

Key Biden adviser slams 'sheer hypocrisy' to extend Iran arms embargo **2**

Railway fleet receives 56 new domestically-made wagons, locomotives **4**

Iran denies Andrea Stramaccioni link **11**

Santur virtuoso Puya Sarai remakes Shajarian's "Rabbana" **12**



Iran to build houses on Persian Gulf islands

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ARTICLE
Mahdi Garshasbi
Tehran Times journalist

Persian Gulf, the eternal heritage of ancient Iran

Tenth of the second Iranian calendar month Ordibehesht (April 29) marks the National Persian Gulf Day, which is the anniversary of the victory over Portuguese troops during a war in the Persian Gulf in 1622.

The occasion commemorates the exit of colonial and foreign forces from the strategic waterway.

The Persian Gulf and its equivalent in different languages has been used continuously since 2,500 years ago in all languages and all over the world, especially in the Arab world.

Geography, as the most ancient human knowledge is an applied science which has different aspects. It studies the reciprocal relation of man and nature and provides the results to the users in the form of documents in writing, books and maps.

The name of a feature cannot be observed on the land like the feature itself. Thus, by mentioning the case on maps, Atlases, and books, it will be protected during different eras as a part of historical, cultural identity and saved as human's heritage.

For the same reason, any change, destruction, or alteration of the names registered in historical deeds and maps is like the destruction of ancient works and is considered as an improper action.

The Persian Gulf is located in the southwest of the Asian Continent on the south side of the vast country of Iran, with a length of 1,259 kilometers.

During all the centuries, and at least during the past 2,500 years, i.e. as of the time of the powerful Pars Empire there has never been seen such a unanimity in the West Asia among writers and historians on one name during history, according to the Persian Gulf Studies Center.

■ Persian Gulf in historical documents

No written deed has remained since the era before the Pars Empire, but in the oral history and culture, the Iranians have called the southern waters: Jam Sea, Iran Sea, Pars Sea.

In the travel account of Pythagoras, several chapters are related to description of his travels accompanied by Darioush, a king of Achaemenid, to Shoush and Perspolis, and the area is described. **->9**

JCPOA parties unlikely to accept U.S. argument to extend arms embargo on Iran: Pillar

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Paul Pillar, who was CIA intelligence analyst for 28 years, says the Trump administration is arguing that it is still a party to the JCPOA even though it has grossly violated its obligations under the agreement.

Pillar says, "Indeed, previous declarations by the administration have been nothing short of a complete renunciation of the JCPOA. Other parties to the agreement, especially Russia and China, are unlikely to accept the U.S. argument."

"Other members of the Council realize that it was the United States under the Trump administration that violated the JCPOA and went

directly against Security Council Resolution 2231, which is the formal international endorsement of the JCPOA," Pillar tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

Following is the text of the interview:

■ The United States is working to extend arms sanctions on Iran in the UN Security Council. Given that the United States has violated and withdrawn from the JCPOA, can it legally make such a request?

A: As a permanent member of the Security Council, the United States can make requests for Council action on all sorts of things. The legality of the request is not really the issue.

Other members of the Council realize that it was the United States under the Trump administration that violated the JCPOA and went

directly against Security Council Resolution 2231, which is the formal international endorsement of the JCPOA. For that and other reasons, the Trump administration can expect substantial resistance to its attempt to extend the arms embargo.

■ The United States, despite violating the JCPOA, is set to establish itself as a participant in the agreement. Why is the United States looking for this?

A: The Trump administration has been using every means possible to put every form of pressure it can on Iran. It argues that it still should be considered a participant in the JCPOA so that it can use the "snapback" mechanism the agreement established to restore sanctions on Iran that had previously been lifted. **->2**

Iranian windmills one step closer to UNESCO status

TEHRAN — Iran is further moving towards inscribing its ancient windmills on the UNESCO World Heritage list as the country has recently completed their documentation as a preliminary stage.

The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts has almost completed preparations for a chain of ancient vertical-axis windmills for possibly becoming a UNESCO World Heritage. Vertical-axis windmills, which are locally known as "Asbads" can be found in Sistan-Baluchestan, South Khorasan, and Khorasan Razavi provinces, southeast, south, and northeast of the country, respectively.

"[A select of] Asbads that are scattered in Nashtifan region of Khaf county [in Razavi Khorasan province] has been documented and mapped for being inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage list," CHTN quote Mohammad Rokni,

the director of Asbad cultural heritage sites of Iran, as saying on Tuesday.

The magnificent collection is composed of 30 Asbads located in the historical core of Khaf county, the official said.

"Documentation and mapping work has been carried out by a group of six people specializing in mapping and restoration of historical buildings and structures."

"Documentation and mapping of Khaf Asbads include various architectural plans, cross-section geometry, and perspectives of 30 Asbad devices, their photogrammetric photographs, their ownership documents, and determining proper points for the mapping projects," Rokni explained.

The official also reminded: "All the documenting and mapping stages have been carried out based on the UNESCO standards and criteria."



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Briefing on the windmills and their stances, the official noted there are 107 Asbads within Khaf county, of which 36 located in Nashtifan, and six of them are still operational producing flour.

Iran plans to register a wide collection of its Asbads that are located in the three eastern provinces.

Asbad used to be a smart technique to grind grains. It also bears testimony to the human being's adaption with nature by transforming environmental obstacles into opportunities.

"Asbad is a smart technique to grind grains, a technique which goes back to ancient times when the people living in the eastern parts of Iran, in an attempt to adapt themselves with the nature and transform environmental obstacles into opportunities, managed to invent it," according to UNESCO website. **->8**

Precipitation brings Hamoun wetland back to life

After two decades of dryness, enough rains have finally come to bring Hamoun wetland back to life in southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan, reviving agriculture in the region as well.

The Hamoun Biosphere Reserve includes both terrestrial and wetland ecosystems encompassing a total of seven habitat types, including desert and semi-desert areas, as well as Hamoun Lake, with its marshlands and watersheds. The three wetlands of the biosphere reserve are the most important in the region. The area is also a hotspot for migratory birds (183 species) and home to 30 mammal species and 55 plant species.

Iranian scientist contracts coronavirus in U.S. jail

TEHRAN — An Iranian scientist imprisoned in the United States has contracted the novel coronavirus, according to his family and attorneys.

Dr. Sirous Asgari, who has been pleading for weeks to be released from a U.S. immigration jail due to health problems, is in an isolation cell inside an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) jail in Louisiana.

Asgari's lawyers learned on Tuesday

that his COVID-19 test was positive, and in a phone call with The Guardian, Asgari had a bad cough and said he had had a fever for days.

He and his family are calling for his release to a medical facility where he can receive proper care.

"It makes sense to send me to the hospital as soon as possible. I don't trust them at all," the 59-year-old said on Tuesday amid repeated coughing fits. **->3**

Bank loans to economic sectors up 26% in a year

TEHRAN — Iranian banking system has paid 9.749 quadrillion rials (over \$232 billion) of facilities to domestic economic sectors in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19), registering a 26-percent rise from its preceding year, IRNA reported.

According to the data provided by Central Bank of Iran (CBI), working

capital loans paid to different economic sectors were above 5.261 quadrillion rials (about \$125.26 billion) accounting for 54 percent of the total provided facilities in the said period.

As reported, the total working capital loans provided in the mentioned period increased by 21.8 percent compared to the figure for the preceding year 1397. **->4**

Coronavirus: grave of Parthian warrior accidentally unearthed in Iran

TEHRAN — An ancient tomb chamber has recently been discovered in a graveyard near Sari, northern Iran, as an excavator was digging down quite deep to entomb a coronavirus victim, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Excavation at the grave yielded remains of a human skeleton, vestiges of a pottery vessel, an iron dagger, a quiver, and a piece of iron object, which is believed to be [piece of] a weaponry.

"Considering the type of construction of

the dagger and a three-sided arrow found in the grave, it seems that it belongs to the Parthian soldier," the news agency quoted an expert as saying.

Two years ago, a necklace and a bronze ring were discovered in the cemetery, which dates back to about 3,500 to 5,000 years ago, the report added.

The Parthian Empire, also known as the Arsacid Empire, was a major Iranian political and cultural power in ancient Iran. **->8**

ARTICLE
Morteza Rahmani
Journalist

Persian Gulf: From rich history to security depth

Iran is celebrating the Persian Gulf National Day, which marks the anniversary of the expulsion of colonial and foreign forces from the strategic water body in 1622.

The 10th day of Ordibehesht — the second month on the Iranian calendar, which fell on April 29 this year — has been designated as the Persian Gulf National Day to commemorate not only the historical victory of the Iranian forces against the trespassers in the southern waters but also to remind all that the true name of the Persian Gulf will remain so forever.

The Persian Gulf has always been a source of pride and honor for Iranians. For thousands of years, people of Iran have lived alongside the Persian Gulf and have enjoyed its endless benefits.

In addition to having vast resources of energy and economic significance, the Persian Gulf has an ancient and unique history and culture that can be seen in the people who lived by it.

The rare cultural and artistic identity of the neighboring regions of the Persian Gulf is a category that entails a true strive to preserve and promote until it passes on this ancient culture to the next generations.

■ History

The southern Iranian gulf has been referred by historians and ancient texts as "Persian" since the Achaemenid Empire was established (550 BC) in what is now modern-day Iran.

According to the book "Documents on the Persian Gulf's Name, the Eternal Heritage of Ancient Time," the term Persian Gulf and its equivalents have been used continuously since earlier than 400 BC in all languages, especially in the Arabic language.

On almost all maps printed before 1960, and in most modern international treaties, documents and maps, this body of water is known by the name "Persian Gulf."

Persia is the historic name for Iran. However, since the mid-19th century, some Arab-speaking countries, along with their western allies, have been trying to change the historical name of the Persian Gulf in the mass media but Iran has attributed such efforts as politically motivated which will be of no avail. **->7**

All littoral states tasked to preserve Persian Gulf heritage: ambassador

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Mohammad Ali Hosseini, the Iranian ambassador to Pakistan, has said that all countries bordering the Persian Gulf are responsible to preserve the historical heritage of this strategic waterway.

"The Persian Gulf is a symbol of civilization, culture and history that connect the nations of the region. Therefore, now all the countries in the region have a responsibility to preserve the historical heritage of this region in the same historical and original way," he wrote in an article titled "Persian Gulf: Yesterday, today and tomorrow".



Following is an excerpt of the article published by the Pakistani newspaper The Nation:

The Persian Gulf is an important and strategic historical gulf. Historically, the shores of the gulf and the rivers that flowed into it have been the site of the first human civilisations. By studying the history of the Persian Gulf, you can go to sea with ancient fishermen; hunt pearls from Qeshm Island, go to Mesopotamia and dig out the ancient inscriptions of Cyrus; listen to historical stories of the atrocities committed by

Portuguese and British colonialists on the island of Hormuz, and hear the story of the outbreak of bloody wars, including Iraq's imposed war on Iran and the so-called Persian Gulf War.

So, for Iranians, the Persian Gulf is not just a sea, but part of history, identity and national heritage. This gulf is the ancestral home of the Iranians and they will not let foreigners to log it without permission. But beyond Iran, the Persian Gulf is a symbol of civilisation, culture and history that connect the nations of the region. Therefore, now all the countries in the region have a responsibility to preserve the historical heritage of this region in the same historical and original way. These countries are not the same in terms of the history of creation and civilisation. Some civilisations date back more than 7,000 years, while others do not exceed a few decades; however, the historical character, originality and dignity of each country requires that it be proud of its resources and not be greedy about the cultural, geographical and identity resources of others. No country is allowed to create a false identity for itself by distorting history, overturning the facts and stealing the cultural heritage of others.

The same importance of identical and strategic importance of the Persian Gulf has caused some racist individuals and organisations to use fake names for this gulf in the last few decades in order to be honoured by attributing it to them. But researchers, lawyers, historians and lovers of the Persian Gulf have prevented this with the help of the United Nations. All ancient geographical documents and maps in different languages such as Persian, Arabic, Spanish, etc. have referred to that gulf as the "Persian Gulf". Thus, the distortion of its name is nothing but the blatant denial of a historical truth. The United Nations, citing ancient maps and texts, has been emphasizing the name of the Persian Gulf since 1990 with the issuance of various resolutions and statements. Also, in October 2018, the World Intellectual Property Organization registered the name of the Persian Gulf in an official document. Based on these documents, which stem from international law, no individual, government or organization can call the Persian Gulf by using any other title.

Pakistan PM condemns U.S. sanctions on Iran

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday condemned the United States' sanctions on Iran when the world is fighting the coronavirus pandemic.



"I consider myself duty bound to support Iran against the illegal acts of the United States," Khan said in a phone conversation with President Hassan Rouhani.

Khan also attached great importance to expansion of economic relations.

Rouhani praised Pakistan's support and called for expansion of ties.

The Iranian and Pakistani officials also condemned any discrimination and pressure against Muslims.

Rouhani said on Monday that the United States' sanctions are against the fundamental human rights.

"Illegal opposition, when all the countries in the world are fighting the coronavirus, can be dangerous," he said in a phone conversation with Indonesian President Joko Widodo.

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

On March 31, a UN human rights expert called for lifting international sanctions against countries ranging from Iran to North Korea and Venezuela in coronavirus crisis, according to Reuters.

"The continued imposition of crippling economic sanctions on Syria, Venezuela, Iran, Cuba, and, to a lesser degree, Zimbabwe, to name the most prominent instances, severely undermines the ordinary citizens' fundamental right to sufficient and adequate food," Hilal Elver, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, said in a statement.

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

Guterres said sanctions are heightening the health risks for millions of people and weakening the global effort to contain the spread of the new coronavirus, Foreign Policy reported.

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

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

Rouhani: It is Persian Gulf not New York Gulf

POLITICAL TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that the United States must know that the waterway in the region is the Persian Gulf and not the New York or Washington Gulf.

"They must understand the situation by the name of the place and the people who have protected it for thousands of years and stop hatching plots against the Iranian people," Rouhani said in a cabinet meeting as Iran marked the Persian Gulf Day.

He said, "The United States has witnessed the Iranian people's success in all areas and also in protecting the Persian Gulf waterway. Our soldiers in armed forces, the Guards [the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps], Basij, Army and police forces have always protected and will protect the Persian Gulf."

Rouhani also described the Persian Gulf as very "important" and "sensitive" region. "The Persian Gulf belongs to the Iranian nation and has always been and will be the Persian Gulf," the president noted.

Talking in a ceremony marking the Persian Gulf Day on Wednesday, IRGC Navy chief Alireza Tangsiri said nobody can use a bogus name for the Persian Gulf, a reference to the U.S. State Department which recently used the false name "Arabian Gulf" for the waterway.

Tangsiri also said the Leader of the Islamic Revolution has a great interest in the



Persian Gulf.

The rear admiral proposed that countries bordering the strategic waterway can expel foreign forces from the region.

The chief of the Iranian Army Command and General Staff College (DAFOOS) said on Monday that the United States is an "uninvited guest" in the Persian Gulf region.

"The Persian Gulf is like a big old house which has eight doors and independent rooms and also a yard which is shared by this eight neighbors. If a guest comes, he has to leave after a while, because a guest should not stay permanently," General Hossein Valivand told

reporters on the sidelines of a ceremony held to mark the national day of the Persian Gulf. The top military officer noted that Iran wants the U.S. and all other foreign forces to leave the Persian Gulf region.

"We guarantee security of the Persian Gulf by the Army's Navy and the Guards [the IRGC] and also by cooperation with other neighbors and the countries we have formed military coalition with," he said.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on April 20 that foreign forces' presence in the region is the source of insecurity, instability and tension.

"We consider presence of the foreign forces, especially forces of the United States, in the region a source of tension, instability and illegitimacy. Their presence is illegal and illegitimate. This is our region and our armed forces must be able to patrol without hurdle," he said in a press conference held through video conference.

He said, "This issue led to our forces' response. It has been for thousands of years that Iran is in this region and the regional security must be provided by the regional countries, especially Oman which is in the Strait of Hormuz region."

He urged foreign forces to leave the region and not make Iran give them warning.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote on his Twitter page on April 23 that "US forces have no business 7,000 miles away from home, provoking our sailors off our OWN Persian Gulf shores."

It came after U.S. President Donald Trump said he had ordered the U.S. Navy to destroy Iranian boats "if they harass" U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf.

"I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea," Trump said in a tweet on April 22.

The IRGC has rejected U.S. description of the Iranian boats' behavior in the Persian Gulf, saying such a depiction is like "Hollywood scenarios".

Key Biden adviser slams 'sheer hypocrisy' of White House to extend Iran arms embargo

By staff and agency

Tony Blinken, the Joe Biden campaign's chief foreign policy adviser, has slammed the Donald Trump administration's "sheer hypocrisy" for relying on a mechanism in the 2015 nuclear deal to reinstate multilateral sanctions on Iran should the United Nations fail to extend an arms embargo on Tehran.

"It's hard not to almost admire the sheer hypocrisy of the action that the administration is trying to take in seeking to, in effect, force countries at the Security Council to find a way to extend the arms embargo on Iran," Al-Monitor quoted Blinken as saying on Tuesday on a virtual panel hosted by the Jewish Democratic Council of America.

"They're trying to use this provision in the [nuclear deal] to require the extension of the arms embargo. The only problem is we are no longer participating in the agreement," Blinken said. In a report on Sunday, The New York Times said Pompeo is preparing a legal argument that the United States remains a participant in the Iran nuclear accord that President Trump has renounced, part of an intricate strategy to pressure the United Nations Security Council to extend an arms embargo on Tehran or see far more stringent sanctions reimposed on the country.

"In an effort to force the issue, Mr. Pompeo has approved a plan, bound to be opposed by many of Washington's European allies, under which the United States would, in essence, claim it legally remains a 'participant state' in the nuclear accord



that Mr. Trump has denounced — but only for the purposes of invoking a 'snapback' that would restore the UN sanctions on Iran that were in place before the accord," The Times said.

Trump unilaterally quit the nuclear deal in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions in history on Iran as part of his administration's "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran. By its exit from the nuclear accord, the U.S. flagrantly violated UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that approved the pact.

In a report published by Reuters on Tuesday, it was also said that the United States will face a tough, messy battle if it uses a threat to trigger a return of all UN sanctions on Iran as leverage to get the 15-member Security Council to extend and strengthen an arms embargo on Tehran, diplomats said.

Washington has shared its strategy, confirmed by a U.S. official speaking on condition of anonymity, with Britain, France and Germany, who are council members and parties to the 2015 deal between Iran and world powers.

Under that deal, a UN arms embargo on Iran is due to expire in October. A U.S.-drafted resolution to extend the embargo has been given to Britain, France and Germany, the U.S. official confirmed, but UN diplomats said it has not been shared with the remaining 11 council members, including Russia and China.

"It will be dead on arrival," predicted a Security Council diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A resolution needs nine votes in favor and no vetoes by Russia, China, the United States, Britain or France to be adopted. Diplomats said the United States would likely struggle to get Russia and China to allow an arms embargo extension.

Russia and China are also parties to the Iran nuclear deal.

"It's very difficult to present yourself as a compliance watcher of a resolution you decided to pull out of," said a European diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Either you're in or either you're out."

It is a move likely to be challenged, diplomats said.

"It's going to be messy from a Security Council standpoint because, regardless of what (Britain, Germany and France) think, Russia and China are not going to sign up to that legal interpretation," said a European official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Zarif discusses Afghan developments with Abdullah, Ghani

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has held separate phone conversations with Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah to discuss the latest developments in Afghanistan.

The talks were in line with Iran's efforts to help Kabul start inter-Afghan talks, the Foreign Ministry website reported on Wednesday.

In a phone conversation on Saturday, Zarif and Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, the Qatari foreign minister, highlighted the importance of an inclusive government in Afghanistan.

The officials discussed the latest developments in Afghanistan and Iran's efforts for a political agreement and formation of an inclusive government in the country.

Afghanistan has been facing a political deadlock since last September's presidential elections. The Election Commission has declared Ghani as the winner but Abdullah has also proclaimed himself winner.

According to Tolo News, sources close to Abdullah said that he has made his final decisions about ending the political crisis and that he is preparing the final draft of his plan.

The sources added that Abdullah is seeking a decision-making leadership role in the peace process, but he wants all decisions regarding peace to be made collectively within the reconciliation



council.

Abdullah's aides will hold their final discussions to finalize Abdullah's proposed plan, according to sources.

Officials from the Presidential Palace and the Sapidar Palace are optimistic that the political tension may end soon.

"It will be a nice step if Mr. Abdullah works on the peace process. We see it as a good omen. It will be in the country's favor if President Ghani reaches an agreement with the Stability and Convergence team," said Mohammad Karim Azimi, an analyst.

The sources also said that Abdullah has asked for a 50% share in the cabinet and for the authority to appoint governors

in provinces where he had more votes in last year's presidential elections.

Abdullah will propose the deal as a political agreement, the sources said.

Iranian analyst Pir Mohammad Molazehi is of the opinion that prevention of extra-regional interference will guarantee peace in Afghanistan.

"Iran wants a more active role by influential regional players and prevention of extra-regional players' interferences. Iran believes neighbors of Afghanistan can guarantee peace in the country," Molazehi told IRNA in an interview published on April 18.

Molazehi said that it is not possible for a country to have two governments.

"Talks to settle political crisis in Afghanistan have started. It seems that Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani have reached a preliminary agreement in the way that 50 percent of the government officials be appointed by Abdullah and 50 percent by Ghani," he stated.

Mohsen Rouhifefat, an expert on international affairs, has said that the Afghan leaders and political groups must take steps in settling the political crisis in their country.

In an interview with IRNA published on April 15, he said that cooperation among all Afghan political groups is required to end the political deadlock in the country.

Warren: It 'makes no sense' that U.S. seeks to extend arms embargo on Iran

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Former Democratic presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren has dismissed an argument by the Trump administration that the U.S. is a party to the JCPOA and is seeking to extend arms embargo against Iran, saying such an argument by the Trump administration, which has abandoned the nuclear deal with Iran,

"makes no sense"

Under the JCPOA, the arms embargo against Iran expires in October.

Warren, a senator from Massachusetts, called on Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to "make up" his "mind" whose department has presented a draft resolution to certain Security Council members in attempt to extend arms embargo otherwise invoke a

restoration of previous UN sanctions against Iran lifted under the 2015 nuclear deal.

"The international prohibition on weapons going to/from Iran ends in October. To extend this arms embargo, the Trump admin is suddenly arguing that the US is a party to the same Iran Deal it abandoned. That makes no sense. Make up your mind, @SecPompeo," Warren tweeted.



JCPOA parties unlikely to accept U.S. argument to extend arms embargo on Iran: Pillar

➔ If the United States fails to extend arms sanctions on Iran, it is likely to turn to a trigger mechanism. How can the U.S. do it legally?

A: The Trump administration is arguing that it is still a party to the agreement even though it has grossly violated its obligations under the agreement. Indeed, previous declarations by the administration have been nothing short of a complete renunciation of the JCPOA. Other parties to the agreement, especially Russia and China, are unlikely to accept

the U.S. argument. They will say that the only reasonable interpretation is that the United States can be either in the agreement or out of it, and that it cannot renounce its own obligations while using the agreement to impose punishment on one of the other parties. Parties other than the United States are fully aware that although Iran has exceeded some of the limits on uranium enrichment specified in the JCPOA, this was in direct response to the U.S. violations.

■ Do European countries want to activate the trigger

mechanism and take Iran's case to the UN Security Council?

A: The Europeans felt obliged to start the dispute resolution process when Iran progressively exceeded the enrichment limits of the JCPOA. But the European goal all along has been to salvage the agreement, not kill it. The European preference probably is not to take the case to the Security Council but rather to buy time and extend the dispute resolution process until after the U.S. presidential election, in the hope that a new administration will take office.

U.S. seeks indefinite UN arms embargo on Iran: AP

POLITICAL TEHRAN — The U.S. has circulated a draft UN resolution that would indefinitely extend a UN arms embargo on Iran set to expire in October, U.S. officials and UN diplomats said on Tuesday.

The move will almost certainly spark opposition from Russia, which has made no secret of its desire to resume conventional weapons sales to Tehran, according to The Associate Press.

The draft document, which as of Tuesday had been circulated only to a small number of Security Council members, would strike the expiration of the arms embargo from the council resolution that endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal between six major powers and Iran, according to Trump administration officials and UN diplomats, who were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The U.S. officials said the aim is to present the resolution for a vote in May when Estonia, a NATO member and close U.S. ally that is not party to the nuclear deal, holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council.

The officials said since Iran is admittedly no longer complying with several elements of the nuclear deal, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Trump administration believes it has a case to make that the embargo should not be lifted.

Still, any attempt to extend the embargo will likely face stiff opposition from Russia and China, two veto-wielding permanent members of the Security Council who have argued it should be removed and want to resume arms sales to Iran.

Russia has been more outspoken on the matter and has derided U.S. attempts to bring the matter up for discussion, criticizing President Donald Trump for withdrawing the U.S. from the nuclear deal in 2018 and re-imposing tough American sanctions on Iran.

Despite that opposition, the U.S. officials said the administration is not planning at this point to raise the controversial matter of "snapback" — or restoring all UN sanctions against Iran that had been lifted or eased under the terms of the 2015 deal.

Although the administration pulled



Kourosh Ahmadi, an international law expert, has said the United States' legal argument that it remains an original "participant" under the terms of the Security Council resolution lacks any legal logic.

out from the deal two years ago, the U.S. maintains that it retains the right to invoke a sanctions snapback that the deal envisaged in the event of "significant non-performance" by Iran.

That position rests on a novel State Department legal argument that was first presented in December and asserts that although the U.S. is no longer in the nuclear deal, it remains an original "participant" under the terms of the Security Council resolution that enshrined it. That resolution does, in fact, list the parties to the 2015 agreement by name, but numerous diplomats have said the American argument is specious because the Trump administration has made such a point about no longer participating in the deal.

The U.S. risks sparking a diplomatic war and throwing the already damaged credibility of the Security Council into further jeopardy should it decide to invoke snapback because it is unlikely that either the Chinese or the Russians, and possibly other members, would go along

with the re-imposition of UN sanctions or enforce them.

The Chinese, Russians and many other council members have lamented the impact that the unilateral U.S. sanctions have had on Iran, crippling its oil exports and badly damaging its economy.

Kourosh Ahmadi, an international law expert, has said the United States' legal argument that it remains an original "participant" under the terms of the Security Council resolution lacks any legal logic.

In an article published in the Etemad newspaper on Wednesday, Ahmadi said hardline senators such as Ted Cruz are pushing the Trump administration to take a tough stance in this regard.

"Their goal, which is approved and supported by headline elements in Trump's team, is to revive all anti-Iran UN Security Council resolutions by highlighting the dangers of lifting the arms embargo on Iran, and hence totally destroy the JCPOA," he remarked.

"While their immediate goal is to pre-

vent the lifting of the arms embargo on Iran, but given the U.S. presidential elections in November, they wish to minimize the possibility of a JCPOA revival in the event of Trump's defeat," he opined.

Failure of 'maximum pressure'
Amid the heightened tensions between Tehran and Washington, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) surprised the world last week with a successful launch of its first military satellite dubbed Nour (light) into the orbit.

"All parts of the satellite, including the carrier and satellite, have been produced by the Iranian scientists despite the U.S. sanctions," IRGC Chief Major General Hossein Salami said.

Responding to the launch, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Tehran should be held accountable while citing UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

"Every nation has an obligation to go to the United Nations and evaluate whether this missile launch was consistent with that Security Council resolution," he told journalists.

Iran rejected Pompeo's accusation, saying Resolution 2231 does not ban it from launching satellites. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif slammed the U.S. and Europe for misreading the resolution and reiterated Tehran's missiles are not designed to carry nuclear weapons.

"US has been bullying all against UNSC Resolution 2231 since 2017," Zarif tweeted on April 24. "Europe obeyed US instead of 2231."

"Neither can lecture Iran based on flimsy misreadings of UNSC 2231," he said, adding, "Iran neither has nukes nor missiles 'DESIGNED to be capable of carrying' such horrific arms. Guess who do?"

According to Seyed Hossein Mousavian, a former Iranian nuclear negotiator, "the recent satellite launch shows that despite all the sanctions and pressure, Iran's missile capabilities have grown and it has almost reached the point of no-return."

Mousavian, the Middle East security and nuclear policy specialist at Princeton University, told Al Jazeera that "Tehran's missile capability is the biggest concern for U.S. and Israel in case of a military attack against Iran."

UN human rights office concerned over non-existent forceful lockdown in Iran

POLITICAL TEHRAN — The UN human rights office has voiced concern about "excessive and sometimes deadly force" to ensure lockdowns and curfews due to the COVID-19 pandemic in more than a dozen countries, including Iran.

However, Iran has not enforced any kind of lockdown. "Emergency powers should not be a weapon governments can wield to quash dissent, control the population, and even perpetuate their time in power," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said in a statement on Monday, according to Reuters.

A top official from her office said about 80 countries have declared emergencies due to the new coronavirus, including 15 where the allegations were deemed most troubling.

They were: Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Peru, Honduras, Jordan, Morocco, Cambodia, Uzbekistan, Iran and Hungary.

However, Georgette Gagnon, director of field operations, added at a virtual briefing in Geneva "there are probably several dozen more we could have highlighted".

"A main concern on exceptional emergency measures is what has been described as a toxic lockdown culture in some countries," Gagnon said. "As the High Commissioner highlighted, police and other security forces are using excessive and sometimes deadly force to enforce lockdowns and curfews."

"What garbage," said Mohammad Marandi, a professor at the University of Tehran, in response to the UN human rights office's inclusion of Iran in the list.

"Many complain that the govt hasn't been nearly strict enough," Marandi said via Twitter. "There were no lockdowns anywhere or at anytime where people were forced to stay at home."

"It seems the UN has a duty to put Iran on all available lists of violators to please their overlords in Washington," he added.

Iran is among the countries hardest hit by the novel coronavirus pandemic. The disease has so far infected 93,657 people in the country and claimed the lives of 5,957 people.

Suffering from the United States' illegal and unilateral sanctions which have severely damaged its economy, the Iranian government has not enforced



Suffering from the United States' illegal and unilateral sanctions which have severely damaged its economy, the Iranian government has not enforced any sort of lockdown or curfews that would force people to stay home, arguing that imposing strict lockdown regulations will harm more people with subsistence problems than coronavirus infection.

any sort of lockdown or curfews that would force people to stay home, arguing that imposing strict lockdown regulations will harm more people with subsistence problems than coronavirus infection.

In yet another contradiction with the UN report, the U.S.-funded Radio Farda and many other foreign-based media outlets covering Iran have so far repeatedly attacked the Islamic Republic for not imposing a strict

lockdown to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

Earlier this month, the government announced implementation of the third phase of its social distancing plan, which it called "smart social distancing". The plan includes safe reopening of businesses and other protective measures while urging the people to observe social distancing and other protective measures.

The plan rejects criticisms that the government must have avoided reopening the country quickly, and basically argues that each country should find a strategy that best fits its own circumstances.

Iranian authorities have on numerous occasions referred to U.S. sanctions as a major impediment foiling the government's efforts to contain the deadly virus.

Last week, Mayor of London Sadiq Khan said that many of the measures taken in London to counter coronavirus are similar to those taken in Tehran, and Tehran is even ahead.

Khan made the remarks in an online meeting with Tehran mayor Pirouz Hanachi on Friday.

Referring to the conditions imposed on Iran by U.S. sanctions, Khan said: "In meetings with the British government officials, I would tell them about the problems of Tehran in relation to sanctions and I hope that this problem will be solved soon."

Hanachi told The Guardian on April 4 that "To many of us urban administrators in Iran, the onslaught of coronavirus has underscored an important fact of life: no town, city or nation can be indifferent to global crises, even in far-flung corners of our world."

Presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi said last week that Iran is fighting two viruses, one is the coronavirus and the other is the United States' sanctions.

According to a recently-leaked intelligence brief, U.S. sanctions have "left Iran bereft of financial resources to mount an effective public health response."

Citing the military intelligence cable, The Nation reported on April 22 that the U.S. sanctions have "badly crippled" Iran's economy as well as its ability to respond to the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The document, which dated April 3, warns that U.S. sanctions have left Iran "unable to order ventilators from abroad, which are crucial for treatment."

One segment of the briefing said "President Trump refuses to let up on choke hold."

Iranian scientist contracts coronavirus in U.S. jail

1 → "If something happens, they are not fast responders... I prefer to leave this dirty place."

Asgari's story sparked international outrage after he spoke about his fears of COVID-19 spreading inside crowded ICE facilities with substandard cleaning practices and a lack of supplies.

The professor, who has a history of respiratory problems, was exonerated in a U.S. sanctions trial last year, but ICE has refused to release him or allow him to return to Iran.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif recently called for his release, as have some U.S. lawmakers and human rights groups.

Asgari is confined to a small room at the Winn correctional center in Louisiana, a state hard hit by the coronavirus.

While ICE informed the attorneys that his test was positive, Asgari said ICE had not yet told him the results and that he had learned of them on a call with his family



and lawyers. "The nurse... always says the test results are not in," he said, noting that the medical staff checked on him twice or three times a day.

ICE told Asgari's lawyers he would only be released to a hospital if he was struggling to breathe, the attorneys said.

Bryan Cox, an ICE spokesman, said there were two confirmed COVID-19 cases at Winn but declined to answer specific questions about Asgari.

Iran to build houses on Persian Gulf islands

Leader orders building houses on Persian Gulf islands: admiral

POLITICAL TEHRAN — The Iranian islands of the Persian Gulf will be turned into residential areas, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy Chief Alireza Tangsiri announced on Wednesday.

Tangsiri said the decision came according to an order issued by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The announcement was made as Iran marked the National Persian Gulf Day on Wednesday.



"We plan to prepare the Persian Gulf islands for the people to live on by creating the residential infrastructure," he said.

He said the decision is intended to show that Iran is after establishing security in the region.

"Iran has always transmitted the message of peace to regional countries and believes that security of the Persian Gulf can be ensured by regional countries' cooperation," he remarked, Mehr reported.

He named the presence of foreign forces in the region as the major source of insecurity.

"Illegal presence of American forces in the Persian Gulf is a big threat to its security and Iranian forces do not permit any foreign flotilla to enter its territorial waters," he added.

The admiral also said Leader of the Islamic Revolution has a great interest in the strategic waterway.

He also said littoral states can make foreign forces leave the Persian Gulf.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, in his Wednesday remarks in the cabinet meeting, addressed the U.S. saying that "this gulf's name is the Persian Gulf not the gulf of New York or Washington gulf."

"The U.S. must stop applying its conspiracy plots against the Iranian nation who has its name on this gulf and has protected it in history," Rouhani said.

"The Iranian nation and soldiers beside the IRGC, Armed Forces and Basij forces will continue protecting the Persian Gulf," he underlined.

Iranian officials have repeatedly said that the Persian Gulf belongs to its littoral states and that they are capable of providing its security and there is no reason for the United States to be in the Persian Gulf to have its Navy there.

Russia slams U.S. maximum pressure policy against Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) — Russia has slammed the United States' policy of maximum pressure against the Islamic Republic, saying such measures have negatively affected the global non-proliferation regime and regional security.

"What is the main result of U.S. maximum pressure policy? The compelled reduction of Iranian commitments under #JCPOA. Isn't it high time to reassess objectively counterproductive decisions which have affected negatively the global non-proliferation regime and regional security?" Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mikhail Ulyanov wrote on Twitter on Tuesday.



U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled Washington out of the JCPOA in May 2018 and reimposed "toughest ever" sanctions against the Islamic Republic in defiance of global criticism.

In response to the unilateral move, as well as the European signatories' failure to safeguard Iran's economic interests in the face of U.S. sanctions, Tehran rowed back on its nuclear commitments step-by-step in compliance with Articles 26 and 36 of the JCPOA, but stressed that its retaliatory measures will be reversible as soon as Europe finds practical ways to shield the mutual trade from the U.S. sanctions.

In another tweet earlier on Tuesday, Ulyanov called the U.S. allegations of nuclear commitment and Washington's plans to reinstate UN sanctions against Iran "pessimistic".

"The United States now claims that it will remain a member of the UN Security Council and that it can use the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 to establish a mechanism to restore UN sanctions against Iran. It has nothing to do with the fact that the United States has long been out of the deal and trying to break it down. It's pessimistic," he wrote.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo plans to invoke a provision in the Iran nuclear agreement in an effort to either extend an arms embargo on Iran or reimpose even harsher United Nations (UN) sanctions, the New York Times reported on Sunday.

Last week, Pompeo also called on the UN Security Council to extend Iran's arms embargo under the pretext of preventing a new arms race in the West Asia.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif criticized the bullying policies of the U.S. regarding the nuclear deal and UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Bank loans to economic sectors up 26% in a year

1 → During the said period, the country's mining and industry sectors received 2.167 quadrillion rials (about \$51.59 billion) in the form of working capital loans, accounting for 41.2 percent of the total such facilities.

According to CBI, the country's banking system offered 7.737 quadrillion rials (about \$184.2 billion) facilities to domestic economic sectors in the Iranian calendar year of 1397 (ended on March 20, 2019), 26-percent more than the figure for its previous year.



Working capital loans paid to different economic sectors was above 4.319 quadrillion rials (about \$102.8 billion) accounting for 55.8 percent of the total provided facilities in the said year, registering a 14-percent increase from its previous year.

Shares squeeze out gains as economies look to reopen

World shares eked out slim gains on Wednesday, with optimism over economies easing coronavirus lockdowns and oil prices clawing back ground leavened by caution over corporate earnings.

MSCI world equity index .MIWD000000PUS, which tracks shares in 49 countries, ticked up 0.2%, with European shares mirroring a buoyant day in Asia after initially choppy trading.

The broad Euro STOXX 600 gained 0.1%, with German automaker Volkswagen VOWGp.DE saying it expected a full-year profit even after a plunge in first-quarter earnings and Daimler (DAIGn.DE) also eyeing an operating profit for its Mercedes-Benz Cars & Vans unit. Still, major drug makers Roche (ROG.S) and Novartis (NOVN.S) weighed on the market, falling 2% and 0.7% respectively.

Markets in Frankfurt .GDAXI and Paris .FCHI both gained 0.3%, with London .FTSE adding 1%.

Risk assets including equities have rallied for most of this month thanks to heavy doses of fiscal and monetary policy stimulus around the globe aimed at softening the economic blow from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Still, Europe's quarterly results continue to deteriorate, with Refinitiv data pointing to a 40.4% decline in earnings for companies listed on the STOXX 600, versus 37% a week ago.

Investors across the world are growing confident the pandemic may be peaking as parts of the United States, Europe and Australia gradually ease restrictions.



New Zealand this week allowed some businesses to reopen. "The market is broadly buying stocks on the hope of the recovery and focusing on the eventual winners of this part of the cycle related to COVID-19, and then the structural winners," said Sebastian Galy, a strategist at Nordea.

Positive news around potential treatments for the infection as well as progress in developing a vaccine have also boosted sentiment.

Earlier, MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan .MIAPJ000000PUS gained 1% to a near two-month peak. Wall Street futures ES1 were up 0.7%, helped by forecast-beating revenues from Alphabet Inc's Google (GOOGL.O).

Crude comes back

Hopes the moves would help revive demand sent U.S. crude futures CL1 up about 15% to \$14.12 a barrel, paring a 27% plunge over the first two days of this week.

Brent crude LCO1 futures rose 5% to \$21.47 a barrel. The moves also emboldened bets on riskier currencies, keeping the dollar on the back foot, with the greenback falling 0.3% to 99.610 against a basket of currencies =USD.

The euro EUR= was flat at \$1.0860 though the euro index =EUR eased after Fitch cut Italy's credit rating to BBB-, just one notch above "junk" status. Italy's government bond yields rose after the cut.

Some analysts were circumspect about the rally in stocks, noting a concentration among tech and IT stocks. "We were actually seeing a big dislocation in performance in the new world - the tech thing - and the old economy of industrials reliant on human costs," said Olivier Marciot, portfolio manager at Unigestion.

Investors are now watching out for results from the other major tech firms including Amazon (AMZN.O) and Apple (AAPL.O). Earnings from Facebook (FB.O) and Microsoft Corp (MSFT.O) are due later in the day.

The gains have come even as analysts predict a sharp contraction in world growth.

Moody's expects economies of the group of 20 advanced nations (G20) to shrink 5.8% this year with momentum unlikely to recover to pre-coronavirus levels even in 2021.

(Source: Reuters)

Industry Ministry plans to save \$3.3b by surge in production

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Domestic production of industrial and mining products is planned to save the country over \$3.3 billion in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 20), Iranian Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani announced, IRNA reported.

Mentioning the Industry Ministry's plans for reducing the imports of industrial equipment and machinery by \$10 billion in two years, Rahmani noted that his ministry is going to follow its plan of strengthening domestic production more seriously in the current year, which is named the year of "Surge in Production" by Leader of Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei.

According to the official, the ministry managed to reduce the industry and mining sector's imports by \$3.4 billion in the past calendar year.

"Positive measures have been taken for promoting domestic production in the country which will result in self-sufficiency and sustainable development in the long



run," Rahmani said.

In October 2019, the minister had

announced that the ministry plans to reduce the country's imports by \$10 billion by

the Iranian calendar year 1400 (March 2021-March 2022)."

According to the official, of the mentioned total \$10 billion, \$1.2 billion will be in the textile and garment industry, \$500 million in cellulose products, \$2.7 billion in petrochemicals, \$2.4 billion in mining, \$600 million in steel industry, \$650 million in home appliances, \$650 million in machinery, \$1.4 billion in the automotive industry, and \$250 million in electrical and electronic appliances.

Improving and boosting domestic production has been one of the major strategies that Iran has been following in the past two years to increase its independence.

To this end, the Iranian government has put supporting domestic producers atop agenda.

Providing the required working capital for the production units and offering them facilities is one of the major measures being pursued by the government to support such units.

Railway fleet receives 56 new domestically-made wagons, locomotives



ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian railway fleet received 56 new domestically-made locomotives and wagons in a ceremony attended by Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami on Wednesday.

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

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

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

In late December 2019, Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (known as 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 Derakhsan Arak Company.

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

Annual bank loans paid to knowledge-based firms up nearly 75%



ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian banking system paid 137.6 trillion rials (about \$3.27 billion) of facilities to 1,108 knowledge-based companies in the past Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19), to register a 74.5 percent rise compared to the preceding year 1397.

As reported by IRNA, Bank Mellat accounted for the biggest share of the paid facilities with 28.2 trillion rials (about \$670 million), followed by Melli Bank with 21.2 trillion rials (about \$504 million) of offered facilities.

Back in January, CBI announced that 83 trillion rials (nearly \$1.97 billion) of facilities were offered to more than 870 knowledge-based companies across the

country in the first 11 months of the past calendar year (March, 21 2019-January, 21 2020).

Iran has developed plans to support and empower knowledge-based companies as a step forward to materialize the goal of a surge in production, as the economy is grappling with the U.S. sanctions.

According to Rouhollah Zolfaghari, deputy head of Innovation and Prosperity Fund, over 63 trillion rials (nearly \$1.5 billion) is proposed to be allocated to support the knowledge-based companies leaping for production.

In the coming year, detailed plans have been prepared to support knowledge-based companies.

Iran's railway network to be expanded by 1,200km

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian transport minister said 1,200 kilometers of railroads are going to be constructed across the country during the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 19), IRNA reported.

Speaking in a ceremony for adding new domestically-made wagons and locomotives to the country's railway fleet on Wednesday, Mohammad Eslami said rail transport will become more efficient and safer in the current year.

"This year which is named the year of surge in production, the share of rail in transit should be increased. Now we are witnessing a 25-percent growth in the share of freight rail transportation, which is a positive step," the official said.

According to the minister, up to 400 km of side lines are also going to be constructed in collaboration with



the private sector.

Expanded transportation via railway is, today, one of the major pillars of sustainable development for all countries; and it is why the governments usually allocate noticeable funds and resources to the development of the railway.

In Iran, the development of railway has been among the top-priority plans of the governments in recent years.

The country's Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (2016-2021) has envisaged that the railway will account for at least 30 percent of cargo transportation and 20 percent of passenger transportation in Iran. Such a target requires at least 850 trillion rials (about \$20.238 billion) of investment.

Coronavirus likely hammered U.S. economy in first quarter

The anticipated decline in gross domestic product (GDP) will reflect a plunge in economic activity in the last two weeks of March, which saw millions of Americans seeking unemployment benefits. The Commerce Department's snapshot of first-quarter GDP on Wednesday will reinforce analysts' predictions that the economy was already in a deep recession.

"The economy is in free fall, we could be approaching something much worse than a deep recession," said Sung Won Sohn, a business economics professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. "It's premature to talk about a recovery at this moment, we are going to be seeing a lot of bankruptcies for small and medium sized businesses."

Gross domestic product probably decreased at a 4.0% annualized rate last quarter, weighed down by sharp declines in consumer spending and a drawdown of inventory at businesses, according to a Reuters survey of economists.

That would be the steepest pace of contraction in GDP since the first quarter of 2009. A deepening downturn in investment by businesses was likely another major factor in the slump last quarter. Those drags probably overshadowed positive news from a shrinking import bill, the housing market and more spending by the government.

Estimates in the survey were as low as a 15% drop in GDP, which would be the steepest decline on record.

According to Kwok Ping Tsang, an associate professor of economics in the Virginia Tech College of Science, GDP was slashed by nearly \$1.2 trillion from March 19 — around the time parts of the United States began lockdowns — to April 15, a 26% drop in output compared to the same period last year.

Many factories and nonessential businesses like restaurants and other social venues were shuttered or operated below capacity amid nationwide lockdowns to control the spread of COVID-19, the potentially lethal respiratory illness caused by the virus.

"For employees who have moved to work-from-home status, it is highly unlikely that labor input remains at 100 percent," said Tsang. "Employees also must juggle child care, home schooling, and more stressors. Both limitations suggest that our estimates are likely to be biased downward."

The anticipated contraction in GDP, together with record unemployment, could pile pressure on states and local governments to reopen their economies.

It could also spell more trouble for President Donald Trump following criticism of

the White House's initial slow response to the pandemic, as he seeks re-election in November. Confirmed U.S. COVID-19 infections have topped one million, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally.

"We've got the biggest shock since the Great Depression," Trump's economic adviser Kevin Hassett said on Tuesday. "It's a very grave shock and it's something we need to take seriously."

The U.S. Congress has approved a fiscal package of around \$3 trillion and the Federal Reserve has cut interest rates to near zero and greatly expanded its role as banker of last resort, but economists say these measures are inadequate.

They also did not believe that reopening regional economies, as some states are now doing, would not return the broader economy to pre-pandemic levels, which they said would take years. They expect an even sharper contraction in GDP in the second quarter.

More pain to come

"You are going to get close to 40% contraction in the second quarter," said Joe Brusuelas, chief economist at RSM in New York. "It's important that when we talk of reopening, we are not talking about it in a binary fashion. It's not going from zero to one or flipping the

switch. Firms are opening, but still heavily constrained by public health policy."

Reopening the economy also comes with the risk of unleashing a second wave of new infections and a return to lockdowns.

Economists believe the economy entered recession in the second half of March when the social distancing measures took effect.

The National Bureau of Economic Research, the private research institute regarded as the arbiter of U.S. recessions, does not define a recession as two consecutive quarters of decline in real GDP, as is the rule of thumb in many countries. Instead, it looks for a drop in activity, spread across the economy and lasting more than a few months.

"The NBER will probably not tell us that for a while, but certainly all the characteristics of a very deep recession are fully underway," said Michelle Girard, chief U.S. economist at NatWest Markets in Stamford, Connecticut.

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of U.S. economic activity, is expected to have dropped at as much as a 17% rate in the first quarter. Spending grew at a 1.8% pace in the October-December period.

The other components of GDP were probably equally weak last quarter.

(Source: Reuters)

SP phase 14 refinery to be fully operational by June 2021

ENERGY TEHRAN — South Pars gas field's phase 14 refinery will be fully operational by the end of the next Iranian calendar year's Q1 (June 21, 2021), according to the operator of the phase 14 development project, Mohammad Mehdi Tavasoli-Pour.

"The project's engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) progress is currently at about 83 percent," Tavasoli-Pour said. He pointed to the coronavirus pandemic problems and limited financial resources

as the main issues in the way of completing phase 14 refinery, saying that despite all the problems the refinery will be operational by June 2021.

The official further noted that the offshore section of the phase is fully operational and producing 56 million cubic meters (mcm) of gas per day.

Platform 14D, which was the fourth (and last) platform of phase 14 of South Pars gas field (in the Persian Gulf) development project, was installed on its designated



offshore jacket in early February.

The 2400-ton platform added 500 million cubic feet (14.2 million cubic meters) of gas to the field's output, according to Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of developing the giant gas field.

The first platform of phase 14 started operation in summer 2018 and the second

platform namely 14C was shipped in September 2018.

South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar, is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate. The field is divided into 24 standard phases.

Rise in power consumption necessitates infrastructure expansion: Tavanir

ENERGY TEHRAN — Head of Iran's Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution Management Company, known as Tavanir, says if the country's electricity consumption increases at the current pace the infrastructure in this sector should be doubled.

"The average growth of electricity consumption in the country is about seven percent per year, and if this growth rate continues, the industry's facilities should be doubled every 10 years," IRAN quoted Mohammad-Hassan Motevalizadeh as saying on Wednesday.

The official noted that doubling the electricity industry facilities requires six quadrillion rials (over \$142.8 billion) of investment which is a huge cost.

He went on to point out the encouraging strategy of the Energy Ministry to reduce electricity consumption and said: "Electricity tariffs are designed in such a way that with a 10 percent reduction in a subscribers' consumption, electricity bills will be reduced by 20 percent."



According to the official, implementing consumption management programs during the last summer saved the consumers 70 trillion rials (about \$1.66 billion).

People should manage their consumption to pass through

the hot season consumption peak without any power outages, he stressed.

Tavanir head also underlined the 100 percent coverage of electricity across the country as an indication of the progress of Iran's electricity industry.

Back in August 2019, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said that implementing consumption management programs had reduced the summer peak electricity consumption by 3300 megawatts (MW).

In this regard, Deputy Energy Minister for Electricity Affairs Homayoun Haeri had also said that the ministry planned to focus on consumption management and increasing the average efficiency of the country's power plants to reduce consumption.

Later, the ministry's spokesman Mahmoud Haqifam, announced that three policies of "modifying tariffs", "issuing energy cards" and "changing consumption levels" were to be applied to amend electricity consumption patterns in the country.

Oil prices rise as U.S. inventories build smaller than feared

Oil prices gained on Wednesday after U.S. stockpiles rose less than expected and gasoline stocks fell and buoyed by hopes demand will improve as some European countries and U.S. cities moved to ease coronavirus lockdowns.

June Brent crude futures were up 2.30 percent, or 47 cents, to \$20.93 a barrel by 0834 GMT, after hitting \$21.60 a barrel. The more active July contract added 22 cents, or 0.97 percent, to \$22.96 a barrel.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures jumped 12.56 percent or \$1.55 to \$13.89 after a 27 percent plunge over the first two days of this week.

U.S. crude inventories rose by 10 million barrels to 510 million barrels in the week to April 24, data from industry group the American Petroleum Institute showed on Tuesday, compared with analysts' expectations for a build of 10.6 million barrels.

Gasoline stocks fell by 1.1 million barrels, the API said, compared with analyst forecasts for a 2.5 million barrel rise.

"In part thanks to better than expected, or more accurately

not as bad as feared, looking U.S. inventory data, WTI prices have managed to make up lost ground," JBC Energy said.

"Aside from a Cushing build that was hardly extravagant, API inventory data reportedly also hinted at the first gasoline stock draw in several weeks, a signal which optimistic market observers tend to like," the JBC analysts added.

The market will get another read on U.S. inventories when the U.S. Energy Information Administration releases weekly data later on Wednesday.

While storage is rapidly filling up, production cuts by U.S. shale producers, estimated by consultants Rystad Energy at 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) for May and June, should help slow flows into tanks. The United States is now the world's biggest oil producer.

"One ray of hope for WTI though could occur next week," said Jeffrey Halley, market analyst at OANDA.

Regulators in the U.S. state of Texas, the country's biggest oil producer, will hold a vote on May 5 on whether to enact output cuts.

Officials in the states of North Dakota and Oklahoma are also examining ways to legally allow output cuts.

That would add to production cuts of almost 10 million bpd agreed by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other large producers including Russia equivalent to about 10 percent of global production which are due to take effect from May 1.

At the same time, hopes for at least some demand recovery put a floor under oil prices, following two days of selling in June contracts by exchange-traded funds looking to avoid the extreme volatility which hit the WTI May futures contract last week.

"The other thing coming through is more detail and a louder groundswell towards plans for removing COVID restrictions, particularly in Europe — in countries like Spain, France, Austria and Switzerland. That's going to see demand pick up," said Lachlan Shaw, head of commodity research at National Australia Bank in Melbourne.

(Source: Reuters)

Up to 25 U.S. LNG cargoes may be cancelled

As many as 25 LNG cargoes originally scheduled for June loading from US liquefaction facilities have likely been cancelled as European and northeast Asian spot prices have dropped to all-time lows.

Delivered markets at a tight premium or even at a discount to the Henry Hub have incentivized firms with US offtake to turn down some cargoes, potentially tightening supplies in Europe and supporting prices for deliveries to the region and northeast Asia.

Around 10 Asian and European firms may have cancelled loadings for around 16 cargoes from Cheniere Energy's 25mm t/yr Sabine Pass LNG terminal in Louisiana and 10mm t/yr Corpus Christi LNG terminal in Texas, according to industry participants. Another four firms have likely turned down a total of five cargoes from the 10mm t/yr Freeport LNG export plant, also in Texas, they said.

Fob customers had until 20 April to notify Cheniere Energy if they would not be lifting their contractual volumes from Sabine Pass or Corpus Christi in June. The 14 firms — four of which are from Asia, including Indonesia, Japan and Singapore — have confirmed their cancellations with Cheniere.

"We informed Cheniere [about our decision to cancel LNG loadings] just before the 20 April deadline," said an off-taker with a portfolio supply agreement with Cheniere. "As long as there is a cancellation clause in your contract [with Cheniere], any firm's request to cancel cargoes should be automatically approved." Cheniere did not respond to requests for comment.

Contracts with Cheniere generally give buyers the option to not lift cargoes, but they are required to notify the exporter 45-60 days in advance of the delivery date and pay liquefaction fees.

Cheniere's term offtakers typically pay around 15pc of the final Nymex Henry Hub settlement for the month in which a cargo is loaded for feedgas, on top of \$2.25-3.50/mn Btu in liquefaction fees. Most of the contracts are signed on a "take-or-pay" basis, meaning



that buyers will still have to pay liquefaction costs even if they cancel purchases.

A narrowing of the price spread between European gas hubs and northeast Asia spot LNG in recent weeks amid a slump in prices has effectively rendered the inter-basin arbitrage closed. This means the delivery of Atlantic cargoes to Europe would be comparatively more economical than to northeast Asia.

U.S. cargo cancellations reduce potential supply pressure on Europe, which is the market to which sellers and traders would likely have sent the cargoes had they not been cancelled. The reduced availability of cargoes could lend some support to European gas prices, with a knock-on effect on northeast Asian spot prices. Market participants have typically referenced European gas hub prices as the floor for spot prices in northeast Asia, although the inter-basin differential has narrowed in recent weeks.

European gas hub prices have come under pressure in the past month and fallen to record lows, weighed down by weak industrial and power sector demand because of the Covid-19 outbreak. The June contracts of the UK NBP and Dutch TTF stood at \$1.758/mn Btu and \$1.994/mn Btu, respectively, yesterday, putting their discount to the ANEA price, the Argus assessment for spot deliveries to northeast Asia, for July at just 19.6-43.2c/mn Btu, which would not be sufficient to cover the differential in shipping costs between the two delivery markets. A differential of around \$0.90-1/mn Btu is required, market participants said.

(Source: Argus Media)

Australia could get 90 percent of electricity from renewables by 2040

Australia could get 90 percent of its electricity from renewable energy by 2040 without an increase in power prices, according to an analysis by the energy and carbon consultancy RepuTex.

Under current government policies, the country is on track to have 75 percent of its electricity generated by renewables within 20 years, but the analysis suggests a weak federal policy framework would lead to wholesale prices rising for a period after 2030.

RepuTex's latest outlook for the national energy market finds investment driven by state policies, including renewable energy targets in Victoria and Queensland, will help keep wholesale electricity prices down throughout the 2020s.

But it says wholesale prices would rise again in the 2030s without federal policy to encourage investment in new clean energy generation before ageing coal-fired power stations close.

RepuTex examined two scenarios, one that forecasts wholesale electricity prices under current government policies, and another that forecasts prices under the Australian Energy Market Operator's more ambitious "step change" scenario that uses a carbon budget in line with the Paris agreement. It has made a summary of its report and methodology, but not the full report, available on its website.

Under current policies, Australia would reach 50 percent renewable energy by 2030 and 75 percent by 2040, despite the absence of a federal policy framework beyond the underwriting of new generation investment scheme.

The report finds new investment would be driven by state-based policies and renewable energy targets, which RepuTex forecasts would bring about 17 gigawatts of new capacity by 2030, along with 4GW of rooftop solar and 3.5GW of new storage capacity.

The falling costs of clean technology would put pressure on coal and gas generation and lead to 18GW of thermal capacity exiting



the market by 2040. It forecasts wholesale prices would remain at roughly the current level, between \$50-\$70 a megawatt hour, over the next 10 years. Wholesale electricity prices have fallen by nearly 50 percent over the past year.

"As new renewable energy and storage projects such as Snowy 2.0 are commissioned, along with the continued uptake of small-scale resources, traditional volumes for black coal and gas-fired capacity are likely to be eroded," RepuTex's head of research, Bret Harper, said.

But the report finds that a disorderly closure of coal-fired power stations would push wholesale prices up in the 2030s in the absence of federal policy to guide investment.

RepuTex found that an increase in wholesale prices could be avoided under the more ambitious scenario, forecasting that average annual prices in the 2030s would remain below \$80/MWh. The step change scenario sets out an emissions budget for the electricity sector that would lead to decarbonised energy systems by 2050, in line with the Paris agreement commitment of keeping global heating below 2C.

RepuTex forecasts this scenario would lead to Australia reaching 70 percent renewable energy generation by 2030 and 90 percent in 2040, and that the combination of more renewable energy, improved storage technologies and a carbon budget would be "fatal" for coal-fired power.

(Source: The Guardian)

BP sees 'exceptional' uncertainty on prices and demand

BP warned Tuesday of "exceptional" uncertainty over prices and oil demand, and said coronavirus could prompt a long-term reduction in oil consumption, but that cost reductions arising in part from technological change would protect the business.

Unveiling first-quarter results, including a \$3.7 billion write-down in the value of BP's oil inventories, new CEO Bernard Looney said he did not expect the company to curtail its oil production due to the filling up of storage capacity worldwide, but he did expect output to be cramped by production cuts implemented by the OPEC+ group of countries, highlighting Iraq, where BP operates the Rumaila field, as an example.

He added BP was in "conversation" with countries such as Angola, Azerbaijan and Russia on the issue.

BP said its own cost-cutting measures such as delaying upstream project work and curtailing lower-margin projects would reduce its production by 70,000 bpd of oil equivalent this year, with most of the reduction to occur at the company's BPX shale business in the US.

BP said it would reduce its "balance point," or the price at which it could break even, after dividend payments, to \$35/b next year, down from \$56/b in 2019, partly helped by technological change that has reduced the cost of deep water wells.

"We are taking decisive actions to strengthen our finances — reinforcing liquidity, rapidly reducing spending and costs, driving our cash balance point lower," Looney told analysts as he presented his first set of quarterly results since taking over on February 5.

The company added that its second-quarter oil and gas production would be lower than its first-quarter production, which was down 3 percent on the year at 2.60 million boe/d.

However, it said its forecast for second-quarter production was subject to high uncertainty. "There are significant uncertainties with regard to the implementation of OPEC+ restrictions, price impacts on entitlement volumes, divestments, market restrictions given lack of demand for oil and COVID-19 operational impacts," it said. "There remains an exceptional level of uncertainty regarding the near-term outlook for prices and product demand. There is the risk of more sustained consequences depending on the efforts of governments and the public and private sectors to manage the health, economic and financial stability effects of the pandemic."

Reiterating his commitment to BP having net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, Looney said: "The pandemic I think only adds to the challenge for oil in the future. We're all living and working very differently — no travel, I'm connecting with people, the company is running, and I think there's a real possibility that some of that will stick... and therefore the question has to be will consumers consume less, and I think there's a real possibility that that may happen."

He noted BP had rapidly scaled back rig numbers at its BPX shale business, from 13 to one or two, but voiced confidence in the soundness of that business, the underlying geological assets, and the opportunity it provided to modulate spending according to market conditions. "The rocks continue to be as good as — if not better than — what we planned for," he said.

BP reiterated plans to cut its capital expenditure to \$12 billion this year and indicated scope for a further \$1-2 billion cut next year, but insisted this would not harm the fundamentals of the business thanks to progress in areas such as digitization.

Cost reductions

As an example, a deepwater well off West Africa that would have cost \$150 million a few years ago could now be drilled for \$50 million, with far fewer expatriate staff needed on-site and much of the oversight carried out in the UK, said Murray Auchincloss, who is BP's upstream chief financial officer and takes over as CFO on July 1. Auchincloss said there was little chance of cost reductions coming from a struggling supply chain in the upstream, saying, "We're not presuming we're going to get any deflation. The supply chain is in a pretty difficult place inside the upstream business."

However, he said: "The sector had a shale revolution a decade ago, it's in the midst of a digital revolution right now, and it's structurally changing the cost of supply of our business."

One BP project being directly hit by the coronavirus outbreak is the Tangguh LNG project in Indonesia, while a fabrication yard in South Korea working on the Mad Dog Phase 2 project in the Gulf of Mexico has also had to suspend activities, though BP did not indicate any delay in getting to first production, due in late 2021.

Looney said he remained committed to the company's energy transition goals, which could mean BP's oil output declining as it repositions itself, and that he was not guided by oil volumes.

The company took a big financial hit in its results, with its debt gearing ballooning to 36.2 percent, well outside its 20-30 percent guidance range, and expected to increase further in Q2 and remain outside the range into 2021.

It reported an outright first-quarter loss of \$4.4 billion, reflecting the cut in its inventory values.

(Source: Platts)

China's INE may allow oil deliveries to storage owned by participants

China's Shanghai International Energy Exchange (INE) said on Wednesday it is considering improving its crude oil futures delivery mechanism by allowing deliveries to fulfill contracts into storage tanks and ships held by market participants.

INE was responding to a Reuters query over oil importers' concerns that speculative buying in the past two months has pushed Shanghai crude oil futures above international benchmark Brent, disconnecting China's only crude futures contract from global markets. "The exchange will gradually improve the delivery mechanism, to consider including refiners or traders' tanks as a storage warehouse and to break bulk from a vessel anchoring point and then transfer to storage as new methods," INE said in an emailed statement.

Reuters reported in early April that oil traders seeking to take advantage of the wide price gap between the Shanghai contract and global oil prices by delivering crude into the INE futures contracts are unable to do so because storage designated by the exchange is full.

In April, the exchange has increased the amount of storage capacity available to fulfill futures contracts to 8.5 million cubic meters, or nearly 48 million barrels, by adding new tanks in Shandong, Hainan, Guangdong and Liaoning, the INE said in the statement. The exchange also said there are now 14 delivery points.

The amount of capacity available to fulfill INE contracts was equal to 27 million barrels as of April 3, according to previous announcements from the exchange.

(Source: Reuters)

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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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FBI's spying operation against U.S. citizens in coordination with Israeli intelligence service!

By Mohammad Jafari

Documents, released by a monitoring website, prove that the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had been in close coordination with certain Israeli intelligence bodies in long-run spying operation on a Palestine solidarity group whose members are the United States' legal residents.

Asa Winstanley, an investigative journalist living in London who writes about Palestine and the Middle East, explained in his reports published by the Middle East Monitor that how the FBI had been cooperating for a long time with the Israeli intelligence bodies to hunt down Palestinian civil right activists overseas.

The FBI documents obtained by The Intercept and published at the start of April made for fascinating reading. They showed that federal officers conducted a 2004-2006 "terrorism" investigation into the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), a non-violent Palestine solidarity group.

The investigation proved only that the ISM was exactly what it said it was: a peaceful activist group that sent delegations to occupied Palestine. However, the revelation raises serious questions about FBI activities. As well as proving that the Bureau harassed activists involved in lawful free speech campaigns, the documents — obtained only after a Freedom of Information law suit — suggest that the FBI may have engaged in spying on U.S. citizens at the behest of Israel.

The ISM was a diffuse network of mostly European and American activists who worked in solidarity with the Palestinian people living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. ISM delegations used to travel to the occupied territories to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Palestinians involved in non-violent resistance to Israel's occupation.

"As a young activist, I was with the ISM in occupied Palestine between 2005 and 2007, and for several years afterwards with ISM London, the local support group back home. In Palestine, we joined Palestinians in villages such as Bil'in, near Ramallah, which was threatened with the destruction and annexation of collective village lands for the construction of Israeli settler-colonies and the illegal annexation wall," Winstanley went on to say in his report.

At that time, several such villages held weekly protests against the Israeli occupation and its crimes. The villagers asked for solidarity, and people from all around Palestine would join the protests, as did activists and delegations from around the world. Even some dissidents from Israel, such as Jonathan Pollak, took part.

ISM members also engaged in less attention-grabbing work, like accompanying Palestinian children to school when they were at threat of being attacked by Israeli settlers. This was often the case in the areas where the most fanatical settlers were active, like the Palestinian city of Hebron, where the settlements were — and still



are — concentrated uniquely within the city itself, rather than on the surrounding hillsides, as is the more common pattern elsewhere in the West Bank.

There were also the autumn olive harvest trips, when we would join Palestinian farmers in picking their produce in areas near to the more rural Israeli settlements, such as those on the hilltops around Nablus. Some of the most extreme Israeli settlers outside of Hebron have their base in those areas. They would often attack Palestinian villages and burn their olive trees and other crops.

The idea behind the International Solidarity Movement was that Palestinians would be less likely to be attacked by Israelis when there was a presence of (usually white) American and European passport holders. The belief was that Israel preferred to avoid diplomatic crises with the governments of the states that the ISM members came from, due to the military, political and diplomatic aid such states provide to the occupation force.

Of course, this was not always the case, and several ISM volunteers were attacked by Israeli settlers and troops. In two such cases in 2003, these attacks proved to be deadly. U.S. citizen Rachel Corrie was crushed by a militarized Israeli bulldozer in March 2003; she was 23 when she was killed. A month later, British activist and photographer Tom Hurdall, also 23, was shot in the head by an Israeli sniper; he died in hospital 10 months later without ever regaining consciousness. Both Rachel and Tom had been protecting Palestinian civilians from Israeli army attacks in the Gaza Strip when they were killed.

The newly released FBI documents indicate that it was in the months after these deadly incidents that the Bureau launched its investigation into the ISM in America. Instead of investigating the Israelis for their murder of

U.S. citizens, the FBI instead blamed the victims.

There is an indication within the documents that the FBI probably opened its investigation at the behest of — or at least in coordination with — the Israeli government. The crucial evidence for this has been redacted from the documents, but it doesn't take much reading between the lines to see it, because FBI agents in the U.S. shared information with an FBI office stationed in a U.S. embassy overseas. This was almost certainly the FBI office in the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv.

The reason for such sharing of information is clear. During the Corrie family's civil case against the Israeli state for the unlawful killing of their daughter, it was confirmed that the Israeli government repeatedly attempted to smear Rachel Corrie with "terrorism" allegations, and cast the ISM as "illegitimate violent agitators". Both allegations were complete falsehoods. They were actually an extension of the standard Israeli smear campaign which commonly casts non-violent Palestinian demonstrators and other Palestinians murdered by Israeli troops as "terrorists" or "terror supporters".

The documents show that the FBI was hunting for evidence of such "terrorist" links. The Bureau's Los Angeles field office even used confidential informants within the ISM in the futile hunt for such "extremism". After a two-year investigation, though, the FBI concluded — inevitably — that the ISM had broken no laws and posed no threat to national security.

Nevertheless, the documents show once again that the FBI is far from being the apolitical protector of U.S. civil liberties that its own propaganda proclaims. In fact, it is a right-wing political police force in the service of U.S. capitalism.

The FBI investigators repeatedly conflated political beliefs with terrorism, focusing on how many ISM members held anti-capitalist views

and sympathized with Palestinian human rights. As Ali Abunimah reported for The Electronic Intifada, "The probes into ISM hearken back to the FBI's infamous COINTELPRO spying and sabotage program in the 1960s, which targeted Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights and Black radical groups, and the anti-war movement."

It is surely also no coincidence that — at exactly the same period that the FBI was investigating the ISM — an undercover British police officer infiltrated the ISM in London. Was that also, I wonder, done at the behest of Israel?

Another report by the MEM in early April revealed that hundreds of pages of FBI documents proved that the FBI has opened a counter-terrorism investigation into ISM.

The group of activists, of whom the academic Mark Chmiel and other unnamed individuals are members, is a pro-Palestinian movement which identifies itself as a "Palestinian-led movement committed to resisting the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land using nonviolent, direct-action methods and principles."

The FBI conducted a series of probes into figures like Chmiel, who was approached by the Bureau in 2006 regarding his trip to the West Bank three years prior.

The FBI papers also included other methods used to monitor pro-Palestine solidarity groups and individuals associated with them, with the most prominent reportedly being through the use of secret informants. It makes references to other investigations carried out by federal agents throughout the country, but many of the papers are significantly redacted up to such an extent that they were deemed impossible to identify what they exactly referred to.

The Bureau's investigations into ISM were also wildly inaccurate, as they "relied heavily on biased right-wing publications making fantastical claims of questionable veracity."

ISM's co-founder Huwaida Arraf condemned the FBI's investigations and probes into its work, telling the outlet that "The fact that ISM was under this kind of extensive investigation is ridiculous and a complete waste of taxpayer money." Arraf added that "ISM has always been open and transparent about who we are, what we do, and what we stand for, which is purportedly what this country stands for — freedom and human rights."

The U.S. has long supported Israel as an essential and strategic ally and has banned a variety of movements who have sought to resist the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and constant violation of international law, one of them being the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in recent years.

Such revelations of the FBI's secret investigations into pro-Palestine groups and activists are seen as the latest manifestation of its efforts to curb popular pro-Palestine support within the U.S.

Persian Gulf: From rich history to security depth

1 → In this regard, back in 2006, Iran designated the Tenth of Ordibehesht as the Persian Gulf National Day, to remind them all that the name of the water body will remain Persian forever.

The date designated as the national day coincides with the anniversary of Abbas I of Persia's successful military campaign when the Portuguese navy was driven out of the Strait of Hormuz in the Capture of Ormuz.

In the Persia-Portugal war in 1602, by the order of Abbas I, the Persian army under the command of Imam-Quli Khan, managed to expel the Portuguese from Bahrain. In 1612, the Portuguese Empire took the city of Gamrun and transliterated the name to Comorao. Almost two years later (in 1615), the city was taken by Abbas the Great after a naval battle with the Portuguese and renamed it to Bandar-e 'Abbas, or "Port of 'Abbas".

In 1622, Abbas completely retook Hormuz from the Portuguese in the Capture of Ormuz.

Geopolitics

The Persian Gulf has been in the spotlight for its geopolitical significance for a long time.

Spanning some 250,000 square kilometers, the Persian Gulf is bounded by the Arvand River in the north, which forms the frontier between Iran and Iraq, and the Strait of Hormuz in the south, which links the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean.

It shares boundaries with littoral states Iran (Persia), Oman, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates. The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman.

Connecting the Middle East to Africa, India and China, the Persian Gulf is one of the most important waterways and strategic areas in the world.

The Middle East's first discovery of oil in the Iranian city of Masjed Soleiman in the early 19th century increased the geopolitical weight of the Persian Gulf region, and consequently, the start of a wave of explorations, extractions and exploitations changed the region's — and the world's — history.

The Persian Gulf is now considered as the energy hub of the world. Close to 20 million barrels of crude and condensates are shipped from the Persian Gulf and through the strategic Strait of Hormuz per day. With the normal global oil consumption amounting to about 100 million bpd, that means almost a fifth of world demand passes through the strategic strait.

About 50,000 ships navigate through the waterway annually, of which 17,000 are oil tankers that head to Asian countries.

However, the variable geopolitical factors in the Persian Gulf are not merely limited to oil. In fact, different periods of history have laid different impacts on the strategic water body.

The Persian Gulf region has been the scene of severe tensions between the regional and non-regional powers in the past decades.

The several wars between the neighbors in the past decades and the heightened military activities by the regional and non-regional countries, such as the naval drills and the establishment of military bases in the Persian Gulf's Arab states, are among other proofs to the undeniable position of the strategic water body to all.

Experts believe that not maintaining security in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz will adversely affect economies throughout the world since they are closely interconnected.

Nearly half of global workforce risk losing livelihoods in pandemic: ILO

Some 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy, representing nearly half of the global labor force, are in immediate danger of losing their livelihoods due to the coronavirus pandemic, the International Labour Organization (ILO) said Wednesday.

The U.N. agency's latest report sharply raised its forecast for the devastating impact on jobs and incomes of the COVID-19 disease, which has infected more than 3.1 million people globally, killed nearly 220,000 and shut down economies.

"It shows I think in the starkest possible terms that the jobs employment crisis and all of its consequences is deepening by comparison with our estimates of 3 weeks ago," ILO Director-General Guy Ryder told a briefing, foreseeing a "massive" poverty impact.

Already, wages of the world's 2 billion informal workers plunged by an estimated global average of 60 percent in the first month that the crisis unfolded in each region, the ILO said.

Informal workers are the most vulnerable of the 3.3 billion global workforce, lacking welfare protection, access to good healthcare, or the means to work from home, it stressed.

"For millions of workers, no income means no food, no security and no future. Millions of businesses around the world are barely breathing," said Ryder. "They have no savings or access to credit. These are the real faces of the world of work. If we don't help them now, they will simply perish."

"Protect the vulnerable"

The ILO said prolonged lockdowns and office and plant closures are now expected to lead to an "even" worse fall in total working hours worldwide in the second quarter than what was forecast just three weeks ago.

Worst-hit sectors are manufacturing, accommodation and food services, wholesale and retail trade, and real estate and business activities.

Total working hours in the second quarter are expected to be 10.5 per cent lower, equivalent to 305 million full-time jobs, than the last pre-crisis quarter, the ILO said, with biggest declines forecast for the Americas, Europe and Central Asia.

The previous ILO estimate on April 7 was that disruptions would wipe out labor equivalent to the effort of 195 million workers, or 6.7 percent of hours clocked worldwide.

About 436 million enterprises — businesses or self-employed — face "high risks" of disruption, the agency added.

The long-term panorama was unclear.

"The eventual increase in global unemployment over 2020 will depend substantially on how the world economy fares in the second half of the year and how effectively policy measures will preserve existing jobs and boost labor demand once the recovery phase begins," it said.

As governments splurge unprecedented cash to counteract the crisis, the ILO urged them to speed procedures for unemployment benefits, extend support to independent workers, and fast-track small and informal businesses' access to credit and loans.

"As the pandemic and the jobs crisis evolve, the need to protect the most vulnerable becomes even more urgent," Ryder added.

(Source: Reuters)

A report on situation of migrants, refugees in coronavirus-hit Europe

The European nations have been hosting a huge number of migrants and asylum seekers over the past decades utilizing their skills, professions, capabilities and many other advantages to build up their economy with the lowest expense possible, but most of the mentioned nations are ignoring these vulnerable communities amid COVID-19 outbreak.

Ramzy Baroud, a senior journalist, author and editor, criticized most of the European countries for their irresponsible approach towards asylum seekers and migrants amid the novel coronavirus outbreak in the continent.

He further drafted a detailed report published by the Middle East Monitor to clarify how some nations, including Portugal, have not ignored the vulnerable migrants in the current hard days and how some other European countries have not paid required attention to health of refugees and migrants.

"As soon as the COVID-19 pandemic began spreading its tentacles throughout China and eventually to the rest of the world, the World Health Organization (WHO), along with other international groups, sounded the alarm that refugees and migrants are particularly vulnerable to the deadly disease," he wrote in his report.

"We strongly emphasize the need for inclusive national public health measures to ensure migrants and refugees have the same access to services as the resident population, in a culturally sensitive way," Dr. Santino Severoni, Special Adviser on Health and Migration at WHO/Europe implored governments throughout the continent.

More than 120,000 'irregular' migrants and refugees have landed on European shores in 2019 alone, a large percentage from war-torn Syria.

Having hundreds of thousands of people navigate dangerous terrains or held under inhumane conditions in various camps and detention centers without proper medical care is already bad enough. It is far worse, however, that these vulnerable groups are now enduring the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic without much government attention, a centralized strategy or even safe shelters.

Euronews reported last month on the story of 56 people arriving on the Greek island of Lesbos, coming mostly from Afghanistan and various African countries.

Just as the coronavirus was peaking in Europe, these unfortunate escapees of war and poverty arrived to find that they have no protection, no assistance, and no prospect of any help arriving any time soon.

One Afghan refugee said that the group was left fending for itself, for fourteen days without any support, not even gloves or masks.

But not all European countries neglected the refugees, partially or entirely. Although one of the poorest European countries, Portugal has decided to legalize all of its undocumented refugees and migrants, therefore, providing them with the same medical

attention and support as its own citizens.

Below, is a quick look at how European countries treated refugees and migrants since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

Spain

Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and other Council of Europe member states suspended deportation of refugees to their own countries.

For its part, Spain has finally emptied its Centros de Entrenamiento de Extranjeros (CIE), the notorious detention and deportation centers that have been criticized by various human rights groups in the past.

59% of all refugees and migrants to Spain were reportedly held in the CIE. By early April, however, that percentage had gone down to zero, according to Italian newspaper, Corriere della Sera.

It remains unclear, however, if and when CIE will resume their activities or if Spain will review the status of refugees and migrants who have been slated for deportation prior to the outbreak of the virus.

Portugal

Spain's precautionary measures are different from those of its neighbor, Portugal. The latter will treat all refugees and migrants, who have pending applications as permanent residents, starting July 1.

The government decision was meant to secure refugees' and migrants' access to public services during the coronavirus outbreak.

"Applicants including asylum seekers need only provide evidence of an ongoing request to qualify — granting them access to the national health service, welfare benefits, bank accounts, and work and rental contracts," Reuters reported.

A spokesman for Portugal's Ministry of Internal Affairs, Claudia Veloso, summed up the logic behind her government's decision in a language that is, sadly, quite alien to the pervading European political discourse on refugees: "People should not be deprived of their rights to health and public service just because their application has not yet been processed. In these exceptional times, the rights of migrants must be guaranteed."

Italy

One of the countries that has suffered most as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, Italy has a significant population of refugees and asylum seekers, numbering 300,000 by the end of 2018.

On March 12, due to the closure of courts across the country, the Italian government suspended all hearings and appeals relevant to asylum seekers. It remains unclear when the pending status of refugees will be reviewed, considering the high death toll and the degree of economic devastation that have afflicted Italy in recent months.

Although, by law, all foreigners in Italy have access to the country's healthcare system, "many asylum seekers fear going to hospitals if undocumented, or face discrimination or language barriers," Refugees International said last March.

Coronavirus: grave of Parthian warrior accidentally unearthed in Iran

→ 1 The Parthians largely adopted the art, architecture, religious beliefs, and royal insignia of their culturally heterogeneous empire, which encompassed Persian, Hellenistic, and regional cultures. At its height, the empire stretched from the northern reaches of the Euphrates, in what is now central-eastern Turkey, to eastern Iran.



Parthian warfare was characterized by the extensive use of cavalry and archers. Coming at enemy troops from all directions Parthian riders created confusion and wreaked havoc.

Smart with their tactics, the Parthians were also adept at psychological warfare. At the Battle of Carrhae, before the Romans approached, Surena, the Parthian general, hid the bulk of his force behind his advance guard so his army would appear small. Then, "to confound the soul and unseat judgment" (Crassus, 23:7) the Parthians filled the plain with a deafening beat of kettledrums. Plutarch mentions these drums were covered with bronze bells.

The total number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in Iran reached 93,657 on Wednesday, of whom 5,957 have died and 73,791 recovered.

Sistan-Baluchestan exports over \$3m of handicrafts

HERITAGE TEHRAN – Handicrafts exports from the lesser-known Sistan-Baluchestan province surpassed \$3 million during the previous Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended on March 19), IRNA reported.

"Handicrafts valued at 3,078,586 dollars were exported from the province over the past year," deputy provincial tourism chief Mohammad-Behrouz Isazehi announced on Sunday.

The handicrafts were mostly composed of needlework, traditional textiles, earthenware, and potteries exported to littoral Persian Gulf states, Iraq, Tajikistan, Germany and other countries, the official noted.

Last August, Sistan-Baluchestan tourism department announce that exports from the southeastern province rose by 195 percent since one of its villages, Kalpourgan, was named a world village of pottery by the World Crafts Council - Asia Pacific Region (WCC-APR). The village is widely famous for being a living museum of potteries, where the in-house expertise has been passed down generations to generations over the course of history.



Needlework (Souzan-douzi in Persian) is a very common occupation among people of the southeastern province. It is the art of drawing images on plain fabrics by sewing delicate stitches using needle and colorful yarns. They are mainly used to embellish women's clothes, however, such works are applied to decorate bracelets, necklace, bags and scarfs.

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

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

Ancient relics of Iran: Seated statue of a Mesopotamian prince

(Part 2/2)

(Louvre museum) – This near life-size statue was carved from a large block of diorite. A very hard, dark stone of volcanic origin, diorite had been the royal stone par excellence since the Akkadian period. Texts of the third millennium record that it was imported a great distance from the land of Magan, or modern Oman. It was therefore scarce, and its use was a sign of wealth and power. Though difficult to work, its hardness - which promised durability - showed off the technical skills of sculptors and enabled them to work with vigor and precision. Gudea of Lagash had chosen diorite for his statues, and the stone was prized by princes throughout the whole of the Palaeo-Babylonian period.

It was once thought that this work, impressive in its dimensions and material, might be a depiction of Hammurabi after his conquest of the city; certain details, however, such as the rendering of the locks of the beard, indicate that this prince reigned at the very end of the third millennium or the very beginning of the second.

Iranian windmills one step closer to UNESCO status

→ 1 "The earliest known references to windmills are to a Persian millwright in 644 CE and windmills in Seistan [Sistan], Iran, in 915 CE," the Encyclopedia Britannica says.

Currently, avid visitors and researchers can examine the subtle yet simple mechanism in person as several windmills have been restored and brought back to life to testify how ancient Iranians harnessed the wind to make a living.

In the village of Nashtifan, Mohammad Etebari serves as the last keeper of the ancient tradition. Now elderly, Etebari has dedicated his life to keeping the town's few dozen historic windmills turning.

But Etebari doesn't know how much more time he has, and none of the younger generation seem interested in the hard work of daily maintenance. Without his regular attention, the windmills that have put the town on the tourist map may one day stop.

"It's the pure, clean air that makes the windmills rotate—the life-giving air that everyone can breathe," Etebari said in an interview a couple of years ago.

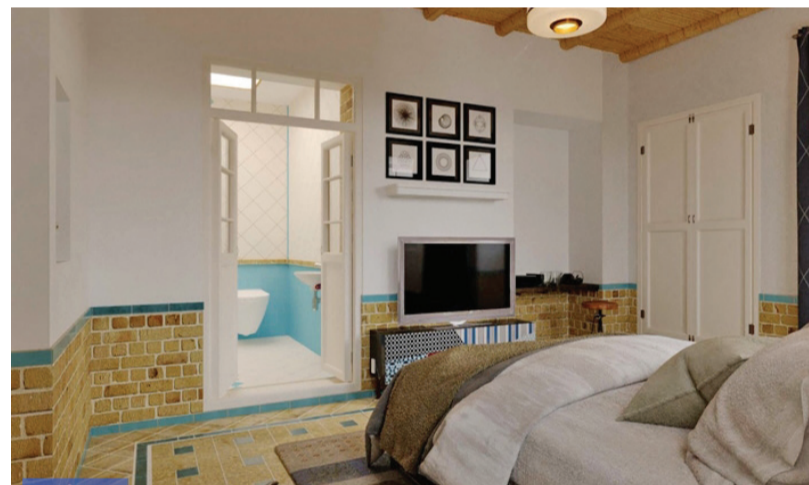
Made of natural clay, straw, and wood, each of the windmills of Nashtifan is comprised of eight chambers, with each chamber housing six blades. As the area's strong, steady wind enters the chambers it turns the blades, which then turn grindstones. The structures reach up to about 65 feet in height.

The region is so well known for its wind that the name Nashtifan is derived from words that mean "storm's sting." With the ample winds, the devices can readily glean enough power from the wind to turn a stone. If they were hooked up to a generator they would produce only a small amount of electricity, possibly not even enough for a lightbulb. Today's power-harvesting turbines have more efficient designs that take advantage of lift to attain higher speeds, and therefore produce much more power.

In 2002 the windmills were recognized as a national heritage site by Iran.



Tourism projects worth \$1.5b underway in Shemiranat



TOURISM TEHRAN – Nine tourism projects, worth 60 trillion rials (about \$1.5 billion), have started in Shemiranat county, Tehran province, provincial tourism chief Ali Rafiei said, CHTN reported on Wednesday.

The projects include building ecologic guest houses, hotels and traditional restaurants as well as recreational and tourist facilities, he added.

He also noted that the projects have created 370 direct job opportunities.

Last October, Iran's tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan announced that a total of 2,451 tourism-related projects

worth 2,000 trillion rials (about \$47 billion) were being implemented across the country.

"The country has potential to attract whatever investment is made in this [tourism] sector and now the tourism share of the country's gross domestic product is about 2.9%, while a share of 4.5% is sought to be achieved. To attain such figure we need 21 billion dollars of investments in tourism arena," Mounesan said.

Being close to the capital city of Tehran and having a very nice weather makes Shemiranat an alluring destination for both domestic and foreign travelers.

West Azarbaijan tourist sites, museums available online



Qareh Klise (St. Thaddeus Monastery)

TOURISM TEHRAN – Some tourist attractions and museums in the northwestern province of West Azarbaijan can be visited on virtual tours during the coronavirus outbreak in the country, said provincial tourism chief Jalil Jabbari, CHTN reported on Tuesday.

People can visit the province's historical sites, museums and natural sights live on Instagram with the presence of a tour leader, he added.

West Azarbaijan embraces a variety of lush natural sceneries, cultural heritage

sites and museums including the UNESCO sites of Takht-e Soleyman and Qareh Klise (St. Thaddeus Monastery), Teppe Hasanlu and the ruined Bastam Citadel.

The region was a center of several ancient civilizations. According to Britannica, it was conquered by Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC and was named Atropatene after one of Alexander's generals, Atropates, who established a small kingdom there. Ultimately, the area returned to the Persian (Iranian) rule under the Sasanians in the 3rd century CE.

Iran, Asia-Pacific countries discuss post-coronavirus tourism

TOURISM TEHRAN – Iran and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Asia-Pacific member states held a webinar on Tuesday, discussing ways to expand tourism in the region after coronavirus crisis ends.

Representatives of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Ministry as well as UNWTO Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific Hae Guk (Harry) Hwang attended the meeting, which was chaired by UNWTO Senior Media Officer of Communications and Publications Marcelo Risi, CHTN reported.

The meeting was also attended by representatives of Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Singapore, South Korea, Bangladesh and Fiji.

The fallout from the pandemic has devastated travel-related corporations and small businesses, as well as travelers throughout the world. Due to the coronavirus, many people across the globe remain afraid to travel as governments and health officials have warned the public to cancel travel plans and long flights. Major events like conferences, trade shows and festivals have been canceled or postponed.

A recent study conducted by Tourism Economics predicts that compared to last year, the travel industry in 2020 will shrink by 50 percent, affecting airlines, hotels and restaurants, as well as corollary businesses. The number of international



travelers could shrink from 1.4 billion to fewer than 1 billion: the first time the international traveler number has fallen that low since 2015.

On Monday, the head of the Association of Iranian Hoteliers Jamshid Hamzezhadeh announced that the travel industry in Iran has lost 53 trillion rials (about \$1.2 billion) just over the past two months due to coronavirus outbreak in the country.

Earlier this month, the UNWTO released a set of recommendations, calling for urgent and strong support to help

the global tourism sector in the face of the novel coronavirus pandemic that has crippled traveling and jeopardized related jobs all over the globe.

Formulated with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO), the recommendations call on innovators and entrepreneurs to put forward new solutions to help the tourism sector recover from COVID-19.

UNWTO is also collaborating with World Health Organization (WHO) in launching "Healing Solutions for Tourism", an innovation challenge to help the tourism sector recover from COVID-19, where millions of jobs are at risk as the pandemic hits hard. In the face of an unprecedented challenge, the UNWTO, with the support of the WHO, calls on innovators and entrepreneurs innovators to submit ideas that can be implemented immediately in destinations, businesses and public health efforts to help the tourism sector mitigate the impact of the pandemic and kick start recovery efforts.

According to the nonprofit World Travel and Tourism Council, which represents the international tourism industry, travel and tourism contributed \$8.8 trillion to the global economy in 2018 and was responsible for 10.4 percent of all economic activity. The council estimates that travel and tourism are responsible for 319 million jobs around the world.



UNESCO-registered Kazeruni Mansion in Bushehr

Bushehr ready to boost tourism after coronavirus

TOURISM TEHRAN – The tourism sector of Iran's southwestern Bushehr province is ready to jumpstart after coronavirus crisis ends, provincial tourism chief Mohammad-Hossein Arastuzadeh said on Tuesday, CHTN reported.

He also stressed that the province needs innovative plans and programs to attract more tourists and travelers to its tourist attractions and historical sites.

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

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

The historical and architectural monuments of Bushehr include Islamic buildings like mosques and praying centers, mansions,

old towers, castles, as well as gardens.

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

Persian Gulf, the eternal heritage of ancient Iran

From among the other significant deeds written in this field, the world map: Hecataeus (472 to 509 B.C.) can be stated where Persian Gulf has been clearly shown.

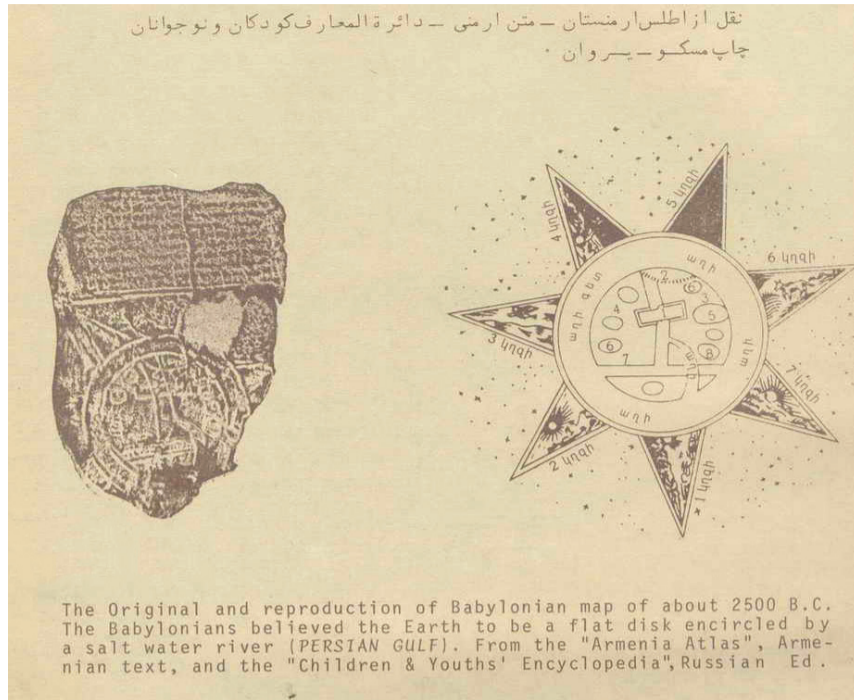
At the same time, many maps and deeds prepared up to the 8th century by the scientists and geographical researchers such as Hecataeus and Herodotus (father of Science of Geography) and in the Islamic period, Mohammad Ibn Mousa Kharazmi, Abou Yousef Eshagh Kandi, Ibn Khardazabeh, Harrani (Bani), and others, mention that there is a wide sea at south of Iran named Pars Sea, Pars Gulf, Fars Sea, Fars Gulf, Bahre Fars, Sinus Persicus and Mare Persicum and so on.

By describing the water body, the life of Persians living at both sides have also been confirmed.

Persian Gulf in historical maps

In all the important historical maps and Atlas whether modern or belonging to previous centuries, the water artery located at south of Iran has been registered as Persian Gulf. In the Arabian countries too, it has always been named Persian Gulf up to the 70s.

For instance, in the Atlas "Alaragh fi Alkhavaret Alghadimeh" by Dr. Ahmad Souseh (Baghdad 1959) including 40 maps among the Arabian sources of the Middle Ages. In the maps presented by Arabian countries to the International Court of the Judiciary for settlements of border



The Original and reproduction of Babylonian map of about 2500 B.C. The Babylonians believed the Earth to be a flat disk circled by a salt water river (PERSIAN GULF). From the "Armenia Atlas", Armenian text, and the "Children & Youths' Encyclopedia", Russian Ed.

claims, the name of Persian Gulf has been mentioned.

The book: "Osoul Alkuwait Almanshour Alalam" (1991) published in the Netherlands also contains 15 maps where the name of Persian Gulf exists.

In Atlas of "History of Islam" (1951-55

America and Egypt) the name Persian Gulf has been mentioned 16 times.

Furthermore, about 30 valid Atlas have registered the name of Persian Gulf within the past 30 years, such as: Atlas of Thomas Herbert (1628), Atlas of Pars, Lousaj University (1863), Atlas of

Germany (1861), Pars Envile Atlas (1760), Atlas of Modern Geography (1890), Atlas of London (1873), Atlas of Ernest Embrosius (1922), Atlas of Bilefield (1899), and Atlas of Harmsorth (19th Century, London).

Application of Persian Gulf by international organizations

Organizations and affiliated foundations have applied the correct name of Persian Gulf since they have been incorporated, excluding one case, which corrected it through Note No.6 AD311/IGEN dated March 5, 1971.

In confirmation and response to the correspondence of the government of Iran for application of the complete name of Persian Gulf in the publications and deeds of United Nations and affiliated organizations, 14 notes and correspondences can be mentioned containing the aforementioned note of Secretariat of United Nations, containing the amendment of Deed IPPD14/UNIDB.

In all the above mentioned notes and circulars, it has been requested that the water body existing at the south side of Iran be stated: Persian Gulf. The Specialized Group for Experts on Standardization of Geographical Names, active in the United Nations Social Economic Council also emphasizes the correct use of historical names for features, and is active in dispute settlement related to geographical names.

COVID-19, climate change, require 'brave, visionary and collaborative leadership': UN chief

To combat the COVID-19 pandemic and the "looming existential threat of climate disruption", the only credible response is "brave, visionary and collaborative leadership" anchored in multilateralism, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, said on Tuesday, during an international discussion focused on climate change.

And against the backdrop of threatened lives, crippled businesses and damaged economies, the UN chief warned the Petersberg Climate Dialogue in Berlin that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also under threat.

"The highest cost is the cost of doing nothing", he spelled out, underscoring the need to urgently "strengthen resilience and cut greenhouse gas emissions to limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees" above pre-industrial levels, to mitigate climate change.

Political will required

Heartened by technology and public opinion, especially among the younger generations, he observed that many cities and businesses are taking action.

"But we still lack the necessary political will", he said, advocating for "significantly more ambition" on mitigation, adaptation and financing.

On mitigation, all countries must commit to carbon neutrality by 2050. And developing countries - least responsible for climate change but most vulnerable to its impacts - need resilience-building support. This requires adequate financing, beginning with a promised \$100 billion dollars a year for mitigation and adaptation efforts, added Mr. Guterres.

'Profound opportunity'

In planning the coronavirus pandemic recovery, there is "a profound opportunity" to steer the world on "a path that tackles climate change, protects the environment, reverses biodiversity loss and ensures the long-term health and security of humankind", the Secretary-General said.

"By making the transition to low-carbon, climate-resilient growth, we can create a world that is clean, green, safe, just and more prosperous for all", he emphasized.

As such, he proposed six different climate-related actions that countries can take, to shape the recovery.

Recognizing that like the coronavirus, greenhouse gases respect no boundaries, Mr. Guterres maintained that isolation is a trap in which "no country can succeed alone".

"We already have a common framework for action - the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change", he reminded.

Carbon neutrality by 2050

Pointing out that 121 States have already committed to carbon neutrality by 2050, the Secretary-General asked all countries to "prepare enhanced national climate action plans", or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), "to reach net zero emissions by 2050".

"I encourage the European Union to continue showing global leadership by presenting, by the end of the year, a Nationally Determined Contribution in line with its commitment to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050", he said.

(Source: news.un.org)

Coronavirus: why UK's death toll could soon be the worst in Europe

The UK's five-day average for coronavirus deaths is now the highest of any major European economy at this point in the pandemic's curve, new analysis has revealed.

At this point in the pandemic, some 42 days since the tenth death, the five-day average for deaths in the UK stands at 598, according to the latest data from Johns Hopkins University. This is far higher than Italy (559), France (509) and Spain (423).

UK coronavirus deaths have been the highest among all major European countries for four days in a row, overtaking France at this stage of the pandemic.

This is despite the international data for the UK only recording deaths in hospitals, in contrast to countries like France which records all community deaths.

ONS figures released today reveal that a further 4,319 coronavirus deaths have now been recorded outside of hospitals in England and Wales. This means that, up to Friday 17 April, the UK death toll was 39 per cent higher than the totals published by NHS England.

Looking at the latest international data, the UK has seen the highest rate of increase in deaths over the last week, prompting experts to worry that a prolonged coronavirus peak could lead to the UK becoming the worst-hit country in Europe.

While the peak of the crisis in the UK is thought to have passed in early April, the five-day average in UK daily deaths has only just fallen below 600.

Experts are concerned that our peak is prolonging longer than Italy, Spain or France, prompting some to think the UK

will be one of the worst, if not the worst affected, country in Europe.

So far, Italy, Spain and France all have a higher death toll than the UK's 21,092. But this could be about to change with the UK's epidemiological curve stubbornly refusing to bend downwards.

Over the last week, between Monday 20 April and Monday 27 April, the UK's total death figure increased by 28 per cent. This is higher than Germany's 26 per cent, France's 15 per cent, Spain's 13 per cent or Italy's 12 per cent.

While only marginally higher than Germany's rate, it's important to note that Germany has less than a third of the UK's overall deaths.

The fact that the UK's rate of death isn't slowing as fast as other European countries is one of the reasons why the Government is resisting calls to weaken the lockdown, with Prime Minister Boris Johnson saying he refused to "throw away" the public's "effort and sacrifice".

Daily UK deaths are starting to drop, but the UK's daily average has only just fallen below 600, for the first time in 20 days.

On Monday 27 April, the last calendar day for which full data is available from Johns Hopkins University, the UK recorded 360 daily deaths. This is higher than Spain (331), Italy (333) and Germany (150).

France was, however, marginally higher with 437 deaths - although it's important to note that France's numbers are for the whole community while the UK's are hospital-only.

(Source: telegraph.co.uk)

Ayatollah Khamenei donates \$110,000 for releasing inmates

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has donated 4.5 billion rials (about \$110,000) to help release prisoners of unintentional crimes.

As an annual tradition, benefactors come together in a ceremony to raise funds for releasing prisoners of unintentional crimes, ISNA quoted Asadollah Joolaei, head of Blood Money Organization, as saying on Wednesday.

This year, however, due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, the ceremony will not be held, he noted.

According to the organization's report, the Leader has donated more than 25 billion rials (about \$600,000) over the past ten years, helping release over 700 prisoners of unintentional crimes in the country.



2020 is likely to be the hottest year ever recorded: report

A new report from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says there is a 75 percent chance that 2020 will be the hottest year in recorded history.

Despite major reductions in air pollution across the world during COVID-19 shutdowns, climate scientists predict temperatures will continue to rise because of how much cumulative greenhouse gases are already in the atmosphere.

If 2020 doesn't pass the previous hottest year on record, 2016, the NOAA says it's all but certain to rank in the top five, all of which have happened since 2015.

"The emissions will go down this year, but the concentrations keep on rising," University of Oxford climate scientist Karsten Haustein told The Guardian. "We are very unlikely to be able to notice any slowdown in the built-up of atmospheric GHG levels."

"But we have the unique chance now to reconsider our choices and use the corona crisis as a catalyst for more sustainable means of transport and energy production (via incentives, taxes, carbon prices etc)."

An earlier estimate from The Met Office also put the odds of 2020 being the hottest year yet on record at 50 percent.

NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York recently released their own report giving a 60 percent chance that 2020 will pass 2016's previous high.

Whether this year, actually breaks the previous record, climate scientists agree the warming trend in recent years could lead to environmental catastrophe.

"Greenhouse gas concentrations are at the highest levels in three million years - when the Earth's temperature was as much as three degrees hotter and sea levels some 15 meters higher," UN Antonio Guterres said in March.

"Ocean heat is at a record level, with temperatures rising at the equivalent of five Hiroshima bombs a second."

2020 has already seen a number of record-breaking highs, with the hottest January on record, with some parts of Europe experiencing temperatures 10.8 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the 1981-2010 averages.

In February, temperatures in Antarctica reached a shocking 68 degrees Fahrenheit, and average global temperatures were the second hottest ever, behind 2016.

(Source: Daily Mail)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Iraq UN explosion

(August 20, 2003)

Tuesday's explosion at the United Nations headquarters in Iraq is a personal tragedy for the families of those killed or hurt. But there will also be diplomatic results. The UN has an uncertain role in Iraq - the Security Council did not accept the United States-led attack on the country and yet, after that, UN officials went to work there. This report from Mark Doyle: The attack on the United Nations headquarters in Iraq leaves the UN more exposed than ever.

The physical security of United Nations personnel may be uppermost in the minds of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and other officials as they gather for crisis talks in New York over the next day or two. But the organisation is exposed politically as well.

Supporters of the UN - such as the former UN Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson - say the attack should be a wake-up call to redouble efforts to get a wider UN mandate to steer Iraq back to sovereignty.

But - quite aside from whether the US-led occupying powers would allow such a strong UN mandate to be developed - the attack is bound to discourage potential troop-contributing countries from taking part in any international force.

The UN has always been at pains to say that its role in occupied Iraq is distinct from that of the US-led forces, and many ordinary Iraqis appreciated that the primary UN role was humanitarian. But the UN Security Council recently passed a resolution welcoming the establishment of the Iraqi Governing Council, a council appointed under United States supervision. That Security Council resolution was controversial for opponents of the US-led occupation. Its adoption was an example of the tightrope the UN has to walk between the reality of American power and the demand of some of its other member states for a bigger say in world affairs.

Words

exposed: in a dangerous situation
physical security: bodily safety, safety of people
uppermost in the minds of: most important thing they are thinking of at the moment
mandate: instruction or authority to do something
sovereignty: power to govern itself
potential troop-contributing countries: countries which might provide soldiers in the future
humanitarian: helping people, trying to avoid suffering
passed a resolution: made an official decision by voting at a meeting
controversial: causing disagreement, discussion or argument
tightrope: piece of rope stretched between two poles on which acrobats balance and perform tricks; here, gives the idea of being in a difficult position

(Source: BBC)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

Motorcyclists responsible for 63% of accidents in Tehran

Motorcycle riders are the highest contributors to road fatality being responsible for 63 percent of the accidents happened in the Iranian capital in the first 10 months of the current [Iranian calendar] year (starting on March 21, 2018), head of accidents department of Tehran Traffic Police has said.

Unfortunately, motorcycle users represent over 38 percent of the total traffic fatalities happened in the aforementioned period, Tasnim quoted Ehsan Momeni as saying on Tuesday. As per the figures revealed by forensics, young motorcyclists aged 18-28 years constituted 33 percent of the fatal crashes resulted in their deaths, while being blamed for over 63 percent of the total accidents, he lamented.

راکبان موتورسیکت در ۶۳ درصد تصادفات تهران مقصر بودند

رئیس اداره تصادفات پلیس راهور تهران بزرگ گفت: در ده ماهه نخست سال ۹۷ راکبان موتورسیکت در تهران در ۶۳ درصد تصادفات به عنوان مقصر حادثه شناخته شده‌اند.

به گزارش روز سه شنبه خبرگزاری تسنیم؛ سرهنگ احسان مؤمنی در تشریح تصادفات منجر به فوت شهر تهران گفت: ۳۸ درصد کل متوفیان حوادث رانندگی مربوط به موتورسیکت سواران بوده است. وی اظهار کرد: با توجه به آمار پزشکی قانونی ۳۳ درصد راکبان موتورسیکت فوتی ۱۸ تا ۲۸ سال سن داشته‌اند و در ۶۳ درصد تصادفات به عنوان مقصر حادثه شناخته شده‌اند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"galacto-, gala-, galact-"

Meaning: milk
For example: The Milky Way is the *galaxy* which is the home of our Solar System.

PHRASAL VERB

Have (got) something against somebody/something

Meaning: to dislike or be opposed to someone or something for a particular reason
For example: I can't see what you've got against the idea.

IDIOM

Bucket list

Explanation: a list of things a person would like to do or achieve before a certain age or before dying
For example: I have never visited the pyramids of Egypt but they're on my bucket list.

India should be placed on religious freedom blacklist: U.S. panel

A U.S. government panel has called for India to be put on a religious freedom blacklist over a "drastic" downturn under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, triggering a sharp rebuttal from New Delhi.

In an annual report published on Tuesday, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) said India should join the ranks of "countries of particular concern" that would be subject to sanctions if they do not improve their records.

"In 2019, religious freedom conditions in India experienced a drastic turn downward, with religious minorities under increasing assault," the report said.

The bipartisan panel recommends but does not set policy, and there is virtually no chance the State Department will follow its lead on India, an increasingly close U.S. ally.

But the lower ranking for the ally amounts to a stark show of disapproval of India's divisive new citizenship law, which the United Nations has called "fundamentally discriminatory".

Trump declined to criticize the law during his February visit to India, where his meeting with Modi was punctuated by the worst violence in decades in New Delhi, in which 53 people, mostly Muslims, were killed.

Allowed violence against minorities

The commission, by contrast, is empowered as an independent arbiter to look only at nations' religious freedom records, apart from their relationship with the U.S., Vice-Chair at USCIRF Nadine Maenza said.

Beyond the citizenship law, Maenza said in an interview, India has a broader "move toward clamping down on religious minorities that's really troublesome".

It called on the U.S. to impose punitive measures, including visa bans on Indian officials believed responsible and grant funding to civil society groups that monitor hate speech.

The commission said Modi's Hindu nationalist government, which won a convincing election victory last year, "allowed violence against minorities and their houses of worship to continue with impunity, and also engaged in and tolerated hate speech and incitement to violence."

It pointed to comments by Home Minister Amit Shah, who notoriously referred to mostly Muslim migrants as "termites," and to a citizenship law that has triggered nationwide protests.

It also highlighted the revocation of the autonomy of Kashmir, which was India's only Muslim-majority state, and allegations that Delhi police turned a blind eye to mobs who attacked Muslim neighbourhoods in February this year.

The Indian government, which has long been irritated by the commission's comments, quickly rejected the report.

"Its biased and tendentious comments against India are not new. But on this occasion, its misrepresentation has reached new levels," Foreign Ministry spokesman Anurag Srivastava said.

"We regard it as an organisation of particular concern and will treat it accordingly," he said in a statement.

'Saudi activist detained for criticizing discrimination in Shia-majority Qatif'

Saudi forces have reportedly arrested a social activist over complaining about the Riyadh regime's discriminatory and racist policies in the Shia-populated Qatif region.

The Arabic-language Mirat al-Jazeera news website reported on Tuesday that Saudi activist Atef Abdul Wahid al-Ghanem had been taken into custody on Friday.

The report came three days after the Twitter account nashetqatifi (Qatif activist) said Ghanem had been arrested for protesting the kingdom's systematic racism and sectarian incitement against Qatif's Shia community.

Qatif, situated in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province has, since 2011, witnessed anti-regime demonstrations, demanding free speech, release of political prisoners, and an end to economic and religious discrimination against the kingdom's minority Shia population.

Riyadh has suppressed pro-democracy rallies that have intensified since January 2016, when Saudi Arabia executed respected Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr.

It has also stepped up security measures, increasing politically-motivated arrests, prosecution and conviction of peaceful dissident writers and human rights campaigners.

According to Press TV, Last month, the kingdom imposed a lockdown on Qatif region under the pretext of preventing the spread of the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

The latest arrest in Saudi Arabia came days after the first anniversary of the execution of 37 nationals, at least 33 of them Shias, after they were tortured into making false confessions.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) described the killings as "the largest mass executions of Shia in the history of Saudi Arabia since the 1900s."

Nearly 70 dead in coronavirus outbreak at U.S. veterans home

Nearly 70 residents sickened with coronavirus have died at a home for ageing veterans in Massachusetts state as officials try to figure out what went wrong in the deadliest known outbreak at a long-term care facility in the United States.

While the death toll at the state-run Holyoke Soldiers' Home continues to climb, federal officials are investigating whether residents were denied proper medical care, and the state's top prosecutor is deciding whether to bring legal action, al Jazeera reported.

"It's horrific," said Edward Lapointe, whose father-in-law lives at the home and had a mild case of the virus. "These guys never had a chance."

Sixty-eight veteran residents who tested positive for the virus have died, officials said on Tuesday, and it is not known whether another person who died had COVID-19. Another 82 residents and 81 employees have tested positive.

The home's superintendent, who has been placed on administrative leave, defended his response and accused state officials of falsely claiming they were unaware of the scope of the problem there.

The superintendent, Bennett Walsh, said earlier this month state officials knew the home was in "crisis mode" when it came to staffing shortages and were notified early and often about the contagion at the facility.

Go battle Covid-19 at home! Chinese Navy 'expels U.S. warship from territorial waters'

A U.S. warship was "expelled" from disputed South China Sea waters after Beijing's navy scrambled fighter jets and naval assets to escort it away, accusing Washington of "provocative" actions at sea.

The USS *Barry*, a guided missile destroyer, "trespassed" into Beijing's territorial waters near the disputed Xisha Islands — also known as the Paracel Islands — on Tuesday, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy said in a statement. The incident marks the first time the navy "actively announced" an illegal trespass in the area, according to the Global Times.

"The U.S.'s provocative actions seriously violated international law and related norms, seriously violated Chinese sovereignty and security interests, and intentionally increased regional security risks," said Senior Colonel Li Huamin, a spokesman of the PLA Southern Theater Command, adding that the action could have led to an "accident."

Earlier this week, the *Barry* traversed the nearby Taiwan Strait in its second "routine transit" this month, the U.S. Navy said, closely followed by a Chinese aircraft carrier on both occasions.



American warships regularly "patrol" the Strait, as well as the South and East China seas, citing the need to protect "freedom of navigation," but Beijing

has repeatedly slammed the operations as infringing on its sovereignty. Tensions between Washington and Beijing have seen a steep rise in recent weeks, with

both sides trading accusations regarding the coronavirus pandemic and its origins. U.S. officials, including President Donald Trump, claim that China concealed vital information in the early stages of the health crisis, even freezing funding for the World Health Organization over its supposed role in the cover-up. Beijing has hit back by insinuating that the U.S. military may have had a hand in the original Covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan, while a number of Chinese officials have rejected the U.S. allegations, insisting it shared information on the virus as soon as it was available.

Made up by some 40 islets and reefs, the Paracel Islands are claimed by China, Vietnam and Taiwan — which itself is also regarded by Beijing as its own territory — but since a short military confrontation over the archipelago with Vietnam in 1974, China has maintained control of the islands, which are now administered by the provincial government of Hainan. Washington, however, does not recognize Beijing's territorial claim, considering the area around the island chain to be international waters.

(Source: RT)

Saudi Arabia, U.S. urge UAE-aligned separatists to rescind self-rule in southern Yemen

Saudi Arabia has urged the separatists allied with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to end the self-rule rule they have newly announced in Yemen's south and return to cooperation under a Riyadh deal, as a rift in the Saudi-led coalition waging war on Yemen cracks open again.

The Saudi cabinet stressed that conditions in Yemen's Aden and some southern provinces should return to the way they were before the so-called Southern Transitional Council (STC) declared a self-rule and state of emergency, the state-run SPA news agency reported on Tuesday.

It also noted that emphasis should be on ending any steps contrary to the Riyadh-brokered agreement signed between the two sides last November to end their power struggle in southern Yemen, which has deeply divided the Saudi-led coalition of aggressors.

On the weekend, the UAE-backed STC declared a state of emergency and announced "self-administration rule" in Yemen's southern regions, including the port city of Aden — which has served as the seat of Yemen's former Riyadh-allied government during the Saudi-led war.

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo — whose country has been a staunch backer of the Riyadh-led invasion of Yemen — said on Tuesday Washington was "concerned" over the STC's measure amid fears over the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the Arabian Peninsula state.

"Such unilateral actions only exacerbate instability in Yemen," he said in a statement. "They are especially un-



helpful at a time when the country is threatened by COVID-19 and also threaten to complicate the efforts of the UN Special Envoy to revive political negotiations" between the self-proclaimed government of former Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and the Houthis Ansarullah movement.

He urged the separatists and forces loyal to government of ex-president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi to engage "in the political process provided under the Riyadh Agreement."

A day earlier, the Riyadh-led military alliance similarly urged the STC to rescind its self-rule declaration, saying it was an "escalatory action" at a time all parties should focus on confronting the coronavirus.

"The coalition urges an immediate end to any steps contrary to the Riyadh Agreement, and work rapidly toward its implementation," it said.

Saudi Arabia, along with a coalition of its vassal states, launched the military aggression on Yemen in a bid to re-install the Hadi regime and crush the Houthis. However, over five years into the war, the kingdom has achieved neither of its objectives.

The Western-sponsored bombing campaign has plunged Yemen into what the UN says is the world's worst humanitarian crisis and killed more than 100,000 people in the impoverished state.

Yemen announced its first COVID-19 case on April 10, but since then authorities have been unable to track down "patient zero" amid warnings that the country's health system is ill-equipped to handle the outbreak.

Virus probably circulating in Yemen

In another development on Tuesday, the office of the UN aid chief in Yemen said that based on transmission patterns in other countries and given that 17 days have passed since the country reported its first case, "agencies are warning there is now a very real probability that the virus has been circulating undetected and unmitigated within communities."

"This increases the likelihood of a surge of cases which may quickly overwhelm health capacities," it said in a statement.

The office further pointed out that 31 of 41 major UN humanitarian assistance programs will scale-down or stop in coming weeks without more money, warning that the funding shortage would compromise efforts to combat the highly contagious virus in Yemen.

Satellite images of luxury boats further suggest North Korea's Kim at favored villa



Satellite imagery showing recent movements of luxury boats often used by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his entourage near Wonsan provide further indications he has been at the coastal resort, according to experts who monitor North Korea events.

Speculation about Kim's health and location erupted after his unprecedented absence from April 15 celebrations to mark the birthday of his late grandfather and North Korea's founder, Kim Il Sung, Reuters reported.

On Tuesday, North Korea-monitoring website NK PRO reported commercial satellite imagery showed boats often used by Kim had made movements in patterns that suggested he or his entourage may be in the Wonsan area.

That followed a report last week by a U.S.-based North Korea monitoring project, 38 North, which reported satellite images showed what was believed to be Kim's personal train was parked at a station reserved for his use at the villa in Wonsan.

Officials in South Korea and the United States say it is plausible Kim may be staying there, possibly to avoid exposure to the new coronavirus, and have expressed scepticism of media reports he had some kind of serious illness.

They caution, however, that Kim's health and location are closely guarded secrets and reliable information is difficult to obtain in North Korea.

The last time official media in North Korea reported on Kim's whereabouts was when he presided over a meeting on April 11, but there have been near-daily reports of him sending letters and diplomatic messages.

Kim's seaside compound in Wonsan, on the country's east coast, is dotted with guest villas and serviced by a private beach, basketball court, and private train station, according to experts and satellite imagery. An airstrip was bulldozed last year to build a horse riding track, while a boathouse nearby shelters Kim's Princess 95 luxury yacht, valued at around \$7 million in 2013.

40 killed, dozens injured in bomb attack in northern Syria



More than three dozen people have lost their lives when a powerful fuel truck bomb explosion rocked a northwestern Syrian city seized by Turkish military forces and their allied militants in the aftermath of a cross-border ground offensive against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militants more than two years ago.

The Turkish Defense Ministry, in a post published on its official Twitter page, said the attack took place in the city of Afrin, located more than 40 kilometers (24 miles) north of Aleppo, on Tuesday afternoon.

The ministry added that at least 40 people, including eleven children, were killed and 47 others wounded, blaming YPG militants for the explosion, press TV reported.

However, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least 36 people were killed and nearly 40 others wounded when an explosive device inside the fuel truck went off at a market in the city.

The Britain-based war monitor said the blast left at least six Turkish-backed militants dead as well.

Back on October 31, 2019, a car bomb

exploded in Afrin, leaving at least nine people dead and 30 others injured.

According to witnesses and a rescuer, the explosion took place at a busy market. Some reports said at the time that two children were among the fatalities.

On July 11 that year, more than a dozen people, including eight civilians, were killed and several others sustained injuries when a car rigged with explosives went off in the same northwestern Syrian city.

The Observatory said then the car bomb exploded near a checkpoint, manned by Turkish-backed militants of the so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA), at the entrance to Afrin, where vehicles were gathering to be checked.

The UK-based group added that 13 people were killed in the explosion, which shook Tirende residential area south of Afrin center. More than 30 people sustained injuries as well.

In March 2018, the Turkish military and allied Syria militants took control of Afrin after a two-month-long offensive, which dislodged YPG militants from the Syrian city.

New York City Mayor de Blasio singles out the city's Jewish community for flouting coronavirus rules

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio is catching heat for singling out the Jewish community in a tweet about people who are not following the city's social distancing rules.

"My message to the Jewish community, and all communities, is this simple: the time for warnings has passed," he wrote on Tuesday evening. "I have instructed the NYPD to proceed immediately to summons or even arrest those who gather in large groups. This is about stopping this disease and saving lives. Period."

The tweet was one of three sent Tuesday night, but they were not threaded together, Business Insider reported.

Earlier, de Blasio vented his frustrations about a large funeral gathering in Williamsburg that occurred on Tuesday night — that he personally went to help break up.

"Something absolutely unacceptable happened in Williamsburg tonight: a large funeral gathering in the middle of this pandemic," he tweeted. "When I heard, I went there myself

to ensure the crowd was dispersed. And what I saw WILL NOT be tolerated so long as we are fighting the Coronavirus."

Williamsburg, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, has a large population of ultra-Orthodox Jews, also known as Hasidic Jews, numbering about 57,000. The insular Jewish community has seen large numbers of coronavirus cases and some members have openly flouted social distancing rules by holding large prayer services or funerals.

Radosevic makes his case for being No. 1 at Persepolis

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Bozidar Radosevic is adamant that he will be Persepolis's No. 1 football team goalkeeper next season.

The Croatian goalkeeper joined the Reds in 2016 as Alireza Beiranvand's backup. He won Iran Professional League (IPL) with Persepolis for three consecutive seasons along with winning Hazfi Cup and the Iranian Super Cup three times.

Following the outbreak of the coronavirus, Rado has moved to Croatia and is waiting for the IPL to start again, so that he can return to Iran and participate in his team's training sessions.

Speaking about the situation in Croatia in these days of global crisis, he said: "Here, as in the rest of the world, everything is affected by coronavirus pandemic and all people are under lockdown. This is a global problem, and people must work together to eradicate the virus from the world as soon as possible."

The Croatian custodian claimed that he will continue to work hard and stay fit during this period when the IPL has taken a break owing to the Covid-19 pandemic,

and then talked about the resumption of the league: "Public health is the most important factor right now. If the situation is such that continuing the league do not endanger the lives of people, I am definitely eager for the league to restart," he said.

Iran international goalkeeper, Alireza Beiranvand, will leave Persepolis at the 2020 summer as he has signed a contract with the Belgian team Royal Antwerp and will play for them next season.

It provides the best opportunity for Rado to prove himself as the Iranian champions' No. 1 goalkeeper. He has a special place in hearts of Persepolis fans because of his loyalty, work and behavior.

The 31-year-old shot-stopper confidently considers himself the main goalkeeper of Persepolis next season.

"Beiranvand has absolutely proved with his performance that he is the best goalkeeper in Iran and Asia. For me, it is a great honor to be in Persepolis club. I have been sitting on the bench at this club over the past years. Now, it is my turn to be Persepolis's No. 1 keeper and I will not miss this opportunity," Radosevic concluded.



Iran denies Andrea Stramaccioni link

S P O R T S TEHRAN — The Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) has denied reports claiming the federation has negotiated with Italian coach Andrea Stramaccioni.

The Italian media have reported that Iran will hire Stramaccioni as new head coach, but FFIRI spokesman Amir Mahdi Alavi has rejected the speculation.

"Dragan Skocic will remain as Iran head coach and the federation has never negotiated with Stra-

maccioni," he said.

Stramaccioni stepped down from his role as coach of Esteghlal football team in December after the Iranian club failed to pay his wage.

Iran had already denied reports linking it to Italian coach Gianni De Biasi but the ex-Albania coach revealed that he was close to taking over Iran.

The Persians will have to play Hong Kong, Cambodia, Bahrain, and Iraq at the 2022 World Cup qualifiers.



Mehdi Mahdavia reveals his best goal

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Mehdi Mahdavia has revealed what he believes to be the best goal in his career.

Mahdavia made 111 appearances for Iran national football team and scored 13 goals.

The 2003 Asian Footballer of the Year, has scored memorable goals and has now lifted the lid on which one he feels was the best.

"When asked about my favorite goal, I always remember a goal I scored against the U.S. at the 1998 FIFA World Cup. I think it was the best goal in my career," Mahdavia told Asian football podcast.



Asked about his best teammate, Mahdavia said, "Ali Karimi is the best teammate I've ever had."

He says the Australia match in the 1998 FIFA World Cup qualification is the most difficult match in his career.

"It was my most difficult match because they were the better team and created so many scoring chances. But I think the God granted the Iranian people a gift after their second goal and we could return to the match. We reached the World Cup after 20 years in Melbourne," the former

Persepolis player said.

The Rocket considers his match against Juventus as the best performance in Hamburger SV's, where he was the impetus that rallied his team back after being down 3-1 by scoring once, assisting one and winning a penalty for Hamburg that saw them take a 4-3 lead; Juve managed to equalize with an Inzaghi penalty.

"Zidane is the greatest player I've seen and I am happy I played against him and Alessandro Del Piero. Zidane was the magician of the match," Mahdavia said.

Iran link with Stramaccioni; a sales pitch?

By Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

TEHRAN, Apr. 29 (MNA) — Italian media outlets reported talks between Iranian Football Federation and ex-Esteghlal head coach Andrea Stramaccioni for taking charge of Team Melli.

The Italian media reports came as the Iranian Football Federation has already signed an agreement with Croatian Dragan Skocic for the sit after Belgian Marc Wilmots stepped down after six months in charge.

The federation was then under immense pressure to appoint a quality coach since the team was seeing four must-win games in a few months. And on the other hand, lack of enough financial resource, due to the US sanctions against Iran, hampered the federation's capability to negotiate with top coaches. There were rumors of choosing an Iranian coach for the hot seat but eventually the position was offered to Skocic who had achieved good results with Sanat Naft club in IPL and had a good understanding of the Iranian football.

As the coronavirus hit the world, all the sporting events were affected, including the 2022 World Cup Qualifica-

tions where the Iranian team was supposed to play. Iran sits third in Group C and needs to win all four remaining games against Cambodia, Hong Kong, Bahrain, and Iraq to ensure a safe entry into the next level of qualifications. Had the officials in the federation knew in advance that such an outbreak would happen, they would have probably waited a bit longer to appoint the coach.

The appointment has received both praise and criticism from the Iranian football society. Some say that Skocic is not experienced enough for a national team as he has never guided one. However, some believe that he was the best choice with regard to circumstances.

After the postponement of Asian football events, there has come reports about foreign coaches being linked with Team Melli. In early April, reports were circulating about the federation talks with former Persepolis coach Gabriel Calderon. And now, Italian media suggest Italian Stramaccioni as a replacement for Skocic.

Some believe that the reports are being sponsored by the very same coaches as a form of sales pitch. "Reporting on proposals for foreign coach's who have experienced Iranian football and the wide covering of the issue in foreign media



has been turned into a weapon in the hands of coaches and media outlets close to them," reads a report by Persian sports service of Mehr News Agency.

The report indicate that foreign coaches are probably using their media teams for a 'sales pitch' so that they can find a new team.

All in all, the Iranian federation has strongly rejected both links and has noted that Skocic will remain as the team's boss, the public opinion seems to be ready for a new replacement.

Asia's greatest national teams: Iran (1970s)

Kuala Lumpur: Having looked at the World Cup winning Japan Women's team last week, the latest edition of this series remembers Islamic Republic of Iran's dominant national team from the 1970s.

The 1970's were eventful in terms of football for Iran, as it saw them lift the AFC Asian Cup title twice - including their last title in the competition - as well as their first ever FIFA World Cup appearance.

Iran have remained at the forefront of Asian football since and are the second highest ranked Asian team in the latest FIFA Ranking. Team Melli's introduction to the continental scene was a grand one, as they took Asia by storm, winning the AFC Asian Cup title on their debut on home soil in 1968.

The following decade would see the Iranians prove their triumph at home was far from a coincidence, and that they were a force to be reckoned with in the entire continent.

Repeating the Trick

Four years on, and with the number of teams increased to six; Iran set out to defend their title in Thailand 1972. They were pitted against the hosts and neighbors Iraq in Group A.

Hossein Kalani bagged a hat-trick in the opening match as TIran dispatched the Lions of Mesopotamia 3-0 in Bangkok. Top spot

in the group was sealed in style four days later. Ali Jabbari needed just eight minutes to net the fastest hat-trick in the history of the AFC Asian Cup, helping Iran come from behind to defeat Thailand 3-2.

Runners-up from Group B, Cambodia awaited in the semi-final, and goals from Safar Iranpak and Parviz Ghelichkhani were enough for head coach Mohammad Ranjbar's men to book a date in the final with Korea Republic.

In front of 15,000 fans in Bangkok, Jabbari's goal was cancelled out by Park Lee-chun, forcing extra-time. Kalani scored in the 108th minute to ensure the continental title remained in Tehran for four more years.

Three is a Charm

Back at home and under the guidance of legendary manager Heshmat Mohajerani, Iran still had a point to prove. Just as four years earlier, they would start their campaign against Iraq. And just like in Thailand, Iran were victorious; goals from Nasser Nouraei and Hassan Roshan sealed a 2-0 win.

The second game saw Mohajerani's men flex their muscles in what is still to date the largest win in AFC Asian Cup history; an 8-0 defeat of South Yemen. Kuwait had topped the other group, while China PR came second, meaning Team Dragon would

face the hosts in the semi-finals.

A cagey affair saw no goals in 90 minutes, but the Iranians were finally able to break the deadlock through Alireza Khorshidi at the 100-minute mark. Roshan's second of the tournament confirmed a 2-0 win and a place in the final a minute before the final whistle.

In front of a record 100,000 passionate home fans at the iconic Azadi Stadium, the Iranians would settle for nothing less than the trophy, and it was the legendary Ali Parvin who scored the only goal of the night to calm the nerves and seal Iran's third AFC Asian Cup triumph.

The World Stage

Having established themselves as the undisputed dominant force in Asian football, Mohajerani's men set their eyes on the world stage. The target was FIFA World Cup Argentina 1978

In the first round of the Qualifiers, Saudi Arabia and Syria were no match for Iran. Saudi Arabia were brushed aside 3-0 in Riyadh and 2-0 in Shiraz, while Syria withdrew from the return leg having lost 1-0 in Damascus, meaning Iran advanced to the final round of the Qualifiers with full marks and without conceding a single goal.

A more competitive second round saw Australia, Hong Kong, Korea Republic

and Kuwait battle Iran for one ticket to Buenos Aires. Iran were held to two draws by Korea Republic, and won all their remaining six matches.

Losing to Australia and drawing Kuwait meant the Taeguk Warriors were left four points behind Iran who topped the group, earning their place as Asia's proud representatives at the 1978 FIFA World Cup.

On their FIFA World Cup debut, Iran found themselves pitted against eventual runners-up Netherlands, and an iconic Peru side featuring the legendary Teofillo Cubillas, as well as Scotland.

Rob Rensenbrink demonstrated a glimpse of his ability, scoring all three-goals as the Netherlands beat Iran 3-0 in the opening match. Iraj Danaeifard won the honor of becoming the first Iranian to score in a FIFA World Cup, but his goal was cancelled out by an unfortunate Andranik Eskandarian own goal, meaning Team Melli walked away with just a point against Scotland.

The campaign concluded with a 4-1 defeat at the hands of Peru with Cubillas getting a hat-trick and Roshan adding his name as Iran's second scorer at the FIFA World Cup. The trip to South America was the culmination of a decade of success for Iran.

(Source: the-afc)

Igor Kolakovic reaches agreement with Warta Zawiercie

TASNIM — Former Iran volleyball coach Igor Kolakovic has reached an agreement to join Warta Zawiercie.

The details of the contract have not been revealed. Warta Zawiercie, based in Zawiercie, south of Poland, plays in Plus Liga and finished in 10th place in the current season.

Iran volleyball federation parted ways with Kolakovic after volleyball tournaments were canceled due to coronavirus.

Mehdi Taremi to join a bigger club soon: coach

PLDC — Rio Ave football team coach Carlos Carvalhal believes that Mehdi Taremi will join a big club in the transfer window.

The Iranian forward has scored 11 goals in 27 games for his team this season.

Taremi, 27, arrived at Rio Ave from Al Gharafa of Qatar at the beginning of the season.

Porto, Benfica and Sporting Lisbon have shown interest in signing Taremi.

"Taremi has so many offers and will join a big club in the summer," Carvalhal told record.pt.

FIFA medical committee chairman insists football shouldn't return until September

Football could be forced to rest in its current dormant state until September.

Michel D'Hooghe, chairman of FIFA's medical committee believes that the game shouldn't return before September 1.

"The world isn't ready for competitive football to return," D'Hooghe told Sky Sports.

"I hope it can change quickly, but we need more patience. It's the most dramatic situation we've faced since World War II, we can't underestimate it.

"We have to be realistic and football is only possible if contact is possible," D'Hooghe added.

(Source: Marca)

Japan's Abe says impossible to hold Olympics unless pandemic contained

TOKYO (Reuters) — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Wednesday that the Tokyo Olympics could not take place next year unless the coronavirus pandemic is contained, as the city's governor requested an extension of Japan's state of emergency.

The International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government last month postponed the Games until July 2021 because of the coronavirus crisis.

With the epidemic's worldwide infection rate climbing and experts suggesting a vaccine is a long way off, doubts have been raised about the chances of holding the huge event next year.

"We've been saying the Olympic and Paralympic Games must be held in a complete form, in that athletes and spectators can all participate safely. It would be impossible to hold the Games in such a complete form unless the coronavirus pandemic is contained," Abe said in response to an opposition lawmaker.

Abe staked part of his legacy as Japan's longest-serving premier on holding the Games and was hoping for a boom in tourism and consumer spending. Japan gathered some \$3 billion in domestic sponsorship, an Olympic record, and spent close to \$13 billion on preparations.

The prime minister said on Wednesday that the Olympics "must be held in a way that shows the world has won its battle against the coronavirus pandemic," and cautioned that Japan should "brace for a protracted battle".

Tokyo confirmed 47 new infections on Wednesday, private broadcaster Nippon Television reported. The national tally stands at 13,895 infections, including 413 deaths, national broadcaster NHK said.

While that tally is still low compared to other nations, critics say Japan is not doing enough testing to reveal the scope of a problem that has driven some hospitals to the brink.

Maradona asks for Hand of God to end pandemic

BUENOS AIRES (Reuters) — A decision to restructure Argentine football that will save Diego Maradona's club from relegation was dubbed another Hand of God moment on Tuesday, but the former striker said the divine intervention he wished for was to beat the coronavirus pandemic.

The Argentine Football Association voted to suspend relegation for two seasons on Tuesday, saving the Maradona-coached Gimnasia club, who are currently bottom of the league, from going down.

"This happened to us today and many people are calling it a new Hand of God," said Maradona, who dubbed his notorious hand-assisted goal against England in the 1986 World Cup as the Hand of God.

"But today I am asking for that hand to do away with the pandemic so people can get back to living their lives, with health and happiness," he added.

Maradona said he disagreed with the decision to suspend relegation for two years but called the favourable ruling "a prize."

Argentina has so far recorded 4,127 cases of COVID-19, with 214 fatalities.

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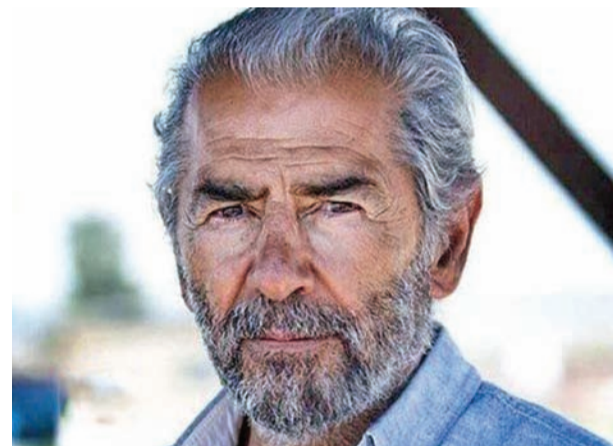


GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

A usurped stone in a house causes the ruin of that house.
Imam Ali (AS)

Iran to try first post-revolution drive-in theater with "Exodus"

A R T TEHRAN — Iran will try its first drive-in movie theater after the victory of the Islamic revolution by screening director Ebrahim Hatamikia's latest movie "Exodus" in the parking lot of Milad Tower in Tehran on Friday, the official website of the director has announced.



Faramarz Gharibian acts in a scene from director Ebrahim Hatamikia's "Exodus".

The decision has been made after he screened his movie online due to the shutdown of the movie theaters during the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran.

However, Hatamikia has not given further details about the project on how the cars will be situated and how the film will be heard.

The project is a collaboration between the Owj Arts and Media Organization, the producer of the movie, and the Iranian film company Nurtaban.

The tickets will be on sale at the cinema ticket office on Thursday and the film will be on screen for one week in the parking area.

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

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

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

"Funfair" honored at European Independent Film Festival

A R T TEHRAN — "Funfair", a short film by Iranian director Kaveh Mazaheri, has won the Best Non-European Independent Dramatic Short Award at the 15th edition of the European Independent Film Festival (ECU), the organizers have announced.



A scene from "Funfair" by Kaveh Mazaheri.

"Funfair" is about Majid, a young financially struggling man who comes up with a ploy in order to better the life of his wife Sarah.

The Best European Independent Dramatic Feature Award was given to "Shibil" by Nikola Bozadzhev from Bulgaria.

With 87 films from 28 countries participating in the festival this year, the ECU 2020 ended with its customary final ceremony recognizing 25 award winners in 14 categories.

The festival went online in Paris, France from April 24 to 26.

Santur virtuoso Puya Sarai remakes Shajarian's "Rabbana"

A R T TEHRAN — Musician Puya Sarai has remade "Rabbana", a recitation of an invocation performed by legendary vocalist Mohammadreza Shajarian in 1980, with santur and some electronic instruments.

The piece can be downloaded for free on numerous websites.

"As one of the ritual songs for Ramadan, master Shajarian's 'Rabbana' has been memorable for everybody over the past few decades," Sarai said in a press release on Wednesday.

"I remade 'Rabbana' to denote the musical values of the piece other than its content," he added.

"Except its ordinary function, religious and ritual music, as far as seen in West Asian cultures, has always been highly regarded as listenable music," Sarai noted.

"There are numerous melodies from many renowned masters in religious and ritual music, which are more compelling than those pieces created by ordinary musicians," added Sarai who has collaborated with Shajarian's

son, Hodayun, in several musical projects.

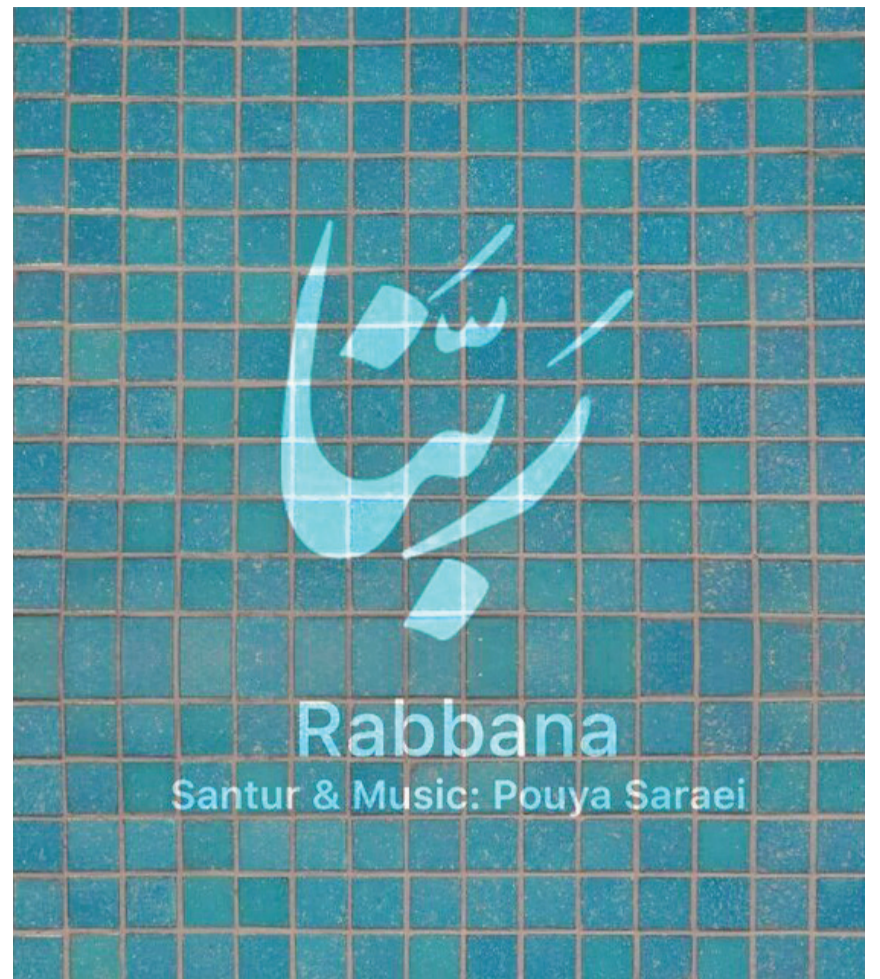
"Rabbana" was inscribed on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage list in May 2017.

The recitation of the supplication, which is composed of several verses of the Holy Quran that are read before iftar, the evening meal for breaking the fast during Ramadan, was recorded at Iran's national radio at a singing class Shajarian held for two of his students.

Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) announced in 2009 that it would stop broadcasting Shajarian's works, including "Rabbana", following the vocalist's protest against IRIB's extensive use of his epic songs in programs celebrating Mahmoud Ahmadijeh's victory in the presidential election of that year.

Afterwards, Shajarian asked "Rabbana" to be broadcast by popular demand. However, IRIB turned a deaf ear to the demand.

IRIB produced numerous recitations of the invocation by several prominent reciters and tawashih groups, but none of them could gain popularity.



A poster for santur virtuoso Puya Sarai's remake of "Rabbana".

A Week with Sadi and Sepehri online seminar records 200,000 viewers

C U L T U R E TEHRAN — The Book City Institute has recorded nearly 200,000 viewers for "A Week with Sadi and Sepehri", a program that was organized from April 20 to 27 online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program commenced last Monday, which is Sadi Day as well as the 40th anniversary of the passing of Sepehri, one of Iran's icons of Persian blank verse.

"The warm welcome to the online program showed that we can maintain the cultural relationship by organizing programs through new communication technology," Book City deputy director Ali-Asghar Mohammadkhani said in a press release on Wednesday.

"During this weeklong program almost 200,000 people enjoyed the online program and have asked that the method be used for organizing similar programs in the future through voicemails and written messages," he added.

About 50 articles, audio and visual files on Sadi and

Sepehri from Iranian experts, including Reza Davari Ardakani, Zia Movahhed, Mahmud Dowlatbadi and Shams Langerudi, were published on the Book City Telegram channel and website.

Copies of "Sadi" autographed by its writer Movahhed, which were offered at the bookstores of the Book City on the first day of the program, were sold out over five days.

As one of the greatest figures of classical Persian literature, Sadi is famous worldwide for his Bustan (The Orchard) and Gulistan (The Rose Garden), which have been translated into many languages.

Born in 1928, Sepehri is second only to poet Nima Yushij, who is known for his pure style of blank verse. He came to prominence with the publication of his collection "The Water's Footfall" in 1965.

His works have been translated into the English, French, Italian and Spanish languages. He died of leukemia in 1980.



A poster for "A Week with Sadi and Sepehri".

Late teacher Hamid Samandarian to return to theater schools

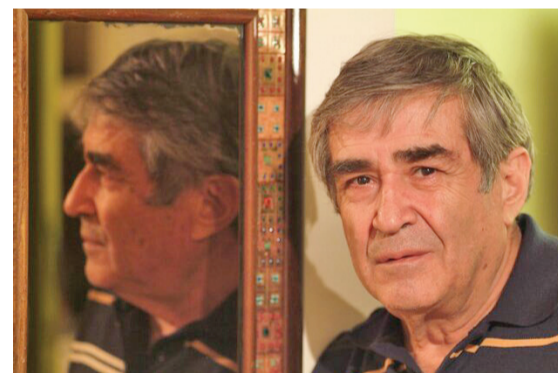
A R T TEHRAN — Late prominent teacher, playwright and director Hamid Samandarian will return to drama schools through the videos of the master's educational courses recorded by his student Afsaneh Mahian.

She plans to release the videos in the near future to be used at theater schools.

"The videos of 80 interviews with Samandarian will also be released," Mahian told the Persian service of ISNA on Tuesday.

"The master will reappear onstage once again with the videos providing an opportunity for the younger generations of directors and thespians," she added.

Samandarian, who was a teacher of several generations of Iranian directors, thespians and dramatists who are currently among the big names in Iranian theater and cinema, died



Hamid Samandarian in an undated photo.

of liver cancer at the age of 81 in July 2012.

Mahian, who has the license to preserve, publish and release all Samandarian's works, said that the collection is the most precious heritage she has inherited and that she has plans to present them in the best way possible.

"What connects us to the future generation is this precious heritage," she added.

She said that Samandarian's main characteristic was his being up-to-date.

"He has taught seven generations in theater from master actors like Ezzatollah Entezami and Mohamad-Ali Keshavaz to the present generation. His teachings can still be useful and influential for the next generations," she said.

She added that she has not yet decided how she will release the videos, however, she will do it in the best way possible.

Most Americans to avoid sports, other live events before coronavirus vaccine

N E W Y O R K (Reuters) — Fewer than half of Americans plan to go to sports events, concerts, movies and amusement parks when they reopen to the public until there is a proven coronavirus vaccine, according to a Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll released on Tuesday.

That includes those who have attended such events in the past, an ominous sign for the sports and entertainment industries hoping to return to the spotlight after being shut down by the pandemic.

Only about four in 10 who follow sports avidly and go to arts and entertainment venues and amusement parks said they would do so again if they reopened before a vaccine was available, the poll found.

Another four in 10 said they were willing to wait, even if it takes more than a year to develop a vaccine.

The rest said they either "don't know" what to do or may never attend those events again.

"Just because people say we can go back, until people feel fully safe ... they aren't going to go back," said Victor Matheson, a specialist in sports economics at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts.

"We go to games for entertainment and you're not going to be very entertained if you're not worrying about who the next player to bat is and instead worrying about that person who just coughed two rows down."

The United States leads the world with almost 1 million coronavirus infections and more than 56,000 deaths as of late Monday.

While as many as 100 potential vaccines are in development around the world, scientists are projecting that bringing one to market could take 18 months.

Only 17% of American adults said they would attend professional sporting events when they reopen to the public, while 26% said they would rather wait until there is a vaccine.

Among those who have attended a professional sporting event in the past year, 42% said they would return whenever it reopens to the public and 39% said they would rather wait for a vaccine, even if that means waiting more than a year.

Cincinnati resident Angie Hopkins, who has gone to pro

games in the past, said she would not attend them again before there is a vaccine, out of concern for her health and that of her son.

"The risk of being with all those people, crammed in together, I think that would be unsettling," she said.

"I have fibromyalgia, which could make me at risk for more serious complications. And my son has asthma, so I wouldn't want to expose him either."

About 59% of sports fans agreed that before a vaccine is available, professional sports leagues that have seen their seasons upended - like Major League Baseball, the National Basketball Association and the National Hockey League - should hold games with no in-person fans, while 33% disagreed.

That could spell trouble for tennis' U.S. Open, which is scheduled to kick off in hard-hit New York City on Aug. 24. Organizers have said it was highly unlikely that they would hold the largest and loudest Grand Slam tournament without fans.

It is also unclear whether the NFL will delay the scheduled Sept. 10 start of its 101st season. Commissioner Roger Goodell said last week he believed the season could begin on time, but did not specify whether the league would consider doing so without fans.

The poll showed that only 27% of those questioned would go to a movie theater, concert or live theater performance when venues reopen, underscoring the hurdles faced by the entertainment industry as it tries to get back on its feet.

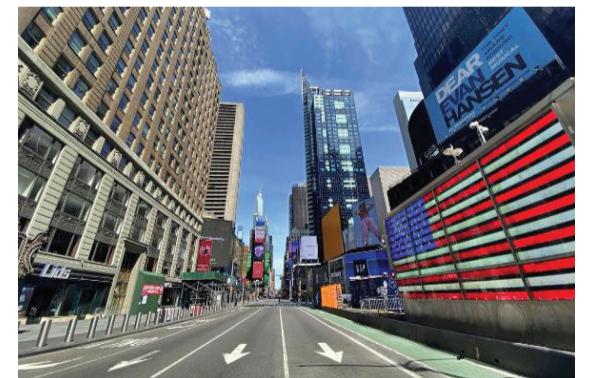
Thirty-two percent said they would wait for a vaccine before going back to the movies, theater or concerts.

In all, 55% of Americans said those events should not resume before a vaccine is available.

Hollywood has been tentatively hoping movie theaters could reopen partially by late July and recoup some losses from the normally lucrative summer season.

While dozens of summer movie releases have already been moved to the autumn or into 2021, Walt Disney Co's "Mulan" and Warner Bros. "Wonder Woman 1984" are scheduled for release in July and August respectively.

The annual Coachella music festival in Southern California, which usually draws about 90,000 people, shifted its April



A nearly deserted 7th Avenue in Times Square is seen near midday in Manhattan during the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in New York City, New York, U.S., April 7, 2020. (Reuters/Mike Segar)

dates to October in the hope the worst of the coronavirus pandemic would be over by then.

Enthusiasm for amusement and theme parks was even bleaker. Fifty-nine percent of respondents said they should not reopen until a vaccine is available. Only 20% said they would visit a theme park when they reopen.

Universal Studios has extended its closures in California and Florida until at least May 31, while Disneyland and Walt Disney World are closed indefinitely.

Disney Executive Chairman Bob Iger said earlier in April that temperature checks for visitors were one of the measures under consideration for any eventual reopening.

Broadway theaters were forced to shut down in mid-March and extended the closure to June 7, with several producers saying their plays would not return at all.

The Reuters/Ipsos poll surveyed 4,429 American adults from April 15 to 21, asking about their previous attendance at sports events and live concerts and their interest in attending if they reopened before a coronavirus vaccine is available. The poll questions noted a vaccine might not be available for more than a year.