



Iron Age relics unveiled in Zanzibar **8**



Protests in UAE turned violent **10**



Wilmots cheated on Iran football federation: Taj **11**



Tehran Symphony Orchestra releases video of "Ode to Joy" **12**

No successful cyberattack on port facility

See page 2

U.S. must end illegal occupation of Syria, Iran says

TEHRAN — Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, says the United States must end its illegal occupation of Syria and stop shielding the terrorists under the guise of fighting terrorism. "Sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria must be fully respected by all, and accordingly, all foreign forces whose presence is not permitted by the Syrian government must

leave the Syrian territory," Takht-Ravanchi said on Monday, according to IRNA. He made the remarks in an address to a virtual meeting of the UN Security Council, called "Middle East: Syria – Political". The following is the transcript of his speech: I reiterate our longstanding position that the Syrian crisis must be settled through political means. **→3**

Iran, Venezuela challenging U.S. energy dominance; who is violating intl. law?

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — It has been few weeks since the rumors began spreading that Iran intended to ship several fuel consignments to Caracas to help alleviate Venezuela's severe fuel problems. The rumors got closer to reality when last week, news agencies around the world reported that five tankers

carrying Iranian fuel have set sail for Venezuela. Angry with Iran's bold act of defiance, Washington is reportedly considering military measures in response to Iran's fuel shipment to Caracas and unconfirmed reports suggest that the U.S. intends to deploy its navy to the Caribbean. **→4**

Alireza Qorbani, world musicians release Sadi-inspired music video in pandemic

TEHRAN — A music video inspired by Persian poet Sadi's famous poem "The Sons of Adam Are Limbs of Each Other" has been released with the voice of Iranian vocalist Alireza Qorbani in collaboration with several Italian singers and overseas musicians during the pandemic. The music video has been released to promote the message of peace and friendship, the Italian theater and cin-

ema actress Pamela Villosi has said in an introduction to the music video. Composed and arranged by Iranian musician Pejman Tadayon, the project was initiated by the Biondo Theatre in the Italian city of Palermo, and was recorded on cellphones at home during the pandemic. Italian singers Tony Bungaro and Barbara Eramo have collaborated with Qorbani in this project. **→12**



ARTICLE

Masoud Hossein
Head of the Sport Desk of the TehranTimes

Football brings back happiness

Football competitions are going to restart amid concerns over many worrying issues in the world and it can be a turning point for the people to taste happiness and excitement once again. Football and all sports activities were halted due the outbreak of Covid-19 but the leagues gradually start reopening. K-League, South Korea's top men's professional football division, was the first to resume the league behind closed the doors and Bundesliga also restarted the matches at the empty stadium.

According to the strict health protocol, only players, staff, team officials, broadcasters and security personnel are allowed to be inside the stadium and it works anywhere.

Goal celebration and handshakes are banned and there will be no team photos ahead of the match. There will be no child mascots around the field as well.

It means the fans can be happy to watch football since the sport is part of their lives and has returned to their homes.

Iranian fans, without a shadow of doubt, are different fans. They make tent outside the stadium a night before the match and dedicate themselves to football. The resumption can bring them joy.

You can take a look at Mohammadreza Fahimi, the world's most loyal fan.

The Iranian football crazy has been hospitalized for 18 years after suffering a spinal cord injury on the way back to his home from a football match in Sari, northern of Iran. The photographers have snapped photos of Mohammadreza laying down on a bed to watch the game.

Now, the Iran Football League Organization has announced that the football competitions will resume on June 18 and it has brought back the fans happiness. However, some Iranian clubs make excuse to finish the campaign because of their interests but the government has decided to resume the nine-game tournament.

Football can be a pleasure in the most difficult days as millions of fans watched the Bundesliga matches on the weekend.

Coronavirus is expected to remain with us for a long time and we must deal with the reality of the noble virus but football can be helpful these days.

Iran provides social insurance for 100,000 vulnerable refugees

TEHRAN — Some 100,000 vulnerable refugees residing in Iran are covered by social insurance in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21), Davood Hajghasem Ali, an official with Health Insurance Organization has said. Regarding the provision of services to vulnerable citizens over the last year, he said "With the agreement signed between the Health Insurance Organization and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Iran in March, about 100,000 vulnerable citizens were covered by insurance services."

Referring to the conditions for non-vulnerable refugees to use health insurance services, he noted that for non-vulnerable nationals, as in previous years, in the form of a list received from the Ministry of the Interior, are covered by insurance with premiums paid by the head of the household.

The insurance premiums for vulnerable cit-

izens are paid by the High Commissioner for Refugees in Iran, of whom 2,000 are suffering from rare diseases, he stated, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

He added that the coverage of vulnerable citizens has increased by 8,000 compared to last year.

Medicine coverage and insurance services of foreign nationals in the form of a commission contract are similar to that of Iranian insured persons with the same deductibles, he explained.

For coronavirus patients, foreign nationals like Iranians use insurance services, he further concluded.

Iran spends about 20 trillion rials (nearly \$477 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) every year on the education of foreign national students residing in the country, head of the international affairs department of the Ministry of Education Gholamreza Karimi said in March. **→9**

Saudi Arabia is the World's largest terrorism exporter: Ilhan Omar

TEHRAN — Ilhan Omar, who is serving as the U.S. Representative for Minnesota's 5th congressional district, reacted to the investigation results of the FBI related to the shooting at the Pensacola military base in the state of Florida on his Twitter page and wrote: Saudi Arabia sends a terrorist to train with our military, yet most of our leaders are whitewashing Saudi ties to another attack on America. If this was Iran we would be calling for accountability. Why can't we hold the biggest exporter of terrorism in the world accountable?

The U.S. Justice Department and FBI announced Monday that the Saudi military trainee who killed three U.S. sailors and wounded several others in a terror attack last year on a military base in Pensacola, Florida, was a longtime associate of al Qaeda who had communicated with operatives from the group as recently as the night before the shooting.

U.S. investigators uncovered the al Qaeda connection after the FBI broke through the encryption protecting the Saudi attacker's iPhones and have been able to use the information on the devices to carry out a recent counterterrorism operation in Yemen, Attorney General William Barr and FBI Director Christopher Wray said at a news conference.

"The evidence we've been able to develop from the killer's devices shows that the Pensacola attack was actually the brutal culmination of years of planning and preparation by a longtime AQAP associate," Wray said, referring to al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, one of the deadliest branches of the terror group.

Mohammed Alshamrani, a member of the Royal Saudi Air Force who had been training at Naval Air Station Pensacola, was killed by law enforcement during the attack. **→10**

Railway fleet receives 88 new domestically-made wagons, locomotives

TEHRAN — Iranian railway fleet received 88 new domestically-made locomotives and wagons in a ceremony attended by Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami and Head of Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (known as RAI) Saeed Rasouli on Tuesday, IRNA reported.

The current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20) is named the year of "Surge in Production" by Leader of Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei, and since the year start, the national

railway fleet has received new domestically-made locomotives and wagons in two stages.

The first time, which was on April 28, the fleet received 56 new domestically-made locomotives and wagons.

As reported by the portal of Transport Ministry, over 1.25 trillion rials (about \$29.7 million) was invested by six domestic companies for the manufacturing of the mentioned wagons and locomotives.

According to Eslami, all the locomotives

and wagons added to the country's railway fleet, have been made by domestic companies during the first month of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-April 19), to register a 143-percent rise compared to the same period last year.

In the mentioned month, some 50 freight wagons, two passenger wagons, and two locomotives were produced by four domestic companies and two locomotives entered the country's rail fleet after complete reconstruction. **→4**

Double amputee Salarvand shows a unique determination

TEHRAN — Sajad Salarvand, 38, is showing his determination by climbing the mountains without legs.

Both of Sajad's feet had been amputated four years ago after a car accident.

Being born and raised in the city of Dorud in Lorestan Province, Salarvand got interested in mountaineering as a teenager due to the close proximity to the slopes of Oshtrankuh, the mountain that is located about 15 kilometers south of Dorud.

The Iranian mountaineer sees his feet as a God-given gift that was taken away by God as well. **→11**



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TEHRANTIMES

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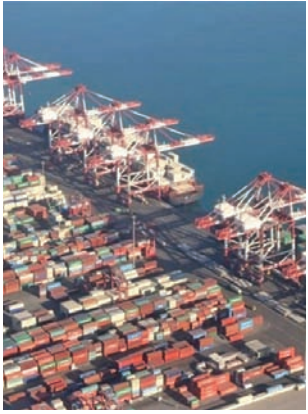
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No successful cyberattack on Shahid Rajaei port facility

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — An official has dismissed claims of a successful cyberattack on the Shahid Rajaei port facility.



"In the past week, there had been some disruption in computer systems of the port which could be because of a cyberattack," Tasnim news agency quoted the official at the port facility as saying.

Related officials at the Shahid Rajaei port facility has said that given the readiness of the civil defense units and timely and effective confrontation against the cyberattack, there has been no disruption in operations of the port facilities, Tasnim reported.

The Washington Post claimed in a report published on Monday

that shipping traffic at Iran's bustling Shahid Rajaei port terminal came to an abrupt and inexplicable halt due to a substantial cyberattack that the U.S. and foreign government officials say appears to have originated from Israel.

'Iran's advisory presence in Syria to continue'

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — An informed military source has said that Iran's advisory presence in Syria will continue.

Iran's advisory presence in Syria has not changed, the source told Nour News on Tuesday.

"We will stay in Syria as long as the Syrian government needs Iran's advisory help," the source said.

Israel's outgoing defense minister claimed on Monday that Iran has begun withdrawing its forces from Syria.

According to Reuters, he made the claim without offering any evidence to support his assertion.

The Syrian government has described the presence of Iranian military advisors in the conflict-plagued Arab country as legitimate and lawful.

Health minister censures 'inhumane' U.S. sanctions on Iranians amid pandemic

"Any measure or policy, which would prevent cooperation among governments in the health sector, is irresponsible and inhumane," Saeed Namaki says

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran's health minister says unilateral sanctions imposed on the country by the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump are inhumane and cause suffering and pain for people, Press TV reported.

Addressing the 73rd World Health Assembly through video-conference on Monday, Saeed Namaki said, "Any measure or policy, which would prevent cooperation among governments in the health sector, is irresponsible and inhumane."

"There is no doubt that unilateral sanctions constitute an obstacle and are an inhumane measure, which brings about suffering and pain [for people]," the Iranian minister said, adding, "The United States must be held to account for the severe sanctions that have put the lives of Iranian people in jeopardy."

He hailed the leading role of the World Health Organization (WHO) in supporting the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic and emphasized that the body deserves to be supported, not punished and criticized by certain countries.

Trump has claimed that the WHO had failed to disclose or respond to "credible" information in December that suggested the virus could be spread through human-to-human transmission.

He also accused the agency of siding with China and reliance on Chinese data, blaming it for "all sorts of false information about transmission and mortality" that was circulated amid initial reports. Speaking in a news briefing in Washington on April 15, the U.S. president halted funding to the WHO, accusing the international body of mishandling the deadly flu-like pathogen.

"Today I'm instructing my administration to halt funding of the World Health Organization while a review is conducted to assess the World Health Organization's role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus," Trump said.

Republican U.S. lawmakers then threw their weight behind Trump's decision to halt the WHO's funding, insisting that unless its director general resigns Washington should not resume payments to the international body.

Addressing the WHO's main annual meeting on Monday, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar slammed the UN health agency's "failure" to obtain and provide vital information on COVID-19 that could have reined in the pandemic and saved many lives.

"We must be frank about one of the primary reasons this outbreak spun out of control: there was a failure by this organization to obtain the information that the world needed, and that failure cost many lives," Azar said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian minister stressed the importance of boosting global solidarity and cooperation to contain the coronavirus pandemic, saying it is necessary that all countries have access to medicines and vaccine at an appropriate time and price.

He added that Iran has succeeded in decreasing the coronavirus death toll due to its extensive measures in the public health sector based on the approach that calls for the involvement of "the whole government and the whole society."

The Iranian minister noted that some 78 million people have been screened for the coronavirus in the country in the first phase with the help of the strong infrastructure of Iran's primary health care (PHC) system while over 22 million high-risk people have also been screened so far in the second phase.

Iran increased its laboratory capacities in outpatient clinics with the main focus being on screening the patients, social distancing, and timely treatment, and in doing this, the country gradually reopened businesses in order to prevent more harm to the country's economy, he explained.

Iran's Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said on Monday that 2,294 new infections were confirmed in the past 24 hours, raising the total to 122,492.

Jahanpour added that 1,760 of the new cases were outpatients and people who had been in close contact with those infected.

More than 95,600 of those hospitalized with the virus had recovered and been discharged.

Unilateralism is a lethal poison for intl. community: Kharrazi

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Kamal Kharrazi, chairman of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, said on Tuesday that unilateralism is a "lethal poison" for international community, noting the necessity of forming an "international democracy".

"Unilateralism is a lethal poison for international community which adds to complications of the world," Kharrazi said in an online meeting of Leaders for Peace Foundation.

The veteran politician noted that the current form of multilateralism in the world is not effective, suggesting that the international community must form an "international democracy".

"Inefficiency of the current multilateralism is rooted in excessive demands and hegemonic inclinations of the United States' administration which is trying to impose its unilateral approach on others," he added.

Kharrazi also said that it is essential to form a "new system of multilateralism" and a "new international solidarity" which make the voice of all nations heard.

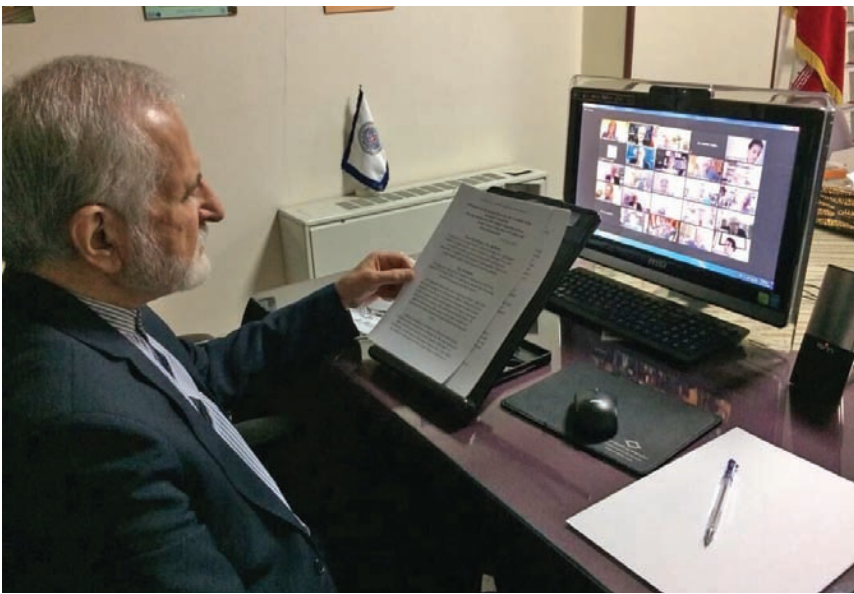
■ **'Fighting coronavirus contingent upon intl. cooperation'**

Kharrazi also said that an effective fight against the coronavirus is contingent upon cooperation and solidarity at international level.

"Secretary General of the United Nations [Antonio Guterres] and many countries have highlighted the necessity of ending clashes and removing sanctions against countries such as Iran which has faced restrictions in providing financial source for purchasing medicine and medical equipment," stated Kharrazi who was Iran's foreign minister from 1997-2005.

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

He said sanctions are heightening the health risks for millions of people and



weakening the global effort to contain the spread of the new coronavirus, Foreign Policy reported.

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

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

■ **'It is essential to prevent political interference in intl. bodies'**

Kharrazi also said that it is essential to prevent political interference in international bodies such as the World Health Organization and International Monetary Fund.

"When the international bodies are influenced by big powers, the countries lose their trust on these bodies. For example, the International Monetary Fund has not responded to Iran's request for loan to fight

the coronavirus under the pressure of the United States," he lamented.

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

Iran's central bank wrote in March to the IMF requesting \$5bn from its Rapid Financing Initiative, an emergency program that gives loans to countries facing sudden shocks such as natural disasters.

Earlier in April, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing sources from the White House, that the United States was seeking to prevent the IMF from providing loan to Iran.

Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati, in a post on his Instagram page on April 9, wrote, "We expect the IMF to immediately respond to the request of Iran which itself is a founding member of the fund."

Hemmati has urged the IMF to put pol-

U.S. unlikely to succeed in extending Iran arms embargo, says Russian ambassador

TEHRAN (TASS) — The United States is unlikely to succeed in its attempts to extend a UN arms embargo on Iran, Russian Ambassador to Tehran Levan Dzagharyan said in an interview with TASS, dedicated to the 100th anniversary of relations between Russia and Iran.

"The arms embargo expires on October 18, 2020. I think that the Americans will hardly succeed in their clumsy attempts to prevent this from happening," the am-

bassador pointed out.

Dzagharyan added that "the U.S. blatantly violated international law and failed to observe its own obligations, and is now seeking to spur other countries to follow suit." According to the envoy, "Russia doesn't see any trouble in lifting the embargo and continuing defense cooperation with Iran. If Iran submits specific requests, they will be carefully studied in accordance with international norms," Dzagharyan emphasized.

The U.S. mission to the United Nations said in a statement on May 13 that "the United States will work tirelessly with a coalition of concerned nations to ensure the embargo is extended." Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Vasily Nebenzya said that the U.S. could not demand an extension of the arms embargo because it had withdrawn from the Iran nuclear deal. He pointed out that there was no reason to prolong the embargo.



Zarif's assistant holds phone talks with Ansarullah chief negotiator Abdulsalam

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Ali Asghar Khaji, the assistant to Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif for political affairs, held a phone conversation with Mohammed Abdulsalam, the spokesman for Yemen's Ansarullah and chief negotiator of the National Salvation Government, discussing developments in the war-ravaged Yemen.

Khaji and Abdulsalam discussed the latest developments in Yemen and also necessity of sending humanitarian aid to the country in the coronavirus pandemic.

In a phone conversation with Abdulsalam on May 9, Khaji suggested that dialogue, which will be based on an end to the Yemeni war and blockade, is the only solution to the crisis.

On the same date, Abdulsalam brief Khaji on the ongoing political developments in his country.

The spokesman also praised Iran's humanitarian, political and spiritual supports for the Yemenis.

Zarif and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres held a phone conversation on April 26 discussing the necessity to send humanitarian aid to the war-stricken Yemen, especially as the country is

being hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

For this purpose, the two top officials highlighted, it is needed to open the Yemeni borders and also protect security of borders and ports.

Guterres also welcomed Iran's efforts for a truce in Yemen and pushing for start of political talks between the warring sides in the country.

In another telephone conversation on April 12, Zarif and Guterres discussed regional developments, especially in Yemen.

Zarif expressed Iran's support for dialogue to settle regional issues, noting that the Yemen crisis does not have a military solution.

He added that a consistent ceasefire can be a good start for a political resolution of the ongoing conflict in the country.

In April 2015, Zarif submitted a letter to Ban Ki-moon, then UN secretary general, outlining Iran's four-point peace plan for Yemen.

The plan calls for an immediate ceasefire and end to all foreign military attacks, humanitarian assistance, a resumption of broad national dialogue and establishment of an inclusive national unity

World 'not tolerating bullying', Shamkhani says of U.S. move to extend arms embargo on Iran

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** - Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said on Tuesday that the United States' efforts to extend arms embargo on Iran are fruitless as other countries are opposed to it, adding that the "world is not tolerating bullying".

"Fruitless efforts of the #USA to continue the #IranWeaponSanction have provoked a strong reaction from Russia, China & the confusion of US's allies. The world is not tolerating bullying, based on free & resilient nations. The end of this path is collapse of unilateralism," he tweeted.

The United States has stepped up calls for the extension of a UN arms embargo on Iran since April. In his with this move, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is preparing an argument that the U.S. remains a participant in the Iran nuclear accord as the U.S. name is mentioned in the UN Security Council endorsing the nuclear deal.

This is while President Trump officially proclaimed the U.S. withdraw from the nuclear deal in May 2018.

The Trump administration has threatened

that it may seek to trigger a snapback of all sanctions on Iran if its attempts to extend the arms embargo fail.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on May 5 that Pompeo pretends UNSCR 2231 is independent of the JCPOA, noting that the JCPOA is "PART of 2231". Zarif advised Pompeo to read UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that has endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Prior to this tweet, Zarif called on Pompeo to "stop dreaming".

Iran has threatened that it may suspend its membership to the NPT if the UN sanctions are returned.

"It is definitely a legal charade to claim any right out of the U.S. name in a UNSC resolution," Kourosh Ahmadi tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview earlier this month.

China has said the United States has "no right" to extend arms embargo on Iran "let alone to trigger" a return of all UN sanctions on Tehran.

"It has no right to extend an arms embargo on Iran, let alone to trigger snapback," China's

UN mission wrote in a tweet on Thursday.

"Maintaining [the] Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is the only right way moving forward," it added.

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 violated it by quitting the JCPOA, the official name for the nuclear pact.

"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 this situation, it is cynical to push for the activation of the snapback mechanism [return of sanctions], which is laid down in this resolution," Ryabkov said.

"Washington will not have an easy road

itics aside and do its professional duties in regard to Iran's requests for financial aid during crises, especially in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I would like to repeat that all UN organizations say the IMF or WHO, should stay away from politics and deliver on their institutional mandates," Hemmati said in an interview with Bloomberg published on April 19.

Government spokesperson Ali Rabiei said on April 13 that the United States has no right to prevent the IMF from giving a loan to Iran.

"From the legal point of view, the United States is not in the position to obstruct the legal performance of institutions and international organizations," he said in a press conference.

Rabiei added, "The United States must understand that the international institutions are not its property."

European Union foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell on April 24 criticized the U.S. for blocking Iran's request for a loan from the IMF.

"I regret that ... the United States are opposing the International Monetary Fund to take this decision," Borrell said during a virtual press conference at the end of a video meeting of EU foreign affairs ministers, Politico reported.

"From the humanitarian point of view, this decision, this request should have been accepted."

In an article titled, "U.S. and Iran Need a Coronavirus Peace Plan" published by Bloomberg on Thursday, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein wrote, "Supporting Iran's request for \$5 billion in emergency funds from the International Monetary Fund, with oversight mechanisms within or similar to the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement, to facilitate the flow of much-needed goods to the Iranian people while safeguarding against the regime's diversion of funds for malign purposes."

Iran after peaceful coexistence with neighbors: envoy

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Tehran's Ambassador to Moscow, Kazem Jalali, says Iran is interested in maintaining peaceful coexistence with its neighbors and it is not after expansionism.

"We are not engaging in expansionism," Mehr quoted Jalali as saying on Monday. "We want to have good and peaceful relations with all our neighbors."

He made the remarks during an online conference, which was held to mark International Quds Day.

The ambassador said the U.S. and Israel are arousing anti-Iran sentiments and are trying to get the Iranian issue to the foreground in West Asia, while the significance of the Palestinian-Israeli crisis is knowingly downplayed by these countries.

"Regretfully, we see that in the present-day world, the Americans, the Israeli regime, as well as certain Arab countries, are making efforts to remove the Palestinian issue from the primary agenda of the Muslim world, making it



a marginal issue."

"However, the Islamic Republic of

Iran believes that the Palestinian issue is of priority for the Islamic world," the

ambassador explained.

Jalali noted that Iran sees it as its duty to assist the Palestinian people who are seeking support to settle the conflict with the Zionist regime of Israel.

The ambassador also termed the "deal of the century" suggested by U.S. President Donald Trump as "absolutely inhumane". 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.

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.

This year's International Quds Day falls on May 22.

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.

U.S. must end illegal occupation of Syria, Iran says

1→ In this context, we extend our support to the work of the Constitutional Committee, as has been expressed by the Astana Format meetings on numerous occasions.

While the Committee should be supported to do its work, as a matter of principle, any and all forms of external pressure must be avoided by all, as stipulated in its rules of procedure.

At the same time, any possible assistance to the Committee, even by the United Nations, must be extended only at the request of the Committee itself in accordance with its ROP.

As a principled position, which also has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the Astana Format Summits, we continue to reject any separatist agendas as well as any and all attempts to create new realities on the ground, including through illegitimate self-rule initiatives.

Sovereignty, political independence, unity and ter-



ritorial integrity of Syria must be fully respected by all, and accordingly, all foreign forces whose presence is not permitted by the Syrian government must leave the Syrian territory. In this regard, the living example is the

occupation of certain parts of Syria by the U.S. forces who continue to support and shield terrorist groups under the mask of combatting terrorism.

Similarly, Israel's aggressions against Syria are in gross violation of international law and the UN Charter, in the face of which, the Syrian government has a sovereign right to decide how and when to exercise its inherent right to individual or collective self-defense. Such aggressions must come to an end.

We also stress that the occupation of the Syrian Occupied Golan by Israel is illegal, and the recognition by the U.S. of its annexation to Israel is null and void. Condemning such unlawful irresponsible act, we stress that Golan is and will remain a part and parcel of the Syrian territory.

Finally, the right to determine the future of Syria belongs exclusively to Syrians and the international community should assist them to realize this right.

Iran, Russia, China, and Pakistan hold talks on Afghanistan



POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Diplomats from Iran, Russia, China, and Pakistan discussed the situation in Afghanistan in an online conference on Monday.

In the four-party video conference, the Iranian, Pakistani, Chinese and Russian special representatives for Afghanistan talked about the current condition and the process of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

The four-way talks took place one day after President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah signed a power-sharing agreement. Under the agreement, Abdullah will lead council for peace talks and members of his team will be included in the cabinet.

They issued a joint communiqué reflecting the results of the negotiations.

Following is the full text of the communiqué published by Tasnim:

The special representatives of the four countries for Afghanistan affairs:

1. Affirm their respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial unity of Afghanistan and for the decision of that country's people on determining the course of the future developments;

2. Welcome the agreement between the leaders of the two main political factions and hope that the major upheaval would expedite the launch of intra-Afghan negotiations;

3. Support the process of peace and reconciliation under the ownership and guidance of Afghanistan, and believe that inclusive intra-Afghan negotiations will be the only way for national reconciliation and an immediate end to the prolonged disputes;

4. Call on all ethnic groups and parties in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, to seize the opportunities to act to set the stage for the immediate start of intra-Afghan negotiations;

5. Support Afghanistan in achieving comprehensive and sustainable peace in the near future (reservation taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran: with respect to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the basic rights of women and the ethnic and religious groups);

6. Are closely monitoring the conse-

quences of the developments that result in the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, and also call on the foreign forces to withdraw in an orderly and responsible manner, in such a way that the situation in Afghanistan would experience a trouble-free transition;

7. Support the release of the prisoners and captives that are held by all warring sides;

8. Hope that the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2513 (2020) could be implemented and observed;

9. Support the United Nations Secretary-General's initiative for a global ceasefire, and call for the declaration of an inclusive ceasefire at the same time across Afghanistan on the basis of an agreement among the parties engaged in the conflict;

10. Express concern about the serious threat of terrorism prevailing in Afghanistan, encourage all parties in Afghanistan to adopt serious measures against al-Qaeda, ISIS, the East Turkestan movement, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, and the other terrorist organizations that run operations against the regional countries, and to fully eradicate the production and trafficking of opiates in that country;

11. Reaffirm support for Afghanistan in tackling the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak, and welcome the continuation of humanitarian aids from the international community for Afghanistan;

12. Emphasize that the process of peace and reconciliation is expected to pave the way for the return and resettlement of the Afghan refugees, and call on the international community to support a scheduled return along with respect and keeping the dignity of Afghan refugees;

13. Agree to maintain their contacts on the issue of Afghanistan and to cooperate in advancing peace, national reconciliation and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

The communiqué was issued on May 18, 2020, in Tehran, Islamabad, Beijing and Moscow in the Persian, English, Chinese and Russian languages, according to the Iranian Foreign Ministry's website.

Iran will give crushing response to any aggressor: Defense Minister



TEHRAN (Press TV) — Iran's Defense Minister says the Islamic Republic will give a crushing answer to any aggressor when it comes to defending its national security.

Speaking in a meeting with the Iranian Parliament's Commission on National Security and Foreign Policy on Monday, Brigadier General Amir Hatami made a reference to Iran's missile attack on Ain al-Assad military base in Iraq, which houses U.S. forces, after the American military assassinated Iran's top general, Qassem Soleimani, and his companions earlier this year.

Lieutenant General Soleimani, who headed the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' Quds Force, was martyred alongside fellow Iraqi commander, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), known as Hashed al-Sha'abi in Arabic, and some others in a terrorist drone strike that targeted their vehicle at the Baghdad International Airport on January 3.

Both commanders were admired by Muslim nations for eliminating the U.S.-sponsored Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

Soon after General Soleimani's assassination, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said Washington was to face a "harsh revenge" for the atrocity.

On January 8, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) unleashed volleys of ballistic missiles at the airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar Province. The Leader later described the retaliatory strikes as "only a slap."

Noting that Iran's attack shattered the United States' false pretense of grandeur in the region and the world, the Iranian Defense Minister said, "Through this firmness of resolve in acting timely against the common front of the [global] arrogance and hegemonic system, Iran

proved that it will give rapid, categorical and crushing response to any aggressor in defense of its national interests and security."

Pointing to Iran's defense achievements in the field of ground, air, naval, electronic and aerospace warfare, and especially the missile achievements that have always been a thorn in the side of its enemies, Hatami said, "The Defense Ministry achieved major growth in this field in terms of quality and quantity during the first two years of this administration."

Expressing the significant progress Iran has made in the field of air defense, the minister pointed to the unveiling and operationalisation of various short, medium and long-range air defense systems — Bavar-373 and Khordad-15 — and said, "Relying on these completely indigenous achievements, we have managed to secure the Iranian sky more than ever before."

Hatami went on to say that the enmity of the hegemonic system has always been obvious to us, and the Armed Forces, relying on indigenous know-how, have during the four decades of the glorious Islamic Revolution make the most of their capacities and been able to turn threats into opportunities.

Over the past days, the U.S. administration has ramped up its anti-Iran rhetoric and threatened to seize or target Iran's fuel-carrying vessels crossing the Caribbean to the sanctions-hit Venezuela.

The U.S. Navy is said to have 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.

Iran has vowed a crushing response to any acts of aggression and adventurism against its oil tankers on the part of the administration in Washington.

Tehran-Moscow-Damascus strategic co-op to continue untouched

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian Parliament speaker, has said Tehran, Moscow and Damascus will continue their strategic cooperation.

Amir Abdollahian made the remarks in a meeting with Syrian Ambassador to Iran Adnan Hassan Mahmoud in Tehran on Monday.



During the meeting, the advisor hinted at the age-old and longstanding history of relations between Iran and Syria.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic have always enjoyed excellent and strategic ties and Iran's support for Syria will continue until the complete defeat of terrorism in this Arab country," he said, Mehr reported.

Tehran, Moscow and Damascus will continue their strategic cooperation, he said, adding, "Countering the cruel economic sanctions of enemies is of the provisions of serious cooperation between these three countries."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Amir Abdollahian pointed to the significance of parliamentary cooperation in the expansion of relations between the two countries and said, "Expansion of parliamentary ties plays an influential role in the development of joint cooperation between the two countries and parliamentary diplomacy of the two countries will help realization of peace and security in the region effectively."

For his part, the Syrian ambassador said relations between the two countries are at a strategic level and that the Syrian government and people are always grateful for the effective support of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran is a key ally of Syria. The Islamic Republic has been providing military advisory to Damascus in its anti-terror campaign.

Iranian officials have made it clear that Tehran would stand by Syria in the reconstruction projects of the war-stricken country.

Recently, rumors circulated around the world 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).

In response, Amir Abdollahian described the rumors as a "big lie" pushed by the U.S.-Israeli media outlets.

"Dr #BasharAssad is the legitimate president of Flag of Syria & great leader of fighting Takfiri terrorism in Arab World," he 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."

Russian Ambassador to Tehran Levon 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.

Iranian husband, wife sentenced to death for corruption

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Iranian Judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili announced on Tuesday that two of the defendants in corruption cases were sentenced to death.

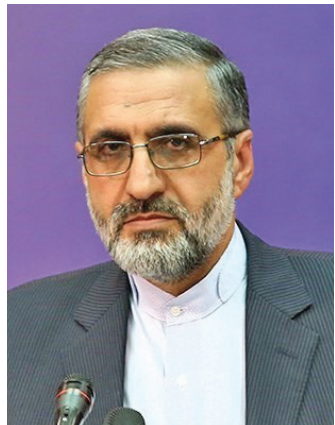
The defendants, a husband and a wife, were involved in manipulating the foreign exchange and gold markets and hoarding cars from Saipa Company.

"In a case that had more than 50 defendants, more than 40 people were indicted and 34 defendants were convicted in the court," Esmaili said during a press conference.

"In this case, part of which was disruption of the foreign exchange market and another part was disruption of the auto industry and gold coin market; Vahid Behzadi, the son of Aboutalebi, and his wife Najva Lashidaee were sentenced to death for participating in disruption of the economic system through registering fake orders and an illegal exchange shop, and pre-purchasing more than 6,700 vehicles from Saipa Company and participating in money laundering amounting to 32,000 billion [rials]," he said.

The spokesman added that 24,000 Azadi gold coins and 100 kilograms of gold were found in their house.

Esmaili also said former CEO of Saipa Mehdi Jamali was sentenced to seven years in prison; former deputy director of Saipa's marketing Reza Taghizadeh to 15 years in prison; MP Mohammad Azizi to 61 months in prison; Fereydoon Ahmadi to 61 months in prison; and former head of Saipa's security Hossein Hashroodi to 61 months in prison.



Annual wheat production to exceed 14m tons

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's wheat production is expected to exceed 14 million tons in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021), IRNA quoted Esmail Esfandiari-Pour, the advisor to agriculture minister as saying on Monday.

According to Esfandiari-Pour, the wheat harvest has begun in nine hot and dry southern provinces, and the last amount of wheat purchased has exceeded 1.6 million tons.

The official mentioned some of the Agriculture Ministry's programs for improving wheat production in the current year and said implementation of supportive programs like providing seed,



pesticides, expert consultations and technical supervision, as well as damage control programs like weed control have been among the ministry's programs for boosting wheat production this year.

He stated that over six million hectares of land across the country are under wheat cultivation, adding: "one third of these lands are irrigated and the rest are rain-fed."

The official further emphasized the necessity of supporting knowledge-based companies that are working in his area

for introducing new wheat cultivars.

According to the official, the wheat harvest season is approximately 4.5 months in Iran starting in early April up to mid-August.

Based on the agriculture ministry data, Iranian farmers produced nearly 14.5 million tons of wheat in the previous Iranian calendar year, 1.2 million tons more than the figure for its preceding year.

According to Esfandiari-Pour, who is also the head of the government program to buy wheat from farmers, Iran's use of improved seed technology over the past five years has boosted the country's self-sufficiency in wheat by more than 30 percent.

Good precipitation across Iran has also resulted in a prosperous harvest in various agricultural sectors across the country.

Iran's wheat harvest is enough to make the county self-sufficient in the production of this strategic crop for the fifth year in a row, according to the official.

Amir Bayat appointed acting head of IDRO

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's Acting Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade Hossein Modares Khiabani appointed Amir Bayat as the acting head of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO), IRNA reported on Tuesday.

Bayat replaced Mohammad-Baqer Ali, who was the head of the mentioned organization since May 8, 2019.

As reported, Modares Khiabani has called on the acting head to provide serious and effective support for the expansion of the private sector's share in the industry, while making comprehensive planning for financing and completion of semi-finished projects, increasing domestic production, completing production chains and increasing job opportunities in order to realize the motto of "surge in production".



Amir Bayat (left) was selected as the acting head of IDRO on Tuesday, replacing Mohammad-Baqer Ali (middle), the head of IDRO since May 8, 2019.

Amir Bayat, who has a PhD in Industrial Management, was previously the managing director of Lidco and Fidko companies, and also the chairman and member of the board of directors at Iranian aluminum companies, as well as Iran Offshore Company.

Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran was established in 1967 to develop the industry sector and to accelerate the industrialization process of the country.

In recent years and in accordance with the country's privatization policy, IDRO has made great efforts to privatize its affiliated companies.

While carrying on its privatization policies and lessening its role as a holding company, IDRO intends to concentrate on its prime missions and to turn into an industrial development agency. IDRO has focused its activities on the following areas in order to materialize such strategy and to expedite the industrial development of Iran:

- * Promotion of local and foreign investments with minority holdings owned by IDRO (less than 50% of the shares) with particular emphasis on new, Hi-tech and export-oriented industries.

- * Restructuring the existing industries through participation of reputable foreign companies in order to transfer new technologies and to enhance the non-oil exports of Iran.

- * Development of general contracting activities with the participation of the Iranian private sector and credible foreign companies.

- * Rendering consultancy and support services to foreign investors.
- * Privatization of the existing subsidiaries.

Railway fleet receives 88 new domestically-made wagons, locomotives

1 → In late December 2019, Islamic Republic of Iran Railways celebrated the addition of 243 domestically-made wagons and locomotives to the country's fleet.

Valued at 3.4 trillion rials (about \$80.9 million), the mentioned wagons and locomotives were made by three different companies namely, Wagon Pars, Iranian Rail Industries Development Company and Foolad Derakhshan Arak Company.

Back in September 2019, another 213 domestically-made wagons and locomotives had been added to the country's fleet.

Realizing 'Surge in Production' requires macro policy changes: ICCIMA head

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) says in order to develop the domestic production fundamental changes must be made in the government's policies, ICCIMA portal reported.

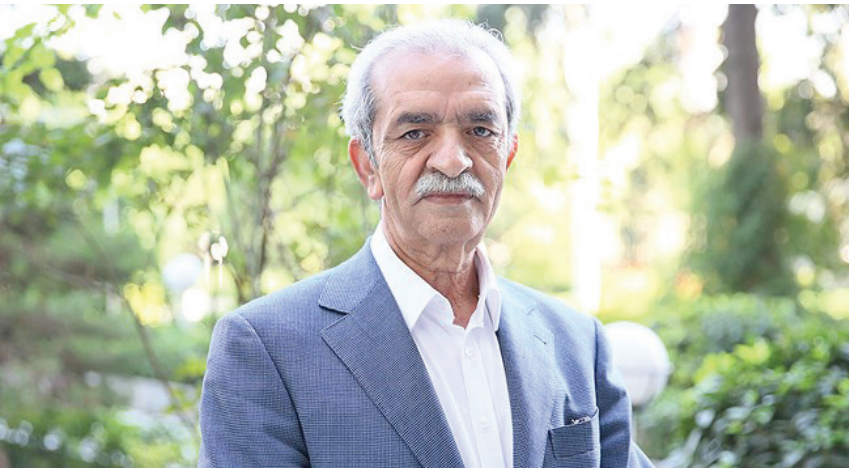
"If fundamental changes do not take place in the country's macro policies, the surge in production will remain as a slogan and we will not be able to realize the production boom," Gholam-Hossein Shafeie said.

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

According to Shafeie, the productive sectors should become more attractive to the investors and profitability of the productive sector must be higher than that of the commercial sector.

"If this does not happen, no matter how hard we try, the resources will go from production to non-productive and commercial sectors," Shafe'i stressed.

Referring to the performance of the productive sectors in combating the coronavirus, the official said: "There are many potentials and capabilities in the country's productive sector, some of which were dis-



played in the battle against the coronavirus."

"There are many countries in the world that are not under the same restrictive sanctions as Iran, but during the pandemic they did not act as well as our country", he underlined.

The ICCIMA head also mentioned the privatization of state-owned companies and noted: "If we are looking to achieve the goals of the Article 44 of the country's constitution, we must focus on handing over the management of such companies

to private sector."

"Ownership changes are happening now, but there is no change in the management. This approach contradicts the main objectives of Article 44. If the management is to remain with the government and only shares transfer, we will not achieve those main goals."

In early March, Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjasand said offering the shares of state-owned companies, which are planned to

be privatized, would be sped up.

Dejjasand had previously said that the government should amend its policies and methods of setting the prices and transferring the shares in the process of privatization.

In Iran, implementation of privatization plan aimed at more productivity, investment making, job creation, promotion of trade balance, more competition in domestic economy, and reducing financial and management burden on the government has been under the spotlight over the past decade.

The law on implementation of the general policies of the Article 44 of Iran's Constitution on privatizing state-owned companies was declared in 2006 in a bid to downsize the government and promote the private sector's role in the national economy.

Later, the government envisioned a large privatization program in the country's Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015) with the aim of privatizing about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year.

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

Iran, Venezuela challenging U.S. energy dominance, who is violating intl. law?

1 → Now, considering the fact that Venezuela and Iran are both independent states and the dollar-free trade exchange between the two nations which is taking place through international free waters is completely legal, the question is under which law the U.S. is trying to interfere with a transaction that is in fact a humanitarian support from Iran to the Venezuelan people who are suffering in a situation that is a direct result of U.S. interference in their country. Who is violating the international law?

In an interview with the Tehran Times, International Energy Expert Mahmood Khaghani answers this question.

■ Venezuela

The Venezuelan oil industry is targeted by severe U.S. sanctions and the country's refineries are mostly shut down due to maintenance problems.

Earlier this month, under the U.S. pressure, the Russian state-owned oil company Rosneft, which accounted for nearly two-thirds of the country's oil and oil products trade and a significant share of crude production, announced that the firm was ending its operations in Venezuela and selling all of its assets in the country.

The Latin American country is currently in desperate need of gasoline and other refined products to keep the country afloat amid the economic collapse resulted from the U.S. sanctions.

According to Khaghani, in recent years, the U.S. has increased its pressures on Venezuela under the claims of democracy and diplomacy, however the U.S. is in fact keeping Venezuela's oil out of the market to shift the oil prices up.

Back in June 2017, Trump announced the U.S.'s energy dominance strategy, Khaghani said, adding the U.S. sanctions on Venezuela, which has one of the biggest oil



reserves in the world, is an indication that Washington is clearly imposing that policy on the global energy market.

■ Iran's support

Iran, for long, has been supporting Venezuela's independence against the U.S. unilateralism and capitalism.

The cooperation between the two countries, both of which are under U.S. sanctions, expanded even more in recent years.

Last month, Iran sent several consignments of refining materials via plane to Venezuela, in order to help the country overhaul its Cardon refinery.

Earlier this month, Argus Media reported that Iran, China and Venezuela have reached a tripartite agreement to carry out a major overhaul program for several Venezuelan refineries, including CIA and Cardon, which together have the potential to refine 75 percent of Venezuela's state oil.

Iran's supportive acts have clearly made the U.S. very angry and Washington is looking for ways of getting back to Iran through empty accusations.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly announced that

Monthly steel products output surpasses 1.5m tons

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Production of steel products in Iran reached 1.534 million tons in the first Iranian calendar month Farvardin (March 20-April 19), IRNA reported citing the data released by the country's steel producers.

The released data show that the country's steel products output has fallen eight percent in the first month of this year from that of the same month in the previous year, which was 1.668 million tons.

As previously announced, Iran's export of steel products in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) rose 27 percent compared to its preceding year.

The country's major steel producers managed to export about 7.33 million tons of the products in the previous year.

According to the data released by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry, in the mentioned period over 20.226 million tons of steel ingots were produced by the country's 10 major companies to register a five-percent rise year on year.

The mentioned companies also produced nearly 13.38 million tons of other steel products last year, six percent more than the preceding year.

As Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) has announced, Iran's annual steel ingot production is planned to increase 3.2 million tons in the current Iranian calendar year, which began on March 20.



The country has defined 16 development projects in the steel sector to boost the output of steel products by 17.3 million tons in five years.

These projects are for constructing production units each with the capacity of 600,000 tons, while some other projects have been also defined to set up some units with under 500,000-ton capacity that together with the 600,000-ton capacity units will add 19.1 million tons to the country's annual steel products output.

In its latest report, the World Steel Association (WSA)

we saw transferring of shares, but not the management."

Iran's stock market witnessed its largest-ever initial public offering on April 15, when Social Security Investment Company (SSIC, also known by its Persian acronym Shasta) offered eight billion shares, which account for 10 percent of its stakes, for sales in Tehran Stock Exchange.

Shasta is the investment arm of the Social Security Organization, which provides healthcare entitlement and pension benefits for a large proportion of Iran's middle and working-class members of the labor force.

On Saturday, the managing director of the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), which is

Iran's major stock market, told ILNA that the country's stock market has attracted 350 trillion rials (about \$8.33 billion) of liquidity since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year.

Highlighting that the stock market is welcoming the initial public offering of the companies, Ali Sahraei said, "We held the IPO of Shasta although it was a very complicated process."

Answering to a question about the number of IPOs planned for the current year, Sahraei said, "We try that more IPOs will be held this year compared to the previous year, while it is important that the large and strong companies will offer their shares."



hands, it will create some problems in the long-term.

Khansari mentioned Shasta as an example in this regard, and said, "In terms of Shasta,

SP phase 19 refinery to go through annual overhaul

ENERGY

TEHRAN – The operator of phase 19 of Iran's South Pars gas field said overhaul operations for the field's 10th refinery, which processes the gas from phase 19, are going to be started on June 9, IRNA reported.

The mentioned operations are expected to take 23 days to be completed, Soheil Rafiei said.

According to the official, the field's off-shore facilities overhaul program is aimed to maintain the production levels in the current year which has been called the year of "Surge in Production" by Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran Seyed Ali Khamenei.

The official noted that changing the catalytic bed of the first gas train, repairing the interior cover and inspecting the pre-flash drum are among the activities planned for this period.

"Inspection and cleaning of the re-boilers of the regeneration tower, inspection and minor repairs of the burners, internal repair of the sulfur tank, elimination of leaks



from the header steam lines, and solving mechanical problems of various valves

are also planned for this year's overhaul program," he added.

Rafiei also mentioned cleaning and inspection of various types of drums as another important part of the overhaul program and said: repairing the internal cover and inspection of DSO separator, inspection of heat exchangers, preventive repairs of electrical items and precision instruments that cannot be done in normal condition are also some of the most important activities that will be carried out in the major repairs of the current year in collaboration with exploitation, overhaul, engineering, technical inspection and safety units.

South Pars is the world's largest gas field, covering an area of 3,700 square kilometers of Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf.

The giant field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

The field is divided into 24 standard phases that send the extracted gas to 14 refineries on the shore.

Oil gains on signs of output cuts, improved demand

Oil prices rose slightly on Tuesday amid signs that producers are cutting output as promised just as demand picks up, stoked by more countries easing out of curbs imposed to counter the coronavirus pandemic.

Benchmark Brent crude climbed 7 cents, or 0.2 percent, to \$34.88 a barrel by 0907 GMT, after earlier touching its highest since April 9.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude was up 70 cents, or 2.2 percent, at \$32.52 a barrel.

"The market sees both forces aligning: the cuts OPEC+ promised are materialising and other non-member production shut-downs are also really helping to limit the oversupply," said Paola Rodriguez Masiu, senior oil markets analyst at Rystad Energy.

"Meanwhile, lockdown measures are removed globally and the economy needs fuel to restart."

The June WTI contract expires on Tuesday, but there was little sign of a repeat of the historic plunge below zero seen last month ago on the eve of the May contract's expiry amid signs of rising demand for crude and fuels.

The July WTI contract was up 12 cents per barrel at \$31.77.

The market was boosted earlier by signs that output cuts agreed by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and others including Russia, a group known as OPEC+, are being implemented.

OPEC+ cut its oil exports sharply in the first half of May, companies that track shipments said, suggesting a strong start in complying with their latest pact to curb output.

U.S. production is also falling, with crude output from seven major shale formations expected to fall to 7.822 million barrels per day in June, the lowest since August 2018, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

A recovery in fuel demand in India also gathered momentum in the first half of May.

Still, global demand recovery is expected to be slow as some restrictions remain and there is a significant risk of repeat outbreaks and lockdowns.

The Eurasia group urged caution on oil consumption, citing "a global recession, cautious consumers, and a later and potentially worse peak of the coronavirus outbreak



in emerging markets such as Latin America, Africa, and South Asia".

(Source: Reuters)

Repeat of oil's sub-zero plunge unlikely as June expiry nears

Oil's historic crash below zero looked increasingly like an aberration as the June contract rose for a fourth day in its last session of trading before expiring.

Amid growing signs of a nascent recovery in demand, deepening production cuts and optimism that the world is getting closer to finding a vaccine for the coronavirus, futures in New York climbed around 2 percent toward \$33 a barrel. The July contract, which was a lot more active, was little changed.

With open interest in June futures at a fraction of later months and U.S. storage facilities no longer full to the brim, a repeat of the collapse that sent the front-month West Texas Intermediate contract to almost \$40 a barrel below zero looked unlikely. In another sign traders aren't worried about a sharp plunge, the premium to pay for out-of-the-money puts on WTI versus calls fell to the lowest since early March, just before the price war kicked off.

Chinese oil use is almost back to pre-virus levels, while a jump in Indian fuel sales shows the worst may be over there as lockdown restrictions are eased. Italians were allowed to go back to restaurants and New York is set to open a sixth region as some of the hardest-hit areas in Europe and North America move ahead with restarting their economies. Crude also got a boost on Monday after American biotechnology company Moderna Inc. said its vaccine showed signs



it can create an immune-system response to the virus.

On the supply side, shale oil output from the U.S., the world's biggest producer, is forecast to fall to the lowest since late 2018 next month, according to the Energy Information Administration. There's also been a "stunning reversal" in OPEC+ shipments so far in May, data intelligence firm Kpler said, after the alliance's deal to curb production kicked in at the beginning of the month.

"Optimism is being expressed across all markets, not just oil but base metals are rallying and we're seeing good support from equity markets," said Michael McCarthy, chief market strategist at CMC Markets Asia Pacific. However, "markets may be running ahead of the facts in thinking the economies will be back on track quickly once lockdown measures are lifted" and there's a risk WTI could drop in the short term, he said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Trump admin slaps solar, wind operators with retroactive rent bills

The Trump administration has ended a two-year rent holiday for solar and wind projects operating on federal lands, handing them whopping retroactive bills at a time the industry is struggling with the fallout of the coronavirus outbreak, according to company officials.

The move represents a multi-million-dollar hit to an industry that has already seen installation projects canceled or delayed by the global health crisis, which has cut investment and dimmed the demand outlook for power.

It also clashes with broader government efforts in the United States to shield companies from the worst of the economic turmoil through federal loans, waived fees, tax breaks and trimmed regulatory enforcement.

U.S. power plant owner Avangrid Inc, majority owned by Spain's Iberdrola, received a bill for more than \$3 million for two years of rent on its 131-megawatt Tule wind project on federal land near San Diego, according to spokesman Paul Copleman.

Officials at two other renewable projects also confirmed they had received retroactive rent bills from the federal government but asked not to be named discussing the issue as the industry continues to lobby the government for support to weather the downturn.

Some 96 utility-scale solar, wind and geothermal projects operate on lands run by

the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management, according to The Wilderness Society and Yale Center for Business and the Environment.

The bills came as a surprise, said Shannon Eddy, executive director of the Large-scale Solar Association, a trade group for owners of big solar farms. But she said some companies had likely set funds aside in case the bills ever came.

The Interior Department had stopped charging the rents at the end of 2018 to review company complaints that former President Barack Obama's administration had increased them too much, making them uncompetitive with rents on private property.

The Interior Department declined repeated requests to comment on the outcome of that review, or the issuance of the retroactive rent bills.

A budget document on the Interior Department's web site shows it expects to collect \$50 million in rent fees for wind and solar projects in 2020, up from \$1.1 million in 2019 and \$21.6 million in 2018.

The rent bills landed around the same time the Bureau of Land Management notified oil and gas drillers on federal lands of the procedures they would need to follow to get relief from paying royalties amid an oil market slump.

(Source: Reuters)

Natural gas drillers face price meltdown as storage fills fast

Natural gas, the poster child of the fossil fuel industry and the bridge fuel to a renewable future, has suffered its fair share of problems amid the coronavirus pandemic. And it may suffer the same fate as oil, at least when it comes to storage. It may also suffer the same fate with regards to negative prices.

For now, natural gas is faring better than oil in terms of prices and loss of demand. According to an analysis from Wood Mackenzie's Kristy Kramer, Head of Global Gas Market Research, gas demand has fallen by just 2 percent since the start of the crisis, compared with 6 percent for oil. That's thanks to sustainable demand from several industry sectors, notably power generation and heating. However, prices have plummeted because the outbreak came amid an already oversupplied gas market, pretty much the same as the oil market. Besides, Kramer notes, gas storage was already getting full because of the mild winter. Now it is likely to get fuller.

In the United States, withdrawals this

winter were the lowest since 2015/2016, with the total amount in storage 19 percent above the five-year seasonal average, the Energy Information Administration said in April. The agency forecast that gas in storage will remain at elevated levels throughout the summer period as well.

Meanwhile, in Europe, storage is also filling up fast. Bloomberg reported earlier this month that as traders look for places to stash their unsold gas, storage facilities across the continent may get topped by July, especially since they were already half full before refilling season began. For Europe, it was a combination of mild weather, a rising share of renewables in the power generation mix, and a crash in industrial demand for gas amid the pandemic that did natural gas in.

Wood Mackenzie's Kramer expects that some 15 to 20 metric tons of liquefied natural gas will be wiped out from demand during this summer season. That's about 5 percent of the global total, with a lot of the reduction

in supply coming from U.S. producers whose production costs are higher than selling prices.

However, that won't be enough to erase the gas market glut as new supply comes in later this year and next, Kramer noted in her analysis.

Rystad Energy earlier this year forecast that global liquefied natural gas supply this year could rise by 17 million tons to a total 380 million tons. Demand, on the other hand, was seen to increase by just 6 million tons to 359 million tons. And while under normal circumstances markets have been able to soak in excess gas, the circumstances this year are anything but normal.

"In 2020, when ample LNG supply is coupled with demand destruction, prices have already hit record lows and storages have already filled faster than usual. Production shut-ins are becoming a realistic possibility," Rystad Energy said earlier this month.

In the U.S., these have already begun: a lot of U.S. natural gas comes from oil wells

as associated gas. Now that producers are shutting these wells in, natural gas supply is falling alongside the production of crude oil. This has served to prop up U.S. prices, Wood Mac's Kramer said, although it has been bad news for exporters looking for a competitive edge in an oversupplied market.

With storage filling fast, demand slow to pick up—even if it never stopped growing in China—and prices depressed, what's next? Negative prices are a possibility, according to a senior executive with one of China's largest gas distributors, ENN Energy Holdings.

"For natural gas, I have heard about the possibility of negative prices. I also think it could happen," Wang Yusuo, chairman of the company, told Bloomberg earlier this month. "That's because natural gas has even more limited storage capacity and its production is also more rigid. So it may happen. But I don't think it will be a dominant or long-lasting scenario."

(Source: oilprice.com)

Coronavirus creates repair headache for oil and gas industry

The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted maintenance at oil and gas projects and refineries from Russia's Far East to the coast of Canada, storing up problems for an industry already reeling from slumping prices, analysts say.

Lockdowns to stop the spread of COVID-19, the flu-like infection caused by the virus, have snarled the supply of spare parts and have prevented maintenance workers from doing their job.



Regular repairs are needed to keep wells pumping, pipelines and refineries functioning and ships moving. Without maintenance, the risk of glitches or unplanned outages increases and delays risk driving up the cost of work later - partly because there will be a rush to do maintenance when lockdowns ease, and partly because plants have lost the optimal timing and weather for work during the northern hemisphere spring.

"When the virus and the quarantine measures have been eased and it is safe to get back to work, it doesn't mean the same work can be done with the same intensity because the weather windows could be missed and that can push maintenance even to the next year," said Matthew Fitzsimmons, Vice President of the Oilfield Service team at research firm Rystad.

In the meantime, companies which service the oil industry are being hit by the lack of work.

"A lot of service companies are not getting the revenues they had otherwise expected in 2020. That is going to have a huge impact on the health of the service industry," said Fitzsimmons.

■ A major headache

Oil and gas companies involved in exploration and production spent an average of \$80 billion a year on maintenance between 2015 and 2019, according to Rystad.

The industry typically takes advantage of periods of slow demand to do repair work but with oil prices nearly halved since the start of the year, this is no ordinary trough. Companies, many of them lumbered with high debts, are slashing all but the most essential work.

Some units were shut down for maintenance but the work never started according to Amanda Fairfax, downstream oil market analyst at Genscape, a firm that monitors refineries activities with cameras.

"They don't want either to invest the capital expenditure into the maintenance project or they don't want to have as many contract workers on sites as the additional influx of workforce might compromise people who have to remain at the refinery as essential personnel," she said.

A large maintenance program in Russia's Far East Sakhalin-2 project faces delays as the firm could not get pre-ordered pieces of machinery, two sources told Reuters.

"There was a major headache with parts manufactured in China. After the coronavirus outbreak there, the supplier told us it couldn't deliver our order. There are attempts to replace it, but the time has been lost," an industry source told Reuters.

Sakhalin Energy told Reuters that the company operates according to a long-term maintenance plan, which is being constantly revised.

"All works will be carried out in accordance with up-to-date plans, safety instructions and quarantine measures required by the state authorities," the company's representative said in an email.

Its neighbor, Sakhalin-1 project, operated by ExxonMobil, also said earlier this month that it was adjusting the schedule and scope of work at the plant.

"To ensure the safety of our personnel ... we are focusing on those activities, which can be executed safely in the current COVID-19 situation and are essential for our continued economic and operational resilience," ExxonMobil said.

Reuters has identified nearly a dozen companies whose maintenance and development plans have been affected by lockdowns.

■ The Italian connection

The lockdown in Italy, which has suffered one of the worst virus outbreaks globally, has reverberated across the energy sector because the country is a leading valve manufacturer.

An industry source in Milan told Reuters that until recently less than 10 percent of Italian producers remained active, struggling to supply even strategic valves to overseas clients.

Italy eased its coronavirus lockdown early in May, giving factories the green light to restart production lines.

One energy company in Nigeria said it was hoping to receive valves from its Italian supplier soon as they had been first in line when the shutdown began, the source said. But others are less optimistic.

A maintenance and development operation at an onshore field in Nigeria was delayed for months as the local oil firm could not receive equipment on time, a company source told Reuters.

Oil companies across Nigeria have also struggled to move workers to where they are needed due to lockdowns that vary by state, and regulations from the petroleum regulator limiting the number of workers at any oil site is also complicating operations. Rivers state, home to the oil hub of Port Harcourt, is under a lockdown so strict that the governor arrested 22 oil workers who landed there, despite federal government permits allowing them to travel.

The Rivers movement restrictions have also trapped pipes and other needed materials that are needed at oil fields outside the state, industry sources told Reuters.

(Source: Reuters)

In the Name of God



Shahid Tondgooyan Petrochemical Company

Call for Identify Resources

Shahid Tondgooyan Petrochemical Company (STPC) intends to identify the following chemical suppliers which are qualified.

Subject:

ROW	CHEMICAL NAME	CONSUMPTION RATE (TON/YEAR)
1	ISOPHTHALIC ACID	5000
2	TITANIUM DIOXIDE	600
3	ANTIMONY (III) OXIDE	110
4	ANTIMONY (III) ACETATE	150
5	HYDROBROMIC ACID	250
6	Cobalt Acetate	60
7	CMB	600
8	Terminol 66	Up to process condition
9	SHELL OIL	Up to process condition

General Conditions of Suppliers & Specialized Degree Necessary:

1. Have at least 2 years relevant experience to chemical
2. License agency or distribution agency
3. Business cards
4. Submit the bid bond for tenders

Place & Deadline of Receive Evaluation Forms:

Legal & Contracts Affairs, Phase # 1, (STPC), Site # 4, Petrochemical Economic Special Zone (PESZ), Bandar Imam Khomeini, Khuzestan Province, Iran, 06152172045

It shall be given latest by 16:00 pm on 30/May/20.

Place & Deadline of Submission Evaluation Forms Document:

Legal & Contracts Affairs, Phase # 1, (STPC), Site # 4, Petrochemical Economic Special Zone (PESZ), Bandar Imam Khomeini, Khuzestan Province, Iran.

It should be submitted latest by 16:00 pm on 14/Jun./20.

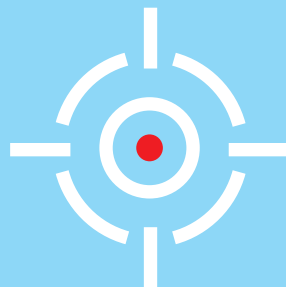
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Oil min. holds phone talk with Russia's energy min. on reducing oil output

TEHRAN, Feb. 20 (MNA) -- Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh held a phone conversation with the Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak on Thu. with regards to the cooperation of the two countries within the framework of OPEC Plus.

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U.S. forced by Zionism lobby to assist in establishing Israel despite its will

By Payman Yazdani

In an interview with Tehran Times, American thinker Alison Weir said that despite the U.S. officials and nation will, the U.S. was forced to assist in establishing Israel due to pressure of the Zionism lobby.

15th of May 'Nakba Day', meaning 'Day of the Catastrophe' commemorates the displacement of 700,000 Palestinians forced to flee as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The result of the war was land theft and the destruction and depopulation of hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages by the Zionists that have continued through today.

The refugees were forced to seek refuge in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, often without citizenship being granted.

On the eve of the international Quds Day, to know more about the history of the establishment of the Zionist entity in the occupied lands we reached out to Alison Weir.

Alison Weir is executive director of If Americans Knew, president of the Council for the National Interest, and author of Against Our Better Judgment: The Hidden History of How the U.S. Was Used to Create Israel.

Here is the full text of the interview:

■ Based on the available data on the U.S. and Britain's arms and financial support to the Israelis, how do you see the role of Washington and London in the formation and realization of the Zionist regime?

In the decades preceding the creation of Israel in 1948, the U.S. establishment actually opposed supporting Zionism. There were numerous studies and memos by the State Department, intelligence agencies, and the Pentagon recommending against it.

In 1912, the Zionist Literary Society asked the government for an endorsement, but the Secretary of State turned them down flat, noting that "problems of Zionism involve certain matters primarily related to the interests of countries other than our own."

In 1919 the director of the State Department office that covered Palestine opposed the Zionist position.

He wrote that "[it] impinges upon the rights and the desires of most of the Arab population of Palestine."

Westermann and other U.S. diplomats felt that the Arab position was much more in line with Wilson's principles of self-determination, and they circulated Arab material at the Paris Peace Talks after World War 1 when decisions about the lands under the defeated Ottoman Empire were being made.

President Wilson decided to send a commission to Palestine to investigate the situation.

After spending two months in the area, the commission, known as the King-Crane Commission, recommended against the Zionism.

The commissioners stated that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine could be accomplished only with "the gravest trespass upon the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine," pointing out that to subject the Palestinians "to steady financial and social pressure to surrender the land, would be a gross violation of the principle [of self-determination] and of the peoples' rights..."

Zionists in the U.S., however, managed to bury this report and it had little impact.

The U.S. State Department opposed this partition plan strenuously, considering Zionism contrary to both fundamental American principles and U.S. interests.

For example, the director of the State Department's Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, Loy Henderson, consistently recommended against supporting a Jewish state in Palestine. He warned that the creation of such a state would go against locals' wishes, imperil U.S. interests, and violate democratic principles.

Henderson emphasized that the U.S. would lose moral standing in the world if it supported Zionism, writing:

"At the present time, the United States has a moral prestige in the Near and West Asia unequaled by that of any other great power. We would lose that prestige and would be likely for many years to be considered as a betrayer of the high principles which we ourselves have enunciated during the period of the [second world] war."

When Zionists pushed the partition plan in the UN, Henderson recommended strongly against supporting their proposal, saying that such a partition would have to be implemented by force and was "not based on any principle." He warned that partition "would guarantee that the Palestine problem would be permanent and still more complicated in the future..."

There were many such reports.

However, the Zionist lobby was far stronger than these officials, and Harry Truman was more interested in getting Zionist support and winning the election than in taking actions in the U.S. interest.

The Zionist lobby in the U.S. had begun in the late 1800s and worked to manipulate the U.S. government and American people, using both public and covert methods. This has continued through today.

One little-known example in the early years was a secret society called "The Parushim." This society was first exposed by Israeli professor Sarah Schmidt in an article in the American Jewish Historical Quarterly and by long-time New York Times journalist Peter Gross.



The goal of this secret group was to promote the Zionist agenda throughout the United States. One of its leaders was Louis Brandeis, a Supreme Court Justice who was close to President Woodrow Wilson. (Another Supreme Justice also seems to have been a member.)

Zionists in Britain used Brandeis to obtain the Balfour Declaration. There was a "gentleman's agreement" between the British government and Zionists that Britain would assist the Zionist goal of establishing a Jewish "homeland" in Palestine in return for Zionists pushing the U.S. to enter the "great war" (World War I) on Britain's side.

At the time, the large majority of Americans opposed entering this unnecessary and tragic European war. However, after Zionists began to work to plunge the U.S. into this war, the U.S. did indeed enter it, helping Britain defeat the Ottoman Empire. This paved the way for Britain to be placed in charge of Palestine, and then to open it to Jewish colonization.

I have much more information about all of this in my book, Against Our Better Judgment: The Hidden History of How the U.S. Was Used to Create Israel. (All its information is cited; in fact, the book is half footnotes.)

There has been a great effort to suppress this information in the United States. Even some Jewish groups and individuals who say they support Palestinian rights have tried to block information about the book from reaching Americans.

Fortunately, despite these efforts, the book is doing extremely well and has sold over 30,000 copies. I believe it has been translated into Farsi.

The Israel lobby continues to be extremely powerful in the U.S. and largely determines U.S. West Asia policies. Campaign donors such as Sheldon Adelson (Republican), Haim Saban (Democrat), and numerous others pressure politicians to support Israel.

In addition, the Israel lobby is extremely

influential in the U.S. media. For example, CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer used to openly work for an Israel lobby organization. There are many such examples of Israel partisans enjoying powerful positions in U.S. media, both print, and broadcast.

■ The U.S. moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem al-Quds in 2017; how much did this measure favor the legalization process of the Zionist regime?

This greatly favored the Zionist agenda and went against the actions of all previous presidents, who knew it would cause extreme harm in Palestine and create enormous hostility to the U.S.

Currently, in the U.S. there is a struggle between the hard-core Zionists, who wish to take over the West Bank and Gaza, and the more intelligent Zionists, who think such actions hurt Israel.

The powerful lobby group AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, is an example of the former, and the much newer pro-Israel lobby group, J Street is an example of the latter. Both are working for what they perceive as Israeli interests.

For almost the first time in U.S. politics, there is a somewhat significant difference between Republicans and Democrats on Israel.

Progressive Americans have finally begun to learn the real facts about Israel-Palestine, and large numbers now support Palestinian human rights. For that reason, Democratic politicians largely favor the J Street "soft" Zionist approach.

However, conservative Americans have received even more pro-Israel, anti-Muslim propaganda than before, and therefore Republican candidates largely favor the AIPAC version of Zionism. While in the past some Republican politicians like Paul Findley, Pete McCloskey, and Charles Person opposed the Israel lobby, today very few Republicans are daring enough to do so. (Although this could change as more and more evangelical Christians are starting to change their positions on Israel and their interpretation of the Bible.)

Trump entered office with statements indicating he might be somewhat reasonable on this issue. However, this changed when he came under the onslaught by the Democratic establishment that began even before he was inaugurated, and he has now moved over to the AIPAC hard Zionist approach.

If Trump is re-elected, U.S. policies could grow even more misguided.

If Biden is elected, U.S. policies would likely not be quite as bad. While Biden has called himself a Zionist and is greatly beholden to the Israel lobby, his base may decree that his policies be less blatantly counter to human rights.

Will extension of UNAMID mandate in Sudan beyond October 2020 guarantee peaceful transition of power?

Deployment of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) will end in October when the crisis-hit Sudan may face a fresh round of tensions among the men of weapons, leaving the plan of power transition in the African nation without reliable international support.

The African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur is a joint African Union and United Nations peacekeeping mission formally approved by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1769 on 31 July 2007, to bring stability to the war-torn Darfur region of Sudan while peace talks on a final settlement continue.

Ahmed H Adam, a Research Associate at SOAS' School of Law, University of London, believes that an early withdrawal of UN peacekeepers could have devastating consequences for the country.

"Just over a year after President Omar al-Bashir was deposed following months-long protests across the country, Sudan finds itself in an increasingly difficult political and socioeconomic situation. Counter-revolutionary forces have sought to undo much of the progress that has been achieved since last year, while the civilian government, which is supposed to lead the country through a political transition, is increasingly exposed to attacks and internal divisions," Adam wrote in his article published by Al Jazeera.

Meanwhile, the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) alliance, the civilian coalition behind the protests which helped form the government, is facing increasing fragmentation due to political, ideological and ethnic differences, further weakening civilian power.

Amid this increasingly difficult situation, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok sent two letters to the United Nations, requesting the formation of a special political mission to Sudan under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, which deals with the peaceful settlement of disputes. The current UN mission in the country, the UNAMID, which was created under the Chapter VII provisions on peacekeeping and operates along with an African Union force, has a peacekeeping and civilian protection mandate in Darfur which will expire in October this year.

The requested new mission is to cover the "entire territory of Sudan" and support the application of Sudan's Constitutional Declaration, which was introduced last year to pave the way for civilian rule. It would also be tasked with the promotion of peace settlements in conflict zones in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, the mobilization of international economic assistance, the coordination of humanitarian aid, and constitution-making and various state reform efforts, as stated in Hamdok's letters to the UN.

His request, if approved, will shift the role of the international community in Sudan from peacekeeping to peacebuilding, something Khartoum has been calling for since last year. This move by the prime minister has triggered extremely heated



debate and tensions that could lead to deep divisions and violence in Sudan.

Many armed groups have taken the opportunity to attack the government and accuse it of undermining the country's sovereignty and independence and putting its territorial integrity at risk by opening Sudan for new colonialism.

Among other factors, the accusations stem from claims that Hamdok's letters to the UN were reflecting the British and German joint proposal at the UN Security Council. This strengthened the belief in some circles that the requested new UN mission would be a tool for foreign interference in Sudan's internal affairs and that Hamdok's government is a puppet of foreign powers.

Others also found the move problematic, albeit for different reasons.

Many activists and observers inside the country believe that the divisions within the FFC and Hamdok's failure to capitalize on the momentum of the revolution by mobilizing grassroots support for his government have weakened it. His request for a new UN mission, which to a certain extent indeed aligns with British and German proposals, constitutes an attempt to increase his international legitimacy as he faces growing domestic troubles.

But more worryingly, Hamdok's decision to seek a political mission with no peacekeeping powers is a concession to the military. Many have feared that tensions between the prime minister and the FFC have pushed him to seek support from General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the army and chairman of the Transitional Sovereign Council, and Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (also known as Hemedti), the leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), one of the main state-sponsored militias accused of war crimes in Darfur.

It is in the interests of both the army and the RSF for UN peacekeepers to withdraw from the country and for no foreign force to have a civilian protection mandate, which would interfere with their operations in different conflict hotspots across the country. A weaker UN presence would also mean a weaker position of civilian power vis-a-vis the military. Undoubtedly,

this situation will eventually undermine Sudan's civilian government and the transition it is supposed to lead.

Therefore, not requesting civilian protection powers for the new UN mission is a fatal mistake.

Hamdok has claimed that the political, security and humanitarian situations have improved after al-Bashir's removal, but nothing is further from the truth.

The civilian population of Darfur has seen no improvements in their daily lives so far. The armed attacks, as well as the systemic and wide-spread human rights violations against civilians, particularly, internally displaced persons, continue in the region.

In early January, violence erupted in West Darfur, from where UNAMID forces have withdrawn, killing more than 80 people, injuring 190 and displacing 8,000.

The area of Jebel Marra in central Darfur, where UNAMID still has some presence, has also seen continuous incidents of violence. A UN report released in March lists 21 violent incidents from October 2019 to January 2020, which resulted in the deaths of 17 people. Some 8,600 people were displaced in the area as a result of the violence while frequent sexual violence and physical assaults against civilians have continued. UNAMID has had to step up patrols in order to deescalate the situation.

In May, more than 30 people were killed when clashes between Fallata and Rezeigat tribes erupted in South Darfur. Some 95 criminal incidents were reportedly perpetrated by armed persons in military uniform, as well as members of nomadic communities.

The March UN report expresses concerns about the persistent violence in areas from which UNAMID has withdrawn and warns that the "fundamental conflict drivers remain unresolved" which could "exacerbate intercommunal tensions".

Apart from the UN, various non-government organizations have also expressed concerns about the withdrawal of UNAMID and the lack of civilian protection provisions for the new UN mission requested by Hamdok.

Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, has argued: "The UN Security Council should recognize that Darfur requires a far more gradual withdrawal and keep a UN security presence on the ground to actively protect civilians. Past and ongoing violence there means civilians can't trust Sudanese security forces alone and still look to peacekeepers for protection."

On May 4, 98 human rights and civil society groups and activists sent a letter to Hamdok, in which they expressed their strong opposition to "the departure of the UNAMID from Darfur with a mandate under Chapter VII to be replaced with a Chapter VI mission. In the face of grave vulnerabilities facing civilians in displaced camps, it is inconceivable that your government would not put civilian protection at the top of the list."

One-third of world's population lives under direct, indirect consequences of U.S. sanctions!

BY Mohammad Jafari

It is unbelievable that millions of people in 48 world countries are struggling with negative impacts of the United States' sanctions directly or indirectly, especially these days that the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the mentioned nations' economic plight.

Hrair Balian, J.D., the director of the Carter Center's Conflict Resolution Program since 2008, underlined in an article published by

the Responsible Statecraft that the U.S. must suspend sanctions that affect the target nation's health sector broadly amid novel coronavirus outbreak.

As the United States works to contain the catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic, resorting to extraordinary measures to limit health and economic damage to its own population, it should also suspend economic sanctions that are making it harder for some countries to fight COVID-19 and keep their citizens safe.

The mostly unilateral economic sanctions and export controls imposed by the United States affect 48 countries, home to a third of the world's population. Eight of those countries, with the great majority of the affected population, say that the sanctions are undermining their response to COVID-19.

Iran, Syria, North Korea, Venezuela, and Cuba are under the most severe economic sanctions and face extreme risk of health, economic, and security failure, especially now. Expanding these sanctions on Iran during a pandemic, as the U.S. is threatening, is cruel.

Of these countries, Iran has been hit hardest by the pandemic – with over 114,000 confirmed infections and 6,800 deaths as of May 17 – and the numbers are rising rapidly. Other countries, including Syria, are reporting unrealistically low numbers of infections and deaths because they do not have the ability to test or are wary of unfavorable public reaction. A devastating eight-year war, that forced displacement of half of its population and severe sanctions combine to make Syria terribly vulnerable to a catastrophic spread of the epidemic.

Though reported cases in the occupied Palestinian territories are still less than 400, Palestinian authorities are also severely hampered in their effort to control COVID-19 because of the Israeli siege of Gaza and cuts in U.S. financial contributions, which are in essence another form of sanctions.

Most sanctions regimes provide for "humanitarian exceptions" to accommodate the provision of goods and services to the civilian population of countries affected by sanctions. However, the exception rarely works because the web of sanctions is often too complex for humanitarian organizations to navigate without violating one provision or another.

For humanitarian reasons, it's time for the U.S. to suspend sanctions that affect the target nation's health sector broadly. This would be a gesture of compassion in an extraordinary worldwide crisis, permitting the leaders of countries and international organizations to assist civilian populations under extreme threat. These measures should remain in effect for the duration of the health crisis – and extend beyond the crisis where possible.

An uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 in countries under sanction will have a ripple effect. In an April 5 statement, a bipartisan group of American and European national security leaders urged the U.S. government to ease sanctions on Iran, arguing, "We must remember that an outbreak anywhere impacts people everywhere. ... reaching across borders to save lives is imperative for our own security and must override political differences among governments."

Such measures are not unprecedented. In 2003, during a period of high tensions between the U.S. and Iran, the U.S. military sent plane loads of relief supplies to the government of Iran after an earthquake struck the city of Bam. In 1988, the U.S. sent aid to the Soviet Union for the first time since the 1940s when an earthquake hit Soviet Armenia.

In addition to the obvious health benefits, lifting sanctions could help thaw the icy relations between the U.S. and adversaries, opening doors for peace with some. On March 23, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for waiving international sanctions around the world, stating "this is the time for solidarity not exclusion." He added, "The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war," calling for a global ceasefire "in all corners of the world" to make it easier to fight the pandemic. Some warring parties have responded positively to the call.

The goodwill generated by suspending or easing sanctions would only save lives, it could also be the catalyst for peace talks. Chances for peace would increase if countries benefiting from sanctions relief reciprocated by at least temporarily ceasing war activities, releasing prisoners and hostages, initiating dialogue, or taking other meaningful steps toward resolving disputes.

"The time to act is now; sanctions are impeding the effort to fight COVID-19. Suspending sanctions is both the compassionate and the smart thing to do," the author concluded.

Also on May 16, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet called for lifting or suspending sanctions against Iran to help the country in its fight against the Coronavirus.

In an interview with France 24, Michelle Bachelet called on the U.S. to lift sanctions against Iran and Venezuela, stressing that the current situation requires such a move, in order to save lives.

"The medical exemptions to those sanctions touted by the Trump administration are too narrow and only a suspension or a lifting of the sanctions will have a real impact," Bachelet added.

In late December 2019, Chinese authorities notified the World Health Organization (WHO) about an outbreak of a previously unknown pneumonia in the city of Wuhan, central China. WHO declared the outbreak of the novel coronavirus a global pandemic and named the virus COVID-19.

According to the data of the World Health Organization, coronavirus cases have been confirmed in more than 212 countries and territories.

National heritage list adds 770 sites in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Some 770 historical and archaeological sites, scattered across Iran's southwestern Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province, have been inscribed on the national heritage list, provincial tourism official has said.

So far some 2800 historical sites have been identified across the province through excavations and surveys conducted by the province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department, CHTN quoted Majid Safai as saying on Tuesday.



He also noted that the highlight of the tourist attractions of the province is the ancient city of Belad Shapur, known by its current name, Dehdasht, which was inscribed on the National Heritage List in 1985.

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

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

Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province is known for its nomads and nomadic life. Sightseers may live with a nomadic or rural family for a while or enjoy an independent stay and assist them with day-to-day life. It also opens up an opportunity to feel rustic routines, their agriculture, traditions, arts and culture.

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

Iron Age relics unveiled in Zanjan

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – A total of 32 pre-historical objects, estimated to date from the Iron Age, were unveiled at the Zolfaqari Museum of the northwestern Zanjan province on Monday to mark International Museum Day.

The historical objects were unearthed through excavations conducted by Zanjan Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department in the historical cemetery of Jeiran Tappeh, CHTN quoted provincial tourism chief Amir Arjmand as saying on Monday.

The relics were restored by teams of cultural heritage experts and restorers, he added.



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.

Iron Age is in fact final technological and cultural stage in the Stone–Bronze–Iron Age sequence. The date of the full Iron Age, in which this metal, for the most part, replaced bronze in implements and weapons, varied geographically, beginning in West Asia and southeastern Europe about 1200 BC but in China not until about 600 BC, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Although in West Asia iron had limited use as a scarce and precious metal as early as 3000 BC, there is no indication that people at that time recognized its superior qualities over those of bronze.

Zanjan is one of the cities founded by Sassanid King Ardashir I (180-242 CE). The province makes a base for wider explorations with the architectural wonder of Soltaniyeh, the subterranean delights of the Katala-Khor caves, colorful mountains, and the UNESCO-registered Takht-e Soleiman ruins are nearby.

In late January, Zanjan was designated as a "world city of filigree" by the World Crafts Council after the WCC assessors visited various craft workshops, stores, exhibits, and bazaars of the city in a two-day itinerary in last December.

Filigree consists of curling, twisting, or plaiting fine, pliable metal threads and soldering them at their points of contact with each other with a metal groundwork.

Kharanaq, a 4,000-year-old mud-brick town in central Iran

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – A photographer's dream with a labyrinth of streets, tunnels, passageways, and rooms, Kharanaq is a 4,000-year-old abandoned mud-brick town in central Iran.

Sitting in a remote valley about 70km north of Yazd, itself a UNESCO-registered oasis city, is the village of Kharanaq, which is home to more impressive buildings such as a tiny mosque, a shaking minaret, and an old caravanserai that welcomed merchants and pilgrims centuries ago.

According to Ancient Origins, the site has been occupied for approximately 4,000 years, while the dilapidated adobe buildings that draw foreigners from around the world date back around 1,000 years.

Kharanaq, which means 'place of birth of the sun', is divided into two parts – the Old Town, which is almost completely deserted, and the New Town, where still some families continue to live.

The Old Town was constructed with sun-baked mud bricks, forming one of the largest collections of adobe buildings in the country. It was once a prosperous farming village, but when water supplies dried up the inhabitants left, leaving the town to turn to ruins.

In recent years, a New Town was constructed within 2km of the ancient town with government-supplied water and electricity. Apart from a few elderly people who reportedly refused to leave their old houses and continue to live among the ruins, the rest of the Old Town's inhabitants moved to the New Town.

While most of the Old Town of Kharanaq consists of crumbling homes and collapsing roofs, there still remain a number of historically important and well-preserved monuments.

A Qajar-era (1789-1925) mosque has been fully restored and stands with a 15-meter-high minaret, known as the Shaking Minaret of Kharanaq. The 17th century minaret has three floors and a spiral staircase winding its way up inside. The minaret is frequently seen shaking and vibrating. The cause of this phenomenon remains unknown.

Another blue-domed mosque stands out against the earthen colors of the surrounding town and landscape.

A well-preserved caravanserai – a place where merchant caravans are halted – from the time of the Qajar Dynasty



A blue-domed mosque stands out against the earthen colors of the surrounding landscape. (Erwin Bolwidt / Flickr)

sits on the edge of Kharanaq. The caravanserai is fortified with stables for pack animals, storage areas, and rooms for travelers passing through.

Other highlights include an old castle linked to the historical periods of Islam, ancient aqueducts built to irrigate the surrounding fields, and an ancient but still functional bridge.

Under tourists' eyes

Here is a select of comments that visitors to the mud-brick village have posted to TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel websites in the world:

■ 'Stunning old and abandoned mud village'

For all those who loved the vibe of the old town in Yazd,



The Old Town is a labyrinth of streets, tunnels and passageways of Kharanaq, a 4,000-year-old abandoned mud-brick town in central Iran. (Left: Matt Werner / Flickr. Right: Jurriaan Persyn / Flickr)

I would highly recommend a 1-2 hour visit to Kharanaq. It's an abandoned village 70 km away from Yazd city, best visited during late afternoon or early evening. It is the kind of site where you would prefer to walk around the narrow pathways, peek into abandoned rooms, and find your way onto roofs with fantastic views. Avoid visiting as part of a tour group as you would just be given 15-20 mins under the scorching heat to peek into the village. I would recommend hiring a cab from Yazd. Find fellow tourists in hostels/hotels to split the costs with. (Mirmax124 from New Delhi, India; Date of experience: May 2016)

■ 'Amazing village'

We did this trip alongside Chak Chak and it was a highlight. Although the old village is abandoned due to a lack of water, it is very well preserved and fascinating. We kept turning a corner and seeing a different amazing view. Well worth the small diversion if you are travelling from Isfahan to Yazd. (GeraldineUK from Malmesbury, United Kingdom; Date of experience: May 2016)

■ "One of several old mud villages"

When you are passing by, it is worth to drop in. But to



The old bridge of Kharanaq, with the Old Town in the background. (Wikimedia Commons)



pay a special visit does not make sense. Unless you have not seen before such old mud villages. It is pretty much destroyed. Be careful walking around. (Rexonaut from Brussels, Belgium; Date of experience: May 2016)

■ 'Nice but nothing spectacular'

It's a nice trip but nothing spectacular. Nice scenery but the town itself is desolated and abandoned. (Back-



The collapsing mud-brick houses of Kharanaq, Iran. (Johannes Zielcke / Flickr)

packadventures2 from El Valle de Anton, Panama; Date of experience: April 2016)

■ 'Special'

Visited this ghost town as part of a day trip from Yazd. This was our favorite. Crumbling and falling apart but with so much character. The roofs and houses are like a playground for adults. The scenery is breathtaking. (IndianDays from Utrecht province, The Netherlands; Date of experience: March 2016)

HIGHLIGHT: The abandoned town is a photographer's dream with a labyrinth of streets, tunnels, passageways, and rooms, as well as more impressive buildings such as a tiny mosque, a shaking minaret, and an old caravanserai that welcomed merchants and pilgrims centuries ago.

New archaeological season begins at Hegmataneh

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – A new round of archaeological excavation has recently commenced at the ancient Hegmataneh Hill in the west central Iranian province of Hamedan, provincial tourism chief has said.

The 22nd archaeological season aims at exploring and studying the rampart of the hill, ILNA quoted Ali Malmir as saying on Monday.

The Hegmataneh Hill, also called Tepe Hegmataneh (thought to correspond to the ancient citadel of Ecbatana), has a circumference of 1.4 kilometers with an area of about 40 hectares.

The view of distant mountains from the top of this low, open hill is pleasantly rewarding, especially in the late afternoon, but it's what lies below that excites archaeologists: an ancient Median and Achaemenid city.

Small sections have been excavated over the last century, most extensively



in the 1990s. There's a smart museum nearby, as well as two Armenian

churches, now part of Hamadan University.

Tourism projects worth \$3m underway in North Khorasan

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Three tourism projects are being carried out in the northeastern province of North Khorasan, provincial tourism chief has said.

The projects, worth 130 billion rials (about \$3 million) will come on stream in the near future, CHTN quoted Habib Yazdanpanah as saying on Monday.

North Khorasan Carpet Museum as well as Shirvan Museum are being implemented in Shirvan city, while Bigan tourism complex is being carried out in Bigan village, near Shirvan, he added.

Though North Khorasan province may not be the first

choice of travelers, its tourism is getting momentum.

According to Lonely Planet, most foreign tourists pass straight through North Khorasan in transit between Mashhad and Gorgan, but if you have time to explore, it's worth diverting south from the capital, Bojnurd, towards Esfarayen, famed for its wrestling tournaments, the remarkable citadel of Belqays and the partly preserved stepped village of Roein some 20km north. Although a lot of new building spoils the effect in parts of the village, Roein is considered Khorasan's answer to the well-known Masuleh and is a possible starting point for hikes to little-visited mountain villages.



Over 10 new species discovered in Hamoun International Wetland

SOCIETY TEHRAN — In recent years, according to a study by researchers at Zabol University, more than 10 new species of arthropods have been identified in Hamoun International Wetland.

Centralized studies by researchers at Zabol University have been started since five years ago, to examine the world's seventh-largest international wetland and Iran's largest freshwater lake in the plains of the Sistan region, with a focus on the subgroup of Hymenoptera, Ali Afshari Moghaddam, the university's public relations head, said on Saturday.

In this study, several species were identified, named and introduced, so that tens of other rare species have been collected in this region and their existence has been recorded for the first time in Iran, he added.

He went on to say that Hamoun International Wetland is a dynamic and fertile habitat that plays an important role in the survival of animal species, especially arthropods, as a biological reserve in the animal food chain.

So far, more than 20 articles have been written by Zabol University researchers on new species of Hamoun International Wetland that have been published in prestigious international journals, he highlighted.

In recent years, the lack of precipitation and drought caused by dried up Helmand River along with the 120-day winds in the Sistan region, in addition to causing great economic and social damage, has led to the complete drying up of Hamoun Wetland and its ecosystem, he lamented.

One of the most important criteria for granting international importance to a wetland by the Ramsar Convention is having a significant collection of rare or endangered species or subspecies of rare plants and animals, he also emphasized.

He concluded that citing researches conducted by Zabol University, in the first stage can provide reasonable



evidence to the international authorities regarding the double emphasis on the importance of protecting the habitat and allocating its water rights by Afghanistan.

Hamouns are transboundary wetlands on the Iran-Afghanistan border made up of three lakes: Hamoun-e Helmand, which is entirely in Iran, Hamoun-e Sabari on the border, and Hamoun-e Puzak, almost entirely inside Afghanistan. The three lakes are linked and fed by water

from the Helmand River which starts in the Hindu Kush Mountains in Afghanistan.

In the last two decades, once fertile wetlands have drastically dried up. The Taliban government closed the sluices to the Kajaki Dam on the Helmand until 2002, which aggravated the impact of the worst drought the region has experienced in many decades, brought about partially by climate change and warming temperatures.

Unemployment rate drops by 1.7% in winter

SOCIETY TEHRAN — The unemployment rate among the active population (ages 15 and above who are economically active either employed or looking for a job) in Iran stood at 10.6 percent in the winter, a 1.7 percent drop compared to the same season last year, according to the Statistical Center of Iran.

Last year's total employed population was at 24.27 million, nearly 430,000 more than the year before.

Also, out of a total of 61.6 million people aged 15 and above last year, about 44.1 percent are in the active population group and 55.9 percent are the economically inactive population who are neither in employment nor unemployed.

In addition, 89.3 percent of the active population were employed while 10.7 percent of whom were unemployed.

According to statistics, the service sector has the largest share of employment with 52.7 percent, then come the industrial and agriculture with a share of 31.7 and 15.6



percent, respectively.

Unemployment rate for young people aging 15-24 indicates that 25.7 percent of the active population were unemployed in the winter, which shows a 2.4 percent decline compared to the same period last year.

A study of the unemployment rate of the population aging 18-35 also shows that in the winter, 17.8 percent of the active population were unemployed, which has decreased by 1.6 percent compared to that of a year ago.

German data protection watchdog warns officials against using WhatsApp

Germany's data protection commissioner Ulrich Kelber has warned federal authorities against using Facebook's WhatsApp messenger while working from home during the coronavirus crisis, in a letter leaked by media on Sunday.

"Even in these difficult times data protection should not be neglected. For this reason I would like to point out that the use of WhatsApp by a federal agency is out of the question", Kelber said in an email published by the German digital rights blog, Netzpolitik.

He warned that, although Facebook and the mobile operating system that could be used to piece together the user's profile.

German authorities use the app to timely inform citizens about disinformation and digital fraud schemes.



Kelber said this proved that a trusted information service needed to be created to satisfy the country's strict data protection rules.

WhatsApp Messenger is an American freeware, cross-platform messaging service owned by Facebook that allows users to send text and voice messages, make voice and video calls, as well as share images, documents, user locations, and other forms of media, according to the sputniknews website.

Iran provides social insurance for 100,000 vulnerable refugees

1 → Over 474,000 Afghan national children are receiving education in Iran completely free of charge, he added.

Out of 970,000 foreigners (men and women) in working-age of 15 to 60 years, some 36,000 are under social insurance coverage in the country, head of Social Security Organization's department for foreign nationals Ahmad

Reza Khazaei said in July 2018.

Iran is host to one of the largest and most protracted refugee populations worldwide.

According to UNHCR, more than 3 million Afghans, including registered refugees, passport holders and undocumented, reside in Iran.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

Clean air days double for Tehraners this year

Tehrani citizens have experienced a 2-fold rise in the number of clean air days since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2018) compared to the same period last year, an official with Department of Environment has said.

Since the aforementioned period, clean air stayed in the capital for 27 days, while last year, during the same period, Tehraners breathed clean air for only 14 days, IRNA quoted Shina Ansari as saying on Sunday.

Also, the air quality of the capital was healthy for 262 days, while being unhealthy for sensitive groups for 59 days, she said, adding that compared to the same period last year, Tehran's air quality reached healthy levels for 229 days and 97 days of unhealthy for sensitive groups has hit the capital.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-plast, -plasty, -plastic”

■ **Meaning:** living cell or particle

■ **For example:** The next approach is **angioplasty**, in which a catheter is used to balloon open the arrowed part of the artery.

PHRASAL VERB

Head something off

■ **Meaning:** to prevent something from happening, especially something bad

■ **For example:** The President intervened to head off the conflict.

IDIOM

Nip something in the bud

■ **Explanation:** to prevent something from becoming a problem by stopping it as soon as it starts

■ **For example:** Try to nip this kind of bad behavior in the bud.

تهرانی‌ها امسال دو برابر بیشتر روزهای پاک داشتند

مدیرکل دفتر پایش فراگیر سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست گفت: تهرانی‌ها از ابتدای امسال تا امروز (۱۲ اسفند ۹۷) نسبت به مدت مشابه سال گذشته، دو برابر هوای پاک تنفس کردند.

شینا انصاری روز یکشنبه در گفت‌وگو با ایرنا افزود: تهران از ابتدای امسال تا امروز، ۲۷ روز هوای پاک داشته در حالی‌که سال گذشته در مدت مشابه، تعداد روزهای پاک ۱۴ روز بوده است.

وی اظهار داشت: همچنین از ابتدای امسال تاکنون، کیفیت هوای پایتخت برای ۲۶۲ روز قابل قبول و ۵۹ روز ناسالم برای گروه‌های حساس بوده که در مدت مشابه سال گذشته به ترتیب ۲۲۹ و ۹۷ روز بوده که هشت روز نیز ناسالم برای تمام گروه‌ها بوده است.

107 Iranian medical staff died in coronavirus battle

SOCIETY TEHRAN — An official with the Iranian Medical Council has said that 107 healthcare workers have so far lost their lives in the country in fighting the coronavirus.

"We are gathering precise data from all over the country in order to know how many people from among medical staff have been infected with the coronavirus or lost their lives in fighting the virus. So far, 792 individuals have been infected and 107 dear colleagues have lost their lives. Let's pray for the patients," Hossein Kermanpour wrote on his Twitter account on Tuesday.

The Ministry of Health has received 41 trillion rials (over \$995 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) to combat the coronavirus pandemic throughout the country, IRNA news agency reported.

The number of people diagnosed with coronavirus in Iran reached 124,603 on Tuesday, of whom 7,109 have died and 97,173 recovered so far.

Over the past 24 hours, 2,111 new cases of people having the virus have been identified, and 48 died, Deputy Health Minister Kianoush Jahanpour said.

Climate crisis: Arctic temperatures 'break records', as ice melting season starts early

A heatwave is underway in the Arctic unusually early in the year, with temperatures reaching record highs for spring and kick-starting an earlier annual melting season, scientists have found.

An anomalous high pressure weather system over the North Pole has seen temperatures soar, with some parts of Siberia recording highs of over 20C.

This warm air over Russia has created a "highway" to the pole, transporting unseasonable warmth north into the Arctic. Meanwhile, colder air is moving south into Scandinavia and North America.

The current temperature spike follows a considerably warmer April than normal for the Arctic. In mid-April average temperatures reached highs of more than 0C, meaning overall some recordings were up to 20C above the long-term normal values for the area, according to data collected by Nasa and other agencies.

Speaking to The Independent about the record-breaking data, climate scientist Martin Stendel of the Danish Meteorological Institute said "the temperature anomalies in the high Arctic and large parts of Siberia are indeed quite extreme".

"I could not find anything comparable for the high Arctic in a data set which goes back to 1958."

"There is no similar event so early in the season" on record, he said.

Temperature anomaly analysis carried out by Severe Weather Europe, which provides centralised information gathering and sharing of climate and weather data from Europe, said over the weekend warm spots inside the Arctic circle were 12C above normal.

The average April global air temperature was +1.16C above the 1951-1980 climate baseline.

The disparity between the rest of the world and what is occurring over the North Pole reflects how the Arctic is warming much more rapidly than anywhere else.

The warm spring is among the factors which have led to the beginning of an early melt season in Greenland.

The onset of the melt season at the beginning of the summer is defined as the first of three days in a row with a melt extent exceeding 5 per cent over the ice sheet. The onset in 2016 was the earliest on record and happened on 11 April with an even larger anomaly. This year the melt season officially began on May 16.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Nelson Mandela launches new AIDS campaign

(October 22, 2003)

Nelson Mandela has launched the 46664 campaign to raise funds for HIV/AIDS treatment in South Africa and to raise awareness of the disease. The first event of the campaign, which has the same number as Mr Mandela's prison number, will be a charity concert featuring several famous musicians. Elizabeth Blunt reports: AIDS, tragically, is a young people's disease. Each year half of those **newly infected** are under the age of twenty-five. The so-called 46664 campaign is **targeting** young people, using music, the internet, mobile phones, and the one **international figure** who's a **hero** to all ages, including the young, Nelson Mandela **is fronting** the campaign and the funds it raises will be used for the AIDS work of his Nelson Mandela Foundation. "I was imprisoned on Robben Island, known as just a number. Millions of people today, infected with AIDS, are just that - a number. They too are serving a **prison sentence** - for life." (Nelson Mandela)

His old prison number will be used for a website, and calling it by mobile phone will let people all over the world **donate** money, put their names to a **petition** urging governments to do more to fight AIDS, and let them listen to songs and greetings from their favourite stars.

The campaign proper will **kick off with** a huge concert in Cape Town at the end of next month. The organisers say Youssou Ndour, Angelique Kidjo, Ladysmith Black Mambaza, Bono, Beyonce and Queen will all be among the performers, and the event will be broadcast round the world to **reach** - they hope - two billion young people.

■ **Words**

newly infected: people who have recently become HIV positive

targeting: if you target a group of people, you hope to communicate with them specifically

international figure: someone who is well-known around the world

a hero: a man who is well respected and admired because of his skills, actions and qualities

is fronting: if you front something, you represent it and people link you to it

a prison sentence: the time that a person must stay in prison as punishment

donate: give

a petition: a document that many people put their names on to ask officials for something

kick off with: begin with

reach: to be seen or heard by

(Source: BBC)

Protests in UAE turned violent

By staff and agencies

Al-Quds Al-Arabi reported that videos have been circulated in social media, showing the protests in Musaffah area in Abu Dhabi Industrial district.

Based on the information obtained from social media, the daily wrote the demonstrations were staged against the “Sawaed” company, and dozens of people were arrested.

Sawaeed Employment is the brainchild of Sawaeed Holding. Founded in Abu Dhabi in 2006 by a group of UAE National entities to create resolution through employment and support services to fulfill the most significant challenges facing organizations across all industries in the region.

Previously, UAE warned it would review labor ties with countries refusing to take back citizens, including those who lost their jobs or were put on leave, and said it was considering strict quotas for work visas issued to nationals of those states.

The UAE is on lockdown and most hotels are shut, leaving very low paid migrant workers – mainly employed in the tourism, hospitality and construction sectors – stranded in the country with no prospect of earning. The Emirati government has allowed some repatriation flights for Asian migrant workers left jobless by the pandemic. However, some countries have refused to allow their citizens home, citing concerns over possible disease transmission, leaving workers struggling to survive without funds.

“These are worrying reports. Given the already vulnerable position of migrant workers in the UAE, abrupt redundancies are likely to have a devastating effect,” says May Romanos, Amnesty International’s Persian Gulf migrant rights’ researcher.

In accordance with UAE law, Accor is still providing its blue-collar migrant workers with food and accommodation. But in addition to their worry over debt, both Bipul and Dulhara say they are increasingly frightened their families back home will find paying for food difficult now they can’t send money.

Syrian warring sides agree to Geneva constitution talks: UN envoy

Representatives of opposing sides in Syria’s war have agreed to reconvene in Geneva for stalled negotiations on the constitution, according to Geir Pedersen, the United Nations special envoy to the country.

A lull in fighting could provide an opportunity to start healing “deep, deep mistrust” between them, Pedersen said on Tuesday. “As soon as the pandemic situation allows, they have agreed to come to Geneva and they have agreed on an agenda for the next meeting,” he told journalists.

Pedersen did not give a date and said a virtual meeting of the constitutional committee would not be possible.

In the same briefing, Pedersen repeated a call for key international actors, including the United States and Russia, to hold talks about a push for peace, al Jazeera reported.

Moscow has been the key backer of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad while Washington opposes him.

Pedersen told the UN Security Council (UNSC) on Monday that al-Assad ally Iran and opposition backer Turkey “are key players too”.

Rocket hits area near U.S. embassy in Baghdad’s Green Zone

A rocket has hit an area near the U.S. embassy in Baghdad’s Green Zone, security sources say.

The rocket that hit the Green Zone early Tuesday was the first to land in the high-security area in weeks.

The sound of explosion could be heard across the Iraqi capital and triggered security sirens at the U.S. embassy compound but did not cause casualties, the sources confirmed to AFP.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The rocket attack follows more than two dozen similar attacks against American interests in Iraq since October. The volleys of rockets have so far killed U.S., British and Iraqi armed personnel.

Nearly 5,200 U.S. troops still remain in Iraq while the Iraqi parliament voted in January to expel all American forces from the terror-ravaged country.

Baghdad and Washington are to hold negotiations in June to set a framework for the presence of U.S. troops in the Arab country.

The American embassy in Baghdad -- the world’s largest -- lies within the fortified neighborhood, also known as the International Zone, surrounded by concrete walls.

The Green Zone is home to several Western embassies and government offices including the parliament, the prime minister’s office, and the presidency.

Defecting French lawmakers deprive Macron of outright parliament majority

Defectors from Emmanuel Macron’s ruling party announced the creation of a new group in France’s lower house of parliament Tuesday, depriving the president of an outright majority and raising pressure for more left-wing policies.

Seven lawmakers are splintering from Macron’s La Republique En March (LREM) to join the new “Ecology, Democracy, Solidarity” group, which will count 17 parliamentarians in its ranks.

That means Macron’s party now only has 288 MPs, one short of an absolute majority, and down from the 314 Macron had after he redrew the political landscape in 2017, Reuters reported.

However, 17 is less than the 58 MPs suggested by media reports earlier this month, indicating that party bigwigs had managed to stem the flow.

“The pressure from the executive, the party and the group was such that we had to move the announcement forward,” one defector told Reuters. “Many eventually decided not to take the plunge.”

Macron’s party, formed by the former banker to propel him to the presidency in 2017, had already suffered a string of defections by lawmakers frustrated by his tight grip on decision-making and his pro-business policies.

Macron can still count on the support of a smaller alliance partner, the centrist MoDem. However, the arithmetic may now give MoDem more leverage over policymaking in the final two years of Macron’s mandate.

His reform drive has been stalled by the coronavirus pandemic, just as he was seeking to regain momentum after weeks of pension reform and “yellow vest” protests.

Saudi Arabia is the World’s largest terrorism exporter: Ilhan Omar

→ 1 The officials stopped short of saying that Alshamrani had been directed by the terror group, but said his ties to the AQAP began as far back as 2015 and were “significant.”

The connection between the group and the attack marked a major development in the U.S. fight against terrorism: Since 9/11, no foreign terrorist organization has successfully directed a deadly attack in the U.S., according to New America, a think tank.

The Justice Department has previously called the attack an act of terrorism that was motivated by “jihadist ideology.” Alshamrani had made anti-American, anti-Israel and jihadi posts on social media -- including one on the September 11 anniversary -- that stated “the countdown has begun,” and another two hours before the attack that referenced the words of an al Qaeda cleric.

During a 15-minute shooting spree, Alshamrani shot at a photo of President Donald Trump as well as a former president. He made statements during the attack that were critical of American servicemen overseas, the FBI has said.

AQAP had claimed responsibility for the



Pensacola attack and said it was in touch with Alshamrani. In February, the White House announced that Qassim al-Rimi,

the leader of the group, had been killed in an airstrike in Yemen. Barr would not say whether the second

EU won’t recognize unilateral Israeli annexation of occupied land: Borrell

The European Union (EU)’s foreign policy chief has warned Israel against acting on its “unilateral” decision to annex parts of the occupied Palestinian territory, saying the 27-nation bloc will not recognize any such changes to the 1967 borders.

In a statement released on Monday, Josep Borrell said the EU viewed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s push for annexation with “grave concern.”

“International law is a fundamental pillar of the international rules-based order. In this respect, the EU and its member states recall that they will not recognize any changes to the 1967 borders unless agreed by Israelis and Palestinians,” he said.

“We strongly urge Israel to refrain from any unilateral decision that would lead to the annexation of any occupied Palestinian territory and would be, as such, contrary to international law,” the top EU diplomat added.

A key campaign promise of Netanyahu and his right-wing Likud party in recent Israeli elections was imposing Tel Aviv’s “sovereignty” over Israeli settlements and the strategic Jordan Valley in the occupied West Bank.

A coalition deal that Netanyahu recently signed with his chief rival, Benny Gantz, allows the cabinet to begin moving ahead with the annexation bid on July 1.

Presenting his new cabinet on Sunday, Netanyahu said Israel’s law should be extended over the West Bank areas.

“The truth is, and everyone knows it, that the hundreds of thousands of settlers in Judea and Samaria will always stay put in any future deal,” he said, referring to the occupied West Bank by its biblical name.

Elsewhere in his statement, Borrell expressed the EU’s willingness to help restart Israeli-Palestinian talks, adding



that “the two-state solution, with Jerusalem [al-Quds] as the future capital for both states, is the only way to ensure sustainable peace and stability in the region.”

according to Press TV, Borrell had said Friday that the European nations “must work to discourage any possible initiative towards annexation” and such a strategy will require that states reach out to Israel, the U.S., the Palestinians and Arab partners “using all channels that the EU and the member states have.”

The resolution of the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict “remains a priority and it is one of the strategic interests of the European Union,” he told a press conference in Brussels after a virtual meeting with EU foreign ministers on the matter.

Netanyahu’s U.S.-backed plan to consolidate Israel’s

occupation of Palestine has been met with harsh criticism from almost the entire international community, including its close allies.

Several member states of the EU — Tel Aviv’s largest trading partner — have raised the possibility of taking punitive measures in a bid to deter Israel from its new land grab bid.

■ **World must slap Israel with sanctions: Palestine PM**

Addressing a virtual meeting of the UN committee that deals with Palestinian rights on Monday, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said it is time for the world community to stand by the Palestinian nation in the face of Tel Aviv’s annexation scheme.

“Now that the Israeli government has loud and clear and explicitly stated that they are going to annex certain parts of Palestine, no country has an excuse not to stand [against] this injustice,” he said.

Shtayyeh also urged the international community to recognize Palestine as a sovereign state and impose sanctions on Israel if the regime goes ahead with the annexation plan.

“That should be the most serious reply to what Israel is intending to do,” he said, noting that the Palestinian leadership will meet Tuesday night to discuss its next steps.

Shtayyeh further criticized the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump for giving Israel the “green light” for annexation in the so-called “deal of the century,” which was unveiled in January.

The U.S. has held an unsuccessful “monopoly” over the so-called peace process, but the Palestinians want a multi-lateral approach starting with an international conference under UN auspices, he said.

Syria vows fight against ‘American, Turkish, Israeli occupiers’

Syria’s UN envoy says any presence of foreign forces on Syrian soil without authorization from the Damascus government amounts to “aggression and occupation,” emphasizing the Arab nation’s right to defend its sovereignty and resources.

Addressing a teleconference meeting of the UN Security Council on Monday, Bashar al-Ja’afari said Syria would not abandon its right to safeguard its land and resources.

The Arab country, he added, is determined to keep up the fight against both foreign-backed terrorists and the occupiers, whether they are Americans, Turks or Israelis.

He slammed Turkey for sponsoring the terrorist groups that are active in different regions of northern Syria, describing Ankara’s move as a flagrant violation of its obligations under the agreements in Sochi, Moscow, Kazakhstan and under international law in general.

On the US military intervention in his country, Ja’afari said the American troops had begun to establish a new military base in the countryside of the eastern city of



Dayr al-Zawr with the aim of tightening their grip on Syrian oil wells and looting the nation’s resources.

According to Press TV, the senior Syrian diplomat further referred to the Israeli regime’s frequent acts of aggression against the country using the airspace over the Tel Aviv-occupied side of the Golan Heights or Syria’s neighbors.

Syria says such hostile practices — which are in flagrant violation of international law — are part of an agenda to prop up the terrorist groups wreaking havoc on the country and prolong the crisis gripping the nation since 2011.

Trump threatens to quit WHO

U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened to pull out of the World Health Organization, calling the UN health body a Chinese “puppet”.

Trump said the United States might permanently freeze all of its funding to the WHO if “major substantive improvements” weren’t made in the next 30 days.

In April, Washington suspended payments to the WHO, tasked with monitoring global health, accusing it of being too deferential to China and mismanaging the coronavirus pandemic.

On Monday, Trump tweeted images of a letter he sent to WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, saying the letter was “self-explanatory.”

“It is clear the repeated missteps by you and your organization in responding to the pandemic have been extremely costly for the world. The only way forward for the World Health Organization is if it can actually demonstrate independence from China,” Trump said in the letter.

Trump said, “They’re a puppet of China, they’re China-centric to put it nicer.”

China shot back on Tuesday, arguing that President Trump was trying to divert



attention from his own administration’s flawed response to the pandemic.

Trump said the U.S. pays around \$450 million annually to the WHO, “but, we’re not treated right. They gave us a lot of bad advice.”

“Plans are being crafted to slash the funding,” Trump said at the White House.

The U.S. president, who is under fire over his handling of the virus crisis in the country, spoke as the WHO held its first annual assembly since the pandemic swept the world after originating in China, killing 316,000 people — close to a third of them in the United States.

Civilian casualties by Taliban, Afghan forces rising: UN

The United Nations called Tuesday for an immediate reduction of violence in Afghanistan, warning that civilian casualties at the hands of both the Taliban and Afghan security forces are on the increase. The UN mission also expressed concern about stepped-up attacks and brutality of the Islamic State group.

A horrific attack last week at a maternity hospital in the Afghan capital has not been claimed by any group, but the United States said it bears all the hallmarks of Afghanistan’s IS affiliate - targeting the country’s minority Shiites in a neighborhood of Kabul that IS militants have repeatedly attacked in the past, AP reported.

The Taliban denied involvement in the maternity hospital attack, which killed 24 people, including two infants and several new mothers.

The UN report blamed the Taliban for killing or injuring a total of 208 civilians last month and also said that operations by Afghan forces in April had killed or injured 172 civilians. Civilians are often caught in the



crossfire of the fighting and Afghan forces say they are targeting the insurgents, not civilians, in anti-militant operations.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Muhahed disputed the

UN figures in a tweet and blamed “blind airstrikes and artillery fire by U.S. and internal forces” for the casualties.

“Parties have committed to finding a peaceful solution and should protect the lives of all Afghans and not jeopardize people’s hope for an end to the war,” said Deborah Lyons, the UN chief’s special representative to Afghanistan.

She added that “intra-Afghan peace negotiations need to start as soon as possible.”

The UN’s call for an end to violence comes as Washington’s special peace envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, began another round of talks with the Taliban to press them to start talking to the newly reconciled Afghan political leadership in Kabul and implement an immediate reduction in violence, said the U.S. State Department.

Khalilzad, who is the architect of a U.S.-Taliban deal signed in February, has been trying to salvage the agreement and jump-start intra-Afghan negotiations between the Taliban and the Kabul government.

Persepolis head coach happy for football resumption

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Yahya d e s k Golmohammadi, head coach of Persepolis football team, has expressed his happiness on the resumption of the Iran Professional League (IPL) matches.

"I am a football coach and I have played football for many years as well. The suspension of football due to the coronavirus outbreak forced us to stay at home for about three months. Now, we are happy that football will start again and we respect this decision," Golmohammadi said.

The Iran Professional League will resume on June 18, the Iran Football League Organization announced on Monday.

All sports activities in Iran were suspended on March 11, following the outbreak of the COVID-19 coronavirus. The season was halted with nine rounds remaining.

According to the announcement, the teams can start their training on Saturday.

Golmohammadi believes that that football can stimulate social vitality.



"Considering the coronavirus situation, there are many risky jobs in the community. We know the virus is still in our country and all over the world. But we cannot stop football more than this. Can anyone guarantee that the virus will be eradicated after a few more months? Personally, I have no job other than football and thus no other way to earn money.

"Football causes society to regain its vibrancy. It is difficult to train, play and travel in this situation, but health and safety protocols and guidelines can be effective and decrease the risks," he said.

Persepolis were leading the standings on 47 points with Sepahan and Tractor 10 behind.

"It is good that we hold such lead at the IPL table and that we have played with the top teams in the table and got good results, but nothing is guaranteed in football and we cannot say that we are champions," the head coach of Persepolis added.



Wilmots cheated on Iran football federation: Taj

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Former president of the d e s k Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) Mehdi Taj has said that Marc Wilmots has cheated on the federation.

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.

Wilmots has recently said he has filed a complaint

against Iran to FIFA and is waiting for the verdict. He also accused the Iranian federation of manipulating his contract.

"There is no possibility of manipulation in the contract. Wilmots doesn't seem to use language responsibly," Taj said in an interview with state-run TV.

"We have to pay compensation to him for just three months not two-year. He has cheated on the federation," the ex-president added.

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.

Real, Bayern, Inter join forces to boost healthcare in Italy and Spain

Real Madrid, Bayern Munich and Inter Milan have announced a mini tournament called the 'European Solidarity Cup - Football for Heroes', to raise funds for health care resources in Italy and Spain which have been depleted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In separate statements, the clubs announced that the matches would take place at each of their stadiums and would raise money for boosting healthcare resources in Italy and Spain, but not in Germany.

"The net proceeds from all three games will be donated to medical facilities in Italy and Spain," said Bayern's statement.

"FC Bayern sees its contribution as a symbol of support for a united Europe, in which everyone takes responsibility for each other."

Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge added: "Despite all the suffering and all the problems, we in Germany are perhaps fortunate that our healthcare system is proving resilient in this crisis."



"But we have also seen horrifying images from Italy and Spain, both countries among those hardest hit in Europe by the pandemic."

Italy is the second-worst affected country in Europe behind Britain by the coronavirus, with a death toll of more than 32,000. Spain is the third-worst affected, with over 27,000 people dying from the virus.

Germany has fared comparatively well, registering 8,007 deaths despite having the highest population in Western Europe.

Last Saturday, the Bundesliga became the first major soccer league in Europe to resume action after the virus paralyzed world sport in March.

Bayern will host Real at the Allianz Arena in Munich, Real will play against Inter at their Santiago Bernabeu stadium, while Inter would host Bayern at the San Siro.

The three clubs added that healthcare professionals who have fought against the pandemic would be invited to the matches, which will take place when it is safe for supporters to return to stadiums without risk of being infected by the virus.

(Source: Reuters)

Curtailed French season could have been completed in August, UEFA letter reveals



An August 3 deadline to complete the suspended football season was only a recommendation and "not official", according to a letter written by UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin amid an ongoing row over the decision to call a premature end to the campaign in France.

In a letter sent to the Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas on May 14 -- revealed by French daily Le Parisien and of which AFP has obtained a copy -- Ceferin explains that European football's governing body had indeed discussed setting an August 3 deadline for countries to finish their domestic leagues.

August 3 was cited as the latest date for the top 15 European leagues, including France, to finish seasons which ground to a halt in mid-March because of the coronavirus pandemic. The date for lower-ranked competitions was July 20.

"However, we always mentioned during those meetings that these dates were recommended and tentative, not official," Ceferin wrote.

Referring to a UEFA meeting on April 23 setting out a way forward for suspended leagues, the head of European football's governing body emphasized that the aim was to play on wherever possible.

"UEFA's recommendation was ... clearly to encourage the national associations and leagues to do their utmost to finish the

ongoing domestic championships, either in the original format or an adapted format, if necessary," he wrote.

However, the French league (LFP) called an end to its season on April 30 with 10 rounds of matches left unplayed.

- Discontent -

That was after the French government said that the season "cannot restart" and that large gatherings would remain banned until September.

Paris Saint-Germain were declared champions but Lyon were one of several clubs left deeply unhappy with the decision which denied them European qualification for next season.

Aulas has been outspoken in his rejection of what he saw as a hasty decision, insisting that a way could have been found to finish the season in August before the next campaign begins.

Meanwhile Amiens have launched legal action against the league's decision which condemned them to relegation from Ligue 1.

Aulas has claimed that the LFP based their decision around the deadline put forward by UEFA.

The date of August 3 was indeed mentioned in the minutes of the LFP's meeting as "an obstacle to the 2019-20 Ligue 1 season restarting when it will be possible to organize matches again".

(Source: AFP)

Ronaldo back training at Juventus after two months



Cristiano Ronaldo returned to training with Juventus in Turin on Tuesday after an absence of over two months because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 35-year-old arrived at the Juventus Training Centre in a Jeep with tinted windows around 09:20 (0720 GMT), leaving three hours later with a smile and thumbs up for waiting photographers.

Ronaldo underwent medical and physical tests before joining up with his teammates for the first time in 72 days for individual training, according to media reports.

Coach Maurizio Sarri has been conducting training in small groups since Monday, pending the final health protocol to be agreed with the Italian government.

Juventus players got back to individual training on May 4, the day Ronaldo returned to Italy after spending lockdown in his native Portugal.

For the past two weeks, he has been in quarantine in his villa in Turin.

Ronaldo played in Juventus' last Serie A game before the season was suspended, a 2-0 win over Inter Milan behind closed doors at the Allianz Stadium on March 8.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner is the first Juventus foreign player, among those who left Italy during the lockdown, to return

to the team's Continassa training centre. Italy has been one of the countries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic with more than 32,000 deaths.

League leaders Juventus are leading Lazio by one point as they target a ninth consecutive 'Scudetto'.

The Italian Football Federation (FIGC) announced on Monday that all its competitions, including Serie A, will remain suspended until June 14.

Serie A had hoped to return on June 13 but the FIGC has pushed back the date in line with a government decree that all sports competitions be suspended until next month.

The FIGC said the choice was made "pending any further... decision by the authorities", suggesting the possibility of a restart on June 13 might still exist.

But Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said on Saturday he needed "more guarantees" before the green light could finally be given for football to resume.

A meeting is planned in the near future between Conte and Italian football bosses.

The government's technical and scientific committee will decide in the coming days if it accepts the new health protocols proposed for a return to group training and competition.

(Source: Eurosport)

Double amputee Salarvand shows a unique determination

1 → It is the spirit that causes him to stand on the highest peak of Iran, Damavand, less than two years after the accident. The double-leg amputee then conquered the Bisotun Wall for the first time in the world.

Sajad poses an example to people with disabilities with his many mountaineering achievements, such as the conquest of Milad Tower with stair climbing and Mount Ararat, which is the highest peak in Turkey. He is the third super professional disabled mountaineer in the world.

Iran's Esfandiar joins Greenyard Maaseik VC

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran international wing spiker d e s k Amirhossein Esfandiar has joined Belgian volleyball club Greenyard Maaseik.

Esfandiar has joined his compatriot Javad Karimi in the team.



The 21-year-old was a member of Iranian club Kalleh Mazandaran over the past five years.

Esfandiar was named as the Most Valuable Player at the 2017 FIVB Volleyball U19 World Championship, the 2018 Asian U20 Championship and the 2019 World Cup U21.

Esfandiar was part of the team who won the AVC Men's Tokyo Volleyball Qualification tournament in January in China.

Omid Ebrahimi close to Al Ahli return

TASNIM — Iranian international midfielder Omid Ebrahimi is close to returning to Al Ahli club after the second season on loan in the Belgian club Eupen, Staddoha reported.

Ebrahimi's contract with Eupen runs at the end of the season.

The Qatari club is going to part company with Australian defender Shane Lowry and wants to bring back Ebrahimi to Doha.

Ebrahimi joined Al Ahli in July 2018 but was loaned to Belgian top-flight team Eupen a year later.

He played 21 matches for Al Ahli and scored four goals for the team in the 2018-19 season.

Palestine Pro League to restart on June 12

The Palestine Football Association (PFA) has announced that the 2019-20 season will resume on June 12.

"Out of the national and sport interest, and according to the regulations of the association and in agreement with the clubs, the professional league and the first division will be resumed on Friday June 12, 2020," read a PFA statement.

Clubs will begin training on May 27, having seen the season halted in March due to the COVID19 pandemic.

The remaining three rounds of the professional league will be played behind closed doors in three stadiums - The Houari Boumediene Stadium in Dora, the American University Stadium in Jenin and the Faisal Al-Husseini Stadium in Al Ram.

The PFA said that the resumption of the league will be in line with the health protocol set by the Palestinian Ministry of Health, which was distributed to the clubs and there will be specific workshops held for all parties concerned.

Markaz Balatah are leading the 12-team league with 42 points, seven points clear of Markaz Shabab Al-Am'ari while defending champions Hilal Alquds are fourth with 30 points.

(Source: AFP)

Button shocked Vettel will not be at Ferrari next season

Former world champion Jenson Button says he is shocked Sebastian Vettel will not drive for Ferrari next season and that it would be "madness" if the team had pushed him out.

Ferrari said last week that four-times world champion Vettel would leave them at the end of the 2020 season, after talks on a new contract ended without a deal.

They then replaced the German with Spaniard Carlos Sainz to race alongside Charles Leclerc.

German media had reported that Vettel, who won 14 races with Ferrari and is their third-most successful driver, had rejected a one-year extension with a reduced salary but the 32-year-old said financial matters played no part in the joint decision.

"If he was pushed, for me it's madness," Button, the 2009 world champion, told Sky Sports.

"He showed his speed last year. He had a tough moment in the season when Charles was performing really well and that hurt him a bit mentally. But he came back strong ... he's somebody you'd definitely choose to put in your car if you had an F1 team."

(Source: Reuters)

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■ Managing Director: Mohammad Shojaeian
■ Editor-in-Chief: Ali A.Jenabzadeh

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051430
» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807
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No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.O. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713



GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

A usurped stone in a house causes the ruin of that house.

Imam Ali (AS)

Alireza Qorbani, world musicians release Sadi-inspired music video in pandemic

→1 Violinists Dahl ah Lee from South Korea and Linda Bull from Australia, saxophonist Javier Giroto from Argentina and violoncellist Dagmar Bathmann from Germany are among the musicians collaborating on the project.

Other musicians are from France, India, Senegal and Spain. The singers perform the following poem of Sadi's in Persian in the music video.



Vocalist Alireza Qorbani acknowledges the audience after his performance in Tehran's Vahdat Hall on March 14, 2016. (Tasnim/Mohammad Delkesh)

"The sons of Adam are limbs of each other
Having been created of one essence.
When the calamity of time afflicts one limb
The other limbs cannot remain at rest.
If thou hast no sympathy for the troubles of others
Thou art unworthy to be called by the name of a man."

Qorbani has collaborated with numerous musicians during concerts around the world. He gave a concert at WOMEX – the World Music Expo in October 2017.

Composer Saman Samimi, tar player Milad Mohammadi and percussionist Hossein Zahavi accompanied him in the performance.

Music ensembles from Ukraine, Greece, India, Colombia, Sweden, Germany, the U.S., France and several other countries also gave performances at the expo.

Gordon Orians' "Snakes, Sunrises, and Shakespeare" published in Persian

CULTURE TEHRAN — American ornithologist and ecologist Gordon h. Orians' book "Snakes, Sunrises, and Shakespeare, How Evolution Shapes Our Loves and Fears" has recently been published in Persian by Nashre No Publications in Tehran.

The book has been translated into Persian by Kaveh Feizollahi. "Our breath catches and we jump in fear at the sight of a snake.

We pause and marvel at the sublime beauty of a sunrise. These reactions are no accident; in fact, many of our human responses to nature are steeped in our deep evolutionary past." Amazon writes in an introduction to the book.

"We fear snakes because of the danger of venom or constriction, and we welcome the assurances of the sunrise as the predatory dangers of the dark night disappear. Many of our aesthetic preferences – from the kinds of gardens we build to the foods we enjoy and the entertainment we seek – are the lingering result of natural selection.

"In this ambitious and unusual work, evolutionary biologist Gordon H. Orians explores the role of evolution in human responses to the environment, beginning with why we have emotions and ending with evolutionary approaches to aesthetics.

"Orians reveals how our emotional lives today are shaped by decisions our ancestors made centuries ago on African savannas as they selected places to live, sought food and safety, and socialized in small hunter-gatherer groups.

"During this time our likes and dislikes became wired in our brains, as the appropriate responses to the environment meant the difference between survival or death.

"His rich analysis explains why we mimic the tropical savannas of our ancestors in our parks and gardens, why we are simultaneously attracted to danger and approach it cautiously, and how paying close attention to nature's sounds has resulted in us being an unusually musical species."



Front cover of the Persian translation of Gordon Orians' "Snakes, Sunrises, and Shakespeare".

Tehran Symphony Orchestra releases video of "Ode to Joy"

A R T TEHRAN — The d e s k Tehran Symphony Orchestra has released a video featuring a performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 "Ode to Joy" produced along with over 170 world musicians and vocalists to give encouragement to people around the world in the battle with COVID-19.

"We believe that this performance conveys the message of equality and friendship," Iran's Rudaki Foundation that is the producer of the video said in a statement published on Tuesday.

"Under these circumstances in which the world is dealing with a mutual affliction, there no way except to unite to overcome this crisis," it added.

Musicians and vocalists from Armenia, Russian, the U.S., Italy, Lebanon, Argentina, Austria, Germany, South Korea, China, Egypt and Kazakhstan collaborated in this video recorded under the supervision of Tehran Symphony Orchestra conductor Bardia Kiaras.

For producing the video, all the musicians sent their rendition of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 "Ode to Joy" recorded at home to the Tehran Symphony Orchestra.

Earlier on April 17, the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) announced that the Young Musicians European Orchestra and the Tehran Symphony Orchestra have teamed up to record a music video for Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 "Ode to Joy".

The performances were to be supervised by the conductor of the Young Musicians



This file photo shows the Tehran Symphony Orchestra performing a concert at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on December 20, 2017. (YJC/Alireza Farahani)

European Orchestra conductor, Paolo Olmi, who was supposed to do the final arrangements for the orchestra.

The Rudaki Foundation, which supervises Iran's state orchestras, produced the videos of Hossein Dehlavi's "Sabokbal" and Morteza

Neydavid's "Romantic Passion" during home quarantine in appreciation of the efforts made by the healthcare staff.

Golestan Palace launches virtual Coronart exhibit

A R T TEHRAN — Golestan d e s k Palace in Tehran has launched a virtual exhibit named "Coronart", calling on artists to reproduce paintings and digital artworks on the theme of the coronavirus pandemic.

The artworks must be created based on a collection of photos of a number of Qajar-era characters, the organizers have announced.

The photos of the original works are available at the Golestan Palace website and interested individuals are asked to reproduce the artworks in the form of painting, graphic design or balloon word.

Artists can choose the photos available on the palace's website for their paintings and graphic designs.

Artists are asked to submit their works to the organizers of the exhibit before August 19.

The selected works will be published in the digital catalogue of the exhibit and will go on view at the palace after the pandemic is over.

Located in the heart and historic core of Tehran, the palace complex is one of the oldest in the Iranian capital, originally built during the Safavid dynasty in the historic walled city.

Following extensions and additions, it received its most characteristic



A poster for the Coronart exhibition at the Golestan Palace in Tehran.

features in the 19th century, when the palace complex was selected as the royal residence and seat of power by the Qajar ruling family.

It was not only used as the governing base of the Qajar kings but also functioned as a recreational and residential compound and a center of artistic production in the 19th century. Through the latter activity, it became the source and center of Qajar arts and architecture.

"Eleventh Step", "We Only Get One Planet" to compete Annecy animation festival

A R T TEHRAN — The d e s k Iranian movies "The Eleventh Step", "We Only Get One Planet" will be screened in various sections of the Annecy International Animated Film Festival, the organizers have announced.

The festival will be organized online in the alpine town in southeastern France from June 15 to 30.

Directed by Maryam Kashkulinia, "The Eleventh Step" will be screened in the Young Audiences Short Films in Competition.

A little lion cub, born in a zoo, lives in a cage that is only ten steps long. On the eleventh step he bangs his head against the bars, but one day the zookeeper leaves the cage door open. However, the lion cub never dares to take one more step toward its freedom.

The movie has been made based on Iranian children's author Susan Taqdis story of the same title.

"We Only Get One Planet" directed by Aqil Hosseini will go on screen in the Commissioned Films in Competition.

Géraldine Soto, Chrystel Mussy-Masucci and Nathalie Leffray are the members of the jury for the Young Audiences Short Films in Competition.

The animation tells the story of a passenger, who is eating while sitting on



"The Eleventh Step" by Iranian director Maryam Kashkulinia.

the back seat of a moving car, throwing his rubbish out of the car window. This rubbish is collected, along with all the other rubbish that has been thrown out onto the road.

A jury composed of Canadian art expert Marco De Blois, Korean director and producer Dahee Jeong and Art Ludique Le Musée Managing Director Diane Launier from France will judge the movies in this category.

Penguin Books publish Garus Abdolmalekian's poetry in English

CULTURE TEHRAN — Penguin Books d e s k published a selection of poems by young Iranian writer Garus Abdolmalekian in English.

Entitled "Lean against This Late Hour", the book was translated into English by Idra Novey and Ahmad Nadalizadeh.

The book contains "Hollows", "The Faded Colors of the World", "Lines Change Places in the Dark", "The Hidden Bird" and dozens of other works by the poet.

Abdolmalekian is an acclaimed young Iranian poet. He

is the author of four poetry books that have been reprinted several times.

His poems have been translated into Arabic, French, German, Kurdish and Spanish. Abdolmalekian is presently the editor of the poetry section at Cheshmeh Publications in Tehran and the executive editor of publications at the Youth Poetry Office in Iran.

A Swedish translation of a selection of poetry by Abdolmalekian was published in Sweden under the title, "Raderna byter plats i morkret" in 2016.



A copy "Lean against This Late Hour" by Iranian poet Garus Abdolmalekian.

Kenneth Oppel's "Half Brother" comes to Iranian bookstores

CULTURE TEHRAN — A d e s k Persian translation of Canadian children's writer Kenneth Oppel's story "Half Brother" has come to Iranian bookstores.

Translated into Persian by Simin Zargaran, the book has been published by Cheshmeh Publications.

"Half Brother" is about the way families are made, the way humanity is judged, the way easy choices become hard ones, and how you can't always do right by the people and animals you love.

In the story, Ben Tomlin was an only child for thirteen years. But all that changes when his mother brings home Zan — an eight-day-old chimpanzee. Ben's father, a renowned behavioral scientist, has uprooted the family to pursue his latest research project: a high-profile experiment to determine whether chimpanzees can acquire advanced language skills.

Ben's parents tell him to treat Zan like a little brother. Ben reluctantly agrees. At



This combination photo shows Canadian children's writer Kenneth Oppel and his book "Half Brother".

least now he's not the only one his father is going to scrutinize.

It isn't long before Ben is Zan's favorite, and Ben starts to see Zan as more than just an experiment. His father disagrees.

Soon Ben is forced to make a critical choice between what he is told to believe and what he knows to be true — between obeying his father or protecting his brother from an unimaginable fate.

Iranian artists to produce works on Palestine's resistance on Quds Day

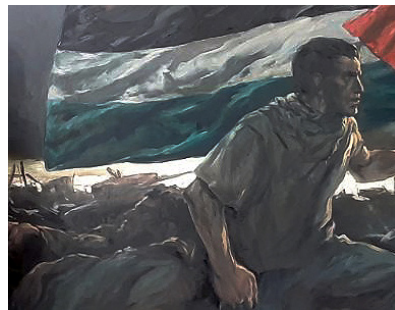
A R T TEHRAN — Over 30 d e s k Iranian artists will be creating artworks on the resistance of Palestinians in a gathering to be held in the courtyard of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS), the eighth Shia Imam, in Mashhad on International Quds Day on Friday.

Organized by the Art Bureau's Visual Arts Office, the program has been arranged to respect and support the years-long resistance of the oppressed people of Palestine.

Mohammad-Ali Rajabi, Masud Nejabati, Ali Vazirian, Hassan Ruholamin, Abbas Barzegar Ganji, Zahra Asadian, Nasser Taqizadeh, Abbas Gudarzi and Mehdi Farrokhi are among the participating artists.

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

The day is observed by rallies around



A painting by Hassan Ruholamin.

the world on the last Friday of the fasting month of Ramadan.

Rallies are held each year in various cities around the world by both Muslims and non-Muslim communities.

This year Quds Day will be held in Tehran by a procession of cars under the watchful eyes of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps to combat coronavirus pandemic. People can attend Quds Day rallies by riding in their cars.