



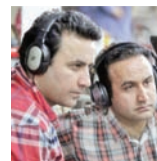
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Free hepatitis care on agenda, end of disease by 2030

By Faranak Bakhtiari

TEHRAN – Iran is planning to provide free diagnosis and treatment services to people who are suffering from hepatitis and eradicate the disease by 2030.

“By 2030, if we could reduce the incidence of hepatitis by up to 90 percent and decrease mortality by 65 percent, we would have implemented the elimination program as planned by the World Health

Organization,” Rashid Ramezani, head of the hepatitis of the infectious diseases management department of the Ministry of Health, explained.

“Some 1.5 million Iranians are diagnosed with hepatitis B and less than 200,000 people with hepatitis C; nearly 3,000 people are infected with hepatitis C each year,” he stated, IRNA reported on Saturday. **→9**

Iran, Uzbekistan stress expansion of transport ties

TEHRAN — During a meeting of Iran-Uzbekistan Joint Road Transportation Committee held via video conference, the Iranian and Uzbek officials emphasized the significance of boosting bilateral ties in transportation sector, IRNA reported on Saturday.

As reported, the meeting was attended by Iran's Deputy Transport Minister Abdolhashem Hassan-Nia and Uzbekistan's Deputy Minister of Transport Davron Dekhkanov, as well

as Uzbekistan's ambassador to Iran, and the representative of Iran's Embassy in Uzbekistan.

Addressing the virtual meeting, the Iranian deputy transport minister said that expansion of economic relations between Iran and Uzbekistan has been always emphasized by the two sides' senior officials, and in this due, boosting transport ties between the two countries is seriously pursued by the Iranian Transport Ministry. **→4**

Iran, Tunisia to expand tourism ties

TEHRAN – Iran and Tunisia have recently signed a memorandum of understating (MOU) to expand tourism ties despite the coronavirus pandemic.

The MOU was inked by Iran's ambassador to Tunisia Mohammadreza Rauf Sheibani and Tunisian Minister of Tourism Mohamed Ali Toumi. ILNA quoted Iran's deputy tourism chief Vali Teymouri as

saying on Saturday.

Despite the spread of the coronavirus in the world and restrictions on international tourism communications, tourism ministry tries to achieve its goals of foreign tourism development through the ambassadors and representatives of Iran in the target countries, the official added. **→8**



ARTICLE

Yuram Abdullah Weiler
Analyst and journalist

Trump's troops: Fast forwarding fascism across America

In a brash show of force to promote a “law and order” image, Rogue U.S. President Donald Trump has dispatched federal troops to Portland, Oregon to quell ongoing protests against racism and police brutality. The city's mayor, who had not requested assistance from the federal government, joined with protestors only to become a victim of a tear gas attack himself. Trump has vowed to dispatch troops to Chicago, Albuquerque and other American cities to suppress protestors, which he characterizes as violent, left-wing extremists.

Since the brutal extrajudicial execution of George Floyd by Minneapolis, Minnesota police on May 25, 2020, protests have erupted across America demanding an end to vicious and violent law enforcement policies and procedures. Unified calls by demonstrators to defund police and transfer badly needed funds to programs that meet more pressing social needs, such as expanding health care and educational facilities, have been met with a show of force by the radical, fascist-leaning Trump regime. On May 29, Trump exposed his sentiments by posting a slogan borrowed from a racist U.S. police chief, which read “when the looting starts, the shooting starts.”

Having bungled the effort to control the COVID-19 pandemic in America and witnessing declining numbers in the political polls, Trump has settled upon a re-election campaign strategy of inciting violence in inner cities and then cracking down hard with heavily-armed federal personnel. In his first attempt at promulgating his tough, “law and order” image, Trump coerced Pentagon officials, Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Joint Chief chairman Mark Milley, to walk with him across the street from the White House to St. John's Episcopal Church as Park Police and other agencies forcibly cleared a path through peaceful protestors with tear-gas, flash-bang grenades and pepper balls. Trump denied the use of tear gas, despite being clearly visible, and even demanded a retraction by “every news organization which reported the tear gas lie.” **→7**

COI director calls on Resistance filmfest to promote culture of resistance in region

TEHRAN — Director of the Cinema Organization of the Resistance International Film Festival to put their focus on plans for promoting the culture of resistance in the region.

“Iran is the motherland of resistance and the Resistance festival can and should be the promoter of the culture of resistance in the region,” Hossein Entezami said in a meeting with the organizers of the 16th edition of the Resistance International Film Festival on Saturday.

“This festival should play a key role in developing and naturalizing the culture of resistance, and also provide patterns for producing films in the future,” he added.

He said, “The Cinema Organization of Iran strongly supports the festival, because it deems resistance as one of the valuable

concepts of the Islamic Revolution.”

The director of the festival, Mehdi Azimi Mirabadi, said that the event has been welcomed by filmmakers around the world based on the numerous submissions the organizers have received.

The 16th edition of the Resistance International Film Festival is scheduled to take place in Tehran from September 21 to 27.

The festival has allocated a special section to films on health workers this year.

The category named “Health Defenders” has been established in honor of the medical workers on the front line of the campaign against COVID-19.

It also plans to honor innovative filmmakers with the Rasul Award named after the Iranian war film director Rasul Mol-laqolipur.

Protests hit Portland for 56th day; Trump plans ‘surge’ of agents

By staff & agencies

The U.S. city of Portland witnessed another night of anti-racism rallies on Friday, with thousands of protesters calling for an end to police brutality and racial injustice.

The demonstrators, for the 56th consecutive day, flocked to the streets in Portland, Oregon, and peacefully marched to the federal courthouse late on Friday.

They chanted slogans against federal agents that have been deployed to the city by the US administration to quell protests triggered by the brutal murder of unarmed African American George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody in May.

The federal forces once again fired teargas canisters and rubber bullets on a number of occasions to break up the rallies.

The UN human rights office has already called on U.S. police and security forces in Portland

and other cities not to use disproportionate force or unlawful detention against protesters.

The deployment of federal troops, ordered by President Donald Trump, has drawn widespread backlash from various popular rights groups and organizations, pitting state authorities against the White House.

Democratic leaders in Oregon say federal intervention has worsened the two-month crisis, and the state attorney general sued to allege some people had been whisked off the streets in unmarked vehicles.

Trump announced plans on Wednesday to dispatch a “surge” of federal agents to U.S. cities amid widening crackdown on anti-racism protests.

The U.S. president, who is running for re-election in November on a campaign of law and order, has threatened to deploy federal forces in more “Democrat-run cities” accused of being soft on crime. **→10**

Euro-Med Monitor calls on ICAO to investigate U.S. harassment of Iranian plane

TEHRAN — The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor has said the United States' harassment of an Iranian passenger plane over Syria on Thursday evening constitutes a serious violation of international agreements relating to the safety of civil aviation.

Euro-Med Monitor's legal adviser Tariq Hajjar has said that “the U.S. military command's description of the incident as ‘professional’ is inaccurate.”

“It is not professional for an armed military plane to harass a civilian plane that poses no danger at all, thus endangering the lives of dozens

of civilian passengers,” he added, according to Euro-Med Monitor's website.

A number of the Iranian plane's passengers were injured, including children, the elderly and women, as the pilot took the aircraft to a lower altitude. The American jet came within 100 meters of the Iranian plane.

According to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation of 1971 (referred to as the Montreal Convention), the incident is a criminal act as it

put lives of civilians in danger.

The Montreal Convention of 1971 and its supplementary protocol stipulate that, “unlawful acts against the safety of civil aviation jeopardize the safety of persons and property, seriously affect the operation of air services, and undermine the confidence of the peoples of the world in the safety of civil aviation... Considering that, for the purpose of deterring such acts, there is an urgent need to provide appropriate measures for punishment of offenders...” **→3**



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Army general visits military production center

TEHRAN — Deputy Chief of the Iranian Army for Coordination Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari paid a visit to an army production center that produces medical equipment required to combat Covid-19.

“Initially, the purpose of our visit was to evaluate the capability and expertise of this center's staff in the combat against the coronavirus, and to assess the production of disinfectants and masks in the center and to improve our preparations,” IRNA quoted the commander as saying on Saturday during a visit to the army's Shahid Zarrharn Center for Optimization, Renovation and Construction of Parts. **→2**

Persian Gulf states working hard to cause clash between Turkey and Egypt over Libya: Turkish analyst

By Mohammad Mazhari

The assassination of Jamal Khashoggi on October 2, 2018 at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul led to political conflict between Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Ankara blamed Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman over the killing and stagnation in Saudi-Turkish relations.

Interestingly, the pro-government Turkish media recently shifted their focus from the Saudi crown prince to Abu Dhabi's crown prince, Mohammed bin Zayed, and described him as the actual evil man who is stirring up hostility against Turkey.

Nevertheless, the latest conflicts between Turkey and the UAE-Saudi bloc is over Libya.

While the Egyptian parliament on July 20 gave a green light for possible military intervention in Libya, Erdogan's top security adviser, Ibrahim Kalin, warned any Egyptian deployment in Libya would hamper efforts to end the fighting and would be risky for Cairo.

“I believe it will be a dangerous military adventure for Egypt,” Aljazeera quoted Kalin as saying.

Yassin Aktay, the Turkish president's advisor, accused Saudi Arabia and the UAE of inciting the Egyptian president to “invade and occupy Libya on their behalf”.

In this regard, Onur Sinan Güzaltan, a Turkish lawyer tells the Tehran Times that “some Persian Gulf (Arab) countries, and the United Arab Emirates in particular, are doing their best to cause a clash between Turkey and Egypt over Libya, with the mentorship they got from the United States and Israel.” **→7**

Lebanon to sue U.S. for harassing Iranian plane

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Lebanese Health Minister Hamad Hassan announced on Saturday that Lebanon will file an international lawsuit against the United States for its harassment of an Iranian passenger plane over Syria.

“I will spare no means to file a complaint in any international forum or court to obtain the right of these citizens who were terrorized on board this peaceful Iranian civil plane,” Hassan told al-Alam news network in a televised interview.



Two U.S. warplanes dangerously came close to Mahan Air's Airbus A310 passenger plane over Syria on Thursday, forcing the pilot to suddenly change altitude to avoid a collision. The plane was en route from Tehran to Beirut. At least 12 people onboard were injured. Iran strongly denounced the U.S. move as a “terrorist act” and submitted a letter of complaint to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The minister also considered the interception of the Iranian plane by American jet fighters as an infringement of the international civil aviation rules and a violation of all international norms and conventions.

He also called the interception a “flagrant aggression”, adding that Lebanon will soon take an official stance towards the incident.

Hassan visited some of the plane passengers who are receiving treatment in a Beirut hospital for the injuries they sustained during the U.S. harassment of the Iranian plane. He wished them a speedy recovery.

■ UN: ‘Safety of civilian air travel should be respected by all’

The United Nations also urged all countries to respect the safety of civilian air travel, without referring to the United States.

“As a matter of, of principle, the safety of civilian air travel should be respected by all,” said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric during a daily press briefing on Friday, when he was asked about the incident.

Dujarric stressed that the world body had “no specific information on that incident” yet, adding that what he said about the safety of civilian air travel was “just a principled position”.

On Friday, Lebanese Hezbollah also condemned as “dangerous and terrorist” the U.S. harassment of Mahan Air's Beirut-bound plane, calling on the international community to take a stance on the U.S. harassment.

In a statement released on Friday, Hezbollah described the attack as “terrorist and dangerous that could have unknown repercussions on the entire region.”

The U.S. interception of the Iranian plane carrying on board Lebanese passengers requires an international stance, Hezbollah said, underlining that the U.S. is an occupation power in the Syrian territories and airspace.

Army general visits military production center

1 → Rear Admiral Sayyari said that producing face masks and other medical gear is not part of the center's original mission, but it's doing so to help combat the novel coronavirus.



He also said that the center produces a variety of military equipment including tanks, armored personnel carriers, air defense systems, aircrafts and boats.

According to the commander, these productions are in line with the instructions that they follow to meet their needs and achieve independence in terms of producing arms.

Sayyari also stated that the center produces parts needed by many civilian firms.

“Before the [1979 Islamic] revolution, foreign forces were in charge of repairing [our equipment], but today we are proud that all software and hardware repairs are done by our own forces, and this is one of the blessings of the revolution. Today we are not in need of any country in this regard,” pointed out the general who served as Navy chief for some years.

This reckless behavior has to end

As more information comes out about this incident, it is obvious the pilot of the Iranian passenger airplane must be given a medal. For averting the U.S. reckless provocation, for saving his passengers and for preventing what could have escalated into an unavoidable destructive confrontation, none of us wants to see in our region.

Had the worst happened, it is unlikely that Iran would have been able, or expected to tolerate another downing of its passenger aircraft by U.S. forces in the region. The first was also in July, 1988 by USS Vincennes over the Persian Gulf waters.

Responsible and right thinking Americans, before some catastrophic incident happens, must act to rein in the cowboy mentality and thuggery that seems to direct America's current regime.

It is not patriotic nor should it be considered “American” to sit silently as your government acts irresponsibly globally to serve its short term electoral objectives or internal political fights, even to American's own detriment. It is one thing to allow Coronavirus politicization and circus for partisan and media benefits, it is quite another to push global events dangerously to the edge of the cliff.

Responsible people, especially those who claim they have freedoms of expression denied others, should demonstrate how they can use that freedom to control the forces they have unleashed on the rest of the global community. It's not just your right to do so; more important, it is your obligation to do so.

Tehran-Beijing partnership is ‘a turning point’, says Iran’s ex-ambassador to UN

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The 25-year cooperation agreement between Iran and China marks a “turning point” in the development of bilateral ties, Iran's former ambassador to the UN has said, noting that the cooperation is of “strategic” importance.

“The cooperation with China is strategic, and that the U.S. has failed to isolate Iran,” Gholamali Khoshroo told the IRIB news agency on Saturday.

He said that the 25-year cooperation plan is a roadmap for the two countries to take advantage of their capabilities to expand the regional and bilateral cooperation.

“Because of its economic position over the last two decades, China is now the second-largest economy in the world, and if it continues this way, it will become the world's first economy,” noted the former envoy, adding that the Islamic Republic if Iran can be China's big trade partner, given its oil and gas reserves as well as its petrochemicals.

Iran and China are negotiating over a long-term cooperation agreement that is yet to be finalized. The cabinet of Hassan Rouhani approved the draft of the 25-year comprehensive cooperation plan on June 21 and tasked Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif with negotiating with China over the plan in order to finalize it.

Government spokesman Ali Rabiei said on June 23 that Iran and China have drafted the plan for comprehensive partnership and it is based on a win-win approach which “heralds long term cooperation”.

“Recognizing cultural commonalities, encouraging multilateralism, supporting equal rights of the nations, and insisting on domestic development are parts of this



plan,” Rabiei added.

In a cabinet meeting on June 21, Rouhani elaborated on the strategic partnership, saying that the agreement is a positive step towards increasing the importance of global energy and sustainable development of oil and gas resources, as well as renewable energy and joint investment in free zones.

“This cooperation is a ground for Iran and China's participation in basic projects

and development of infrastructure, including the large ‘Belt and Road Initiative’, and an opportunity to attract investment in various economic fields, including industry, tourism, information technology, and communication,” the presidential website quoted Rouhani as saying.

Khoshroo also said that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can bring Iran and China closer together.

Khoshroo says the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can bring Iran and China closer together.

Iran-China partnership shows futility of maximum pressure: article

“To avoid even worse failure in the future, we must change course immediately,” the writer says

By staff and agency

Writing an article in the Business Insider on July 22, Daniel L. Davis, a senior fellow for Defense Priorities and a former Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army, acknowledges that the 25-year cooperation plan between Iran and China shows futility of Washington's policy of maximum pressure against Iran.

“This month, it was reported that China and Iran had all but completed a long-rumored security and economic pact, again showing the consequences of our steadfast refusal to recognize the futility of the ‘maximum pressure’ campaign against Iran which relies on sanctions and the threat of military attack,” says L. Davis.

“To avoid even worse failure in the future, we must change course immediately,” L. Davis wrote in the article titled “A deal between Iran and China shows that ‘getting tough’ doesn't solve the US's problems”.

“The deal between Beijing and Tehran extends into the ‘sectors of trade, economy, politics, culture and security’ and is reportedly worth \$400 billion over 25 years,” the writer said.

It is said in the article that to a New York Times request for a response, a State Department spokesman said the

“United States will continue to impose costs on Chinese companies that aid Iran.”

“But towards what end?” asked the writer.

“The cost of our failed strategy is now expanding to the point that it not only fails at its intended purpose but has expanded to include strengthening bonds between our adversaries at our expense,” the retired Lt. Col remarked.

“It is crucial, therefore, that we stop repeating failure and start using more powerful and beneficial tools of statecraft. We will always have a need to back up any diplomacy with a mighty military, but it's time to rediscover effective diplomacy, of engaging in more open discussions where others can come out with something they want, and start allowing other countries to take responsibility for their own security.”

Former Pakistani army chief General Mirza Aslam Beg has said that Iran-China 25-year cooperation plan shows failure of the U.S. policy of maximum pressure on Tehran.

“Tehran-Beijing partnership shows the United States' strategic failure and the country's policy of maximum pressure,” IRNA quoted Aslam Beg as saying on Friday in an article published by the Pakistani media.

A U.S. newspaper has underlined the importance of the



25-year strategic partnership deal between Iran and China, saying the deal is a “massive failure” of the U.S. maximum pressure policy against Tehran.

“U.S. President Donald Trump's administration pursued a policy of economic sanctions in an attempt to bring Iran to the negotiating table, but such approach pushed Tehran towards signing an accord with Beijing rather than Washington,” The Chicago Tribune wrote.

“The new China-Iran partnership represents a massive failure of the administration's Iran policy,” it said.

Syrian ambassador: U.S. move against Iranian plane is a terrorist act

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Syrian ambassador to Tehran has said that the harassment against the Iranian passenger plane in the Syrian sky by the United States was a terrorist act against the innocent civilians.

“Harassment against the Iranian passenger plane of Mahan airline by the United States' fighter jets in Syria's sky is a symbol of the United States' terror-

ist actions against civilians, including women and children, and is also violation of law and international agreements on non-military flights,” Adnan Hassan Mahmoud said in a statement on Saturday.

Mahmoud also said the aggressive action against the Iranian civilian flight was in line with the United States' actions in supporting terrorism and looting the

Syrian people's wealth, insisting on the need that all foreign forces who are illegally in Syria leave the country.

He said the presence of occupation forces in Syria threatens “security and stability in the region”.

Two U.S. warplanes conducted dangerous and aggressive maneuvering close to an Iranian airliner on Thursday, putting lives of tens of civilian passengers on

board in danger.

Syria's permanent representative to the United Nations has said that the United States must be held accountable for threatening the Iranian passenger plane, noting presence of the U.S. forces in Syria is “an illegal occupation”.

“It is not a presence, it is an occupation according to international law,” IRNA quoted him as saying on Saturday.

Ex-diplomat says harassing Iranian passenger plane is in line with maximum pressure

POLITICAL **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Abdolreza Farajirad, Iran's former ambassador to Norway, has said that the harassment against the Iranian passenger plane by a United States' fighter jets was in line with Washington's policy of maximum pressure against Iran.

In an interview with IRNA published on Saturday, he said that the U.S. adventurism and pressure have become more dangerous as the presidential election in the country is getting close.

However, the former ambassador noted that the U.S. has not been able to reach its objective through maximum pressure.

Elsewhere, Farajirad said, “The United States' dangerous actions against Iran have been coordinated with Israel and it seems that Washington and Tel Aviv have divided the job. Even there is possibility that the actions against the Mahan plane was done by Israelis but it was carried out by the United States, because Israel is fearful of Iran's



response.”

He suggested that the international community must condemn the U.S. act.

He said that Iran should send letter to heads of European countries as well as Russia and China and explain about the danger of such moves.

■ ‘No one has let the U.S. inspect passenger plane’
Farajirad also said that no one has let the U.S. inspect passenger planes of other countries.

“Presence of the United States' forces in Syria and also its fighter jets' air missions are illegal,” he noted.

U.S. warplanes operating illegally in Syria conducted aggressive maneuvers close to an Iranian Mahan Air flight over Syria's al-Tanf region on Thursday. The plane was en route to the Lebanese capital, Beirut.

Syria's permanent representative to the United Nations has said that the United States must be held accountable for threatening the Iranian passenger plane.

“If we don't call them accountable [for] this act, they will repeat it again,” IRNA quoted Bashar al-Jaafari as saying on Friday.

Harassment of Iranian plane amounts to ‘aerial banditry’: human rights official

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — The Head of the Iranian Judiciary's High Council for Human Rights slammed the harassment of an Iranian passenger plane by two American fighter jets over Syria as a brazen example of aerial banditry.

In remarks on Friday, Ali Baqeri-Kani denounced the dangerous maneuvering by the U.S. warplanes close to the Iranian airliner in the Syrian airspace as an example

of aerial banditry and a serious threat to global aviation security, saying lack of severe action against such an American move would violate international peace and security.

Denouncing the U.S. government for “systematic rudeness” in breaching international rules and regulations, he said, “The terrorist CENTCOM's harassment of the Iranian passenger plane over Syria was

in violation of aviation security, freedom of civilian flights, and the fundamental and basic rules and principles of international humanitarian law.”

Baqeri-Kani also emphasized that the Iranian Judiciary will resort to the domestic legal procedures, such as the “law on counteraction against the violation of human rights and the U.S.'s adventurist and terrorist measures in the region,” to

seriously pursue the case against those who ordered, perpetrated, aided and abetted the harassment of the Iranian jetliner for the threat of violation of the passengers' right to life and for the physical and mental damages to them.

Prosecution of the violators of public rights will be on the agenda of the Iranian Judiciary at the international level according to the law, Baqeri-Kani concluded.

U.S. must be held accountable for threatening Iranian passenger plane: Syria

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Syria's permanent representative to the United Nations has said that the United States must be held accountable for threatening the Iranian passenger plane.

"If we don't call them accountable [for] this act, they will repeat it again," IRNA quoted Bashar al-Jaafari as saying on Saturday.

On the U.S. presence in Syria and Washington's claim that it is fighting the terrorists in the war-torn country, Jaafari said the presence of U.S. forces in Syria is "an illegal occupation".

"It is not a presence, it is an occupation" in accordance with international law, the ambassador added.

On Thursday night, U.S. warplanes operating illegally in Syria conducted aggressive maneuvering close to an Iranian Mahan Air flight over Syria's al-Tanf region.

Mahan Air's Flight 1152 had taken off from Tehran and was en route to the Lebanese capital, Beirut, when the incident happened.

Iran said harassing a passenger plane is a violation of the principles of international law.

"The harassment of the Iranian passenger plane by U.S. warplanes constitutes clear violation of international law as well as aviation standards and regulations," Iran Civil Aviation Organization said in a statement.

It also urged the ICAO to look into the issue as soon as possible.

In his remarks, Jaafari said that all U.S. acts, which include jeopardizing safety of civil airliner or jeopardizing the safety of the Syrian people or helping the terrorists expand



their acts through the Syrian territory, are illegal and should be condemned.

He further said, "Condemnation actually is a legal term but it is not enough to qualify exactly the aggressive act represented by the American occupation of part of a Syrian territory."

"Here we can understand much better what they did yesterday to the Iranian civilian airliner of Mahan Air company," he said, describing such act as "the American

aggressive policy towards the Iranian civilian airliner."

"This act was a double criminal act" that was not done accidentally, he said, adding rather it was due to "cowboy mentality" of the United States.

The ambassador stressed, "It wasn't only addressed towards violating the Syrian sovereignty, but it was also jeopardizing the safety of civilian airlines crossing the Syrian airspace."

"This act number one was violation of international law, violation of the Chicago Convention" to which the United States is an integrated party, the Syrian envoy noted.

The Chicago Convention, a convention on International Civil Aviation signed by 54 states at Chicago on December 7, 1944, was established to promote cooperation and "create and preserve friendship and understanding among the nations and peoples of the world," according to ICAO.

"They didn't even respect their own commitments towards the safety of the civilian airlines," he said while referring to the Chicago Convention signed in the United States.

"This is not the first time that they are threatening the safety of the Iranian passengers," he said, pointing to the year of 1988 when they [American forces] shot down the Iranian passenger plane over the Persian Gulf and killed 290.

The Syrian envoy stressed that incidents should not be forgotten, because "If we don't hold them accountable to this act, they will repeat it."

He appreciated the speech made by Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Majid Takht-Ravanchi to the UN Security Council on Thursday for describing the U.S. unilateral sanctions against the Syrian people as "shameful".

Jaafari thanked Iran for stressing that all foreign forces whose presence is not permitted by the Syrian government must leave the Syrian territory.

'We are witnessing international and moral decline of United States'

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Office for the Protection of the Interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Cairo has said in a tweet that the world is witnessing the United States' international and moral decline.

"The United States' fighter jets harassed Iranian passenger airline in the Syrian sky. A country which was once a superpower harasses a passenger airline. We are witnessing international and moral decline of the United States," said the tweet, ISNA reported on Saturday.

The U.S. warplanes conducted aggressive maneuvering close to the Beirut-bound Iranian passenger airplane on Thursday. The incident involved two warplanes and Mahan Air's Flight 1152 which had taken off from Tehran and was en route to the Lebanese capital.

■ **'Harassing Iranian airline violates intl. law'**

Also in a tweet on Friday, Iran's embassy in Japan said that the U.S. harassment of the Iranian passenger plane violates international law.



"The United States' action in harassing the Iranian Mahan airline in a third country is clear violation of international

law and can be pursued in related international bodies," said the tweet.

In a statement on Thursday night, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said Iran will take the necessary political and legal actions once the investigation is completed.

Laya Joneidi, the presidential aide for legal affairs, has also said the action against the passenger plane is a violation of the principles of international law.

She said the actions taken by the U.S. fighters are a violation of Articles 3 and 44 of the International Civil Aviation Convention (Chicago Convention).

According to Joneidi, the explanations provided so far are unjustified and unconvincing, so the actions taken by the fighters will cause the international responsibility of their respective governments and will lead to legal action by Iran, including in the ICAO Council and the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Victims of terror slam Iran International for promoting terror cult



POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian victims of terrorism and their families have written a letter to the Judiciary and the Foreign Ministry calling for legal proceedings against the management of the Iran International TV.

"We, the signatories of this letter and request, are part of the big family of 17,000 victims of terror in Iran, who lost our fathers or children in the terror attacks of groups such as Monafeqin," the letter read, Mehr reported on Saturday.

Earlier, the London-based TV channel was strongly criticized for its live coverage of a gathering of the MEK (Mujahedin-e Khalq) terrorist group, which is also known as "Monafeqin" (hypocrites) in Iran.

"Unfortunately, we saw in recent days that one of the satellite channels named Iran International, which is broadcast by Saudi money from London, has given live coverage of the gathering of the Mujahedin-e Khalq," the signatories said.

They also condemned the coverage as "unacceptable", citing the group's long

record of resorting to violence and terrorism against Iranian citizens.

Last week, Iran's Ambassador to the UK Hamid Baeidnadj reacted to the live broadcast, saying the Saudi-funded channel showed its utter obscenity and indecency by the act.

After they had an interview with a spokesman for the Al-Ahvazieh terrorist group, the live broadcast of this gathering was commissioned by the Saudi owners of the channel, Baeidnadj wrote in a tweet on July 18.

The MEK was established in the 1960s to express a mixture of Marxism and Islamism. It launched bombing campaigns against the Shah, continuing after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, against the Islamic Republic. Iran accuses the group of being responsible for 17,000 deaths.

Based in Iraq at the time, MEK members were armed by former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein to fight against Iran during a war that lasted for 8 years in the 1980s.

In 2012, the U.S. State Department removed the MEK from its list of designated terrorist organizations under intense lobbying by groups associated with Saudi Arabia and other regimes opposed to Iran.

A few years ago, the MEK operatives were relocated from their Camp Ashraf in Iraq's Diyala Province to Camp Hurriyet (Camp Liberty), a former U.S. military base in Baghdad, and were later relocated to Albania.

Iran to 'decisively respond' to U.S. harassment of passenger plane: MP



POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Seyyed Nasser Mousavi Laregani, a member of the Parliament's presiding board, said on Saturday that Iran will decisively respond to the U.S. harassment of an Iranian passenger airliner over Syria.

"Definitely, this criminal act of the U.S. will not go unanswered. The Islamic Republic of Iran will decisively respond to this U.S. act, which is illegal and in violation of international law," Mousavi Laregani told the Fars news agency.

Two U.S. warplanes dangerously came close to Mahan Air's Airbus A310 passenger plane over Syria on Thursday, forcing the pilot to suddenly change altitude to avoid a collision. The plane was en route from Tehran to Beirut. At least 12 people onboard were injured. Iran strongly denounced the U.S. move as a "terrorist act" and submitted a letter of complaint to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

"The Americans have always been domineering and aggressive and they aren't going to give up their behavior," said Mousavi Laregani, the representative

of Falavarjan in the Parliament.

He also called the "cowardly harassment" of the Iranian plane a "state terrorism", adding that the U.S. must wait for Iranian response to "this barbaric act".

"This is not the first time that [the U.S.] terrorist administration [commits such a crime] and it will not be the last time. Therefore, it shouldn't be allowed to get away with its barbaric acts without cost," cautioned the MP.

He also alluded to IRGC Quds Force commander Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by an American drone near Baghdad's International Airport on January 3, 2020, saying that "the U.S. will pay the price for these acts."

On Friday, Seyyed Abbas Mousavi, the spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry, strongly denounced the U.S. "adventurist and dangerous" move against Mahan Air's Beirut-bound passenger plane, saying the U.S. had no rights to inspect civilian planes in the sky.

"Both the presence of U.S. troops in Syria and the air missions of their warplanes were illegal. More importantly, no one has allowed the U.S. to inspect passenger planes in the sky using its fighter jets," the spokesman said in a statement.

Muharram rituals to be held by observing healthcare protocols: Rouhani

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday that Muharram mourning rituals will be held with observing healthcare protocols and social distancing.

During a meeting of the National Task Force for Fighting Coronavirus, Rouhani said that the mourning ceremony of Imam Hussein (AS) must be held throughout the country gloriously with precise observation of healthcare protocols.

The president noted that the ritual should be held in a way that it will not give a pretext to the enemies, but make Iran a role model for other countries and Shiites who hold mourning ceremony for Imam Hussein (AS).

During the Muharram rituals, millions of Muslims commemorate martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussein (AS), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad.

U.S., Israel concerned about Iran's influence in West Asia: ex-diplomat

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The United States and Israel are concerned about Iran's influence in West Asia, says a former Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman.

The American and Israeli officials feel that their plans for the region have no result, Ramin Mehmanparast said in an interview with ILNA published on Saturday.

Referring to the recent incidents to Mahan Air passenger plane, the ex-diplomat added, "In order to keep the Islamic Republic of Iran away from the region, they do not even hesitate to threaten our passenger planes."

Mehmanparast, who also served as Iran's ambassador to Poland, said, "They shaped the biggest anti-human terrorist movement in our region; we will not forget the crimes committed by Daesh group (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria."

He said the presidential election in the U.S. is approaching fast "and Trump is not in a strong position due to his failed policies in the regional and domestic sectors, including the fight against coronavirus, as well as the racist debate that he and his friends have supported."

So Washington is trying to divert the public opinion from realities, he added.

Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations, said on Friday that threatening ordinary people, including children and women, to achieve political gains is the dirtiest kind of politics that will surely fail.

Mahan Air passenger plane was en route to Beirut, Lebanon, when it was threatened by two military jets. The pilot of the Iranian plane has said when he was talking to the pilots of the fighter jets to ask them to keep their distance, to which they replied that they were "American".

On Friday, Iran's Foreign Ministry said a protest had been lodged with the International Civil Aviation Organization — a UN agency — and the Swiss embassy in Tehran that handles U.S. affairs in Iran since ties were cut in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The United Nations also urged all countries to respect the safety of civilian air travel, without referring to the United States.

"As a matter of, of principle, the safety of civilian air travel should be respected by all," said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric during a daily press briefing on Friday, when he was asked about the incident.

Dujarric stressed that the world body had "no specific information on that incident" yet, adding that what he said about the safety of civilian air travel was "just a principled position".

"I don't have any [information], at this point, we don't have any specific information on this incident," he further said.

"I checked with my colleagues in Montreal at ICAO [International Civil Aviation Organization]. They have nothing. They have not received anything as of yet," Dujarric added.

Expression of Interest (EOI)

World Health Organization through its country office in Iran in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MOHME) is seeking the services of a company for Third Party Verification of activities and deliverables of the WHO Iran COVID19 emergency response project (ICERP). ICERP is a USD 50 million project implemented by WHO with a duration of one year that procures live saving medical equipment and reagents for COVID-19 diagnosis and treatment for installation and use in some 180 hospitals and laboratories selected by the MOHME covering all 31 provinces.

The task of the Third Party Verification company will be inter alia: (i) post-delivery visits to all beneficiary hospitals and laboratories (around 180 in total) to verify that the distributed equipment is installed and used as intended; (ii) verification of eligible goods procured; stock balances by storage locations, and distribution of eligible goods to beneficiary facilities; and (iii) environmental and social performance.

We are looking to identify companies that are active and specialized in the above fields. Interested companies should be able to provide services such as demonstrated contextual monitoring expertise, mobilize rapidly a project team with appropriate qualifications, manpower and technical experts with experience of conducting field-based survey, monitoring and evaluation, analysis and reporting, data manager, procurement specialist, infrastructure specialist, medical and laboratory equipment specialist, social sector/environment specialist, quality control specialist, finance specialist and GIS specialist.

The whole contract would be for a period of approximately 9 months for accomplishing the all components of the tasks. Interested companies should send their letter of interest along with their resume, team composition and related experiences through the email address emacoiraof@who.int by CoB 1 August 2020.

The short-listed companies will be invited to submit their proposals based on more detailed information on the project which will be shared with them in later stage. All communicated documentations must be submitted in English.

Euro-Med Monitor calls on ICAO to investigate U.S. harassment of Iranian plane

➔ The agreement confirms that "any person commits an offence if he unlawfully and intentionally performs an act of violence against a person on board an aircraft in flight if that act is likely to endanger the safety of that aircraft."

According to Euro-Med Monitor, relevant national and international bodies, in particular the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), should open an immediate, transparent and

independent investigation to expose the circumstances of the incident, and

present the results to the United Nations General Assembly, asking that it

"It is not professional for an armed military plane to harass a civilian plane that poses no danger at all, thus endangering the lives of dozens of civilian passengers," says Euro-Med Monitor's legal adviser Tariq Hajjar.

take the necessary measures to punish the perpetrators to deter such acts from recurring in the future.

It added that if the international community, especially the United Nations, fails to take measures to deal with the incident, it may encourage similar actions, which could lead to serious destabilization of civil aviation and other security, economic and consequences at the global level.

Iran’s exports to Russia rise 20% in a quarter

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN**— Iran’s exports to Russia have increased 20 percent during the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-June 20), the chairman of Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce announced.

Hadi Tizhoosh Taban told IRNA on Saturday that the growth in the exports indicates that the coronavirus pandemic has not affected trade between the two neighbors.



During a video-conference between Iran’s Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali and Russian officials at Federal Customs Service including Vladimir Vladimirovich Ivin, the deputy head of the customs, two weeks ago, the two sides investigated ways of boosting bilateral customs cooperation.

Addressing the conference, Jalali said that Iran is ready to create customs “Green Corridor” with Russia in the pandemic occasion when many international activities have been brought to lockdown.

To have multilateral cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union (EUEA) in the framework of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s initiative to create the customs “Green Corridor” in coronavirus and post-coronavirus periods is among the main agenda of development of economic relations, the ambassador said.

During the talks, the two sides exchanged views about fostering customs cooperation and solving some problems for the Iranian lorry drivers.

The two sides stressed the need to have constant contact.

Russia suggested considering President Putin’s initiative to create “green corridors” for delivery of essential goods that would be unimpeded by sanctions and trade wars, news agency “TASS” quoted Russia’s Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) envoy Alexander Lukashevich as saying in late April.

Putin talked of the initiative at the emergency summit of the G20 group last March.

According to the official data, trade turnover between Russia and Iran amounted to \$1.74 billion in 2018 and \$1.589 billion in the period between January-September 2019.

Iran, Uzbekistan stress expansion of transport ties

1 → Hassan-Nia further announced his country’s readiness to transfer knowledge and experience in the field of transportation to Uzbekistan.

The Uzbek official for his part emphasized the significance of holding such meetings in removing the problems in terms of transport cooperation between the two countries and expressed hope that such meetings will lead to laying a better ground for the expansion of bilateral ties.

Iran and Uzbekistan emphasized the expansion of relations in all economic areas during the two countries’ 13th Joint Economic Committee meeting in Tashkent in mid-December last year.



The meeting was chaired by the former Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani and Uzbekistan’s Deputy Prime Minister Elyor Ganiyevand, and representatives of several renowned companies from both sides attended the event.

Speaking in the meeting, the Iranian minister pointed to the presence of 50 Iranian companies in the meeting and holding mutual trade conferences as well as Iran’s exclusive exhibition in Tashkent as indications of the importance that Iran puts on mutual trade and economic collaboration with Uzbekistan.

“Over the past few years, major documents have been signed by the two countries in a variety of areas including trade, transportation, and joint investment, some of which have been already operationalized”, he said.

Rahmani further expressed hope that holding such committee meetings would help the two sides to take major steps for boosting collaboration between the two countries’ private sectors.

Later that month, the board chairman of Iran’s Chabahar Free Trade–Industrial Zone Organization announced that Uzbekistan has reached an agreement with Iran for transiting agricultural products and minerals to India through Iran’s Chabahar Port.

According to Abdolrahim Kordi, the agreement was made during the Iran-Uzbekistan’s 13th Joint Economic Committee meeting in Tashkent.

“We reached an agreement with Uzbekistan’s Navoi Free Trade Zone for cooperation in transiting agricultural products and minerals,” he said.

“In the Iran-Uzbekistan Cooperation Document [which was signed in the end of the 13th committee meeting] three specific clauses were dedicated to cooperation between free zones, development of logistic hubs and joint ventures,” Kordi added.

Rebuilding 270 passenger wagons by next March projected

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (known as RAI) said that RAI has rebuilding 270 passenger wagons a top agenda of its activity in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2021), which is named the year of “Surge in Production”.

Saeed Rasouli said that the project of rebuilding the passenger wagons was started on June 3 and many of these wagons will join the national fleet after being completely rebuilt, IRIB reported.

Saying that the wagons had been out of service for ten years, the official said they are now under rebuilding operation by the domestic companies.

Iranian railway fleet received 65 new domestically-made locomotives and wagons in a ceremony on June 30, the third group of additions this year.

As reported by the portal of Transport Ministry, the ceremony was attended by Transport Minister Mohammad Eslami and the head of Islamic Republic of Iran Railways.

Speaking in the ceremony, Rasouli said, “With the new additions, so far, a total of 209 wagons and locomotives have joined the country’s railway fleet in the current Iranian calendar year.”



The value of the third group of locomotives and wagons, which were manufactured by domestic companies, was estimated to be over 1.56 trillion rials

(about \$37.14 million).

According to the official, the number of new locomotives and wagons added to the railway fleet in the first three

months of the current calendar year (March 20-June 20) has increased by 78 percent compared to the same period last year.

The new additions included 53 freight wagons, two passenger wagons, and two locomotives, as well as eight reconstructed wagons.

Railway fleet has received three groups of new wagons and locomotives since the beginning of the current Iranian year, the first of which was on April 29 when 56 units worth 1.25 trillion rials (about \$29.76 million) were added to the country’s rail fleet; in the second phase, 30 units worth 1.44 trillion rials (about \$34.28 million) were added on May 19.

Meanwhile, in late December 2019, RAI celebrated the addition of 243 domestically-made wagons and locomotives to the country’s fleet.

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

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

TPO to hold 3rd meeting of Commodity-Country Desk on trade with Iraq next week

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN**- Iran’s Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) will hold the third meeting of its Commodity-Country Desk on trade with Iraq next week, Farzad Piltan, the director-general of TPO’s Office of Arabian and African Countries, announced.

As reported by the website of TPO on Saturday, the meeting will be mainly focused on investigating the ways for increasing garments export to Iraq.

Despite the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions against the Islamic Republic, Iraq has been getting closer to Iran both politically and economically.

There is also the same approach adopted by Iran, as many Iranian companies are now eager to conduct trade with Iraq, especially with the Kurdistan region where there is a great demand for Iranian products.

Iraq is currently Iran’s biggest trade partner and the two countries have been taking significant steps to improve their mutual trade over the past few years.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi arrived in the Iranian capital Tehran on Tuesday noon.

The trip followed the Iranian foreign minister’s visit to Baghdad and Erbil last Sunday.

Iran and Iraq are finalizing a foreign currency agree-



ment, based on which several billions of dollars will be injected into Iran’s market in the near future, an official with the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) said.

Hamid Ghanbari, who accompanied Foreign Affairs Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in the mentioned visit to Iraq on Sunday, said the two sides held positive talks and agreed on expanding foreign currency and banking ties.

“During this visit, useful and constructive talks were held with the Iraqi side, the results of which will be finalized during the visit of the Iraqi Prime

Pistachio exports bring Iran over \$154m in a quarter

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran exported 21,720 tons of pistachio worth more than \$154 million during the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-June 20), the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

Rouhollah Latifi said Iran’s pistachio was exported to 54 countries during the first quarter, IRNA.

Importing 5,547 tons of pistachio valued at \$35.4 million, China was the first export destination of the Iranian product, while Germany, Iraq, Russia, and Kazakhstan came next through importing 2,982 tons, 1,866 tons, 1,455 tons, and 1,129 tons of pistachio, respectively, from Iran in the three-month period, the official stated.

The acting head of Iranian Agriculture Ministry’s Economic Affairs Department Shahrokh Shajari has put Iran’s exports of the agricultural products at about 7.104 million tons worth \$5.8 billion in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19).

In the previous year, over 6.941 million tons of agricultural and foodstuff products worth \$6.392 billion were also imported into



the country, according to Shajari.

Watermelons, apples, tomatoes, potatoes, onions, and shallots were the top five exported products in the previous year in terms of weight, while in terms of value, pistachios, apples, tomatoes, pistachio kernels, and watermelons were the five major exported products, the official said.

Shajari further pointed to the major imported items in terms of weight, saying, corn, barley, soybean meal, soybean, and untreated sugar were the top five imported items, while in terms of value livestock corn, rice, barley, and soybeans were the top imported products.

‘Tax exemption expands trade in FTZs’

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Tax exemption in the country’s free trade zones (FTZs) will increase the volume of trade in these zones, an official with Iran’s Free Zones High Council stated.

Speaking in an interview with IRNA on Friday, Ahmad Jamali, the deputy secretary-general of the council for the economic affairs, stressed that the laws and regulations in the free zones, including the tax exemption law, have been set considering the potential for trade and employment in these areas.

Development of existing free trade zones and establishment of new FTZs is currently one of the major economic approaches of Iran and in a bid to attract more investments to these zones Iranian government offers various incentives to the investors.

Tax exemption is one of those incentives which has been offered for more than a decade to the investors in the free zones.

This incentive has been recently criticized by some officials and economists, while there are still many supporters of



this exemption.

If the 20-year tax exemption in the country’s free trade zones is removed, the investment making will be limited in these areas, according to Abazar Azarboun, an expert with Iran’s Free Zones High Council.

The expert said that those active in the free zones prefer to do business in these areas rather than the mainland because taxes and duties do not limit their activities there, but if there are no such incentives, investment making in the free zones will be risky for them, IRNA has previously reported.

Iran, Afghanistan discuss ways to complete Khaf-Herat railway

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian and Afghan officials investigated the ways to complete Khaf-Herat railway on Friday.

Afghan official with Herat Governor’s Office Jilani Farhad told IRNA that a joint committee was set up following the emphasis of the Afghan president to accelerate construction and completion of the project considering its significance to improve transit between Iran and Afghanistan.

Vahid Ghatali, the governor of Herat, appreciated the efforts made by the Iranian consulate in Herat to help accelerate the “national project”.

Construction of Khaf-Herat railway, which is underway in four parts and is 193 km, began in 2007.

Two parts of the railway (77 km), which is located in Iran, has been completed a long time ago but the two other parts (116 km), on the Afghan soil, are yet to be worked out.

Earlier this month, Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami said that

Khaf-Herat railway will become operational before the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2021).

The minister announced that a part of the Khaf-Herat railway will be constructed by Iran while the remaining part will be built by neighboring Afghanistan, Mehr news agency reported.

Construction operation of the part related to Iran is on the verge of completion, Eslami emphasized.

He put the length of the railway from border to Khaf city at 66km and stated, “The significance of this giant project is that the railway in Afghanistan will be revived so that Afghanistan will be connected to Iran’s national railway network as well as other parts of the world.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, Eslami pointed to the transit and added, “Iran has a variety of routes such as North-South Corridor and also East-West Corridor in a way that transiting Afghan territory and investing in Afghanistan is essential for Iranian traders and also this country.”

Afghanistan government has commitments to transfer the country’s mining and mineral capacity to

other countries so that a treaty inked between India, Afghanistan, and Iran will have an effective role in this regard, he added.

Khaf-Herat railway, as long as 35km, will connect the Iraqi rail network to Central Asia.

Khaf-Herat is part of the Iran-Afghanistan rail corridor. The project started in the fiscal year of 2007-2008, connects Iran’s eastern city of Khaf to Afghanistan’s western city of Ghoryan.

In a meeting with Afghanistan’s Acting Foreign Affairs Minister Mohammad Haneef Atmar in Tehran on June 22, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said that the third section of Khaf-Herat railway project which connects the rail networks of Iran and Afghanistan will come on stream in the third quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (September 22-December 20).

Underlining the significance of the two countries’ economic relations, the official said that completing this section is aimed at accelerating the development of economic relations between the two countries.

Daily gas supply to power plants up 14.5% in a month

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN-** Gas supplied to the country's power plants by the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) has risen 14.5 percent in the past Iranian calendar month (ended on July 21) compared to its preceding month, the company's spokesman told IRNA.

Mohammad Asgari put the gas supplied to the power plants at 275 million cubic meters (mcm) per day in the past month, while the figure was 240 mcm in its preceding month.

According to the official, gas supply to power plants reaches its maximum level during the summer peak consumption period.

As reported, currently all the country's gas and thermal power plants are connected to the national gas network, however, in the cold seasons, with the increase in gas consumption by the domestic sector, the supply to the power plants will be reduced and replaced with liquefied fuel.

Earlier in May, Caretaker Manager of Iranian Gas Transmission Company (IGTC) Mehdi Jamshidi Dana had said that during the peak consumption period in summer power plants would need 310 mcm of gas per day, a



figure that could be easily met by the National Gas Company given its network capacity.

According to the official, all the fuel needs of the power plants connected to the national

gas network are currently met unless they are going through minor repairs in their gas sector.

Currently, 85 power plants across the country are using natural gas as fuel.

Back in May, Jamshidi Dana announced that the transmission capacity of the national gas network was raised to one billion cubic meters per day (bcm/d).

Noting that several projects were carried out last Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19) to increase the country's gas network capacity, the official said: "Many of the mentioned projects have been implemented in the ninth national line, most of which will be operational this year."

The official had previously said that 61 billion cubic meters of gas was supplied to the country's power plants during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19).

Iran is currently producing over 810 mcm of natural gas daily which is mostly used inside the country for the domestic sector and also as fuel for the power plants and a small portion is also exported to the neighboring countries like Iraq.

Oil and natural gas industry struggles through first half of 2020

By Alex Mills

Crude oil prices are making a comeback, but natural gas has the summer blues.

Crude oil prices on the New York Mercantile Exchange closed Wednesday at \$41.96 for 30-day delivery, which is a \$1.67 increase over last week, but natural gas dropped again to \$1.675 per million British thermal units (MMBtu).

Even though crude oil inventories continue to be high, traders believe demand will continue to rise in the U.S. and globally narrowing the oversupply gap.

Three recent reports from the International Energy Agency (IEA), the Energy Information Administration (EIA), and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) are key reasons for the optimism.

All three organizations recently revised their second quarter demand figures resulting in a smaller demand decline than originally projected. The initial demand decline was as much as 20 million barrels per day (b/d). Their current estimate is 7.9 million b/d.

On the supply side, U.S. oil production has declined about 2 million barrels per day from roughly 13 million (b/d) to 11 million b/d currently.

OPEC and some other oil producing countries reduced production by 9.6 million b/d in May, June, and July, but will change to 7.7 million b/d starting in August. OPEC's leadership was concerned about some countries over producing their

quotas, and it formed a committee to monitor compliance.

The committee reported June compliance was an impressive 112 percent. Three countries – Iraq, Nigeria, and Angola – did not stay within their quotas, but said they would reduce production in the future to make up the difference.

U.S. and global oil inventories are near record levels, but the three forecasts believe the production cuts and the increase in demand because of increased economic activity will reduce the oversupply and return to pre-coronavirus levels by the third quarter of 2021.

Natural gas suffers some of the same problems as crude oil. The primary market for natural gas is electricity generation. Demand for electricity is down because economic activity is down. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports to other countries have dropped, too. Natural gas inventories are at record levels.

Natural gas prices at the U.S. Henry Hub benchmark reached record lows during the first half of this year, according to EIA. "The average monthly Henry Hub spot price in the first six months of the year was \$1.81 per MMBtu," EIA reported. "Monthly prices reached a low of \$1.63/MMBtu in June, the lowest monthly inflation-adjusted (real) price since at least 1989.

Prices started the year low because of mild winter weather, which resulted in less natural gas demand for space heating. Beginning in March, spring weather and the economic slowdown induced by mitigation efforts for the coronavirus



disease 2019 (COVID-19) contributed to lower demand, further lowering prices."

"Contributing to high U.S. storage levels and lower prices has been a decline in LNG exports," EIA stated. Demand for U.S. LNG exports has fallen by half in the first half of 2020, from 9.8 billion cubic feet per day (Bcf/d) in late March to less than 4.0 Bcf/d in June.

Drilling for new production and well completions are off more than 50 percent. Many companies have slashed budgets in an effort to avoid bankruptcy. Surviving the economic crunch is top priority.

(Source: Times Record News)

Reliance overtakes Exxon as second most valuable energy firm

India's oil-to-telecoms conglomerate Reliance Industries surpassed on Friday Exxon as the world's second most valuable firm doing business in energy after Saudi Arabia's oil giant Aramco.

Reliance Industries is the most valuable company in India and has diversified operations, including oil refining. Its market capitalization hit US\$189 billion (14.1 trillion Indian rupees) on Friday, overtaking Exxon's market capitalization, Indian media report.

Early on Friday, Exxon's market capitalization was US\$185.58 billion.

Reliance Industries became the first Indian company to hit a market capitalization of more than 14 trillion Indian rupees, equal to US\$187 billion. Its shares have been rising in recent weeks after tech giants such as Google invested in Reliance's Jio Platforms, while Amazon is reportedly considering buying a stake of 9.9 percent in Reliance Retail.

Over the past five weeks, Reliance Industries has added US\$39 billion to its market value, according to The Economic Times. In the past 14 trading sessions alone, Reliance Industries' shares surged so much that they added US\$29 billion to the company's market cap.

The Indian conglomerate, however, is not an energy firm per se, and most of the



market rally in recent weeks was thanks to its digital and retail operations, not the oil industry.

Regardless, Reliance Industries became the second most valuable company involved in the energy business in the world.

Saudi Aramco of Saudi Arabia, which has been trading on the Saudi Stock Exchange, Tadawul, since December 2019, has a market capitalization of more than US\$1.7 trillion and is not only the most valuable energy company in the world but also the most valuable company in any sector. Saudi Aramco is more valuable than the likes of Apple, Amazon, Microsoft, or Alphabet.

Earlier this month, Apple was close to overtaking Aramco when its market cap jumped to just over US\$1.7 trillion, compared to Aramco's US\$1.78 trillion based on current exchange rates. Early on Friday, Apple's market cap was US\$1.58 trillion.

Ukraine opposes U.S. LNG pricing formula

Ukraine's state-held gas firm Naftogaz is reportedly opposed to the pricing formula for U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) it could receive under a long-term contract, while there isn't enough infrastructure ready to ship American LNG from Poland into Ukraine, analysts have told DW.

The U.S. is eager to supply its LNG to central and eastern European markets, especially Poland and Ukraine, arguing that American gas is superior to gas from Russia, which binds economic contracts with politics.

However, talks between Louisiana Natural Gas Exports Inc and Ukraine's Naftogaz have stalled, reportedly because the Ukrainian company doesn't agree with the U.S. firm's proposal to have the price of the LNG under a 20-year contract linked to the U.S. natural gas benchmark Henry Hub, without any reference to European gas prices, analysts told DW.

In May, the government of Ukraine, which is keen to wean itself off Russian energy supplies, approved a plan to import LNG from the United States. Under the memorandum approved by the government, Ukraine would be importing at least 5.5 billion cubic meters of LNG annually, while the seller will be Louisiana Natural Gas Exports, according to acting energy minister Olga Buslavets.



Ukraine has been seeking for years to diversify its oil and gas supplies away from Russia after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. The Russian annexation of Crimea drew reactions from the U.S. and the EU, which imposed sanctions on some Russian energy firms and projects, prohibiting Western firms and banks from working with Russian projects.

Ukraine and Poland, both of which seek diversified energy supplies, signed in August last year a trilateral memorandum of cooperation with the United States to enhance the regional security of natural gas supply.

Earlier in May, the Ukrainian port Odesa on the Black Sea also received its first-ever crude oil cargo of WTI Crude from the United States, after the U.S. shipped its first oil to Ukraine just last year. Ukraine's first-ever U.S. crude oil cargo was received in July last year when a tanker carried 80,000 tons of Bakken crude to the port of Odesa.

Schlumberger books second consecutive loss amid shale bust

The world's largest oilfield services provider, Schlumberger (NYSE:SLB), reported on Friday a second straight quarterly loss on the back of a dramatic revenue slump in U.S. shale and asset impairment charges in what "has probably been the most challenging quarter in past decades," as CEO Olivier Le Peuch said.

The company also announced it would get rid of 21,000 jobs as oil producers rein in spending.

Schlumberger reported on Friday a net loss of US\$3.434 billion for the second quarter, after a US\$7.376-billion loss for Q1, which was the result of a US\$8.5-billion impairment charge.

As a result of the market conditions, Schlumberger recorded US\$3.7 billion of pretax restructuring and asset impairment charges in the second quarter, including US\$1 billion of severance costs associated with the massive workforce reduction.

Schlumberger's total revenues slumped by 28 percent quarter on quarter and by 35 percent year on year, to US\$5.356 billion. The drop in North American revenue alone was much steeper—down by 48 percent compared to Q1 and down 58 percent compared to Q2 2019.



While Schlumberger gets more revenues from outside the American market, the company was affected by the collapse in drilling activity in the United States and the cut in spending plans outside North America of major oil and gas companies after the price crash.

"This has probably been the most challenging quarter in past decades. Schlumberger second-quarter revenue declined 28% sequentially, caused by the unprecedented fall in North America activity, and international activity drop due to downward revisions to customer budgets accentuated by COVID-19 disruptions," chief executive Le Peuch said.

"North America revenue declined 48% sequentially with land revenue falling 60% as customers dramatically cut back spending," the executive added.

According to Schlumberger, there are conditions for a modest increase in frac completion activity in North America in the third quarter, but if the economic recovery is slower and a second wave forces new major disruptions, they would be downside risks to its forecasts.

Brazil's oil giant to boost production at deepwater field

Brazil's state-held oil firm Petrobras launched on Friday a tender for three new Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSOs) units for one of the largest deepwater oilfields in the world, Búzios, as part of a development plan to have the field pump more than 2 million barrels of oil equivalent per day (boed).

The tender for the three new FPSOs is part of Petrobras' plan to have a total of twelve units installed at the Búzios oilfield by the end of this decade, the Brazilian oil firm said in a statement on Friday, oilprice.com published.

Once development is completed, the Búzios field is expected to produce more than 2 million boed, becoming Petrobras' largest production asset.



The field currently has four operational FPSOs.

The first of the three new units will be the FPSO AlmGte Tamarandé with startup scheduled for the second half of 2024, while the other two units, P-78 and P-79, will be contracted under the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) model and are expected to start operating in 2025. FPSO Almirante Tamarandé will have a daily processing capacity of 225,000 barrels of oil, while the other two will have the capacity to process daily 180,000 barrels of oil each, Petrobras said.

Petrobras also aims to make better use of the associated natural gas in its prolific oil-rich pre-salt area by having offshore liquefied natural gas (LNG) units to process the gas, whose production has been rising with growing oil output in the area.

Offshore LNG liquefaction could be a solution to the associated gas from oil fields 100 miles off the coast and could reduce flaring, Viviana Coelho, Corporate Emissions and Climate Change Manager at Petrobras, said at a webinar earlier this month.

Petrobras currently ships the natural gas produced in the pre-salt area via pipelines to the coast, where it is processed. In the past, the Brazilian oil firm has said that insufficient infrastructure for natural gas production could limit its efforts to boost crude oil output in the pre-salt area.

India June oil imports lowest in nearly 9 years; none from Venezuela

India's oil imports fell in June, hitting their lowest since October 2011, as refiners curbed purchases due to maintenance turnarounds and weaker fuel demand, data from industry sources showed.

India, the world's third biggest oil consumer and importer, received 3.2 million barrels per day (bpd) oil in June, a decline of 0.4% from May and about 28.5% from a year ago, the data showed, Reuters reported.

Last month, India did not import oil from Venezuela for the first time since June 2009, the data also showed.

Refiners including Indian Oil Corp, the country's top refiner, Reliance Industries, operator of the world's biggest refining complex, and Bharat Petroleum Corp plan to shut units for maintenance.

Indian fuel consumption, a proxy for oil demand, typically tapers during the four-month monsoon season from June as rains hit construction and transportation.



In the first of half July, India's fuel demand slowed compared with the previous month due to high retail prices and renewed coronavirus lockdowns in parts of the country.

Private refiner Nayara Energy, part owned by Russian oil major Rosneft, last month imported a cargo of Khafji oil from Neutral Zone, whose production belongs to both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, making it India's first purchase from the region since September 2015.

In June, Iraq replaced Saudi Arabia as top oil supplier after a gap of two months, while UAE and Nigeria retained the third and fourth slots, the data showed.

The United States was in fifth place, a position held by Venezuela in May.

Iraq denies it's not committed to OPEC+ reduced production pact

The Iraqi Oil Marketing Company (SOMO) denied reports claiming it had violated the OPEC+ production cut agreement in July.

Earlier this week, financial data site Refinitiv Eikon, Iraq's oil exports increased in the first 20 days of July, suggesting that Baghdad may have abandoned its commitment to reduce crude production under the OPEC+ agreement. Another report posted on Attaqa website under the heading "Iraq increases oil exports in July, still pumps above OPEC+ target".

In response, SOMO issued a statement saying it would like to clarify that the Attaqa report and its findings are "unprofessional and far from the reality".

"At the time when the news confirmed that exports from the southern ports of Iraq recorded a rate of 2.7 million barrels per day, it had neglected the fact that this rate in itself was 100,000 barrels per day less than June's export rate," the statement said, adding that "this rate in itself is not final and does not reflect the commitment of Iraq, which will be shown by the results of the July exports at the beginning of August.

The company called on media outlets to use credible information sources in order not to affect their credibility.

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

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

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Persian Gulf states working hard to cause clash between Turkey and Egypt over Libya: Turkish analyst

1 → He believes that the United States and Israel have launched a propaganda campaign to promote this illusion among Arab countries, especially Egypt, that their “arch-enemies are Turkey and Iran, not Israel”. They have been seeking such a project through the media power of the Persian Gulf Arab countries.

“For this purpose, many Arab intellectuals are being hosted in Israel,” he adds.

On reports the UAE is taking steps toward recognizing Israel by using the so-called COVID diplomacy through some airlifts and is preparing the public opinion in the Arab world for such a move, Güzaltan says, “In the near future, the Persian Gulf countries may officially recognize Israel, which they already have secret negotiations and agreements with.”

“What they are afraid of is the reaction of the Arab nations when this moment comes,” he notes. “The thing that lies beneath the Persian Gulf’s desire to provoke Turkey and Egypt over Libya is actually an effort to create and guide the perception that Turkey is the arch-enemy.”

He argues that the U.S.-Israel bloc along with the Persian Gulf countries is seeking to isolate Ankara by provoking Egypt against Turkey.

“Turkey’s actions that contradict the American interests in the region and its close ties with Iran and Russia have caused a deep disturbance in the United States,” the Turkish analyst says.

Turkey supports the Government of National Accord in the Eastern Mediterranean, which made it confront the Saudi-led coalition.

The U.S.-Persian Gulf coalition and some European countries, France in particular, are unsettled by Turkey’s approach.

“They are trying to implement the concept of ‘creative chaos’ suggested by Condoleezza Rice, the preferred environment for the United States and Israel, by clashing Turkey and Egypt, two well-established countries in the region,” Güzaltan stresses. “Turkey, however, is a country with enough state traditions, to not fall for these kinds of traps.”

The Turkish writer calls for direct dialogue between Turkey and Egypt “to overcome this trap, which was put by the imperialism.”

Turkey, Iran, and Egypt are the countries with great civilizations in the region. Unfortunately, the relations between Iran and Egypt deteriorated after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.

Turkish-Egyptian relations also suffered damages in 2013 after the overthrow of Mohammed Morsi and Abdelfattah El-Sisi’s rise to power.

“The winners in the disputes between these three countries will be the United States and Israel,” Güzaltan says. “Therefore, the struggle



against imperialism today is through advocating the Ankara-Tehran-Cairo dialogues.”

“If this dialogue ever starts, problems can be easily resolved not only in Libya but also in Syria and Iraq and Palestine,” he argues.

Referring to the UAE and Saudi allegations that Turkey interferes in Arab affairs, the Turkish lawyer says, “Ankara is present in Libya with the invitation of the Government of National Accord, which is the legitimate government of Libya, recognized by the United Nations.”

He stresses that the maritime boundary treaty signed between Turkey and the GNA is also made in accordance with international law.

“Turkey has no imperialist or invasive motivations in Libya. In the Eastern Mediterranean, the Turkish Armed Forces have taken action to protect our rights that are under the threat of Greece, Greek Cyprus, France, and Israel,” claims Güzaltan.

“Turkey is not fighting to interfere in other countries’ internal affairs but to protect its rights that are guaranteed by international law,” he maintains.

Founded on October 29, 1923, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Republic of Turkey declared it has no intention to resurrect the Ottoman Empire, while Turkey under the Erdogan presidency is facing an accusation of following in the footsteps of the

Ottoman Empire.

“Turkey’s presence in Libya and its agreements have the intention to protect its legitimate interests in the Eastern Mediterranean in accordance with international law,” Güzaltan says. “Turkey is following a strategy that clashes with the threats to its national security outside its borders but holds no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of other countries.”

From Güzaltan’s point of view, Turkey’s plan in the region should be aimed at creating an Ankara-Cairo-Tehran bloc against the U.S.-Israel axis.

“Such a front would definitely prevent the intervention of any third power in the region,” he points out.

He thinks that if we apply a similar Astana template with Egypt in Libya, the imperialist plans will be crushed in the region.

“It would be logical to cooperate with Russia as well when fighting against imperialism. Our main goal should be to establish the largest front,” he emphasizes.

Referring to the murder of Khashoggi at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul by order of Saudi authorities, Güzaltan tells the Tehran Times, “It is now a fact that has resonated through the international public opinion.”

The Turkish intelligence service got the audio recordings of the assassination and shared it

with international partners.

“The United Nations report on this murder, has stated that the murder could not be carried out without the notice of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman,” Güzaltan states.

Saudi Arabia arrested 11 officials who were allegedly involved in the murder, but Saud Al-Qahatani, who is claimed to be responsible for the incident, has yet to be prosecuted.

In this regard, the United States issued statements in support of the Saudi Kingdom.

“It is clear that the Saudis wanted to cover up this murder,” the Turkish writer adds.

Turkish courts began the prosecution of the 20 suspects on July 3, 2020, in absentia.

Saud Al-Qahatani and Ahmed Bin Mohammed al-Asiri are among the prosecuted names, at the 11th Criminal Court of Istanbul. The vast majority of these individuals held diplomatic immunity at the time of the murder, which has paved the way for them to flee Turkey.

“Turkish courts will independently continue to follow up this brutal murder, but the obstacles within international law are likely to arise in the conducting of a possible conviction,” Güzaltan notes.

Answering the Tehran Times that why Bin Salman’s name was not mentioned on the accused list, the Turkish lawyer says, “The limitations from the diplomatic immunity is in effect by international law.

“This situation also occurs through bilateral agreements between the two countries.”

“There is a difference between politically and legally convicting bin Salman.”

“Turkish courts are fully independent, and I do not think there will be no such political pressure,” Güzaltan believes. “But judging the second man of the Saudi Kingdom in a local court is just symbolism, and there is no way of enforcing the sentence.”

Güzaltan calls for a special tribunal to try Bin Selman and hold the Saudi regime accountable for its conduct.

“The way to this tribunal, is through an all-out political and economic embargo that can be implemented against the Saudi regime, which is cooperating with the United States and Israel until it gives up on the cooperation with these countries.”

The lawyer goes on to say that the United Nations report on Khashoggi’s assassination has stated that “the murder could not be carried out without the notice of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman.”

Hadds, “Some Persian Gulf countries, and the United Arab Emirates in particular, are doing their best to cause a clash between Turkey and Egypt over Libya.”

“In the near future, the Persian Gulf countries may officially recognize Israel, which they already have secret negotiations and agreements with.”

What were the protests in Serbia really about?

By Marija Pantelic

On July 7, mass protests erupted in Belgrade after President Aleksandar Vucic announced that the government would reimpose a tough curfew on the country amid a rising number of coronavirus cases. This came just two weeks after Vucic’s Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) won an undemocratic parliamentary election, which the European Union readily accepted.

The police descended on the protests with brutal force, tear-gassing, assaulting and arresting unarmed, peaceful protesters and even beating passive bystanders.

The media in both Serbia and the West was quick to characterize the protests as anti-lockdown riots, but this was far from the truth.

The immediate trigger of the protests was public anger over Vucic’s decision to lift the initial lockdown in May and to portray himself as having successfully tackled the outbreak ahead of the June 21 elections, thereby making political gains but also allowing a new spike in coronavirus cases and deaths.

But the roots of the mass civil disobedience lie in years of political dissent among Serbians of all walks of life, fed up with the rife corruption, media suppression, neoliberal policies and creeping authoritarianism of the Vucic rule. This civil resistance is very much reminiscent of the grassroots revolution that overthrew Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000.

■ Sacrificing lives to win an election

At first, Serbia’s response to the pandemic was prescient and systematic. A full lockdown and strict border controls were introduced on March 15, when the confirmed cases were still few.

Less than two months later and in preparation for the June elections, the government ended the state of emergency with no clear epidemiological explanation.

Overnight, Serbia went from one of the world’s strictest lockdowns to permitting and encouraging super-spreader events, including a Serbian Football Cup semi-final match with 20,000 spectators. Together, the sudden shift from lockdown to large gatherings and the falsified sharp declines in COVID-19 statistics served to tell a simple lie: The government had defeated the virus.

As expected, on June 21, the SNS won by a landslide in rigged elections with less than 50 percent voter turnout due to the opposition’s boycott and disillusionment fueled by a widespread belief that the vote would be undemocratic. Shortly after the polls closed, videos emerged of COVID-unsafe celebrations with party leaders, including Vucic and Prime Minister Ana Brnabic.

Having both criticized Serbian citizens for the boycott and encouraged them to vote in the midst of the pandemic, U.S. and EU officials readily endorsed the election results.

But the day after the elections, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) published an investigation, which revealed that the real number of COVID-19 infection and mortality numbers were three times higher than what the government officially reported. Vucic adamantly denied this but nonetheless on July 7, he announced a new curfew, noting that the health system was overwhelmed due to citizens’ irresponsible behavior. This announcement triggered protests with tens of thousands of protesters flooding the streets and entering the parliament.

It is important to point out here that the protesters did not oppose government intervention to combat the pandemic. Rather,

they were angered by Vucic’s disregard for the lives of Serbian citizens in shifting measures to accommodate his political agenda.

This reckless move reflected the very logic of his long political career: Power by any means and at any cost, even people’s lives and wellbeing.

Although Vucic is now reporting an increase in COVID-19 cases and deaths, the numbers are still massively downplayed. On July 18, the official total number of COVID-19 deaths according to government data was 472, way below what BIRN reported in June - 630. Epidemiologically, this can only mean one thing - that the current real number of COVID-19 deaths is substantially higher than any available report.

■ Vucic’s EU-backed rule

Vucic’s political career has been mired by contradicting ideologies and suppression of speech. He joined the ultranationalist militant Serbian Radical Party in 1993 which was then the second-largest parliamentary party after Milosevic’s Socialist Party (Milosevic allowed the rise and influence of SRS as it was a vehicle for extreme nationalism while making him seem comparatively moderate).

Just five years later, Vucic was appointed minister of information. In the two years he occupied this position, journalists criticizing the government faced mobbing, job loss and even murder, while propaganda spreading hate towards ethnic minorities was intensified in what was then left of Yugoslavia. These are considered to have been the toughest years for Serbian media under Milosevic.

After the overthrow of Milosevic, Vucic spent 12 years in opposition: first criticizing the corruption, neoliberal profiteering and pro-EU politics of the ruling Democratic Party, then reinventing himself as a pro-EU figure, starting with his switch to SNS in 2008.

In 2014, Vucic became prime minister before running for president in 2017, with a campaign characterized by media dominance and voter intimidation. Vucic’s presidential election victory sparked two months of protests against his authoritarian tendencies.

Despite his criticism of the post-Milosevic transition and capitalist market reforms, since coming to power himself Vucic has continued and expanded neoliberal policies that have earned Serbia a reputation for having “cheap but skilled labor” that is “attractive to business”. The government has given cash incentives to foreign corporations as a way of attracting foreign investment. For example, Korean company JURA and Italian carmaker Fiat have received as much as 10,000 euros (\$11,455) per job created.

But these government-subsidized corporations pay monthly wages as low as 250 euros (\$286) and now are forcing factory workers to labor in unsafe conditions during the pandemic.

These investments have hardly improved the standard of living of Serbians. A 2018 Survey on Income and Living Conditions found that more than a quarter of Serbs are living on less than 150 euros (\$172) per month. A third of university students plan to leave the country after graduation to find jobs within their profession, while some 50,000 Serbs emigrated in 2018 alone.

In parallel, as part of its austerity measures due to loan deals with the International Monetary Fund, successive SNS governments have viciously dismantled social security and the public

sector. In 2014, Vucic unconstitutionally cut 700,000 pensions overnight by 25 percent.

The health system, which had been well-developed in socialist Yugoslavia, has been left to crumble, with Serbian citizens often forced to pay exorbitant fees in private clinics and hospitals to receive proper care. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, private hospitals are reportedly further inflating their fees.

Meanwhile, public hospitals are struggling with the growing number of patients and symptomatic cases who need to be tested. Vucic has claimed that Serbian hospitals are better equipped than those in Germany, but there have been continuing media reports of shortages of personal protective equipment and medical staff.

The president has also sought to make political gains with donations of medical supplies from abroad, trying to play competing foreign interests - EU, U.S., Chinese and Russian - against each other, even amid the pandemic.

Vucic’s unsustainable geopolitical game has resulted in a political agenda that prioritizes burning sociopolitical issues and civil rights in his country in order to focus on foreign policy and investment. While Serbian protesters were being mercilessly beaten up, Vucic was welcomed by French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris to discuss EU enlargement and Kosovo negotiations, as if no human rights violations were taking place in the streets of Serbia.

For many Serbs, this was symbolic of where Vucic’s and the EU’s priorities lie. The Serbian president clearly reports to outside powers, not the Serbian people. And the EU - along with the U.S. - favors autocratic “stability” over democracy as long as its interests are protected.

■ Vucic is scared and it is showing

After a week of police brutality, the protests have abated and Vucic has tried to pacify the public. The curfew that he announced on July 7 was scrapped and a dozen or so of the 150 people detained during the protests have been released.

The president has also claimed that Serbia will be one of the first countries in the world to benefit from an effective vaccine this year with the help of an unnamed country that is, according to him, already vaccinating vulnerable groups.

Vucic appears quite desperate but his attempt to placate the people’s anger with more lies is unlikely to succeed. He is right to be scared: This is the beginning of the end of his grip over Serbia.

He surely remembers what happened to Milosevic and is able to recognize the signs better than most. In the face of Milosevic’s tactics to crack down on opposition and media, resistance against his administration grew steadily over the 10 years of his rule. Protests started in 1991 and culminated with the 2000 revolution.

Many of Serbia’s youth grew up protesting with their parents against Milosevic’s dictatorship in the 1990s. They know firsthand that the “beginning of the end” can mean years of resistance and they are ready for it.

These most recent protests might have fizzled out but the youth’s determination to see genuine political change has not. Vucic may have successfully used the coronavirus outbreak to expand his power in parliament, but this will not save him from the inevitable. As public anger simmers, the full economic and public health consequences of Vucic’s mishandling of the pandemic are yet to reach their peak.

Trump’s troops: Fast forwarding fascism across America

1 → The resulting photo-op featuring Trump holding a Bible in his hand in front of the church was condemned by clergy and military officials alike, but seemed to play well with Evangelical Christians. “I thought it was completely appropriate for the president to stand in front of that church,” commented Trump ally and Dallas, Texas megachurch pastor Robert Jeffress. “His presence sent the twin message that our streets and cities do not belong to rioters and domestic terrorists,” chanted Faith and Freedom Coalition chair Robert Reed. The bishop, Right Rev. Mariann Budde, in whose diocese the church is located, however, was less than enthused by Trump’s grandstanding, charging that she “was not given even a courtesy call, that they would be clearing with tear gas so they could use one of our churches as a prop.”

Borrowing forces from different components of a complicit and complicit Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Trump sent his unrequested troops to Portland following almost two months of continual demonstrations, which have at times involved substantial, but understandable, civil disobedience. Portland mayor Ted Wheeler objected. “We didn’t ask for these troops in our cities,” he said in a Twitter post, “We don’t want these troops in our cities.” Standing with protestors on July 22 against Trump’s private army, Mayor Wheeler stated unequivocally, “The reason I am here tonight is to stand with you no matter what, and if they launch the tear gas against you, they’re launching the tear gas against me!” Shortly after 11 o’clock, the tear gassing began, and, to his credit, Wheeler held his ground. “This is abhorrent,” the mayor lamented, “This is beneath us.” After Wheeler left, Trump’s private militia of thugs began tear gassing protestors at will.



Tom Ridge, former DHS chief under George Bush, condemned the use of the agency’s personnel in Portland and expressed support for Mayor Wheeler’s objections to Trump’s troop deployment. “The department [DHS] was established to protect America from the ever-present threat of global terrorism,” he explained. “It was not established to be the president’s personal militia.” Nevertheless, acting DHS secretary Chad Wolf defended Trump’s actions, claiming “These valiant men and women have defended our institutions of justice against violent anarchists for 48 straight days.” Furthermore, Wolf warned, “We will not retreat. We will continue to take the appropriate action to protect our facilities and our law enforcement officers.” Wolf, incidentally, was the architect of Trump’s policy of separating migrant children from their families at the U.S. border as a way to discourage immigration.

Demonstrating his distorted world view, Trump tweeted on July 19, “We are trying to help Portland, not hurt it. Their leadership has, for months, lost control of the anarchists and agitators.” Oregon attorney general Ellen Rosenblum disagreed and has filed a lawsuit against DHS, seeking a restraining order and charging that Trump’s unidentified shock troops have pulled people off the streets “without warning or explanation, without a warrant, and without providing any way to determine who is directing this action.” Strange that the suddenly beneficent Trump had previously denied any obligation to help U.S. cities and states with battling COVID-19. “I don’t take responsibility at all,” he declared, blaming his presidential predecessor for the pandemic.

Lurking behind this Trumpian show of force is the reality of the U.S. presidential elections in November and an attempt by the floundering president to present a Nixonian “law and order” image to voters in a desperate ploy to prop up his slipping poll ratings. Given the disastrous state of the coronavirus pandemic in the U.S.—over 144 thousand deaths and 4 million confirmed cases of COVID-19—Trump desperately needs something to divert the public’s attention from his failed presidency. Consequently, he has chosen to target cities with Democratic mayors in states with Democratic governors, like Portland, Chicago and Albuquerque to name a few. He will then send in the shock troops, provoke increased violence and claim a heavy-handed response is needed to stop the “anarchists and agitators,” while frightening white suburban voters into voting for him.

Another tactic of Trump’s re-election campaign is to deflect attention from the mess he has made onto the presumptive Democratic nominee, former vice president Joseph Biden, by branding him a radical leftist. This is clearly a ludicrous label, given that Biden is within the same bandwidth of the political spectrum as his former boss, and recall that in 2011, Washington Post columnist Ezra Klein categorized former president Barack Obama as a “moderate Republican.” He also remarked, “A reality-television star who can’t persuade anyone that his hair is real is alleging that the president of the United States was born in Kenya.” On July 19, that same reality-television star with the same hair now in the Oval Office, warned in a Twitter post, “The Radical Left Democrats, who totally control Biden, will destroy our Country as we know it.” With the exception of a small number of progressives like Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), most Democrats feign left while assuring their corporate masters unwavering allegiance, just like their Republican counterparts.

Now, Trump is fast-forwarding his fascist agenda by slowly deploying his private army across America, whether leaders of states and municipalities like it or not. “I don’t need invitations by the state, state mayors, or state governors to do our job,” pontificated acting DHS head Wolf, sounding more like a mafioso than a public servant. “We’re going to do that, whether they like us there or not.” Such mobster tactics should come as no surprise from a president who called his former security chief “Matty the Squid.”

Neanderthal-era tooth to go on show in Qazvin

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – A fossilized tooth, which is amongst earliest evidence of Neanderthal settlements in the Iranian plateau, will be displayed at a museum in Qazvin, west-central Iran, where it was discovered in a nearby cave.

“Early human’s tooth discovered in this cave [Qal-e Kord Cave in Avaj county] has been sent to two laboratories in France and the United States, and the results of radiocarbon dating experiments show that it relates to the oldest-known Neanderthal civilization in Iran,” IRNA quoted provincial tourism chief Alireza Khazaeli as saying on Saturday.



In November 2018, the first season of the joint Iran-France archaeological exploration led to the discovery of over 6,000 cultural pieces in the area. It also yielded bone remains of horse, deer, bear, and many stone tools belonging to the Middle Paleolithic period (between 200,000 up to 40,000 years ago).

A 2019 study published in the Journal of Human Evolution, suggests that Neanderthals were roaming at the Iranian Zagros Mountain sometimes between 40 to 70 thousand years ago.

Until the late 20th century, Neanderthals were regarded as genetically, morphologically, and behaviorally distinct from living humans. However, more recent discoveries about this well-preserved fossil Eurasian population have revealed an overlap between living and archaic humans.

Neanderthals lived before and during the last ice age of the Pleistocene in some of the most unforgiving environments ever inhabited by humans. They developed a successful culture, with a complex stone tool technology, that was based on hunting, with some scavenging and local plant collection. Their survival during tens of thousands of years of the last glaciation is a remarkable testament to human adaptation.

Restoration work resumed on Iran’s second-largest mudbrick citadel

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – A new round of restoration works has been commenced on Belqeys citadel, known as the second-largest mudbrick fortress in Iran after the UNESCO-registered Bam citadel.

“The project for the restoration and protection of Belqeys citadel, located near the historic city of Esfarayen, which had been halted for some time due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, is resumed in accordance with health protocols,” CHTN quoted a local official in charge of cultural heritage as saying on Saturday.



“Currently, an emergency operation to buttress tower and fortification No. 24, which is located on the eastern side of the monument, is atop agenda. Moreover, additional measures will be carried out in this phase to set up preliminary tourism infrastructure to better host visitors and researchers.”

The ruined citadel, which is sometimes referred to as Shahr-e Belqeys (“The city of Belqeys”) is located in northeastern North Khorasan province. It lies at a short distance from the city of Esfarayen. Remnants of the citadel, family lodgings, irrigation channels, a cistern, and a hypostyle hall are amongst objects so far been unearthed in Belqeys during rounds of excavation.

Massive windcatcher, reminiscent of genius architecture in oasis, being restored

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – The main and the tallest badgir (windcatcher) of the Qajar-era (1789–1925) Nematollahi mansion in the central province of Yazd has undergone some rehabilitation works, a provincial tourism chief has said.

Badgirs are the traditional air-conditioning systems of local houses around the desert in Iran, which are the essential elements at the residential structures.

The restoration project aims at reviving, preserving, protecting, and strengthening the historical structure, Ali Asghar Samadiani said, CHTN reported on Saturday.

Building’s architecture follows the traditional characteristics of the structures of the buildings in desert areas with the materials of raw clay, mud and brick, and plaster.

The mansion has wind catchers, a hall, five-door and three-door rooms as well as summer and winter rooms and a central yard.

The historical house was inscribed on the National Heritage list in 2008.

In July 2017, the historical structure of the city of Yazd, which is the capital of Yazd province, was named a UNESCO World Heritage. The oasis city is wedged between the northern Dasht-e Kavir and the southern Dasht-e Lut on a flat plain ringed by mountains. Its historical structure enjoys a very harmonious public-religious architecture that dates from different eras.

The city of Yazd is usually referred to as a delightful place to stay, or a “don’t miss” destination by almost all of its visitors. It is teemed with mudbrick houses that are equipped with innovative badgirs (wind catchers), atmospheric alleyways, and many Islamic and Iranian monuments that shape its eye-catching city landscape.

The province has an interesting mix of people as well, some 10 percent of whom follow the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism.

Yazd Jameh Mosque, Dowlatabad Garden, the Yazd Atash Behram, also known as Atashkadeh-e Yazd, Towers of Silence, and adjacent desert landscape are among its tourist sites.

Ancient human skeleton unearthed in Isfahan

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – The remains of an ancient person, believed to date back to the Parthian era (247 BC – 224 CE), has been discovered during an archaeological season which is underway at Tepe Ashraf, the sole archaeological hill in Isfahan, central Iran.

Though the gender of the skeleton has not been determined yet, it is likely that it belonged to a Parthian woman based on specifications of its burial site, IRNA quoted senior archaeologist Alireza Jafari-Zand as saying on Saturday.

Jafari-Zand, who heads the archaeological excavation at the hill, lamented that the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization does not pay enough support to develop the archaeological project.

“I told the [Ministry of] Cultural Heritage that there is a need for an extensive excavation because the speculations have provided a good prospect for widening excavations because some objected excavated so far have been



unearthed beneath a [modern] street. And the safeguard of this historical evidence depends on expanding the excavations.”

Earlier this month, an ancient burial containing the remains of a horse -- estimated to be four years old was found near a place where a giant jar-tomb was unearthed weeks ago, which researchers believe could shed new light on ancient human life in Isfahan.

“Tepe Ashraf is the second place after the Tepe Sialk (in Isfahan province) that has yielded the discovery of such jar tombs that offers valuable clues to uncover the obscure history of pre-Islamic Isfahan,” according to the archaeologist.

Excavations at Tepe Ashraf initially began in 2010 when Jafari-Zand announced his team found evidence at the site suggesting that the Sassanid site had also been used during the Buyid dynasty (945–1055). “We stumbled upon a reconstructed part in the ruins of the castle, which suggests that the structure had been used during the Buyid dynasty.”

Iran, Tunisia to expand tourism ties

→ 1 He also noted that although there are many obstacles to the exchange of official delegations in the field of tourism at the moment, the ministry seeks to strengthen international tourism ties by using various tools in cyberspace and indirect communication.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization has recently praised efforts made by Iran’s tourism ministry to manage the travel industry during the coronavirus pandemic. UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said in a letter to tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan that the country’s measures have truly earned plaudits to mitigate the impact on tourism.

“A series of measures that the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of Iran has taken, under the guidelines and recommendations of UNWTO, has truly earned plaudits as an effective practice to mitigate the

impact on tourism.”

Experts expect Iran to achieve a tourism boom after coronavirus contained, believing its impact would be temporary and short-lived for a country that ranked the third fastest-growing tourism destination in 2019.

Iran expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bath-houses, 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. 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).

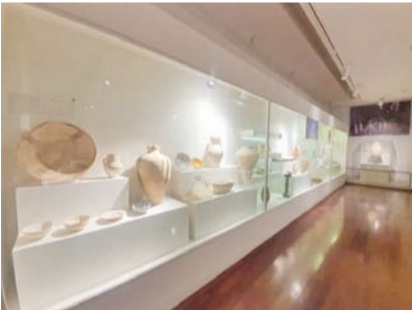


Over 54,000 museumgoers visit Spanish archaeological heritage show in Tehran

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – A total of 54,672 Iranians and foreign nationals paid visits to the archaeological heritage exhibition of Spain’s Archeological Museum of Alicante (MARQ), which was held in Tehran for seven months.

Hosted by the National Museum of Iran, the large-scale exhibition displayed around 300 objects, some of which dating for millennia, ISNA reported on Saturday.

The exhibit was scheduled to be held from September 22 to April 14, but as the coronavirus outbreak in the country put everything on a halt, the exhibit came to an end in mid-March, said Jebrael Nokandeh,



the director of the National Museum of Iran.

While international flight suspensions in response to the coronavirus pandemic,

caused a delay in returning the artifacts to the Spanish museum, the National Museum of Iran launched an online visit and virtual tour of the exhibit, he added.

However, it was finally decided to collect the works without the presence of the representatives of the Archeological Museum of Alicante and the objects were returned to Spain on Wednesday, the official mentioned.

The exhibit was in return for a landmark Iranian exhibit titled “Iran, Cradle of Civilization” that the Spanish museum had hosted from March 14 to September 1, pulling in 101,108 visitors Spain and other nationalities.

“Iran, Cradle of Civilization” was previously on show at Drents Museum, Assen, the Netherlands, where it was well-received by museumgoers from June to November 2018.

“Iran, Cradle of Civilization” turned the spotlight on the earliest developments of agriculture and livestock farming from the very beginning to cuneiform clay tablets, gold beakers and ornaments, bronze weapons and beautifully painted ceramics associated with successive Iranian kingdoms as it featured nearly two hundred pieces of a large span of Iranian history, starting from pre-historical era to the Islamic period.

Stone vessels, utensils found at Persepolis World Heritage being documented

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Fragments of stone vessels and utensils, unearthed during archeological excavations at the magnificent UNESCO World Heritage site of Persepolis in the southern Fars province, are being documented and re-arranged by a team of experts.

The pieces were discovered during excavations conducted in close collaboration with the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in Persepolis in the 1930s, CHTN quoted Hamid Fadaei, the director of the World Heritage, as saying on Saturday.

Fadaei said that evidence suggests the vessels have deliberately been smashed into pieces millennia ago.

“The interesting and important thing about these pieces is the deliberate crushing and breaking of these containers because, regarding the material and thickness of the shreds, their fragmentation and crushing due to the passage of time is a false and unlikely theory. Probably after looting the valuable treasures of the Achaemenids, including gold and silver vessels in the treasury of Persepolis, these stone vessels appeared to be worthless and insignificant so that looters and were



deliberately shattered and crushed them.”

“According to the studies, most of these pieces have been collected from the two halls of the Persepolis treasury..... In those years, some of the pieces were assembled to go on display at museums. And many of the fragments

ended up their ways to be stored in Persepolis for future investigations,” the official explained.

Persepolis, also known as Takht-e Jamshid, whose magnificent ruins rest at the foot of Kuh-e Rahmat (Mountain of Mercy), was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire. It is situated 60 kilometers northeast of the city of Shiraz in Fars Province. The royal city was burnt by Alexander the Great in 330 BC apparently as a revenge to the Persians because it seems the Persian King Xerxes had burnt the Greek City of Athens around 150 years earlier.

Persepolis was the seat of the government of the Achaemenid Empire, though it was designed primarily to be a showplace and spectacular center for the receptions and festivals of the kings and their empire. The terrace of Persepolis continues to be, as its founder Darius would have wished, the image of the Achaemenid monarchy itself, the summit where likenesses of the king reappear unceasingly, here as the conqueror of a monster, there carried on his throne by the downtrodden enemy, and where lengthy cohorts of sculpted warriors and guards, dignitaries, and tribute bearers parade endlessly.

Iran is a kaleidoscope of color: Amir Chakhmaq Mosque Complex

TOURISM d e s k The 19th-century Amir Chakhmaq Complex with its imposing three-story facade is one of the abundant tourist hotspots of Yazd, an oasis city in central Iran.

Located on a square of the same name, the prominent complex is noted for its eye-catching rows of symmetrical sunken alcoves, which are perfectly lit up following the sunset.

The structures that make up the complex include a mosque, a caravanserai, a bathhouse, a cold-water well and a tekkeh where Shiite Muslims come together for observing special religious ceremonies, all of which have been designed in accordance with traditional layout principles.

The perfectly proportioned niches on the façade may seem at their best and most photogenic late in afternoon, when towering exterior appears to glow against

the darkening sky and copper-colored sunlight is captured within each alcove.

A pedestrianized square overlooking the complex is usually full of visitors. It is landscaped with a vast pool, illuminated fountains, well-manicured trees and shrubs that lend an attractive foreground to the splendid vista at night.

Underneath the complex is a small bazaar with rows of two-story arcades.

Once an important station on the Silk Road, the historical structure of the Yazd was named a UNESCO World Heritage site back in July. It is home to plentiful historic mosques, minarets, and public-religious buildings

Most buildings boast the presence of gorgeous wind-catchers (badgirs) atop their rooftops. The walls of the ancient city are adobe and mud brick, which seem glittering under the sunlight and blending naturally into the adjacent

desert landscape. The city has an interesting mix of people as well, some 10 percent of whom follow the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism.

In July 2017, the historical structure of the city of Yazd was named a UNESCO World Heritage. Wedged between the northern Dasht-e Kavir and the southern Dasht-e Lut on a flat plain, the oasis city enjoys a very harmonious public-religious architecture that dates from different eras.

Yazd is usually referred to as a delightful place to stay, or a “don’t miss” destination by almost all of its visitors. It is teemed with mudbrick houses that are equipped with innovative badgirs (wind catchers), atmospheric alleyways, and many Islamic and Iranian monuments that shape its eye-catching city landscape.

The city is known today with



its traditional districts, the qanat system, traditional houses, bazaars, hammams, water cisterns, mosques, synagogues, Zoroastrian temples, and the historic garden of Dolat-Abad. The city enjoys the peaceful coexistence of three religions: Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism.

Iran, UNFPA to build partnerships in support of women breadwinners

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare of Iran held a joint webinar on Wednesday aimed to build partnerships to help boost the resilience of female heads of households.

To mark World Population Day in Iran, UNFPA and the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare jointly held the webinar on Wednesday aimed to build partnerships to help boost the resilience of female heads of households.

Female heads of households are a vulnerable population group that faces greater challenges in accessing health and reproductive health services, and a steady income and livelihood during the pandemic, according to UNFPA.

The online event took place in the presence of high level authorities from the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, UN heads of agencies, and the diplomatic corps.

Leila Joudane, UNFPA Representative in Iran moderated the panel, all the while



emphasizing on the importance of uninterrupted sexual and reproductive health services, including prevention of violence against women, during the COVID-19 crisis.

Government panelists, Ahmad Meidari, Deputy Minister of Social Welfare and Issa Mansouri, Deputy Minister of Entrepreneurship presented their complementary views

on a socio-economic approach, stressing the bridging between humanitarian and longer term development interventions, to address the need of the most vulnerable women.

In the same line, Maryam Mirmalek, director general of the office of Support and Empowerment, informed participants about the first on-line dashboard developed by the ministry in order to monitor the socio-economic and health status of female heads of households on real time basis.

"The socio-economic recovery plan requires \$50 million. \$15 million have already been mobilized by UN agencies in Iran", concluded Ugochi Daniels, UN Resident Coordinator in Iran, and one of the panelists. "UN agencies in Iran stay committed to complement government's efforts to leave no one behind".

World Population Day is an annual event, observed on July 11 every year, which seeks to raise awareness of global population issues. The event was established by the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme in 1989.

Free hepatitis care on agenda, end of disease by 2030

1 → World Hepatitis Day, July 28, is an opportunity to step up national and international efforts on hepatitis, encourage actions and engagement by individuals, partners and the public and highlight the need for a greater global response as outlined in the WHO's Global hepatitis report of 2017.

The date was chosen because it is the birthday of Nobel-prize winning scientist Dr. Baruch Blumberg, who discovered hepatitis B virus (HBV) and developed a diagnostic test and vaccine for the virus.

Low coverage of testing and treatment is the most important gap to be addressed in order to achieve the global elimination goals by 2030.

"Following the vaccination plan and blood transfusion safety, we have vaccinated 300,000 blood donors last year, he noted, adding, 400,000 prisoners were also vaccinated and in total, 35 million Iranians under the age of 30 were immune by vaccination."

He went on to say that "to remove hepatitis, we need medicine and a quick diagnosis kit because patients do not have the financial means to treat themselves."

Pointing out that treating hepatitis is investing and conserving resources, he said that every dollar spent on hepatitis C eradication can lead to \$18 cost reduction for the countries.

Ramezani continued "Every hepatitis C patient can infect 12 people a year, so we must treat them to stop the transmission cycle."

He pointed to the elimination of malaria and said that AIDS is also under control in the country and the eradication of malaria is our achievement, but the hepatitis death rate is increasing and we need national determination and the help of authorities to control and eliminate it.

So far, 124 countries in the world have put the hepatitis elimination program on the agenda; Iran is also committed to take steps in this regard, he noted.

Lamenting that many patients are not aware of their disease, Ramezani said that the disease is asymptomatic, especially in the elderly, and If the virus stays in the body for 6 months, it becomes chronic.

Only 10 percent of patients are aware of their disease, which increases the importance of awareness and diagnostic programs, he said, regretting, 1.4 million deaths per year are caused by hepatitis.

WHO goals of controlling hepatitis C

An estimated 325 million people worldwide live with hepatitis B and/or C, and for most, testing and treatment remains beyond reach.

Some types of hepatitis are preventable through vaccination. A WHO study found that an estimated 4.5 million premature deaths could be prevented in low- and middle-income countries by 2030 through vaccination, diagnostic tests, medicines and education campaigns. WHO's global hepatitis strategy, endorsed by all WHO Member States, aims to reduce new hepatitis infections by 90 percent and deaths by 65 percent between 2016 and 2030.

The World Health Organization is focusing on full control of hepatitis C by 2030. Statistics also show that the number of people living with infectious diseases in the world is currently declining, but the number of people infected with hepatitis C is rising; Therefore, the WHO, while inviting all countries in the world to fully control hepatitis, has set guidelines in this regard.

According to WHO's three goals of controlling hepatitis C, the incidence of new cases of hepatitis C infection should be reduced by 90 percent, 80 percent of infected people should be treated, and hepatitis C mortality should be reduced by



65 percent. With these goals in mind, the world now has high hopes for opening new doors to reduce the number of sufferers, especially with the developments that have taken place in the field of diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis and making them completely controllable.

According to the WHO, 12 countries will achieve the goals in complete control of hepatitis C by 2030. Iran, which has a 30 percent reduction in new hepatitis cases and a 10 percent reduction in hepatitis deaths by 2021, is now one of 17 countries working to achieve the goal of full hepatitis control.

Domestically-made medicine raise hope to cure hepatitis

A study, on 1,361 patients with hepatitis C with a mean age of 50 years in 46 treatment centers treated with new domestic medicine, showed that Iranian-made medicine has been effective on all hepatitis C genotypes and has shown 98 percent success in treating patients, deputy health minister Reza Malekzadeh has said.

With the help of these medicine, hepatitis C can now be treated in 8 to 12 weeks, and the study showed that it has no side effects; However, treatment with previous medicines caused numerous side effects and made the treatment of hepatitis C difficult and tedious.

Malekzadeh also pointed to the cheap price of domestic drugs compared to very expensive foreign ones and said "it will reduce the cost of complete treatment of hepatitis C d to one hundred dollars."

It will also reduce the number of patients with liver cancer that are added to the transplantation list each day, he added.

Simple diagnostic test the most important step in hepatitis control

Referring to Iran's important measures in controlling hepatitis C, he said that the most advanced public health policy to reduce drug harm in the region by establishing more than 4,000 methadone treatment clinics, and 700 harm reduction centers.

Implementing national plans such as "free control and treatment of prisoners and addicts with hepatitis C", "plan on improving liver health", the pilot city-to-city plan for hepatitis C, the plan to identify hepatitis C patients in the target population of HIV patients were among the major measures taken in this regard, he highlighted.

Just as Iran has succeeded in producing generic drugs for the definitive treatment of hepatitis C under U.S. sanctions, it is now considering eliminating the costly hepatitis C test by researching to develop a simple, low-cost blood test. The project has begun and is in the process of being tested on samples.

He estimated the credit needed for this project at 500 million rials (nearly \$11,000 at an official rate of 42,000 rials) and said that but its foreign currency savings are tens

of million dollars.

Iran's challenges in full elimination of hepatitis C

Complete control of hepatitis C in Iran with the global "point elimination" strategy needs to address several key challenges. One of these challenges is the lack of accurate statistics on people at high risk for hepatitis C, Amir Ali Sohrabpour, the head of the Iranian Hepatitis Network said.

While it is necessary to identify 20,000 patients with hepatitis C in Iran annually, only 10 percent of hepatitis C patients have been identified; Therefore, it seems that the challenge of identifying and accurate statistics of high-risk groups in Iran needs a more immediate solution, he added.

On the other hand, the provinces with high hepatitis C prevalence have not yet been fully identified but is planned to be done, and the country's medical universities can play an important role, while the prison organization can also help hepatitis network by identifying patients to determine how many prisoners are infected with hepatitis C, he emphasized.

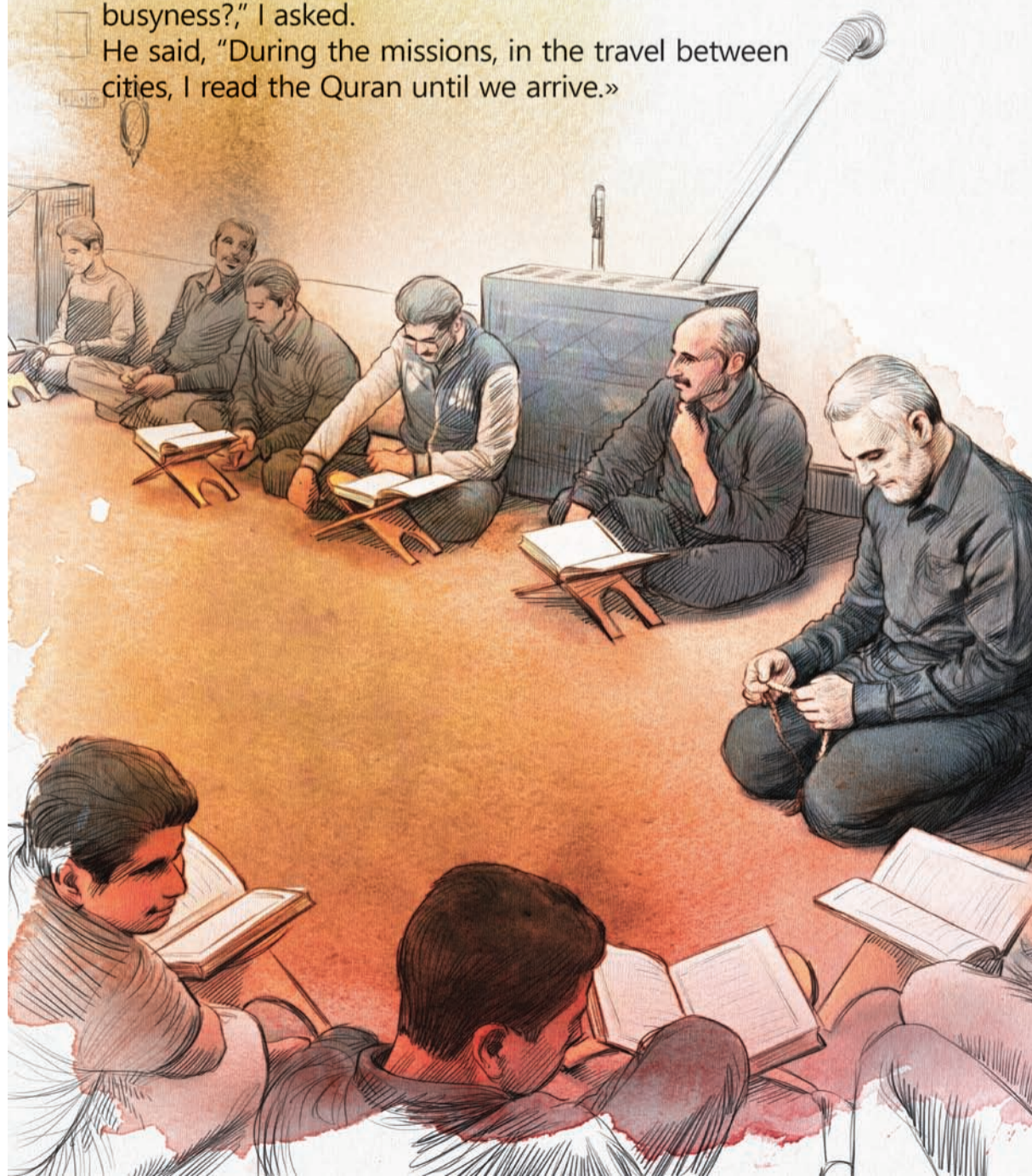
There are 1.5 million drug users in Iran, 300,000 of whom are injecting drugs, but one of the challenges is the need for a full treatment of these high-risk groups, including adequate funding for diagnostic tests and distribution of free medicine, he stated.

Seizing every moment

Popped in a religious ritual in the village; he sat in a corner, like everyone else, and started reciting the Quran.

"How did you have the time to memorize the Quran with all your busyness?" I asked.

He said, "During the missions, in the travel between cities, I read the Quran until we arrive."



Isfahan University, ECO to hold webinar on Covid-19



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The University of Isfahan and the Science Foundation of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) will hold a joint webinar on August 10 on the economic and health effects of Covid-19 in the region, ISNA reported on Saturday.

As a financial center, the ECO Foundation coordinates the activities of member countries to strengthen scientific, engineering, research and development institutions, develop economic projects, enhance scientific cooperation through the exchange of scientists, and hold joint seminars, conferences, science, and technology exhibitions.

Aiming for the sustainable economic development of its member states and the region as a whole, ECO was established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey and was later joined by seven new members, namely Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

In 2019, Iranian science minister Mansour Gholami became Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the ECO Foundation for the next two years.

The foundation is headquartered in Islamabad, Pakistan. The city of Isfahan will also host a meeting of mayors of the ECO member countries to discuss ways to overcome the complicated coronavirus crisis through developing urban diplomacy in the Iranian calendar month of Shahrivar (August 22- September 21).

Making food cheaper won't solve world hunger

According to a new United Nations report, global rates of hunger and malnutrition are on the rise. The report estimates that in 2019, 690 million people – 8.9 per cent of the world's population – were under-nourished. It predicts that this number will exceed 840 million by 2030.

If you also include the number of people who the UN describes as food insecure, meaning that they have trouble getting access to food, over 2 billion people worldwide are in trouble. This includes people in wealthy, middle-income and low-income countries, the Independent reported.

The report further confirms that women are more likely to face moderate to severe food insecurity than men, and that little progress has been achieved on this front in the past several years. Overall, its findings warn that eradicating hunger by 2030 – one of the UN's main "Sustainable Development Goals" – looks increasingly unlikely.

Covid-19 has only made matters worse: the report estimates that the unfolding pandemic and its accompanying economic recession will push an additional 83 million to 132 million people into undernourishment. But based on our work serving as independent experts to the UN on hunger, access to food and malnutrition, under the mandate of the "Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food", it's clear to us that the virus is only accelerating existing trends. It is not driving the rising numbers of hungry and food-insecure people.

Experts have debated for years how best to measure hunger and malnutrition. In the past, the UN focused almost exclusively on calories – an approach that researchers and advocacy groups criticized as too narrow.

This year's report takes a more thoughtful approach that focuses on access to healthy diets. One thing it found is that when governments primarily focused on making sure people had enough calories, they did so by supporting large transnational corporations and by making fatty, sweet and highly-processed foods cheap and accessible.

This perspective raises some important issues about the global political economy of food. As the new report points out, people who live at the current global poverty level of \$1.90 per day cannot feasibly secure access to a healthy diet, even under the most optimistic scenarios.

More broadly, the UN report addresses one of the longest-running debates in agriculture: what is a fair price for healthy food?

One thing everyone agrees on is that a plant-heavy diet is best for human health and the planet. But if prices for fruits and vegetables are too low, then farmers can't make a living, and will grow something more lucrative or quit farming altogether. And costs eventually go up for consumers as the supply dwindles. Conversely, if the price is too high, then most people can't afford healthy food and will resort to eating whatever they can afford – often, cheap processed foods.

Food prices don't just reflect supply and demand. As the report notes, government policies always directly or indirectly influence them.

Some countries raise taxes at the border, making imported food more expensive in order to protect local producers and ensure a stable supply of food. Rich countries like the US, Canada, and in the EU heavily subsidise their farming sectors.

Virus surges worldwide as public loses faith in authorities

A surge in coronavirus cases across the United States and Europe has forced governments to strengthen containment measures as a survey released Saturday showed support for the handling of their pandemics has slipped.

The disease has now killed almost 635,000 people around the world and infected more than 15.5 million, according to an AFP tally, with America the hardest-hit nation.



For the second straight day Friday the U.S. reported more than 70,000 new cases and over 1,000 deaths as the virus takes hold in the country's south and west.

A similar resurgence in Europe prompted the World Health Organization to sound the alarm over the spread, as Britain joined France, Germany and Austria in tightening rules on masks and rolling out greater testing.

Populations in France, Germany, Britain, Japan, Sweden and the U.S. widely believed death and infection figures to be higher than recorded, according to the study, which polled 1,000 people in each nation.

Europe accounts for a fifth of the world's case count so far. The WHO's European chapter expressed concern Friday about the rise in cases on the continent in the past two weeks and warned tighter restrictions may be needed.

A three-year-old girl this week died in Belgium, becoming the country's youngest victim of the virus.

Outbreaks have been seen recently in the Spanish regions of Aragon and Catalonia where officials have reintroduced curbs on daily life and urged Barcelona residents to only leave home for essential trips.

French Prime minister Jean Castex said on-the-spot testing would be rolled out for travellers arriving in France from 16 high-risk countries.

Masks are now mandatory in enclosed spaces across the nation and there are fears that the summer holiday season could see a new spike in the disease as people flock to beaches and tourist spots.

Britain on Friday also made it compulsory to wear a face covering in shopping centres, banks, takeaway outlets, sandwich shops and supermarkets.

Exceptions have been made, including for children under 11 or people with respiratory problems, but others who refuse to cover their nose and mouth in the UK risk a fine of up to £100 (\$130).

Austria has reimplemented a similar policy with face masks mandatory again in a range of places from supermarkets to pharmacies -- the rule previously had been relaxed.

New outbreaks continue to wreak havoc elsewhere around the world, with fresh clusters emerging across Asia.

South Korea on Saturday reported its highest infections figure in nearly four months, and in Vietnam the first locally-transmitted case in nearly 100 days was detected.

Authorities in China said Friday they would introduce a new wave of testing in the port city of Dalian, home to about six million people, after fresh infections were detected there.

The local government's health commission said the city must "enter wartime mode" to prevent any spread as it announced on-the-spot nucleic acid tests for people using the subway system and new lockdowns for some communities.

Resistance News

Israeli police brutally beat, detain three teens in J'lem Old City

INTERNATIONAL DESK **TEHRAN**— The Israeli occupation police on Friday evening physically assaulted and kidnapped three Palestinian teenagers in the Old City of Jerusalem.

The detainees were identified as Hatem Bashiti, Abdul-Rahman Bashiti and Nabeel Sidr.

Video footage that has gone viral online showed police officers savagely beating, subduing and detaining the young men in al-Wad street in the Old City.

The detainees were hauled to a police interrogation center, with no information about the reason for their detention.

Thousands of Muslim worshipers preform Friday prayer at Aqsa

INTERNATIONAL DESK **TEHRAN**— Thousands of Muslim worshipers observed the Friday khutba (sermon) and prayer yesterday at the Aqsa Mosque, amid tight Israeli movement restrictions in the holy city.

According to local sources, about 10,000 worshipers performed the Friday prayer at the Mosque, while following health guidelines to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

The worshipers started to flock to the Mosque in the early morning hours from Jerusalem and the 1948 occupied lands.

Dozens of young volunteers were also seen throughout the Mosque's courtyards handing out protective masks and prayer mats and working on ensuring physical distancing between worshipers.

U.S.-led forces withdraw from Iraqi military base near Baghdad

The U.S.-led military coalition, purportedly formed to fight the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group, has officially handed over a military base south of the Iraqi capital Baghdad to the country's security forces.

"Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) turned over its facilities in Besmaya Range Complex to Iraqi security forces, thanks to the successes achieved by the troops in the campaign against ISIS (Daesh)," the official Iraqi News Agency quoted Major General Gerald Strickland, the Deputy Commander-Strategy of CJTF-OIR, as saying in a press release on Saturday.

Strickland said he is "working to re-position his forces inside Iraq," noting that "these military moves were planned long ago in coordination with the government of Iraq."

The statement said the coalition was "handing over the seventh site this year to Iraqi security forces, as part of an ongoing partnership between the Iraqi forces and the international coalition against ISIS (Daesh)," praising the crucial role of Iraqi soldiers in the liberation of the strategic northern city of Mosul three years ago.

On Friday afternoon, four Katyusha rockets struck Besmaya base, where Spain had led the training of Iraqi security forces since 2015, Press TV reported.

Iraq's Security Media Cell announced in



a statement published on its official Twitter page that one of the projectiles landed on a warehouse, while another hit caravans belonging to the protection regiment of the base. The other two rockets fell in an open area. The rockets only caused some material damage, and there was no mention of casualties.

No group claimed immediate respon-

sibility for the rocket attack.

On July 22, a convoy carrying logistical support for American troops was struck by two roadside bombs on the al-Bathaa road in Iraq's southern province of Dhi Qar.

Turkey's official Anadolu news agency, citing an unnamed Iraqi security source, reported at the time that the explosive devices had damaged some of the trucks and

their consignments.

A week earlier, the Lebanese Arabic-language al-Mayadeen television news network, citing Iraqi tribal sources, reported that an explosion had targeted a U.S. convoy carrying logistic supplies in Iraq's north-central province of Salahuddin. It was not immediately known if the attack had resulted in any casualties.

The resistance group Ashab al-Kahf later claimed responsibility in a statement, saying, "We confirm the destruction of a large logistical support convoy with its materials in Salahuddin."

Anti-U.S. sentiment has been running high in Iraq following the assassination of top Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps and his Iraqi trench mate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy head of the PMU, and their companions in a U.S. assassination drone airstrike authorized by President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3.

Iraqi lawmakers approved a bill two days later, demanding the withdrawal of all foreign military forces led by the United States from the country.

The U.S. responded to the move by threatening crippling sanctions against the Arab country.

U.S. agents occupy Chinese consulate in Houston

By staff & agencies

U.S. federal agents and local law enforcement entered the Chinese consulate compound in Houston earlier Friday in a series of black SUVs, trucks, two white vans and a locksmith's van as a crowd of observers and news cameras observed from the edge of the diplomatic compound.

According to CNN, U.S. officials speaking to reporters Friday said the consulate had been implicated in a fraud investigation at a Texas research institution and that Chinese consulate officials "were directly involved in communications with researchers and guided them on what information to collect."

The activities of consulate officials in Houston "are a microcosm, we believe, of a broader network of individuals in more than 25 cities that network is supported through the consulates here," a U.S. Justice Department official said Friday. "Consulates have been giving individuals in that network guidance on how to evade [and] obstruct our investigation. And you can infer from that the ability to task that [a] network of associates nationwide."

The U.S. had given China roughly 72 hours to "cease all operations and events" at the Houston facility on Tuesday,



according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, which called the move an "unprecedented escalation" amid ongoing tension between the two countries.

Relations between China and the United States have plummeted in the past year, amid an ongoing trade war, the coronavirus pandemic, and U.S. criticism of China's human rights abuses in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.

Washington's demand for the Houston consulate to close

set the stage for federal agents to enter the diplomatic compound on Friday afternoon. It also triggered a Chinese demand earlier Friday that the U.S. close its consulate in Chengdu.

Late Tuesday evening, police in Houston said they responded to reports of smoke in the courtyard outside the consulate, located on Montrose Boulevard, in the city's Midtown area. Local media shared video of what appeared to be officials inside the compound burning documents.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortugas said Wednesday the consulate was directed to close "in order to protect American intellectual property and Americans' private information."

The idea to close the Houston consulate emerged this spring after China interfered when U.S. officials returned to the consulate in Wuhan to retrieve diplomatic materials, according to a senior State Department official.

Chinese authorities refused to let the U.S. officials leave Wuhan with the pouches, saying they had to search them before leaving, an aggressive move that violates the Vienna Convention which governs diplomatic relations. The encounter left Secretary of State Mike Pompeo irate, the State Department official said.

Hezbollah capable of targeting Israeli offshore gas rigs in Mediterranean: Israeli commander

A senior Israeli military official says the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement now has the capability to attack Israeli offshore natural gas platforms in the Mediterranean Sea in case of a future confrontation.

Israeli Hebrew-language Israel Hayom daily newspaper quoted the commander of the Israeli navy's Haifa base, Brigadier General Gil Aginsky, as alleging on Friday that Israeli naval forces are ready to face off any potential threat, noting that the Tel Aviv regime currently "faces two challenges at two levels: One on the surface of the water and one beneath. We know how to deal with any complex and thorny scenario. In relation to what is under the surface of the water, we are getting prepared and acquiring weapons to confront this stiff challenge," the London-based and pan-Arab al-Araby al-Jadeed media outlet reported.

Aginsky noted that Hezbollah is working on an undersea attack tunnel that crosses into the occupied territories.

"They are active in sea water.... They intend to prevent us from being here, and if they can, they will do it. Our job is to prevent such a thing. We maintain and cover the northern border wall," he said.

Aginsky went on to say that the Israeli

army has learned lessons from the Hezbollah anti-ship missile attack on INS Hanit corvette on July 14, 2006, during Israel's 33-day war on Lebanon.

The Israeli naval commander highlighted that the vessel was struck 16 kilometers (9 miles) off the coast of the Lebanese capital Beirut, and that four Israeli marines were killed in the incident.

"The threat remains and is serious, but we monitor and guard gas platforms. If Hezbollah wants to do strategic damage, it will try to harm these platforms..." Aginsky pointed out.

According to Press TV, Back in February 2018, Hezbollah released a video that showed what appeared to be drilling platforms floating above Israeli gas fields with targeting sights superimposed on the images.

The video, aired by Israel's Hadashot TV news at the time, also included quotes from Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's speech, in which he warned that the group would retaliate against any Israeli strike on Lebanon by attacking Israel's offshore platforms.

"If you attack, we will attack. If you bomb, we will bomb you.... I promise you, within hours [the platform] will cease operating," Nasrallah said then.

OPCW leaks show U.S. cover-up of illegal Syria bombing: American weekly

Leaked documents from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) show that the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump bombed Syria in 2018 on false grounds and pressured officials at the chemical weapons watchdog to cover it up, an American weekly magazine reports.

Analyzing the leaks, The Nation reported on Friday that the OPCW had manipulated the original report on the alleged chemical attack in the city of Douma near the capital Damascus on April 7, 2018.

The U.S. and its allies were quick to blame the incident on the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Damascus, however, said that no chemical attack happened and that the incident was staged by foreign intelligence agencies to pressure the government in the face of army advances against foreign-backed terrorists.

One week after the Douma incident, the U.S., Britain and France launched a coordinated missile attack against sites and research facilities near Damascus and Homs with the purported goal of paralyzing the Syrian government's capability to produce chemicals.

In March 2019, the OPCW concluded in its final report that there are "reasonable grounds" to believe that a chemical

weapons attack occurred in Douma and that "the toxic chemical was likely molecular chlorine."

But, subsequent internal OPCW documents, including a trove published by WikiLeaks, revealed that the Douma investigators' initial report had reached different conclusions from their organization's published version.

According to the report, the leaks reveal that senior OPCW officials "reedited" the Douma investigators' original report, "removed or misrepresented" key facts and rewrote conclusions in a bid to support the allegation that a chlorine gas attack had occurred in Douma.

"Yet the team's initial report did not conclude that a chemical attack occurred, and left open the possibility that victims were killed in a 'non-chemical related' incident," it added.

The report also referred to a toxicology review which found that observed symptoms of the civilians in Douma, particularly the rapid onset of excessive frothing, as well as the concentration of victims filmed in the apartment building so close to fresh air, "were inconsistent with exposure to chlorine, and no other obvious candidate chemical causing the symptoms could be identified."

Protests hit Portland for 56th day; Trump plans 'surge' of agents

Christopher Columbus Statues Removed From 2 Chicago Parks

➔ 1 U.S. charges 18 Portland protesters

On Friday, U.S. authorities leveled federal charges against 18 protesters in Portland as Trump presses ahead with the deployment of federal troops to U.S. cities.

Five people were charged with suspicion of assaulting a federal officer, trespassing and creating a disturbance during the protest nights, and seven people were charged in connection with criminal conduct. Another six were charged over failing to comply with a lawful order.

The U.S. Department of Justice said all of those charged had been released and that their trials or other court appearances are pending as their cases are being investigated.

■ Trump sued over immigrants exclusion order

In a separate development on Friday, a coalition of 35 U.S. states, cities and counties sued Trump over his directive not to count undocumented immigrants when apportioning the 435 seats in the House of Representatives.

In the complaint filed in a federal court in New York City, the plaintiffs censured the U.S. president's plan as "unconstitutional" and stressed that everyone in the country must be counted regardless of their legal status.

The complaint said Trump's directive could hurt communities by deterring immigrants from responding to the census now under way. The move, as critics have said, is designed to favor Republicans since the Trump's plan could cause a few House seats to shift from Democratic-leaning states with large immigrant populations to Republican-leaning states.

■ Christopher Columbus Statues Removed From 2 Chicago Parks

Meanwhile, a statue of Christopher Columbus in downtown Chicago's Grant Park was taken down early Friday, a week after protesters trying to topple the monument to the Italian explorer clashed with police.

Crews used a large crane to remove the statue from its

pedestal as a small crowd gathered to watch. The crowd cheered and passing cars honked as the statue came down about 3 a.m. Several work trucks were seen in the area, but it was unclear where the statue would be taken.

The Associated Press sent an email Friday seeking comment from Mayor Lori Lightfoot's office.

Plans to remove the statue were first reported Thursday night by the Chicago Tribune and the removal followed hours of vocal confrontations between opponents and supporters of the statue. And on July 17, protesters had clashed with police, who used batons to beat people and made arrests after they say protesters targeted them with fireworks, rocks and other items.

"This statue coming down is because of the effort of Black and Indigenous activists who know the true history of Columbus and what he represents," Stefan Cuevas-Caizaguano, a resident watching the removal, told the Chicago Sun-Times.

Golmohammadi dedicates IPL title to Persepolis fans

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team head coach Yahya Golmohammadi dedicated their league triumph to the fans.

Persepolis claimed Iran Professional League (IPL) title Friday night for the fourth time in a row after beating Naft Masjed Solyman 2-1 in their away match.

With four matches to spare, the Reds clinched the title with 62 points, 17 points above Sepahan.

“Persepolis players sacrificed them-

selves to win the title. I want to dedicate the title to all fans and all former players who supported us,” Golmohammadi said.

“We faced the shortage of players due to the injury of our players but these players sacrificed themselves in this match and I am proud of what they did,” he added.

“We were motivated to keep winning the title for the fourth time in a row and made it happen,” the ex-Iran defender said.



Persepolis also set a record in IPL since it was quickest title wins in the history of the competition.

“I am very happy because of setting the new record. Also, I am so happy because it was Persepolis's first win against Masjed Solyman in the history of the Iran league,” he stated.

The competitions are being held behind the closed doors due to coronavirus outbreak and Golmohammadi says their fans were really missed.

“I wished our fans to attend the title-winning celebration and it's a pity that they were absent,” Golmohammadi concluded.

Parviz Mazloumi named Iran 19 team coach

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Parviz Mazloumi has been named as new head coach of Iran U19 football team on Friday.

The 65-year-old coach said he will start his job from Monday.

Since parting company with Esteghlal in 2016, Mazloumi has not worked in any team in Iran football.

Iran U19 football team have been without a coach since Sirous Pourmousavi stepped down from his role in early June.

As an experienced coach, Mazloumi has already served as coach at several Iranian teams such as Esteghlal, Mes Kerman, Aluminium, Sanat Naft and Iran B national team.

Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh, Hamid Estili and Alireza Mansourian were



candidates to lead Iran U19 team.

Iran will take part in the 2020 AFC U19 Championship in Uzbekistan in October, where the Persians are drawn in Group A along with Indonesia, Cambodia, and Uzbekistan.

Persepolis claim fourth successive IPL title

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team claimed Iran Professional League (IPL) title for the fourth time in a row on Friday.

With four matches to spare, the Reds clinched the title in Masjed Soleyman with 62 points, 17 points above Sepahan.

Persepolis defeated Naft Masjed Soleyman 2-1 at the Behnam Mohammadi Stadium.

Ali Alipour put the visiting team into the lead in the 39th minute and Mehdi Abdi made it 2-0 in the 58th minute.

Masjed Soleyman midfielder Hossein Ebrahimi halved the deficit in the 71st minute from the penalty spot.

It was quickest title wins in the history of IPL.

Persepolis started the 2019-20 IPL under stewardship of Gabriel Calderon but the Argentine left the Iranian giants



in January after financial problem with the team's officials.

Former Persepolis defender Yahya Golmohammadi was named as new head coach for his second stint and led them to win the title for the fourth successive time.

Manchester United in nearly-\$100 million game against Leicester

Manchester United, Chelsea and Leicester City would have likely -- to use the expression -- “bitten your hand off” to be in the position they are now in the English Premier League.

On the final day of the season, the three teams know a win Sunday would guarantee them a lucrative Champions League spot -- against the odds.

Indeed few might have predicted such a scenario, given Manchester United languished for much of the first half of the season, Chelsea dealt with a transfer ban and Leicester City isn't part of the traditional “Big six” despite its improbable title in 2016.

Only two of the three will qualify, since champion Liverpool and runner-up Manchester City have already sealed the first two berths.

Manchester United sits third on 63 points, the same as Chelsea and one more than Leicester.

And to make things even more interesting, Leicester hosts Manchester United on Sunday.

“We want to be in the Champions League and we would love to be able to do that,” Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers told reporters Friday, putting the pressure on United. “But when you are a club like Manchester United, or one of those super clubs, there is a need to be in the Champions League for many



reasons.

“That is pretty clear. For us we would want to be in it. We will give everything we can. If we fall short then we have still had a really good season.”

Chelsea meanwhile have a tough-looking home game against sixth place Wolves.

■ **Resurgence under Solskjaer**

Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has hardly had a smooth time managing the club he shone for as a striker, mostly as a substitute.

Improved results immediately followed when the Norwegian replaced Jose Mourinho last season but by season's end, his job appeared to be under threat as United dipped.

That carried over into this season and there were many who felt Solskjaer would be replaced in January after a 2-0 loss to arch-rival Liverpool was followed by a 2-0 loss at home to Burnley.

But buoyed by the arrival of Portuguese midfielder Bruno Fernandes, the Red Devils have thrived since the season restarted in June after it was halted by the coronavirus pandemic. They've won five and drawn three in the league to catch Leicester, which held an 11-point advantage in the middle of January.

Fernandes, Anthony Martial, Mason Greenwood and Marcus Rashford have made for a strong attacking quartet, while World Cup winner Paul Pogba has also returned and showed flashes of brilliance. Not as rosy for Solskjaer has been the form of longtime No. 1 goalkeeper David De Gea.

Not qualifying for the Champions League would see the pressure on Solskjaer increase once again, especially since missing out could cost the club a reported 70 million pounds (\$90 million).

(Source : CNN)

Tokhteh's time has come

The best underlying storyline in Iran's campaign in the past year is the transition of young players in the senior national team, among them is 19-year-old Amir Hossein Toukhteh, whose time has come after his successes in age-group competitions.

The middle blocker's coaches in the youth and junior teams deserved a chunk of credit for their fine work as Toukhteh was molded for success.

“I believe a player can be like raw clay and the coach like a potter which can mold the clay into a beautiful piece of art,” the 19-year-old said. “I listened to my coaches and trained following all their instructions, so I could earn my first age-group World Championship title.”

Toukhteh was just turning 16 when he made his debut in Naypyidaw, Myanmar at the 2017 Asian Boys' U19 Volleyball Championship, where Iran's fourth place finish secured a spot at the U19 World Championship in Bahrain that same year. The result was far better than expected as the Iranian team captured the world title for the second time since 2007 along with a special reward for the young middle blocker.

“The first tournament was the Asian Boys' U19 Volleyball Championship in Myanmar, where we finished fourth. That paved the way for me to work harder and win the U19 World Championship title in Bahrain. I was also selected as the Best Middle Blocker there.”

Igor Kolakovic, then coach of the senior men's national team, took notice of the young middle blocker's talent. The Montenegrin mentor gave the 17-year-old boy from Urmia a spot in the senior team at the 2018 FIVB Volleyball Nations League.

“The most memorable tournament with the senior men's team was when I played the VNL in Russia. We played against Brazil and I played my best game as a 17-year-old despite that loss against a powerhouse team.”

The young lad also saw action at the World Championship where he delivered a stellar performance, taking the place of injured middle blocker Mohammad Mousavi.

Last year, he returned to Bahrain for the U21 World Championship and his growing confidence helped his team overcome a rough start to still come out on top for their first world title in that age category. So what else is in store for the youngster?

“It is the desire of every athlete to climb all the peaks of success. After winning two (age-group) world championship titles, I would love to be in the Olympic Games.”

Toukhteh counts his teacher as his biggest influence, his mother as the one who he owed his success to, his coaches and teammates as his guides for improvement, and himself as his own idol.

“I really loved volleyball and chose to play because I was really interested in it. One of my teachers, Mr Adli, encouraged me to play volleyball when I was in primary school.

“When asked about what sets me apart from the other players, I would say who made me special instead of what made me special. I owe all my success to my mother. I appreciate the coaches who worked hard to teach me to this day, as well as the players who I look up to. I realized that I have become more distinctive because I have all of them in my life.



“I would dare say I am my own idol because I know Amir Hossein Toukhteh the most.”

He is young but he has wisdom beyond his years. He is confident and strong like an adult, but never deprived of his enjoyment of his youth.

“One of the biggest challenges of an athlete is to stay away from their family and not being able to find the opportunity to study well. There were many things that motivated me along the way, but it was my family who pushed me to be self-confident and have belief in my abilities.

“I am serious and very much disciplined as an athlete and as a person. I always do sports, but the sports I like aside from volleyball are billiards, swimming and table tennis.”

(Source : Asianvolleyball.net)

Ali Daei among the Asian legends with successful home return

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Ali Daei, the former player of Iran national team, has been chosen by the AFC website, as one of the Asian football legends who have returned to their countries after years of playing abroad.

The return of the prodigal son. It is a footballing plot point nearly as old as the game itself, with the reappearance of a long-departed local hero possessing a special ability to stir the passions of even the most jaded of fans.



Asia has had no shortage of these storylines, with a range of pioneering football exports and national team icons going back to where it all started to cap off their careers.

To coincide with FC Seoul's signing of former Korea Republic captain Ki Sung-yueng, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) website has looked at eight local heroes who returned and thrived, after years abroad.

The story of Ali Daei goes as following by the AFC: “One of the biggest names of all when it comes to Asian football, Ali Daei was already 27 when he departed Persepolis for Qatari outfit Al Sadd, but he was only a fraction of the way to establishing the legendary statistics he is known for today.

Daei left the Iranian club game with 21 international goals to his name. When he returned seven years later, that tally had ballooned to 81, with the prolific striker also winning a Bundesliga title with Bayern Munich in the intervening years.

He scored 16 league goals in his return season with Persepolis, then bagged 35 goals in all competitions in two seasons with Saba Battery, before scoring 10 times to help his final club Saipa win the Iran Pro League title as a 38-year-old in 2007.

Daei also added another 28 international goals during his four-season farewell to Iranian football, finishing with a world record 109, and a reputation as one of the global game's great scorers.”

Younis Mahmoud (Iraq), Roda Antar (Lebanon), Tim Cahill (Australia), Igor Shkvyrin (Uzbekistan), Zheng Zhi (China), Shunsuke Nakamura (Japan), Sun Jihai (China), are among the other Asian football heroes mentioned by the AFC.

Vouria Ghafouri chosen the best right-back for ACL2018 Team

Esteghlal defender Vouria Ghafouri has been voted as the best right-back for all-star XI in 2018 AFC Champions League.

Ghafouri appeared in all 10 of Esteghlal's games as the Tehran giant reached the quarter-finals for only the second time. The full-back's energy down the right was a constant threat to opposition defenses while he also weighed in with two goals, including a match-winning strike against Al Hilal.

In a poll conducted by the-afc.com, 92 percent of participants voted for the Iranian right-back.

Ghafouri vied with Japanese Koki Anzai, Lee Yong from South Korea and Zhang Linpeng from China.

(Source: the-afc)

Sydney FC clinch Premiers Plate

Sydney FC were confirmed as A-League Premiers after their closest challengers Wellington Phoenix drew 1-1 against a revitalised Adelaide United on Saturday.

Wellington now trail the runaway leaders by 11 points with only three games left to play after substitute Ulises Davila saw his 88th-minute penalty saved by in-form Reds gloveman Paul Izzo at Bankwest Stadium.

Jaushua Sotirio levelled five minutes after Kristian Opseth had put Adelaide ahead on the hour mark and, although the draw lifts Phoenix ahead of Melbourne City into second place, the Sky Blues cannot be caught in the race for the Premiers Plate.

Talay rung the changes, bringing in six fresh faces from the midweek win against Perth Glory, and Carl Veart's side had the better of a closely-contested first half with Opseth landing the only attempt on target with a bullet header that forced a fingertip save from Stefan Marinovic as half-time approached.

Mexican playmaker Davila sparked Wellington into life when he came off the bench at half-time but Opseth dented the 'Nix's chances when the Norwegian forward ghosted between two defenders to convert Ben Halloran's cross on the hour.

Sotirio hit back on 65 minutes and the Kiwi club piled forward in the closing stages, as Davila saw his curling strike parried on to the crossbar by Izzo. The Aussie 'keeper would not be beaten again as a late spot-kick save earned a point for the Reds, who tighten their grip on sixth place with their first draw in 23 matches this campaign.

(Source: Sydney FC)

Spain and Barcelona great Xavi tests positive for COVID-19

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — Former Spain and Barcelona midfielder Xavi Hernandez has tested positive for the coronavirus.

The 40-year-old Xavi, now the coach of Qatari club Al-Sadd, said Saturday that he was tested according to the Qatar league protocol and that the latest test showed he had contracted COVID-19.

“Fortunately, I'm feeling OK, but I will be isolated until I am given the all-clear. When the health services allow it, I will be very eager to return to my daily routine and to work,” Xavi said on Instagram.

Al-Sadd announced on its website that Xavi would not be joining the rest of the team for its league game against Al-Khor later Saturday.

It is third-place Al-Sadd's first game since the league was suspended in March due to the pandemic. The league resumed on Friday.

Qatar has recorded 109,036 positive cases and attributed 164 deaths to the virus, according to Johns Hopkins University.

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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» 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
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One can purchase the world with contentment, and live in happiness with benevolence.

Imam Ali (AS)

Iranian, American musicians team up to perform opera in pandemic

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — A number of Iranian and American musicians have teamed up to perform an opera during the pandemic to keep the solidarity of the two nations in these hard days of battling with the coronavirus.

The North American Iranian Friendship Association in Washington has invited a number of Iranian and American musicians to perform the last two parts of Serse, an opera series in three acts by George Frideric Handel, the German-born English composer of the late Baroque era.

"The invitation was warmly received by the musicians of the two countries, leading to the establishment of the Solidarity Chamber Orchestra with 19 musicians in Tehran in collaboration with Iran's Rudaki Foundation," Vahid Abideh, founder and the CEO of the association, has told the Persian service of IRNA. "The orchestra has performed the music, which was recorded at the Rudaki Hall in Tehran, observing the health protocols and social distancing," he added.

"Afterwards, the video of the performance was sent to the U.S. where seven top American singers joined to sing and perform the opera under the supervision of the IN Series, a company for innovative opera theater in Washington," Abideh explained.

"A video of the work is under final production and will soon be released after the final editing," he said.

"After the rapid spread of coronavirus in the world, many countries have been battling with this new virus, and have tolerated great social and human damages. That is why paying due attention to unity and solidarity between people of the countries is felt more now than at any other time," Abideh said.

Abideh called the collaboration between Iran and North America very important and said, "The opera has been produced by the North American Iranian Friendship Association in collaboration with Iran's Rudaki Foundation."

Iranian institute publishes Braille books by top children's writers

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) has published a Braille version of a selection of nine books.

The collection includes poetry collections and stories written by Iranian and world children's book writers.

Two collections of poetry by Khatun Hosseini from Iran and Akiko Kageyama from Japan are among the books.



This photo shows the front covers of a collection of Braille books published by Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults.

The poetry collection "An Umbrella of Petals" by Afsaneh Shabannejad, "Yellow Crow" by Nasser Keshavarz and "Once There Was a Dog, There Was a Jungle" by Mostafa Rahmandoust are also included.

"The Hunger of the Little Man" by Pierre Delye, "God's Cookies" by Claire Joubert and "Tickle" by Sepideh Khalili are seen in the collection.

Also included is "Carriage-Riding Sun" by Hossein Bokai. The young adults can also enjoy "In the Silence of Sands" by Kamal Shafiei, "Goodbye on Autumn Street" by Maryam Eslami and "I Am Less a Man and More a Sparrow" by Habib Nazaari.

The IIDCYA has released many audiobooks over the past year and hopes to publish books for children with low visual acuity and low hearing ability.

Mahmudi brothers to make series on coronavirus for IRI release

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Tehran-based Afghan brothers Jamshid and Navid Mahmudi will be making a drama series on coronavirus, which will be released by Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB).

The series has been titled "Empathizer", the director Of IRIB studio Sima Films, Behrang Malek-Mohammadi, announced on Saturday. Malek-Mohammadi added that the filmmaking crew has had several meetings with the IRIB Health Channel to better review the events and the aftermath of the new virus.

He said that the story of the series is set in a hospital and added, "The series narrates three parallel stories: one is about a nurse, one is about the son of a businessman, and one is about a young team of researchers."

"The characters enter the hospital based on a series of events, but their attitudes towards different issues change while in the hospital, leading to changes in their decisions in their lives," he explained.

He noted that the series will be reflecting the current condition of the society in the hard coronavirus days.

"After the spread of coronavirus in the country, we have witnessed a big sacrifice



Tehran-based Afghan brothers Jamshid and Navid Mahmudi in an undated photo.

by the healthcare staff, and the series will make its utmost efforts to portray part of their sacrifices over the past months," he said.

"The sympathy of people to help the needy people during the coronavirus days, and the charity teams producing face masks for health workers combatting the coronavirus observed in every corner of the city are among the main motivations for the crew to make this series," he concluded.

The 15-episode series will be aired during winter.

"A Few Cubic Meters of Love" was the Mahmudi brothers' first film, which was selected for screening in the official competition section of the Fajr Film Festival in 2014.

Their drama "To Die in the Pure Water" also competed in the official competition of the 38th edition of the festival in January 2020.

Their "Rona, Azim's Mother" won the Ecumenical Film Prize at the 68th International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg in November 2019.

The film also received the Cultural Diversity Award under the Patronage of UNESCO at the 13th Asia Pacific Screen Awards in Brisbane, Australia also in November 2019.

Sofia hosts Iranian Film Week



Hamed Behdad acts in a scene from Reza Mirkarimi's drama "The Castle of Dreams".

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Bulgarian capital of Sofia is playing host to the Iranian Film Week, which opened on Friday evening.

The Embassy of Iran is organizing the weeklong festival in collaboration with the Sofia Middle East & North African Region (MENAR) Film Festival, the Iranian Cultural Center in Sofia announced on Saturday.

Seven acclaimed movies by Iranian filmmakers have been selected to be screened at Dom na Kinoto Cinema House during the week.

A highlight of the lineup is the drama "The Castle of Dreams" by Reza Mirkarimi. It is about two young children whose mother has just died, and their father, Jalal, after long years of absence, returns to sort things out, but he does not want to take the children with him.

Director Soheil Movaffaq's comedy "Pastarioni" will also be screened. It tells the story of an intense rivalry between a luxury Italian restaurant and a small family restaurant in Tehran, which leads them to unite.

Also among the selected films is Hooman Seyyedi's drama "Sheeple" about brothers Shakur and Shahin, two lowlifes who run a crystal meth laboratory hidden in Tehran.

They do care about the honor of their family, however. When a video of their sister revealing her hair ends up on the internet, the brothers become the protagonists of some strange incidents.

Roqayeh Tavakkoli's "Motherhood", which is about Nava who tries to convince her sister to get back with her husband, while her own fiancé is cheating on her, will also be screened.

The lineup also includes "Season of Narges" by Negar Azarbayjani, "316" Peyman Haqqani and "The Five-Star" by Mahshid Afsharzadeh.

Five films from Iran were screened in various sections of the Sofia MENAR Film Festival, which was held from January 14 to 30.

"The Castle of Dreams" and "Pastarioni" were among the films. "Weightlessness" by Mehdi Fardqaderi, "Domino" by Laleh Barzegar and "The Underwater Cypress" by Mohammad-Ali Bashe-Ahangar were also competing in the event.

Over 30 animations under production at IIDCYA

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) announced on Saturday that it is producing 31 animated films in a new project.

"Several veteran filmmakers along with a number of promising young animators have commenced making the collection, which will be released in the next few months," an IIDCYA deputy director Mohammadreza Karimi said in a press release.

"The Eleventh Step" by Maryam Kashkulinia is one of the animations being produced in this project. It is based on children's writer Susan Taqdis's acclaimed story "The Eleventh Step". The story is about a lion cub that never dared to take one more step toward its freedom when the zookeeper forgot to lock its cage's door.

"The Eleventh Step" has been screened in

several international events, including the Supertoon International Animation Festival in Croatia and the Annecy International Animated Film Festival in France.

Among the veteran animators are also Mahin Javaherian with "By What?", Alireza Golpayegani with "My Little Garden's Friend" and Abdollah Alimorad with "The Successor".

In addition, "Uninvited Guests" by Ravanbakhsh Sadeqi, "I Wish I Had a Brother" by Nahid Shamsdoost, "Three Flowerpots" by Hossein Saafi, "The Bird, the Little Boy and the Train" by Rashin Kheirieh and "Once Upon a Time a Dragon" by Mohammad-Ali Soleimanzadeh are the other old-timers working on this project.

"The Crab" is one of the movies made by young animators. Directed by Shiva Sadeq-Asadi, it is contending for the Golden Goblet Award in the short film section of the 23rd



"The Eleventh Step" by director Maryam Kashkulinia.

Shanghai International Film Festival, which opened in the Chinese metropolis on Saturday.

The short animation tells the story of a shy schoolboy who is interested in performing in a play with his school's theater troupe.

But the only part offered to him is to play the role of a crab.

The movies by young filmmakers also include "The Lovely Sky" by Amir-Hossein Mehran, "Hush, We Have a Plan" by Fatemeh Gudarzi, "Bang Bang" by Lida Fazli, "The Happiest Chair of the World" by Mohammad Moqaddam, "A Gift for You" by Samaneh Asadi, "A City Built with Gold" by Ahmad Soflaji and "Poison Sprayer" by Farnush Abedi.

Most of the animated films will be made based on books by Iranian writers published by the IIDCYA.

The animators are trying to complete their works in time to screen their movies at the 12th Tehran International Animation Festival, which is organized by the IIDCYA every year in March. However, it may be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The O. Henry Prize Stories 2018" appears in Iranian bookstores

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** — "The O. Henry Prize Stories 2018" compiled by Laura Furman has recently been published in Persian by Neyestan Publications in Tehran.

The book has been translated into Persian by Ali Famian under the title of one of the stories, "Lucky Dragon".

"The O. Henry Prize Stories 2018" contains twenty prize-winning stories chosen from thousands published in literary magazines over the previous year.

The winning stories come from a mix of established writers and emerging voices, and are uniformly breathtaking.

They are accompanied by essays from the eminent jurors on their favorites, observations from the winning writers on what inspired their stories, and an extensive resource list of magazines that publish short fiction.

"The Tomb of Wrestling" by Jo Ann Beard, "Counterblast"

by Marjorie Celona, "Nayla" by Youmna Chlala, "Lucky Dragon" by Viet Dinh, "Stop 'n' Go" by Michael Parker, "Past Perfect Continuous" by Dounia Choukri, "Inversion of Marcia" by Thomas Bolt and "Nights in Logar" by Jamil Jan Kochai are some of the books.

Also included are "How We Eat" by Mark Jude Poirier, "Deaf and Blind" by Lara Vapnyar, "Why Were They Throwing Bricks?," by Jenny Zhang, "An Amount of Discretion" by Lauren Alwan and "Queen Elizabeth" by Brad Felver.

Furman is the winner of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts for her fiction.

As the author of several books, including the story collection "The Mother Who Stayed", she taught writing for many years at the University of Texas at Austin. She lives in Central Texas.



Front cover of the Persian version of Laura Furman's collection "The O. Henry Prize Stories 2018".

New Persian translation of Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov" published

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** — A new Persian translation of Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov" Asghar Rastegar has come out in Tehran.

Negah is the publisher of the novel, which has been rendered into several other Persian translators.

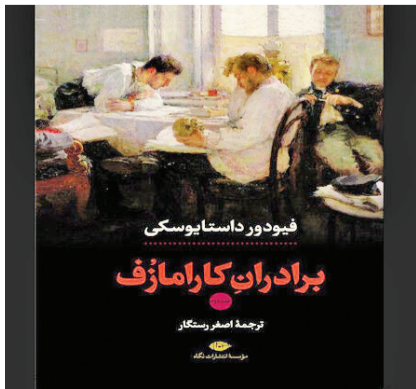
"The Brothers Karamazov" is a murder mystery, a courtroom drama, and an exploration of rivalry in a series of triangular love affairs involving the "wicked and sentimental" Fyodor

Pavlovich Karamazov and his three sons — the impulsive and sensual Dmitri; the coldly rational Ivan; and the healthy, red-cheeked young novice Alyosha. Through the gripping events of their story, Dostoevsky portrays the whole of Russian life, is social and spiritual striving, in what was both the golden age and a tragic turning point in Russian culture.

An award-winning English translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky remains

true to the verbal inventiveness of Dostoevsky's prose, preserving the multiple voices, the humor, and the surprising modernity of the original. It is an achievement worthy of Dostoevsky's last and greatest novel.

Dostoevsky spent nearly two years writing "The Brothers Karamazov", which was published as a serial in The Russian Messenger from January 1879 to November 1880. Dostoevsky died less than four months after its publication.



Front cover of a new Persian translation of Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov" Asghar Rastegar.