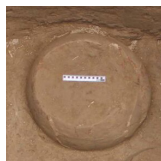




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## Population growth drops to less than 1% for first time

**TEHRAN** — The country's population growth rate has decreased to less than one percent for the first time over the past four decades, Seyed Hamed Barakati, deputy health minister for family and school population has said.

The marriage rate in the country has dropped by 40 percent since 10 years ago, which is an alarm that threatens

the country's future in all economic, social and even security dimensions, he lamented.

In [the Iranian calendar year] 1389 (March 2010- March 2011), the number of marriages estimated at 890,000, which decreased to less than 550,000, last year, he stated, IRNA reported on Wednesday. **→9**

## Iran says its navy will regularly operate in Persian Gulf

**TEHRAN** — An Iranian military official has said that the Iranian navy will maintain regular missions in the Persian Gulf.

"The naval units of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman will continue their regular missions in accordance with professional principles as in the past," the official told Nour News on Wednesday.

The comments came after the United

States' Navy issued a warning on Tuesday to mariners in the Persian Gulf to stay away from U.S. warships.

According to Reuters, in an alert that appeared aimed squarely at Iran, the U.S. Navy issued a warning on Tuesday to mariners in the Persian Gulf to stay 100 meters (yards) away from U.S. warships or risk being "interpreted as a threat and subject to lawful defensive measures." **→3**

## 'Non-oil exports booming as pandemic subsides'

**TEHRAN** — Governor of Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati said the country's non-oil exports are improving following a downtrend of the coronavirus cases in the country, IRNA reported.

"As the coronavirus pandemic subsides, the country's non-oil exports are reviving and booming," Hemmati wrote in an Instagram post on Tuesday.

"Today, during a meeting of the Government's Economic Coordination Head-

quarters in the presence of the president, the government's plans for the expansion of non-oil exports and providing foreign currency for the country's imports in the [current Iranian calendar year] 1399 (started on March 19) were examined and good decisions were made," the official said.

The acting minister of industry, mining and trade also presented a report on predicting rate of non-oil exports with a focus on neighboring countries, the CBI governor added. **→4**

# Covid-1948



## ARTICLE

**Martin Love**  
Political analyst from  
North Carolina

## The U.S. movement from prosperity to utter decay...

Very few people in the West nowadays know or have heard of British General Sir John Glubb, but it is probable that some educated people in the Middle East know the name, and particularly in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Glubb (1897-1986) was a soldier, author and even a scholar of sorts who from 1939, until he was dismissed by King Hussein of Jordan in 1956, led and trained the famed "Arab Legion" as its commanding officer.

It's hard today to know what to make of Glubb, who was a kind of lesser latter day T.E. Lawrence (who also was a British army officer with a kind of exotic fascination with the cultures and splendors of the Middle East) at a time when Western imperialism might have seemed and should have been on the wane, except that it was not at all, finding its most odious expression in the Zionist infestation of Palestine over the last 100 plus years with gobs of British support initially and later especially with U.S. support (and corruption).

Glubb was not entirely trusted by thinkers in the Arab world and it was claimed that he considered giving Palestine away to the bloody Zionists if could have retained a small corner of the country for himself. There is no question he also served his ultimate imperialist masters in the British military. And tellingly, he named his son "Godfrey" — after Godfrey of Bouillon, who happened to be in 1099 for a year until his death the first ruler of the so-called Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. (Might he have been remembered more fondly if he had named his son Salah ad-Din? One would imagine so.)

But Glubb was not a bad writer even if he was not a great one, and perhaps recalling from his studies and experiences the example at least of the very finest early social historian and theorist, Ibn Khaldun (d. 1400), who discerned patterns in the rise and fall of countries, societies and empires, Glubb also came up with an explanation of what happens in failing societies and politics. Failing societies and politics like the United States has become in the past decade since the last economic recession in 2008-09. **→3**

## Producer price index improves in a quarter

**TEHRAN** — Iran's Producer Price Index (PPI) data for the Q4 of the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) indicates that the index has improved 10.6 percent compared to the Q3, IRIB reported on Wednesday.

According to the data released by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), the point-to-point inflation of the country's producer price index for the past year's Q4 reached 15.0 percent, which is 10.6 percent lower than the previous season.

As reported, the highest inflation rate was reported to be related to the mining sector (33.3 percent), while the lowest inflation rate was reported for the electricity sector (7.1 percent).

Back in February, SCI reported that Iran's industrial producer inflation dropped to -2.3 percent in last autumn (September 23-December 21, 2019) for the first time in four years.

The point-to-point inflation in the mentioned sector reached 27 percent, to register a 33.6 percent

decrease compared to the figure for the last year's same season, the report said.

Based on the SCI data, among the various industrial sectors, the lowest seasonal inflation was attributed to the "coal industry and oil refineries" (-10.7 percent), followed by "paper and paper products" (-4.6 percent), and the petrochemicals (-2 percent). The highest inflation rates were reported to be related to "office and computing appliances" (26.6 percent), "garment production, processing, and dyeing" (9.5 percent) and "transportation equipment production" (7.8 percent).

Later in March, SCI announced that the inflation rate in the country is expected to experience a downward trend in the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 20).

The SCI estimated the annual and point-to-point inflation rates using three different scenarios, all of which forecast the future inflation rates using the data from the previous similar time spans and comparing them to the present situation.

## Theater owners call on Rouhani to lift coronavirus restrictions

**TEHRAN** — The Association of Iranian Theater Owners has asked President Hassan Rouhani to lift the coronavirus restriction on cinemas, calling for reopening of the theaters across the country based on the health protocols during the pandemic.

In the letter published on Wednesday, they have explained the problems and the damages caused by the shutdown of the movie theaters across the country because of the pandemic, and asked the President for more help and support.

"Due to the COVID-19 outbreak in Iran and in the world, many big and small industries have been shut down, causing serious damage to the economy of the country," reads part of the letter.

"Among all these are art and culture, which have suffered the most damage and a great loss," it says.

"The big family of theater owners, which completes the distribution and screening process of films, has been ignored over the past three

months, and there has been no word about their catastrophic situation in the country," it adds.

"The theaters were closed before other cultural and economic and religious centers in order to avoid the spread of the new virus. However, there has been no attempt to reopen them, despite the announcement of different times and dates for them," it adds.

"The cinema industry has lost over 40 percent of its annual income and over 5000 jobs have been lost directly and indirectly in this industry. There is no bright future for them, and considering the increasing daily costs these days, more support is requested from the managers," it continues.

"The life of filmmaking depends on screening films and return on capital, and we ask the officials in charge to support this industry, otherwise the shutdown of theaters will soon effect the entire culture," it ends. **→12**

## U.S., China trade barbs at UN, amid spat over pandemic

Representatives from China and the United States have traded barbs at a United Nations Security Council meeting, as the US continues to blame China for the coronavirus pandemic without evidence.

During a Security Council meeting on Tuesday, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Kelly Craft called on China "to validate its claims of global leadership in combating COVID-19" by supporting "a resolution to allow the UN to combat this pandemic by delivering life-saving aid cross-border" into Syria.

China's UN Ambassador Zhang Jun hit back by calling on Washington to focus on global efforts to fight the pandemic and "stop playing political games and really focus on saving lives and stop diverting from its own responsibilities to other countries."

The U.S. President Donald Trump administration has been suggesting that the coronavirus was artificially synthesized at a lab in China and that Beijing failed to act promptly when its own outbreak began late last year. China

has rejected the allegations.

The tensions between the two veto-wielding powers has hampered a months-long attempt by the Security Council to agree on a resolution backing UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' call for a global ceasefire so the world can focus on fighting the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) on Tuesday passed a resolution on the need to investigate the global response to the coronavirus pandemic. **→10**



## Awe-inspiring, ancient and lonely: Zahhak Castle

Sightseers pay a visit to the ruined Zahhak Castle which is perched on a hillside near Hashtroud, northwest Iran, on May 19, 2020.

The lonely castle served as a military stronghold during the Parthian era (247 BC – 224 CE). In the Persian legend, Zahhak is the name of an Arab king who conquered and ruled over ancient Iran. The story is recounted in the Shahnameh (Book of Kings), written by Iranian illustrious poet Ferdowsi.

### TEHRAN TIMES

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The next issue of the Tehran Times will be published on Tuesday, May 26.



## Quds will never be forgotten, Rouhani says

### President says Quds will not remain in occupation of the tyrants

**POLITICAL** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that Quds will never be forgotten and it will be liberated from the tyrants.

“Quds will never be forgotten. Quds will not remain in occupation of the tyrants. The Palestinian land will be liberated someday. We will never accept this aggression and tyranny and we will never tolerate it,” he said in a cabinet meeting.



He noted that pressure against the Palestinians is increasing each day.

“However, the Palestinian people’s resilience and resistance will continue and they will gain victory sooner or later. We will celebrate that day,” he added.

Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi has underlined the importance of the Palestinian cause and liberation of the holy city of Quds.

Addressing a meeting of Judiciary officials in Tehran on Monday, Raisi pointed at the upcoming International Quds Day and said it is a priority for Muslims to liberate Quds.

He also denounced the Zionist regime’s crimes against the people of Palestine, Lebanon and other regional countries, saying the regime is now seeking to implement the scandalous “deal of the century” plan.

The U.S. and the Zionist regime will never succeed in carrying out this plot, he added.

The International Quds Day is a legacy of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, who designated the day in solidarity with Palestinians.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the International Quds Day has been held worldwide on the last Friday of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

## “Deal of century” proposal is play with fire: parliamentary body

**POLITICAL** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The International Conference on the Palestinian Intifada of the Iranian Parliament issued a statement on Wednesday saying the so-called “deal of the century” is play with fire.

“The deal of the century, which is intended to annex the West Bank to the occupied lands, marginalizes the Palestinian people. It is playing with fire which can explode tinderboxes in Palestine and the region,” the statement said.



It noted that the Palestine issue has entered a critical phase.

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

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

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

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

Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi said on May 11 that a new Intifada will emerge if the West Bank is annexed to the Palestinian occupied lands by the Israeli regime.

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

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

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

Just recently the Zionist regime’s Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and his main rival Benny Gantz signed a coalition agreement that includes a clause to advance plans to annex parts of the West Bank, including Israeli settlements, starting on July 1.

# General Soleimani’s name is symbol of Quds: Hezbollah official

**POLITICAL** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Hashim Safi Al Din, the head of the Hezbollah Executive Council, has said that Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani’s military career was on the path to liberate Quds from the Israeli occupation.

In an interview with al-Mayadeen TV channel, Safi Al Din said that Soleimani’s name is symbol of Quds, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

Soleimani, commander of the Quds unit of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), was assassinated in a terrorist U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on January 3.

“General Soleimani was a real commander for the resistance front. He made a lot of efforts to establish the front and supported it,” the Hezbollah official remarked.

The head of the Hezbollah Executive Council also said that the Zionist regime of Israel used U.S. President Donald Trump to target the resistance front.

General Soleimani was a legendary commander in leading the resistance forces against terrorist groups, especially Daesh, in both Syria and Iraq.

Ziad al-Nakhala, secretary general of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, has said that Soleimani played an important role



in strengthening the Palestinian resistance movement.

General Soleimani turned the Palestinian resistance forces into an “armed powerful army”, ISNA quoted him as saying in March in an interview with an Arabic language channel.

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Ismail

Haniyeh said in January that the assassination of Soleimani will not change the course of the Resistance Front and that the resistance movement will continue in Palestine.

“I declare that the resistance project in Palestine will continue and will not be weakened and it won’t retreat,” Haniyeh

## France reaffirms support for nuclear deal

**POLITICAL** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — France’s permanent mission in Vienna has reaffirmed Paris’ support for the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the JCPOA.

“France reaffirms its support for JCPOA and the work of the Agency [the International Atomic Energy Agency] and its inspectors, whose verification and inspection mission in Iran is essential. It calls on Iran to return to the implementation of the agreement, and to cooperate fully with the @iaeaorg,” it said in a tweet in French language.

Rafael Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has said that the cooperation of Iran as an inspected state has not been interrupted.

“We are there, our inspectors are there. They are carrying out their activities, which is very important. At the same time, what our inspectors have been verifying is the diminishing degree of compliance of the agreement in 2015,” he told Euronews in

an interview published in February.

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

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

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

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

On January 5, Iran took a fifth and last step in reducing its commitments and said it would no longer observe any operational

limitations on its nuclear industry, whether concerning the capacity and level of uranium enrichment, the volume of stockpiled uranium or research and development. However, Iran has insisted if the Europeans honor their obligations it will immediately reverse its decisions.

Iran’s move is in line with paragraph 36 of the JCPOA.

President Hassan Rouhani said on May 6 that Iran will return to full implementation of the JCPOA if other signatories do the same. Josep Borrell, the EU foreign policy chief, said in December 2019 that the signatories to the nuclear deal should adopt a united stance to preserve the deal.

Mojtaba Zolnour, the head of the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has said that the nuclear deal has just been implemented by Iran.

“The JCPOA has just been implemented by Iran and for the current time, nothing has remained from the JCPOA,” he told the

said in a speech at the funeral of General Soleimani in Tehran.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in January that Soleimani will be serving as an inspiring example for the resistance front.

During a meeting with Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza in Tehran, Zarif described Soleimani as a “remarkable” figure of resistance.

Zarif said in an interview with the khomeini.ir published on February 17 that Soleimani was not only a hero of resistance but also a hero in the fight against terrorism and advocating peace.

“The Islamic Republic has always stood by Palestinians’ and other Muslim nations’ side in their resistance, including Lebanon, Syria and other Arab countries whose lands have been occupied by the Zionist regime. Martyr Soleimani was, in fact, a symbol of the Iranian nation’s cooperation with and assistance to the nations of the region. Martyr Soleimani was an individual who mounted resistance not only in the face of the Zionist regime but also in the face of extremism and terrorism. He stood by the side of the resistant people of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine,” Zarif stated.

## Iran urges Europe to support Palestinians

### Foreign Ministry likens illegitimate establishment of Israel to Covid1948

**POLITICAL** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — As Israel is planning to annex parts of the West Bank, Iran’s Foreign Ministry has issued a series of tweets urging Europe to “listen to the global conscience” and support the Palestinians.

“Since the illegitimate establishment of the Zionist regime, Europe has left behind #Palestinians & incurred painful costs on them. It’s high time Europe listen to the global conscience & take bold steps in defending the Palestinians agnst the Israeli atrocities. #Covid1948,” the Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

In another tweet on Wednesday, the ministry said, “The Zionist regime was born through terror, and since then has assassinated thousands of people from ordinary #Palestinians to prominent Arab figures and Iranian scientists. A terrorist regime in nature, Israel still continues to sow seeds of chaos in our region. #Covid1948.”

It also said in another tweet that the Quds Day “is a yearly reminder to the Muslim world that the Israeli regime’s occupation and aggressive actions have been an underlying factor in conflicts in our region.”

Quds Day was initiated by the founder of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 to express solidarity with Palestinians whose land is being occupied by the Zionist settlers.

Quds Day is held at the last Friday of the fasting month of Ramadan. This year it falls on May 22.

■ **‘Israel’s occupation source of crisis in West Asia’**

Iran’s embassy in Croatia has issued a statement saying Israel’s occupation and expansionism are sources of the crisis in West Asia.



“Occupying lands of the Palestinian people and committing crimes against them by the Zionist regime are focal point of crisis and catastrophe in West Asia,” the statement said.

It also said, “In May 1948, Palestine witnessed one of the most painful events in history of Islam and the world. Since then, the Palestinian people are deprived of their right and peace.”

“72 years ago, the Zionists resorted to their racist ideology and violence and killed the Palestinian people, including women and children, or forced them to leave their homeland. Since then, West Asia is in crisis,” the statement noted.

In 1948, the Zionist regime forced 760,000 Palestinians out of their homeland to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, neighboring Arab states as well as to many other countries in the world, and hundreds of Palestinian villages were depopulated and destroyed. The vast majority of Palestinian refugees, both those outside the 1949 armistice lines at the war’s conclusion and those internally displaced,

## Senior MP underscores IRGC aerospace force’s plans to orbit satellites in 36,000-km altitude

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force is seriously pursuing plans to send satellites into the 36,000-km orbit in the future, a senior legislator said.

“The IRGC Aerospace Force is making extensive efforts to reach the 36,000-km altitude,” Rouhollah Motefakker Azad told FNA after IRGC Aerospace Force’s Commander Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh held a meeting with him and several other lawmakers on Tuesday.

He added that the IRGC Aerospace Force has prepared precise plans to attain this goal, especially given the emphasis of Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution

Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, and noted, “Certainly, we will witness their further success in the near future.”

Motefakker Azad said that during the meeting with General Hajizadeh, the Iranian MPs could witness tracking of Noor satellite and its signals closely.

The IRGC launched the Satellite Noor-1 by the domestically-built launcher Qassed (herald) on April 22 and placed it into the orbit at an altitude of 425km.

The Launcher Qassed is a three-stage launcher using compound solid-liquid fuel.

The satellite was sent to the space on the anniversary of the IRGC establishment (April 22, 1979).

IRGC Spokesman Brigadier General

Ramezan Sharif said the IRGC’s satellite launch once again proved that the U.S. sanctions have failed to hinder the country’s scientific progress.

“Following the launch, the Americans and Europeans admitted that the embargos have failed to interrupt the Islamic Republic’s scientific advancement,” Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif said late in April.

“When the country is capable of taking such measures under sanctions, it is also able to meet its people’s needs despite the economic terrorism imposed on them,” he added.

Ramezan Sharif thanked the Iranian scientists, officials, political figures,

and the noble nation for their positive reactions to the satellite launch, stressing that the IRGC will continue its efforts on the course of developing and empowering Iran.

Earlier this month, Commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force’s Space Department Brigadier General Ali Jafarabadi said that Iran has long-term plans to send satellites into the 36,000-km orbit.

Iran has plans to “increase the orbital altitude (of its satellites) and reach the 36,000-km altitude in the next few years”, General Jafarabadi said.

He added that the altitude which is of strategic importance is special to telecommunication and TV satellites.



# Iran says will respond to any trouble to its oil tankers

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Wednesday that Iran will respond firmly to any “annoyance” to its oil tankers which are carrying gasoline for Venezuela.

“Our policies are clear and we have announced that we will not tolerate any kind of annoyance,” Hatami told reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting.

He added, “Annoyance against fuel tankers runs contrary to international law. The international organizations and countries who are sensitive about security in waterways must respond to this issue.”

He also noted that annoyance is a kind of “piracy”.

On Sunday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warning the U.S. about sending troops to the Caribbean Sea with the aim of interfering with the transfer of Iran’s fuel to Venezuela.

Zarif has stressed that the U.S. must give up bullying on the world stage and respect the rule of international law, especially free shipping in the high seas.

Zarif warned that any move against the Iranian tankers will be “illegal”, “dangerous”, “provocative”, “instance of piracy” and a “great danger to international peace and security”.

Deputy Foreign Minister for Political



Affairs Abbas Araghchi also told the Swiss ambassador, whose country represents U.S. interests in Iran, that any potential threat to the Islamic Republic’s tankers would be met with a “quick and decisive response” and that “the United States government will be responsible for its consequences”.

Also, government spokesman Ali Rabiei on Monday warned that Iran is ready to respond to any act of piracy against its tankers by the United States.

“We want to ensure the full security of these commercial shipments from any act of piracy by the U.S. government, which has

a long record in this regard,” Rabiei told a press conference.

He said no country is compelled to adhere to the U.S.’s unilateral sanctions on other countries and “we are committed to do our expected commercial interactions with Venezuela.”

“The gasoline-carrying tankers were sent to Venezuela due to a request by the Venezuelan government,” the spokesman explained.

Rabiei said Iran expects the international community to ensure the security of commercial waterways, condemning the U.S. for violating maritime laws.

An unnamed official with the U.S. administration that has brought both Iran and Venezuela under sanctions told Reuters last Thursday that the shipment was “unwelcome,” claiming “we’re looking at measures that can be taken.”

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has called the threat “shameless” and said the U.S. under President Donald Trump was disrupting the world order, ignoring the standing norms, and waging anarchy.

Mousavi said the shipments face no legal prohibitions.

He said the development is completely legitimate as opposed to maritime piracy “which is [something that is] mastered by the U.S.”

## Iran not a threat to peace process in Afghanistan: U.S. intelligence

*By staff and agency*

U.S. military intelligence recently said that Iran is not looking to destabilize Afghanistan and is not a threat to peace process in the country.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed in January that Iran is “actively working to undermine the peace process.” But the Defense Intelligence Agency painted a much different picture for U.S. government investigators supervising the war effort in Afghanistan, the National Interest reported on Tuesday.

The DIA told the Lead Inspector General in a Tuesday report that Iran has not indicated that it will “actively oppose” the peace accords, which call for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan.

“Iran’s strategic objectives relating to Afghanistan continue to be maintaining a stable Afghan central gov-



ernment and security along Iran’s eastern border,” the Lead Inspector General wrote in a Tuesday report.

U.S. forces are preparing to leave Afghanistan as part of a peace deal signed in February. U.S. Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad left for Afghanistan and Qatar on Sunday to push for talks between the Afghan government and Taliban rebels.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry had said in a March 1 statement that the U.S. government “has no legal standing to sign a peace agreement or to determine the future of Afghanistan,” but also welcomed the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

The DIA told the inspector general that “nothing in Iran’s March statements suggested Iran will actively oppose the deal, because it has previously voiced support for a U.S. withdrawal from the region.”

## International Quds Day 2020: An opportunity to support the oppressed

**(Press TV)** — With the Quds Day arriving, Muslims, non-Muslims, and all freedom-seeking people across the world are preparing to mark a day that epitomizes the Palestinian people’s valor and heroic resistance over the years against an illegal entity that has no scruples about shedding their blood.

International Quds Day, celebrated on the last Friday of the Islamic month of Ramadan, is seen as the legacy of the late founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Khomeini, who is revered as a spiritual leader by Muslims across the world.

On May 22 every year, people across the world, regardless of their faith, denounce Israel’s atrocities against the Palestinian people and voice their support for the Palestinian cause.

The annual event is an opportunity for people to express their indignation at the apartheid regime of Israel, which has occupied Palestinian territories since 1967.

This year’s Quds Day comes in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, which has so far claimed more than 320,000 lives and

infected 4.8 million others since it started late last year.

The following are some excerpts from interviews Press TV news channel has conducted with a number of pro-Palestine luminaries and activists in the run-up to the International Quds Day.

Tisetso Magama, a senior board member and spokesperson of Africa for Palestine, from Johannesburg, described the Quds Day as an opportunity to build solidarity across the world.

“It is one of the opportunities that we have to build solidarity across the globe to make people aware of the plight of our brothers and sisters who have been living under the occupation for more than 70 years” Magama said.

“It is one of those significant events on our calendar, which of course the Israeli regime fears because it, like other regimes, apartheid regimes, colonial regimes and imperialist regimes, understands that no regime can oppress innocent people forever. That is a profound lesson of history and the Israeli regime knows that. Now the regime in Tel

Aviv understands that it is only human solidarity that will be able to break the chains of bondage and oppression and suppression and indeed the mass murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians. So they know that their days are numbered,” he added.

Booker Ngesa, a member of Kenya Palestine Solidarity Movement, from Nairobi, said Kenyans would mark the Quds Day to “show enormous friendship to our brothers and sisters in Palestine and communicate with them that we share in their struggles and pain.”

Ngesa underlined that the message from the African continent to Israel is that the Zionist regime will be defeated and the people of Palestine will triumph and reclaim their land, and there will be permanent peace, not with oppression but with justice.

Feroze Mithiborwala, an Indian activist, denounced the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and described the usurpation as the legacy of British imperialism in South Asia.

“Since the early years of the twentieth century, colonial powers have been masters

of the so-called ‘divide and rule’ dogma to prolong their rule. The partition of Palestine to create the Zionist entity in the midst of the 20th century — which occurred just one year after British India was partitioned to create Pakistan — is always seen as the legacy of British imperialism in South Asia,” Mithiborwala said.

Laith Marouf, a Lebanese activist and commentator from Beirut, praised the Iranian people for standing with the Palestinians and backing their cause in the face of Israeli aggression.

“It is a very significant day for the Palestinians because it falls in Ramadan, it falls in the last 10 days of the holy month. It is very significant because it was called by the late supreme leader of Iran to show solidarity of Iranian nation for the Palestinian people,” Marouf said.

“So, we are one voice. It is lucky for the Palestinians that Iran is a sovereign state and it’s a country that respects the human rights of its fellow brothers and sisters in the Arab world,” he added.

## Death knell of Israel heard in Tel Aviv: top general

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri has said the anti-Israeli resistance in Palestine and other countries has sounded the death knell for the Zionist regime, adding that such sense of doom is felt in the streets and garrisons of Tel Aviv.



In a message released on Wednesday on the occasion of the International Quds (Jerusalem) Day, Major General Baqeri said the Palestinian Intifada (uprising) has gone beyond the occupied territories and entered a new decisive stage.

The far-reaching impacts of the Palestinian resistance in Quds and the surrounding territories have eroded the will of occupiers, the general said, adding, “These days, the death knell of usurper Israel can be heard even in the streets and garrisons of Tel Aviv.”

He also lashed out at certain reactionary Arab regimes for siding with the U.S. in the treacherous “deal of the century” ploy and for seeking normalization of political ties with the “fake, usurper and child-murdering Zionist regime.”

Zionism is currently stuck in a large morass of problems and incidents and is no more capable of ensuring the survival of its regime, the Iranian commander added.

In December 2016, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei expressed high optimism that the Israeli regime will perish within the next quarter of a century.

“The Zionist regime - as we have already said - will cease to exist in the next 25 years if there is a collective and united struggle by the Palestinians and the Muslims against the Zionists,” Ayatollah Khamenei said.

## Gen. Soleimani predicted looming victory against Israel in letter to Palestinian cmdr.

**(Press TV)** — In a letter addressed to a Palestinian resistance leader before his martyrdom, Iran’s top anti-terror commander assured the Palestinians that victory against the US-backed Israeli regime was on the horizon, and that the Islamic Republic would never abandon the oppressed nation in its anti-occupation cause.

“By God’s grace, the dawn of the day of victory is near, and the death knell for the invasive Zionists has begun to toll,” General Soleimani had told Mohammed Deif, senior commander of Ezzedine al-Qassam, the military wing of the Palestinian Hamas resistance movement.

The missive was sent to Deif some time before General Soleimani was martyred in a U.S. drone attack in Baghdad in January, reported Lebanon’s al-Mayadeen television channel that published the letter posthumously.



“Defending Palestine is an honor for us, and an obligation that we will not abandon in exchange for nothing,” the letter read.

Everyone should stay assured that Iran will not forsake Palestine no matter how much more pressure and sanctions will be put on the Islamic Republic, General Soleimani told the Palestinian leader.

Defending Palestine exemplifies defending Islam, he had noted, and warned that whoever gets to hear the Palestinians’ outcry for help and withholds assistance was not to be considered a Muslim.

“Palestine’s friends are our friends and Palestine’s enemies are our enemies. This has been and will always be our policy,” he said.

General Soleimani also wished for divine assistance in his efforts to provide support for the Palestinians and hoped that God grant his wish “for martyrdom on the path of al-Quds” [liberation].

The commander urged to lead the Quds Force of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) before his martyrdom. During his military career, General Soleimani earned reputation as the Middle East’s most effective and respected anti-terror figure due to his indispensable contribution to the defeat of foreign-backed terrorists, including the Daesh group, throughout the region.

The letter was unveiled in the run-up to the International Quds Day.

Every year, millions of Muslims hold demonstrations worldwide to underscore the plight of Palestinians, heeding a call by the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, who designated the last Friday of every Ramadan after the fashion.

## The U.S. movement from prosperity to utter decay...

**1→** Glubb wrote an essay in 1978, brought to this writer’s attention by Charles Hugh Smith, in which he noted the progression of polities and societies from an Age of Pioneers, to that of Conquests, to Commerce, to Affluence, to Intellect and finally to the “age” the U.S. and some other Western countries find themselves in now – an age of Decadence. This last period happens to be, Smith correctly notes, one of greed, corruption, political fractures that cannot heal, moral decay, frivolity (“bread and circuses” as in the Roman Empire) and gross materialism.

Regarding the United States, these different “ages” appear to have progressed over the last 150 years and the one of “Decadence”

is indisputably in full and rotten flower now. And this seems most apparent in the economic sphere where you have a private bank, the Federal Reserve, literally creating money in the trillions and trying desperately to throw it around to maintain what is mostly a faux economic health which, ironically, is precisely undermined by the Fed’s actions to save the system (and it has no other tools at hand but money printing) where debt has expanded and is expanding to such an extent that the world has never before seen anything like it. The inevitable, historical trap of excess spending, arrogance, presumptions of eternal “growth”, war mongering and more

has arrived in spades. And there is no apparent way out.

All this is pretty obvious to most history-minded observers despite the propaganda and bluster to the contrary, but why mention the obvious now? Because it presents a good lesson and a warning to other countries and especially those

**What can anyone make of the country, for recent examples, that set eastern Syria’s wheat fields aflame with military flares to try to starve Syrians, or ran a legion of Cuban doctors out of Ecuador sent there to aid in the battle against Covid 19, or gave its assent to the racists in apartheid Israel to annex most of the West Bank against all international laws?**

## Iran says its navy will regularly operate in Persian Gulf

**1→** The notice to mariners, which was first reported by Reuters, follows U.S. President Donald Trump’s threat last month to fire on any Iranian ships that harass Navy vessels.

It follows an incident last month in which

11 Iranian vessels came close to U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships in the Persian Gulf in what the U.S. military called “dangerous and provocative” behavior. Tehran blamed the U.S. for the incident.

The Islamic Revolution Guard Corps

(IRGC) refuted the U.S. narration, saying the U.S. navy gave a «Hollywood version of events» over the petrol of the Iranian vessels.

However, the IRGC said it had increased patrols in the Persian Gulf after the U.S.

navy blocked the path of an Iranian ship earlier that month.

The IRGC’s statement said that U.S. forces had blocked one of its ships in two separate incidents in early April, using «dangerous behavior while ignoring warnings».



## Mining projects worth over \$1.1b handed to private sector in a year

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Some 50 trillion rials (over \$1.1 billion) worth of mining projects were handed over to the private sector in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), Iran Minerals Production and Supply Company (IMPASCO), announced.



According to IMPASCO which is a subsidiary of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), last year, tenders were held for awarding 12 mining projects in which domestic investors as well as companies from China, Tajikistan, Iraq and Georgia participated.

As reported, contribution of the private sector in the country's mining sector is going to improve the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the current Iranian calendar year which has been called the year of surge in production by the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran Seyed Ali Khamenei.

Utilizing the private sector's resources, the mining sector is going to generate more employment, production and value added for the country.

Last week, IMIDRO Head Khodadad Gharibpour announced that IMIDRO is contributing to \$1.93 billion worth of projects that are going to be implemented by the private sector.

According to Gharibpour, IMIDRO and its subsidiaries are going to implement 31 projects, worth \$2.276 billion, in a variety of fields including steel, copper, gold, antimony, nepheline syenite, phosphate and also mining infrastructure in the current year.

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

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

## 14 transport projects to be listed for stock market financing

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Iranian Transport and Urban Development Ministry plans to offer 14 infrastructure projects to be financed through the country's stock market, Iran's Deputy Transport Minister for Resource Planning and Management said.



"Studies have been concluded for 14 infrastructure projects for entering the capital market, and investment companies are assessing various methods and models of offering this projects in the stock market," Amir-Mahmoud Ghaffari told ILNA.

According to Ghaffari, seven railway projects and seven freeway projects will be offered in the capital market, and the transport ministry is considering which of these projects should be the priority.

"This is the Transport and Urban Development Ministry's first experience in this area and we are designing a model for its implementation", the official explained.

He further noted that the ministry is holding several meetings with the Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) to plan the model and approach for these projects to enter the market, adding that investment companies are developing a proposal for the stock exchange which will be finalized within the next month.

Referring to the schedule for the offerings, the deputy minister said, "We are trying to offer the projects in the capital market in the first half of the current [Iranian calendar] year (started on March 20)."

"At the first stage, two projects will be listed," he added.

Back in December 2019, Ghaffari had said that the county needs over 1.8 quadrillion rials (about \$42.8 billion) of financial resources for completing its transportation infrastructure projects.

The ministry plans to tap the existing capacity of capital market to fund projects in the transportation and housing sector, he said.

The official further noted that the Transport Development Fund (TDF) has been established as the only specialized and financial institution in the field, for supporting the Transport Ministry's infrastructure projects.

In the past few years, Iran's capital market has gone through major transformation and every year the country is advancing more in this area.

The government has been taking serious measures for supporting the stock market and for attracting public resources into this market.

Earlier this week, the managing director of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), which is Iran's major stock market, said 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 (March 20).

# ‘Non-oil exports booming as pandemic subsides’

**1 →** "During the session, I explained the central bank's various methods for returning exporters' earned foreign currency to the economic cycle," he added.

A good opportunity has emerged for a surge in national production, prevention of unnecessary imports and development of non-oil exports, which will be achieved with the help of God Almighty and the efforts of the country's producers and businessmen, he maintained.

Eerier this month, Hemmati said the CBI access to its financial resources abroad has been improving.

Mentioning the problems caused by the coronavirus outbreak and the preventive measures taken by neighboring countries which resulted in the closure of border terminals, Hemmati noted that the situation will become normalized with the gradual reviving of non-oil and oil exports.

"Over the past 50 days, more than



\$2.5 billion has been provided by the central bank and non-oil exporters, about 50 percent of which has been supplied through the NIMA system [Iran's domestic Forex Management Integrated

System]," he said.

Increasing non-oil exports to the neighboring countries is one of the major plans that the Iranian government is pursuing in the current Iranian calendar year.

## Govt. to announce \$1b support package for non-oil exports



**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Iranian government is going to announce a \$1-billion support package for promoting non-oil exports in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20), Tasnim news agency reported on Wednesday, quoting an official with Trade Promotion Organization (TPO).

The acting minister of industry, mining and trade has referred the package to the First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri to be announced and implemented as of today which is the beginning of the Iranian calendar month of Khordad, Head of Commercial Services Department at TPO Ehsan Ghamari said.

"One billion euros has also been included in the package for providing buyer and seller' credit," Ghamari mentioned.

Exporters of carpets, technical and engineering services, as well as knowledge-based products are among the priorities for receiving facilities from the mentioned budget sources, he stressed.

"Bank facilities, budget resources and other support packages are considered to come to the aid of exporters in the current Iranian calendar year, Ghamari said.

"Meanwhile, the National Development Fund (NDF) has also set aside one billion euros in the form of buyer and seller credit."

According to the official, the payment of NDF support resources for the previous calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19) will begin next week.

Parsian Bank, Iran Venezuela Bi-National Bank, Tose'e Ta'avon Bank, Export Development Bank, and Bank Saderat are going to participate in allocation of the said resources, he said.

Earlier in January, TPO had announced that Iran's Resistance Economy Headquarters approved a "Non-Oil Export Support Package"

prepared by TPO.

According to Hamid Zadboum, the mentioned package was developed by the Iranian Trade Promotion Organization, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, the National Planning and Budgeting Organization (PBO) and the National Development Fund (NDF).

He noted that in this package, various incentives have been considered for exporters, which will be provided for them based on the priorities determined in the package.

"The export incentives covered in the non-petroleum export support package include National Development Fund resources in addition to the budget allocated by the Trade Promotion Organization for promoting exports," Zadboum explained.

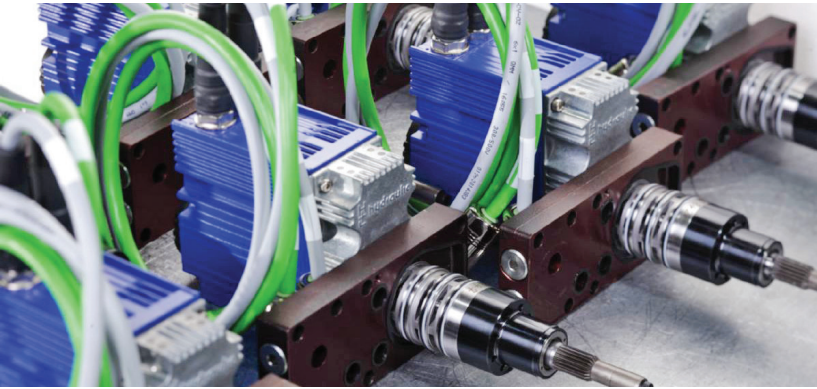
Increasing non-oil export to the neighboring countries is one of the major plans that the Iranian government is pursuing in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21, 2019).

Acting Minister of Industry, Mining, and Trade Hossein Modares Khiabani, who was previously the deputy industry minister, has said that his ministry was planning to increase the value of Iran's non-oil exports to its 15 neighbors up to \$50 billion.

"Our goal is to be able to meet five percent of our neighboring countries' needs, which would amount to more than \$50 billion a year considering the total import of all the 15 countries which is at least \$1 trillion annually," he said in last August.

The official expressed hope that the mentioned goal would be realized before the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (which starts in March 2021), saying that the Institute for Trade Studies and Research and also Trade Promotion Organization are currently developing detailed plans to achieve this goal.

## Knowledge-based firms play prominent role in indigenizing oil industry's equipment



**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Strengthening domestic production and indigenizing the knowledge and technology for production of the products and equipment that Iran imports from other countries has become one of the major programs that the country is pursuing in the recent years.

To materialize this objective, knowledge-based companies have played a noticeable part, especially in indigenizing the products and equipment applied in the oil industry, which is the major sector in the country's national economy.

Cooperating with capable domestic knowledge-based companies and startups is one of the very fruitful steps that the oil ministry has taken in its efforts to reach complete independence from the foreign resources for meeting its equipment needs.

Earlier this week, an Iranian knowledge-based company announced that it has indigenized production of the safety valves for refineries.

"After two years of research and one year of field testing, we are producing a knowledge-based product with applications in the oil, gas and petrochemical industries," Mohammad Hassan Zarnoush, the CEO of the company, said.

He added that the product blocks leakage in the oil installations and reservoirs resulted from heightened pressure and prevents fire and explosion.

Zarnoush said that the safety valves include 15 to 20 strategic parts which are designed and produced in his company, adding that 10,000 indigenized safety valves have been sold so far.

In a relevant development in November, an Iranian company announced plans to mass-produce multiphase pumps, in a bid to further increase the country's self-sufficiency, frugality, and environmental-friendliness in the field of transporting oil and gas.

CEO of Petro Iran Development Company Sepehr Sepehri said that his company, as an upstream company in the petroleum industry, was keen on supporting domestic manufacturers and knowledge-based com-

panies in the industry.

Petro Iran has signed a contract with the National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) regarding the use of Iranian-made multiphase pumps in oil fields.

Referring to Petro Iran's efforts to expand technology, innovation and ultimately commercialization and development, which include design, and production of goods and services in the field of high technologies, he said, "one of the main goals of this mission is to create value added through the production of software and hardware, as well as production of items required in the oil and gas industry based on state-of-the-art technologies."

To materialize the goal of indigenizing production of oil industry's equipment, the country's Petrochemical Research and Technology Company (PRTC) has also played a very significant role in collaborating with the knowledge-based companies for working on innovative research projects for producing various equipment and base-products needed in the industry.

PRTC's Managing Director Ali Pajouhan has recently announced that National Petrochemical Company (NPC), in collaboration with domestic companies, is planning to indigenize the knowledge for producing nine major catalysts used in the petrochemical industries within the next two years.

However, catalysts are very expensive substances and currently, the country is spending millions of dollars every year on importing such products into the country, producing such catalysts inside the country would make a huge difference in the profitability rate of the petrochemical plants.

Iranian petrochemical industry is currently using 40 different types of catalysts which cost the industry \$260 million annually.

"Currently, the knowledge for producing 16 of the mentioned 40 types has been indigenized which would save the country \$105 million every year," Ali Pajouhan said, adding that "We plan to produce over \$100m worth of petrochemical catalysts annually, by the end of the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (March 20, 2022)."

## Trade with neighbors being resumed as borders reopening

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — While Iran's borders are being reopened, the county's trade with its neighbors is being resumed as well.

On Saturday, Deputy Head of Iran-Pakistan Joint Chamber of Commerce Amanollah Shahnnavazi said that the two countries' border bazaars are gradually resuming activities following the reopening of the border crossings.

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

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

Referring to the suspension of about 800 trucks in the last three months at the Mirjaveh border, Shahnnavazi said: "Currently, only 10 trucks with food and basic goods are allowed to cross the border every day, which has caused severe traffic on this border."

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

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

Pakistan first closed its eastern and western borders with Iran, Afghanistan, and India on March 15 to contain



the spread of the new coronavirus.

The border markets of Iran and Pakistan are mostly based in Sistan-Baluchestan Province in southeastern Iran. The bazaars of the province are located in Mirjaveh, Kuhak, Pishin, Jaleq, and Riman.

Also on Sunday, Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) published on its news portal that the Iranian customs officials discussed reopening of Mehran border with Iraqi partners to resume trade as both nations have taken health measures to guarantee hygienic transportation of goods.

Director-General of the Customs Office of Iran's western Ilam Province Rouhollah Gholami said that the Iranian envoy in Baghdad is seriously pursuing the issue.

The coronavirus outbreak caused a two-month halting of trade activity between Iran and Iraq via this border, he said adding that necessary health measures have been taken to resume trade activity through this border."

Mehran, a key border spot between the two countries, was one of the first borders closed down after the spread of the new coronavirus.

Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan also reached an agreement before reopening the Shushmi border to cargo traffic under the supervision of a medical team and the police.

Drivers welcomed the re-opening of the border which links the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region of Iraq with Iran, saying that many lost their jobs because of its closure. The border still remains closed for tourists and the regular passage of people.

Meanwhile, according to local authorities, Iran has resumed exports to neighboring Afghanistan through the Milak border crossing in the southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province.

A total of 80,072 tons of goods were exported from Milak border terminal to Afghanistan during the first month of the current Iranian year (March 20-April 19), said Teymour Bageri, the deputy head of the province's Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization.



# Daily electricity consumption in Iran touches 46 GW

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — Following an upward trend in recent months, electricity consumption in Iran reached 45,847 megawatts (45.84 gigawatts) on Wednesday, May 19, IRNA reported.

As reported, the country's electricity consumption stood at 43,598 MW on the same date last year, which means the consumption has increased by 2,249 MW.

Based on the data, electricity consumption by the industry sector also exceeded 4600 megawatts (MW) and reached 4,606 MW on the mentioned day.

The country's renewable power plants generated 6,502 MW of electricity in the said date to register a slight increase compared to the previous day.

According to the Iranian Deputy Energy Minister Homayoon Haeri, the capacity of renewable power plants has quadrupled in the past four years.

Last week, Iran's Power Generation and Distribution Company (known as TAVANIR) announced that the country's



electricity consumption, since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20) up to May 6 has increased by five percent compared to the same period

last year.

The installed capacity of renewable power plants in the Iranian calendar year 1394 stood at 200 MW, and by the end of the year 1398 (ended on March 19) it had reached more than 800 MW, Haeri said.

Earlier, Iran Grid Management Company (IGMC) had announced that electricity consumption in the country reached a record high of 41,694 megawatts (41.69 gigawatts) on May 10.

The country's electricity consumption stood at 38,695 MW on the same date last year, which means the consumption has increased by 2,999 MW.

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

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

## Oil rally stalls with fed warning countering production cuts

Oil steadied after a four-day gain as investors weighed signs the market is rebalancing against what's still a precarious economic outlook.

Futures in New York for July delivery were little changed near \$32 a barrel after the June contract closed at a 10-week high as it expired. Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell warned Americans could start losing their homes and that long-term unemployment could damage the economy. A report that a virus vaccine study that had boosted assets earlier in the week didn't produce enough critical data to assess its success added to the cautious tone.

Still, the oil market is in much better shape than it was a month ago as output cuts have kicked in and pockets of demand have emerged. There was no repeat of last month's plunge below zero when the West Texas Intermediate contract rolled over, with the June futures trading at a premium to July before they expired, suggesting concerns the U.S. would run out of storage have eased.

Oil has jumped almost 70 percent this

month as supply and demand have started to rebalance, with Citigroup Inc. saying the crude surplus will flip to a deficit next quarter. Chinese oil consumption is almost back to pre-virus levels, while gasoline is benefiting as commuters avoid public transport and deliveries surge. However, the rally could be self-defeating if it continues as it would encourage output to return when demand is still shaky, UBS AG said in a note.

"We're a little surprised at how quickly oil prices have bounced back in the past month," said Vivek Dhar, a commodities analyst at Commonwealth Bank of Australia. There's potential for prices to stay at these levels in the next month or perhaps go slightly higher if stockpiles decline, he said.

WTI for July delivery declined 0.1 percent to \$31.93 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange as of 7:53 a.m. in London after rising 1 percent in the previous session. The June contract finished up 2.1 percent at \$32.50 as it expired on Tuesday. Brent for July settlement rose



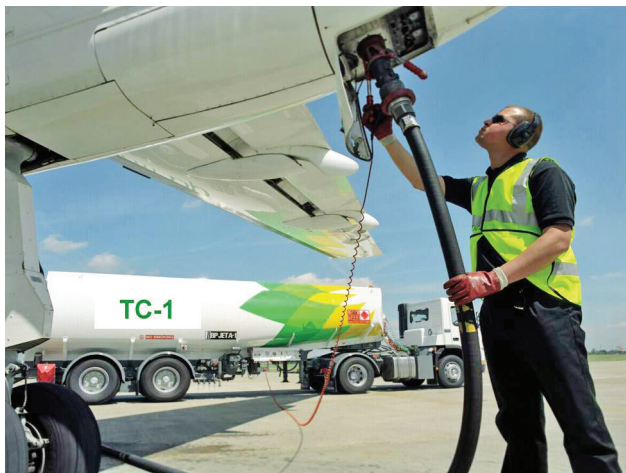
0.2 percent to \$34.71.

In more evidence the supply response to the virus is gathering pace, the American Petroleum Institute reported stockpiles at the storage hub at Cushing, Oklahoma, fell by 5.04 million barrels last week,

people familiar with the data said. U.S. crude inventories dropped by 4.84 million barrels, the API said. The official Energy Information Administration figures are due later on Wednesday.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Jet fuel demand will take years to recover



The coronavirus pandemic swept across the airline industry, upending fleet, route, and passenger number predictions for years to come. Commercial air travel, alongside tourism, is the worst-hit business in these unusual times of restricted travel, lockdowns, social distancing, and online-only business conferences.

Airlines and aircraft manufacturers face a few years of losses and cost cuts before air travel numbers return to pre-crisis levels. In these several years of a marked downturn for the industry, demand for jet fuel is expected to be the last oil product to see demand recover to levels from 2019.

While oil demand for road transportation already shows signs of recovery as people prefer commuting with their own cars rather than using public transport, demand for jet fuel will probably take much longer—possibly years—to recover, analysts say.

### ■ The airline business has already changed

The COVID-19 pandemic has already brought significant changes to the way the business operates, according to Forbes Senior Contributor Ted Reed.

Passenger traffic on airlines has dropped off a cliff since countries moved to restrict inbound travel in an effort to flatten the curve of infections. In the United States, for example, total traveler throughput at security was just 253,807 this past Sunday, compared to 2,620,276 passengers who cleared security at airports on the same day last year, according to the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). In other words, the passenger numbers in mid-May were less than 10 percent of the typical day at U.S. airports last year.

The airlines, of course, are feeling the pinch, and so are aircraft manufacturers. While U.S. airlines have an obligation not to lay off staff at least until end-September as a condition to receive U.S. grants, they are warning that layoffs will be coming after that.

"October 1st is likely to emerge as one of the darkest days in history for airline labor," JPMorgan Chase said earlier this month, as carried by Reuters.

At Delta Air Lines, for example, 37,000 employees, more than one-third of the workforce, have elected to take voluntary unpaid leaves ranging from 30 days to one year, CEO Ed Bastian said on the earnings call in April.

Delta was burning cash at a rate of \$100 million per day in March, and expected that cash-burn rate at \$50 million a day in May, Bastian added.

Outside the United States, airlines are already taking an ax to payroll numbers. IAG, the owner of British Airways, warned in early May that it is likely that there would be redundancies of up to 12,000 British Airways' employees. Europe's biggest budget carrier, Ryanair, is negotiating 3,000 job cuts, mainly pilots and cabin crew, and expects to carry this year half the number of passengers compared to initial expectations. Emirates is reportedly weighing 30,000 job cuts, according to Bloomberg News.

Airlines of all sizes now have to figure out how social distancing and face-coverings on flights would work apart from the gloomy outlooks for this year.

### ■ Aircraft manufacturers also suffer

Significantly reduced passenger numbers and a highly uncertain recovery timeline impacts airlines' fleet rotation, retirement, and new buys, affecting manufacturers and suppliers such as Boeing, Airbus, and GE Aviation, which are also cutting jobs.

Boeing has taken action to lower employee numbers by around 10-15 percent through a combination of voluntary layoffs (VLO), natural turnover, and involuntary layoffs as necessary. This means that Boeing will cut 15,000-16,000 jobs, as "the pandemic is also delivering a body blow to our business," Boeing President and CEO Dave Calhoun said in a letter to employees at the end of April.

Unlike in road transportation, where recovery is gaining momentum with eased lockdowns and more U.S. states and major economies opening up, airline transportation will suffer for years to come, executives and analysts say. As a consequence, jet fuel demand—the fuel worst hit by the slump—will recover at the slowest rate.

"Given the combined effects of the pandemic and associated financial impact on the global economy, we believe that it could be up to three years before we see a sustainable recovery," Delta's Bastian said on the earnings call.

While global oil demand is set to rebound with a V-shaped recovery, demand for jet fuel will continue to languish for at least another two years, cut by significantly reduced business travel, Goldman Sachs says.

Gasoline demand in the U.S. stood at 7.398 million bpd for the week to May 8, and although this was still below the 9.148-million bpd demand for the same week last year, the number was a clear improvement from the 5.86-million-bpd demand just two weeks prior, EIA data shows.

Global jet fuel demand, on the other hand, will drop by 33.6 percent this year, or by at least 2.4 million bpd from last year's demand of 7.2 million bpd, according to Rystad Energy. Next year, jet fuel demand will not have returned to the pre-crisis levels and is expected to average 6.9 million bpd.

According to Wood Mackenzie, jet fuel demand is not expected to regain the 2019 level until 2022 at the earliest.

Travel restrictions and lockdowns impact near-term projections for the airline industry's future, but a lasting change in lifestyles and travel behavior could upend the air travel business and its demand for fuel forever.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Oil up on lower U.S. stocks, firmer demand

Oil prices firmed on Wednesday on signs of improving demand and a drawdown in U.S. crude inventories, but worries over the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic and weak refining margins capped gains.

Brent crude futures were up 51 cents, or 1.47 percent, at \$35.16 per barrel at 0928 GMT.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) July crude futures were up 22 cents, or 0.69 percent, at \$32.18 a barrel.

The WTI June contract expired on Tuesday at \$32.50 a barrel, up 2.1 percent, avoiding the chaos of last month's May expiry, when prices sank well below zero.



U.S. crude inventories fell by 4.8 million barrels to 521.3 million barrels in the week to May 15, data from the American Petroleum Institute (API) showed on Tuesday.

Refinery runs rose by 229,000 barrels per day, the API said, indicating plants are trying to produce more fuel as the United States eases its lockdowns.

Official data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA) is due later on Wednesday.

"Fundamentals in the market are improving, thanks to supply cuts and recovering demand," ING said in a note.

Easing of lockdown restrictions worldwide are boosting demand for fuels, while initial shipping data shows that compliance with oil production cuts from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies has been strong so far.

But weak crude refining profits persist, which could delay a recovery in oil demand.

"We would need to see strength in refinery margins in order to persuade refiners to increase utilization rates, but at current levels there seems little incentive for them to do so, with many regions still seeing negative margins," the bank added.

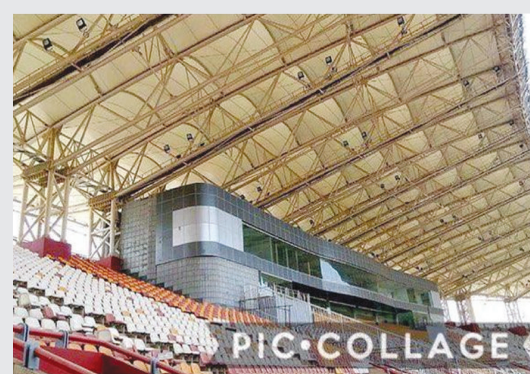
Refiners are pinning hope on easing of lockdowns boosting gasoline demand.

Lingering concerns about the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, especially in the United States which is the world's biggest oil consumer, kept a lid on further gains.

U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said on Tuesday layoffs by state and local governments will slow the U.S. economic recovery.

(Source: Reuters)

## Modern Stadium of Martyrs of Khuzestan Football Club (KSC)





# The Oslo process was a trap from which the Palestinians never escaped: ex-UN Special Rapporteur for Palestine

By M.A. Saki

TEHRAN — Richard Anderson Falk, professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University and former UN Special Rapporteur for Palestine, says “the Oslo process was a trap from which the Palestinians never escaped”.

“Indeed, the dynamics of this Oslo period from 1993 until the start of the Trump presidency in 2017 was to raise Israeli expectations with respect to its maximal territorial ambitions,” Falk tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

Here is the full text of the exclusive interview:

■ As a UN Special Rapporteur for Palestine your reports revealed many facts about the Israeli settlement policies, its apartheid approach, and so on. Your efforts in this regard are commendable. To what extent did these reports have a practical impact on Israeli policies?

A: My period as UN Special Rapporteur to Palestine was between 2008 and 2014. During that time Israel carried out massive attacks on Gaza in 2008-09, 2012, and 2014, while expanding the archipelago of its unlawful settlements on the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and blocking any realistic process of a political compromise in the context of the Oslo Peace Process. I mention these negative developments as background for responding to your question about whether my reports had any ‘practical impact on Israeli policies.’ I would have to acknowledge that I could not identify any positive impact on Israeli practices and policies, especially in relation to its efforts to pursue its expansionist ambitions with regard to the control of Palestinian territory and its non-Jewish inhabitants or its unabashed defiance of international law and UN authority.

It seems that the heightening of criticism of Israel’s behavior by myself and others did encourage Israel’s new approach, which abandoned defending itself against allegations of unlawfulness and criminality, and instead mobilizing energy and devoting resources to defaming critics, and doing its best to discredit, and even criminalize support for the BDS Campaign and other global solidarity initiatives as the Free Gaza Campaign. This Israeli pushback culminated in the widespread adoption of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism that deliberately conflated hatred of Jews as a people with criticism of Israel as the State of the Jewish people. It is ironic that this regressive move has been most influential in countries such as the U.S., UK, and Germany that pride themselves on being the most respected constitutional democracies the world has known since ancient Athens, and yet when it comes to Israel the right of free expression and nonviolent protest are violated with official approval.

I believe my reports did have some beneficial impact on the discourse within the UN itself (including civil society NGOs), and on the understanding of the diplomatic community, with respect to four distinct aspects of Israeli behavior: 1) Understanding the settler colonial character

**What is worse (during the Oslo process), the Palestinians went along with their own entrapment, somehow thinking that they would be rewarded by their cooperative attitudes.**

of Israel’s domination and dispossession of the Palestinian people; 2) The de facto annexationist aspects of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem carried out in violation of international humanitarian law; 3) The unsupportable character of prolonged belligerent occupation, the abusive nature of which is not addressed by international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions and Protocols; 4) The apartheid character of Israel’s Jewish State, not only in relation to the occupation of the territory acquired in the 1967 War but in relation to the Palestinian people as a whole, including refugees and involuntary exiles, the minority living in pre-1967 Israel, and those in Gaza after Israel’s ‘disengagement’ of 2005.

I gave particular attention in my reports to the daily injustices associated with prolonged occupation of Palestinian territories, which had not attracted much prior attention, although my successor as SR, Michael Lynk, has carried my arguments further and to their logical conclusion that the occupation must be ended by judicial and political action at the international level. The legally, morally, and politically problematic character of ‘prolonged occupation,’ especially as combined in this with a denial of all civil and political rights to the residents of the occupied Palestinian territories and subversive of underlying Palestinian sovereignty as evidenced by UN recognition of Palestine in 2012 as a non-voting member State in the UN.

I believe that my reports helped in small ways to change the discourse and perceptions of civil society activists as well as of many members of the diplomatic community who privately conveyed to

**This hostile propaganda (against Palestinians), popularized by Hollywood movies demonizing Arabs and glorifying Israelis, bestowed on Israel the political space to impose an apartheid structure of control over the Palestinian people as a whole, and to avoid any international accountability relating to its defiance of international law beyond token expressions of disapproval from European capitals and Washington whenever Israel’s provocations could not be entirely ignored.**

me their agreement with my analysis. The reports also brought up to date the lawlessness of Israel’s behavior with respect to the settlements, the separation wall, and reliance on excessive force, most pronouncedly in Gaza, which figured in the way the media and public opinion understood the competing arguments being put forward by Israel and Palestine, and seemed of some use to governments in formulating their approach to the underlying conflict.

■ One of your reports on Israel was removed from the UN website under pressure from the United States and Israel. What was the content of the report, and why was there so much sensitivity about it?

A: My report was temporarily removed from the UN website in either 2009 or 2010, but interestingly, not at the initiative of either Israel or the United States, but by the Palestinian Authority, which represents Palestine at the UN. Their sole objection to my text was its acknowledgement of Hamas as the administering authority of Gaza, in effective control of the governing process, reflecting both through its electoral victory in the 2006 elections in Gaza, and as a result of the expulsion of Fatah forces associated with the Palestinian Authority during the following year. It was the mere mention of Hamas that disturbed and agitated the PA to the point of seeking my resignation as SR, especially after I criticized aspects of the PA administration of the West Bank and their surprising controversial support of Israeli and U.S. demands that the UN disregard the recommendations of the Goldstone Report that had been critical of Israel’s violation of the Laws of War during Operation Cast Lead, its devastating military attack on Gaza that started at the end of 2008 and lasted for several weeks in January 2009. After failing to oust me from my position, the PA shifted its tone and posture, and for the remaining years of my mandate was cooperative, and did not subsequently object to my reports even when the role of Hamas was discussed.

■ You have repeatedly criticized Israel’s policies and considered the peace process as a hoax. Why do you think this process is a hoax?

A: Maybe the word ‘hoax’ overstates my view, which was that the peace process as structured and

implemented greatly favored Israel, discriminated against Palestine to such an extent that it was naive to expect a sustainable and just peace to emerge from such one-sided diplomacy. This basic imbalance was evident in a number of respects. Above all, the framework for negotiations was seriously flawed by giving the United States, an overt and unconditional supporter of Israel, the inappropriate role of intermediary or ‘honest broker.’ This flaw exhibited itself by diplomats and staff representing the United States in the course of the Oslo process often being closely identified with the Zionist Movement, including being drawn from former employees of the pro-Israeli extremist lobbying group AIPAC. Such partisanship also explained the U.S. pressure on the Palestinian negotiating team not to object to settlement expansion or press other legal grievances as such objections would disrupt the peace process, insisting that such issues be left unresolved until ‘final status’ negotiations occurred at the last stage of the process, which was never reached. This pressure to mute international law objections to Israeli expansionism was perversely coupled with Washington’s acceptance of ‘facts on the ground’ as taking precedence over legal objections to the settlements, in effect, punishing Palestinians for following the advice to defer objections. This play of arguments reveals the entrapment of the Palestinians by the Oslo process—instead of insisting to Israel to freeze settlement activity to safeguard the diplomatic prospects, it exerted pressure on the Palestinians to suppress their objections to Israeli unlawful behavior, which by its nature, threatened reaching a two-state compromise.

**The Trump Plan, whether known as ‘the deal of the century’ by its official name of ‘From Peace to Prosperity’ gives its seal of approval to the Israel vision of a one-state solution, slightly disguised by designating areas set aside for Palestinian administration as ‘a State,’ what was correctly associated with the Bantustans established by the apartheid regime in South Africa to hide the ugliest features of racist domination and exploitation.**

What is worse, the Palestinians went along with their own entrapment, somehow thinking that they would be rewarded by their cooperative attitudes.

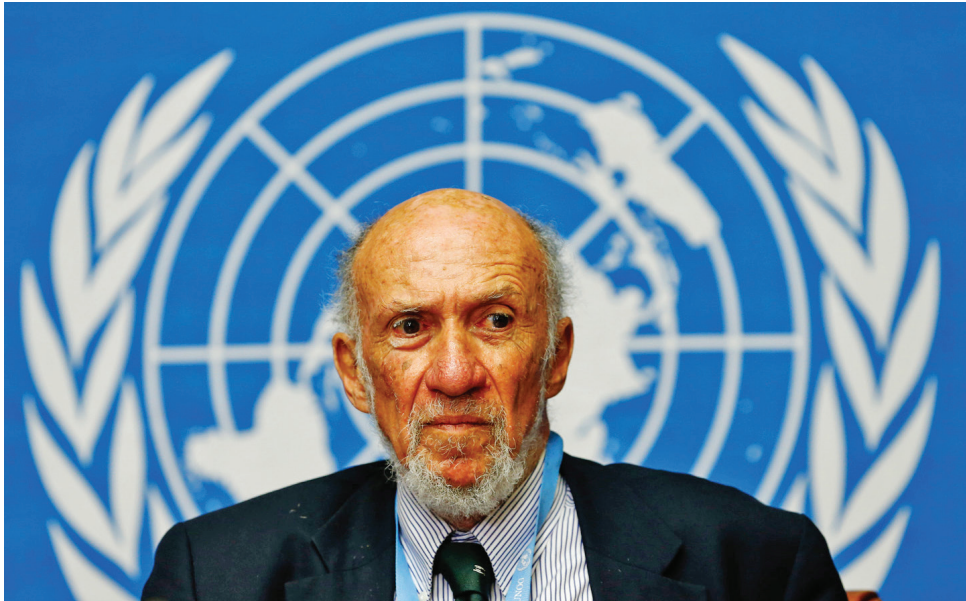
The Oslo process was a trap from which the Palestinians never escaped, and ended up worsening Palestinian prospects as well as inflicting additional torments, including the frequency and viciousness of settler violence directed at Palestinian residents of the West Bank. Indeed, the dynamics of this Oslo period from 1993 until the start of the Trump presidency in 2017 was to raise Israeli expectations with respect to its maximal territorial ambitions, and to depress Palestinian hopes of reaching a political compromise in the form of the co-existence of separate sovereign states enjoying equal standing in international society. It became evident, as well, that Israeli internal politics drifted steadily to the right, partly reflecting the increasingly leverage of the settler movement. These developments made it increasingly clear that a two-state political compromise was no longer seen by the Israeli leadership as an expedient goal. In effect, it was no longer necessary to hide the Israeli belief that the West Bank, known in Israel by its biblical names of Judea and Samaria, was an integral element of the entitlement of the Jewish people to the land of Palestine as interpreted by mainstream Zionism as ‘the promised land.’ Some Zionists, attached to the ‘democratic’ claim attached to Israel’s political identity, worried that annexing the West Bank would explode a demographic bomb that would make it impossible to hide the apartheid nature of the Israeli state.

■ U.S. President Donald Trump has now proposed a so-called Deal of the Century, and Israel is seeking to annex the West Bank. How do you evaluate this process?

A: As the occupation continued, and Israel’s annexationist moves met with only token international resistance, there was a noticeable shift in the outlook of Netanyahu, the dominant Israeli political figure of the period, from an international posture favoring political compromise to an outcome reached unilaterally in the form of an imposed Israeli one-state solution. When Trump arrived in the White House in early 2017 this shift for the first time enjoyed the explicit geopolitical support of the U.S. government, and need no longer be hidden from view. In this atmosphere Israel moved to affirm its claims to most of the promised land, and relinquished any attachment to ‘peace’ through negotiations, even negotiations biased in their favor. The Trump Plan, whether known as ‘the deal of the century’ by its official name of ‘From Peace to Prosperity’ gives its seal of approval to the Israel vision of a one-state solution, slightly disguised by designating areas set aside for Palestinian administration as ‘a State,’ what was correctly associated with the Bantustans established by the apartheid regime in South Africa to hide the ugliest features of racist domination and exploitation. As is now known to the world, even the PA was unable to treat the Trump Plan as a serious negotiating proposal, correctly dismissing it as a blueprint for the Israeli one-state victory scenario. Israeli plans to annex a large portion of the West Bank by de jure enactment, on the basis of a green light from Washington, seems likely to be implemented in coming months, although opposed by some prominent security officials in Israel and even by maximalist Zionists on the grounds either of imperiling the Jewish demographic majority or provoking a surge of renewed Arab and international support for Palestinian grievances, and perhaps a trigger for a third intifada.

It should be internationally understood that the Trump Plan lacks any respectable international backing, and as such is in no way deserving of respect at the UN or elsewhere. It is an extremely partisan and arrogant set of proposals that are inconsistent with international law, the UN consensus, and elementary morality. Rather than being seriously considered, it should be summarily dismissed as an irrelevant geopolitical attempt to deny the Palestinian people of their inalienable right of self-determination.

■ May 15 marked the 72nd anniversary of the establishment of Israel, and all through these years Israel has been supported by countries such as the



**A more promising Palestinian strategy, additional to continuing acts and displays of resistance, is to encourage pressures mounted by the global solidarity movement including at the UN. Such campaigns can gain inspiration from the South African worldwide anti-apartheid movement, which overcame seemingly insurmountable odds to achieve an unexpected, mostly bloodless, victory over racism in the form of a nonviolent transition to multi-racial constitutional democracy.**

United States and Britain. It is also noticeable that countries are consenting to Israel’s occupation. Please explain?

A: The core rationale of support for Israel over the years has changed. Back when Israel was established in 1948 the public mood was shaped by the experience of World War II, including an acute sense of guilt on the part of liberal democracies in the West as having done so little to oppose Nazi racism toward Jews. From the start of the Zionist Project in the late 19th century anti-Semitic governments in Europe oddly shared the goal of Zionists of inducing Jews to leave their countries, and were eager to encourage emigration to Palestine. These attitudes underlay the 1917 colonialist initiative of the UK, known to the world as the Balfour Declaration, by which Britain pledged to look with favor on the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine although the Jewish minority was less than 8% and the Arab majority was never consulted. The more politically active personalities in Palestine opposed the idea of a Jewish homeland in their midst from

**The framework for negotiations was seriously flawed by giving the United States, an overt and unconditional supporter of Israel, the inappropriate role of intermediary or ‘honest broker.’**

the beginning. In that sense, Western support rested on these rather weak moral foundations that were not even consistent with regional strategic interests such as access to (Persian) Gulf oil reserves, trade routes, and leverage in the post-Ottoman Arab world. Zionism in Palestine turned against its British backer when Arab unrest in the 1930s led to some limits being imposed on Jewish immigration to Palestine, and the more militant Zionist militias started an ‘anti-colonial’ war in Palestine despite themselves being colonists. Of course, this was not so unusual in the British experience, having their earlier memories of the American Revolutionary War waged by their own colonists to gain political independence. In Palestine, as elsewhere, British divide and rule tactics during its administration of Palestine between the two world wars suggested to the UN that partition, again without consulting the smaller, yet still Arab majority, was the solution, which in turn sparked a series of regional wars, culminating in the 1967 War. In that war Israel demonstrated its military prowess, and was no longer regarded by American policymakers as a troublesome burden of conscience for the United States, but was seen as a reliable strategic ally in a turbulent region, and Israel has remained reliable over the course of the last fifty years. All in all, Israel made this unusual transition from being a burden of conscience to becoming a geopolitical junior, often not so junior, partner of the United States. In the process of a string of military defeats of the Arab countries by Israel, especially the 1973 War, there was a gradual weakening of regional support for the liberation of Palestine, and more of an Arab elite disposition to normalize the presence of Israel, and more recently join in an implicit coalition confronting Iran with the lead role being assumed by the U.S., a result of Trump’s tightening regional alignments with Israel and Saudi Arabia during the last four years. The Jewish diaspora also provided a major source of Zionist pro-Israeli leverage around the world, first, in the post-Holocaust context, and after 1967, in the

course of celebrating Israel’s military successes and modernizing record of achievement.

Throughout the process, the native Palestinian population was Orientalized, denigrated as ‘backward’ and inclined toward ‘terrorism.’ This hostile propaganda, popularized by Hollywood movies demonizing Arabs and glorifying Israelis, bestowed on Israel the political space to impose an apartheid structure of control over the Palestinian people as a whole, and to avoid any international accountability relating to its defiance of international law beyond token expressions of disapproval from European capitals and Washington whenever Israel’s provocations could not be entirely ignored. Although Israel has benefitted over the decades from American aid and support and European less blatant support, Israeli leadership has always had a Plan B. Israel, sought by every means to be self-reliant with respect to its security, highlighted by its covert acquisition and development of a nuclear weapons arsenal. In this sense, unless there are important shifts in the outlook of Arab governments

(although not among the captive populations), even the withdrawal of U.S. support, which seems highly unlikely, would not make Israel much more vulnerable to external pressures.

■ Based on the realities on the ground, it seems that the only way for the Palestinian people to get their rights is to resist the Israeli occupation. What is your opinion?

A: In view of the considerations discussed above, the most opportune Palestinian strategy would be to give up hopes under present conditions for reaching a satisfactory solution through diplomacy or at the UN. A more promising Palestinian strategy, additional to continuing acts and displays of resistance, is to encourage pressures mounted by the global solidarity movement including at the UN. Such campaigns can gain inspiration from the South African worldwide anti-apartheid movement, which overcame seemingly insurmountable odds to achieve an unexpected, mostly bloodless, victory over racism in the form of a nonviolent transition to multi-racial constitutional democracy.

The UN should not be forgotten. It remains a crucial site of struggle in waging what I have in the past referred to as ‘the legitimacy war’ fought to gain control of world public opinion, as well the high ground of public morality and international law. It should be appreciated that since 1945 the side that prevailed in the legitimacy war, rather than the side that controlled the battlefield, usually achieved political victory in the end. Gandhi appreciated the role of international public opinion in changing the balance of forces in India against the British Empire as did Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam in leading the defeat of overwhelmingly superior American military capabilities. Each conflict has unique characteristics, but the Palestinian struggle, despite present difficulties, can draw hope from the historical record of liberation and self-determination struggles of the past 75 years, and it is winning the legitimacy war, despite the Zionist defamatory pushback.



# Quds Day: Reminder of Palestinian struggle

By Salman Parviz

Originating in Iran with the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini declared the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan as Quds Day with the aim of forging unity among the Muslims and Arab nations so that they will unanimously express their backing for the Palestinian nation each year.

To mark the occasion amid the novel coronavirus pandemic the International Quds Day Conference was held online May 18 and 19.

This year's Quds Day has special significance in the denunciation of the so-called "Deal of the Century" and proposed annexation of Jordan Valley and occupied West Bank, a display of shocking disregard for international law. The deal has given green light to Israeli sovereignty on the illegal settlements built since the 1967 war, which is now colonized by more than 600,000 Israeli Jews.

Protests in the region on May 15 marked 72nd anniversary of the Nakba or "catastrophe", when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced into exile following creation of the Zionist state in 1948. It was another opportunity to denounce the policies of the U.S. President D. Trump's ultra-right policies and alliance with Israel.

While successive U.S. presidents and administrations have supported Israel, none has done as much in such a short time to embolden its right-wing settler-led colonialist government than Trump whose



*The three-year-old girl in the photograph has been twice displaced with her family in the West Bank over the past year (2018). Israeli destruction of Palestinian homes in West Bank, 'not compatible' with international humanitarian law, UN says. (Photo: UNRWA/Lara Jonasdottir)*

administration recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017, stalling the road map for a two-state solution.

Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner worked closely with former U.S. special envoy for the Middle East, Jason Greenblatt, to design the "Deal of the Century". The plan was announced in January after several months of delay. What Palestinians saw as a "surrender note", referred in one of the Tehran Times' headlines as the "Highway to Hell" and what many consider "Heist of the Century".

After three inconclusive elections in the Zionist state a three-year power sharing

agreement was announced in April which allows Netanyahu first bite at leading before handing power to Benny Gantz. At the heart of that agreement is the illegal annexation of large swathes of the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley and the Northern Dead Sea.

Israel is 21st century's Middle East version of apartheid-era South Africa, the only remaining apartheid state where Palestinians remain, at best, second class citizens in Israel, under occupation in Gaza, East Jerusalem and West Bank.

Of historical significance is the plight of residents of Gaza Strip. In January 2006,

Hamas won a sweeping majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections ending more than 40 years of domination by Fatah, the political faction built by the late Yasir Arafat.

Following the elections U.S., EU and Canada cut off funding to the Palestinian Authority despite Canada having helped to facilitate and monitor the elections. Worth mentioning is that the Israel-Hezbollah conflict ensued during the summer of 2006.

Gaza Strip was put under Israeli and Egyptian blockade in 2007 when the Hamas resistance movement started controlling the enclave. As a result of Israel's stifling measures the UN has warned in the past that the Gaza Strip would become "uninhabitable" by 2020.

More than two million people cramped up in a 362 square kilometer area, deprived of their fundamental human rights including freedom of movement. Under strict air, sea and ground siege imposed by Israel and Egypt for the last thirteen years, Gaza Strip is considered the largest open-air prison in the world.

This prison verdict is backed by international community, mainly the Western powers and the U.S. During the siege the coastal enclave has undergone three major Israeli offensives.

Today around 6.5 million Palestinians live abroad as refugees or members of the diaspora.

Quds day is reminder of the plight of Palestinian people.

## A Zionism-free world on strategic agenda of International Quds Day

By Dr. Mohammad Hossein Niknam

The decades-old crisis surrounding Palestine is universal. The crisis has not only imposed its negative impacts on the Palestinian geographical territory and the West Asian region, it has also badly affected the entire Islamic world and other world nations.

Prolongation of the occupation of Palestine has influenced the involved societies in various social, cultural, economic, security, military and humanitarian aspects. The main reason behind such a devastating prolonged occupation is a plot engineered by the hegemonic powers. Such a conflict could only be materialized via the establishment of the military regime of Israel in the region as well as the occupation of Palestine.

The Zionism, using its media power and its influence on the hegemonic powers, has tried through the history to create this view in the world public opinion that the mentioned crisis is restricted to the Palestinian geography or finally Muslim nations. But Imam Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, called such a plot by the Tel Aviv regime global arrogance or global Zionism.

Colonialism has experienced a bitter confrontation with the Islamic civilization. Following the emergence of Islam and its spread across the region, a powerful civilization was formed with its own cultural, scientific, military and economic characteristics. Wherever the newly-formed civilization arrived it was welcomed by the hosting nations. The West, which was seemingly Christian but in fact was materialistic and profit-seeking, had found the new civilization as an obstacle to its colonial projects.

ever the newly-formed civilization arrived it was welcomed by the hosting nations. The West, which was seemingly Christian but in fact was materialistic and profit-seeking, had found the new civilization as an obstacle to its colonial projects.

The West further resorted to getting the world involved in two great devastating wars to undermine the influence of Islamic civilization. In 1916, during the World War I, the Great Ottoman Empire was broken down within the framework of a colonial plot named the Sykes-Picot plan which ended in the formation of a variety of political factions and movements in the West Asia region.

At the same time, the establishment of the

military regime of Israel in Palestine assisted the West to prevent revival of any new Islamic civilization via escalating tensions, insecurity and disputes in the region.

Following the plot for establishment of Israel and occupation of Palestine and then creation of the Zionist regime, the Islamic world has been involved in continuous tensions which have inflicted heavy losses on regional nations.

West Asia enjoys rich resources of crude and natural gas, tourism capacities and wonderful geographical status. But regrettably the entire region is suffering from an old problem. The wealth produced in the region is invested in Western countries or deposited

in Western banks due to lack sustainable security in regional countries.

According to a World Bank report, the oil-producing Arab countries have invested over \$4,000 billion in the United States. This is a hefty amount of money that can cover a large number of industrial, scientific and research projects in the U.S. and provide a situation for Washington to grant \$4 billion to Israel annually.

If we look at the Zionist regime's damages to the entire region from the above-mentioned viewpoint, we admire Imam Khomeini's wise and accurate view which called the Zionist regime a "cancerous tumor". Imam Khomeini called for the elimination of Israel and initiated the International Quds Day in efforts to remove this tumor.

As Imam Khomeini wished, the International Quds Day will unite the entire oppressed people worldwide to form a global movement to settle international disputes.

In fact, Imam Khomeini, via initiating the International Quds Day, offered the people around the globe to think about a world without Zionism, without colonialism and without hegemonic powers.

The growing mystery behind opposing Israel and honoring the International Quds Day have their roots in the deep pleasure of thinking about a world without Israel and arrogant powers.

**Following the emergence of Islam and its spread across the region, a powerful civilization was formed with its own cultural, scientific, military and economic characteristics. Wherever the newly-formed civilization arrived it was welcomed by the hosting nations. The West, which was seemingly Christian but in fact was materialistic and profit-seeking, had found the new civilization as an obstacle to its colonial projects.**

## The battle for Quds will not stop

By Ahmed Al-Mudallal

The Palestinian people will not forget their lands from which they were expelled by the Zionists in 1948. This happened after the occupiers committed massacres against Palestinian inhabitants.

The Palestinian people are still suffering from the fallout of Nakba Day (catastrophe), which occurred in 1948. Until now, the Palestinian story is alive. The Palestinian tragedy is still affecting the people. The Palestinians have never forgotten their right of return to their own land. The right of return is a sacred issue that the Palestinian people cannot abandon.

Therefore, our people are still struggling to regain their full rights for which they have made great sacrifices.

The significant launch of marches on the borders of the Gaza Strip and the marches that rejected the proposed "deal of the century" are aimed to assert the Palestinian people's right to return to their motherland.

The International Quds Day, proposed by Imam Khomeini, is a Palestinian day with a distinction of support for the Palestinian cause in the Islamic world. Quds Day stresses the need that the issue is the central issue of the Islamic world. It reminds the Islamic countries of the need to mobilize their energies and capabilities towards the liberation of Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

Quds is the issue of the Islamic Ummah and as long as Quds remains occupied, capitals of the entire Islamic nations cannot remain safe from occupation.

Quds must remain present in the eyes of the Islamic nations. Iran, which proposed this day, is working intensively to support the Palestinian steadfastness and has provided unprecedented support to keep the work of the Resistance Movement alive.

International Al-Quds Day will be endangered by efforts to normalize ties with the Zionist entity. Such an attempt will be a treason and crime against the Palestinian cause. The International Quds Day, marked on the last Friday



of Ramadan, must stay alive. There is a doctrinal linkage between Palestine and Quds with the Arab and Islamic nations that can never be separated.

The battle for Quds will not stop.

*Ahmed Al-Mudallal is the leader of the Islamic Jihad movement in Palestine*

## Islamic ummah reestablishes ties with Palestine on Quds Day

to Palestine and the Palestinian cause.

International Quds Day is the day of the Islamic ummah for Palestine, and on this day the whole world realizes that the issue of Quds cannot die or fade away and that the Palestinian cause is the cause of the entire nation. It also reminds people of the tragedy in which the Palestinian people are living in and also plans to Judaize the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

International Quds Day is when the Islamic ummah re-establishes and supports its relationship with Palestine and with Quds, a wound that has not been healed yet. The Zionist regime's occupation procedures will not stop until it entirely obliterates the Arab and Islamic identity of this

city. It is because Zionists are fully aware of the symbolic significance of the city. This fact sends a warning message to the Arab and Islamic world of the need to save Quds and its people.

International Quds Day was an initiative by Imam Khomeini, may God have mercy on him. The initiative revived the question of Palestine and the issue of Quds in the hearts of all people. We should thank the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is always keen to support the Palestinian people and turn Quds Day into a national day for Palestine.

*Nafez Azzam is a member of the political bureau of the Islamic Jihad movement*



By Nafez Azzam

The Islamic Republic of Iran has turned Quds Day into a world day for the Islamic nation to pay more attention

## Qassem Soleimani sacrificed himself to protect Quds

By Talal Abu Zarifa

International Day of Quds is an occasion to remind the world of its responsibilities towards the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the city of Quds, and the Zionist entity's actions in Judaizing the city.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and Martyr Qassem Soleimani made it clear that Muslims have to defend Quds, and Haj Qassem sacrificed himself to protect the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the city of Quds.

Iran is still moving forward with its positions on the Palestinian issue.

*Talal Abu Zarifa is a member of the Political Bureau of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine*



## Quds Day confirms role of Muslims to help liberate Palestine

By Ismail Radwan

On the International Day of Quds, for which many have been martyred, including Martyr Qassem Soleimani, we say that Quds was and will be the eternal capital of the Palestinian people.

Quds Day was a culture that Imam Khomeini instilled. He named the last Friday of the blessed month of Ramadan as a global day for the Quds to perpetuate the culture of Quds and to emphasized the duty of the Arab and Islamic nations to strive for the liberation of Quds and Palestine; this confirms the role of the Islamic countries to work towards liberating Palestine.

*Ismail Radwan is a leader of Hamas movement*



## Quds is the capital of all free people in the world

By Hani Al-Thawabatah

Quds Day declared by Imam Khomeini, leader of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, to grant loyalty to Quds and its heritage and the sanctity of the city, which is the capital of the hearts of all free people in the world.

It means that the Islamic Republic of Iran and the axis of resistance are loyal to this city, which is subject to Judaization, abuse, and suffer because of the Zionists' invasion and occupation.

We believe that concentrating efforts and forming a united resistance front is the only way to confront the aggression against Quds and to liberate the land and people who own it.

*Hani Al-Thawabatah is a leader in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine*



## Quds forms the essence of fight between Islamic faith and Zionism

By Yousef Al-Hasayneh

Naming the last Friday in Ramadan as the International Quds Day by Imam Khomeini sheds light on what is happening in this city and the Palestinian cause and the fight of wills among Palestinians and Zionists.

Imam Khomeini did this to emphasize the issue of Quds and make it a concern in the minds and conscience of Muslims because Quds is the summary of the fight between the essence of Islamic faith and the essence of Israel and Zionism which the Western countries support.

*Yousef Al-Hasayneh is a member of the Political Bureau of the Islamic Jihad Movement*



## We Palestinians celebrate Quds Day

By Toher Al-Nono

On this day, we say to our people and our nation that this year, Quds is in grave danger and faces the threat of Judaization. Al-Aqsa Mosque may be divided by Zionists, but our confidence in our nation is high.

International Quds Day is the day when people come out in response to the call of Imam Khomeini, may God have mercy on him, who set this date. Our nation will not fail. They believe that God protects Quds and its people.

We Palestinians consider every day as Quds Day. We welcome all efforts and supports evoked by the Quds issue, and we send our best wished to all Palestinians of Quds who live around the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

We, as Palestinians, celebrate this day, and we consider every day to be a Quds Day. We believe that the city of Quds is the eternal capital of the Palestinian people, not the Zionist entity's capital, as the Trump administration wants.

We thank the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has always stood with the Palestinian people and supports them to reclaim their rights.

*Taher Al-Nono is a member of the political bureau of Hamas*



## Quds Day is in hearts of Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims

By Nael Abu Odeh

International Quds Day is in the hearts of the Palestinians and the Arab and Islamic nations and it serves as candlelight for Quds and the Palestinians.

On International Quds Day, we say that any candlelight that does not cast light on Jerusalem al-Quds and move towards the liberation of Palestine will die down.

We believe that every Arab and Islamic nation must support and strengthen the steadfastness of the Palestinian people in the face of the plots that are wiping out the Palestinian blood on the earth to seize their lands.

*Nael Abu Odeh is a member of the Political Bureau of the Palestinian Mujahideen Movement*





## Chahar Bagh historical school getting back to its heyday

**TOURISM d e s k** TEHRAN – Restoration of the historical dome of Chahar Bagh Theological School in the city of Isfahan is underway, CHTN reported on Tuesday.

The restoration project, which began in 2012, is 85 percent complete and will come to an end by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2021), the report added.

The Safavid-era (1501–1736) school was built by the order of the mother of the Safavid king Sultan Hossein, to serve seminary students. In order to finance the school, the income of Soltan Hossein's mother nearby large caravanserai directly went to the foundation.



The dome and parts of the walls are covered in bright yellow bricks which give a feeling of lightness. The entrance gate is decorated with gold and silver facade. The central part with pool and garden, is surrounded by arcades on two levels, each giving access to students' rooms.

Soaked in a rich history and culture, Isfahan was once a crossroads of international trade and diplomacy in Iran. Now, it is one of Iran's top tourist destinations for good reasons. The ancient city is filled with many architectural wonders such as unmatched Islamic buildings, bazaars, museums, Persian gardens, and tree-lined boulevards. It's a city for walking, getting lost in its mazing bazaars, dozing in beautiful gardens, and meeting people.

The city has long been nicknamed as Nesf-e-Jahan which is translated into "half the world", meaning seeing it is relevant to see the whole world. In its heyday, it was also one of the largest cities in the region with a population of nearly one million.

Isfahan is renowned not only for the abundance of great historical bridges but also for its 'life-giving river', the Zayandeh-Rood, which has long bestowed the city an original beauty and fertility. The cool blue tiles of Isfahan's Islamic buildings, and the city's majestic bridges, contrast perfectly with the encircling hot, dry Iranian countryside.

The huge Imam Square, best known as Naghsh-e Jahan Sq. (literary meaning "Image of the World"), is one of the largest in the world (500m by 160m), and a majestic example of town planning. Built in the early 17th century, the UNESCO-registered square is punctuated with the most interesting sights in Isfahan.

Modern Isfahan is now home to some heavy industry, including steel factories and a nuclear facility on its outskirts, however, its inner core wants to be preserved as a priceless gem.

## Ancient castles and fortresses in Iran: Nushijan Citadel

**HERITAGE d e s k** Nushijan Castle is one of the oldest adobe architectures in Iran yet it is one of the least known in the country.

A destination for sightseers and history buffs, the castle is situated in Shusab village near Malayer, west-central Hamedan province. The monument is estimated to date back to the Iron Age and early Mede settlements in the Iranian plateau.



Sources say that between 1964 and 1977, a season of archaeological excavations was conducted by David Stronach at the British Institute of Iranian Studies (BIPS) at the site, and renovations were also carried out.

The achievements of the team are the identification of three ancient architectural periods of the Mede, Achaemenid, and Parthian eras.

The inner space of the building is rectangular and its entrance is in the neighboring room. The rest of a coal bowl on the southern side of the main room proves, that the fire ceremony was carried out (secretly).

The hall was built on an adobe platform. Its foundation is from a loam mortar. The hall is 20 m long and 15 m wide. Its eastern side is not completely right-angled. The eastern wall has two decorative niches. But on the western side, there are no decorations. Under the ceiling, there are some windows for lighting, which provides enough light for the space.

Known in classical times as Ecbatana, Hamedan was one of the ancient world's greatest cities. Pitifully little remains from antiquity, but significant parts of the city center are given over to excavations, and there's a scattering of historical curiosities.

# Seven-thousand-year-old clay vessels unearthed in Iran

**HERITAGE d e s k** TEHRAN – A total of six clay vessels, which believed to date back to the fifth millennium BC, have recently been unearthed in Moushelan Tepe, a significant archaeological site 65 km west of Tehran.

"The vessels, which probably belong to a burial chamber, were discovered along with some pottery and bone fragments as well as some historical layers of the soil during an archaeological survey aimed to demarcate Moushelan Tepe," IRNA quoted archaeologist Siavash Saraqi, the head of the survey, as saying on Tuesday.

According to studies conducted in this area, 10 architectural surfaces along with graves and pottery fragments belonging to the fifth and fourth millennium BC have been identified yet, he added.

"In general, it is assumed that the "thickness" of the ancient layers in Moushelan Tepe reaches about 6.70 meters."

Talking about other achievements in the historical site, Saraqi noted: "The archeological team carved 26 trenches on the site in various directions. Fortunately, as a result of those speculations, in addition to the aforementioned relics, a pottery with a red gutter with geometric and animal motifs (depicting a goat), which is concurrent with those found in the Cheshmeh Ali [an archaeological site in southern Tehran], was discovered; a unique finding in its kind."

"The recent study showed that, contrary to the topography of the site and previous commentaries, the dimensions of the site are more than previously announced and the site of Moushelan Tepe is stretched in an east-west direction and unfortunately a large part of It is generally leveled on the west side tuned into to gardens and villa construction projects by the locals," the archaeologist concluded.

Moushelan Tepe was first excavated by Hakemia in 1958-1959 and again by Navaie in 1978-1979.

The Cheshmeh Ali cultural period (ca. 5300-4300 BC), followed by the Sialk culture (near the modern city of Kashan in central Iran), not only covers the



A total of six clay vessels, which believed to date back to the fifth millennium BC, have recently been unearthed in Moushelan Tepe, a significant archaeological site 65 km west of Tehran.

North of Central Iran region, but also it is evidenced in neighboring regions. The genesis of this culture has coincided with the consolidation of sedentary-farming in this cultural region.

## Open-air recreation centers, natural landscapes open under health protocols: tourism minister

**TOURISM d e s k** TEHRAN – Open-air recreation centers and natural landscapes have been reopened in Iran under the condition of observing health protocols to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

"People can use open-air recreation centers and natural landscapes only if they can make sure health protocols are observed," Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan said on Tuesday.

"Tenting and camping for those who are intending to stay for night in parks in large groups – which can lead to high-risk gathering of people and increased danger of Covid-19 spread – is still illegal. We recommend staying in formal and legal accommodations that have received the necessary permits from the ministry," the official added.

The minister also pointed out that the decision could help ease people's stress caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

"We requested the Ministry of Interior, provincial authorities, police, and security guards to collaborate with us and prepare the ground for people to visit natural landscapes and use open-air recreation centers during a



Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan in an undated photo

time when a lot of mental pressure is imposed on the society as a result of coronavirus pandemic."

Deputy minister Vali Teymouri told the Tehran Times on Monday that the tourism industry will get back on the right track sooner

than expected thanks to measures taken to tackle the spread of coronavirus.

"I believe that tourism industry of the country will get back on the right track far sooner than generally expected thanks to the measures taken to deal with the spread

of coronavirus in tourist destinations, hotels, stopovers, and all the centers which are affiliated with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts."

On April 20, Iran lifted intercity travel bans days after President Hassan Rouhani unveiled a "Smart Social Distancing Initiative" as a new phase of measures to prevent the virus spread. Over the past couple of months, many countries, including Iran, imposed travel restrictions to help curb the spread of novel coronavirus. In this line, incoming and outgoing flights have been suspended, and road travels restricted to a great extent.

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

Iran expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 24 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, it aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

## 40 historical monuments restored in Zanjan

**HERITAGE d e s k** TEHRAN – Some 40 historical buildings and structures in northwestern Zanjan province were restored during the previous Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 19).

Gonbad-e Soltaniyeh, Historic Bazaar of Zanjan, Chehel Sotun Mosque, Hakimian Mansion and Seyyed Mohammad Bridge are among the restored sites, CHTN quoted provincial tourism chief Amir Arjmand as saying on Tuesday.

He also noted that over 840 historical and natural sites across the province have been inscribed on the National Heritage List.

The UNESCO-registered Mausoleum of Oljaytu, locally known as Gonbad-e Soltaniyeh, is the highlight of Zanjan's tourist attractions.

Dominating the skyline, the 14th-century monument is highly recognized as an architectural masterpiece particularly due to its innovative double-shelled dome and elaborate

interior decoration.

According to UNESCO, the mausoleum's interior decoration is so outstanding that scholars like A.U. Pope have described the building as "anticipating the Taj Mahal".

The UN cultural body adds the Mausoleum of Oljaytu as an essential link and key monument in the development of Islamic architecture in central and western Asia.

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.



## Ramadan a time for practicing patience, simplicity and empathy

**HERITAGE d e s k** Photo collection depicts Iranian people breaking their day-long fast with simple iftar meals while still at work in the city of Tabriz, May 18, 2020.

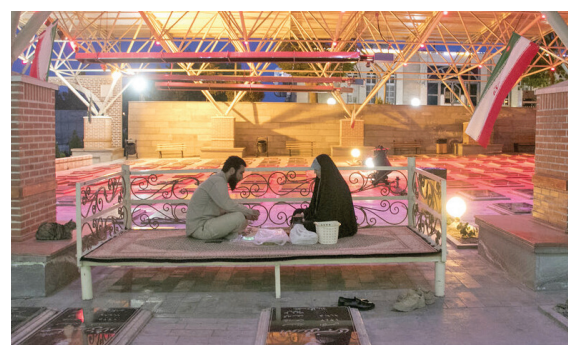
A fasting day during Ramadan begins before the sunrise and continues during the daylight hours. It comes to an end with the evening meal of iftar served at sunset.

Muslims break their fast at the time of the call for evening prayer.

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

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

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





# Caspian Sea water level sinks to lowest in 25 years

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The Caspian Sea water has reached its lowest level since 1995, mainly because of a recent drop in the water level of the Volga River, which supplies most of the sea’s water, by about 22 percent.

In 2019, the average water level stood at -27.18 meters, showing 13 centimeters decrease compared to the year before, ISNA reported.

The average annual inflow of Volga water into the Caspian Sea is about 240 billion cubic meters and the total annual estimate of the inflow of rivers leading to the Caspian Sea is 300 billion cubic meters. Of the other major rivers, such as the Kora, the Ural, the Terek, the Sefid-rud, and the Haraz, a total of 34 billion cubic meters of water enters the Caspian Sea.

The volume of water entering the rivers is considered as a very important indicator in the Caspian water balance and its annual changes are affected by climatic factors, hydrological regime and exploitation.



The results of the study show that in 2019, the flooding period of the Volga River, which normally lasts from early May to late July, was shorter and its discharge

rate was lower than the long-term average.

According to the national center for Caspian Sea studies and research affiliated to the Water Research Institute, sea water

temperature is one of the main criteria in heat exchange and an indicator in assessing the potential for evaporation from the water level, which is one of the main components of the Caspian water balance.

The increasing trend of the Caspian Sea surface temperature, especially in recent years, has been one of the factors affecting the reduction of water level. The average temperature of the Sea in 2019 has increased by 0.2 degrees Celsius compared to 2018, and one degree higher than the long-term average.

Analysis of water temperature changes in the last two years indicates an increase in water temperature in all parts of the Caspian Sea, except for the northern part.

The Caspian Sea is the largest enclosed inland body of water on Earth by area. It is bounded by Kazakhstan to the northeast, Russia to the northwest, Azerbaijan to the west, Iran to the south, and Turkmenistan to the southeast. The sea has a surface area of 371,000 square kilometers and a volume of 78,200 cubic kilometers.

## Lake Urmia being revived ‘slowly, but surely’: UNDP

**ENVIRONMENT** **TEHRAN** — A combination of man-made efforts and higher rainfall in recent years is “slowly, but surely reviving what was once the second largest saltwater lake in the world,” Claudio Providas, Resident Representative in Iran for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), has stated.

There is still a long way to go for the lake though. The target is to reach a water level of just over 1,274m, something which “still requires substantial efforts,” Providas said. “But things are at least heading in the right direction. Regarding the biodiversity of the lake, there are signs of hope,” he added, according to Forbes.

He went on to say that brine shrimp, which had disappeared from the lake’s ecosystem due to high salinity, are returning. The number of water birds such as flamingos has also increased from 4,000 during the worst period to 60,000 last years.

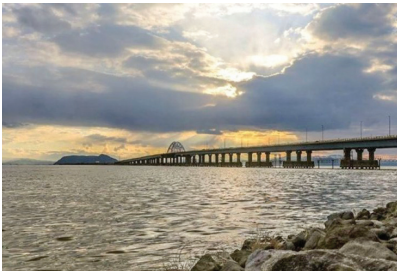
Rescuing the lake has been an international effort, the ministries and the Urmia Lake Restoration Program made efforts with the UNDP support. Local communities have also been heavily involved, in addition to almost \$7 million in financial support from the Japanese government, so far more than \$1 billion has been spent on the project in total.

Farhad Sarkhosh, head of the Lake Urmia Restoration Program’s office in West Azarbaijan province said that the lake’s level has reached 1,271.87 meters, which is 37 centimeters higher than the last year’s level.

The lake’s water volume was estimated at more than 4.620 billion cubic meters, which indicates an increase of 1.010 billion cubic meters compared to the last year and 1.7 meter since 2014.

He went on to say that Lake Urmia’s surface area has now reached more than 3,093 square kilometers, adding that the figure has increased by 244 square kilometers compared to the same period last year.

According to the latest statistics of the Meteorological Organization, since the be-



ginning of this water year, West Azarbaijan province received 339.9 millimeters of rain, which demonstrates an increase of 14.6 percent compared to the long-term average.

The above normal levels of rain came to help conservation measures to preserve the Lake Urmia, however, it still needs 9.5 billion cubic meters of water to reach its ecological level of 1274.10.

Shared between West Azarbaijan and East Azarbaijan provinces in northwestern Iran, Lake Urmia, was once the largest salt-water lake in West Asia. It was home to many migratory and indigenous animals including flamingos, pelicans, egrets, and ducks, and attracted hundreds of tourists every year who had bathed in the water to take advantage of the therapeutic properties of the lake.

However, decades of long-standing drought spells, excessive dam construction and elevated hot summer temperatures that speed up evaporation as well as increased water demands in the agriculture sector shrank the lake drastically. In 1999 the volume of water which was at 30 billion cubic meters drastically decreased to half a billion cubic meters in 2013. Moreover, the lake surface area of 5,000 square kilometers in 1997 shrunk to one-tenth of that to 500 square kilometers in 2013.

These days, life has returned to Lake Urmia. The lake now has so much water that tourists can swim in its shiny water and birds and aquatic species such as flamingos and Artemia have returned to it, but it still has a long way to completely survive.

## Child adoption increased in Iran

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — Child adoption has increased in the country, as some 2,000 children are adopted annually, 1,700 of whom are placed for permanent adoption and 300 in temporary custody, Habibollah Masoudi, deputy director of the Welfare Organization has stated.

Following the Law on Protection of Children and Adolescents in [the Iranian calendar year] 1392 (March 2013-March 2014), the number of adoption cases has increased and 2,000 children are placed for adoption annually, some of whom are placed under temporary custody because a temporary trustee is better than care centers, he explained.

For adoption, criteria like mental health, the ability to take care of a child, no addiction, no criminal record and bad reputation, as well as proper income must be achieved. The approach is the result of studying the adoption process in 10 countries around the world, he noted.

He went on to say that many countries in the world have stricter rules for adoption than Iran. For example, driving violations are considered for adoption. It is believed that those who commit traffic violations are lawbreakers and cannot be good parents, also issues such as parties and home safety are considered in some countries.

Last year, 160 children were adopted who were suffering diseases or disabilities. Also, 130 children were given to single girls over the age of 30, he stated.

Previously, adoption only included orphans, but now even children whose parents have been denied permanent custody by court are subject to adoption, he concluded.

Montazer Shabr, the Welfare Organization’s director for children affairs said in July 2019 that there are 10 applicants for fostering each child in the country. Currently, some 2,800 applicants are



waiting for adoption, most of whom are parents not having children or intending to foster a child, he added.

Ahmad Khaki, deputy head of Tehran’s welfare organization for social affairs, said that the number of children adopted in Tehran increased by 25 percent in [the Iranian calendar] year 1396 (March 2017 – March 2018) compared to the year before, as some 500 children were adopted by Tehraners last year (ended March 2019).

According to the Welfare Organization, the country’s adoption and foster laws which dated back to some 44 years ago were revised and modified in 2013. Within the new law kids could be adopted up to the age of 16 while the former law states that kids aged 12 or less could be adopted. In addition to families with no child now families with one kid and single women are able to apply for adoption.

The law formerly authorized adoption only for orphans while the new law permit adoption for children with dysfunctional families as well in case the judge concludes that the new family is suitable for adoption.

Previously, the adoptive families were required to sign over one third of their property to their child-to-be but some could not afford to do so and now the judge gets to decide how a family, depending on their financial status, should be treated.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

## Non-repayable loans for e-bikes must increase: Tehran City Council chairman

While an important strategy to contain Tehran’s air pollution is using clean energies, non-repayable loans to incentivize the owners to replace their motorcycles with electric ones is not sufficient and must increase, Mohsen Hashemi, Tehran City Council chairman, has said.

The scheme on encouraging the citizens to replace carbureted motorcycles with electric ones has started over a few years ago, however, the process has been evolving slowly, he said, adding, we hope to increase the use of electric motorbikes by allocating the necessary funds along with supporting the manufacturers next year (March 2019-March 2020). The handouts supporting the residents to purchase the motorbikes has been about 25 million rials (nearly \$600), which is not adequate anymore given the current economic condition, he stated, Tasnim reported on Saturday.

## تاکید رئیس شورای شهر تهران بر افزایش وام بلاعوض خرید «موتورسیکلت‌های برقی»

محسن هاشمی رئیس شورای شهر تهران با اشاره به اینکه یکی از راه‌های کاهش آلودگی هوای تهران استفاده از انرژی‌های پاک است، گفت: رقمی که به عنوان وام بلاعوض خرید موتورسیکلت برقی برای تشویق دارندگان موتورسیکلت پرداخت شده است، پاسخگوی این شرایط نیست و این رقم باید افزایش یابد.

وی تصریح کرد: جایگزینی کردن موتورسیکلت‌های برقی به جای موتورسیکلت‌های کاربراتوری از چند سال پیش آغاز شده است اما این کار با کندی پیش رفته است و امیدواریم در سال آینده با تخصیص اعتبارات لازم و حمایت از تولیدکنندگان، میزان استفاده از موتورسیکلت‌های برقی افزایش یابد.

به گزارش روز شنبه خبرگزاری تسنیم هاشمی با اشاره به میزان تسهیلاتی که تا به امروز به‌عنوان وام بلاعوض برای خرید موتورسیکلت برقی در نظر گرفته شده است، یادآور شد: با توجه به افزایش قیمت خرید موتورسیکلت برقی، رقم ۲ میلیون و ۵۰۰ هزار تومان رقم قابل قبولی به‌عنوان وام بلاعوض نیست و باید این رقم افزایش یابد.

## IDIOM

### Browned off

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

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

## PHRASAL VERB

### Hand something out

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

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

## PREFIX/SUFFIX

### “-an, -ian”

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

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

## Population growth drops to less than 1% for first time

**1 →** He went on to explain that 14 policies to support child-bearing and the family were announced by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in [the Iranian calendar year] 1389 (March 2014- March 2015), when he stressed that social, cultural and economic development should be done in accordance with these general policies to support families.

“But since 2 years ago, the marriage rate declined by 8 percent annually. With this trend, we will be one of the oldest countries in the world in the next 30 years, and this is dangerous in all scientific, social, cultural and economic fields,” he lamented.

At the beginning of the Islamic revolution (in 1979), the country’s population grew by 2.5 percent annually, however, suddenly, population growth reached about 1.5 percent in the 1970s, he highlighted.

## World Bee Day: Are we ignoring biodiversity risks in the same way we ignored the pandemic?

Before the coronavirus outbreak began late last year, scientists had been warning of the likelihood of a global pandemic for decades.

A number of experts across the world had predicted that it was not a case of if - but when - a new debilitating disease would sweep the planet, and that we were greatly underprepared.

And while it is now obvious that the risk of a pandemic and its global impact was severely underestimated, it far from the only biological risk that we have been ignoring.

Biodiversity, and the threat to the population of bees in particular, may not seem the most pressing issue on the horizon amidst a global crisis.

However, the importance of bees to both the environment and our economy is more important than many people realise, and their populations are under threat.

Bees are vital to our way of life because they pollinate food crops, fertilising plants so that they can produce fruit, vegetables, seeds.

According to the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, pollination is worth £691 million to the UK economy.

“Insect pollinators are essential for food production,” Gill Perkins, CEO of Bumblebee Conservation Trust told The Independent.

Bees and other insect pollinators together pollinate 87 per cent of all plant species, and about 75 per cent of crop species, without bees it has been estimated that supermarkets may have half the amount of fruit and vegetables.

The extinction of bees could lead to a significant disruption in our food supply chains, drive up the price of fresh produce, and likely cause famine in poorer regions, according to a number of wildlife organisations.

“Without them, we would have no apples, tomatoes, strawberries, peppers, cherries, chocolate, coffee, and much much more. We could not feed the human population; billions would starve,” Dave Goulson, Professor of biology at the University of Sussex specialising in the ecology and conservation of insects, said in an interview.

Their decline or extinction would also have a knock-on effect on the makeup of our ecosystems, as bees contribute significantly to the pollination of wildflowers that provide the basis of many food chains.

“Numerous flowering plants would disappear from natural ecosystems, leading to a collapse of biodiversity with further dire consequences for planetary health,” Prof Goulson added.

Importantly, there are three different types of bees in the UK including bumblebees, solitary bees, honey bees, alongside over 280 bee species in total, which are all important pollinators.

According to a report by World Wide Fund in 2019, 17 species of bees had become regionally extinct in the UK, with 25 other types marked as threatened and another 31 of conservation concern.

Further afield, twelve wild bee species within Europe are classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as critically endangered. A further 52 are listed as endangered.

Their populations are threatened by a number of factors including habitat loss due to agriculture and farming, urban and suburban development, pesticides, climate change, and disease.

And while the climate crisis has drawn more mainstream attention in the last few years, experts urge that acknowledging threats to biodiversity, that are often easily overlooked, is just as important.

“Loss of biodiversity is as big a threat to our future as climate change, but gets much less attention, perhaps because the benefits we get from biodiversity, though vast, are largely hidden to us in our everyday, urban lives,” Prof Goulson said.

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### California fires

(October 27, 2003)  
Forest fires started in the US state of California on Tuesday and are still spreading. So far thousands of people have had to leave their homes. Robert Nisbet reports:

Underneath the layer of thick smoke now covering all of southern California, thousands of firefighters are still struggling to contain ten separate **blazes**. Thirteen people are now known to have died, at least nine in the state’s biggest fire in San Diego County. **Over a quarter of a million acres** and six hundred and fifty homes have been destroyed in what the **outgoing governor**, Gray Davis, is calling the worst fires in California for a decade. He’s asked President Bush to declare the area a **disaster zone** to **free up federal funds**. The fires have **taken hold** because of **drought** and an infestation of **bark beetle**, which has left millions of dead trees. **Emergency services** say it may take until Wednesday **bring the fires under control**.

■ **Words**

**blazes:** very large fires

**over quarter of a million acres:** more than a hundred thousand hectares

**outgoing governor:** the political leader of California State, who is leaving his job soon.

**disaster zone:** area with serious problems, which receives immediate help from central government

**free up federal funds:** make available money from US central government

**taken hold:** a fire which has taken hold is very difficult to stop

**drought:** a long period of time without rain

**bark beetle:** an insect which attacks trees

**Emergency services:** Fire fighters, police and ambulance are emergency services

**bring the fires under control:** stop the fires spreading

(Source: BBC)



## UN accuses UAE of operating air bridge to support Haftar in Libya

A confidential United Nations report revealed that the UAE is operating an air bridge to supply weapons to Brigadier General Khalifa Haftar in Libya, violating the UN arms embargo imposed on the oil-rich country, according to U.S. news agency Bloomberg.

The news agency pointed out that a United Nations expert committee tasked with monitoring compliance with the sanctions imposed on Libya had conducted an investigation into 37 flights.

The report pointed out that the flights operated through a complex network of companies registered in the UAE, Kazakhstan and the British Virgin Islands.

The United Nations noticed an increase in the number of secret flights taking off from the UAE and from its air base in Eritrea towards airstrips controlled by Haftar, who is fighting to topple the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli.

The UAE Ambassador to the United Nations, Lana Zaki Nusseibeh, said the allegations were false.

The UN-backed GNA is struggling to impose control over the war-torn country which saw a new wave of violence launched by Haftar last year in an attempt to gain control of the capital Tripoli.

The war soon turned into a proxy conflict that brought regional and international powers into the country and attracted mercenaries.

Haftar is backed by Egypt, the UAE as well as Russia, while Turkey is supporting the GNA.

## Turkey, Germany, France, UK hold teleconference

Foreign ministers of Turkey, Germany, France and the UK held a teleconference to discuss regional issues and latest developments, an official statement said on Tuesday.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a written statement that Mevlut Cavusoglu, Heiko Maas, Jean-Yves Le Drian and Dominic Raab gathered for a virtual meeting to follow the results of a quartet summit of Turkish, French, German and British leaders in March.

“At the meeting, the current situation in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and the possible common steps to be taken, and the latest regional developments, especially in Syria, Libya and Iraq, were discussed in detail,” the statement said.

The meeting was useful in exchanging views on these issues, it added.

According to Anadolu, the foreign ministers agreed to meet again within the same framework, the statement concluded without setting a date.

## Venezuelan bank files legal claim with Bank of England over gold

The Central Bank of Venezuela has launched a legal claim to try and force the Bank of England to release €930m (\$1bn; £820m) worth of gold it holds.

Venezuela, which is already under U.S. sanctions, says it wants to use the gold’s value to tackle coronavirus, BBC reported.

The proceedings follow a request, made weeks ago, asking for the value to be transferred to the United Nations.

Legal documents say the bank wants the transfer made “as a matter of urgency” to buy supplies like food and medicine.

The country has so far reported 618 coronavirus cases and 10 deaths.

Venezuela’s economy has collapsed under the leadership of President Nicolás Maduro, whose leadership is not recognized by dozens of nations including the UK and the U.S.

Millions of people have fled the country in recent years and shortages of essentials have become widespread.

Selling off gold reserves has become an economic lifeline for Mr Maduro’s government, which is under strict international sanctions.

The legal claim was filed in a London court on 14 May.

The Central Bank of Venezuela says it wants the funds transferred to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to administer the purchase of supplies like medical equipment.

## Pakistani legislator dies from COVID-19, as highest daily toll recorded

Pakistani local legislator died Wednesday after contracting COVID-19, hospital officials said, marking the first death of a political figure in the South Asian nation from the disease at a time the country has lifted its countrywide lockdown.

Pakistan has recorded 45,898 infections and 985 deaths to date from the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Tuesday saw the most deaths in a single day reported, at 46.

Shaheen Raza, a 65-year-old female member of the provincial assembly of Punjab, the country’s largest province, died in the eastern city of Lahore, the CEO of Mayo Hospital, Dr Asad Aslam, told Reuters.

“She was admitted to a hospital on May 17, and brought to Mayo Hospital on Monday, where she tested positive for the virus,” Aslam said.

Raza belonged to the ruling party of Prime Minister Imran Khan and was elected on a reserved seat for women. Punjab’s Health Minister Yasmeen Rashid, who is from the same party, said Raza had been visiting quarantine centers in the province for inspections and was a cancer survivor.

Meanwhile, despite rising rates of infections and deaths, Pakistan continued to open up the country Wednesday, with cross-country train operations restarting after almost two months.

The timing of the restart presents a challenge for authorities with the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, due to fall Sunday or Monday, subject to the sighting of the new moon - meaning tens of thousands of people will be looking to board trains for their home towns.

Railways authorities told Reuters that bookings had been limited to 60 percent of capacity to ensure social distancing. Tickets sold out shortly after becoming available.

# Hezbollah says perfectly ready for any confrontation with Israel

A senior Hezbollah official says the liberation of Jerusalem al-Quds from Israeli occupation tops the agenda of the regional resistance front, and that the Lebanese movement is fully prepared for any type of confrontation with the regime in Tel Aviv in line with that objective.

“We are perfectly ready to confront any act of aggression or instance of folly that the Zionist regime could commit,” Seyyed Hashem Safieddine, head of Hezbollah’s Executive Council, told Lebanon’s al-Mayadeen television channel on Tuesday.

“The resistance movement is currently assured and well aware of its approach and choices in the event of such a confrontation with the enemy,” he added.

The movement, however, is not seeking war and is not working to ignite one, the official noted.

### ■ Israel in a ‘tight spot’

According to Press TV, Safieddine further highlighted a string of defeats Israel has suffered in the face of the regional resistance front over the past years, including in the wars the regime waged against Lebanon in 2000 and 2006.

“The [Israeli] army, which had been described as invincible, was subdued and



suffered defeat,” he said.

The Zionist regime is currently caught in a “tight spot” as it has fallen short of answering questions that have to do with military affairs, Safieddine said.

### ■ Liberation of al-Quds

The Hezbollah official said the main goal of the regional resistance front is to secure the liberation of Jerusalem al-Quds from Israeli occupation, and that all have a “duty

## Palestine president ends ‘all agreements’ with Israel, U.S.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas announced on Tuesday that his administration considers all agreements signed with Israel and the United States null and void, after Israel declared it would annex parts of the occupied West Bank, according to local media reports.

Palestinian news agency Wafa reported that Abbas made the announcement during an emergency meeting held in Ramallah to discuss the Israeli plans.

“The Palestine Liberation Organization and the State of Palestine are absolved, as of today, of all the agreements and understandings with the American and Israeli governments and of all the obligations based on these understandings and agreements, including the security ones,” Abbas reportedly said.

“The Israeli occupation authority, as of today, has to shoulder all responsibilities and obligations in front of the international community as an occupying power over the territory of the occupied state of Palestine.”

Abbas threatened to withdraw from agreements back in February, after U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled his Middle East plan, which included the possibility of annexation.

Al Jazeera correspondent Nida Ibrahim said the implications of the move remained unclear.

“While he said that the PLO is no longer bound by agreements signed with Israel, he did not say that he is dissolving the Palestinian Authority,” Ibrahim said from Ramallah.

During his address, which was broadcast on Palestinian television, Abbas also said he was still ready to negotiate with Israel and remains committed to ending the conflict on the basis of a two-state solution.

### ■ Skepticism

Speaking from Chicago, Ali Abunimah of Electronic Intifada was sceptical about Abbas’ announcement.

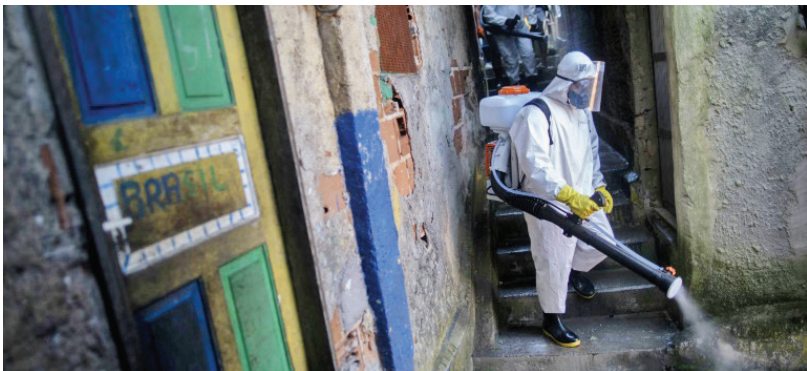
“Mahmoud Abbas has announced I can’t remember how many times that he’s suspended this agreement or

that agreement and the fact is that he’s never (actually) done that. He’s never (actually) suspended an agreement,” he said. “The reality is that the Palestinian Authority cannot move a salt shaker from one side of the table to another without the permission and help of the Israelis.”

Annexing parts of the occupied West Bank and the Jordan Valley as part of Trump’s Middle East plan was a central promise of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s latest re-election campaign. His former political rivals-turned-allies Benny Gantz and Gabi Ashkenazi have also expressed their support of the plan.

Netanyahu was sworn into office for another term on Sunday, after more than 500 days without a stable government and three inconclusive elections. Addressing the parliament before the vote, Netanyahu said his incoming government should apply Israeli sovereignty over Jewish settlements, which are illegal under international law.

## Brazil sees record virus deaths as pandemic surges in Latin America



Brazil has seen a record number of coronavirus deaths as the pandemic that has swept across the world begins to hit Latin America with its full force.

After Asia, Europe and North America, Latin America has seen coronavirus infections surge in recent days and now accounts for about 580,000 of the world’s nearly five million confirmed cases, AFP reported.

Brazil has been hardest-hit in the region, rising to the third-highest number of cases in the world, as Peru, Mexico and Chile also see steady increases in infections.

Health officials in Brazil reported 1,179 new coronavirus deaths Tuesday, the first time the daily toll exceeded 1,000, but far-right President Jair Bolsonaro remains bitterly opposed to lockdowns, hav-

ing described them as unnecessary over a “little flu”.

With the outbreak in the world’s sixth-largest country expected to accelerate until early June, many Brazilians are deeply worried about the next few weeks.

“Our country is going from bad to worse,” said retiree Gilberto Ferreira in Rio de Janeiro.

“We have an inefficient government, and the people also do not obey the rules of the pandemic.”

Bolsonaro has refused to accept experts’ advice on responding to the pandemic, pressing regional governors to end stay-at-home measures.

And like U.S. counterpart Donald Trump he has also promoted the use of anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine against the virus despite studies showing it has no benefit.

## Trump attacks study, defends using malaria drug for COVID-19

U.S. President Donald Trump emphatically defended himself Tuesday against criticism from medical experts that his announced use of a malaria drug against the coronavirus could spark wide misuse by Americans of the unproven treatment with potentially fatal side effects.

Trump’s revelation a day earlier that he was taking hydroxychloroquine caught many in his administration by surprise and set off an urgent effort by officials to justify his action. But their attempt to address the concerns of health professionals was undercut by the president himself, AFP reported.

He asserted without evidence that a study of veterans raising alarm about the drug was “false” and an “enemy statement,” even as his own government warned that the drug should be administered for COVID-19 only in a hospital or research setting.

“If you look at the one survey, the only bad survey,



they were giving it to people that were in very bad shape,” Trump said. That was an apparent reference to a study of hundreds of patients treated by the Department of

## Afghan Taliban leader says committed to deal with U.S.



The leader of the Taliban said Wednesday that militants were committed to a landmark deal with the U.S., despite being accused of carrying out thousands of attacks in Afghanistan since it was signed.

Haibatullah Akhundzada urged Washington “not to waste” the opportunity offered by the deal to end America’s longest war in a message released ahead of next week’s Eid al-Fitr holiday, which marks the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, AFP reported.

“The Islamic Emirate is committed to the agreement signed with America and urges the other side to honor its own commitments and not allow this critical opportunity to go waste,” Akhundzada said in a statement, using the name the Taliban called Afghanistan when they were in power.

“I urge American officials to not afford anyone the opportunity to obstruct, delay and ultimately derail this internationally

recognized bilateral agreement” between the two sides, the reclusive leader added.

After months of negotiations, the Taliban and U.S. signed a deal in February which stipulates Washington will withdraw all troops by next year in return for security guarantees.

U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration has made it a priority to end the war in Afghanistan, and in a bid to withdraw foreign forces U.S. officials have been pushing the Taliban and Afghan leaders to hold peace talks.

Under the accord, the Taliban pledged to stop attacking cities and foreign forces, but has continued to target Afghan forces in the provinces.

Analysts say the Taliban have been emboldened by the February deal, and Afghan government officials have reported more than 3,800 attacks, which killed 420 civilians and wounded 906, since signing the deal.

Veterans Affairs in which more of those in a group who were administered hydroxychloroquine died than among those who weren’t.

“They were very old. Almost dead,” Trump said. “It was a Trump enemy statement.” During a Cabinet meeting, he elicited a defense of his practice from other officials, including VA Secretary Robert Wilkie who noted that the study in question was not conducted by his agency.

But the drug has not been shown to combat the virus in a multitude of other studies as well. Two large observational studies, each involving around 1,400 patients in New York, recently found no COVID benefit from hydroxychloroquine. Two new ones published last week in the medical journal BMJ reached the same conclusion.

No large, rigorous studies have found the drug safe or effective for preventing or treating COVID-19.

## U.S., China trade barbs at UN, amid spat over pandemic

→ 1 “We want accountability more than anyone,” Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO’s director-general, said. “We will continue providing strategic leadership to co-or-

dinate the global response” to the pandemic.

He made no reference to a letter to the WHO by Trump in which the U.S. president threatened to reconsider America’s

membership in the international body, as well as to permanently halt funding for the WHO if it did not commit to unspecified improvements within 30 days.

Trump has called the WHO a “puppet of China.” The UN organization has praised China’s response to its outbreak, which was the world’s first.



# Iranian football teams start coronavirus testing

**S P O R T S** TEHRAN — Several Iranian Professional League teams started testing their players for coronavirus on Wednesday ahead of a return to training on Saturday.

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.

Test results will be analyzed within 48 hours. Esteghlal and Persepolis football teams, as the most popular Iranian teams, tested their players for Covid-19.

Some clubs are dissatisfied with the IPL resumption due to the virus threat but Mehrzad Khalilian, head of the Sports Medicine Federation, has said the competition will resume under the terms of a strict health protocol.

Iranian Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi had already announced plans to ease the coronavirus lockdown.

“We held a meeting with Mehrzad Khalilian (head of the Sports Medicine Federation) and discussed with a view to complete the season as the organizers of La Liga, Serie A and Bundesliga are going to make it happen,” Harirchi said.

“With nine weeks remaining, we can finish the current season in six weeks. The teams will have three weeks to prepare for the competition,” he added.

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

The death toll from the novel coronavirus in Iran surpassed 7,000 on Sunday, while nearly 97,173 positive cases have recovered from the disease.



By Farrohk Hessabi

**TEHRAN** — How football will be different after the coronavirus crisis? Sports events are going to resume after months of hiatus that was the result of the outbreak of the novel virus.

In Iran, the Football League Organization has announced

## Football post-coronavirus: A new era?

that the football matches will resume on June 18 and the teams are able to start group training by next week.

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.

Also around the world, Sport has been brought to a standstill due to Covid-19, the Premier League, Serie A, La Liga, Bundesliga, Ligue 1, and leagues across Africa were all suspended.

However, the German Bundesliga restarted last Saturday and gave a glimpse into what the other top leagues and also all the football leagues in the world, may look like if they return.

The important question is whether football and sports in general, can still have its excitement and attractiveness after such a hiatus?

Unfortunately, the answer is probably no. playing behind closed doors will be the major reason to reduce the appeal of the game.

The presence of spectators is undoubtedly the most

important asset for football, and now the most popular sport in the world will see this asset lost for an unknown time. Even if fans are permitted into a venue, they could be fewer in number.

It remains to be seen how long football -- as well as other sports and even the Olympics games -- could be economically sustainable with no fans in the stands. For some professional teams, gate revenue is more than half the income for their enterprises.

Football will be different when the dust is settled. Even the transfer fees and salaries will be different. The financial crisis in the clubs has led to the reduction of players' wages and it can continue in the future as well.

“Things are changing” is a warning from thought leaders around the world. They say it may not be possible to return to the way things used to be.

Football, as well, may no longer be the same as it used to be, and this may be the beginning of a new era in the history of the sport. However, perhaps there is hope or maybe just a desire for normality.



IRIBF has always been eager to respond to these crises within the country, such as the floods in Sistan and Baluchestan and the earthquake in Kermanshah.

“By improving our social activities, we promote both our basketball and the society,” said Masoud Ammari, Secretary General of IRIBF. “We hope we cannot only be motivators for our people to love basketball, but also act as a pioneer federation in helping the society so that other federations would follow. This can improve the popularity of sports, especially basketball, among people and leave a greater impact compared to any other promotional activity.”

“Unfortunately, numerous national crises were suffered by many Iranian last years, but we showed that as a team, we support each other. The flood in Sistan and Balouchestan or the earthquake in Kermanshah are all examples that not only our legends and players but also the national federation personnel are willing to get involved and help send their financial and non-financial support down to their compatriots.”

“It is something in the nature of human beings and specifically, Iranian families. IRIBF is just like a big family in which we all have the responsibility to promote Iran's basketball family.”

Through the cooperation between everyone from players to referees to the body of IRIBF, this healthy basketball family has been continuously socially active even outside these crises, such as their involvement with Raahe Aseman.

As a charity organization, Raahe Aseman supports children involved with cancer. On the day of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 Trophy Tour, children of

the Raahe Aseman charity were invited to the ceremony in Iran. These children took photos with national team players and legends as well as received flowers and signed basketballs from their heroes. They enjoyed the ceremony and took pictures with the prestigious Naismith trophy, while also receiving the jerseys of Hamed Haddadi, Hamed Hosseinzadeh, and Sajjad Mashayekhi.

“Considering the two major visions of FIBA Asia with the “Ball’ In Schools” program and supporting the children fighting with cancer, we have been trying to move forward in the same direction with an emphasis on these two groups,” said Dr. Ramin Ahmadi Tabatabaei, President of IRIBF. “We try to increase the penetration of basketball into people's lives.”

“Our strategy to publicize basketball is to leave a cultural and social impact on people's lives, especially children, as they are the most valuable resource every society owns. I believe these activities would prove that the whole basketball community is supporting the society, being there to help those in need, and this would automatically reflect back the same support for basketball from the society in different national and international basketball events. These strategies should be initiated from the national federations and proliferated then among society.”

“One of the greatest missions of the federations along with holding competitions and development programs in sports is to have a strategic key role in the social and cultural development of the society, especially through the younger generations and children,” added Farideh Shojaei, Vice President of IRIBF. “If our women's national team is appearing strong in their first international appearance, it is because they have learned to support each other even in the days where there seemed to be no hope to go the distance and compete in international games. But they worked hard, kept each others' spirits up, and received the same support, knowing that it is boosting them all.”

“Directing the youth's energy and passion for compassionate movements and social activities, especially when they see other people suffer, would indirectly help not only the society but also the players themselves.”

“They learn what teamwork means. Learning this concept helps them be better basketball players, just like when they need to help their teammate who is double-teamed by two tough defenders and needs to pass the ball.”

“If others don't help, the whole team loses the ball.”  
(Source: FIBA)

## Dejagah the greatest Bundesliga Asian player

Ashkan Dejagah defeated his countrymen Ali Daei, Mehdi Mahdavia and Vahid Hashemian to be named as the greatest Bundesliga Player.

In a poll conducted by the-afc.com, 37 percent of participants voted the Iranian midfielder.

Born in Tehran and raised in Berlin, Dejagah was a regular German youth international in his teens before becoming a star in the Bundesliga, as well as the Iranian national team, in his twenties.



A scorer and provider of goals from midfield, Dejagah is one of three Asian players to have helped Felix Magath's unheralded Wolfsburg outfit from fifth place to a surprise title in 2008-09, and also made a name for himself in the English Premier League with Fulham.

Cha Bum-kun (Korea Republic), Yasuhiko Okudera (Japan), Makoto Hasebe (Japan), Koo Ja-cheol (Korea Republic), Shinji Kagawa (Japan) and Son Heung-min (Korea Republic) also were vying for the award.

(Source: the-afc)

## Iran cycling Grand Prix to be held on June 12

**TASNIM** — Iran Cycling Federation is going to hold a Grand Prix on June 12 following resumption of the sports activities.

All sports activities in Iran were halted on March 11 but according to the country's government, the competitions will resume on June 11.

The Iranian federation will hold a Cycling Grand Prix in men's and women's sections.

The federation has yet to announce the exact amount the prize.

## Alireza Habibi resigns as Iran handball coach

**IRNA** — Alireza Habibi has stepped down as Iran national handball team head coach.

The Iranian handball federation will make decision over the new head coach of the national team in the near future.

Under stewardship of Habibi, Iran failed to book a place at the 2021 World Men's Handball Championship

Team Melli finished in sixth place at the 2020 Asian Men's Handball Championship in the qualifying competition held in Kuwait in January.

## Dragan Skocic to return to Iran next week

**TASNIM** — National football team head coach Dragan Skocic will return to Iran by the end of the next week.

The Croat left Iran on March 12 following the cancellation of Team Melli's training camp due to coronavirus outbreak.

The Asian qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 were postponed in mid-March due to coronavirus concerns.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has caused sports events to be suspended or postponed in Asia and Europe, including both domestic and international events.

Skocic to return to Tehran by the end of the next week.

## Son returns to Tottenham Hotspur training

Song Heung-min has resumed training with Tottenham Hotspur after completing a three-week compulsory military training in Korea Republic. Son rejoined his Tottenham teammates in training ahead of the English Premier League's expected resumption in June.



Spurs tweeted a picture of a smiling Son on the ground with the caption, “Look who's back.”

The Korea Republic star took part in a session at Hotspur Way Training Ground on Tuesday, having not played since fracturing his arm in a league match against Aston Villa on February 16.

Son was named one of the top five recruits in his unit upon finishing his military training earlier in May.

On the pitch, Son won the EPL's Goal of the Month award in December for his amazing solo goal against Burnley.

(Source: the-afc)

## IRIBF continues mission to be socially active during COVID-19 situation

**TEHRAN (Iran)** — In times of crisis as we have been experiencing during the COVID-19 situation, it is as important as ever for communities to stay united and help each other out. The Iran Basketball Federation (IRIBF) has always been socially active and are continuing to do so during this COVID-19 situation.

IRIBF has been reaching out to help others in the society from the homeless and the medical staff as well as simply keeping the basketball community active during these times.

Through the “Basketball Benefactors and Veterans” group, which is formed within the body of IRIBF, there have been activities held focusing on providing sanitary and healthy homemade food for the homeless. Ali Shakouri, head of veteran and emeritus committee and member of the board of IRIBF, said that these homeless people would normally receive some benefactors or handouts from restaurants or benefactors. Still, the current situation has made these activities difficult to continue.

Therefore, the IRIBF has been voluntarily distributing 100 to 300 meals (twice per day) for the homeless and needy since March 30, and this activity will continue with no expectation to stop for as long as possible.

Besides lending a helping hand to the needy, the IRIBF has also been actively catering to the various members of the basketball community through online campaigns, workshops, clinics, and webinars. The IRIBF social media campaigns have varied from stay-at-home activities, dribbling videos from players, contests, interviews, and educational courses. It has also extended to live talks and video footage from referees and statisticians like Atena Taheri and Sina Talebian. They also work in the frontline as doctors or medical staff, which provide useful and necessary information about the difficult situation.

Other members of the IRIBF family have personally put in their own helping hand in these times. IRIBF has always encouraged players and other members of the community to be socially active, and they have continued to respond positively to that calling.

Hamed Sohrab Nejad, a prestigious member of the men's national team, volunteered to gather and send two containers of medical equipment such as scrubs, masks, gloves, and even wheelchairs to Towhid Hospital in Sanandaj, Kurdistan District.

Mohammadreza Salehian, a FIBA referee who owned and ran a coffee shop which was closed due to the pandemic, started serving free coffee and cookies to the medical staff.



INTERNATIONAL DAILY  
www.tehrantimes.com

■ 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  
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» Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603  
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com  
» Printed at: Jame Jam Bartar Borna - 44197737

Tehrantimes79 Tehrantimes79 Tehrantimes79

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran  
P.O. Box: 14155-4843  
Zip Code: 1599814713



GUIDE TO  
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

A believer divides his day and night into three parts: he spends some of it in communion with God; another part in repairing his life and needs; and the third part in providing his body and soul with legitimate and admirable joys.

Imam Ali (AS)

## Theater owners call on Rouhani to lift coronavirus restrictions

→ Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance canceled all art, cultural and cinematic events across the country in February in an attempt to stem coronavirus' spread.



A theater in Tehran.

According to the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi, the coronavirus outbreak in Iran is estimated to have caused an estimated loss of over 9,700 billion rials (Over \$230 million) in the art and culture sectors by April 19, the end of the first month of the Iranian calendar year.

## Bangladeshi publisher Saeed Bari releases book on Commander Qassem Soleimani

**CULTURE** TEHRAN — The Bangladeshi publisher Saeed Bari has recently published a book on IRGC Quds chief Qassem Soleimani.

"Martyr Qassem Soleimani: Hero of Struggle against Terrorism and Colonialism" has been published in collaboration with the Iranian Cultural Center in Dhaka, the center announced on Wednesday.



Copies of Bangladeshi publisher Saeed Bari's book "Martyr Qassem Soleimani: Hero of Struggle against Terrorism and Colonialism".

The book begins with a detailed biography of Soleimani who was assassinated in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad in January.

A chapter of the book describes his charisma. The book also carries materials introducing him as the spiritual father of martyrs' families.

In his last will, Soleimani had expressed his wish to be buried next to his friend Martyr Yusef Elahi's grave in a cemetery in his home town of Kerman. The book also gives the reasons behind this wish.

The book also analyzes his daughter Zeinab's speech and Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran Seyed Ali Khamenei's lecture during his funeral in Tehran.

The collection also recounts comments by a number of Bangladeshi officials and cultural figures on Soleimani.

A chapter has also been dedicated to poems by Bangladeshi poets on Soleimani.

A biography of Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces deputy commander Abu-Mahdi al-Muhandes, who was also martyred in the U.S. air raid, has also been included.

# Fajr Festival of Visual Arts announces winners

**A R T** TEHRAN — Winners of the 12th edition of the Fajr Festival of Visual Arts, which is organized every year by the Visual Arts Office of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, were announced on Wednesday.

The closing ceremony of the festival, which was postponed due to the new coronavirus pandemic for a later time, was not held, the office announced.

Both the catalog and the certificate of the festival will be submitted to all winners.

In the illustration section, the winners were Zahra Ashuri, Pejman Baghinzadeh and Neda Basharkhah, and the winners in the cartoon section were Ali Mivenejad, Marzieh Tajizadegan and Hossein Rahimkhani.

In the ceramic section, Kazem Ebrahimi, Maryam Neyestani and Parvin Abbasi were the winners, and in the calligraphy section the winners were Amir-Abbas Nasiri, Shahrbanu Najafi and Mostafa Abedini.

The winners in the painting section were Erfan Bibak, Farzad Chegini and Sarvenaz Emtiazi, and the winners in sculpture category were Elham Shokri, Hossein Nakhaei and Hossein Takzare.

Samaneh Doostinia and Sara Sholevar were the winners in the miniature section, the winners in the photography section were Pejman Molai, Gholmareza Yazdani and Mohsen Peyravinejad, and the winners in the graphic design section were Meysam Namdar, Mohammad-Hossein Aqajani and Mehdi Mir-Ahmadi.

The winner in the new art media section



Art aficionados visit artworks on display during the 12th Fajr Festival of Visual Arts at the Saba Art and Cultural Institute in Tehran on February 18, 2020. (ISNA/Mohammad-Ali Qasemi)

was Sajjad Daadpur.

A selection of top works has been purchased by the Visual Arts Office.

A selection of 900 works were put on view in the different sections of painting, photo, sculpture, calligraphy, miniature, il-

lustration, cartoon, graphic design and new media at the Saba Art and Cultural Institute in Tehran in February.

## John Strelecky's "Return to The Why Cafe" available for Persian readers



Front cover of American writer John Strelecky's book "Return to The Why Cafe".

**CULTURE** TEHRAN — "Return to The Why Cafe", a sequel to American writer John Strelecky's bestseller "The Why Café" has been recently been published in Persian.

Ketabsaraye Tandis is the Persian publisher of the book translated by Mahvash Khorramipur.

On a random night, along a forgotten road, John's life was forever changed when he wandered into a tiny little place known affectionately as "The Why Cafe".

After spending an entire evening there, he walked out with a new perspective about the meaning of life overall, and about his life in particular.

To his great surprise, ten years later he suddenly finds himself at the cafe once

again. There are more questions on the cafe menu, along with new adventures to be had. And as before, his time at the cafe launches his life in an inspiring and new direction.

Set in the beautiful islands of Hawaii, this follow-up to the #1 Bestseller, "The Why Cafe", returns readers to the place where great food, thought-provoking questions and life-changing experiences are all on the menu.

So settle into a cozy booth by the window, and enjoy your "Return to The Why Café".

Strelecky is a self-published author and creator of "The Big Five for Life" concept. As of 2018, his books have sold more than 3 million copies worldwide and been translated into 33 languages.

## Ottoman explorer Evliya Çelebi's travelog of Iran published in Persian

**CULTURE** TEHRAN — A diary of Ottoman explorer Evliya Çelebi's travel to Iran during the 17th century has been published in Persian, the Iranian publisher Elmi Farhangi has announced.

Davud Bohluli is the translator of the book titled "Iran in Evliya Çelebi's Book of Travels".

The book is a chapter from Çelebi's Seyahatname ("Book of Travels") concerning his travel to Iran.

The Seyahatname is the result of his visits to from Belgrade to Baghdad and from Crimea to Cairo.

Born in 1611, Çelebi was one of the most celebrated Ottoman travelers, who journeyed for more than 40 years throughout

the territories of the Ottoman Empire and adjacent lands.

He was a son of a chief court jeweler who began the journeys under the patronage of the court.

He possessed a vivid imagination, occasionally mixing fact and fantasy; he described places he could not possibly have visited.

Noted for his fascinating anecdotes and charming style, he wrote about the ethnography, history and geography of the Ottoman Empire and neighboring lands, and also about the inner workings of the Ottoman government during the 17th century.

He died in c. 1684 in Constantinople, now Istanbul.

## Story taking teenager back to Ashura events published



Front cover of "Whiter than Snow, More Scented than Jasmine" written by Gholamreza Aqayari.

**CULTURE** TEHRAN — The Neyestan Publications in Tehran has recently published a story about a young adult who travels back in time to 680 CE when Imam Hussein (AS) stood against the injustices of the oppressive Umayyad dynasty in the Ashura uprising.

Written by Iranian writer Gholamreza Aqayari, "Whiter than Snow, More Scented than Jasmine" tells the story of a young adult whose father owns a teahouse in which a morshed (mentor), who is his father's friend, is due to give a pardekhani (curtain-reading) performance.

The boy seems to drown into the performance where he feels as if he is in Karbala and is closely watching the Ashura events.

Ashura is the 10th day of Muharram, the day upon which Imam Hussein (AS)

and his companions were martyred in Karbala as a result of their valiant stand against the Umayyad dynasty.

The book then continues to introduce some less-known figures who had significant roles in the Ashura event.

The story mostly draws the attention of young adults for its attractive form of narration. The adventures of a young adult from the present era who travels back to the historical time of the past by means of the pardekhani performance has made it more appealing for readers.

The book actually tries to provoke a feeling of respect towards the heroes of Ashura and because of the combination of the modern and traditional styles of storytelling, it is appealing to young adult readers.



Front cover of the book "Iran in Evliya Çelebi's Book of Travels" that features a chapter the Ottoman explorer's Seyahatname about Iran.

## Iranian films honored at Venice Intercultural Film Festival

**CULTURE** TEHRAN — The Iranian short films "The Other", "Olfa Square" and "Intense" were awarded at the Venice Intercultural Film Festival 2020, the organizers have announced.

"The Other" by Saman Hosseinpour and Ako Zandkarimi and "Jolfa Square" by Sina Khanahmadi each won the award for Best Silent Film.

The award for Best Short Documentary on Women went to "Intense" by Shirin Sabur.

In "Intense", Nader's house is to be demolished soon and his daughter Zahra, who has down-syndrome, is sick. Nader calls Najmeh (his sister) and asks her for help packing. She

arrives at his house and discovers a terrible truth.

"Jolfa Square" is about Jolfa Square in Isfahan and its people. "The Other" tells the story of a traditional man accuses his wife of disloyalty.

The organizers announced that because of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country there will be a screening program of the award-winning movies on May 29 following the health instructions of the Italian authorities.

"Entre deux eaux" by Patrice Cordonnier from France won the award for Best Short Film, and the award for Best Short Documentary went to "Mountain, Priest, Son" by John Seddon and Vaibhav Kaul from India.



A poster for "Intense" by Shirin Sabur.