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Tehran, Kabul discuss joint probe into incident surrounding Afghan migrants

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held a phone conversation with acting Afghan foreign minister Mohammad Haneef Atmar on Sunday discussing the tragic deaths of a number of Afghan migrants near the border.

According to the Afghan Foreign Ministry, the two foreign ministers exchanged views on ways to start "joint investigation"

into the incident.

They also agreed to hold joint sessions if necessary.

Atmar said his government has sent an investigation team to Herat and began studying the incident at the site.

Zarif also assured the Afghan side that Iran will soon form a team to probe the incident at the site. **→2**

No new coronavirus-like disease has emerged: expert

TEHRAN — An Iranian specialist in infectious diseases and a member of the National Committee for Influenza has rejected rumors that a new disease similar to the coronavirus has emerged in parts of the world that mostly inflicts children.

Over the past few weeks, doctors around the world have noticed a number of children are sick with a mysterious illness that appears to be linked to the coronavirus. In some cases, the symptoms seem similar

to Kawasaki disease, a rare childhood illness that causes inflammation of the blood vessels.

Masoud Mardani, professor at Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Science, said that Covid-19 can affect everyone with any age and race. After months of the coronavirus outbreak, new symptoms of the disease have emerged and this is not a new disease, ISNA quoted Mardani as saying. **→9**

Iran ready to conduct mineral exploration projects in regional countries

TEHRAN — Deputy head of Geological Survey and Mineral Explorations of Iran (GSI) says the organization is ready to carry out exploration projects for the countries in the region, IRNA reported on Monday.

"Today, with 60 years of experience and with access to modern equipment and facilities, GSI is able to carry out mineral exploration activities for the countries in the region," Mohammad-Baqer Dorri said.

According to the official, Iran is currently extracting 68 types of minerals and GSI experts are ready to do related exploration activities in the neighboring countries.

Stressing the fact that mineral extraction from a depth of several thousand meters is not possible for all countries in the world, Dorri suggested taking advantage of other countries' experiences. **→4**



ARTICLE

Martin Love
Political analyst from North Carolina

American "exceptionalism" is fading at warp speed...

Americans, at least 80 percent of over 320 million souls, are getting walloped by one thing or another. They are having a hard time coping, and while the coping problems may be their own fault either from ignorance or a lack of broad perspective, what's going on is really not their fault. The United States looks like what it has often claimed other countries are, and often because of U.S. foreign policies and war mongering: a "failed" or failing state. So, what is this?

A state "fails" when its political apparatus and its government no longer function properly and cannot meet public needs. It's failing or has failed when decisions made by the government cannot effectively address whatever problems may internally or externally exist, assuming the government has not yet lost its legitimacy. Failure can also occur when a country has lost control of its territory, or the government has lost its monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force. Failure can also be evident when the standard of living in a country declines to such an extent the decline threatens to destroy the entire government and literally to sweep away its presiding politicians, perhaps even to death.

But the time has not yet come for citizens and politicians of other countries that have been under attack or reprimand or sanctions to cheer the internal U.S. failures, if for no other reason but the fact that the U.S. government continues to wield the most dangerous and most powerful military force on the planet, and might tend to ramp up militarism to try to convince its alleged enemies to bow to U.S. pressures.

The cheering perhaps can come later when the chaos in the U.S. has become so evident and rampant that America must address its own problems before anything else and drop its pretense to "empire". This seems to be ahead in the coming decade. And that will be a welcome shift of attention even to a majority of Americans who, if anything now, are increasingly frustrated and frightened by burgeoning, **→3**

Judiciary chief predicts new Intifada if Israel annexes West Bank

TEHRAN — Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi said on Monday that a new Intifada will emerge if the West Bank is annexed to the Palestinian occupied lands by the Israeli regime.

This Intifada will make the United States and Zionist regime of Israel regret, Raisi said during a meeting of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary.

"If the negotiating tables decided issues related to Palestine and the region by yesterday, today the resistance front has the initiative who will not allow the devil intentions of arrogant powers be fulfilled," the top judge remarked.

The West Bank and Gaza were captured by Israel during the 1967 Six Day War. Shortly after the 1967 war Israel began building settlements in the land, in violation of international law.

Just recently the Zionist regime's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and his main rival Benny Gantz signed a coalition agreement that

includes a clause to advance plans to annex parts of the West Bank, including Israeli settlements, starting on July 1.

U.S. President Donald Trump in late January announced the general provisions of the plan dubbed "the deal of the century" at the White House with Netanyahu at his side.

All Palestinian groups have unanimously rejected the deal which gives Jerusalem al-Quds the status of "Israel's undivided capital" and authorizes further Israeli annexations in the West Bank and the Jordan Valley.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has strongly denounced the Zionist regime's move to expand its illegal settlements and annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

In a statement in April, Mousavi described the annexation as a violation of international law and a part of the "shameful plan" proposed by Trump, according to the Foreign Ministry website.

Iran-Syria trade seen to reach \$1b by March 2021

TEHRAN — Head of Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce Keyvan Kashefi believes that the value of Iran's trade with Syria will reach \$1 billion by the next Iranian calendar year 1400 (starts on March 21, 2021).

"Considering the plans we have on the agenda for expanding trade with Syria, the value of Iran's trade with the country is expected to reach \$1 billion by the next year," the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) quoted Kashefi as saying.

According to Kashefi, the two countries' private sectors have been carrying out trade activates in the form of a joint economic committee in the last 1.5 years, however, following the increase in the activities, Iran-Syria Joint Chamber of Commerce has been established and this is a big step for further expansion of trade ties between the two countries.

The official noted that the purpose of the joint chamber is to increase the number of economic engagements between the two nations.

"Syria is one of our main trade markets and export destinations, especially in the future, and we have common interests with this country in various fields, which can support our economic relations," Kashefi said.

Syria is also very interested in boosting economic relations with Iran, and the two sides could take advantage of this opportunity, according to the official.

He further mentioned some of the joint chamber's plans for increasing trade between the two countries including holding an exhibition of Iran's capabilities in Syria in near future, increasing the exchange of trade delegations, and the establishment of an Iranian trade center in Syria. **→4**

Iraq PM: Iraq to review strategic agreement with U.S.

Newly elected Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi said Saturday that a strategic agreement with the U.S. on the basis of protecting the unity and sovereignty of Iraq will be reviewed, Anadolu Agency reports.

Following his first Cabinet meeting, al-Kadhimi told reporters the group established a crisis desk consisting foreign affairs experts.

Iraq and the U.S. signed the Strategic Framework Agreement in 2008 based on a relationship of friendship and cooperation between the two nations.

Parliament gave a vote of confidence Thursday to al-Kadhi-

mi and his partial Cabinet to succeed the resigned government of Adel Abdul-Mahdi.

Al-Kadhimi managed to form a new government after two former prime ministers-designate, Mohammad Allawi and Adnan Al-Zurfi, failed to garner support.

The presence of U.S. forces presents a serious quandary for new Iraqi prime minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

On Saturday, he met U.S. Ambassador Matthew Tueller in Baghdad, reiterating that Iraq would not be a ground for settling accounts and launching attacks on any neighboring

or friendly country.

Around 5,000 U.S. troops are in Iraq under the pretext of supporting Iraqi forces in the battle against Daesh even as Baghdad has declared the fight against the Takfiri terrorists over a long time ago.

Following a cabinet meeting Saturday, Kadhimi said a strategic agreement with the U.S. will be reviewed.

Iraq and the U.S. signed the Strategic Framework Agreement in 2008 based on a relationship of friendship and cooperation between the two nations. **→10**



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Darreh Tefi, a nesting place for storks in western Iran

Every spring, Darreh Tefi village in western Kordestan province, hosts a large number of migratory storks that make nests and begin their mating season. In addition to its natural attractions and tourist sites, the arrival of storks in the village has made it a destination for many nature lovers.

Storks build their nests on electric poles and oak trees, and the villagers treat them kindly.

Trump is culpable in deaths of Americans: Chomsky

Donald Trump is culpable in the deaths of thousands of Americans by using the coronavirus pandemic to boost his electoral prospects and line the pockets of big business, Prof Noam Chomsky has said.

In an interview with the Guardian, the radical intellectual argued the U.S. president was stabbing average Americans in the back while pretending to be the country's saviour during the worst health crisis in at least a century.

He said Trump, who will seek re-election later this year, had cut government funding for healthcare and research into infectious disease for the benefit of wealthy corporations.

Chomsky said: "That's something that Trump has been doing every year of his term, cutting it back more. So [his plan is] let's continue to cut it back, let's continue to make sure that the population is as vulnerable as we can make it, that it can suffer as much as possible, but will of course increase profits for his primary constituents in wealth and corporate power." **→10**

Tehran, Kabul discuss joint probe into incident surrounding Afghan migrants

1 → The two foreign minister also agreed that if necessary the investigation teams from the two countries can hold meetings at the site of the incident and cities of Mashhad and Herat.

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

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



Iran's Foreign Ministry has rejected as a "bitter joke" a claim by the United States that Iranian guards were involved in the tragic deaths of Afghan migrants near the border.

"Iran has strong ties with Afghanistan & leads the way to help Afghan leaders for inclusive Govt. What happened to Afghan nationals in Herat is tragic & unrelated to Iran, but US regime's allegation against Iran is a 'bitter joke'," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement published via Twitter on May 5.

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

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

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

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

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

U.S. congressman calls maximum pressure a 'failed policy'

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — U.S. Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff has said that the Donald Trump administration's policy of maximum pressure against Iran is a "failed policy".

In a tweet on Monday, he noted that the maximum pressure strategy has brought the United States to the brink of war with Iran.

"No amount of spin can save this disastrously failed policy," he said.

Trump unilaterally quit the nuclear deal in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions in history on Iran as part of his administration's "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran.

Many analysts and think tanks believe that the maximum pressure policy has failed.



On the second anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, the Iranian Foreign Ministry 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"

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

President Hassan Rouhani said in December 2019 that the White House has no way other than putting an end to its policy of "maximum pressure" on the Islamic Republic.

Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani also said in December that maximum pressure is a "wrong policy" and the U.S. must stop it.

"There has always been political will to solve issues and there is no dead end... The issue is that policy of maximum pressure is wrong and must be changed. We have not closed the door, however, the United States must come to the understanding that this policy is not right," Larijani said in a press conference.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in September 2019 that Washington's policy of sanction and pressure against Iran has not worked.

"The United States is running out of options. It is desperate. The policy of maximum pressure has not worked," he told CGTN in an interview.

Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has called policy of "maximum pressure" on Tehran bankrupt.

"We have been pressuring them. Maximum pressure... we're seeing the unfolding of really a bankruptcy of approach," Kerry told CBS News.

Rouhani talks to Kadhimmi on phone, says Iran will stand beside Iraqis

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — In a phone conversation with new Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on Monday, President Hassan Rouhani said that Iran will stand beside the Iraqi government and people.

"As we proved that we stand beside the Iraqi people in fighting Daesh, we will stand beside the Iraqi government to help establish stability and make progress," Rouhani stated in phone call.

He said Iran attaches great importance to Iraq's independence, political stability, national sovereignty and integrity.

"We always have to be careful about plots which target interests of the Iraqi people and the region," he noted.

Rouhani also highlighted the importance of regional peace and stability.

Elsewhere, he called for expanding economic cooperation and implementing agreements between the two countries.

For his part, Kadhimmi said that it is essential for two countries to expand economic relations.

The prime minister described Iran as a



"friendly" and "brotherly" country.

"We will never forget Iran's help to Iraq in fighting Daesh and we seek expansion of relations in various areas," he said.

Prime Minister Kadhimmi also received Iranian ambassador to Baghdad Iraj Maon

Saturday, discussing banking cooperation, issuing visa for citizens, Khoramshahr-Bara railway projects among other things.

Kadhimmi 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.

Kadhimmi 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 Kadhimmi 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.

Russian envoy calls nuclear deal 'a masterpiece of diplomacy'

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, has said that the majority of states believe that the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, was a "masterpiece of diplomacy".

In a tweet on Monday, he also said, "In the IAEA Board of Governors US is practically in total isolation on this topic."

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.

After a meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors in March, Ulyanov tweeted, "The #IAEA Board of Governors started today consideration of the report on verification in #Iran in the light of UNSC 2231. No surprises so far. Almost all Governors disagree with US policy on #JCPOA and call upon Iran to resume full implementation of the nuclear deal."



Kuwaiti Deputy FM receives Rouhani's written message to Emir

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah received on Sunday President Hassan Rouhani's written message to Kuwaiti Emir Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

According to Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Irani delivered the message.

Irani and Jarallah discussed relations, regional and international developments in light of the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Rouhani held a phone conversation with the Kuwaiti Emir on April 21.

Rouhani said that there is no way but expanding regional cooperation and friendship to boost security and stability in the region.

The Kuwaiti Emir also said his country supports Iran's proposed Hormuz peace initiative.

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



of my country in maintaining security, peace, stability, and progress in the Persian Gulf region and Strait of Hormuz, I would like to invite all the countries directly affected by the developments in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz to the 'Coalition for Hope', meaning Hormuz Peace Endeavor," President

Hassan Rouhani told the UN delegates.

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

In a tweet in September, Zarif said the initiative entails "dialogue, confidence-

building, freedom of navigation, energy security, non-aggression, and non-intervention".

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

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

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

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

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

Trump's foreign policy based on hatred towards Obama: New Hampshire University professor

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Kurk Dorsey, a professor at University of New Hampshire, has said that U.S. President Donald Trump's policies are based on his hatred towards Barack Obama, the former U.S. president who signed the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

In a violation of Resolution 2231 that endorsed the nuclear agreement, Trump withdrew the U.S. from the multilateral pact in May 2018 and imposed the toughest ever sanctions in history on Iran.

"So, he will not change his policies just because the Iranians are suffering from sanctions," Dorsey told ILNA in an interview published on Monday.

He added, "China and other countries' support for removal of sanctions will not change his mind and it will probably lead him to adopt harsher position."

However, he predicted that Trump's policy of sanction will yield no result.

U.S. Senator Chris Murphy said in January that Trump quit the nuclear deal, officially known as the JCPOA, just because it had Obama's name on it. "The Iran deal was working, but Trump ripped it all up just because it had Obama's name on it," he said in a tweet.

He also said in his tweet that Trump's blind escalation put the U.S. on the brink of war and has led Iran to restart their nuclear program, adding, "And all for nothing."

Iran suspended all limits on its nuclear program on January 5.

Ben Rhodes, former Obama's adviser, said in July 2019 that Trump quit the



JCPOA, because Obama negotiated it.

"Did anyone really need a leaked document from the UK Ambassador to know that Trump pulled out of the Iran Deal because Obama negotiated it?" Rhodes tweeted.

Kim Darroch, the former British ambassador to the U.S., has said Trump seemed to be discarding the Iran nuclear deal for "personality reasons," as the deal had been agreed to by Obama, the Daily Mail reported in July 2019.

Darroch said the Trump administration was "set upon an act of diplomatic vandalism" in its decision to abandon the JCPOA.

Former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told IRNA in an interview in October 2019 that Trump quit the nuclear deal because Obama signed it.

He said that the U.S. must admit that it made a wrong decision to quit the nuclear deal, urging the White House to return to the pact.

Straw said that the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA had "no logic".

Sirous Asgari held in U.S. will return to Iran soon

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif announced on Monday that Iranian scientist Sirous Asghari held in U.S. captivity will soon return to Iran

Asgari had tested positive for coronavirus in prison. He broke the story in an interview with the Guardian on April 28.

"Sirous Asgari has been acquitted of charges and if his coronavirus test proves negative, he will return to the country with the first flight," Zarif told reporters after attending a parliamentary committee meeting.

All necessary measures have been taken for his return, Zarif added.

Asgari, a materials science and engineering professor, had visited the U.S. to see her daughters that was arrested under the allegation of violating sanctions against Iran.

The professor, who has a history of respiratory problems, was exonerated in a U.S. sanctions trial last year, but Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) jail in Louisiana had refused to release him or allow him to return to Iran.

Speaking at the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, Zarif also said exchange of prisoners between Iran and the U.S. would not require any negotiations between the two sides.

According to parliamentary committee spokesman Seyed Hossein Naqavi Hosseini, Zarif said this could be done via the Swiss embassy which represents the U.S. interests in Iran. "There is no problem in exchange of prisoners and detainees between Iran and the U.S. and we do not need negotiations and we will not hold any negotiations with the U.S. at all," Naqavi Hosseini quoted Zarif as saying,

Fars reported.

Government spokesman Ali Rabiei said on Sunday that Iran was ready to exchange all prisoners with the United States without preconditions, reminding that Washington had not yet responded.

"We have declared our readiness to exchange all prisoners and discuss their release without any preconditions, but the U.S. has refused to answer," Rabiei said.

Zarif had also said in December that Tehran was ready for a full prisoner exchange with the U.S., tweeting, "The ball is in the U.S. court."

Rabiei held Washington responsible for the safety and health of all Iranian citizens held in U.S. prisons amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"We hope that in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak, which threatens the Iranian citizens in U.S. jails, the American government will finally prioritize human lives over politics," he added, according to Fars.

Last Monday, the Iranian Foreign Ministry expressed concern about the conditions of the country's nationals who are jailed by Washington while the coronavirus has vastly spread in the U.S.

"Unfortunately, a number of Iranian prisoners have been arrested and jailed in some European states and the U.S. for unjustified reasons and imaginary and baseless allegations and their freedom has always been on our agenda," Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi told reporters via a video conference.

He referred to the squalid condition of the U.S. jails amid the coronavirus outbreak, saying, "We voice concern about the health of all Iranian nationals in the U.S. jails and we hope that they will be freed as soon as possible unconditionally."

19 sailors martyred in naval exercise incident

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Navy's Public Relations Department has confirmed that 19 sailors were martyred and 15 others injured during a naval exercise in the country's southern waters.

The incident took place in the perimeter of Iran's southern Jask port, in Hormozgan province.

On Sunday evening, an incident happened to the Konarak support vessel during a naval drill with other ships in waters near Jask port, where a number of the Navy's sailors were martyred, the department said in a statement on Monday.

It extended condolences to families of the victims, suggesting that until thorough investigations are carried out, it is expected to avoid rumors and speculations.

Following the incident, the naval rescue and relief teams were immediately deployed to the scene, disembarked the injured and the bodies, and took the injured servicemen to the medical centers, the statement said.

The forces on board the doomed vessel showed exemplary courage to save their comrades, it added.

Following the incident, Army Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi expressed condolences to the bereaved families.

"I express my deepest condolences on the martyrdom of a number of the white [uniform] wearers of the Iranian Navy to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and the bereaved



families as well as all my fellow soldiers," Mousavi wrote in a message on Monday, according to Mehr.

He also prayed God Almighty to bestow the martyrs the highest places in heaven for their braveries and selflessness.

Major General Hossein Salami, Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), also expressed his grief over the incident, wishing for quick recovery of the survivors.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif

also expressed condolences to the families of the victims, saying he was deeply saddened by the incident.

"We are all indebted to these loved ones who sacrificed their lives for our security and well-being," Zarif said in his message.

U.S. using SHTA as propaganda tool: Iran-Switzerland chamber of commerce president

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The president of the Iran-Switzerland Joint Chamber of Commerce has said the Trump administration uses the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA) as one of its propaganda tools.

In an interview with ILNA, Sharif Nezam-Mafi said the United States claims to have set up a humanitarian channel, but in practice does not allow it to be used.

The Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement is a payment mechanism aimed at enabling the basic goods to be delivered to Iran.

The aim of the SHTA is to ensure that exporters and trading companies in the food, pharmaceutical, and medical sectors based in Switzerland have a secure payment channel with a Swiss bank through which payments for their exports to Iran are guaranteed.

Nezam-Mafi said the channel is like the "piggy bank" and since the United States does not allow money to be transferred to this channel, it is clear that this process is not practical.



He confirmed that the world's largest agribusiness companies in the world are also present in SHTA channel, which can help Iran to provide 20 million tons of grain that it needs but it depends on the transfer of money to the account.

Referring to the upcoming U.S. presidential elections, the Iranian expert said, "If Joe Biden – now the presumptive Democratic nominee – wins the election, the channel could be more prosperous."

Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, has said the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement does not match Iran's humanitarian needs in the current situation.

"On 27 February 2020, the U.S. Treasury finalized with much fanfare 'the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement' allowing certain humanitarian transactions with Iran," he said.

"However," the ambassador added, "this narrow channel does not match Iran's humanitarian needs in the current situation."

Announced in late January and declared operational a month later, the 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 February 27.

Envoy calls report on shipping gold bars from Venezuela to Iran 'baseless'

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Iranian ambassador to Caracas has rejected a recent report claiming shipping nine tons of gold bars from Venezuela to Iran as a "big lie" and a "baseless rumor".

"Iran has never received such a consignment," Soltani said, adding "Venezuela has not imported Iran's gasoline, either."

He rejected all the news claiming that Venezuela is raiding its gold vaults and handing tons of bars to Iran through recent Mahan Air flights.

The ambassador also rejected the presence of Iranian experts in Vene-

zuelan refineries.

"To the present date, Iranian gasoline has not entered Venezuela. To date, the governments of the two countries have held talks on bilateral trade cooperation, but so far Iranian fuel has not entered Venezuela," he reiterated.

"In recent days, an average of 10 to 17 commercial flights have been made from Iran to Venezuela, for the immediate transfer of equipment needed to reactivate the Paraguayan Refinery Complex, which is now a priority in achieving comprehensive relations between our countries," he added.

Some reports claimed that Venezue-



lan government officials piled some 9 tons of gold – an amount equal to about \$500 million – on Tehran-bound jets in April as payment for Iran's assistance

in reviving Venezuela's gasoline refineries. They said the shipments, which resulted in a sudden drop in Venezuela's published foreign reserve figures, leave the country with just \$6.3 billion in hard-currency assets, the lowest amount in three decades.

Soltani also referred to the Iran-Venezuela cooperation in the fight against the coronavirus, saying, "The Iranian government's cooperation with the Venezuelan people has expanded in times of crisis, and our relations, especially in the area of trade cooperation, are stronger than ever. We are here to help the people of Venezuela."

American "exceptionalism" is fading at warp speed...

➔ current conditions largely fomented by governmental failures inside the U.S. Covid 19, which is more widespread in America than in any other country, is the catalyst but not the cause of the discontent and disillusion.

When Covid 19 began to hit the U.S. back in late February, there existed a host of underlying conditions that the virus has been exploiting relentlessly: a political class dominated by two corrupt political parties, a dysfunctional bureaucracy, a divided citizenry that has for years not been properly addressed. The mere fact that someone like Donald Trump became President, a self-centered man without much intelligence who has failed to mount a rational response to the pandemic, has been telling. The Trump Administration has presented no coherent responses or plans and failed to react wisely, and if it reacted at all, it has frequently been relying on other countries, even Russia and Taiwan, to send humanitarian aid and supplies to the U.S. to try to counter the viral spread.

In this century there has been one crisis after another in America. The first was 9/11/2001. The second was the recession in 2008 and 2009, in part the result of U.S. missteps overseas such as the Iraq War and other foolish, insidious military adventures. The recession just over a decade ago was improperly addressed. The government simply threw a wet blanket of monetary excess over the smoldering economy and the elite. This seemed to save the financial system when, in fact, it only laid the groundwork for the economic

collapse now underway that has resulted in just over two months in some 33 million freshly unemployed workers and an unemployment rate that is pushing towards 1930s Depression levels of over 20 percent, and more inequality between the "rich" and all the rest than has ever previously existed. Trump is a President who has accomplished only one major legislative accomplishment, if you can call it that, which was to cut taxes radically for the wealthy, which only served himself and his cronies in business and on Wall Street.

So, for now, there is immense and growing pain for most Americans, and along with that immense frustration and anger. This in itself is bad enough, and it's a wonder the country has not so far been confronted with the kind of civic unrest that is occurring in some other countries, but it is most likely ahead as the November elections draw nearer. This is because it is so exceedingly difficult, especially for "average" Americans, to envision what the path beyond this current mess looks like, and how they can trust the government to do the right thing especially when there are no easy, painless answers.

For now, the "right thing" has seemed to be throwing trillions of freshly printed or digital "dollars" into the equation to staunch the economic bleeding at the top, and this certainly has softened but only very marginally the hard times faced by most Americans, half of whom allegedly have no or very little savings to fall back on. Meanwhile cumulative deaths from the virus are likely to reach beyond 100,000 this month

and continue to climb this coming summer. But even worse, the entire economic/monetary system is likely to implode eventually because of the money printing, and just this fiscal year alone the U.S. budget deficit will probably be close to four trillion dollars.

Maybe the toll in lives was inevitable given the pandemic and Trump's failures to respond in a timely and effective way, but far worse, it can be argued, are the government's failures to respond to pleas for humanitarian assistance from the U.S. to countries such as Iran, and to other nations deemed de facto enemies of the U.S. like Cuba and Venezuela, Lebanon, Syria and others – many of which have in fact sent or tried to send aid to the U.S. and to other countries suffering under the pandemic strain.

This kind of failure in particular by allegedly the "richest" country will never be forgotten and perhaps never forgiven once this pandemic has subsided or when medical science has found a way to nullify the virus. One might opine that the U.S. may not for a very long time, if ever, be looked upon as much more than a fading rogue power that when it had the opportunity to appear and be a force for good in the world literally failed to change course and act like what it has merely pretended it has been, an enlightened democracy. American "exceptionalism" is fading at warp speed. And the irony is that most Americans, most of them totally disempowered these days, are not at all like the Trumps and Pompeos and their ilk in Washington.

Only a rogue regime takes pride in violating int'l law, Iran says

'8 May 2018 will remain an everlasting disgrace for American polity'

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Only a rogue regime can take pride in dishonoring international commitments and violating international law, Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Sunday evening.

"Only a rogue regime with zero sense of moral responsibility can take pride in dishonoring its int'l commitments and violating int'l law," Mousavi said via Twitter.



"Mark my word: 8 May 2018 will remain an everlasting disgrace for American polity," he added.

The tweet came in response to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's claim that West Asia is more peaceful without the Iran nuclear agreement, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"Two years ago, @realDonaldTrump announced the bold decision to protect the world from #Iran's violence and nuclear threats by withdrawing from the Iran Deal," Pompeo tweeted on Sunday. "Today, Americans are safer and the Middle East [West Asia] is more peaceful than if we had remained in the #JCPOA," he added.

Concurrent with the second anniversary of the U.S. unilateral exit from the JCPOA, which falls on May 8, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said on Friday that 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"

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

Also on Friday, Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, said the United States' withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, officially 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.

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.

Over 420 kg of narcotics seized in Khuzestan

TEHRAN (MNA) — The police chief of Khuzestan province announced on Sunday that over 420 kilograms of narcotics were confiscated in the province in a matter of 24 hours.

Second Brigadier General Heydar Abbas Zadeh said two consignments of narcotics were seized in cities of Behbahan and Hendijan by the anti-narcotics police.



423 kg of opium along with three cars were also busted in separate operations, Abbas Zadeh said.

He added three offenders were also arrested.

Iran, which has a 900-kilometer common border with Afghanistan, has been used as the main conduit for smuggling Afghan drugs to narcotics kingpins in Europe.

Despite high economic and human costs, the Islamic Republic has been actively fighting drug-trafficking over the past decades. The country has spent more than \$700 million on sealing its borders and preventing the transit of narcotics destined for European, Arab, and Central Asian countries.

The war on drug trade originating from Afghanistan has claimed the lives of nearly 4,000 Iranian police officers over the past four decades.

Iran ready to conduct mineral exploration projects in regional countries

1 → Despite its capabilities, Iran still can benefit from the experiences of other countries like Australia, Canada and South Africa in exploration activities and the knowledge of mineral reserves, he noted.

Earlier, GSI Head Alireza Shahidi had said that the organization carried out exploration operations for Tajikistan, Sudan, Nigeria, Bolivia, Venezuela and Ecuador.



Iran is among the top countries in the region in terms of the mining industry.

According to the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), mining exploration operations are currently underway in 652,061 square kilometers of land across the country.

IMIDRO is currently collaborating with major mining companies across the country including Khuzestan Steel Company, Mobarakeh Steel Company, Golgozar Mining, and Industrial Company, Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company, and also Iran Minerals Production and Supply Company for developing the country's mines.

Iran-Syria trade seen to reach \$1b by March 2021

1 → Kashefi also called for the launch of a credit line with Syria to facilitate financial transactions, and noted that necessary measures are being taken in this regard. "We also need the cooperation of the two sides' central banks for this purpose", he added.



Iran and Syria have been taking major steps for expansion of their mutual trade ties. The two sides have exchanged numerous trade delegations and Iranian private companies are investing in various fields of Syrian economy like providing construction materials especially cement and working on several reconstruction projects.

Stock markets lose earlier gains

Global markets moved with uncertainty on Monday as different countries began to ease restrictions on business activity designed to curb the spread of the coronavirus outbreak.

Markets in Europe started strongly but then gave up their gains, following a rise in most Asian markets. Futures markets were predicting Wall Street would open lower.



Some investors are betting on what is called a V-shaped recovery, or an initial plunge in economic activity followed by a strong surge. But a quick recovery isn't assured, especially amid worries that a second wave of outbreaks could eventually undermine efforts to get economies back on track.

In France, Spain, Greece, the Netherlands and other countries in Europe, different restrictions on business activities were eased on Monday, part of a gradual approach as authorities try to balance economic recovery with control of the deadly virus.

Prices for U.S. Treasury bonds — which often rise in times of uncertainty — were generally lower. But oil prices also fell, on continued worries about an oversupply.

In Japan, the Nikkei 225 average closed 1.1 percent higher. Hong Kong's Hang Seng index was up 1.5 percent. Australian, Taiwan and New Zealand markets also rose. Bucking the trend, the Shanghai Composite index in mainland China was flat, while South Korea's Kospi fell 0.5 percent.

(Source: The New York Times)

Over 64m tons of iron ore extracted in a year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran has extracted 64.274 million tons of iron ore during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), IRNA reported on Monday, citing the data released by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO).

In its outlook plan for the Iranian calendar year 1404 (2025-2026) Iran has envisaged production of 55 million tons of steel per annum, and to achieve this target the country requires to extract 160 million tons of iron ore concentrate.

As announced by the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry, production of iron ore concentrates in Iran reached 47.306 million tons in the previous Iranian calendar year, registering a four-percent rise compared to the preceding year.

The data regarding the output of major mineral production companies released by the ministry showed that last year 41.7 million tons of iron ore pellet was also produced.

In a bid to prevent the exports of unprocessed minerals, creating more value-added and meeting the requirements of domestic



producers for the raw materials, Iran has levied a 25-percent duty on the exports of raw minerals (especially iron ore) since September 23, 2019.

The Industry Ministry believes that the

duty is going to encourage the production of more processed minerals such as pellets and concentrate instead of selling the raw minerals.

'Iranian automakers' offering cars at commodity exchanges to be welcomed



ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Secretary of Iranian Auto Parts Makers Association Maziar Beyglou says the judiciary chief has called on the country's automakers to offer their products at the commodity exchange, IRNA reported.

Speaking in a meeting between the country's major carmakers and auto parts manufacturers in Tehran on Monday, Beyglou said both the carmakers and manufacturers of car parts agree with this decision.

"Offering cars at the commodity exchange is going to solve many problems," the official said.

Mentioning the impacts of the coronavirus outbreak on the country's auto industry, Beyglou noted that although auto parts makers started the New Year with a week delay, with complete compliance to the health protocols, this sector minimized the negative impacts of the coronavirus outbreak.

Despite the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry's efforts for balancing the automotive market, the market has faced serious

challenges due to some negative factors like inflationary expectations and the inflow of liquidity toward this sector.

Currently in Iran, unlike other countries where the automotive industry has stagnated due to the coronavirus outbreak, the demand for cars has increased, and automakers have been ordered to increase their production to prevent the price hikes.

Earlier this week, Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani called on the country's major automakers to increase production by 300,000, raising their total output to 1.2 million vehicles in the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 20).

The official further mentioned the current gap between the supply and demand in the country's auto industry and said, "To fill this gap, the ministry is taking necessary measures for launching new automotive hubs and for restoring the country's idle automotive units."

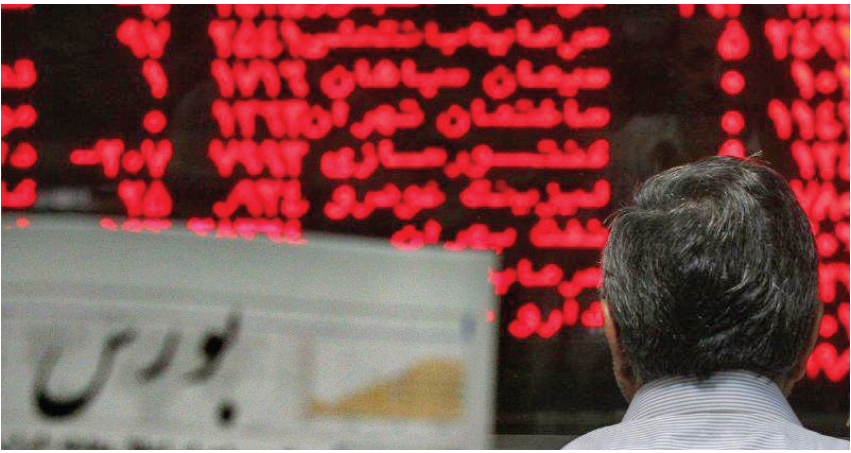
"This crisis can be overcome through transparency," Rahmani stressed.

'Govt. could pave the way for more companies to join capital market'

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's Deputy Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Saeed Zarandi says eliminating tax barriers and reforming some of the government policies will allow more productive companies to enter the capital market, IRIB reported.

According to Zarandi, the Industry Ministry has taken some measures for encouraging industrial units and companies to join the capital market since the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), but there are still some barriers in the way of these companies joining the market.

One of the concerns of such companies which makes them reluctant for entering the stock market is the assessment of their previous financial statements by



the government which could mean more taxes for them, the official said.

If the country's tax policies and regulations be more flexible in this regard, and after the companies are listed on the stock exchange, the tax authority wouldn't assess the financial statements of their previous years, more companies will be interested in entering the stock market, he added.

Zarandi finally noted that using new methods for financing the production sector is the policy of the Industry Ministry, and this necessitates a change of the view for both economic, industrial and mining activists, as well as those in charge and those involved in the money and capital markets.

White House considers more coronavirus aid as jobs picture worsens

The White House has begun informal talks with Republicans and Democrats in Congress about what to include in another round of coronavirus relief legislation, officials said on Sunday, while predicting further U.S. jobs losses in the coming months.

Officials in President Donald Trump's administration, including Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow, said they were holding discussions with lawmakers on issues including potential aid to states whose finances have been devastated by the pandemic.

Another White House economic adviser, Kevin Hassett, said future legislation could include food aid to help Americans struggling with hunger amid widespread job losses that have ruined the finances of many people. It also could include broadband access for those who lack it, Hassett added.

While Democrats, who control the House of Representatives, are moving to unveil new legislation as early as this week, the White House signaled it is in no hurry to pass another relief bill.

"Let's take the next few weeks," Mnuchin told the "Fox News Sunday" program.

Since early March, Congress has passed bills allocating \$3 trillion to combat the pandemic, including taxpayer money for individuals and companies to blunt an economic impact that includes an unemployment rate to 14.7% in April after U.S. job losses unseen since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

"We just want to make sure that before we jump back in and spend another few trillion of taxpayers' money that we do it carefully," Mnuchin said. "We've been very clear that we're not going to do things just to bail out states that were poorly managed."

Pressure for further action may mount as the near-term economic picture worsens.

On CBS's "Face the Nation," Hassett said the U.S. unemployment rate could rise to somewhere "north of 20 percent" in May or June before the economy moves into what administration officials have said will be a robust recovery in late 2020.

The April unemployment rate announced by the Labor Department undercounts some out-of-work Americans, economists say.

Asked if the country could now be facing a "real" unemployment rate of close to 25 percent, Mnuchin replied: "We could be." Such a rate also includes people who have lost jobs and are not actively seeking employment and people considered underemployed.

■ Immigration enforcement

Trump has previously threatened to withhold more coronavirus relief funds from states that limit cooperation with federal immigration enforcement — a stance critics said would exploit a public health crisis to advance political goals. Advisers said last week the White House would not consider new stimulus

legislation in May.

Democrats are pushing for another massive relief bill that would include more money for state and local governments, coronavirus testing and the U.S. Postal Service.

"It's not that we're not talking. We are. It's just informal at this stage," Kudlow told ABC's "This Week" program, referring to White House discussions with lawmakers.

"We're collecting ideas for next steps, which will undoubtedly be data-driven," Kudlow said.

Kudlow said he took part in a Friday conference call with House lawmakers from both parties, and plans to do the same on Monday with members of the Senate, which is controlled by Trump's fellow Republicans.

"If we go to a phase-four deal, I think that President Trump has signaled that, while he doesn't want to bail out the states, he's willing to help cover some of the unexpected COVID expenses that might have come their way," Hassett said on CNN's "State of the Union."

The White House is "absolutely" pushing for a payroll tax cut, Mnuchin said. Trump has called for a cut to the tax, which is paid by employers and workers and funds the social safety-net programs Social Security and Medicare. The proposal has garnered little congressional support.

(Source: Reuters)

NIOPDC to build 50,000-ton wharf in Chabahar port

ENERGY

TEHRAN - National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) has ordered a 50,000-ton wharf to be constructed for the company at the southeastern Chabahar port, Shana reported on Monday.

As reported, NIOPDC Managing Director Keramat Veis-karami issued the order during a visit to the company's Shahid Shoushtari oil storage in the port.

On the sidelines of the visit, Seyed Kazem Asad, the head of NIOPDC Chabahar office, stressed the importance of a suitable wharf for the vessels to dock near the Shahid Shoushtari oil storage and said: "construction of the new wharf will significantly reduce the company's costs."

Back in August 2018, NIOPDC had announced that the company is going to construct a new oil terminal at Chabahar Port in the future.

The mentioned wharf is going to be constructed as part of the Chabahar Port oil inventory development project.

Iran has awarded the development project of this port to India, and the South Asian country committed \$500 million to build two new berths in this port.

Chabahar has two main ports, Shahid Kalantari port and Shahid Beheshti port. Shahid Kalantari port's development has been finished in 1983. However, the development project for Chabahar's Shahid Beheshti port is planned to be implemented in five phases of which the first phase was started in 2007 and due to financial problems resulted from U.S.'s first round of sanctions on Iran the project was almost halted until 2016 in which the sanctions were lifted over Iran's economy.

India has doubled the allocated funding for the development of Chabahar port in its national budget bill for 2020.

As reported, the Indian government has allocated Rs100 crore (nearly \$14 million) for the Chabahar port project in the 2020 budget, while the allocation in the last budget was Rs45 crore.



Monthly hydropower output up 9% yr/yr

ENERGY

TEHRAN —The electricity output of Iran's hydroelectric power plants in the first month of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-April 19) increased by nine percent compared to its previous month (February 20-March 19).

As reported by the portal of Energy Ministry (known as Paven), since the beginning of the current water year up to the end of the first calendar month of Farvardin, the country's hydropower output reached 2,095 gigawatt hours, registering a 75 percent fall compared to the same period last year.

Currently, 55 hydroelectric power plants with a total capacity of 12,169 megawatts (MW) are operational across the country, while 17 power plants with a total capacity of 3,517 MW are under construction and another 217 power plants projects are also going through the research stages.



The mentioned operational power plants every year generate 27,696 GWh of electricity on average.

According to the latest data provided by the Energy Ministry, 16 of the mentioned 55 power plants are located in the Caspian Sea basin, while 25 are located adjacent to the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea, one is near Urmia Lake and finally, 13 are located in central Iran.

Iran's current power generation capacity stands at about 85 GW of which the share of hydroelectric power stands at nearly 16 percent.

The country's total power generation capacity stood at about 83,350 MW at the end of the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (March 19), up from the 80,000 MW of its preceding year.

Currently, combined cycle power plants account for the biggest share in the country's total power generation capacity followed by gas power plants.

Oil falls on fears of coronavirus second wave

Oil prices fell on Monday as a new wave of coronavirus infections in some countries and concern over a persistent glut cancelled out support from supply cuts by the world's biggest producers.

Brent crude was down \$1.11, or 3.6 percent, at \$29.86 a barrel by 0916 GMT, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude fell 92 cents, or 3.7 percent, to \$23.82.

Possible signs of a second wave of infections worried investors as Wuhan, the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in China, on Monday reported its first cluster of infections since the city's lockdown was lifted a month ago.

South Korea also warned of a second wave of the coronavirus on Sunday as countries across the globe begin to step up efforts to ease coronavirus-related restrictions.

"Concern over a second wave, the nearly 50 percent year on year drop in Indian oil demand in April and likely further oil inventory builds this week are likely weighing on oil prices at the start of the week," said UBS analyst Giovanni Staunovo.

Indian fuel demand in April was down 45.8 percent year on year because of a nationwide lockdown. Consumption of fuel, a proxy for oil demand, totaled 9.93 million tons, its lowest since 2007, government data showed on Saturday.

Global oil demand has slumped by about

30 percent as the pandemic has curtailed movement across the world, building up inventories globally.

To reduce the oversupply, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allied producers - a grouping known as OPEC+ - agreed to cut production from May 1 by about 10 million bpd in an effort to support prices.

Fears that the United States is running out of storage space triggered a crash by WTI prices into negative territory last month, prompting some U.S. producers to rein in output.

The number of operating oil and gas rigs in the world's largest oil producer fell to 374 in the week to May 8, a record low according to data going back to 1940 from energy services company Baker Hughes Co. "People are surprised by how quickly the U.S. is shutting in production and that's exactly what we need to support prices," said Tony Nunan, a senior risk manager at Mitsubishi Corp in Tokyo.

"There's another 10 days before the June contract expires... if the WTI contract can avoid a crash going into expiry, hopefully we've seen the bottom."

Both benchmarks have notched gains over the past two weeks as fuel demand rebounded modestly as some travel restrictions are eased.

(Source: Reuters)

Saudi Aramco weighs staggering payments for Sabic deal

Saudi Aramco is in early talks about further staggering payments for the acquisition of a controlling stake in local petrochemical giant Saudi Basic Industries Corp. as the collapse in oil prices puts pressure on its finances.

State-owned Aramco is weighing pushing out payments for the 70 percent holding in the petrochemicals maker and reducing the size of the initial installment to the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund, known as Public Investment Fund, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

The oil giant is also weighing whether it's possible to reduce the \$69.1 billion price tag on the deal, one of the people said, asking not to be identified because the information is private. The talks are in their early stages and it's unclear whether an agreement will be achieved, the people said.

The company is seeking to preserve cash as it confronts a historic rout in crude prices and a burgeoning list of spending obligations. It reaffirmed a commitment to pay \$75 billion in dividends this year, while in March pledged to cut capital expenditure to save cash.

Aramco and the PIF have already restructured the deal. Under the terms of the current agreement from October, Aramco is set to pay a third of the deal in cash, down from half previously. The deadline for paying the rest was extended by four



years until September 2025. The initial pact involved Aramco paying 123.4 riyals (\$32.85) a share for Sabic, whose share price has slumped to 71.7 riyals since that was agreed in March 2019.

A representative for Aramco said it doesn't comment on rumor or speculation. A representative for Sabic said the matter is between the oil producer and the PIF. A representative for the sovereign wealth fund didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

Earlier Sunday, Reuters reported that Aramco is looking to restructure the deal, citing people familiar with the matter.

The acquisition of Sabic is a key part of Aramco's strategy of moving downstream from oil production into chemicals. It will also serve as a way to help the PIF raise cash to fund its investment plans.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Big oil earnings battered by virus, but worst is yet to come

Big Oil emerged from first-quarter earnings battered and bruised, but things are only going to get uglier.

Major oil and gas producers from Norway to the U.S. saw profit plunge in the opening three months of the year. Exxon Mobil Corp. reported its first loss in over 30 years, Royal Dutch Shell Plc cut its dividend for the first time since the Second World War.

And that was only the result of the initial spread of the coronavirus. Things have got even worse since as a global pandemic caused an unprecedented oil-market slump. There are some signs of recovery on the horizon, but companies were united in their warnings that the current quarter will be tougher than the first.

A few key takeaways show which companies can endure another three months of pain, and those that will struggle:

Dividends in play

Big Oil's generous dividends have long been its main attraction to investors. But thanks to Shell Chief Executive Officer Ben van Beurden they are no longer sacrosanct, after he slashed his company's payout by two thirds.

"No CEO wants to have on their track record a cut to the dividend," van Beurden told reporters, after doing just that. Now the taboo is broken, others may follow.

Exxon and Chevron said they remain unwavering in their commitment to the dividend. BP Plc CEO Bernard Looney was more equivocal, saying his board would review the payout on a quarterly basis.

Eni SpA boss Claudio Descalzi refused to give guidance on his dividend until July, when the company will be able to evaluate the impact of cost-cutting measures.



Falling output

Several CEOs said production shut-downs are already happening, whether mandated by members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries or motivated by low prices. That means most major companies will pump less oil and gas in the second quarter.

Output is already plunging in the U.S., and Exxon Mobil, Chevron Corp. and ConocoPhillips plan to cut as much as 660,000 barrels a day by the end of June. Shell and BP are removing rigs from the Permian, with the latter taking \$1 billion out of planned spending in its shale business.

BP said it has been contacted by West Asian countries, Russia, Angola and Azerbaijan -- all members of OPEC+ -- to cut crude production. It has been instructed to cut 90,000 barrels a day from its Rumaila field in Iraq.

Kazakhstan will force international oil companies to slow production so the nation can meet its 390,000 barrel-a-day

cut, people familiar with the matter said last month. That potentially affects Shell, Eni and Chevron.

It's not even an OPEC+ member, but Norway's decision to cut output contributed to Equinor ASA's decision to scrap a 7 percent growth target for this year.

Vanishing cash

For the five largest oil majors combined cash from operations plunged 29 percent from a year earlier to about \$27 billion -- not enough to pay for dividends, interest payments, operating expenses and investments.

That was in a quarter where Dated Brent -- the benchmark against which most of the world's oil shipments are priced -- averaged about \$50 a barrel. Even with the recent recovery in prices, the marker has averaged less than \$20 so far in the second quarter, according to BP data.

Cash-flow crunch

Companies have resorted to selling bonds and taking out new credit facilities to keep liquidity healthy. For some of them, there are questions about how long they can keep piling on debt.

BP's gearing -- the ratio of net debt to equity -- shot up 5 percentage points to 36 percent in the first quarter. While Looney said part of that increase was the result of a temporary working capital build, he refused to give a timeframe for when it would get back to its 20 percent to 30 percent comfort range.

For Chevron Chief Financial Officer Pierre Breber, debt wasn't an issue. The company has "more than enough" capacity to borrow through a long downturn, and to pay the current dividend for two years at \$30 oil, he said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Qatar uses market mayhem to secure top spot in global LNG market

Despite -- or perhaps because of -- the global overhang in liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies, a weak demand profile, and ongoing uncertainty in the hydrocarbons market overall, Qatar believes that the long experience and supportive infrastructure that it has accrued in the sector since first becoming an LNG exporter in 1997 will allow it to regain its former position as the world's number one LNG exporter. To this effect, it has announced big and bold plans for its flagship supergiant non-associated gas reservoir, the North Dome, together with corollary deals to secure massive new LNG capacity in its chief target export market, China. After many years as the world's top LNG exporter, Qatar had reportedly narrowly lost the spot in January to relative newcomer Australia, which shipped an estimated 77.514 million tons of LNG on an annualized basis from the country's 10 LNG projects during 2019. Although there were various figures bandied around, the figure from Australia nonetheless marked an 11.4 percent increase on the 2018 number, driven mainly by production increases at the giant Darwin-based Ichthys LNG Project, and came as a sobering reminder to Qatar that its global competition in the LNG sector had moved up a gear.

Australia's Curtis Island CSG-LNG plants operated by Australia Pacific LNG and Queensland Curtis LNG running at close to full capacity allowed Queensland production to rise by 8.2 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) to 22 million tons for 2019, whilst Northern Territory output also increased - by 153 per cent y-o-y - from 4.15 million tons in 2018 to 10.5 million tons in 2019. At that stage,



moreover, before the coronavirus outbreak and the onset of the Saudi-led oil price war, Australia was poised to lift its production even higher, as its 10 major LNG projects had a combined capacity of 87.8 million tons per year (mtpy), and its giant Prelude LNG Project was due to be ramped up significantly this year. In addition, before the current market mayhem, U.S. regulators had approved four additional LNG projects with a total capacity of 45 mtpy over the next few years.

Qatar's response, then, centered on the intention to increase its LNG production capacity by 64 per cent over the next seven years, with state-owned Qatar Petroleum expecting capacity to rise to 126 mtpy by 2027 from the current capacity of around 77 mtpy. This new figure outstrips the previous number of 110 mtpy, in line with a recent upgrade in estimates for the North Dome to 1,760 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of gas, in addition to 70 billion barrels of condensates and significant quantities of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), helium, and ethane (which will be used to enhance Qatar's petrochemicals sector).

The increase was principally a function of the discovery of further productive layers of gas deposits attached to the main North Dome site but located about 12 kilometers onshore from the coast onshore in Ras Laffan. According to Qatar's Energy Minister, Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi, this will allow the emirate to move ahead with engineering work on two further LNG production facilities, with combined capacity of 16 million mtpy ("mega-trains").

Prior to this most recent expansion announcement, Qatar had revealed that it was already planning to build four new LNG trains. Partly in order to focus on consolidating its position as the world's top LNG exporter -- and also due to long-running disputes with neighboring Saudi Arabia -- Qatar had already (and fortunately) left OPEC at the end of 2018, one year after it had lifted the 12-year self-imposed moratorium on developing the North Dome reservoir.

That Energy Minister Al-Kaabi sees the current coronavirus- and oil price war-destabilization of the hydrocarbons sector as an opportunity for the emirate to re-assert its dominant position in the LNG hierarchy was evidenced in a very recent statement that: "If I'm drilling wells and buying ships, I'm not backing down," referring not just to the output expansion of North Dome but also to a monumental deal just announced to secure LNG ship construction capacity in China. He added: "If you look at what happened this year, a lot of people have delayed LNG projects and that gives us maybe an advantage in the long-term."

Specifically, the deal agreed by Qatar Petroleum with China State Shipbuilding Corporation's subsidiary Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding Group at the end of last month is a QAR11 billion (US\$3.01 billion) agreement to reserve LNG ship construction capacity in China until 2027 (the end of the current expansion phase plan for North Dome). Al-Kaabi anticipates holding 60-80 such vessels at any given time, although Qatar is reserving capacity for about 120 ships. In sum, he underlined, Qatar may end up taking up 60 per cent or so of the entire shipbuilding capacity of the world, just for LNG.

This will come at a point when Australia is seeing the full negative effects of delayed LNG projects. "The unparalleled price crash had prompted LNG companies to reduce capex and defer financial investment decisions [FID] on their respective projects, with Woodside [Energy] contemplating deferring FID for its Pluto [LNG] Train 2 [on the Burrup Peninsula, near Karratha in Western Australia] by a year to 2021, which is likely to push the start year to 2025 from the previously expected 2024," Haseeb Ahmed, oil and gas analyst at GlobalData, told OilPrice.com.

"Major Australian LNG exporter Santos has decided to reduce its spending by about US\$550 million in 2020 due to the recent fall in oil prices and the resulting uncertainty in global economy and the company is likely to delay FID of its Barossa gas project in Australia, which initially was expected to receive this year," he said. "This may affect the expansion plans of the Darwin LNG terminal, as the Barossa project has been identified to provide gas to the terminal once it stops receiving gas from the Bayu-Undan field," he added.

"Also, due to the COVID-19-induced LNG demand uncertainty, Australia's Western Gas Corporation is likely to delay its Equus Floating project [involving the development of 11 gas and condensate fields located in the Carnarvon Basin, approximately 200 kilometers off the coast of Onslow in Western Australia]," he told OilPrice.com. "Despite the landmark OPEC+ deal, oil prices are unlikely to exhibit immediate recovery, given the scale of demand destruction across the globe and this effectively translates to the likelihood of LNG operators delaying discretionary expenditure, while having a unidirectional focus on improving operational efficiencies, which can further delay LNG projects," he concluded.

(Source: oilprice.com)



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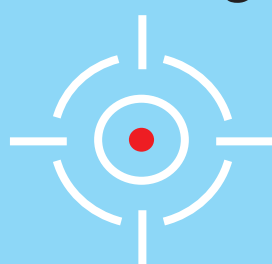
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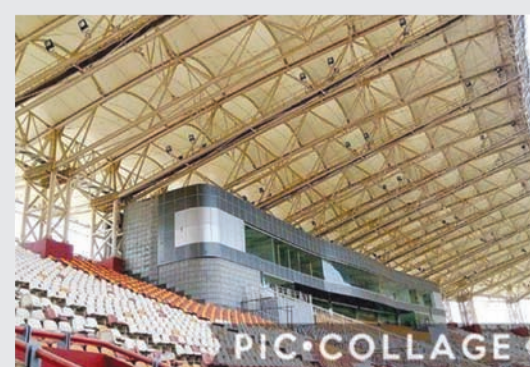
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Oil min. holds phone talk with Russia's energy min. on reducing oil output

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Banning Hezbollah, an example of Germany's double standard in domestic policy

By Deniz Caner

Rumors of Germany's ban on Hezbollah's activities, which have been circulating since Nov. 2019, came true on Ap. 23, 2020. In Nov. 2019, German media outlets claimed that the Foreign Ministry and the Justice Department had accepted a political ban on Hezbollah and that the German Interior Ministry had reviewed it the week after. But the German Interior Ministry denied the news, which was widely reported in the German and European media. A spokesman for the ministry Steve Alter tweeted, "we do not confirm the media reports that the German government has banned Hezbollah from operating."

However, on April 23, 2020, German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer officially announced that the Berlin government has banned Hezbollah from operating in Germany. Following the announcement, police began searching four mosques close to Hezbollah in Germany, the European country where Hezbollah was most active. Dozens of police forces used operational and search dogs during inspections of the mosques which were only a place to worship by civilians and ordinary people.

In Sep. 2019, the U.S. ambassador to Berlin Richard Grenell repeatedly stated that he had spoken to German officials about the ban on Hezbollah's activities. Jewish associations and institutions in Germany also insisted on this regard. Israel Ambassador to Berlin Jeremy Issacharoff also welcomed Germany's decision. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz and other Jewish organizations in Germany also called the move an important decision. For example, chairman of the American Jewish Committee David Harris (AJC) said, "We welcome Berlin's decision, which we have been waiting to be implemented for a long time." Along with Israel, U.S. officials have long been waiting for the German government to shut down Hezbollah-affiliated associations. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has repeatedly spoken out about the need to ban Hezbollah



in Germany.

Based on the remarks made by the Israeli and American officials, it can be concluded that the German's decision to ban Hezbollah was largely due to political concerns. We can say that Germany's policy is formed on the basis of Israel's interests which has affected the domestic and foreign policy of the Berlin government.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, like his Israeli counterpart, welcomed the decision and positively evaluated Hezbollah's ban due to its denial of Israel's existence. Even the content of the statements of other partner parties in the German government emphasized that a group full of ideas of crushing the Jewish state could not be present within the borders of Germany.

■ Germany's double standard in domestic policy

Hezbollah, which has been banned in Germany, is one of the main supporters of Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab, who took office in Jan. Hezbollah is one of the most significant actors in Lebanese politics, with

13 seats in parliament and 3 ministers in the government. Hezbollah's activity is based on political legitimacy and has been banned in Germany due to political concerns. This move is completely contrary to Germany's political understanding of human rights and the constitution.

In fact, Europe, and especially Germany, has had the same relations with all Lebanese officials and parties, and even to this day, they had not created any obstacle for Hezbollah in order to keep all means of communication with Beirut.

The desire of German diplomats to mediate between Hezbollah and Israel was one of the reasons they did not want to cut ties with Hezbollah. For example, Gerhard Conrad, the mediator between Israel and Hezbollah, plays an important role in the exchange of prisoners and moreover, he is known for his good relations with Lebanon. Therefore, Germany's move to ban Hezbollah's political activities will also indirectly affect Berlin-Beirut relations.

■ Germany's Double Standard in Prohibition Act

The ban on Hezbollah's political wing in Germany has drawn attention to the PKK's extensive terrorist activities, which have previously been banned. Has Germany been able to adopt the same policy against PKK's terrorist acts as it did against Hezbollah which is a legitimate political party in Lebanon?

The PKK has been considered as a "criminal organization" since 1993 by the German Federal Prosecutor's Office and has been carrying out its illegal activities in the form of non-governmental organizations in order to cover up its crimes. Every year, the PKK organizes a campaign to raise money and demands a percentage of the families' monthly income. The illegal revenues will provide a significant portion of the group's budget.

In addition to eliminating its opponents, the PKK in Germany also has a history of operations against some German institutions in its crime list. In 2011, for example, members of the group took the German RTL channel building

in Cologne by force and sought to broadcast Abdullah Ocalan's release demand. Also on Aug. 12, 2016, they invaded the headquarter of the state-run WDR channel in Cologne, and on Mar. 21, 2018, fifty members of the group entered the SPD party building in Frankfurt.

More than 14,500 members of this terrorist group are active in Germany, and since 1993 they have carried out a number of acts of violence, from setting highways on fire to injuring police forces. Even German intelligence reports suggest that there are structures available for the coordination of tens of thousands of members and supporters of this group to perform violent acts, if necessary, simultaneously in this country.

Despite all this, sometimes Germany does not respond to the PKK's violent actions and sometimes imposes ordinary punishments seemingly in an attempt to fight against them. Although the PKK members are often sentenced to prison, according to the federal prosecutor's office, these sentences do not have the power to deter them and they continue to commit crimes after their release.

Even in some courts, the members are not sentenced or punished, which affects the position and behavior of the judiciary officials.

The other part of this tragedy is that some politicians and members of the German parliament are sympathetic to the PKK. A report by the German intelligence service in Jan. 2019 emphasized the influence of the group on the German policy.

■ Conclusion

The political reasons given by Germany on the basis of Israel's interests regarding the banning of Hezbollah are very weak among the issues that lead to the functioning of an organization. It is clear that Germany has not shown this sensitivity towards the PKK terrorist group, which has killed thousands of innocent people in Turkey for 40 years. Despite committing numerous crimes in German territory, making such decisions by the largest economy of Europe must be far from political maneuvers.

Expansionism, the main core of Netanyahu-Gantz unity government

Approval of a unity government between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz by the Israeli lawmakers on May 7 proved that how common viewpoint on occupying more Palestinian lands can unite political rivals in Tel Aviv.

Marwan Bishara, a senior political analyst, sees no difference between the "Likud" and the "Blue and White" parties when they want to decide how to maintain Israel's control of Palestinian lands.

"The formation of an "annexation government" in Israel is no surprise. It has been a long time coming, Bishara underscored in his article published by Al Jazeera.

Establishing direct Israeli control over most or all of what it calls "Judea and Samaria", ie, the illegally occupied Palestinian West Bank, has long been the wet dream of the Zionist right.

Everything the Zionist movement has ever done and everything the Palestinian national movement has failed to do, has led up to this moment.

After a century of unabated settlement expansion, half a century of military occupation and a quarter of a century of a dubious peace process, annexation marks a new stage in the evolution of Zionism.

The question is when, not if, Israel will formalize the reality of its expansion and what may be the implications for the Palestinians and peace in the region.

Benjamin (Benny) Gantz's u-turn from being Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu's chief political nemesis to his main governing partner was quite shocking to his partners in the Blue and White alliance.

After all, Gantz, the military chief cum opposition leader, ran three elections campaigns focused primarily on Netanyahu's unfitness to govern, calling on him to resign after his indictment on three charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust, claiming that no prime minister who is on trial should be allowed to govern.

Interestingly, Netanyahu made the same claim back in 2008, when he called on Ehud Olmert to resign after his indictment on corruption. Olmert did resign and ended up in prison, and Netanyahu became prime minister for a second time.

Gantz, on the other hand, did not stand by his word. He succumbed to his opponent's political machinations, shifting from "anyone but Netanyahu" to "no one but Netanyahu" in a matter of weeks and ultimately serving the cunning incumbent a fifth term on a silver platter.

Why?

The answer lies in what happened between January and April this year.

It all started with the invitation to go to Washington delivered personally by US Vice President Mike Pence which both Bibi and Benny wholeheartedly accepted.

Bibi, with the full support of the Trump family and administration, used the occasion to upstage his rival.

By announcing their "deal of the century" at a White House ceremony with much fanfare, he and Trump boxed in Benny, politically and strategically.

Not only was the former general in no position to rebuff Trump's overtures, but he also had no reason to do so.

He faced the leader of the most powerful country in the world, Israel's own patron saint and guardian angel, enthusiastically supporting a "Greater Israel" with full control over all of historic Palestine.

Remember, while on average two-thirds of the people surveyed in 32 countries disapproved of Trump in a Pew poll published in January, a head-turning 71 percent of Israelis have confidence in him.

Who was Benny to oppose him?

The March elections confirmed the new US "Jewish government" consensus. Despite his indictment, Netanyahu



renewed his majority among Israeli Jewish voters, leaving Gantz dependent on the support of Arab parliamentarians to form a government.

So Gantz balked. Unlike Yitzhak Rabin, also a former general cum political leader, who depended on Palestinian support in the Knesset to pursue the Oslo Accords in 1993, Gantz demonstrated a lack of both conviction and courage to engage the Arab-majority Joint List.

The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic sealed the deal. Netanyahu swiftly imposed a national emergency and called on Gantz, the loyal soldier, to form an emergency government to lead the country through the crisis.

Gantz acquiesced, but his partners rejected the deal, accusing him of deceit. This led to the break-up of his Blue and White coalition, leaving the general relatively exposed.

Netanyahu, the consummate politician outmaneuvered Gantz, the political rookie, and struck a deal to lead the government in its first 18 months.

Considering the many ambiguities in their agreement, Netanyahu is sure to outstay his term.

He did not even wait for the new government to be formed before declaring on May 4 victory against COVID-19 with a particularly low death toll of 235. This is despite the fact that, just a few weeks earlier, the prime minister made claims that tens of thousands of Israelis would die, to scare the public and rally support for a unity government.

In a territory where quite a few generals have become politicians, Gantz may prove the most glibbule of them all. He is now seen as Netanyahu's "bodyguard", a useful idiot, lending military credibility to the indicted prime minister's cynical political calculus.

He helped Netanyahu amend Israel's basic law in parliament and ensure his premiership is not contested in the future. And the rest, as they say, is history.

But history is paramount to understanding the ideological and strategic logic behind the annexation.

Contrary to conventional wisdom and diplomatic newspeak, there has long been an Israeli consensus on permanently holding onto Jerusalem, parts of the West Bank and the Jordan River, come what may.

It is a consensus that dates back to at least the late 1960s and deepened with the rise of the right in the late 1970s. Everything Israel has done since then, especially its strategic settlement expansion, enforced this consensus, and nothing it proposed or signed ever compromised it.

It is a consensus that encompasses the ideological, security and theological beliefs of most Israelis.

The fact that the ever-shrinking centre-left Labor party is eager to join Netanyahu's "annexation government" is a testimony to the depth of this consensus. Indeed, even the two major secular opposition parties - Yesh Atid and Yisrael Beiteinu, would have joined the "annexation government", if it were not for Netanyahu and his partnership with the religious parties.

Israeli politicians may have differed on how to maintain Israel's control of Palestinian lands, de facto or through formal annexation, but not on the principle.

Most preferred the earlier option until the circumstances are ripe.

Even Netanyahu has avoided formal annexation until it became a useful slogan to garner the support of the radical right to win a fifth term.

However, Trump's support may have now settled the issue for Netanyahu and the Israeli establishment, turning the slogan into actionable policy.

Well, unless the US president changes his mind again. Meanwhile, the new Trump boost may help Netanyahu secure his other objectives.

Personally, such a move, coupled with the US recognition of Israel's annexation of Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights, will further cement his own legacy as the founder of a Greater Israel.

After 14 years in power, he has already surpassed Israel's founder, David Ben Gurion, in terms of years served as prime minister.

Politically, the "looming annexation" may help him downplay the "looming trial" and strengthen his position on the right.

Strategically, Netanyahu and his backers in the Trump administration reckon the geopolitical environment is ripe to make the move towards annexation.

The Palestinian and Arab leaders are weak, divided and ever more dependent on Washington.

And the rest of the world, especially the Europeans, who made their opposition heard, are too preoccupied with the pandemic to resist, let alone prevent such an Israeli move. So now the question becomes, when exactly?

The coalition agreement stipulates that Netanyahu could present the annexation plan to the Knesset from July onwards. It may be timed before or after the Republican convention that will nominate Trump for a second term.

This confirms the claim made by Trump's ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, that the US is ready to recognize the annexation in a few weeks' time.

A long-time Trump lawyer and confidant, Friedman is one of the main architects of the plan and is presently overseeing the mapping of prospective annexation of up to 30 percent of the West Bank.

Meanwhile, Trump's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who claimed the annexation is "an Israeli decision", is expected in Israel this week, and may suggest first reaching out to the Palestinians on the basis of the Trump plan, which the administration claims, rather falsely, is a fair, win-win plan for both sides.

Although the Palestinians have already rejected the plan categorically, deeming it an assault on Palestinians' national rights, the annexation will still happen, sooner or later.

Needless to say, the annexation of the occupied Palestinian territories is illegal and illegitimate. The UN Security Council minus the US, which has veto power, and the UN General Assembly are also unanimously opposed to it.

Even many of Israel's own friends on the left and more than a few on the right oppose it.

But since might is right in the Trump-Netanyahu era, powerful Israel will do whatever it wants and the international community can puff all it wants.

This is especially true for the huffing-n-puffing Palestinian leaders, who may feel aggrieved, but seem increasingly delusional, especially in Israel's eyes.

Their tired warnings against "the end of the peace process" and "the end of security coordination" are met with utter scorn and ridicule in Israel.

Likewise, their tepid warning of abandoning the two-state in favor of a one-state solution, as if these are off the shelf options, is indeed ridiculous.

It is high time for them to say and do something else, something serious and more effective.

A glimpse at U.S.-Saudi recent relations, particularly crude market coordination, military cooperation

BY Mohammad Jafari

The U.S. President Donald Trump's intention to scale down military presence in Saudi Arabia as well as the argument between Washington and Riyadh over crude oil production and exports should be dealt with in details to realize more realities behind the curtain, a foreign policy analyst suggested.



Daniel R. DePetrus, a fellow at Defense Priorities, a think tank in Washington, D.C. dedicated to introducing more realism and restraint in U.S. foreign policy, opines that the oil price crash in March and April demonstrated Saudi Arabia as an energy rival for the U.S.

"In a phone call last month with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, President Donald Trump delivered Riyadh an ultimatum: if the oil price war with Russia doesn't stop immediately, the U.S. troops and Patriot anti-missile systems that have been deployed to the Kingdom would be preparing for a withdrawal order," DePetrus wrote in an analytic article published by the Responsible Statecraft.

We know how the story ended. After days of high-stakes talks, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and other oil producers in the OPEC-Plus group of nations agreed to a monthly production cut of just under 10 million barrels of day, roughly 10 percent of the world's output. Trump's pressure on Riyadh very likely had a role in accelerating negotiations towards an agreement. But it holds an even larger lesson for the Washington foreign policy establishment: the United States needs Saudi Arabia far less than Saudi Arabia needs the United States.

U.S.-Saudi relations could use a total, unadulterated recalibration. The status-quo, where U.S. troops are sent to protect the Kingdom despite Saudi Arabia spending more money on its military — \$61.9 billion — than Turkey, Iran, Israel, and Kuwait combined — \$61.2 billion — is not aligned with 21st century realities. The latest reports of a U.S. military redeployment from the Kingdom, assuming it proceeds, could serve as the starting point for a re-evaluation of bilateral ties.

The old paradigm that has served as the foundation of the U.S.-Saudi relationship over the previous 75 years — security for Riyadh in exchange for reliable oil supplies for Washington — is no longer as applicable as it once was. With the U.S. public increasingly opposed to seeing U.S. troops bogged down in the West Asia and Riyadh committing a litany of brazen foreign policy errors, the 1945 understanding is as relevant today as black-and-white television.

Washington no longer needs Saudi oil to power its domestic industry or fuel economic growth back home. While the U.S. cannot completely shield itself from the global energy market, it's also true that the U.S. today relies far less on crude from the Persian Gulf than it did in the 1950s, 1990s, or early 2000s. A rise in domestic production has roughly correlated with a 48 percent decrease in U.S. imports of Saudi oil and a 50 percent cut in total imports from the Persian Gulf over the same period of time. The domestic shale boom has removed a key point of leverage from foreign nations that have used energy as a weapon in the past.

As the oil price crash in March and April demonstrated, Saudi Arabia is now a U.S. energy rival. To expand market share, Riyadh has sought to drive U.S. producers out of business. U.S. lawmakers from energy-producing states like Texas and North Dakota understand this, which is why they were fuming when Saudi Arabia and Russia dumped crude into the market. With the market vastly oversupplied, hundreds of U.S. shale companies could be forced into bankruptcy.

The battle for energy is hardly the only dispute between Washington and Riyadh.

Ever since bin Salman ascended the Saudi hierarchy, Riyadh's foreign policy has been a raging dumpster fire. Saudi Arabia's war against neighboring Yemen, which Saudi officials confidently predicted would last only a few weeks, has become the Kingdom's worst foreign policy debacle since its foundation.

In the five years since the war began, over 100,000 Yemeni civilians have been killed, 80 percent of the country's population requires humanitarian assistance to survive, and 2 million children are at risk of malnutrition. The bombing from the air and fighting on the ground has put half of Yemen's hospitals and clinics out of operation, which means the country is in even worse shape as it prepares for a looming COVID-19 pandemic. U.S. weapons systems sold to the Saudis and their UAE partners have ended up in the hands of Islamic extremist groups, some of which are tied to Al-Qaeda. Despite having no U.S. national security interest at stake in Yemen's civil war, Washington continues to protect Riyadh at the United Nations from war crimes charges arising from the conflict.

In this bilateral relationship, Saudi Arabia has an incentive to convince the United States that Riyadh and Washington's national security interests are in perfect harmony. Riyadh has proven quite effective in this regard. When the Saudi oil installations came under cruise missile attack in September 2019, Washington heeded Saudi requests for protection by deploying U.S. servicemen and anti-missile batteries to the Kingdom. Today, 3,000 U.S. troops, fighter squadrons, and air-defense systems are stationed in Saudi Arabia, performing a national defense mission that the Saudi military is more than capable of performing itself.

This doesn't mean the U.S. needs to turn its back on Saudi Arabia completely. In a world where realism and great-power politics are the engines that drive international affairs, it would be a serious mistake to write off any country that may have value to Washington in the future. Washington and Riyadh do share a few common interests where collaboration is an entirely reasonable thing to pursue. Intelligence cooperation against terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State makes imminent sense for both nations — particularly for the Saudis, whose family dynasty has long been in the crosshairs of these groups. To the extent U.S. and Saudi officials can minimize their disagreements on the oil market's supply and demand, they shouldn't hesitate to do so.

But if it's unwise to overturn the relationship entirely, it would be even more unwise and dangerous for Washington to continue engaging with Saudi Arabia as if we still live in the 20th century. The world has changed — and U.S. foreign policy must change along with it.

IranAir to resume flights to Amsterdam after two months

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Iran's flag carrier Homa, known internationally as IranAir, is scheduled to resume flights to the Netherlands' capital Amsterdam after international flights were halted two months ago.



On March 11, IranAir announced the suspension of all its flights to Europe until further notice, a decision apparently linked to a ban on the carrier's planes from entering European airspace.

These flights will be operated every Thursday from Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport to Amsterdam Airport through winning licenses from health ministry and Civil Aviation Organization, IRNA reported.

Bastam historical complex to be restored

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Bastam historical complex in the small city of Bastam, near Shahrud in north-central province of Semnan, will be restored in the near future, CHTN quoted provincial tourism chief Mehdi Jamal as saying on Monday.



The restoration project aims to repair and strengthen different monuments located in the complex, he added.

Bastam historical complex includes holy shrine of Mohammad Ibn Jafar Sadegh (AS), Bayazid Bastami tomb, Bayazid Monastery, Bayazid Mosque, Eljaito Iwan, Ghazan Dome, Jame Mosque, Kashaneh Tower and Shahrokhieh School, which were built in different eras from Seljuk era (1037–1194) to Qajar period (1789–1925).

The prominent Persian mystic Bayazid Bastami lived in the historical city of Bastam, which is located six kilometers north of Shahrud. The monastery was a simple place where he studied and prayed.

Ghazan Khan, the 13th century ruler of Ilkhanate in Iran, is buried in the Ghazan Dome, which is a square building with 7.5 height and a dome covered with turquoise tiles.

Jame Mosque is another building from the complex with a beautiful plastered altar that was restored during the Qajar period.

Kashaneh Tower is a tower connected to the Jame Mosque. It has a cellar which is connected to the top of the tower through a staircase which runs through the interior wall of the tower. The outer covering of the building has collapsed but the lower covering (the current dome) is untouched.

Shahrokhieh School has been built for the use of seminary students with 28 rooms on two floors.

The school also has a very interesting plan and about 28 rooms on two floors, which have been built for the use of students of religious sciences.

The school has a mosque, an iwan and a zurkhaneh, a special traditional place where men practice heroic sport.

Ancient castles and fortresses in Iran: Robot Sharaf Castle/Caravanserai

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Robot Sharaf Caravanserai or Castle is located between Mashhad and Sarakhs and is 6 km south of "Shorlaqaa".

This architectural jewel dates back to the Seljuk era. From its tough façade you may consider it is a fortress but when you stepping the inside, the monument more resembles a palace.



This structure contains two courtyards each made of four cross-shaped terraces along with a Shabestan. Fine pieces of architecture with brickworks can be noted besides inscriptions that prove to be eye-catching.

Sarakhs was plundered and destroyed during the Mongol attack in the year 617 AH.

What's it like visiting Iran during Ramadan?

By Afshin Majlesi

They say for all human beings there is a time to sow and a time to grow under the never-ending generosity of the Almighty God.

For a faithful Muslim, the ninth month of the lunar Islamic calendar, Ramadan, also known as "Ramazan-e Karim" (benevolent/merciful Ramadan), is a time for, more than ever, practicing humility, patience, simplicity, empathy, and acceptance when things don't go their way. It's also a time to make stronger bonds of fellowship.

Muslims observe religious fast from dawn (fajr) to sunset (maghrib) and pray more than usual and with even more intensity to get closer to God. Ramadan is traditionally a time of great hospitality and generosity, so go ahead and accept Ramadan sweets or invitations to feasts, parties, and family gatherings. For Muslims, everything is done ceremoniously and consciously in line with what has passed down from generation to generation.

Muslims' goal to observe Ramadan rituals is to resist temptation in all forms. Purity of thoughts, intentions, and deeds are underlined while the road to self-discipline, self-control, sacrifice, and compassion and affection is paved by will power and endurance.

If you're planning on traveling to Iran or other Muslim-majority countries during this time, you're blessed to gain an utterly fascinating experience. During such a time, however, there are some dos and don'ts you should be mindful of.

As a foreign traveler, you should be respectful of the culture and beliefs of the country you are the guest of. Avoid eating in front of Muslims during the month, just eat somewhere quiet, or at least in obvious tourist areas.

Eating, drinking, and smoking in the public are strictly prohibited as they are considered acts of temptation; especially for locals, where failing to observe Ramadan may attract penalties. However, there



File photo depicts an Iftar spread in the lunar month of Ramadan.

are exceptions for the ill, pregnant, or physically weak people and even long-distance travelers!

In reverse, during Ramadan, one can eat their heart out from sunset to sunrise. Pretty much every restaurant, food stand, and even households have food ready after dark.

After a long day's observance of fasting from dawn, Muslim families gather at sunset to break their fast over a meal known as Iftar, which is typically more than just food at the end of a ritualistic day.

During daytime all restaurants and

coffee shops are closed, however, by the sunset, street Iftar meals are ready to grab for those who cannot reach home in time for breaking their fast.

To bring more comfort to the faithful, work schedules in Iran are modified during this month to make the experience of this month as convenient as possible.

This year's Ramadan began on April 25, which falls in the spring season in Iran and it is estimated to end on May 24.

Because of the nature of the lunar calendar system, the dates of Ramadan vary each year and there is always a sort

of disagreement among scholars as to when does Ramadan precisely start or come to an end.

By tradition, the new moon crescent which is sighted by the naked eye marks the beginning of a new lunar month but these days Muslims prefer to lean towards astronomical calculations to avoid such confusion.

Ramadan comes to an end by Eid al-Fitr, a joyful holiday when Muslims celebrate 29 or 30 days of dawn-to-sunset fasting; complemented by lots of traditional food and family get-togethers.

Half-priced discounts approved for medical staff in post-coronavirus

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iranian tourism minister on Monday announced that 676 four- and five-star hotels, eco-lodge units, and hotel apartments have announced their readiness to offer half-priced discounts to medical professionals after the coronavirus pandemic is defeated.

"At least 50-percent discount has been ratified to be offered to healthcare professionals due to their efforts in the fight against coronavirus, their fulfillment of social responsibilities, and to honor their sacrifices," CHTN quoted Ali-Asghar Mounesan as saying.

Mounesan added that a list of the cited tourism facilities has been submitted to the Ministry of Health.

In late April, the Society of Iranian Archaeology proposed Mounesan to provide medical professionals with travel vouchers after the coronavirus pandemic is defeated.



"As we know, the country's healthcare professionals, particularly nurses, doctors, and laboratory technicians, have been at the forefront of the fight against coronavirus in the past two months. And they have been exhausted and run out of strength," the society wrote to in a letter to the tourism minister.

The Islamic Republic suffered an average 15.8 percent fall in foreign arrivals during the first three months of 2020 compared to the same period last year, according to data released by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) that analyzes the impact of the COVID-19 on international tourism.

Earlier this month and in response to the coronavirus pandemic, the tourism ministry announced new guidelines and instructions to ramp up the safety of travels across the country ahead of anticipated travel surge in the ancient country.

Sassanid-era fortress to undergo urgent restoration

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – The centuries-old Falak-ol-Aflak Fortress in Khorramabad, western province of Lorestan, which was damaged by an earthquake last week, will undergo urgent rehabilitation works, the head of Lorestan's Management and Planning Organization Samaneh Hassanpour said on Monday, CHTN reported.

A budget of 3.5 billion rials (about \$85,000) has been allocated to the restoration project, which will be done in the near future, she added.

The Sassanid-era fortress was hit by an earthquake of magnitude 5.1. The quake was at a depth of 7 km, and took place near the city of Firouzabad on Wednesday.

No serious damage was inflicted on the fortress, except for some cracks on the roof and walls, according to a group of assessors dispatched by the Ministry of

Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts.

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

In the past couple of years, the historic castle was faced with lots of problems that resolved in close co-operation of provincial officials by the means of both essential and urgent repair projects.

The fortress dates from the Sassanid era (224–651). It seems particularly imposing and dramatic when floodlit at night, offering picturesque views of its encircling crenellated battlements.

The Sassanid era (224 CE–651) is of very high importance in the Iranian history, under which Persian art and architecture experienced a general renaissance.



Dashtestan to launch stone museum

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – A stone museum in the city of Dashtestan, southwestern province of Bushehr, will be launched in the near future, a provincial tourism official has said.

The museum will be established at the Borazjan Moshir al-Molk Caravanserai, a historical site dating back to Qajar era (1789–1925), Yadollah Zekavat-zadeh said, CHTN reported on Sunday.

About 40 pieces of moveable stones, previously discovered in various excavations, will go on display at the Dashtestan Stone Museum, he added.

The stones including parts of lower and upper millstones, base of a fire pit, tombstones and stone columns mostly date from the Achaemenid-era (550-330 BC) and Islamic era.

In addition to displaying the objects, the museum will prevent them from being eroded and destroyed, he concluded.

The Achaemenid [Persian] Empire was the largest and most durable empire of its time. The empire stretched from Ethiopia,



through Egypt, to Greece, to Anatolia (modern Turkey), Central Asia and to India.

Building activity was extensive during the height of the empire, and of the several Achaemenian capitals, the ruins

at Pasargadae and at Persepolis are probably the most outstanding. Achaemenian sculptured reliefs and a great number of smaller art objects present a remarkably unified style for the period. Metalwork,

especially in gold, was highly developed, and a variety of carefully executed examples survive.

With over 6,000 years of history and significant monuments from the Elamite, Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanid eras, Bushehr Province is one of Iran's most important historical centers.

Besides its cultural heritage, beautiful beaches and lush palm groves make it an attractive destination for world travelers.

The historical and architectural monuments of Bushehr include Islamic buildings like mosques and praying centers, mansions, old towers, castles, as well as gardens.

When it comes to cultural attractions, there are many historical mounds in Bushehr including Tall-e Khandaq with Sassanid architectural style, Tall-e Marv located near an Achaemenid Palace and Qajar era Malek al-Tojar Mansion. Qajar era Kazeruni Mansion, which has been inscribed on the World Heritage List, is another attraction that world travelers love to see among various ancient sites.

World Migratory Bird Day: birds connect our world

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — World Migratory Bird Day was celebrated worldwide on May 9, under the theme “Birds Connect Our World”.

First held in 2006, World Migratory Bird Day is celebrated on two peak days each year (the second Saturdays of May and October) to highlight the need for international collaboration to ensure the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats globally.

The theme underscores the importance of conserving and restoring the ecological connectivity and integrity of ecosystems that support the natural cycles that are essential for the survival and well-being of migratory birds. Given that there is clear evidence that the destruction of wild areas can facilitate the kinds of infectious diseases the world is now combatting, urgent action to better protect and sustain wildlife and their habitats are needed.

Because migratory birds depend on a network of sites that cross national borders along their migration routes for breeding, feeding, resting, and overwintering, international action to protect them is essential.

Listening to the birdsong is pleasant, imagine you are tired of daily routine and industrial life, so close your eyes and imagine sitting by a pond, the sound of birds polishes



your soul, and you will see that you are feeling better, but if this situation happens in the real world, we will all be fine.

But what has happened, or rather what have we done, that no bird nests on the trees of the cities anymore, of course, if a tree is left in the city, unfortunately, all the trees

have been replaced with apartments and high towers, that no place is left for the birds.

Iran is a climatically rich country, so it is said that the number of bird species in Iran is higher than the whole of Europe. A wide range of wetlands is the reason behind migratory birds choosing Iran for an annual

wintering habitat, as a large number of birds fly a thousand miles each year to benefit from this rich climate.

Many species of birds are migratory, birds migration is usually seasonal and round trip, which is due to climate change, access to food and finding a suitable habitat, so the presence of birds in an area are the signs of being in balance and that the natural cycle is operating properly.

It is estimated that there are about 50 billion birds in the world out of 9,000 species, many of which are migratory. Accordingly, about 5 to 7 million birds migrate to Iran in different seasons. There are about 530 species of birds in Iran, 320 of which are migratory species, some of which are native species.

Iran has long been a major migration habitat for birds, but in recent years factors such as urban development, habitat destruction and overhunting have been identified as threats.

The most tragic of which was the death of over 30,000 migratory birds in Miankaleh international wetland in late January, which was announced by the veterinary organization that the birds have been killed due to the “botulinum toxin”, but it was finally announced that some fishermen, landowners or hunters may have thrown poison into the water and killed these species.

Record global carbon dioxide concentrations despite COVID-19 crisis

Over the past few weeks there have been many reports of localized air quality improvements as the world has locked down to combat the coronavirus pandemic. However, no one should think that the climate crisis is therefore over—far from it.

The most recent data from the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) shows global carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels rising sharply.

In April 2020 the average concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere was 416.21 parts per million (ppm), the highest since measurements began in Hawaii in 1958.

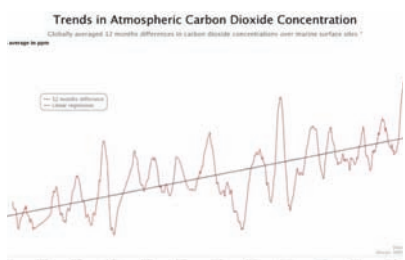
Furthermore, ice core records indicate that such levels have not been seen in the last 800,000 years.

The United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) World Environment Situation Room shows a sharp increase in CO₂ concentrations of more than 100 ppm since March 1958.

The curve shows expected seasonal fluctuations: the northern hemisphere has a greater land mass than the southern hemisphere and more vegetation-absorbing CO₂ during the summer. Global CO₂ concentrations peak in May at the end of the northern hemisphere winter. Then, as photosynthesis takes place and new foliage appears, it absorbs CO₂, lowering concentrations by about 7.5 ppm until October. During the northern hemisphere winter, the Earth has less photosynthesis activity, so CO₂ concentrations go down until the next cycle.

However, owing to anthropogenic CO₂ emissions (emissions from human activities), CO₂ concentrations are not only increasing, but accelerating.

The following graph shows the difference



in CO₂ concentrations between one month and the same month one year before (e.g. + 2.88 ppm between April 2020 and April 2019). It shows that while the increase over one year was around 0.9 ppm during the 1960s it rose to 2.4 ppm on average during the 2010-2019 period. There is a clearly accelerating upward trend.

■ The long-term view

Using ice-core records, it is possible to measure CO₂ trapped in deep Antarctic ice going back 800,000 years. We have never in the last 800,000 years reached 416 ppm.

Given that the Homo sapiens appeared about 300,000 years ago, and the first trace of Homo sapiens sapiens (also called anatomically modern humans) dates to 196,000 years ago, no individual of our species has experienced such high levels of CO₂.

“This is, of course, of great concern for our climate, and demonstrates, yet again, that urgent action is needed to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. To keep average global warming to 1.5°C we need to achieve net zero emissions by 2040 (2055 at the latest),” says Pascal Peduzzi, Director of UNEP/GRID-Geneva and Programme Manager of the World Environment Situation Room.

(Source: unenvironment.org)

Even if climate change wasn't happening, phasing out coal is a 'no-regret' solution

The benefits of phasing out coal far outweigh the real-world costs, scientists say, and that's the case even when climate change is left out of the equation entirely.

Of all the fossil fuels in the world, coal is the biggest source of carbon dioxide, and its impacts on air pollution and public health are profound.

Since the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, large-scale coal burning has cost lives, yet we've been struggling to kick it. Our global reliance on coal runs deep, so deep that even though we know it's bad for us, we continue to burn it at unprecedented levels.

Now, new computer simulations on the regional effects of phasing out coal suggest that continuing on this trajectory is a big mistake, with negative impacts not only on the environment and human health, but also the economy.

“We're well into the 21st century now and still heavily rely on burning coal, making it one of the biggest threats to our climate, our health and the environment,” says Sebastian Rauner who researches climate impacts at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK).

“That's why we decided to comprehensively test the case for a global coal exit: Does it add up, economically speaking? The short answer is: Yes, by far.”

The simulation the team has created incorporates information on the full extent of a ‘coal exit’ scenario, accounting for air pollution as well as the impact on the energy sector as a whole.

Using this thorough modelling, researchers have now examined the direct and indirect effects of three different scenarios: one, where we meet our current emission-cutting



pledges by 2030; another, where we limit global temperature rise by the end of the century to 2°C through carbon pricing; and a third, where we almost completely phase out coal by 2050.

This, of course, would be a substantial transformation of the energy system as we know it, but it may well be worth it.

Monetising the environmental and human health costs for the first time - including how much it would cost to re-wild areas and invest in transforming our energy systems - the authors have come to a stunning ‘no-regret’ decision.

Cutting off our reliance on coal will be hugely beneficial for most regions in the world, even when you don't take into account the global benefits of slowing down climate change.

In the simulations, the effects on air pollution in the coal exit scenario are at almost similar levels to the 2°C scenario, improving global public health exponentially, especially in Asia.

In fact, in almost all regions of the world, the direct policy cost of exiting coal was nothing compared to the human health and environmental benefits that will be reaped come 2050.

(Source: Science Alert)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

All-Iranian COVID-19 diagnostic kits to be released within month

Iran will commercialize domestically-made COVID-19 diagnostic kits by the Iranian calendar month of Farvardin (March 21-April 22), secretary of biotechnology development of Vice Presidency for Science and Technology announced.

Following a call by the headquarters for the production of COVID-19 diagnostic kits, a contract was signed with five knowledge-based companies and manufacturing process began, ISNA quoted Mostafa Qane'ei as saying on Monday.

Diagnosis is the most important part of coronavirus treatment, he highlighted. Patients suspected to coronavirus are currently being identified by diagnostic kits that have entered Iran in the form of assistance and purchases by the World Health Organization, China and UNICEF, he said.

So, the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology decided to manufacture the kits domestically, he noted.

Existing imported kits are sufficient for the next two months but after this period we will be faced with shortages of kits, however, the domestic ones will enter the market, he concluded.

کیت‌های ایرانی تشخیص کووید ۱۹ ماه آینده روانه بازار می‌شوند

دبیر ستاد توسعه زیست‌فناوری معاونت علمی و فناوری ریاست جمهوری گفت: کیت‌های تشخیصی کووید ۱۹، فروردین ماه وارد بازار می‌شوند.

مصطفی قانع، دبیر ستاد توسعه زیست‌فناوری معاونت علمی و فناوری ریاست جمهوری، اظهار داشت: به دنبال فراخوان این ستاد برای ساخت کیت‌های آزمایشگاهی تشخیص کووید ۱۹، با پنج شرکت دانش‌بنیان برای ساخت این کیت‌ها قرارداد منعقد شده است. تشخیص، مهم‌ترین راه ورود به درمان بیماری کرونا است.

در حال حاضر بیماران مبتلا به کرونا به وسیله کیت‌های تشخیصی که در قالب مساعدت و خرید از طریق سازمان بهداشت جهانی، کشور چین و یونسف وارد ایران شده‌اند شناسایی می‌شوند؛ اما ستاد توسعه زیست‌فناوری معاونت علمی و فناوری ریاست جمهوری با انتشار فراخوانی از دانش‌بنیان‌های توانمند دعوت کرد تا به حوزه ساخت این کیت‌ها ورود کنند.

به گزارش از مرکز ارتباطات و اطلاع رسانی معاونت علمی و فناوری ریاست جمهوری، وی افزود: کیت‌های وارد شده تا دو ماه آینده کافی هستند اما بعد از این مدت با کمبود کیت‌های تشخیص کرونا مواجه خواهیم شد. به همین دلیل با کمک توانمندی‌های داخلی این نیاز را مرتفع می‌کنیم.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-an, -ian”

■ **Meaning:** a word ending used to form nouns and modifiers that shows something belongs to a group, place, etc.

■ **For example:** I like to learn how to cook **Mexican** food.

PHRASAL VERB

Hand something out

■ **Meaning:** to give something to each person in a group; distribute

■ **For example:** Could you start handing these books out please?

IDIOM

Browned off

■ **Explanation:** if you are browned off, you are bored, fed up or disheartened

■ **For example:** “Tom is browned off with his job.”

No new coronavirus-like disease has emerged: expert

1 → So far, the number of cases has been small, but it's concerning, given that many of the children hospitalized for the disease also tested positive for the coronavirus.



The World Health Organization has not verified a link between Kawasaki disease and the coronavirus. In total, nearly 100 cases have been confirmed across six countries since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Trump's environmental 'blitzkrieg' advances under cover of coronavirus

The Trump administration is diligently weakening US environmental protections even amid a global pandemic, continuing its rollback as the November election approaches.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, US federal agencies have eased fuel-efficiency standards for new cars; frozen rules for soot air pollution; proposed to drop review requirements for liquefied natural gas terminals; continued to lease public property to oil and gas companies; sought to speed up permitting for offshore fish farms; and advanced a proposal on mercury pollution from power plants that could make it easier for the government to conclude regulations are too costly to justify their benefits.

The government has also relaxed reporting rules for polluters during the pandemic.

Trump's ambitions reach even to the moon, which he has announced he wants the US to mine.

Gina McCarthy, formerly Barack Obama's environment chief, now runs the Natural Resources Defense Council. She said the Trump administration was acting to cut public health protections while the American public is distracted by a public health crisis.

“People right now are hunkered down trying to put food on the table, take care of people who are sick, worry about educating their children at home,” McCarthy said. “How many people are going to really be able to sit down and scrutinize these things in any way?”

McCarthy said the government was “literally not interested in the law or science”, and that “is going to become strikingly clear as people look at how the administration is handling Covid-19”.

The Trump administration is playing both offense and defense, rescinding and rewriting some rules and crafting others that would be time-consuming for a Democratic president to reverse.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has written what critics say will be a weak proposal for climate pollution from airplanes, a placeholder that will hinder stricter regulation.

Trump officials have been attempting to create a coronavirus relief program for oil and gas corporations, a new move in his campaign to back the industry and stymie global climate action. The president has sown distrust of climate science and vowed to exit the Paris climate agreement, which the US can do after the election.

Historians say Trump's presidency has forced a pendulum swing back from the environmental awakening of the 1960s and 70s, when there was bipartisan support for conservation. Protecting the environment – and particularly the climate – is an issue that has become embroiled in political ideology.

“What Trump's done is create a blitzkrieg against the environment... trying to dismantle not just Obama's environmental achievements but turn back the clock to a pre-Richard Nixon day,” said Douglas Brinkley, a history professor at Rice University who is writing a book on the subject.

“It's just death by a thousand cuts. It's not one issue, it's just across the board.”

(Source: The Guardian)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Iraqi children go back to school

(October 01, 2003)

Several million Iraqi children go back to school this week for the start of the new academic year. Many will find radical changes to their classrooms, textbooks and even the style of teaching. This report from the BBC's Jill McGivering in Baghdad:

Under Saddam most Iraqi schools became desperately **run-down**. Now the US-led **coalition** is running a massive programme to rebuild and **refurbish**. It's still underway, but as the new school year starts, more than a thousand schools are **finished**.

Textbooks are being **overhauled** too. UN agencies are printing more than seventy-million new books which omit references to Saddam Hussein and his **ideology**. Until they're ready schools will use old books with political passages simply **blackened out**. Children will no longer have to start the school day **chanting Saddam's praises**. But many may not attend at all. Some parents say they're so worried about the security situation **they'd rather** keep their children at home until the country is more stable.

■ Words

run-down: in a very poor condition

coalition: a group of different organisations or people who are working together with a particular aim

refurbish: to clean and make more up-to-date

finished: here, completed

textbooks: books used in schools or by students

overhauled: improved, refurbished

ideology: set of beliefs

blackened out: here, covered up with black ink, so that they cannot be read

chanting Saddam's praises: if you chant someone's praises you repeat words which support them

they'd rather: they prefer to

(Source: BBC)

Trump is culpable in deaths of Americans: Chomsky

→ 1 Chomsky also said the president had abandoned his duties by forcing individual state governors to take responsibility for combating the virus: "It's a great strategy for killing a lot of people and improving his electoral politics."

Asked to clarify if he viewed Trump as culpable in the deaths of Americans, he said: "Yes but it's much worse than that, because the same is true internationally. To try and cover up his criminal attacks against the American people, which have been going on all of this time, he's flailing about to try and find scapegoats."

The professor said Trump's decision to freeze payments to the World Health Organization, would lead to deaths in Yemen and across the African continent.

Chomsky was speaking in an interview to mark the launch of the Progressive International, a global initiative to unite, organise and mobilise progressive forces around the world.

First convened by Bernie Sanders, the Vermont senator, and Yanis Varoufakis, the former Greek finance minister, it aims to mount a fightback against the increasing rise of rightwing populist movements around the globe.

Other members include Katrin Jakobsdóttir, the Icelandic prime minister, former Labour shadow chancellor John McDonnell, the authors Naomi Klein and Arundhati Roy, and Rafael Correa, the former president of Ecuador. In September, pandemic permitting, the council will convene for an inaugural summit in Reykjavik.

Also speaking in an interview to mark the launch, Varoufakis said articles he and Sanders wrote in the Guardian two years ago were among catalysts for launching the Progressive International.

He said: "It's been urgent for quite a while now. If anything I'm worried that we're coming to the party too late. I hope not.."

Expressing anger at the EU response to the pandemic as a "very sad dereliction of duty", he said the crisis could tear apart the euro single currency bloc. "I don't think the eurozone can survive it. But it can survive long enough to deplete huge amounts of wealth and social capital. Europe is rich enough, it can pretend and extend."

Iraq PM: Iraq to review strategic agreement with U.S.

→ 1 However, relations nosedived following the U.S. assassination and airstrikes on popular counterterror forces which prompted the Iraqi parliament to vote for the withdrawal of American troops.

Speaking to Baghdad Today news website on Wednesday, Kadhimi said he was "serious" about ending any manifestation of the illegal presence of foreign forces in Iraq. He said Baghdad would discuss with Washington the nature of its presence on Iraqi soil in the near future.

Some Iraqi political groups have said they had set action on the parliament's withdrawal vote as a condition for endorsing Kadhimi as prime minister.

On Friday, a senior Iraqi cleric said that American forces do not intend to leave the Middle East region and have to be consequently expelled forcibly by means of resistance.

"The Americans have to be ousted because they do not intend to leave by themselves. Only resistance can expel them," Baghdad Friday prayers leader Sayed Yasin al-Mousavi said.

Iraqi resistance groups have also pledged to take up arms against U.S. forces if Washington fails to comply with the parliamentary order.

The U.S. has not only defied calls to withdraw from Iraq, but has also reinforced its military presence by deploying more troops and military equipment.

The United States has recently started evacuating its occupation forces from a number of military bases in Iraq under a new redeployment plan.

Iraqis believe the move is a military tactic amid reports that Washington is drawing up plans to target members of Hashd al-Sha'abi or Popular Mobilization Forces.

Russia tests new hypersonic missile designed for Tu-22M3M strategic bomber

Russian air forces have recently tested a new hypersonic aircraft missile, a source in the military-industrial complex told TASS. The missile is being created for a modified version of the Tu-22M3M aircraft, the source added.

"Recently, a new hypersonic missile was tested on the Tu-22M3. The missile will be part of the armament range of the upgraded Tu-22M3M along with a number of other latest aviation weapons," the source said.

According to the source, the work on the new missile began several years ago. Its tests should be completed simultaneously with the work on the upgraded Tu-22M3M bomber.

He clarified that this missile does not belong to the line of X-32 missiles, noting that it is "completely different." The official did not name the characteristics of the new missile.

TASS does not have official confirmation of the information provided by the source. The press service of PJSC Tupolev declined to comment.

Earlier, the Russian defense industry developed two types of aircraft hypersonic missiles.

The Kinzhal is the latest Russian airborne system that consists of a MiG-31K aircraft as a delivery vehicle and a hypersonic missile. According to media reports, a Kinzhal missile is the airborne version of the Iskander tactical missile system. Another hypersonic missile was created for the Su-57 fifth-generation fighter. Missile name and characteristics are unknown.



Tu-22M3M supersonic bomber is a modification of Tu-22M3 with expanded combat potential. The first aircraft took off for the first time on December 28, 2018. The upgrade provided new electronic equipment on the Russian element base. New navigational, communication equipment, sights, engine controls, fuel mechanisms and electronic warfare were installed. They increased navigation precision, simplified maintenance and preflight preparation.

(Source: TASS)

China refutes 24 'lies' by U.S. politicians over coronavirus

China has issued a lengthy rebuttal of what it said were 24 "preposterous allegations" by some leading U.S. politicians over its handling of the new coronavirus outbreak.

The Chinese foreign ministry has dedicated most of its press briefings over the past week to rejecting accusations by U.S. politicians, especially Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, that China had withheld information about the new coronavirus and that it had originated in a laboratory in the city of Wuhan.

A 30-page, 11,000-word article posted on the ministry website on Saturday night repeated and expanded on the refutations made during the press briefings, and began by invoking Abraham Lincoln, the 19th century U.S. president.

"As Lincoln said, you can fool some of the people all the time and fool all the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time," it said in the prologue.

The article also cited media reports that said Americans had been infected with the virus before the first case was confirmed in Wuhan. There is no evidence to suggest that is the case.

Keen to quash U.S. suggestions that the virus was deliberately created or somehow leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the article said that all evidence shows the



virus is not man-made and that the institute is not capable of synthesising a new coronavirus.

■ "Timely" warnings

The article also provided a timeline of how China had provided information to the international community in a "timely",

"open and transparent" manner to rebuke U.S. suggestions that it had been slow to sound the alarm.

Despite China's repeated assurances, concerns about the timeliness of its information have persisted in some quarters.

A report by Der Spiegel magazine last

Friday cited Germany's BND spy agency as saying that China's initial attempt to hold back information had cost the world four to six weeks that could have been used to fight the virus.

The article rejected Western criticism of Beijing's handling of the case of Li Wenliang, a 34-year-old doctor who had tried to raise the alarm over the outbreak of the new virus in Wuhan. His death from COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the virus, prompted an outpouring of rage and grief across China.

The ministry article said Li was not a "whistle-blower" and he was never arrested, contrary to many Western reports.

The article did mention that Li was reprimanded by the police for "spreading rumors". Though Li was later named among "martyrs" mourned by China, an investigation into his case also drew criticism online after it merely suggested the reprimand against him be withdrawn.

Rejecting suggestions by U.S. President Donald Trump and Pompeo that the new coronavirus should be called the "Chinese virus" or "Wuhan virus", the article cited documents from the World Health Organization to say the name of a virus should not be country-specific.

Britain, EU start penultimate round of talks before key deadline

Britain and the European Union start their penultimate scheduled round of trade talks on Monday with little progress on major sticking points before a June deadline to agree on any extension of negotiations.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has repeatedly refused to prolong the current transition period beyond the end of the year to grant more time for the two sides to agree the scale and scope of their new relationship. Reuters reported.

The EU is pushing for progress on a comprehensive deal including fisheries, security and the so-called level playing field guarantees of fair competition. London is more keen on a narrower trade agreement with the bloc from 2021.

Both sides have dug in their heels in and negotiations have been complicated by the coronavirus pandemic, which is sapping the energy and political attention on both sides of the English Channel.

Yemen urges UN to pressure Saudi-led coalition over offloading stranded oil tanker

The Yemeni minister of oil and minerals has called upon the United Nations to pressure the Saudi-led coalition involved in a campaign against his country into allowing the offloading of crude oil from a tanker afloat off the coast of Yemen's port city of Hudaydah.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with Yemen's official Saba news agency on Sunday, Ahmed Daress said Safer tanker, loaded with nearly 1.1 million barrels of oil, has

turned into a time bomb that threatens the marine environment < Press TV reported.

He noted that the Saudi-led alliance is adamantly preventing the unloading of the consignment or maintenance work.

"Despite attempts by the Ministry of Oil to carry out maintenance, the coalition of aggression does not permit the entry of the technical team assigned to perform the maintenance under the supervision of the United Nations," Daress said.

U.S. aircrafts transfer Daesh terrorists from Syria to Iraq: Badr

A leader in Iraq's Badr Organization says U.S. forces have transferred Daesh terrorists from Syria into Iraq amid Washington's attempts to reinforce the American presence in the Arab country.

"Eyewitnesses living along the border with Syria have informed security officials that American forces are conducting extensive airborne transfers of Daesh terrorists from Syria to Iraq," Mohammed Mahdi al-Bayati told al-Maalomah news agency on Sunday.

The terrorists entered Iraq via the borders near the Kurdistan region, Bayati said, adding that the new deployment is aimed at stepping up terrorist attacks in Iraq in order to justify the presence of American forces in the country.

U.S. troops are required to leave Iraq per a parliamentary resolution approved in January following the American assassination of senior Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The U.S. has not only defied calls to withdraw from Iraq, but has also reinforced its military presence by deploying more troops and military equipment.

The United States has recently started evacuating



its occupation forces from a number of military bases in Iraq under a new redeployment plan.

Iraqis believe the move is a military tactic amid reports that Washington is drawing up plans to target members of Hashd al-Sha'abi or Popular Mobilization Forces.

On Saturday, Hashd al-Sha'abi thwarted an attempt by Daesh militants to infiltrate into the Iraqi province of Anbar from Syria.

The presence of U.S. forces presents a serious quandary for new Iraqi prime minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

Pence's office DENIES he's self-isolating over Covid-19 fears



Spokesperson for Vice President Mike Pence has refuted media reports the official was planning to enter self-quarantine after one of his aids tested positive for the coronavirus.

"Vice President Pence will continue to follow the advice of the White House Medical Unit & is not in quarantine. Additionally, VP Pence has tested negative every single day & plans to be at the White House tomorrow," Pence spokesperson Devin O'Malley said Sunday, shortly after Bloomberg reported that he would be staying away from public duties after one of his advisers tested positive for Covid-19 on Friday.

Pence has announced several times that he has tested negative for the coronavirus, and the latest report says he again got a negative result on Sunday. Rumours of the VP going into iso-

lation were fuelled by a report alleging that he skipped a meeting with the president and military officials on Saturday.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, who is on the coronavirus White House task force headed by Pence, recently announced he will be entering a "modified quarantine" following "low risk" contact with the staffer who tested positive. His quarantine will include him working from home and wearing a face mask for 14 days.

It has not been officially revealed who the person is with coronavirus who came into contact with members of the task force, but Katie Miller, the press secretary to the vice president, tested positive on Friday. The task force last met in-person on Thursday.

(Source: RT)

Unilateral sanctions hamper Syria's fight against coronavirus pandemic: UN envoy



Syria's Ambassador to the United Nations Bashar al-Jaafari says unilateral sanctions imposed by the Western countries are hampering the Damascus government's efforts to import medicine and other medical supplies to fight the deadly novel coronavirus outbreak in the country.

"Unilateral coercive economic measures hinder Syria's ability to meet the basic needs of its people and confront the epidemic of the novel coronavirus," Jaafari said on Sunday through the video link at a symposium organized by the Sanctions Kill coalition, which comprises a group of activists working to promote anti-sanctions campaigns.

The Syrian diplomat noted that sanctions continue to reduce the capacity of Syria's public and private health sectors since the measures have affected the country's banking sector, left it bereft of financial resources, made money transfers difficult and

negatively influenced the fields of energy, industry, transport, communications as well as domestic and foreign trade.

According to Press TV, Jaafari dismissed Washington's allegations that food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies are exempt from sanctions, saying, "The U.S. exemptions depend on political considerations and the aid only reaches areas under the control of terrorist groups."

He argued that the Central Bank of Syria has been unable to provide funds for the purchase of basic commodities for Syrian people during the past year as its foreign currency reserves have been blocked.

"Syria has mobilized all its available human, medical and nutritional resources to protect all Syrians in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, such capabilities will continue to shrink as a result of the unilateral coercive measures," Jaafari concluded.

Ivankovic breaks silence on World Cup controversy

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Ex-Iran national football team coach Branko Ivankovic opened up about incidents which happened at the 2006 FIFA World Cup. The Croatian coach led Iran at the 2006 FIFA World Cup, where the Persians failed to book a place at the next stage.

Iran started the campaign with a 3-1 loss against Mexico and then lost to Luis Figo's Portugal 2-0. Iran drew 1-1 with Uganda and were knocked out of the competition.

In the match against Portugal, Karimi kicked a sports bag when he was substituted. In the press conference, Ivankovic criticized his player's performance.

"He [Karimi] made a disciplinary mistake which we will need to discuss after the World Cup when we get back to Iran. He may not start our next game against Angola," Ivankovic had said.

Ivankovic left Iran after the 2006 World Cup since his contract expired at the end of the competition and Iran football federation didn't renew that.

"Our players did their best in the 2006 World Cup but we took part at the competition with several injured players. Ali Karimi, Javad Nekounam, Fereydoon Zandi and Sattar Zare were injured ahead of the competition. Karimi had just suffered the worst injury of his soccer career," Ivankovic said in an interview with Varzesh3.com.

"Ali Daei, Yahya Golmohammadi and Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh had joined us too late since they were forced to feature Saba Battery in the AFC Champions League. We could have earned the better result if our players were well-prepared," he added.



"Expectation were very high in the 2006 World Cup and the fans and media put us under pressure. The President (Mahmoud Ahmadinejad) had said Iran had to advance to the semifinals. We started well the com-

petition but in the last 15 minutes against Mexico, our problems started and everything fell apart," Ivankovic said.

The Media had reported that there was disagreement between the players but Ivankovic refuted the claims.

ovic refuted the claims.

"Our players respected each other and there was any problem in the team. As I said, our team were not fully ready for the competition," the Oman coach stated.

Nekounam not ruled out coaching in Spain

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Javad Nekounam has not ruled out the possibility of coaching the Spanish side Osasuna in the future.

A few weeks ago, an article was published on a digital portal linking former Iran international Nekounam to Osasuna which triggered rumors in Iran about Neku's future as a coach.

The report concluded that Nekounam can sit on the Navarrese bench in the future as he did in his time as a player, appearing in 197 official games and scoring 31 goals during his two spells with the team.

Nekounam, who is currently the head coach of the

Foolad Khuzestan in Iran Professional League (IPL), has reacted to the possibility of managing Osasuna in the future.

"It is not something unexpected," he pointed to the question about whether he was surprised to see such analysis about his career as a manager. "If I work well and get good results as a head coach with my teams, I can someday become the coach of Osasuna. The rest is up to me. People, are always kind to me, and the report says that people love me and I can work like many foreign coaches in the history of the club. If I deserve it and work hard enough, I can get it."

Infantino can go to jail for the referees' spray

Pablo Silva and Haine Allemagne keep FIFA and its president, Gianni Infantino, in check, for the use without consent of the sprays that the referees use during the matches to measure distances in fouls. Both are the creators of the aerosols and four years ago they filed a lawsuit against the leaders of the highest body of European football. The ruling is expected to be known in the coming days and, although it would be appropriate, Infantino faces a sentence that can sentence FIFA to a multimillion-dollar sanction and the leader to a prison sentence.

The lawsuit is for patent infringement and unauthorized use of aerosols. Speaking to the newspaper AS, Pablo Silva, one of the complainants and who claims more than 40 million euros from FIFA, assures that "we are waiting for the first instance decision on the merits. We are going to demand that Gianni Infantino and all those that correspond go imprisoned, in addition to the embargo of goods and accounts".

In this sense, the creators of the sprays explain that they had agreed with Grondona and Blatter, former leaders of FIFA, the use of his invention for official competitions organized by the body. However, Grondona passed away and, after the FIFA Gate



exploded, the negotiations were over and Infantino would have, according to Silva and Allemagne, used the spray without his consent, using a different brand and skipping the patent. "We were patient but when we saw that the spray was used in Russia 2018, when the injunction prohibited it, we exploded", insists on AS.

This same information ensures that each match in which the spray has been used since 2017 can carry a fine of \$ 15,000 favorable to its creators, which could force FIFA to attend a sanction of more than \$ 100 million.

(Source: explicia)

Olympic champion Van der Breggen to retire after Tokyo Games

Dutch Olympic champion Anna van der Breggen has said she will retire from cycling after defending her road race title at the rescheduled Tokyo Games in 2021.

The 30-year-old, who won road race gold at the Rio Olympics in 2016, will become a coach with the Boels-Dolmans team after ending her professional career.

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics have been pushed back a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The Olympic Games in Tokyo are, of course, a great challenge and an important reason for continuing another year," Van der Breggen said in a statement here.

"I also want to end my career with a great, full season. Especially after this year, which was largely lost due to the corona pandemic, I am enormously motivated to continue for one more year.

"I've been thinking about a role as team leader/coach for some time. I was quickly excited about the team's proposal. In 2021, I want to get the best out of myself on my bike for one more season. After that, I will focus on this new job."

Van der Breggen, who secured the rainbow jersey at the world championships in Innsbruck two years after her



victory in Rio, has signed a three-year contract to work as a sports director/coach with Boels-Dolmans.

Her compatriot Chantal Blaak, who won the women's road race at the 2017 world championships, will continue to race professionally until 2022 before taking up a coaching role with Boels-Dolmans.

"In women's cycling, it is not common for cyclists to make this step into coaching after their active career," Blaak said. "It is a compliment for me to be seen as one of the mainstays of this team."

(Source: Reuters)

FIBA announces World Tour calendar with record 14 events on 2020 Olympic season

The ninth edition of the FIBA 3x3 World Tour - the flagship competition of the FIBA 3x3 professional season - will feature an all-time best 13 Masters and a final in Riyadh in November 2020.

The World Tour season continues to stretch in 2020. The final in late November will be - by far - the latest World Tour action in 3x3 history.

The jump from 12 to 14 World Tour events also has a positive impact on prize money, which will reach a total of 2.8m USD on the entire professional circuit (up from 2.1m USD in 2019).

FIBA 3x3 Managing Director Alex Sanchez said: "2020 is a big year for 3x3 and we're excited to see our number one competition - the FIBA 3x3 World Tour - continue to expand so quickly. We're proud to attract new amazing cities like Riyadh for the Final and - at the same time - to return after many years to exceptional cities where World Tour history was made like Abu Dhabi and Manila."

Indeed, the World Tour goes back to Manila, five years



after an unbelievable jam-packed event in a mall proving the flexibility of 3x3 and the concept of "bringing the sport to the people". The competition also returns to Abu Dhabi, which hosted 2 outstanding World Tour Finals in 2015 and 2016.

Like last year, the World Tour will be played in iconic urban locations in Doha, Chengdu, Mexico City, Utsunomiya, Prague, Lausanne, Debrecen, Montreal, Los Angeles

and Jeddah as well.

Launched in 2012, the yearly World Tour sees teams representing cities from around the world qualify for 13 Masters and a Final through a worldwide network of qualifying tournaments, such as the Challengers, and via the FIBA 3x3 Team Ranking.

Five Masters will be held before July 25 when 3x3 will make its Olympic debut at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

"For the fans, the FIBA 3x3 World Tour will be the best preview of our urban discipline at the Games", Sanchez said. "It will also be the ultimate preparation for the best 3x3 players in the world before the Olympics. In fact, we will arrive in Japan 2 weeks early, with the 5th Masters of the season in Utsunomiya, followed by a Pre-Olympic Acclimatization Camp for our best athletes to get used to the Japanese climate and deliver the best show possible to the fans."

The top 12 teams in the World Tour standings after the last Masters earn a ticket to the FIBA 3x3 World Tour Final.

(Source: FIBA)

'Iran enjoys necessary infrastructure to host AFC Asian Cup 2027'

MNA — The CEO of Development and Maintenance of Sports Facilities of Iran says the country enjoys the necessary infrastructure to host the AFC Asian Cup in 2027.

Speaking to Mehr News Agency on Monday, Hassan Karimi referred to Iran's bid for hosting the AFC Asian Cup in 2027, stressing that that Iranian stadiums meet the standards for holding the event.

Besides Tehran's Azadi Stadium, which is among the biggest stadiums in the world, there are several stadiums in different cities, including Isfahan, that pass the criteria for AFC competitions, he added.

Noting that Iran has always hosted well the international sports rivalries, Karimi said the AFC Champions League Final between Persepolis FC and Kashima Antlers in 2018 was among the events held in Iran and lauded by the both FIFA and AFC.

In April, Iran officially submitted its bid for hosting the AFC Asian Cup in 2027.

The AFC has granted a three-month extension to the deadline for member associations to submit expressions of interest to host the 2027 Asian Cup. The deadline had previously been March 31, but this was extended to June 30 in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

India, Qatar and Saudi Arabia have already submitted their 2027 bids, the AFC is expected to announce the host country early next year.

Iran previously bid to host the 2019 Asian Cup, having already hosted two Asian Cup tournaments in 1968 and 1976, however the bid was won by the United Arab Emirates. The country also won the tournament three times in a row between 1968 and 1976.

China was confirmed as the host nation of the 2023 edition back in June. The tournament will take place across 10 host cities: Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Chongqing, Chengdu, Xi'an, Dalian, Qingdao, Xiamen and Suzhou.

V-League clubs eye Ghafour, Esfandiar: report

TASNIM — Two unnamed V-League clubs have shown interest in signing Iranian players Amir Ghafour and Amir Hossein Esfandiar.

Ghafour played for Italian team Cucine Lube Civitanova but a Korean volleyball team has set its sight on hiring the opposite striker.

The report says that another Korean team are going to sign wing spiker Esfandiar.

Esfandiar had been linked with a move Belgian team Greenyard Maaseik.

He has recently played for Kalleh Mazandaran of Iran.

Persepolis cancel contract with Anthony Stokes

IRNA — Iranian football club Persepolis cancelled their contract with Irish forward Anthony Stokes.

The former Celtic forward signed a six-month contract with the Iranian team during the winter transfer window but refused to return to Tehran after the match against Sharjah in the AFC Champions League.

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

On Monday, the Iranian media reported that Persepolis have cancelled the contract with the player.

Report: Durant won't play if NBA resumes season

Brooklyn Nets star Kevin Durant will not play if the NBA restarts the season, ESPN's Adrian Wojnarowski reported Sunday.

The Nets are determined to let the four-time scoring champion rest until next season rather than risk reinjuring his right Achilles tendon.

"Kevin Durant's not coming back to the Nets this year," Wojnarowski said during "The Woj Pod" podcast. "That's not happening. ... They're not playing him."

Earlier this month, Brooklyn general manager Sean Marks said he wouldn't rule out Durant returning to the court if the league resumes the 2019-20 campaign. Play has been suspended since March 11 due to the coronavirus crisis.

"He knows his body better than anybody," Marks told News-hub of New Zealand. "Our performance team and training staff have done a tremendous job getting him to this point, but I just don't know how coming out of this pandemic will affect anybody, let alone Kevin."

Durant, 31, was injured during Game 5 of the 2019 NBA Finals as a member of the Golden State Warriors. He signed a four-year, \$164 million deal with the Nets as a free agent in July.

The 10-time All-Star forward was the league's Most Valuable Player in 2013-14 as a member of the Oklahoma City Thunder. He was a two-time NBA Finals MVP with the Warriors.

(Source: Reuters)

Turkey cancels basketball, volleyball seasons due to outbreak

ANKARA (Reuters) — Turkey canceled its basketball and volleyball leagues for the 2019-2020 season on Monday, with no relegated teams and the current standings valid for European competition, following a stoppage in play due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Because the teams did not compete in the play-offs, we will not be declaring any of them champions," said Mehmet Akif Ustundag, the chairman of the volleyball federation.

Last week, Turkey's soccer federation decided to resume its leagues from June 12 and aims to complete the season on July 26.

The number of people who have died from COVID-19 in Turkey stands at 3,786 as of Monday, with the overall number of cases at 138,657, according to the health ministry.

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com
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 » **Webmaster:** webmaster@tehrantimes.com
 » **Printed at:** Jame Jam Bartar Borna - 44197737

Tehrantimes79 f Tehrantimes79 i Tehrantimes79

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The most worthless knowledge is one which comes only on the tongue, and the loftiest is one that manifests itself in the significant parts of the body, such as the head and heart.

Imam Ali (AS)

Revayat Foundation ready to fulfill Leader's call for coverage of fight against COVID-19

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Revayat Cultural Foundation has announced its readiness to fulfill Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's call for the coverage of the country's tough fight against COVID-19.



A logo for the Revayat Cultural Foundation.

In a video conference held on Sunday along with members of the Coronavirus Combat and Prevention Headquarters, the Leader called on artists to help record "pious and astonishing endeavor" of the people, the Basij volunteers, the Armed Forces and other organizations through their words, artworks, films and plays like Morteza Avini, the director of the documentary series "The Narration of Triumph" ("Revayate Fat'h").

He was martyred by a landmine in 1993 during his last trip to the former Iran-Iraq war zone in southwestern Iran while making a documentary about soldiers who were still listed as missing in action.

The Leader called the "pious endeavors" a basis to showcase manifestation of the Islamic and revolutionary culture.

In a statement published on Monday, Revayat Cultural Foundation director Mohammad Yashar Naderi said, "We say yes to this history-making call of the Leader and will move on the path of this wave of the exaltation of art at this time with all our strength and power, and we will take firm steps."

"Art has always been a medium to record major and unforgettable events in history and the exalted art narrates the values and goals which are history themselves," he added.

Children to perform opera on Attar's Mantiq at-Tayr

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Children aged 8 to 15 will take part in an online opera performance based on Mantiq at-Tayr (Conference of the Birds), a magnum opus of the Persian poet and mystic Farid ud-Din Attar Neyshaburi.



A poster for "A Simorgh as Big as Iran".

The performance has been organized by the Afarinesh Music School in Tehran and Maryam Sharifzadeh will direct it.

Interested individuals from Iran and other Persian speaking-countries are asked to join the project named "A Simorgh as Big as Iran", Sharifzadeh said in a press release on Monday.

"At the present time, the members are doing rehearsals online. The project aims to pay due attention to music and literature while making children more familiar with Iran's local birds and the environment," Sharifzadeh said.

Theater instructor Mohammadreza Mahmudpur, artistic director Khashyar Seyyed-Javadi and rhetorician Elinaz Khanjani are collaborating in the project.

Students of the Afarinesh Music School performed the musical "Lion King" in English at Tehran's Niavaran Cultural Center last year.

Willem Floor's book on history of bread in Iran published in Persian

C U L T U R E T E H R A N — A new **d e s k** Persian translation of Dutch Iranologist Willem Marius Floor's book "History of Bread in Iran" by Saba Karkhizan has been published in Persian.

Originally published in 2015, "History of Bread in Iran" has been published by Iranshenasi Publishing in Tehran.

Another Persian translation of the book by Abdolmajid Zavvari, Ehsan Alaipour and Mahmud Yusefi had previously been published by the International Relations Think Tank in Tehran.

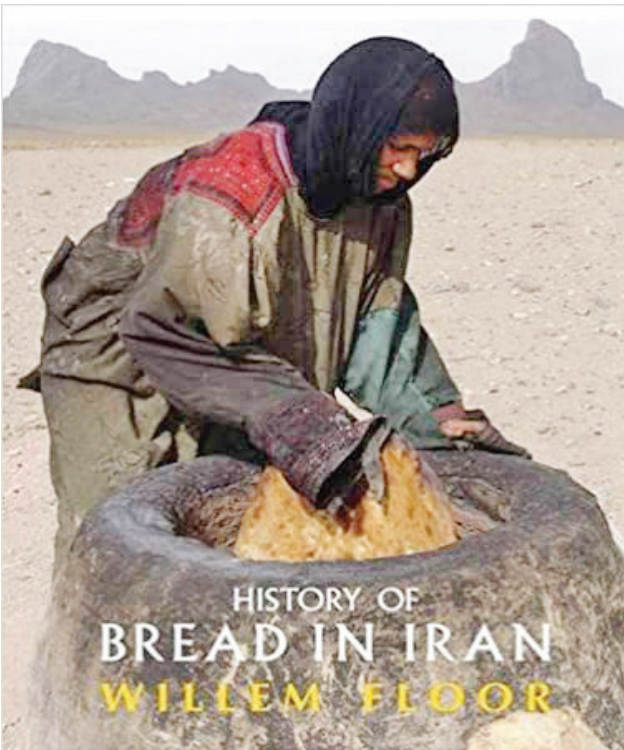
In an introduction to the book, Amazon writes "Given the importance of bread in the Iranian diet, it is surprising that its role in Iranian society has so far been ignored as a subject of study."

"Since ancient times, bread has been the staple diet of the peoples living in the Iranian plateau."

In his book, Floor, one of the foremost scholars of Iranian history, describes the beginnings of agriculture and bread-making, and the various grains and other products that were, and are, used to make bread.

He then delves into the making of dough in rural and urban areas, followed by an overview of baking techniques, and the many kinds of bread that were and continue to be made in Iran.

And, because man does not live by bread alone, the readers are offered an overview of the spiritual and social aspects of bread in Iranian society.



This combination photo shows the front covers of the Persian and English versions of Dutch Iranologist Willem Marius Floor's book "History of Bread in Iran".

Finally, the author assesses the dietary importance of bread to the people of Iran

and ends by addressing the question of how the state dealt with "the bread issue,"

which often determined the rise and fall of governments.

Arab readers impressed by "Goodbye, Commander"



This photo shows copies of the Persian and Arabic versions of "Goodbye Commander".

C U L T U R E T E H R A N — The **d e s k** Iranian publisher Besat has said that the Arabic version of "Goodbye, Commander", a memoir of martyr Brigadier General Hossein Hamedani's widow, Fatemeh Cheraghnoruzi, has become a bestseller.

A new edition of the book has come out as a result, the Persian service of Tasnim reported on Monday.

The Arabic translation of "Goodbye, Commander" by Masud Ahmadi was published in December 2109.

Hamedani, who was a senior military advisor to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), was martyred in October

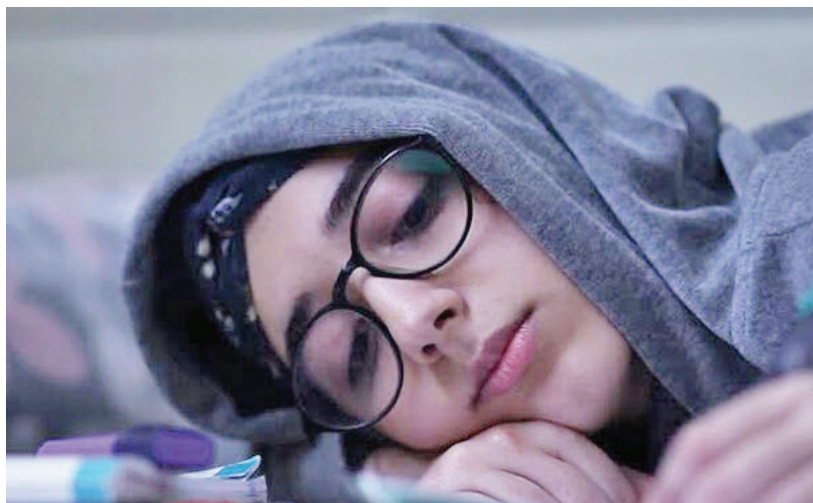
2015 during a mission in Syria.

The book, compiled by Hamid Hesam, recounts Cheraghnoruzi's memories of their stay in Syria.

The story of "Goodbye, Commander" begins in 2011 when the commander and his family left Iran to join Syrian forces in their war against ISIS. The book also returns to the 1960s and continues with the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war and multiple missions of the commander during the war.

"This book perfectly illustrates an Islamic lifestyle," Hesam said and added, "The book is composed of two crescents that form a moon."

"Don't Worry", "So Close So Far" competing in Corona festival



A scene from "Don't Worry" by Mana Pakseresht.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Iranian short films "Don't Worry" and "So Close So Far" are competing in the Corona Short Film Festival in Germany.

The online film festival has been initiated as a reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, the organizers have announced.

"Don't Worry" directed by Mana Pakseresht shows how a teenage girl spends her birthday alone at home because of the coronavirus pandemic, however, her mother, who is a nurse, has a surprise for her from the hospital.

Directed by Komeil Soheil, "So Close,

So Far" shows how many people, from a boy in his twenties in the Amazon forests to those who live on a tiny island in Malaysia, suddenly experienced big changes in their lifestyles.

Next to the Grand Jury Prize, all short films will be competing for an audience award, which will be determined through online voting by people who have the chance to watch the films and vote until May 24.

The winning films will be picked up for international sales and distribution by interfilm, an international short film festival running in Berlin during November.

Grammy-winning 1970s soul singer Betty Wright dies at 66

MIAMI (AP) — Betty Wright, the Grammy-winning soul singer and songwriter whose influential 1970s hits included "Clean Up Woman" and "Where is the Love," has died at age 66.

Wright died at her home in Miami on Sunday, several media outlets reported. Steve Greenberg of S-Curve Records told the New York Times Wright had been diagnosed with cancer in the fall.

Wright had her breakthrough with 1971's "Clean Up Woman," which combined elements of funk, soul and R&B.

Recorded when Wright was just 17, the song would be a top 10 hit on both the Billboard R&B and pop charts, and its familiar grooves would be used and reused in the sampling era of future decades.

The youngest of seven children, Wright was born Bessie Regina Norris in 1953 in Miami, the city whose funk and soul sounds her music would always be identified with.

She started singing with the family gospel group, Echoes of Joy, and released her solo debut album, "My First Time Around," at age 15 in 1968. The album yielded a top 40 hit, "Girls Can't Do What the Guys Do."

After "Clean Up Woman," written by Clarence Reid and Willie Clarke and later sampled by Afrika Bambaataa and Mary J. Blige, she would have her first hit she wrote herself with "Baby Sitter," a 1973 hit that showed off her so-called "whistle register" vocals, an ultra-high singing style later employed by Mariah Carey and others. With members of K.C. and the Sunshine



In this April 2, 2013, file photo, singer Betty Wright performs before an NBA basketball game between the Miami Heat and the New York Knicks in Miami. (AP/Wilfredo Lee)

Band, she co-wrote her 1975 proto-disco hit, "Where is the Love," which would win her a Grammy for best R&B song.

A career lull in the late 1970s and early 1980s prompted Wright to start her own label in 1985, leading to a gold album, "Mother Wit", in 1987 and the comeback hit "No Pain (No Gain)".

She spent much of the rest of her life as a producer and mentor to younger artists, many of whom were singing her praises after her death.

"Thank you for being a master teacher, a friend and one of the greatest female soul singers in our industry," Ledisi said on Twitter. "You were so much more than your music. We were blessed to be around royalty."

John Legend tweeted that Wright "was always so loving and giving to younger artists. Always engaged, always relevant. She will be missed."

Cannes rules out physical edition for now, will host screenings at fall festivals

CANNES (Variety) — The Cannes Film Festival will unveil a selection of movies in early June and collaborate with several festivals, including Venice, to present some films, Variety has confirmed. Organizers also seem to have ruled out the possibility of a physical festival this fall.

"As of today, a physical edition seems complicated to organize, so we are going forward with an announcement of films from the (initial official) selection at the beginning of June," said a spokesperson for the festival, confirming what Cannes' director Thierry Fremaux said on Sunday in an interview with Screen Daily.

Rather than opting for a virtual festival, Cannes will be organizing a "redeployment 'outside the walls' (of Cannes), in collaboration with fall festivals," said the spokesperson. This includes Venice, as previously reported by Variety, and with whom talks have begun, as well as cinemas.

The Cannes chief, who is a fervent supporter of movie theaters, has vowed to help exhibitors lure back moviegoers this fall. "The cinema and its industries are threatened. We will have to rebuild, affirm again its importance with energy, unity and solidarity," Fremaux told Variety in April.

Over the weekend, Fremaux said that instead of unveiling the whole of what should have been this year's official selection — including out of competition and Un Certain Regard — he will only announce a list of movies that were part of the roster and scheduled to be released



General view of the Palais des Festivals in Cannes. (EPA-EFE/Shutterstock/Sebastien Nogier)

in theaters between now and next spring. These films will be given a 'Cannes 2020' label. The selection process for next year's festival, meanwhile, will start in the fall. Some movies that were selected for this edition and have delayed their release by a year will be considered for the 2021 edition.

Cannes will be showing its "labeled" films at festivals such as Toronto, Deauville, Angoulême, San Sebastian, New York, Busan and Fremaux's own Lumière festival in Lyon. Fremaux added the idea with Venice was to go further and jointly present movies.

Meanwhile, the Cannes Marché du Film's virtual edition is due to run June 22-26, alongside a U.S. agencies-led virtual market.

The fate of the Venice Film Festival will be decided at the end of the month. Organizers recently distributed a short survey to industry players to gauge the level of attendance from filmmakers and talent.