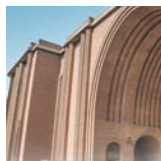




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© File photo

Monthly aluminum ingot output rises 47%

TEHRAN — Production of aluminum ingot in Iran was increased 47 percent during the first Iranian calendar month Farvardin (March 20-April 19), IRNA reported, citing the data released by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO).

The IMIDRO data put the country's aluminum ingot output at 30,030 tons in the first month of this year, while the figure was 20,415 tons in the same month of the previous year.

Production of the aluminum ingot in the country is planned to increase 63 percent by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021).

Iran's major aluminum producers produced 275,716 tons of aluminum ingots in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), according to the data released by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry.

The country's aluminum ingot production in the past year fell eight percent in comparison to the figure for its preceding year.

The data show that among the country's top producers, Iranian Aluminum Company (IRALCO) had the best performance registering a four-percent rise during the mentioned period.

On April 23, during the inauguration ceremony of Iran's biggest aluminum production complex (in the central Fars province), the industry minister said the country's aluminum production is expected to be doubled with this unit going operational.

The minister put the value of the Iranian mining industry's production at about \$22 billion, saying that the country is relatively self-sufficient in minerals and a great deal is also exported every year.

He went on underlying the country's capacities in the sector, saying that Iran is ranked 18th among the world's top aluminum producers, and with this new plant going operational the country will climb four places to stand at 14th place.

Iran plans to reach the annual production of 1.5 million tons of aluminum ingot by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (March 2025-March 2026).

Tourism ministry issues guideline to curb pandemic as travels seen to rise

TEHRAN — Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has issued a guideline comprising health protocols to lessen coronavirus pandemic as many families are expected to start domestic travels during the upcoming Eid al-Fitr holidays (May 24 and 25).

The move comes following months of travel restrictions in the country and many other parts of the globe, some of which remaining in place to fight the virus outbreak.

"In addition to strongly advising the public to reduce intercity traffic and avoid unnecessary trips to maintain the health of passengers traveling between cities by private vehicles, it is recommended to make sure the vehicle is in good condition and clean and disinfect the inside of the car and door handles," the guideline reads.

"Before traveling, make sure you have personal protective equipment, such as a disposable glove, a hand sanitizer, and a paper towel. Use masks

and gloves when refueling at gas stations. On short trips, eat lightly prepared food at home."

"On long trips, the only sojourn at stopover centers/restaurants which are under the supervision of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts. And after using public sanitary services, wash and dry your hands thoroughly according to the protocol announced by the Ministry of Health or use a hand sanitizer solution."

"Upon purchasing any product or food item before use or entering the car, its packaging should be disinfected. Use electronic methods to pay for highway tolls."

On April 20, Iran lifted intercity travel bans days after President Hassan Rouhani unveiled a "Smart Social Distancing Initiative" as a new phase of measures to prevent the virus spread. Over the past couple of months, many countries, including the Islamic Republic, **→8**

PMU honor of Iraq: Al-Kadhimi

By staff & agencies

The newly-elected prime minister of Iraq has visited the command center of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) in Baghdad, wearing their uniform and calling the counter-terrorism forces a source of honor for the Iraqi nation.

In the Saturday visit to the PMU headquarters, Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi held talks with the group's leader Fali al-Fayyadh, a former National Security Council advisor. "Hashd al-Sha'abi is an

honor for Iraq, and I am proud that I am wearing this uniform of the Popular Mobilization organization," PM al-Kadhimi said.

"Protecting the Hashd al-Sha'abi is a duty," he added in an apparent warning to those seeking to undermine the resistance group, better known by its Arabic name used by the prime minister.

The PMU was formed shortly after the emergence of the Daesh terrorist group in Iraq in mid-2014 upon a fatwa by top Shia cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. **→10**

Iran, Russia reject consensus on Assad resignation

TEHRAN — Rumors about an Iran-Russia consensus for the resignation of Syrian President Bashar al Assad is a "big lie" pushed by the U.S.-Israeli media outlets, says a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian Parliament speaker.

"Dr #BasharAssad is the legitimate president of Flag of Syria & great leader of fighting Takfiri terrorism in Arab World," Hosein Amir Abdollahian tweeted on Sunday.

"Rumor abt Iran-Russia consensus for his

resignation is a big lie & American-Zionist media game," he said. "Flag of Iran strongly supports Flag of Syria sovereignty, national unity&territorial integrity."

The comments came in response to media speculation that Iran, Russia and Turkey may reach a consensus to remove the Syrian president and establish a ceasefire in exchange for forming a transitional government that includes the opposition, members of the Syrian government and the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). **→3**

Chambers of commerce provide over \$38m for battling coronavirus

TEHRAN — Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIAMA) says the country's chambers of commerce have provided 1.63 trillion rials (about \$38.8 million) to help containing the coronavirus, IRNA reported.

Speaking in a board assembly of Mash-

had Chamber of Commerce on Saturday, Gholam-Hossein Shafe'i said improving the resilience of the country's productive sector against the economic impacts of the pandemic depends on prioritizing the allocation of government supports and the financial resources collected by the chambers. **→4**

Military to help battle locusts in Iran

TEHRAN — The Iranian agriculture ministry has called on military to help fight locusts that have invaded the south of the country, threatening to destroy crops.

Mohammad Reza Mir, a spokesman for the agriculture ministry's Plant Protection Organization, said the desert locusts had attacked more than 200,000 hectares of orchards and farmland in seven of the country's 31 provinces, ILNA reported.

"The military have promised to help fight the desert locusts, including by providing all-terrain vehicles for use in areas which are hard to access," Mir told ILNA.

"Last year the military provided personnel and vehicles, and that was a big help."

The affected areas, stretching from eastern Iran on the border with Pakistan to the south-western border with Iraq, were likely to soon increase to 1 million hectares, he added. Plant Protection Organization's head, Mo-

hammad Reza Dargahi, said last month that locust swarms threatened billions of dollars' worth of agricultural products across six provinces in southern Iran.

On March 19, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) signed an agreement to provide Iran \$200,000 for capacity building to control desert locust infestation.

"Given the alarming situation of desert locust in the region and the possible huge damages this pest can cause in agricultural production and rural livelihoods, FAO determined to further extend its technical assistance to Iran, and accordingly allocated additional funds to this project," said FAO Representative to Iran, Gerold Bodeker.

He added that "As part of the agreement, FAO will also assist the country in procuring vital equipment needed to equip two desert locust control centers that will allow a quicker and more effective response." **→9**



© AFC

AFC Instagram account reflects on Footshal in Iran

TEHRAN — Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Instagram account has posted the pictures of Footshal in northern Iran.

Footshal is a type of football played between two teams of nine players on a muddy field.

The size of the field is 50 meters long and 25 meters wide.

Footshal derives from Football and Shalzar (paddy field) and is played in Iran northern provinces Gilan and Mazandaran. Footshal is very popular in north of Iran.

Iran's fuel shipment to Venezuela guaranteed by its missile power

(Press TV) — Iran is shipping tons of gasoline to Venezuela in defiance of U.S. sanctions on both countries in a symbolic move guaranteed by Tehran's missile prowess.

Unconfirmed reports and tanker monitoring groups suggest that at least five Iranian-flagged tankers are transporting fuel to Venezuela through the Atlantic Ocean despite the U.S. sanctions on both Tehran and Caracas.

Iran has intentionally hoisted its own flag over the huge tankers which are navigating through the Atlantic before the eyes of the U.S. Navy.

Iran is shipping large consignments of gasoline to Venezuela even though the U.S. would try to intercept the shipments and seize the tankers.

There are unconfirmed reports that the U.S. Navy has deployed its USS Detroit (LCS-7), USS Lassen (DDG-82), USS Preble (DDG-88), and USS Farragut (DDG-99) to the Caribbean along with its patrol aircraft Boeing P8-Poseidon for possible encounter with the Iranian vessels.

However, analysts say it is very unlikely that the U.S. makes such a mistake, as it would have serious repercussions for the Trump administration ahead of the November elections.

The U.S. would not dare to seize the Iranian vessels especially after Iran's reaction to a similar move by the United Kingdom, a close ally of Washington.

Iran has also the upper hand thanks to its missile power, which was showed off to the U.S. in the IRGC's retaliatory missile attacks on the Ain al-Assad Airbase in Iraq, which accommodated American troops. **→2**

TENDER INVITATION NO. 99-1011

IRAN ALUMINIUM COMPANY (IRALCO) would like to invite eligible suppliers for the supply of 180,000 MT Alumina (AL₂O₃) on tender basis. Interested companies are allowed to send their competitive offer till **1. JUN. 2020** based on our required instruction to following address:
NO.49, Mollasadra Ave., Vanak Square, Postal code: 1991614581 Tehran, Iran. Attention: Ms. Mohammadi, Ms. Emadi
Tel: +98 21 88049046-7
Fax: +98 21 88049045
For obtaining tender's documents and more information, please check: www.iralco.ir

Public Relations Department of Iran Aluminum Company



No indications Iran changing regional strategy: analysis

Some nine years after Iran's powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) deployed military advisers and fighters to Syria to prop up the government of President Bashar al-Assad, Israeli and U.S. officials have said Tehran is reducing its presence in Syria.

Analysts told RFE/RL that amid the reports of a movement of forces, there are no indications Iran is changing its regional strategy, which is driven by political and security interests.

Israeli military officials said recently that Tehran has pulled some of its forces from Syria and evacuated military bases near the border with Israel.



"We do see some withdrawal of Iranian-commanded forces. Some of that is tactical because they are not fighting right now," said U.S. special envoy for Syria James Jeffrey at a May 12 panel hosted by the Washington-based Hudson Institute.

But analysts say there are no signs Iran is quitting Syria, the only Arab country that sided with the Islamic republic during the 1980-1988 war with Iraq.

Raz Zimmt, an Iran analyst at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv, told RFE/RL that comments by Israeli officials about an Iranian withdrawal from Syria "are very much exaggerated, partly due to political considerations."

"In fact, the number of cargo flights between Iran and Syria seem to [have] increased since April 2020," he said. "It is, therefore, a tactical withdrawal or redeployment at most, rather than an Iranian withdrawal from Syria."

Zimmt said that since the beginning of its involvement in Syria, the IRGC has adapted its modus operandi to the circumstances at hand.

"There is no doubt that in the last two years Iran has been reducing the IRGC presence in Syria, which is much less required than before," he added.

Zimmt said that the number of IRGC forces has decreased from a few thousand to a few hundred, Tehran has continued to recruit Syrians to hold the Iranian forces' places.

He said U.S. sanctions have to some extent restricted Tehran's ability to assist its allies in the region. But that does not mean a change of course.

"Our experience with Iran has shown that economic considerations have never been the main engine in its regional policy," he said. "Iran has continued to assist its allies... in the region even under severe economic constraints, because it considers its regional involvement and influence a vital national interest."

Ali Alfoneh, a senior fellow at the Arab (Persian) Gulf States Institute in Washington who has closely monitored IRGC activity in Syria, said he is not aware of credible reports about an Iranian military withdrawal from Syria.

"What I see is troop movements within Syria: from Deir al-Zor to a larger headquarters in Palmyra, along with some other tactical moves in the wake of the latest round of Israeli air strikes," he said.

Speaking earlier this week, former Israeli military intelligence chief Amos Yadlin questioned reports about a full Iranian pullout from Syria.

"The Iranians are not leaving — I am not buying this argument," Yadlin was quoted by The Jerusalem Post as saying.

Haaretz strategic blogger Shmuel Meir, a former analyst with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and a Tel Aviv University researcher, says Iran could be adapting its policies to a changing reality on the ground.

Meir added Iran will not be "relinquishing Lebanon, which is the core of Iran's interests."

Iran's fuel shipment to Venezuela guaranteed by its missile power

1 → The US was also reminded of the Islamic Republic's missile prowess following the recent successful launch of Nour-1 military satellite, which reached the orbit using the Qased satellite carrier. Some Western analysts claim the satellite achievements are a prelude to Iran's program to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

Confident about its missile capabilities, Iran is going on with the gasoline shipment to its ally in the Latin America, mocking the U.S. sanctions on the oil sectors of both countries.

The U.S. seems to be between the rock and hard place. While it is unlikely for Washington to dare to intercept the tankers, if they reach their destination safe and sound, it may tarnish the "superpower" forever.

The fuel shipment also shows Iran's success in turning into an exporter of gasoline after years of importing the fuel.

A senior official in U.S. President Donald Trump's administration told Reuters on Thursday that the United States was considering measures against Iran in response to the fuel shipment.

The official said Washington has a "high degree of certainty" that the Venezuelan government is paying Iran in gold for the fuel.

If these claims are confirmed, the "fuel for gold" exchange is also a great achievement for the Islamic Republic amid the U.S.' maximum pressure policy, which deprives the country's economy of billions of dollars' worth of oil revenues.

There are reports that Iran is receiving nine tons of gold in exchange for the fuel its ships to Venezuela. Under the cruel sanctions imposed by the U.S. after its withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal in 2018, nine tons of gold can be a very precious asset for the Iranian economy.

However, we should still wait and see whether the US administration would let the Iranian tankers go and strip Washington of its "superpower" title, or it would dare to intercept the vessels and endanger Donald Trump's campaign ahead of the November elections.

Earlier in the day, Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabiei said Venezuela and Iran are both independent states that have had and will continue to have trade relations with each other, however.

"We sell goods and buy goods in return. This trade has nothing to do with anyone else. We have to sell our oil and we have ways to do it," Rabiei said in reaction to reports of the fuel shipment to the Latin American country.

Hatami says Iran, Iraq should become 'strategic partners'

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Sunday that Tehran and Baghdad should become "strategic partners".

"We want to give Iraq all our capacities and we want to become strategic partners and turn our relations into a successful model of cooperation," he told the newly-appointed Iraqi Defense Minister Enad Sa'adoun Khatab al-Jabouri through a video conference.

Hatami attached great importance to expanding defense cooperation to help establish regional security and stability.

He also invited the Iraqi defense minister to visit Iran.

Elsewhere, he said, "Our principled policy is an integrated, independent and powerful Iraq. So, we hope the Iraqi government will be successful in fulfilling its duties, improving economic situation and fighting the coronavirus."

Mostafa Moradian, the Iranian military attaché to Baghdad, also met with the Iraqi defense minister and called for expanding military cooperation, ISNA reported on Sunday.

In the meeting, the Iraqi defense chief praised Iran's support for Iraq in fight



against Daesh.

In a phone conversation with new Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on May 11, President Hassan Rouhani said Iran will stand beside the Iraqi govern-

ment 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.

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

Iran and Iraq have developed close ties since the ouster of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq in 2003. Iran was the first country that recognized the Iraqi Governing Council in July 2003. Iraq is now also a major trade partner to Iran. Iran also exports gas and electricity to Iraq.

Iran also rushed to the help of Iraqis when Daesh (ISIS/ISIL) made rapid advances occupying large swathes of the Iraqi territory in 2014.

The two countries also share close cultural and religious affinities. Each year hundreds of thousands of citizens from each country visit holy shrines in each country.

Ayatollah Khamenei to deliver speech on Quds Day

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei will deliver a speech on Friday on the occasion of Quds Day.

The Leader's speech will be aired live on local and international radio and television channels, Nosratollah Lotfi, the deputy chief of the Islamic Development Coordination Council, said on Sunday.

In order to make the most of Ayatollah Khamenei's speech, no other event will be held in any part of the

country in the name of Quds Day plans, he added.

International Quds Day was initiated by the founder of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 to express solidarity with Palestinians and oppose the Zionist regime.

Quds Day is held at the last Friday of the fasting month of Ramadan.

However, this year rallies in Iran will be held in a different form due to the coronavirus pandemic as it is

necessary to observe social distancing.

Rallies are held each year in various cities around the world by both Muslims and non-Muslim communities. Many Jewish people also attend the rallies in order to draw a line between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

President Hassan Rouhani announced on Saturday that Quds Day will be held in Tehran by marching cars under the watch of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps.

Columbia University professor urges removal of Iran sanctions

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Robert Jervis, a professor of Columbia University, has slammed the United States' sanctions on Iran, urging their removal in the coronavirus pandemic.

"I support removal or suspension of sanctions in a crisis such as a pandemic. I believe the Trump administration must end sanctions against Iran for humanitarian reasons," he told ILNA in an interview published on Sunday.

However, Jervis expressed doubt that U.S. President Donald Trump would remove sanctions.

Removing the sanctions means admitting a wrong policy by Trump, he noted.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has urged the United States to lift sanctions on Iran and Venezuela, stressing that the sanitary situation called for such a move in order to save lives.

In an interview with France 24 published on Friday, she added that the medical exemptions to those sanctions touted by the Trump administration were too narrow and said only a suspension or a lifting of the sanctions would have a real impact.

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

"At this crucial time, both for global public health



reasons, and to support the rights and lives of millions of people in these countries, sectoral sanctions should be eased or suspended," she said in a statement.

U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein has said that the United States should provide partial, temporary sanctions relief to Iran when the country is fighting the coronavirus.

"The U.S. should provide partial, temporary sanctions relief to Iran and facilitate efforts by international

Nuclear deal has just been implemented by Iran: top MP

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Mojtaba Zolnour, the head of the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has said that the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, has just been implemented by Iran.

"The JCPOA has just been implemented by Iran and for the current time, nothing has remained from the JCPOA," he told Mehr news agency in an interview published on Sunday.

He noted that Iran is still under sanctions while it has fulfilled its obligations under the deal.

U.S. President Donald Trump quit the multilateral nuclear deal in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions on Iran as part of his administration's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran.

The U.S. move was in violation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that endorsed the JCPOA.

Under the JCPOA, Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for the termination of economic and financial sanctions.

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.

Iran's move is in line with paragraph 36 of the JCPOA. President Hassan Rouhani said on May 6 that Iran will return to full implementation of the JCPOA if other signatories do the same.

Josep Borrell, the EU foreign policy chief, said in December 2019 that the signatories to the nuclear deal should adopt a united stance to preserve the deal.

Parviz Esmaeili, the Iranians ambassador to Croatia, has urged the European Union to support the nuclear deal unitedly and practically.

"The European Union's united voice in support for multilateralism and the JCPOA must turn into united determination and act," he said via a videoconference on May 11 with the non-European ambassadors in Croatia.



The ambassador said that the EU has so far played a positive role in supporting the JCPOA politically, yet it is needed that political support is translated into action.

"Only in this way, the European Union can be a support for international diplomacy, peace, and cooperation," the diplomat pointed out.

Pakistan Navy chief extends condolences over death of Iranian sailors

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Pakistan's Navy Commander Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi has sent a message of condolence to his Iranian counterpart Hossein Khanzadi offering condolences over the death of 19 Iranian sailors in a friendly fire in Iran's southern waters on May 10.

Here is the text of the message of condolence sent to the Tehran Times by Pakistan's embassy in Tehran:

Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi NI (M), Chief of the Naval Staff, Pakistan Navy sent a message of heartfelt condolences on behalf of all ranks of

Pakistan Navy to Rear Admiral Hussein Khanzadi, Commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy on the tragic incident at sea resulting in the loss of precious lives of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy.

While stating that it was indeed a great tragedy and Pakistan Navy stands shoulder to shoulder with Iranian brethren in this hour of grief, Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi, Pakistan Navy Chief prayed to Almighty Allah to rest the departed soul in peace, grant fortitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and the bereaved families to bear this irreparable loss.

Zarif welcomes political agreement between Ghani and Abdullah

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Sunday welcomed political agreement between Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah.

Following the political agreement, Zarif immediately telephoned President Ghani and Abdullah welcoming the agreement which ended months of political stalemate in the Central Asian country.

In the telephone conversation, Zarif said Iran is ready to help facilitate reconciliation between all Afghan groups.

Prior to Zarif's telephone talks, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi also released a statement expressing delight

over power-sharing agreement between President Ghani and Abdullah.

Mousavi said Tehran is ready to help the process of intra-Afghan talks which would also include Taliban.

Ghani's spokesman said the agreement is a step that could smooth efforts to end the country's long-running war.

"The Political Agreement between President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah has just been signed," said Sediqli Sediqli on Twitter.

Abdullah would lead the council for peace talks with the insurgent Taliban and his team members would be included in cabinet, Sediqli added, according to Reuters.

Russia says U.S. partners need to read Resolution 2231 more carefully

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), has criticized Washington's push to invoke snapback mechanism against Iran, saying U.S. partners need to read the text of UN Security Council Resolution 2231 more carefully.

"#US mistakenly believes that para 10&11 of #UNSC res. 2231 allow US to invoke SnapBack to restore #UN #sanctions against #Iran," Ulyanov said via Twitter on Saturday. "US partners need to read the text more carefully. Both paras clearly indicate that it can be done only through the procedures specified in JCPOA."

"So, if US decides to initiate #SnapBack, it would need first to refer the issue to Joint Commission under #JCPOA," he explained.

The Russian diplomat added that "for this to happen US would need to restore fully its status of a member of the Commission and ensure full compliance with JCPOA in a verifiable manner. Go ahead!"

Two years after the United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, the Trump administration is looking to extend a UN ban on conventional arms sales to and from Iran, a strategy designed to kill the deal for good.

In a May 9 statement marking the second anniversary of the Donald Trump administration's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pledged to "exercise all diplomatic options" to extend the UN ban on conventional arms



Ambassador Ulyanov says, "If the U.S. decides to initiate snapback sanctions it would need first to refer the issue to the Joint Commission under the JCPOA."

sales to and from Iran beyond its current expiry date on October 18.

Russia has leveled criticism against the U.S.

for trying to kill the deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey

Ryabkov said on Thursday that no country is allowed to implement the United Nations Security Council resolutions selectively.

Ryabkov was openly referring to Resolution 2231 that endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal but the U.S. violated it by quitting the JCPOA.

"No one is allowed to implement UN Security Council resolutions selectively and extremely fragmentarily," Ryabkov told the Valdai discussion club, the UrduPoint News reported.

The actions of the United States to extend the arms embargo and launch the process of returning sanctions against Iran are "cynical" and could lead to a crisis in the UN Security Council, the top Russian diplomat said.

In a Saturday tweet, Ulyanov described the opponents of the JCPOA as "helpless and even ignorant".

"The opponents of the #IranDeal are helpless and even ignorant. At the beginning of a dispute, they provide 2-3 counterarguments and slogans. As soon as these arguments and slogans are exhausted, they move on to insulting opponents without proper justification. Not surprising!" he wrote.

On Wednesday, Ulyanov ruled out assessment of U.S. hawks about Russia's support for the JCPOA.

He wrote, "Do you know why Russia supports #JCPOA? Because from October, RF (Russian Federation) will be able to earn some money from supplies of weapons to #Iran. It's not a joke. This is an assessment of hawks. We can only sympathize with Washington whose experts deliver such judgments to US administration."

Iran, Russia reject consensus on Assad resignation

1→ Russian Ambassador to Tehran Levan Dzhagaryan has also rejected the rumors, saying the future of President Assad and Syria will be decided by "Syrian people through free transparent elections, not by us."

"We are not the countries to decide the future of Syrian people and President Assad," Dzhagaryan said in an interview with Mehr published on Saturday. "Once again, I would like to confirm our position."

"As friendly foreign countries, we must help Syrian people to restart peace and pave the way for the continuation of the political process in this country," he added.

Iran, Russia and Turkey are the guarantor countries that brokered a ceasefire in Syria in December 2016, leading to the Astana talks. Of course, Dzhagaryan continued, these kinds of rumors have been circulated by hostile countries that are against the successful activity of the Astana format.

"These countries are against international law and want to remove a legitimate regime by force, not through an election," he said.

"If any government doesn't suit the U.S. and its ally, so they impose sanctions and try to remove it illegally," the Russian diplomat added.



China was, is, and will be peace builder and promoter in West Asia: envoy

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN (MNA) — Chinese ambassador to Tehran Chang Hua in an interview with the Mehr News Agency criticizes the U.S. baseless accusations over the outbreak of coronavirus.

Ambassador Chang also said, "China was, is and will be peace and stability builder and promoter in the region."

On Saturday, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs published an article on COVID-19, rebutting claims from the U.S. on ties between COVID-19 and China. In the article, China rejected 24 claims.

Following the U.S. accusations against China, there have been some reports on the U.S. possible measures to punish China.

According to CNN, the Trump administration is formulating a long-term plan to punish China on multiple fronts for the coronavirus pandemic, injecting a rancorous new element into a critical relationship already on a steep downward slide.

Multiple sources inside the U.S. administration said that there is an appetite to use various tools, including sanctions, canceling U.S. debt obligations, and drawing up new trade policies, to make clear to China, and to everyone else, where they feel the responsibility lies.

To shed more light on the issue Mehr reached out to Ambassador Chang to discuss the issue and some other issues with him.

Here is the full text of the interview:

■ It seems that the U.S. is trying to create an international consensus against China by repeating accusations that China has not provided the international community with the right information about COVID-19. What is your take of this? What are the real motives behind this?

A: Certain people in the U.S., out of political calculations, went from bad to worse, stigmatizing and smearing China with all they've got in an attempt to shift the blame. China has been open, transparent and responsible in releasing information on the epidemic. It can stand the test of history. We hope the U.S. can also make sure that what they say and do and their data is responsible to the people and could stand the test of history.

When Wuhan was locked down on January 23, there was only one officially confirmed case in the U.S. When the U.S. closed its border to China on February 2, there were 11. When the U.S. announced a nationwide emergency state on March 13, there were 1264. When the lockdown was lifted in Wuhan on April 8, there were already 400,000. Today, the number of confirmed cases in the U.S. tops 1.3 million with more than 80,000 deaths. It took less than 100 days for the number to



jump from just one to over one million. What has the U.S. government been doing during these 100 days? The WHO head said that to all countries around the world, the warning from China is the same and the signal is clear. Why is it that some countries made adequate reactions and effective interventions, while the U.S. failed to do so? Blaming others won't solve one's own problems and bring back lost lives. We genuinely hope that those American politicians who are so bent on the blame game will change course and focus on fighting the epidemic inside the U.S. so that more lives will be saved and their people's health and security be better protected.

■ If the U.S. and its allies become able to create such a consensus against China, what can be the consequences for China?

A: The U.S. is exerting pressure on its Allies and on other countries as well. Actually the U.S. is asking them to be an accomplice in framing China. As we all know, the U.S., out of domestic political needs, has repeatedly ignored the facts so that it can dump the blame on others. It is true that a choice has to be made by Europe and others, not between China and the U.S., but between lies and facts, between unilateral bullying and multilateral cooperation. It is easy to make such a choice and in fact, many countries have done so with action. On strengthening solidarity and cooperation to combat the epidemic, China has always stood firmly with the UN, the WHO, and other countries and made every possible contribution, while the U.S. stands on the opposite side of the vast majority of the international community.

■ Do you see any relation between these claims and the U.S. major strategy to contain Beijing as its main rival?

A: The development of China-U.S. relations over the past 40 years has proven that China and the United States stand to gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation.

China-U.S. relations have far gone beyond the bilateral scope and assumed great significance to world peace, security, stability, and prosperity. While China-U.S. relations once again stand at a crossroads, China has always been on the side of cooperation and hopes the United States meet us halfway.

■ How do you see the cooperation between Iran and China in the fight against COVID-19? How did you find Iran's capabilities and medical infrastructures in this fight?

A: In this fight against the epidemic, the solidarity and mutual assistance between China and Iran fully demonstrate the profound friendship between the two countries and peoples.

Chinese and Iranian high-level officials maintain close communication. President Xi Jinping and President Rouhani have held telephone conversations and exchanged letters. State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Foreign Minister Zarif have also made several phone calls. At the critical moment of the Chinese people's fight against the epidemic, Iran was the first country to extend sympathy and provide materials to China. We will always remember that. After the outbreak of the epidemic in Iran, the Chinese government and various institutions, enterprises, and the public of China also extended a helping hand to Iran. China sent its first medical expert team to Iran to assist its fight against the epidemic. The epidemic has caused temporary difficulties for bilateral cooperation but cannot cut off the strong ties between the two countries. The epidemic will end, and the mutual support during the epidemic will surely consolidate and further our comprehensive strategic partnership.

We are happy to see that under the leadership of the Iranian government and with solidarity and the rigorous response of the Iranian people, the measures taken by Iran are producing results as its epidemic curve

is steadily leveling off. WHO officials also commended Iran's response, saying that Iran's health officials and medical workers are working very hard to contain the epidemic and save lives. The government is also mobilizing the strong national health system and disaster management capabilities to tackle the epidemic. We are confident in the Iranian government and people's last victory over the epidemic.

■ Many believe there will be fundamental changes to the world order in post-corona era. What is your assessment?

A: The international order is always changing in the direction in favor of the common interest and homeland of mankind. The current international order was established after World War II and centered on the United Nations with multilateralism as its basic norm. It lays the foundation for peace, stability, and common development of the world conforms to the trend of peace, development, win-win cooperation of our times, and should be cherished and upheld by the international community. The Covid-19 epidemic has made it clear to various countries that mankind rise and fall together and that only through building a community with a shared future can mankind find the right path to future, and only with solidarity and cooperation can countries remove prejudice and achieve synergy in epidemic response.

What will the world look like in the post-epidemic era? Some people argue that the world will never return to the past. I believe that the epidemic will not change the world theme of peace and development, nor will it stop the historical trend of multi-polarization and globalization and mankind's yearning for civilization and progress.

■ Do you see any relation between the U.S.'s recent decision to withdraw its patriot air-missile air-defense system from Saudi Arabia and the U.S. efforts to endanger the energy route in the Middle East (West Asia) that China's economy is heavily dependent on the oil coming from the region?

A: As a major energy importer and consumer in the world, China hopes that the international energy market could be kept stable. The mutual trust between nations and close interaction of interest through cooperation is the reliable guarantee to security, while military deterrence is not. As to the regional security in the Middle East, China has made its own contribution to the security and stability of the Middle East in accordance with UN resolutions and the aspirations of regional countries. China was, is, and will remain a builder of peace, a promoter of stability, and a contributor to the development of the Middle East.

Khanzadi: Naval forces' willpower will foil plots

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Navy chief has said "strength of will" of the naval forces of the Iranian Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) will not allow the enemies to orchestrate plots against the Islamic Republic.

Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi made the remarks in a meeting with Commander of the IRGC Navy Alireza Tangsiri.

"Today, the atmosphere of cooperation between the Army and Guards navies is strong and effective," Khanzadi stated, according to Fars.



Tangsiri, for his part, said Iran's defensive might and deterrence power is due to the unity and integrity of the Armed Forces under the guidelines of Commander-in-Chief Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Rear Admiral Tangsiri was heading a delegation of commanders and their deputies to extend condolences over the martyrdom of 19 Iranian Navy forces in the recent incident in the Sea of Oman.

Nineteen Iranian sailors were killed and 15 others injured in a fatal incident for the Kenarak support vessel in the country's waters near the southern port of Jask in the Sea of Oman on May 10.

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.

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

Other senior Iranian military and civilian officials expressed condolences over the deadly incident, wishing patience for the bereaved families.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote eulogy in memory of the fallen sailors.

Speaking at a cabinet session on Wednesday, President Hassan Rouhani assured the Iranian people that they will be informed of the cause of the incident as soon as it is determined.

"It was very unfortunate for us that we lost our young Navy personnel in a heart-wrenching accident," he said, according to Press TV.

"I explicitly and humbly tell the families of the martyrs that the cabinet and the whole government share their grief and tragedy," he added.

Tehran slams continued U.S. acts of sabotage amid coronavirus pandemic

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has condemned the U.S. for committing acts of sabotage at a time when the world is in need of a united fight against the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

"While the earth needs to get united in solidarity and unified in action against #COVID19 pandemic, the US continues to disrupt, distract and sabotage," Mousavi tweeted on Saturday.

"From West Asia to Latin America and from UNSC to WHO, the US causes division, steers violence and spoils multilateral institutions," he added.

Mousavi included in his tweet some media reports depicting Washington's acts of sabotage throughout the world.

So far, more than 4,700,000 people have been infected with the coronavirus, and over 310,000 have died.

The United States has the highest number of deaths, which has led many observers to criticize the Trump administration's handling of the virus.

U.S. President Donald Trump has come under scrutiny for his scattershot approach toward the handling of the coronavirus outbreak, which puts the United States on the top of the list of the worst-affected nations across the globe.

Trump has also been under fire for resorting to a blame game strategy to take the spotlight off the deteriorating situation inside the country.

He has accused the World Health Organization -- the UN's health agency -- of mismanaging the spread of the virus and of not acting quickly enough to investigate it when it first emerged in China in December 2019.

The U.S. president has even threatened to cut ties with China over what he calls Beijing's failure to contain coronavirus, in another apparent bid to cover up his administration's mismanagement in response to the pandemic.

Trump has said that China should have stopped the coronavirus at its source. "Whether it came from the lab or came from the bats, it all came from China, and they should have stopped it."

However, U.S. intelligence agencies have confirmed that the coronavirus does not appear man-made or genetically modified, refuting the theory promoted by some Trump backers.

Meanwhile, Mousavi on Friday rejected the United States' blame game against China, calling on independent countries to stand up to the U.S. bullying.

"Iran dismisses the recent American regime's #COVID19-related blame game & smears against China," Mousavi said via Twitter on Thursday.

"The regime's campaigns aim at diverting attentions at home & abroad from the Admin's incompetency to save lives & reopen economy," he remarked. "Iran calls on independent states to stand against of United States bullying."

Earlier this month, China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying urged the U.S. to stop shifting the blame to China and turn to facts.

Chambers of commerce provide over \$38m for battling coronavirus

1 → In this regard, in addition to studying international experiences, and provincial challenges, views and suggestions from 70 private sector organizations and 22 chambers of commerce across the country were collected and summarized, the results of which have provided a comprehensive picture of the existing problems and the future challenges.

The official further underlined Iran's special economic conditions under the U.S. sanctions and noted: "Iran is facing a different situation in the face of the crisis caused by the coronavirus outbreak, since our country faced the pandemic under severe sanctions."



"We also saw falling oil prices, which added to the problems, so the government's packages for supporting the economy and the business environment are very limited and therefore managing these limited resources is of outmost importance and the private sector eyes government strategies in this regard", he added.

In early March, ICCIMA set up Coronavirus Containment Headquarters in the chamber for cooperation with organizations that are responsible battling the virus.

In a letter to the secretary-general of the chamber, Shafe'i ordered the establishment of the headquarters, urging daily meetings among its staff to assist responsible organizations and fellow citizens.

Shafe'i also called on the heads of chambers of commerce across the country to establish Coronavirus Containment Headquarters to carry out their social responsibility and to help people and organizations.

Trade between Iran, Turkey falls 70% in Q1

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**— Trade between Iran and Turkey has declined significantly in the first quarter of 2020, a new report shows, as the two neighbors struggle to maintain exchanges despite the American sanctions imposed on Iran and a pandemic that has seriously affected movement across the borders, Press TV reported.

The Tehran Chamber of Commerce, or TCCIMA, said in a survey that Iran-Turkey trade topped a total value of \$645 million at the end of March, a decline of 70 percent compared to the first quarter of 2019.

It said Iran's exports to Turkey totaled \$270 million over the period, a slight increase compared to the last quarter of 2019 but significantly down from figures seen over the first three months of the same year.



The report insisted that a main reason for declining Iranian exports to Turkey, a trend visible since the end of the first quarter last year, was restrictions imposed by the United States on Iran's trade of crude and petrochemicals.

Iran had maintained a trade surplus of over 1S billion with Turkey at the beginning of 2019 mainly because of its growing exports of products derived from crude.

However, the TCCIMA survey said that Iranian petchem exports to Turkey declined by a staggering figure of 99 percent over the past year causing Iran's balance of trade with Turkey to slide into the negative territory.

Trade deficit narrowed from \$250 million in early 2019 to \$117 million in the first quarter this year, said the report.

It said Iran's total imports from Turkey amounted to \$376 million over the first quarter, a decline of 35 percent compared to the similar period last year. The reduction was mainly blamed on fewer shipments of tobacco, plastic products and cardboard from Turkey into Iran.

The report concluded that first quarter trade between Iran and Turkey was significantly down in March when a new coronavirus pandemic caused a closure of border crossings between the two neighbors.

During a meeting with Turkish Deputy Minister of Customs and Trade Riza Tuna Turagay in Tehran in last October, Iranian Economy Minister Farhad Dejpasand said Tehran and Ankara are eager for enhancing trade interaction to achieve a target of \$30 billion annual trade exchange.

Dejpasand underlined the great history of close ties between the two countries and their officials' great determination to expand bilateral relations, calling for the promotion of cooperation between the two neighbors.

Pointing to the target of \$30 billion annual trade set by Iran and Turkey, the Iranian minister said the level of bilateral trade exchange is expected to rise in light of mutual efforts.

"The cooperation between the customs of Iran and Turkey must be much closer and stronger than the current level," Dejpasand added. For his part, Tuna Turagay reaffirmed the Turkish government's determination to continue trade cooperation with Iran, and called for the modernization of transportation routes between the two countries and for updating the customs equipment in order to accelerate the pace of mutual trade.

Also, during the 27th meeting of Iran-Turkey Joint Economic Committee, which was held in Ankara in mid-September, the two sides investigated different ways of reaching the targeted \$30-billion bilateral trade and reiterated that reaching this figure is possible despite the pressures of the U.S. sanctions.

In that meeting, the Iranian president's chief of staff, Mahmoud Vaezi, who is the Iranian chairman of the committee, mentioned expediting the process of implementing bilateral agreements on trade and economic issues as the most prioritized objective of the joint committee and said Iran has no limitation for expanding and deepening cooperation with Turkey.

Chabahar experiences historic shipment boom

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Docking operations were carried out simultaneously for eight ships at Iran's Chabahar Port, for the first time in the port's history, deputy head of Sistan-Baluchestan Province's Ports and Maritime Department said.

"Since last week, eight docking operations, with a total length of more than 200 meters, were carried out in one day in this port," ILNA quoted Hossein Ebrahimi

as saying.

According to Ebrahimi, the boom in Chabahar Port's maritime traffic is an indication of a bright future for sustainable development in this oceanic port.

For the second consecutive week, all five berths of Shahid Beheshti Port have been occupied, the official said, adding "This shows that Chabahar Port is gaining a significant place among the ports of the country and the region."



Chabahar Port is one of the modern ports in the country in terms of equipment, benefiting from 30 strategic loading and unloading devices, according to the official. "This equipment has played a significant role in the growth of unloading and loading operations, exports and imports in this port," he said.

As Iran's only oceanic port, Chabahar consists of two separate ports named Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti, each of which has five berths.

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.

Iranian petrochemical production rises 6%



ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The output of Iranian petrochemical production units in the first 50 days of the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 19) increased by six percent compared to the previous year's same period, Shana reported.

According to Jalal Mirhashemi, National Petrochemical Company (NPC)'s production control manager, the country's petrochemical complexes are producing with a desired capacity, and many complexes have shown production growth since the beginning of the current year.

He said that Iran's petrochemical industry is ready to realize the surge in production intended for the current year, adding that in addition to launching and operating new projects, the existing idle capacity of some complexes will also be used with the measures taken.

The petrochemical industry is one of the most important pillars and the driving force of development for various sectors of

the country's economy, he stressed.

In late December 2019, President Hassan Rouhani had stressed the significant role of the petrochemical industry in the country's economy in the face of U.S. sanctions, saying that it is at the forefront of the country's non-oil exports.

Later in April 2020, Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said 17 new petrochemical plants are planned to be inaugurated across the country during the current Iranian calendar year.

The current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20) is named as the year of "Surge in Production" by the Leader of Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei.

Petrochemical industry is playing a crucial role in Iran's non-oil economy, so that based on official data, petrochemical exports constitute the second largest hard currency earner in Iran after crude oil. Petrochemical exports already make up nearly 33 percent of the country's non-oil exports.

Commodities worth \$595m traded at IME in a week



ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — During the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), 530,783 tons of commodities valued at \$595 million were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME).

According to a report released by the IME International Affairs and Public Relations Department, last week, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 93,142 tons of various products worth \$249 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 81,314 tons of steel, 5,320 tons of copper, 6,180 tons of aluminum, 160 tons of zinc, 150 tons of molybdenum concentrates, 18 tons of precious metal concentrates as well as 38 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 437,563 tons of different commodities with the total value of \$367 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 157,894 tons of bitumen, 104,000 tons of VB feed stock,

79,796 tons of polymer products, 37,000 tons of lube cut oil, 33,692 tons of chemical products, 3,642 tons of base oil, 6,000 tons of slaps waxes, 2,214 tons of insulation as well as 13,325 tons of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, the side market of the IME experienced trading of 78 tons of metal scrap.

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

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

Iran-Pakistan border markets reopening gradually

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Deputy Head of Iran-Pakistan Joint Chamber of Commerce Amanollah Shahnnavazi says the two countries' border bazaars are gradually resuming activities following the reopening of the border crossings, ILNA reported on Saturday.

The Mirjaveh border (Pakistan's official border with Iran) has been open for two days and border markets are gradually reopening, Shahnnavazi said.

"Currently, only basic goods and foodstuff are allowed to cross the Mirjaveh border, but it has been decided for other goods to be exported during the current week," he added.

Referring to the suspension of about 800 trucks in the last three months at the Mirjaveh border, Shahnnavazi said: "Currently, only 10 trucks with food and basic goods are



allowed to cross the border every day, which has caused severe traffic on this border."

The trucks often carry ceramics, tiles, gas, food and groceries, and it will take at least two months for the traffic in this border to ease, according to the official.

Shahnnavazi also noted that since the reopening of the Mirjaveh border, about 23 trucks that were registered at the customs system last year, have been able to enter Pakistan.

Pakistan first closed its eastern and western borders with Iran, Afghanistan and India on March 15 to contain the spread of the new coronavirus.

Border markets of Iran and Pakistan are mostly based in Sistan-Baluchestan Province in southeastern Iran.

The bazaars of the province are located in Mirjaveh, Kuhak, Pishin, Jaleq, and Riman.

Domestic production of commodities worth over €10b on agenda

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The policy of developing domestic products amid cruel sanctions is considered as an opportunity for Iranian producers and the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade is now following up indigenizing over 10 billion euros of products and equipment over the next Iranian calendar year (March 2021-March 2022), IRNA reported.

Accordingly, in line with the policy of promoting Iranian products, the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry has signed an MOU with the office of Vice President for Science and Technology Affairs and Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, as well as Iran National Innovation Fund.

Based on the latest report of Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry, upon an agreement with the Central Bank of Iran, raw materials imports will be done without transferring currency.

Caretaker of Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade Hossein Modares Khiabani said enemies have targeted people's livelihood and employment



to damage the country.

This is while, the outbreak of coronavirus also as an unpredicted factor added more limitations to the country, he added.

But in these difficult conditions, Iran has experience in the production of medical equipment, he noted.

Earlier, Modares Khiabani said over

15 million coronavirus protection face-masks have been produced so far by Iranian production units.

Based on the recommendations made by the Leader of Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei, the ministry has put on the agenda utilizing the existing capacities in the country to facilitate and accelerate importing required items for the Health Ministry, he added.

The ministry could increase the production of face-masks to 15,266,372 by activating production units.

Last week, Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejpasand said the country needs at least 10 quadrillion rials (nearly \$238.1 billion) to realize the motto of "Surge in Production".

Speaking in the 94th meeting of the government-private sector dialogue council, Dejpasand underlined the important role of the private sector in developing domestic production and noted that public, private, and cooperative sectors all could play an important role in this regard.

Barkindo sends letter of condolences to Zanganeh on death of OPEC governor

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN**— Mohammad Sanusi Barkindo, the secretary general of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), sent an official letter of condolences to the Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh to express his sorrow for the death of Hossein Kazempour Ardebili, Iran's OPEC governor.

The following is the full text of the message: It is with heavy heart that I received the very sad news of the passing away of our dear brother and colleague, Hossein Kazempour Ardebili. May Almighty Allah accept him in Jannat Alferdous and may He give his family and all of us the fortitude to bear this irreplaceable loss.

Hossein was a cherished friend of mine for the past 34 years in OPEC. Throughout these years of service and support to the Organization, he served many terms as a gallant representative of his country to the Board of Governors. As the longest serving member of the Board and its Chairman on several occasions, he gained the respect of his colleagues and the entire OPEC family for his thoughtful leadership and insightful guidance. Hossein was active on many of the Board's committees and played a pivotal role in shaping the Long-Term Strategy of the Organization and strengthening the role and capacity of the OPEC Secretariat.

OPEC has also been most fortunate to benefit from Hossein's remarkable career in the service of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a responsibility from which he never wavered. His expertise and experience were central to OPEC's many achievements and its greatest successes. Hossein was a champion of the Declaration of Cooperation that has brought unparalleled recognition and



OPEC Secretary General, Mohammad Sanusi Barkindo, with the late Hossein Kazempour Ardebili, IR Iran's Governor for OPEC.

respect for OPEC, as evidenced by our proactive leadership in confronting the severe market downturn resulting from impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hossein's commitment and dedication to OPEC throughout his life's work were not only markers of his personal qualities, but those of the great nation which he so ably represented throughout the years.

I would also like to convey my sincerest thanks to you, Excellency, for your dedication and commitment. Your tireless work on behalf of OPEC assures the continued success of the Organization in achieving its founding principles of ensuring sustain-

able oil market stability in the interests of producing countries, investors, consumers and the global economy.

As we look towards our Organization's 60th anniversary in September, we must never forget the legacy of those visionaries from the Founder Members, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, who for the passing of time will not be able to join us but will never be forgotten. Our brother, our colleague and our great friend Hossein Kazempour Ardebili will be among those we shall remember and never forget.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration and respect.

IEF secretary general also sends a letter of condolences

Sun Xiansheng, the secretary general of the International Energy Forum (IEF), has also sent a letter of condolences to the Iranian oil minister on the death of Kazempour Ardebili.

The following is the full-text message of the IEF Secretary General to Mr. Zanganeh: I was very saddened to hear of the death of Mr. Hossein Kazempour Ardebili. On behalf of the IEF Secretariat, please accept my sincerest sympathy on this terrible loss.

Mr. Kazempour was a respected oil veteran, a key figure in Iran's oil industry and one of the ultimate OPEC negotiators.

He was a strong supporter of the global energy dialogue between producers and consumers and therefore he believed in the important role that the IEF can play, as a neutral platform, to foster greater mutual understanding and awareness of common energy interests in order to ensure global energy security.

Mr. Kazempour was associated with the IEF since its early days even before the establishment of the IEF Secretariat. He facilitated the meeting in which the IEF Statute was adopted on 28 September 2003 in Isfahan. Later on he supported the formulation of the IEF Charter and ensured that Iran was among the signatories to the Charter.

He was always keen to participate in all IEF Ministerial Meetings and Executive Board meetings until he was unable to do due to his ailing health.

Mr. Kazempour will always be remembered for his great accomplishments. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration. (Source: Shana.ir)

IEA sees unique opportunity for clean energy during Covid-19 crisis

In the midst of a pandemic that's shaken energy markets to the core and threatens to send the global economy into a depression, renewable energy is holding steady. In the apt words of the world's premiere advisory body and data source for energy, renewables remain 'resilient.' The International Energy Agency (IEA), in its Global Energy Review 2020, provides a snapshot of energy demand for all major fuels this year, as well as CO₂ emissions. The flagship report, released late last month, follows the 'Global Energy and CO₂ Status Reports' of 2017 and 2018. It shows a steep decline in energy usage worldwide through mid-April, with a fall in demand for all energy sources except renewables, specifically wind, solar and hydroelectric power.

The IEA asserts that renewable energy projects will be more solid financially than others post-crisis. And, while renewables should emerge in the best financial position in the energy sector, the IEA also says that demand for oil, gas and coal – and their associated carbon emissions – should revive quickly with renewed economic growth. Its assumption is based on the historical precedent of the energy rebound after the last major economic crisis in 2008.

But the agency also sees the resiliency of renewables in the midst of the crisis as an important indicator of an energy landscape that's fundamentally changing. In the words of Fatih Birol, the IEA Executive Director: "It is still too early to determine the longer-term impacts, but the energy industry that emerges from this crisis will be significantly different from the one that came before."

The IEA sees a unique opportunity now to push the energy sector more toward low carbon sources. The new report urges governments to do this through their stimulus programs by focusing investment on renewables and related technologies that enhance grid system flexibility to accommodate rising shares of variable renewable energy.

Seeing a shift

The report projects that energy demand will fall by 6% worldwide during 2020. It's a decline seven times greater than that which occurred in the wake of the last economic crisis in 2009. There will be sharp reductions in demand

for oil and gas, while demand for coal will see its largest decline in more than seventy years. Global CO₂ emissions are expected to decline by 8%, or almost 2.6 gigatonnes (Gt), to levels of 10 years ago.

Electricity demand is anticipated to decline 5% during 2020. It has seen drops of more than 20% during the 'lock-downs' in several countries so far this year. In these cases, the increase in residential use has been more than offset by decreases in the commercial and industrial sectors. However, the IEA shows that demand for electricity from wind and solar PV has remained steady. Indeed, large parts of Europe and the US now have record-high shares of variable renewables in electricity supply, as measured on an hourly basis during lockdowns.

Shares of power worldwide from wind and solar PV reached 9% of electricity generation in the first quarter, up from 8% last year. And renewables are the only energy sources expected to rise this year. The IEA report estimates that total use of renewable energy will rise by about 1% worldwide in 2020, while renewable electricity generation will rise by nearly 5% with the expansion of solar, wind and hydropower. It should be noted, however, that this anticipated growth is lower than what the agency had forecast for renewables before the current crisis.

Key factors inherent in electricity production from renewables help to explain their relative strength in the face of lower overall electricity demand. Output from renewable sources is to a large extent unaffected by demand, as renewable power is generally dispatched before that of other sources due to its low operating cost and in some cases regulations that give it priority. Its priority dispatch and preferential access to power systems has been complemented by the recent and ongoing growth of installed capacity of wind and solar power.

The IEA report states that the current crisis is actually accelerating a shift that has been underway. It is a shift toward a preponderance of renewable energy in the power mix. While coal and natural gas still provide close to 60% of the world's electricity, their share is shrinking. As the

report notes, low carbon sources including hydropower surpassed coal as the leading source of electricity last year, for the first time in 50 years. They should again surpass coal and provide 40% of the power mix this year. This will occur even as demand for nuclear power is anticipated to fall substantially this year.

Accelerating the shift

Another key indicator of the ongoing shift is noted by the IEA's Fatih Birol in a recent commentary. He points out that, according to IEA data, the world economy expanded by almost 3% in 2019 while its energy-related carbon emissions actually stopped increasing, largely thanks to a decline in emissions from the electricity sector in advanced economies. This shows that transitions to clean energy are indeed occurring.

As he writes, "Let me be clear, economic growth coupled with decarbonisation is not only realistic, it has already been happening."

In its Global Energy Review 2020, the IEA does not speculate that now will be a moment for a major advance in renewables, as conventional fuels are likely to revive quickly with a reviving economy. But the agency calls for seizing an opportunity to enhance a shift already happening. Birol states the basic fact, supported by IEA analysis, that governments directly and indirectly drive more than 70% of global energy investments. Thus, with their big stimulus programs, they can greatly shape energy's future.

Birol calls for 'once-in-a-generation' stimulus plans that support economic recovery while putting greenhouse gas emissions into 'structural decline.' To do this, the recovery packages should support transition to renewables with 'dynamic' technologies such as battery storage and hydrogen. In a recent interview with Reuters, Birol singled out lithium ion batteries and electrolysis (to produce hydrogen from water) as two key technologies that need critical public sector support in order to advance quickly.

The agency's annual World Energy Outlook report, to be published in June, will provide more specifics on programs and technologies needed for an energy transition.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Kurdish government may close 250,000 bpd oil deal with Iraq

The Kurdistan semi-autonomous region of Iraq is ready to hand over to the federal government 250,000 barrels per day (bpd) of oil production and the oil revenues it generates, Middle East Monitor reports, citing a spokesman for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Last month, the federal government of Iraq stopped paying salaries to KRG public sector employees because of the dispute over oil revenues. At the end of 2019, Kurdistan and the federal government of Iraq had agreed that KRG would transfer oil revenues and 250,000 bpd to the federal government.

But the federal government has said that Kurdistan has failed to send oil or cash Baghdad's way.

The federal government of Iraq pays nearly half of the sum necessary to cover KRG administration employees.

Kurdistan, for its part, was severely hit by the oil demand and oil price collapse in March and April and is struggling with payments.

"The Kurdistan Region is going through difficult economic times due to falling oil prices and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, and must make adjustments due to limited financial resources," Prime Minister Masrour Barzani said at a KRG cabinet meeting this week.



After weeks of negotiations and a meeting between KRG representatives and officials from Iraq's federal government on Wednesday, the spokesman for Kurdistan's Regional Government, Jutiar Adel, said, as carried by Middle East Monitor:

"Within the framework of the agreement concluded in 2019, we are willing to deliver 250,000 barrels of oil per day to the federal government. We are also committed to transferring the financial revenues generated from oil sales to the Iraqi state treasury."

Meanwhile, Kurdistan said last month that it would defer payments to oil companies operating in the region for the oil sales they had made between November 2019 and February 2020, as Iraq and the Kurdistan region are struggling to meet their obligations after the oil price crash.

(Source: oilprice.com)

A huge fleet of 117 tankers is bringing super cheap crude to China

While the rest of the world is tentatively coming out of lockdowns, China is taking advantage of the cheapest crude oil in years to stock up as demand is starting to return in the world's largest oil importer.

At present, a total of 117 very large crude carriers (VLCCs) – each capable of shipping 2 million barrels of oil – are traveling to China for unloading at its ports between the middle of May and the middle of August. If those supertankers transport standard-size crude oil cargoes, it could mean that China expects at least 230 million barrels of oil over the next three months, according to Bloomberg. The fleet en route to China could be the largest number of supertankers traveling to the world's top oil importer at one time, ever, Bloomberg News' Firat Kayakiran says.

Many of the crude oil cargoes are likely to have been bought in April, when prices were lower than the current price and when WTI Crude futures even dipped into negative territory for a day.

Last month, emerging from the coronavirus lockdown, China's oil refiners were already buying ultra-cheap spot cargoes from Alaska, Canada, and Brazil, taking advantage of the deep



discounts at which many crude grades were being offered to China with non-existent demand elsewhere.

China was also estimated to have doubled the fill rate at its strategic and commercial inventories in Q1 2020, taking advantage of the low oil prices and somewhat supporting the oil market amid crashing demand by diverting more imports to storage, rather than outright slashing crude imports.

China's crude oil imports jumped in April to about 9.84 million bpd as demand for fuels began to rebound and local refiners started to ramp up crude processing, according to Chinese customs data cited by Reuters.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Funeral held for Iran's OPEC governor

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Iranian oil and foreign affairs ministers attended the funeral procession for Iran's OPEC Governor Hossein Kazempour Ardebili which was held on Sunday in Tehran, Shana reported.



Kazempour Ardebili, 68, passed away in a hospital in Tehran on Saturday, two weeks after he slipped into a coma due to a brain hemorrhage.

Kazempour Ardebili was appointed as Iran's representative to OPEC in 1995 and served for 13 years.

He once again became Iran's governor to OPEC in 2013 and had held the post until he passed away.

In the early 1990s, Kazempour Ardebili had been Iran's ambassador to Japan. He also served as the country's deputy foreign minister and deputy oil minister in the 1980s.

Iran's man battled bombs and sanctions

He survived a bombing that left him badly wounded, and defended Iran's oil interests through war and sanctions. Hossein Kazempour Ardebili, who died on Saturday, was one of the ultimate OPEC negotiators.

Kazempour -- steely, charming, and combative -- was Iran's envoy to the OPEC oil cartel almost uninterruptedly from 1985. He was a constant in international energy circles even as administrations in Tehran came and went.

"Don't forget that from when oil was \$6 dollars a barrel to when it was \$126, I defended Iran's national interest," he said in an interview with state-run Hamshahri newspaper in 2008. "If Iran has had success in the international energy sector, I have been one of the main agents of this success."

Kazempour, who died at 68 after a brain hemorrhage, was a stubborn negotiator. At one OPEC meeting in Vienna in 2018, the debate grew heated as Saudi Arabia suggested that Tehran's recent production increases meant it should now join the group in making cuts. Kazempour's arm went up, in a typically courteous but unyielding gesture, to interject: if anyone had flooded the market, it was Iran's arch-rival Saudi Arabia. Iran remained inflexible and prevailed.

The now famous meeting in March this year that unleashed a vicious price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia was one he missed. Heart problems meant he was too vulnerable to risk catching the coronavirus, and he stayed home.

Just over a year before, he had made his mark at a mid-winter meeting in Vienna: Iran's position almost derailed the agreement before a last-minute deal.

In March 2000, he had gone further. Kazempour was left to represent Iran at a meeting after Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh departed early in protest at U.S. pressure on the cartel to raise production. He refused to sign the eventual decision, and the unanimous statement normally issued at the end of each meeting was scuppered. He grinned in satisfaction.

Bomb attack

The steel he brought to the role was forged by years of hard experiences.

In 1981, while serving in the Commerce Ministry, he was caught in a bomb attack on the headquarters of the Islamic Republic Party. According to his account to an acquaintance, he went to Switzerland for treatment and had to learn to walk again. Another person who knew him said he had hearing loss. He rarely spoke of it.

(Source: Bloomberg)

U.S. throws down gauntlet to china with Mozambique LNG loan

U.S. President Donald Trump's sparring with China is playing out in an unlikely new arena: the sandy turf of northern Mozambique, one of the world's poorest countries.

The U.S. Export-Import Bank on Thursday approved the broadened scope of a \$4.7 billion loan to back American suppliers to a liquefied-natural-gas development that could transform the southeastern African nation's economy. The lender said China and Russia had both been considering helping finance it.

"We were told that China and Russia were slated to finance this deal," Kimberly A. Reed, the bank's president, said in a statement. "This is a great example of how a revitalized Exim, thanks to President Trump's leadership and bipartisan support from Congress, can help ensure the use of 'Made in the USA' products and services, without ceding ground to countries like China and Russia."

The Exim Bank helps foreign companies buy American products when private lenders won't provide financing, with one of its goals being to "advance the U.S.'s comparative leadership in the world with respect to China." The appointment of three Trump-appointed nominees to the bank's board in May 2019 helped provide the quorum needed to restore its ability to approve deals worth more than \$10 million for the first time since 2015, smoothing the way for its participation in the Mozambique project.

Anadarko Petroleum Corp., based in Woodlands, Texas, initially led the Mozambican project that was sold on to French oil major Total SA. U.S. companies including McDermott International Inc. have been awarded contracts worth billions of dollars to help build the facility -- work that Exim Bank said could support 16,700 American jobs over the five-year construction period.

China has a well-established presence in Mozambique. It funded and built Africa's longest suspension bridge in the capital, Maputo, and has invested in a massive hotel and conference center there. Russia has made more recent inroads, winning some oil and gas licenses and reportedly supplying mercenaries to beat back insurgents operating in the vicinity of the gas project.

(Source: Bloomberg)

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How Palestinian refugees' status has been gradually downgraded by certain Arab countries!

The Palestinian refugees, residing in certain Arab countries in the West Asia, have in recent years faced irresponsible approach adopted by the hosting governments under different pretexts, including civil war, a situation that has assisted officials in Tel Aviv to intensify plots in the international scenes to undermine urgent attention to plight of the Palestinians.

"Heinous racism, is how the Geneva-based Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor described a recent decision by Lebanese authorities to bar Palestinian refugee expats from returning to Lebanon," Ramzy Baroud, a journalist and a Non-resident Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA), Istanbul Zaim University (IZU), explained in his analytic article published by the Antiwar.

Lebanon's restriction on its ever-diminishing population of Palestinian refugees is nothing new. However, this event is particularly alarming as it may be linked to a long-term official policy regarding the residency status of Palestinian refugees in this Arab country.

Many were taken aback by a recent Lebanese government's order to its embassy in the United Arab Emirates, instructing it to prevent Palestinian refugees from returning to their homes in Lebanon.

"Tariq Hajjar, a legal advisor to the Euro-Med Monitor said in a statement that the circular includes heinous racial discrimination against Palestinian refugees holding Lebanese travel documents," Baroud wrote in his article.

Hajjar rightly insisted that "the holder of this document should receive similar treatment to the Lebanese citizen."

Indeed they should, as has been the practice for many years. Otherwise, there is no other place where these refugees can possibly go, considering that Lebanon has been their home for decades, starting in 1948 when Israel forcefully expelled nearly a million Palestinians from their historic homeland.

Refugees, regardless of their race, ethnicity or religion, should be treated with respect and dignity, no matter the political complexity of their host countries. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon cannot be made an exception.

Last April, the Palestinian Association for Human Rights called on the United Nations to provide financial assistance to Lebanon's Palestinian refugees, indicating that due to the coronavirus pandemic, a whopping 90 percent of all Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have lost their jobs.

Under discriminatory Lebanese laws, Palestinian refugees are not allowed to



practice 72 types of jobs that are available to Lebanese nationals. This is merely one of many other such restrictions. Thus, employed Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (the vast majority of whom are now unemployed) have been competing within a very limited work market.

A large number of those refugees have been employed at the various projects operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

Many of those who were lucky enough to receive university degrees opted to leave the country altogether, mostly working in the teaching, engineering, banking, and medical sectors in the Persian Gulf Arab countries.

However, due to the coronavirus, the severe financial hardship suffered by UNRWA and to new Lebanese government regulations, all doors are now being shut in the face of Palestinian refugees.

For thousands of those refugees, the only remaining option is sailing the high seas in search for a better refugee status in Europe. Yet, sadly, tens of thousands of those refugees are now living a miserable life in European camps, or stranded in Turkey. Hundreds drowned while undertaking these perilous journeys.

According to a recent survey by the Lebanese Central Administration of Statistics, conducted jointly with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, only 175,000 (from nearly half a million) Palestinian refugees still reside in Lebanon.

The Palestinian refugee tragedy in Lebanon is only a facet in a much larger ailment that is unique to the Palestinian refugees' experience.

Syria's Palestinian refugees arrived in

the country in waves. Their compulsory migration started with the Zionist ethnic cleansing of Palestine during the Nakba (Catastrophe). Others fled the Golan Heights after the Israeli invasion in 1967. Many more fled Lebanon during the Israeli 1982 invasion.

The relatively safe Syrian haven was ruptured during the ongoing Syria war started in 2011. UNRWA's mission, which allowed it to provide the nearly half a million Palestinian refugees in Syria with direct support was made nearly impossible because of the destructive war, and the fact that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians either fled the country or became internally displaced.

The devastating impact of the Syrian war on Palestinian refugees was almost an exact copy of what had transpired earlier during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.

In the case of Iraq, where most of the country's 35,000 refugees fled, the Palestinian refugee crisis was particularly compounded. While Palestinians enjoyed a permanent residence status (though no ownership rights) in Iraq before the war, they were still not recognized as refugees as per international standards, since UNRWA does not operate in Iraq. Post-2003 Iraqi governments exploited this fact to the fullest, leading to the displacement the country's Palestinian population.

Since its advent, the US Administration of President Donald Trump has waged a financial war on the Palestinians, including the cutting of all aids to UNRWA. This infamous act has added layers of suffering to the existing hardships of refugees.

On May 5, UNRWA, somberly declared that it only has enough cash to sustain its operations until the end of the month.

The truth is that, long before Trump targeted the UN agency, UNRWA has functioned for over 70 years with an inherent vulnerability.

UNRWA was established exclusively with a UN mandate that provided the organization with a "separate and special status" to assist Palestinian refugees.

Arab governments, at the time, were keen for UNRWA to maintain this "special status" based on their belief that lumping Palestinian refugees with the burgeoning world refugee crisis (resulting mostly from War World II) would downgrade the urgency of the Palestinian plight.

However, while that logic may have applied successfully in the immediate years following the Nakba, it proved costly in later years, as the status and definition of what constitute a Palestinian refugee remained historically linked to UNRWA's scope of operations.

This became clear during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, but, especially, since the start of political upheavals and subsequent wars in the West Asia in the last decade.

This is precisely why the US and Israel are keen on dismantling UNRWA, because, according to their logic, if UNRWA ceases to operate, the Palestinian refugee ceases to exist with any status that makes him/her unique.

Such precarious reality calls for an urgent and creative solution that should be spearheaded by Arab countries, UN-registered NGOs, and friends of Palestine everywhere.

What is needed today is a UN-adopted formula that would allow the legal status of Palestinian refugees under international law to remain active regardless of UNRWA's scope of operation, while providing Palestinian refugees with the material and financial support required for them to live with dignity until the Right of Return, in accordance to UN Resolution 194 of 1948, is finally enforced.

For the rights of Palestinian refugees to be maintained and for the Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria scenarios not to be repeated, the Arab League must work within the framework of international law – as determined by the UN General Assembly – to safeguard the Palestinian refugees' legal status which is currently under an unprecedented attack.

Palestinian refugees must not have to choose between forfeiting their legal and unalienable right in their own homeland and accepting a life of perpetual degradation and uncertainty.

The PLO has woken up from a deep sleep, but a little late!

By Mohammad Jafari

Most of the Palestinian people, activists and political groups and even the Israeli officials and military have not taken seriously the announcement made by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) that the organization is resolved to cancel all agreements with Tel Aviv due to the latter's plan to continue annexing large part of the West Bank as the PLO has not quitted any deal with Israel even when the Tel Aviv forces violated the Palestinians' inevitable rights.



Motasem A Dalloul, who is a MEMO's correspondent in the Gaza Strip, has criticized in his article published in the Middle East Monitor the PLO's approach towards the Palestinian cause through the history of occupation.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) has been threatening to cancel all the agreements with Israel over the latter's intention to annex large parts of the occupied Palestinian West Bank, including most of the illegal Israeli Jewish settlements and the Jordan Valley.

The PLO threatened to sever previous agreements on numerous occasions; however it has never followed through with it, even when Israel has carried out violations against Palestinian rights. Member of the PLO's Executive Committee, Azzam Al-Ahmad, said this weekend that the organization "is serious in its threats this time."

Hebrew newspaper Maariv also reported several Israeli officials saying that the PLO's threats "are more serious this time" because they are related to the annexation plan which is a measure that would change the reality of the region and "this will embarrass the Palestinian Authority before the Palestinian people". The Israeli newspaper added, "Therefore, the Israeli army is preparing for escalation on the ground."

Political analysts and experts from the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip did not believe that the PLO would carry out its threats and sever its ties with the occupation authorities.

"The PLO will never do anything in response to the Israeli planned annexation of large parts of the occupied Palestinian territories," Mustafa Al-Sawwaf, a political analyst from the Gaza Strip, said. He stressed that these threats are no different to previous warnings, but he said that "they are being made to remind the Palestinians that the PLO is their representative and it is the sole body which fights for their rights."

For his part, the Palestinian Professor of Political Sciences at Al Najah University of the occupied West Bank, Abdul Sattar Qasim, downplayed the effectiveness of such measures.

Speaking to MEMO, Qasim stressed that these threats are not serious and said if such threats were fulfilled, they would never make a difference. "It is too late. If the agreements between the PLO and Israel were cancelled, nothing will happen because the Palestinian Authority (PA) has already achieved the strategic goals of the Israeli occupation in the long term," he said.

He added, "The PA, which was established as a result of these agreements, has destroyed all aspects of the Palestinian nationality."

The PA destroyed the Palestinian economy as it has completely tied the fate of the Palestinians with the hands of the Israeli occupation when it agreed to let it have the final say regarding the imports and exports and authorized it to collect the tax revenues for it. Our water and electricity are also controlled by the Israeli occupation. Nothing left for us!

Qasim also said that the PA has already made social and political division among the Palestinians and "this way, we have lost the power to mobilize international support for our cause because we are unable now to agree on a credible united body that represents the Palestinians on the international podiums. So, we will not be able to do anything if the agreements were abolished."

Regarding the cultural damage, Qasim said, "The PA has been able to change the priorities of so many Palestinians from fighting the Israeli occupation and sacrificing for the sake of their homes and lands to accepting the normalization of ties with it and working just to feed ourselves and our families."

Israeli fears that the situation it different this time, do not stem from political platforms, Al-Sawwaf said, "The situation is different in relation to the people, not the PLO or the PA."

The analyst told MEMO, "The Israeli occupation is sure that the PLO and the PA will never ever do anything, but they are not sure that the Palestinian people will be the same. The Israeli occupation is always preparing for the worst because it is always afraid that the PA might lose the rein of the Palestinians and this will be a crisis for Israel and the PA together. If this happens, it could oust the PA or if it is strong and sustained, it would end the occupation."

For his part, Qasim stressed that the Israelis are not serious even about their fear. "They are not afraid at all ... they empowered the PA to carry out their plans against the Palestinians."

"The PA," he continued, "is committing violations and even being held accountable for this on behalf of the Israeli occupation."

Israel is not depending on U.S. support for its annexation plan or on international silence or even the Arab states who are competing for normalization; it is depending on its own pre-planned endeavor. Israel created the PA and empowered it to take on the responsibility of the occupier; now it's reaping the rewards.

9/11 victim's family members still awaiting more FBI reports shedding light on hijackers' ties with Saudi officials

Approximately 19 years after September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington, the family members of the victims as well as the American public opinion do not know how much evidence exists to connect the Saudi government with the crime, expecting the relevant security bodies, including the FBI, to be brave enough to disclose ties between the hijackers and the Saudi official.

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos, a former bureau reporter for the FoxNews and a social media strategist, has reviewed in her report published by the American Conservative, a mistakenly leak of secret information by the FBI over Saudis' involvement in the terrorist attacks in 2001.

"It has been so long that we forget why Americans are so mistrustful of Saudi Arabia and its despotic monarchy. It's not about oil, or their human rights, or even the dismemberment of journalist Jamal Khashoggi (though that all undoubtedly plays a part)," she wrote in her analytic report.

It's their long assumed role in the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington.

Fantastically, that was brought all back to seering clarity yesterday when Yahoo News reported that the FBI had mistakenly unmasked the name of a Saudi embassy official who has been long linked with the hijackers on 9/11. The name has since been "re-masked" so to speak, but not before the press seized upon it and reminded Americans how close the Kingdom of Saud was to the worst terrorist attack on American soil in our history.

She further quoted reporter Michael Isikoff, who broke the story at Yahoo, as explaining that the disclosure came in a new declaration filed in federal court by a senior FBI official in response to a lawsuit brought by families of 9/11 victims that accuses the Saudi government of complicity in the terrorist attacks.

The declaration was filed last month but unsealed late last week. According to a spokesman for the 9/11 victims' families, it represents a major breakthrough in the long-running case, providing for the first time an apparent confirmation that FBI agents investigating the attacks believed they had uncovered a link between the hijackers and the Saudi Embassy in Washington.

Not surprisingly, the filing in question was part of an attempt to keep the Saudi officials name and "all related documents" secret.

Ironically, the declaration identifying the Saudi official in question was intended to support recent filings

by Attorney General William Barr and acting Director of National Intelligence Richard Grenell barring the public release of the Saudi official's name and all related documents, concluding they are "state secrets" that, if disclosed, could cause "significant harm to the national security."

Right. Nearly 20 years after the fact, the American public does not know how much evidence exists to connect the Saudi government with the crime—but it is not for a lack of trying. The last two decades have been a painstaking exercise in discovery, with three administrations and a mostly compliant Congress enforcing legal roadblocks all the way. Isikoff's reporting is a brilliant reminder of that.

We know that 15 of the 19 hijackers were Saudi nationals and that Saudi Arabia had been aggressively promoting its extremist brand of Islam throughout the world for decades, including establishing Wahabbist mosques and distributing religious textbooks here in the U.S. We know those teachings informed the Al Qaeda terrorist organization that plotted and executed the 9/11 attacks.

Washington has been accused of covering up for the House of Saud from the very beginning. Every administration—Bush, Obama and now Trump—has attempted to thwart the lawsuits by the 9/11 families to out the Saudi connection and retain restitution for victims of the nearly 3,000 killed.

Court after court has said the lawsuits can go forward. Saudi Arabia has spent millions of dollars in trying to influence Congress, even using our own veterans in a foolhardy lobbying campaign to stop the cases from moving forward. They have been unable, so far, to overturn a 2016 law (JASTA) that made it easier to file terrorism suits against other countries in U.S. courts.

The kingdom has long denied that any official has been directly connected to the attacks. The families have centered their case, so far, on Fahad al Thumairy, an imam at the King Fahad Mosque in Culver City, California, and Omar al Bayoumi, said to be a Saudi intelligence officer. They say the two were helping the hijackers acclimate here in the U.S. before the attacks.

This is where Isikoff's findings come into play:

A redacted copy of a three-and-a-half page October 2012 FBI "update" about the investigation stated that FBI agents had uncovered "evidence" that Thumairy and Bayoumi had been "tasked" to assist the hijackers



by yet another individual whose name was blacked out, prompting lawyers for the families to refer to this person as "the third man" in what they argue is a Saudi-orchestrated conspiracy.

That third man's name has been meticulously redacted in every reference, except for the mistake found by Isikoff, where he was named as "Jarrah."

Mussaad Ahmed al-Jarrah, according to Isikoff, is "a mid-level Saudi Foreign Ministry official who was assigned to the Saudi Embassy in Washington, D.C., in 1999 and 2000. His duties apparently included overseeing the activities of Ministry of Islamic Affairs employees at Saudi-funded mosques and Islamic centers within the United States."

Jarrah "was responsible for the placement of Ministry of Islamic Affairs employees known as guides and propagators posted to the United States, including Fahad Al Thumairy," according to Catherine Hunt, a former FBI agent based in Los Angeles who has been assisting the families in the case and issued this information in a court declaration.

All of the information regarding Jarrah has been sealed and classified as "state secrets." While Trump has told the 9/11 families he would help them, even calling James Comey and Robert Mueller, "scum" for helping to obstruct their ability to get information that would bolster their case, it is clear that Trump's own people—Barr and Grennell—are taking on that role for his White House. The question is, how long will this go on and will Trump's recent cooling towards the Kingdom provide the some opening for the 9/11 families, and the American people, to finally get the truth?

Over 30 sites in Sistan-Baluchestan added to national heritage list

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Some 34 historical and natural sites in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan have recently been inscribed on the national heritage list, ISNA reported.

The sites include historical hills and qanats, ancient petroglyphs and cemeteries, as well as historical structures.



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

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

In ancient times, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, the Baluchistan region provided a land route to the Indus Valley and the Babylonian civilizations. The armies of Alexander the Great marched through Baluchistan in 326 BC on their way to the Hindu Kush and on their return march in 325 experienced great hardships in the region's barren wastes.

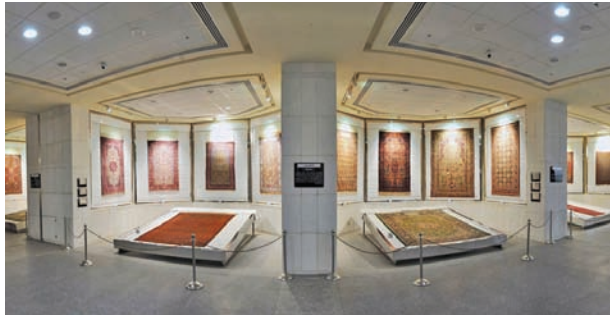
Carpet museum to host online meeting on research approach

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Carpet Museum of Iran will host today an online meeting on the research approach to mark International Museum Day.

Carpet researcher Turaj Juleh is scheduled to deliver a speech during the meeting, which will be streamed both on the museum's official website and social media, CHTN quoted the museum's director Parisa Beyzaei as saying on Sunday.

Besides being a treasure trove of historical artifacts, museums can be a place for scientific researches, she added.

She also noted that it is possible to get a true understanding of carpets as one of the most important products of Iranians through the history by research.



The International Museum Day has been celebrated worldwide since 1977 on or around May 18 to highlight the importance of museums and the challenges they face.

Persian carpets are sought after internationally for their delicate designs and high quality. Official figures show handmade carpets have a significant share in Iran's non-oil exports.

Ancient castles and fortresses in Iran: Zahhak Castle

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Even though Iran is better known for foreign tourists by magnificent mosques, labyrinthine bazaars, madrasas, wind-catchers, ancient cities like Persepolis, which was once the ceremonial capital of the Persian Empire, the nation does have a large number of rather forgotten historical heritages like tens of ruined castles.



Built around 2000 BC, Zahhak Castle is one of those lesser-known monuments. It was used as a government building and a fire temple during the later Parthian era (ca.129 BC-224 CE).

Located in northwest Iran near Hashtroud, the castle contains depictions of animals and symbols that show what life was like for the royalty in ancient Iran. It includes a square-shaped hall made of bricks built during the Parthia period. During this time, Zoroastrianism was the religion of the ruling kings, who likely used part of the castle for a fire temple.

It is unknown why this particular castle was named Zahhak but in Persian legend, Zahhak is the name of an Arab king who conquered and ruled over ancient Iran. The story is recounted in the Shahnameh, or Book of Kings, written by Ferdowsi. Kawa is the hero in this particular story, who rescues his Kurdish people in Iran from Zahhak's control.

Zahhak castle also served as a military defense during the Parthian era given its position close to the Iranian border with other nations in the northwest, including Turkey and Armenia.

Tourism ministry issues guideline to curb pandemic as travels seen to rise

→ 1 imposed travel restrictions to help curb the spread of novel coronavirus. In this line, incoming and outgoing flights have been suspended, and road travels restricted to a great extent.

In response to the pandemic, the Ministry of Health has also declared new guidelines and instructions to ramp up the safety in particular for "emergency or work travels" in hotels, guest houses, eco-lodge unites, tourist destinations, transport facilities, recreational centers, and restaurants.

Earlier this month, Jamshid Hamzehzadeh, the head of the Association of Iranian Hoteliers, briefed on practical health policies introduced to hotels, noting "We have declared that a hotel room is disinfected and remain empty after 48 hours of passenger use. Another issue that is important for us is the emphasis on employee health. Also, each passenger should pass through the diagnostic tunnel when entering a hotel."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Hamzehzadeh announced some 50 percent of hotels across the country had so far been reopened after the hospitality industry took a severe hit from the virus pandemic in both at the national and international levels.

"The shutdown cost Iran's hospitality industry 45 trillion rials (some \$1.1 billion at the official rate of 42,000 rials) over the past three months," he noted. "We have not made an official announcement in this regard, but hotels in each province are reopening under their condition and coordination with local health departments."

"Since business trips have commenced, if hotels are not opened, people may go to unauthorized centers, which may lead to harmful consequences," he said. "We are implementing the health protocols previously announced by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts."

Deputy tourism minister Vali Teymouri early in May introduced measures taken to lessen the impact of coronavirus on the tourism sector and future measures to restore the situation, noting "A smart



Cars are seen on Road 59, also known as the Chalous Road, which connects Tehran to Chalous, on the southern coasts of the Caspian Sea. The mountainous road is one of the busiest in Iran.

travel protocol, which is aimed to reassure healthy travels, has been developed to be implemented across the country."

"The smart travel protocol states what considerations a hotel, agency, or tour guide should follow. It's as if accommodation units need to focus more on renting one-bedroom than two-bedroom. Or if the hotel has been closed until now, with what considerations will it start working and under what conditions will it accept passengers. These cases are detailed in the present protocol we should revise its

articles using the opinion of the relevant organizations."

In response to a question that if travel ads are illegal in face of the virus pandemic, Teymouri said: "We have not officially announced anything for tourism advertising, but in the form of a smart trip, we have addressed the issue of whether they should advertise tourism activities, of course, if the coronavirus is due by the end of the holy month of Ramadan."

Some experts expect Iran to achieve a tourism boom after coronavirus contained,

believing its impact would be temporary and short-lived for a country that ranked the third fastest-growing tourism destination in 2019.

The latest available data show eight million tourists visited the Islamic Republic during the first ten months of the past Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2019).

For Muslims, Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. It's a joyful holiday when the faithful celebrate 29 or 30 days of dawn-to-sunset fasting.

National museum accessible online for hearing impaired

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — The National Museum of Iran has launched virtual tours for hearing-impaired visitors.

Some short videos have been produced to tell the story of the thousand years of human culture in Iran based on the museum's collections to the hearing-impaired visitors, with the presence of a tour guide and in sign language, public relations department of the museum announced on Sunday.

During Persian New Year (Noruz) holidays in late March, the museum arranged online visits to make the best use of the museum during the coronavirus pandemic, which

has forced authorities to shut doors of all museums and historical sites across the country.

Some 10,000 people explored centuries-old objects at the museum at the time, which made the museum to extend its online visits and to launch virtual tours of its joint exhibitions showcasing loaned objects.

The museum is somewhat chockfull of priceless relics that represent various eras of the country's rich history. Its structure was completed in 1928 based on the design by French architect André Godard who was also an archaeologist and historian of French and Middle Eastern Art.

Hamedan exports \$35m of handicrafts in year

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Handicrafts exports from the west-central province of Hamedan reached some \$35 million during the previous Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 19), provincial tourism chief has said.

Traditional glassware, ceramics, wooden products, sculptures, and furniture were among the province's exports, IRNA quoted Hashem Mazaheri as saying on Sunday.

Lalejin pottery held 80 percent share of the province's exports, he added.

Lalejin, a world pottery capital in Hamedan province, is one of the most essential centers for production of the earthenware and ceramics in the country.

Lalejin celebrated its registration as the world pottery capital in 2016, a privilege given by jurors of the UNESCO-affiliated World Crafts Council.



Discover qalamkari, the traditional art of printing

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Photos depict Iranian craftspeople practicing the traditional art of qalamkari — printing on cotton or silk fabric with a tamarind pen using natural dyes - in a workshop in the city of Isfahan, May 15, 2020.

The word qalamkari is derived from a Persian word where 'qalam' means pen and 'kari' refers to craftsmanship.

This art involves 23 tedious steps of dyeing, bleaching, hand painting, block printing, starching, cleaning and more. Motifs drawn in qalamkari include flowers, peacock, and paisleys.

The 3000-year-old art uses earthy colors like indigo, mustard, rust, black and green. Natural dyes used to paint colors in qalamkari art are extracted from natural sources with no use of chemicals and artificial matter.

For instance, craftsmen extract black color by blending jaggery, water and iron fillings which they essentially use for outlining the sketches. While mustard or yellow is derived by boiling pomegranate peels, red hues are created from bark of madder or algin. Likewise, blue is obtained from indigo and green is derived by mixing yellow and blue together.



Over \$300m earmarked for jobless benefits amid pandemic

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Iranian government has allocated 12,860 billion rials (about \$306 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) to pay for unemployment benefits amid the coronavirus pandemic that has left many jobless in the country.

Head of Plan and Budget Organization, Mohammad Baqer Nobakht, said on Saturday that the lifeline had been made available after the government tapped into the country's sovereign wealth fund to pay for the costs of the national campaign against the new coronavirus pandemic, Press TV reported.

Iran has funded various schemes to help the economy recover from nearly two months of closures over the pandemic. Workers have been a special focus of those programs.

Labor minister Mohammad Shariatmadari said on Saturday that around one million firms and enterprises with over 3.2 million workers and staff members had been covered by a government's cheap loan scheme which is meant to offset the economic impacts of the pandemic.

Shariatmadari said that the rescue package, which is worth 500 trillion rials (nearly \$12 billion), would be allocated to firms and enterprises who have avoided laying off workers since March when the pandemic started in Iran.



After the Covid-19 crisis, will we get a greener world?

The current crisis has revealed a sobering truth: the global economic shutdown, which has been achieved at a devastating social cost, has barely dented our carbon emissions. The latest analysis, by the International Energy Agency (IEA), expects this year's annual emissions to be down by just 6-8%. Such a small drop in emissions would have no measurable effect on the world's carbon concentration, or its warming potential. Indeed, 2020 is currently on track to be the hottest year ever recorded.

"You'd need about a 10% drop to have a noticeable effect on the rising CO2 concentrations, but even then concentrations would still be rising," says Richard Betts, head of climate impacts at the Met Office. "The rate of rise of CO2 varies from year to year anyway, as the natural carbon sinks get stronger and weaker because of natural processes, like El Niño." During an El Niño event, tropical forests don't take up as much carbon, so the atmospheric CO2 rises a bit faster. And in La Niña, the opposite occurs. "That effect is probably more important than the small drop in emissions we're seeing now."

Considering that emissions have to fall by at least 7.6% every year to 2050 in order to keep global warming below 1.5C (above pre-industrial levels), this internationally agreed target now feels alarmingly unachievable.

"It shows that the challenge of avoiding dangerous climate change and getting to zero emissions is unbelievably hard," says Simon Evans of climate science website Carbon Brief. "Even something which seems to be having seismic implications for the global economy, at least in the short term, like the current crisis, is something of a drop in the ocean compared to that challenge."

And yet, the cleaner air, burgeoning urban wildlife, and our sudden, dramatic shift to a less carbon-intensive lifestyle reveal the scope of what we can achieve in just days. This is something to cling to as we navigate the twin storms of Covid-19 and climate. We know that the climate crisis will not wait for a more convenient time; we must deal with it and the pandemic crisis concurrently. It is, however, the killer disease that has provoked the strong and urgent response. Governments have been forced to step in and deal with the catastrophe in a way that is unprecedented, including supporting business and industry, and public and private infrastructure.

Across the world, government has never been bigger. Many experts argue that this provides us with a huge opportunity to also deal with the other crisis: to make a transformational leap towards a sustainable society that enables us to keep the world below dangerous warming. How we respond to this unique opportunity could set our climate trajectory for thousands of years to come.

These behavioural changes we've experienced — some of



which may become ingrained permanently, meaning travel and consumption patterns become more responsible — are helpful in reducing pollution, just as hand-washing helps in the pandemic. But what the expected 8% emissions reduction figure shows us is that individual action — driving your car less, attending a meeting via Zoom rather than taking a business flight — is not going to be enough. Equally, it shows that moving to a no-growth economy is not the answer, as some have argued. Instead, systemic transformative action is required at international and state level to get the effective reductions in atmospheric carbon that will bring us to net zero.

"It means we can't be fiddling around the edges," says Betts. "If we are going to have a substantial impact on long-term CO2 concentrations, we need huge, lasting changes in energy systems and other things that rely on fossil fuels."

It's worth noting that the IEA analysis was based on the expectation that human activity will return to some approximation of "normal" within months, so the shutdown period itself is likely to produce a far steeper drop in emissions — CO2 emissions in China fell by an estimated 25% during its February lockdown, for example. India, meanwhile, recorded its first ever annual emissions fall for the year ending March, and is expected to show a 30% drop in emissions for the month of April. "But what we're seeing at the moment is, for the most part, very temporary," Evans says. "When we drive again, the car still burns petrol."

Instead, structural change could mean people swapping their combustion engines for electric vehicles. More fundamentally, Evans says, "it would involve reimagining the way our cities are built and organised, so that going without a car becomes easier, through how roads are laid out, and how provision for walking and cycling and public transport is changed."

All of those things go far beyond the individual choices

we make in our everyday lives. "Our choices are bounded by society," Evans says, "so a shift towards a low-carbon society can't happen via individual action alone."

Cities have been leading this transition with innovative buildings and infrastructure projects. Some are already banning cars and trucks as a temporary measure. Others are going further: Milan is reallocating 35km of street space to cyclists and pedestrians; Brussels is creating 40km of new cycle paths; and France is tempting cyclists out with subsidies. In the UK the government has announced a £2bn infrastructure scheme to encourage more walking and cycling and the mayor of London has unveiled measures to create car free bridges and streets. Many cities are exploring some form of a circular economy, in which waste is minimised with resources kept in use as long as possible through recycling and reuse.

The economist Kate Raworth says: "We live in a world that is complex, deeply interconnected, and human health and planetary health are woven into one. So governments need frameworks and ways of thinking that can hold that complexity — that can think about climate and health and jobs and financial stability and inequality in one space."

For instance, quite apart from the pleasure of experiencing cleaner air, the coronavirus pandemic has revealed how deadly pollution is. One recent study found that a tiny increase in particulates was associated with a 15% increase in the Covid-19 death rate, almost certainly contributing to the terrible rates seen in cities. In Italy, the high death rates seen in the north of the country correlate with the highest levels of air pollution. Reducing air pollution would lower the general health burden and may also help prevent future pandemics from being so deadly.

"We have created a framework, which invites a place to answer: how can our cities be home to thriving people in this thriving place, while respecting the wellbeing of all people and the health of the planet?" Raworth says. She is working with the city of Amsterdam to apply her "doughnut" model of a socially and environmentally sustainable economy to the Dutch capital's post-pandemic recovery.

The Amsterdam project, like many others, predates Covid-19. Momentum for environmental protection has been building over the past few years, and it may be that this crisis proves a tipping point in public consciousness, leading to a meaningful shift in policy. For one thing, the pandemic has shown us how valuable expertise is, and now we're all au fait with the role of infectious disease modellers in guiding public health policy, it should help us appreciate the role climate modellers could play in guiding economic policy, the Guardian reported.

Military to help battle locusts in Iran

1 → Last year, desert locusts penetrated into the provinces of Bushehr, Fars, Hormozgan, Kerman, Khuzestan, and Sistan-Baluchestan, which resulted in major losses on over 500,000 hectares of farmlands and gardens.



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

The end of plastic; new plant-based bottles will degrade in a year

Soft drinks could soon be sipped from "all-plant" bottles under new plans to turn sustainably grown crops into plastic in partnership with major beverage makers.

A biochemical company in the Netherlands hopes to kickstart investment in a pioneering project that hopes to make plastics from plant sugars rather than fossil fuels.

The plans, devised by renewable chemicals company Avantium, have already won the support of beer-maker Carlsberg, which hopes to sell its pilsner in a cardboard bottle lined with an inner layer of plant plastic.

Avantium's chief executive, Tom van Aken, says he hopes to greenlight a major investment in the world-leading bioplastics plant in the Netherlands by the end of the year. The project, which remains on track despite the coronavirus lockdown, is set to reveal partnerships with other food and drink companies later in the summer.

The project has the backing of Coca-Cola and Danone, which hope to secure the future of their bottled products by tackling the environmental damage caused by plastic pollution and a reliance on fossil fuels.

Globally around 300 million tonnes of plastic is made from fossil fuels every year, which is a major contributor to the climate crisis. Most of this is not recycled and contributes to the scourge of microplastics in the world's oceans. Microplastics can take hundreds of years to decompose completely.

"This plastic has very attractive sustainability credentials because it uses no fossil fuels, and can be recycled — but would also degrade in nature much faster than normal plastics do," says Van Aken.

Avantium's plant plastic is designed to be resilient enough to contain carbonate drinks. Trials have shown that the plant plastic would decompose in one year using a composter, and a few years longer if left in normal outdoor conditions. But ideally, it should be recycled, said Van Aken.

The bio-refinery plans to break down sustainable plant sugars into simple chemical structures that can then be rearranged to form a new plant-based plastic — which could appear on supermarket shelves by 2023.

The path-finder project will initially make a modest 5,000 tonnes of plastic every year using sugars from corn, wheat or beets. However, Avantium expects its production to grow as demand for renewable plastics climbs.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

China's first manned space mission

(October 15, 2003)

In an historic step, China has become the third nation to successfully send a man into space. This has come more than forty years after the former Soviet Union launched the first manned spacecraft. This report from Francis Marcus:

Half an hour after the spacecraft **blasted off**, China state television showed **footage** of the launch, the rocket climbing slowly into the clear blue sky. Although it was filmed from a distance, the roar as it **thrust** upwards was clearly **audible**. A **plume** of white smoke marked the falling away of the rocket's first stage. The launch initially had been expected to be shown live. But the government's cautious media management seems to have dictated that that would have been too risky.

Provided the mission concludes successfully though, the state media are likely **to fuel a surge of** triumphant patriotism. It'll be **a far cry from** the legendary Ming dynasty official hundreds of years ago who's believed to have tried to **propel** himself into space using gunpowder rockets and a couple of kites with disastrous results; and many Chinese will feel their country has taken a proud step towards **modernity**.

That's despite the fact that on the internet bulletin boards in recent days, a small but vocal minority from **the cyber chattering classes** have criticised the venture as a waste of money that could have been better spent on the poor.

Words

blasted off: left the ground to begin its journey into space

footage: filmed pictures

thrust: pushed along quickly by using a lot of force

audible: if something is audible, it can be heard

A plume: something that's described as a plume is shaped like a feather

to fuel a surge of: if you fuel a surge of something, you help to create a sudden increase of it

a far cry from: one thing that is very different from another is a far cry from it

propel: push

modernity: a more modern way of life

the cyber chattering classes: people who often share their views by using chat rooms on the internet

(Source: BBC)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ↔ B

'Pharmaceutical industry unfazed by U.S. withdrawal of nuclear deal'

Given Iran's low volume of imports in pharmaceutical and medical equipment industry, the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal won't affect the industry, the Ministry of Health spokesman said on Wednesday.

"Due to the technical know-how we possess we do not depend on import and we are capable of manufacturing many pharmaceutical products domestically," ISNA quoted Harirchi as saying.

Harirchi further highlighted that the country has enough foreign exchange reserves and ensured the public that the current conditions won't raise any problems for the pharmaceutical industry.

سخنگوی وزارت بهداشت: خروج آمریکا از برجام تاثیری در دارو ندارد

سخنگوی وزارت بهداشت تاکید کرد: خروج آمریکا از برجام تاثیری بر بازار دارو و تجهیزات پزشکی نخواهد گذاشت؛ چراکه وابستگی مان به دارو و تجهیزات وارداتی بسیار اندک است.

دکتر ایرج حریرچی در گفت‌وگو با ایسنا گفت: با تکیه بر توان دانشمندان خودمان و تولیدات مان، وابستگی دارویی مان به محصولات خارجی بسیار اندک است و میزان قابل توجهی از داروها را خودمان تولید می‌کنیم.

وی تاکید کرد: با توجه به توانی که دولت در حوزه ارز و منابعی که برای این حوزه دارد، مردم مطمئن باشند که مشکلی در این زمینه نخواهیم داشت.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"fore-"

■ **Meaning:** before or in front

■ **For example:** Can dreams *foretell* the future?

PHRASAL VERB

Go about something

■ **Meaning:** to start to do something;

■ **or example:** I want to learn German but I don't know the best way to go about it.

IDIOM

Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed

■ **Explanation:** a person who is very enthusiastic and full of energy

■ **For example:** Gary was fantastic. He arrived bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at 7am and worked with us all day.

Afghan President Ghani and rival Abdullah sign power-sharing deal

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Abdullah Abdullah signed a power-sharing deal to end a months-long political stalemate that has hampered progress towards peace, Ghani's spokesman said Sunday.



"The Political Agreement between President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah has just been signed," spokesman Sediq Sediqi said on Twitter, adding that Abdullah would lead the council for peace talks and his team members would be included in cabinet, Reuters reported.

Abdullah had disputed the results of September's presidential election. Earlier this year, he announced the formation of a parallel government, undermining Ghani's administration just as the United States was trying to advance a peace process with the Taliban to end Afghanistan's 19-year war.

when the United States was trying to advance a peace process with the Taliban to end the 19-year Afghan war.

Washington, frustrated by the growing impasse between the two men, even after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo travelled to Kabul to mediate, threatened a \$1 billion aid cut if the men could not agree.

It was not immediately clear whether the agreement, would result in aid being reinstated, but it comes as Afghanistan faces growing fiscal pressures, with tax revenues falling and foreign aid pledges due this year expected to shrink.

Officials say that a deal between the Ghani and Abdullah is crucial to launching peace talks, as Abdullah's camp represents much of the country's north-west.

China's ambassador to Israel found dead in Tel Aviv home

China's ambassador to Israel was found dead in his home in a Tel Aviv suburb on Sunday, an Israeli police spokesman said.

He did not comment on the cause of death of ambassador Du Wei, who was 57 years old and became ambassador to Israel in February, according to the embassy's website, Reuters reported.

"As part of the regular procedure, police units are at the scene," the spokesman said.

Israel's Channel 12 TV, quoting unidentified emergency medical officials, said initial indications were that Du died in his sleep of natural causes.

EU to try to head off Israel annexations

EU countries are planning to issue Israel with a warning not to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, to try to head off a diplomatic clash.

The bloc is alarmed by the incoming Israeli unity government's plans to annex Jewish settlements in the West Bank, which it says would violate international law and harm the chances of peace with the Palestinians.

But there is no agreement among EU countries over what punitive action to take should Israel press ahead with the move, which has the support of U.S. President Donald Trump.

In an interview with AFP, Luxembourg's veteran Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn said he had discussed a declaration with his EU counterparts during video talks Friday.

"A very large number of countries on Friday supported a draft text that we drew up with my Irish counterpart Simon Coveney in which we warn against an annexation that would be a violation of international law," Asselborn told AFP.

He said Austria and Hungary had refused to sign the declaration, so it could not be issued in the name of all 27 EU states.

"But the fact that a very large number of countries support this line is a success," he said.

The Israeli unity government formed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former rival Benny Gantz is due to be sworn in Sunday, and the plan is for the statement to be issued after that, on Monday.

"We are not talking about sanctions. We're talking about prevention. This text is not aggressive," Asselborn said.

The four-point statement welcomes the new government and recalls the EU's close ties with Israel, but warns annexation would violate international law.

"The European Union wants to cooperate with neighboring states and countries in the region and reiterates its support for a negotiated two-state solution for a viable peace perspective between Israelis and Palestinians," Asselborn said.

"There is no alternative to this solution. No-one has presented another viable solution," Asselborn said.

The EU has criticized Trump's Middle East Peace Plan, unveiled in January, which gave Israel the green light to annex key parts of the West Bank.

"If we don't succeed in convincing Israel to give up its project, the hardest part will be ahead of us," warned Asselborn.

After Friday's talks the EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he would make a concerted diplomatic push to try to steer Israel away from annexations.

But he admitted there were deep divisions among the EU states, as some like Asselborn push for a tough line and others argue for dialogue.

A European official insisted that options for punitive measures were in place: freezing bilateral agreements, suspending scientific cooperation, cancelling trade preferences and recalling ambassadors.

But adopting such measures would require unanimity among the 27 EU countries.

PMU honor of Iraq: Al-Kadhimi

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

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

The PMU has long rejected Washington's military presence in the country as an obstacle impeding long-lasting security and stability in Iraq.

According to Press TV, In January, Washington assassinated the group's deputy commander, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, alongside Iran's top anti-terror Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in the capital city Baghdad.

Iraqi resistance groups have vowed to take up arms against U.S. forces if Washington fails to comply with a parliamentary order calling for the expulsion of U.S. troops following the assassination.

■ **Iraq launches massive operation against ISIL near Syria border**

Iraq's Armed Forces have launched a new military operation against the Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group covering the provinces of Anbar, Nineveh and Salahuddin to the Syrian border.

Iraq's Security Media Cell announced



the beginning of the counter-terrorism campaign, dubbed Operation Al Jazeera Lions, on Sunday.

"Under the supervision of the Joint Operations Command 'Operation Al Jazeera Lions' was launched this morning to monitor Al Jazeera desert north of Anbar governorate, south of Nineveh governorate, and west of Salahuddin governorate, reaching the inter-

national borders with the Syria," it said in a statement carried by Shafaq news agency.

The campaign, it added, will be conducted on 11 fronts with the participation of military commanders, tribal forces and Popular Mobilization Forces — known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, under the air cover of the Iraqi Air Force.

The statement added that the new military

Pompeo warns ICC of 'consequences' if it probes Israeli war crimes

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has threatened that Washington will "exact consequences" if the International Criminal Court (ICC) moves ahead with a potential war crimes investigation into Israel.

Pompeo's warning came after the ICC prosecutor decided to consider Palestine a state with the ability to submit complaints that could trigger probes into war crimes it says Israel committed in the occupied West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip.

In December, ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda announced that a five-year preliminary examination of the "situation in the state of Palestine" had provided her with "reasonable basis to believe that war crimes were committed" by Israel.

Before launching an investigation, Bensouda had asked the Hague-based court's pre-trial chamber to confirm whether the ICC had jurisdiction over alleged offenses committed there.

In a critical statement on Friday, Pompeo described the ICC's investigations "illegitimate" and deemed the international tribunal a "political body, not a judicial institution".

"This unfortunate reality has been confirmed yet again by the ICC Prosecutor's attempt to assert jurisdiction over Israel, which like the United States, is not a party to the Rome Statute that created the Court," the statement read.

Pompeo said the U.S. does not "believe the Palestinians qualify as a sovereign state".

"The United States reiterates its longstanding objection



to any illegitimate ICC investigations," he said, adding, "If the ICC continues down its current course, we will exact consequences."

Pompeo's statement came two days after his trip to Israel for a meeting with prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to discuss Tel Aviv's plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

The U.S. and Israel have previously claimed that the ICC does not have jurisdiction over Israel and Palestine, that Tel Aviv is being "targeted unfairly" and that Palestine does not qualify as a state.

On Wednesday, a bipartisan group of U.S. House and Senate legislators sent separate letters to Pompeo urging

him to defend Israel, a firm U.S. ally, against ICC investigations, saying the tribunal's assertion amounted to a "politicization" of the court's mission.

Palestine was accepted as an ICC member in 2015, three years after signing the court's founding Rome Statute, based on its "observer state" status at the United Nations.

Both Israel and the U.S. have refused to sign up to the ICC, which was set up in 2002 to be the only global tribunal trying the world's worst crimes, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Both have claimed they have credible legal systems that can properly adjudicate human rights violations which make ICC intervention dispensable.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has backed Israel in its battle against the court.

The Trump administration maintains a tense relationship with the ICC, having previously revoked Bensouda's visa when she intended to investigate potential war crimes by U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.

Bensouda previously dismissed Australia's demand that the tribunal halt an investigation into war crimes committed by the Israeli regime in Palestine.

She affirmed that negative speculations surrounding the probe would not influence the ICC's work and that the Palestine case would be conducted with "utmost professionalism, independence and objectivity in strict conformity with the Rome Statute".

"Any insinuation or assertion to the contrary is simply misled and unfounded," Bensouda said.

UAE dispatched mercenaries to help rebels in Libya: UN report

A confidential report by the United Nations says two private military companies based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have sent foreign mercenaries to support Libyan military strongman Khalifa Haftar in his offensive to seize the country's capital Tripoli.

The report, which was prepared by a UN Panel of Experts and accessed by the American news outlet Bloomberg, said that the foreign mercenaries were affiliated with the Dubai-based firms of Lancaster 6 DMCC and Opus Capital Asset Limited FZE — both registered at free zones in the UAE.

The team of around 20 mercenaries, mostly holding British, American, French, Australian, and South African passports, arrived in Libya in June 2019 as part of a "well funded private military company operation" to support Haftar's offensive against the Libyan government, according to the UN report.

However, after arriving in Libya in late June, the group of mercenaries led by a South African national named Steve Lodge "abruptly pulled out." UN investigators said in the report that they were unable to determine the reason for the team's withdrawal.

Two diplomats who spoke to Bloomberg said the report was shared with the



UN Security Council's (UNSC) sanctions committee in February and that the two military firms supplied "Haftar's forces with helicopters, drones, and cyber capabilities through a complex web of shell companies."

The diplomats said the mercenaries "promised a sophisticated operation that could interdict arms shipments from Turkey to the government of Tripoli using vessels and helicopters."

"The report found that six former military helicopters were acquired and sent to Libya for the project in what it described as non-compliance with a UN resolution for an arms embargo on Libya," Bloomberg said.

Al Jazeera revealed in a report last month that a high-ranking Emirati delegation had visited Sudan to recruit militants to fight against the internationally-recognized government in Tripoli.

Brazil passes Italy and Spain in confirmed coronavirus cases

Brazil's confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus rose past those of Spain and Italy, which was once the epicenter of the pandemic, making Brazil's outbreak the fourth largest in the world, according to official figures.

Brazil's Health Ministry registered 14,919 new confirmed cases in the prior 24 hours, taking the total to 233,142, behind the United States, Russia and the United Kingdom. Brazil has done just a fraction of the testing seen in those three countries.

The global distinction is likely to pile pressure on President Jair Bolsonaro, who lost his second health minister in a month on Friday as he defies public health experts and calls for widespread use of unproven drugs.

Bolsonaro has been fiercely critical of the orders by many of Brazil's state governors for strict social isolation and quarantine to combat the spread of the virus, including the closure of schools, shops and restaurants.

Bolsonaro argues that the toll on the economy is becoming unbearable and businesses must be allowed to reopen as soon as possible. The government now expects Brazil will post its biggest annual economic contraction this year



since records began over a century ago.

Brazil's vice president, Hamilton Mourao, underwent a COVID-19 test and was placed in isolation at his official residence on Saturday, after a public servant who had been near him last week tested positive.

Mourao, 66, will not fulfill official duties on Monday, when the results are expected. Bolsonaro has undergone several coronavirus tests after ministers and other close aides tested positive.

Nationwide testing in Brazil still lags far behind European nations. Brazil had processed nearly 338,000 novel coronavirus tests in official labs by the beginning of the week, according to the Health Ministry. Another 145,000 tests were under analysis or waiting in line.

Obama criticizes U.S. coronavirus response in online graduation speech

Former U.S. President Barack Obama criticized the U.S. government's coronavirus response in an online graduation speech.

"More than anything, this pandemic has fully, finally torn back the curtain on the idea that so many of the folks in charge know what they're doing," Obama said. "A lot of them aren't even pretending to be in charge."

Obama was speaking during a graduation livestream for Historically Black Universities and Colleges (HBCUs), schools established before the U.S. Civil Rights Act in 1964.

The event, "Show Me Your Walk, HBCU Edition," featured many black celebrities and politicians. It was hosted by comedian Kevin Hart.

Obama's speech also highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on black communities, which have seen higher contraction and death rates from the virus.

"Let's be honest: A disease like this just spotlights the underlying inequalities and extra burdens that black



communities have historically had to deal with in this country," Obama said.

"We see it in the disproportionate impact of COVID-19

on our communities, just as we see it when a black man goes for a jog and some folks feel like they can stop and question and shoot him if he doesn't submit to their questioning."

The former U.S. president was referring to the death of 25-year-old Ahmaud Arbery who was killed while jogging in February.

The death has caused outrage after a video surfaced that appeared to show the shooting by two white men.

"Injustice like this isn't new," Obama said. "What is new is that so much of your generation has woken up to the fact that the status quo needs fixing, that the old ways of doing things don't work."

"If the world's going to get better, it's going to be up to you," he said.

Obama has kept a low profile since leaving office after the 2016 election but has lately criticized the Trump administration ahead of the US' November presidential election.

Ex-Iran coach Marc Wilmots waits for verdict

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Former Iran national football team head coach Marc Wilmots says that he has filed a complaint against Iran to FIFA and is waiting for the verdict.

The Belgian left his position as coach of Iran after six matches in charge in early December.

Wilmots was appointed in May to lead Iran in their quest for a sixth World Cup appearance after Carlos Queiroz had secured back-to-back qualifications for the first time in the country's history, however he terminated his agreement with Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) seven months later.

"I've filed a complaint against Iran to FIFA. The case is running and I am waiting for the verdict," said Wilmots.

Under coaching of Wilmots, Iran defeated minnows Hong Kong and Cambodia in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers but lost to Bahrain and Iraq in Group C that left Iran in the third place in the group.

FFIRI Secretary General Mehdi Mohammad Nabi had previously hit out at Wilmots, accusing him of being irresponsible about his team.

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

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



IPL clubs ask foreigners to return ASAP



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran Professional League (IPL) clubs have asked their foreign players to return to Iran as soon as possible.

The country's football top division was officially suspended on March 11, 2020, by the decree of the government after the pandemic coronavirus outbreak.

But the situation in the country is getting better and the government has taken some steps to restart sports events around the country.

President Hassan Rouhani announced on Saturday that Iran football leagues will

resume after the holy month of Ramadan.

During the long IPL hiatus, many foreigners from the Iranian teams traveled to their home countries.

Now that the state approval for the continuation of the football matches has been issued, the clubs have officially asked their foreigners to return to Iran.

However, due to the travel restrictions imposed on international flights by governments, foreigners playing in the Iranian clubs may face difficulties in returning to the country, and it probably will delay the foreign players' return.

Taj becomes member of AFC Emergency Committee



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Former president of the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) Mehdi Taj has been appointed as a member of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Emergency Committee.

The AFC Executive Committee shall stipulate the terms of reference of the Emergency Committee, standing orders for meetings and its ability to make decisions within the AFC Organization Regulations.

The Emergency Committee shall deal

with all matters requiring immediate settlement between meetings of the Executive Committee. The Emergency Committee shall consist of: - the President; and - the five (5) Vice Presidents.

The President shall convene the Emergency Committee meetings.

Decisions of the Emergency Committee shall have immediate effect. The President shall notify the Executive Committee immediately of the decisions passed by the Emergency Committee.

Taj stepped down from his role in December due to the heart problems.

Ehsan Pahlavan among the best midfielders of 2016 ACI

Ehsan Pahlavan, Zob Ahan's winger, is among nine players selected by the official website of Asian Football Confederation (AFC) as the best midfielders of the 2016 AFC Champions League.

With the 2020 AFC Champions League currently on hiatus, the-AFC.com continues its series of articles to determine the best sides from the last four editions of the Continental competition.

It began with the 2016 edition's best goalkeeper, next came the candidates for the backline and now it's time to select the more attacking positions.

Ehsan Pahlavan was just 22 years old when he made his maiden Continental club appearance at the 2016



AFC Champions League, but the young Iranian winger showed no fear with several fine performances in the tournament.

Most notable was Pahlavan's leading role in the Match-day Five win over Saudi giants Al Nassr where he netted a brace in a 3-0 win, before again getting on the scoresheet in the return meeting a week later.

Along with Pahlavan, there are players such as Omar Abdulrahman (Al Ain), Leonardo (Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors), Walter Montillo (Shandong Luneng), Osmar (FC Seoul) and the football fans can pick their favorite player from a shortlist of ten players.

(Source: AFC)

Football but not as we know it: Odd sights from Bundesliga comeback

Germany gave football-starved fans reason to be cheerful on Saturday with the Bundesliga's return to action behind closed doors, on a day in which Borussia Dortmund hammered local rivals Schalke in an echoing Signal Iduna Park.

Here AFP looks at some of the most eye-catching things from a memorable day in the history of the sport:

■ Haaland keeps it socially distanced

Wonderkid striker Erling Braut Haaland began where he left off with the first Bundesliga goal of its restart after a two-month break caused by the coronavirus.

Haaland turned home Thorgan Hazard's low cross just before the half hour to open the scoring against Schalke. It was the 19-year-old's 10th goal in just nine Bundesliga appearances and set his team on their way to a thumping 4-0 derby victory.

Instead of being mobbed by jubilant teammates, Haaland made sure that they all kept their distance as he bobbed a cheeky little dance on the sidelines, in homage to the strict hygiene rules that the league has to follow.

■ Schalke take five

Schalke became the first team to make use of the rule change that allows five substitutions in a game, with David Wagner using the maximum number at Dortmund.

Timo Becker replaced Everton loanee Jonjo Kenny with three minutes remaining as Schalke suffered a destruction at the hands of Lucien Favre's flamboyant side.

Favre, meanwhile, used four substitutions, with man-of-the-match Raphael Guerreiro replaced by Marcel Schmelzer in the final moments after adding to Haaland's opener with an impressive brace.

The increase in subs, approved by the game's lawmakers earlier this month, was adopted by the Bundesliga to limit the risk of injury following two months without matches.

■ Masked men line the dugout

As well as the unusual sight of normally packed stands shorn of the boisterous support that accompanies the Bundesliga, fans watching on TV saw players wearing masks on the sidelines.

Players on the bench wore protective masks in compliance with the stringent safety guidelines implemented to allow the Bundesliga to resume before Europe's other top leagues.

Schalke alternated players on the bench in order to respect social distancing rules while a contact sport was being played out on the field.

■ Augsburg fans question restart

While fans across the world celebrated being able to watch top-level live football after a two-month drought, some supporters questioned the wisdom in restarting the league.

Augsburg followers hung a banner in front of an empty stand that read "Football gives life -- your business is sick" in protest at football being played while the pandemic still takes lives across Europe.



There was little joy for the home side on the pitch either, with Daniel Czekc's stoppage time strike handing Wolfsburg a 2-1 win and deepening Augsburg's relegation fears.

■ Dortmund salute empty wall

A resounding victory over Schalke would usually see Dortmund's players celebrating in front of a throbbing 'Yellow Wall', the massive terrace behind the goal at Signal Iduna Park that holds up to 25,000 passionate fans.

However, with the stadium all-but-empty and the only noise being the cheers and clapping of players and coaches, Dortmund still jogged over to applaud the 'Sudtribune' in honour of the fervent support that usually pours from the stand.

(Source: AFP)

Islamic Solidarity Games postponed to avoid Tokyo 2020 clash

The Islamic Solidarity Games, due to be staged in August next year in Turkey, have been postponed to avoid clashing with the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

Turkish city Konya was scheduled to host the event from August 20 to 29 in 2021, but the rescheduled Olympic Games will now finish just eight days beforehand, while the Paralympics are due to begin on August 24.

The Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF) Executive Board therefore made the decision to postpone the event indefinitely.

Konya is set to still host the fifth edition of Islamic Solidarity Games and the Organising Committee is said to be working with the ISSF to establish a new window for the event to take place.

Turkey has never hosted the event before, with Azerbaijani capital Baku staging the last edition of the Games in 2017.

Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Iran have also hosted the Islamic Solidarity Games.

The postponement of Tokyo 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic has led to a reshuffle of sporting events, with several moving to avoid a clash.

World Athletics and the International Swimming Federation both postponed World Championships from 2021 to 2022, while the World Games and Mediterranean Games have also been moved back a year from 2021 to 2022.

Turkey won 195 medals at Baku 2017 - more than any other country - and finished second in the medals table.

(Source: Insidethegames)

Ex-Persepolis star Anthony Stokes faces court rap

The legislation states it is an offence for anyone to drive, or allow to be driven, a vehicle which does not have a valid test certificate.

It is not clear when the alleged incident took place or if Stokes was behind the wheel, but court papers reveal the case dates from this year.

He is due to appear at Glasgow's Justice of the Peace Court on Tuesday.

It comes two months after the Irish striker was charged with stalking the mother of his three-year-old son.

Stokes denied sending offensive messages to Eilidh Scott, 28, or flouting a four-year ban on contacting her or her mum at Hamilton Sheriff Court.

His lawyer said: "He is adamant he hasn't breached the terms of the order."

(Source: Scottish Sun)

Qatar to complete football season between July and August

The Qatar Football Association has announced that the domestic football competitions for the 2019-20 season will be completed between 24 July and 26 August 2020.

This announcement came after the coronavirus outbreak had earlier forced the suspension of all matches to safeguard members of the Qatari football family.

The QFA confirmed that the decision to play in the selected period along with all accompanying preventive procedures, was taken after consultation with authorities in the Ministry of Public Health, with the aim of maintaining the safety of all concerned personnel, including players, staff, officials and referees.

(Source: QFA)

FIVB President sends message of hope to global volleyball family

The FIVB's president, Ary S. Graça Fº, has sent a video message of hope and understanding to the global Volleyball Family from his office in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The video message marks the first in a series of messages from the FIVB president to provide positivity to all members of the Volleyball Family, and convey key updates on the efforts of the FIVB to promote and develop volleyball during these challenging times.

The FIVB president has also expressed his deepest sympathies for all of those affected by the global coronavirus pandemic, and highlighted the necessity of observing lockdown guidelines in order to stay safe and healthy.

In addition, the FIVB president has reflected on all of the incredible work the entire Volleyball Family has done to support "our beloved sport", from the Continental Confederations and National Federations, to the athletes who continue to use social media to engage with volleyball's global fanbase.

(Source: FIVB.org)

La Liga clubs given permission to expand into group training

La Liga have told clubs they will be able to increase training to involve groups of up to 10 players on Monday as teams take another step towards the planned resumption of the season next month.

The Spanish government has announced protocol that will allow training sessions to be expanded by all clubs, even those belonging to areas that are further behind in the country's de-escalation programme.

It means teams like Real Madrid, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid will be able to train in groups of 10, a source at La Liga told AFP, despite both Madrid and Catalonia remaining in 'phase 0' as two of Spain's worst-hit regions by coronavirus.

Espanyol, Leganes, Getafe and Real Valladolid will also be given special permission to do training in larger groups.

The move comes as a boost to La Liga's hopes of restarting the season in the middle of June and following the lead of Germany's Bundesliga, which staged games behind closed doors on Saturday.

(Source: Eurosport)

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

There is no price for your soul but heaven; so, beware of selling it for anything else.
Imam Ali (AS)

Iranian culture minister offers congratulations on Khayyam Day

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyed Abbas Salehi commemorated the Persian poet Omar Khayyam Neyshaburi on Sunday by extending congratulations on Khayyam Day.



People visit the tomb of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam in the northeastern Iranian town of Neyshabur in an undated photo.

"In the starry sky of the history of Iranian civilization and thoughts, Khayyam Neyshaburi is a familiar name for the people of Iran and seven continents," Salehi said in a message published by his office.

"If not the primary one, Khayyam at least is one of the symbols representing the genuine Iranian identity, culture and thoughts across the world," he added.

"The annual commemoration of Khayyam is a good opportunity for us to raise our knowledge of Khayyam's ideology, which is necessary for the modern world in the present situation and the post-corona world," Salehi stated.

Omar Khayyam Neyshaburi was commemorated during online meetings during Khayyam Day, which fell on May 17 this year.

Khayyam scholars Hassan Nazarian and Hamid Khademi reviewed works written by the great poet during an online meeting organized on Monday by the Neyshabur Office of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

Some Seljuk historical sites in Khayyam's hometown of Neyshabur were discussed by Marzieh Khanqoli as part of the celebration for the day.

The University of Neyshabur also held a webinar on Monday along with Majdeddin Keivani, Majid Mirza-Vaziri, Mohammad Baqeri, Hassan Sadeqi and several other Khayyam experts.

Khayyam is chiefly known to English-speaking readers through a translation of a collection of his quatrains in the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam by the English writer Edward FitzGerald.

"Dickens Stories" comes to Iranian bookstores

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — The Persian translation of "Dickens Stories" by Valerie Wilding has been published in Persian by Peydayesh Publications in Tehran.



Front cover of the Persian translation of Valerie Wilding's "Dickens Stories".

The book has been translated into Persian by Mahmud Mazinani.

"Dickens Stories" contains the top ten of stories by English writer Charles Dickens (1812-1870), including Pip's diary from "Great Expectations" and the ghosts from "A Christmas Carol", revealing how mean Scrooge really was.

"I took ten all-time great stories and retold them in a fun way," writes author Wilding on her website.

"Captain Flint" the parrot tells the story of Long John Silver and "Treasure Island" while chatting up the bird he fancies. "Black Beauty" tells his story to his grandsons, and "Wuthering Heights" becomes a dramatic picture strip story," she adds.

"I hope that, after enjoying these retellings and the light-hearted fact sections, readers might go on to read the original stories," she says.

"I love writing narrative non-fiction, fiction and non-fiction books for young people, and enjoy the challenge of writing for different ages," the writer notes.

"No Way Back", "Cleopatra" and "Playing with My Heart" are Wilding's other books.

Iranian children's books hit Chinese bookstores

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Four books by d e s k Persian children's writers have recently been published in Chinese in Beijing and Shanghai, Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) that is the publisher of the original books announced on Sunday.

The books have been published by the Youbook Agency in Beijing and the China National Publications Import Corporation (CNPIC) in Shanghai in collaboration with the Kia Literary Agency in Iran.

Among the books are "The Bird, the Little Boy and the Train" by Ahmadreza Ahmadi and illustrator Rashin Kheirieh.

"There Was the Moon and a Fox", "My Kind Sara" and "I Am Sacred", all by Anahita Teimurian, are the books published by the Chinese publishers.

Ahmadi was nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2010. "Red Fish, Gold Fish", "Sketch" and "From the Window of the Inn" are among Ahmadi's credits.

Teimurian is an author and illustrator. "A Bird Like Himself", "The Clever Mouse" and "There's Room for Everyone" are among her other credits.

The agreement to publish the Chinese versions of the books was negotiated during the 24th Beijing International Book Fair in August 2017, but the organizations have recently finalized the deal.

Iran was a guest of honor at the book fair and organized an exhibition themed "The Colorful Dream on the Silk Road".



This combination photo shows the four IIDCYA books published in China.

"Dance with Me" to go on screen at drive-in movie theater in Tehran



A scene from "Dance with Me" by Sorsuh Sehat.

A R T **TEHRAN** — "Dance with Me" by Sorsuh Sehat will be on screen at the drive-in movie theater in the parking lot of Milad Tower in Tehran today, after Iran tried its first drive-in movie theater since after the victory of the Islamic revolution by screening Ebrahim Hatamikia's latest movie "Exodus" on May 1.

The film will be screened today following strict health regulations supervised by the Coronavirus Combat and Prevention Headquarters in Tehran.

"Dance with Me" is about Jahangir who invites his friends to his birthday party at his home. Everybody knows he is sick and dying, but the situation makes his friends think about their own lives at the party.

The decision to screen films in drive-in movie theaters was made after the shutdown of movie theaters during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran.

The film brought the award for

best director for Sehat at the 37th Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran during February 2019.

It was also an entry to the competition section of the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, which took place in the Estonian city in November.

Hatamikia "Exodus" received a warm welcome in Iran's first post-revolution drive-in theater during its one-week screenings.

Starring Faramarz Gharibian and Pantea Panhiha, "Exodus" is about a group of cotton farmers who leave their farms to protest a local official's unfulfilled promises at the president's office in the capital.

The story of the film is set in a nowhere-land, where a peasant protest takes place against the local authority that symbolically resembles President Hassan Rouhani's government.

The movie had its Iranian premiere during the 38th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran in February.

Play to recount story on legendary Iranian wrestler Gholamreza Takhti



Legendary Iranian Olympic gold-medalist wrestler Gholamreza Takhti.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian actress and director Tinu Salehi plans to stage a story about the legendary Iranian Olympic gold-medalist wrestler Gholamreza Takhti in Tehran.

Takhti was found dead in a hotel room in Tehran in 1968 and the Persian dailies Kayhan and Ettelaat reported that he had committed suicide on account of his unhappy domestic life. However, a large group of people also believed that he was killed by the SAVAK intelligence services due to his disloyalty to the Shah's regime.

"It's not a biographical play," Salehi told the Persian service of MNA on Sunday and added, "The whole story of the play is set in the hotel from the morning to night until he committed suicide. During this time, he reviews in his mind the people who influenced his life."

Salehi gave no details about her cast

and the exact date for the performance.

Takhti whose manly virtue and social activities during the 1960s made him a national hero has been the subject of several films and theaters after his death.

The latest was "Gholamreza Takhti" directed by Bahrām Tavakkoli in 2019. It premiered during the 37th edition of the Fajr Film Festival.

Director Ali Hatami, known as the Hafez of Iranian cinema due to the native and poetic ambiance of his movies, was the first director who chose Takhti's life story to turn into a film during the 1980s.

He began shooting the film titled "World Champion Takhti", but it remained unfinished due to Hatami's death in 1996.

Director Behruz Afkhami was then selected to complete the film, which critics called a good thriller, but it failed to solve the mystery of Takhti's death.

Jhumpa Lahiri's Italian novel "Dove mi trovo" published in Persian

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — American d e s k author Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel in Italian "Dove mi trovo" ("Where I Am") has recently been published by Tehran-based publisher Ketab Tadaei.

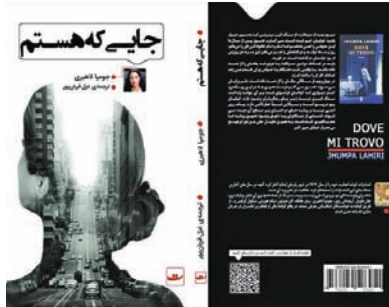
Ghazal Qorbanpur is the translator of the book which was originally published in 2019.

"Dove mi trovo" tells the story of a woman who turns her solitude into a profession. A woman who can't tighten permanent bonds with any other person, only with the places in which she spends her everyday life: the bridges, the squares, the bars, the shops, the pool she often goes to and the stations that sometimes take her a little further away. The city is not just the background where her life takes place, but a living interlocutor, a keeper of all of her memories.

Lahiri is known for her short stories, novels and essays in English, and, more recently, in Italian.

Her debut collection of short-stories "Interpreter of Maladies" in 1999 won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the PEN/Hemingway Award, and her first novel, "The Namesake" in 2003, was adapted into the popular film of the same name.

Her second story collection "Unaccustomed Earth" in 2008 won



Front cover of the Persian version of Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel in Italian "Dove mi trovo".

the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, while her second novel, "The Lowland" in 2013, was a finalist for both the Man Booker Prize and the National Book Award for Fiction.

In these works, Lahiri explored the Indian-immigrant experience in America. In 2011, Lahiri moved to Rome, Italy and has since then published two books of essays, and in 2019. She also compiled, edited and translated the Penguin Book of "Italian Short Stories", which consists of 40 Italian short stories written by 40 different Italian writers.

She has also translated some of her own writings and those of other authors from Italian into English.

Jojo Moyes' "The Giver of Stars" published in Persian

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — The d e s k Persian translation of "The Giver of Stars" by British novelist Jojo Moyes has recently been published by Amut Publications in Tehran.

The book has been translated into Persian by Maryam Meftahi.

From the author of "Me Before You", set in Depression-era America, "The Giver of Stars" is a breathtaking story of five extraordinary women and their remarkable journey through the mountains of Kentucky and beyond.

Based on a true story rooted in America's past, "The Giver of Stars" is unparalleled in its scope and epic in its storytelling.

Funny, heartbreaking and enthralling, it is destined to become a modern classic: a richly rewarding novel of women's friendship, of true love and of what happens when we reach beyond our grasp for the great beyond.

In "The Giver of Stars", Alice Wright marries handsome American Bennett Van Cleve hoping to escape her stifling life in England. But small-town Kentucky quickly proves equally claustrophobic, especially living alongside her overbearing father-in-law.

So when a call goes out for a team of women to deliver books as part of Eleanor Roosevelt's new traveling library, Alice signs on enthusiastically.

The leader, and soon Alice's greatest



Front cover of the Persian translation of Jojo Moyes' story "The Giver of Stars".

ally, is Margery, a smart-talking, self-sufficient woman who's never asked a man's permission for anything. They will be joined by three other singular women who become known as the Packhorse Librarians of Kentucky.

What happens to them and to the men they love becomes an unforgettable drama of loyalty, justice, humanity and passion.

These heroic women refuse to be cowed by men or by convention. And although they face all kinds of dangers in a landscape that is at times breathtakingly beautiful and at others brutal, they remain committed to their job: bringing books to people who have never had any, arming them with facts that will change their lives.