival, the 2020 edition is canceled and

preliminary arrangements for organizing the 2021 festival start from now," Mohammad-Mehdi Asgarpur said in a press release.

"First, it seemed that it was possible to organize the festival during June, but the virus outbreak was so extensive that some international festivals scheduled for spring and summer this year were canceled," he added.

Groups of Iranian cineastes called on the Cinema Organization of Iran to cancel film festivals in the country to allocate the festivals' budgets to those filmmakers and film organizations affected by the coronavirus shutdown.

Asgarpur had previously raised a serious objection to the request.

A British nurse is the chosen superhero in new Banksy artwork

LONDON (Reuters) — A young boy chooses a nurse as the superhero he wants to play with over Batman and Spiderman in a new artwork by Banksy that encapsulates the gratitude Britons have felt toward the country's National Health Service during the coronavirus crisis.

The painting by the secretive street artist was unveiled at University Hospital Southampton, in south England, on Wednesday.

An image of the work was also posted on Banksy's Instagram page with the caption "Game Changer".

Hospital chief executive Paula Head said: "So proud to reveal this amazing piece of art 'Painting for Saints', created by #Banksy as a thank you to all those who work with and

for the NHS and our hospital."

"An inspirational backdrop to pause and reflect in these unprecedented times," she added on Twitter.

It is not the first Banksy work inspired by COVID-19. He posted scenes of his trademark stenciled rats running amok in a bathroom last month, accompanied by the comment: "My wife hates it when I work from home."

His existing "Girl with a Pierced Eardrum" mural was also updated with the addition of a blue surgical mask, although the update was not confirmed to be his work on Instagram.

The new painting will be on display at the hospital until after the lockdown and it will then be auctioned for NHS charities, according to the BBC.



Banksy's painting "Game Changer" at University Hospital Southampton, in south England.

Nigerian comics fight COVID-19 with gags and slapstick slaps

LAGOS (Reuters) — Nigerian comedian Maryam Apaokagi has a sure-fire way of getting people to listen to her coronavirus health advice - she delivers it with a hard slap in the face.

The 21-year-old has joined a lineup of the nation's top performers working health tips into their routines to spread the word about COVID-19.

In one of her online videos, she plays the role on an all-knowing, all-controlling Nigerian mother who watches in horror as a young man sneezes into his hands.

Within seconds she grabs a bottle of sanitizer, slathers it over her palms, then hits him hard in the face. "Ah, a sanitized slap," her companion gasps in mock horror, as the young man learns his lesson the hard way.

Apaokagi, who goes by the stage name Taaooma, said she decided to put out the video to try and reach people who would usually ignore or dismiss advice from the usual official sources - people like her own mother.

"The main reason why I did the coronavirus skit was because of my mom, because you cannot tell her not to go and worship," she told Reuters.

Authorities have put out regular advice on avoiding large gatherings and the importance of washing hands - but trust in the government is low and conspiracies and bogus health tips spread fast on social media.



Comedian Apaokagi "Taaooma" Maryam displays some of her costumes used during her skits production in her office, as the government struggles to contain coronavirus disease in Lagos, Nigeria May 6, 2020. (Reuters/Seun Sanni)

Parents "are the ones that are... the most difficult people to tell not to do things," said Apaokagi. "So when they watch it and laugh, they will also remember the message that they said we should not go to the mosque, they said we should not go to the church for now".

■ Do the dab

In the skit she advises anyone who is about to cough to do the dab - a dance move where your face ends up in the crook of your arm.

Fellow comic Osarenkhoe Lawrence conjures up a world where diseases have their own governing committee.

In his video, performers representing Ebola and cancer make official complaints to the board saying the new kid on the block is stealing all the limelight.

The solution, the disease chairman rules, is to put COVID-19 in its place by keeping clean and maintaining social distance.

"We are no longer joking, we are actually affecting lives and I think this period we need more videos, we need more funny content," said the performer from Benin City, who goes by the name MC Casino.

Nigeria's health ministry has spotted the trend and enlisted popular comedian Bright Okpocha, aka Basketmouth, to appear in a public service video about the dangers of spreading misinformation.

The messages are getting through, said Cyril Oto-Obong, a comedy fan who works as an accountant in Lagos.

"It is not everyone who understands the safety measures when it is spoken in English, but once a comedian makes it a laughing matter, one thing is it will make people pay attention."