

Swiss Admit: Iran Has Got Nothing From Channel

BERN (Dispatches) -- The banking channel set up by the Trump administration to get medicine and other supplies into Iran—a politically calculated show of compassion amid otherwise draconian U.S. sanctions—has not in fact processed any potentially life-saving transactions, the Swiss government confirmed to The Daily Beast. Announced in late January and declared operational a month later, the channel, known as the Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA), was supposed to ensure that “humanitarian goods continue to reach the Iranian people without diversion by the regime,” as Treasury Secretary

Kayhan International

Germany Hastily Apologizes to Zionists Over Map

BERLIN (Dispatches) -- The head of Germany's Military Counterintelligence Service (MAD) has rushed to issue an extraordinary statement of apology to the Tel Aviv regime after the agency deleted the Israeli-occupied territories on a map printed in its report. The Cologne-based intelligence agency said on Thursday that the initial draft of its 2019 annual report erroneously depicted Israel in the same color as neighboring Jordan. “I intensively exchanged views on this mistake in a personal conversation with the responsible employees,” Dr. Christof Gramm, the President of MAD wrote in an email to Zionist newspaper the Jerusalem Post.

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Viewpoint

Would the New Iraqi PM Succeed in Expelling US Troops?

Fajr Intl. Festival Called Off Due to COVID-19



No Green Light for Premier League to Restart Yet



Iraq Won't Be Used as Launching Ground Against Others: New PM



Imamate Rescues Muslims, as Caliphate Falters

By: Seyyed Ali Shahbaz

The 15th of Ramadhan, on which the Almighty's Last and Greatest Messenger became a grandfather for the first time in the year 3 AH, with the birth of Imam Hasan (AS), draws our attention to the vital issue of continuation of divine guidance for human societies – especially when past history and present events are a pathetic tale of how terrorists, mass murderers, and Godless elements have masqueraded as caliphs and forced Muslims to pay allegiance to their caliphate.

Prophet Muhammad (SAWA) was indeed happy on this day as his Immaculate Daughter, Hazrat Fatema Zahra (SA), presented the radiant baby to him, while the proud father, his cousin and son-in-law, Imam Ali (AS), beamed with joy.

Was this happiness the mere doting of a middle aged man unable to control his natural emotions, or did the Seal of Messengers see in his newborn grandson inborn excellence that ordinary human beings cannot perceive?

The Prophet was not a king to tighten dynastic tentacles on temporal power, but neither was Abraham, yet God entrusted the mission for guidance of human societies after him to his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, and ensured that prophet-hood continued in dynastic form among the latter's offspring in answer to his prayer:

“And when his Lord tested Abraham with certain words, and he fulfilled them, He said, ‘I am making you the Imam of mankind.’ Said he, ‘And from among my descendants?’ He said, ‘My pledge does not extend to the unjust’” (holy Qur'an 2:124)

As is crystal clear, in Qur'anic terminology, the “Imam” is an infallibly just Leader of mankind, who is both the spiritual and temporal guide. He is designated by God, and not elected, selected, or nominated by fallible persons. Now we understand why the Qur'an speaks of Solomon inheriting David, and Yahya being the heir of Zacharias.

Prophet Muhammad (SAWA), regarding whom the opening ayahs of Surah Najm say that he neither errs nor speaks by himself but whatever he speaks is revelation revealed by God, did not mince words, either when he proclaimed Imam Ali (AS) his vicegerent at Ghadeer-Khom to a huge gathering of over a hundred thousand pilgrims, or when he told his companions about his two grandsons, Imam Hasan (AS) and Imam Husain (AS):

“These (grand)sons of mine are Imams (Leaders – Just, Infallible and Divinely-designated), whether they rise or (decide to) sit.”

Sadly, no sooner did the Prophet leave the mortal world, the Mowla of Ghadeer was cast aside, as a group of neo Muslims assembled at Saqifa Bani Sa'dah in Medina to seize the political power of the Islamic state in violation of the ayahs of the holy Qur'an, and style themselves caliph.

In response to the grossly unjust act of persons who had spent the greater part of their life in sin and idolatry, Hazrat Fatama Zahra (SA) told them in her famous sermon of Fadak:

“Now hang firmly to this cheap dromedary of caliphate of yours and release it not. But beware! The hump of this camel is injured while there are blisters and holes in its feet. It carries the scars of ignominy and the sign of the wrath of Allah. Eternal shame is attached to it.”

Imam Ali (AS), on the pleas of the leaderless masses, reluctantly took the reins of political power and in the next four-and-a-half years presented to the world the model government of social justice, although he regarded the caliphate as more unworthy than the sneezing of a goat.

On his martyrdom in 40 AH, it was left to his elder son and the Prophet's 2nd Infallible Heir, Imam Hasan (AS), the next Imam of mankind – a position that no usurper could snatch from him – to further expose the ignominious nature of the caliphate in order to unmask hypocrisy, after repeated admonitions such as the following statement that had no effect, either on the rebel or those duped by him through threats and bribes.

“O Mu'awiya! Desist from falsehood and further revolt and pay allegiance to me like the masses have done, as you are well aware that I am entitled to caliphate much more than you in the eyes of Almighty God, his angels and those having a rational mind. So, you should fear God and abandon revolt. Do not shed the blood of Muslims.”

Prophet Muhammad (SAWA), who had foretold the tragedy of Karbala and how his younger grandson Imam Husain (AS), would rise against an openly Godless tyrant in order to save Islam by giving his lifeblood, had also said that his elder grandson, Imam Hasan (AS), would unmask the hypocrisy of an ungodly charlatan, by giving away political rule of a vast realm, in order to save the Ummah from unwarranted bloodshed and discord.

The Treaty of Imam Hasan (AS) that Mu'awiya blatantly violated was thus a masterstroke of peace to save the Muslim World at a time when Byzantine or the Eastern Roman Empire was looking for an opportunity to seize Bayt al-Moqaddas and Palestine, in case of civil war among Muslims.

This proved that only divinely-decreed Imamate can save Islam and Muslims and not the scandalous institution of caliphate.

Further Friction Emerges in U.S.-Saudi Alliance

What Is Behind Pullout of Patriots?



Army Patriot Launch Station operators/maintainers from Bravo Battery, 1-43 Air Defense Artillery, perform a guided-missile transporter reload certification at an undisclosed Southwest Asia location, Feb. 12, 2010.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The U.S. is pulling two Patriot missile batteries and some fighter aircraft out of Saudi Arabia, an American official said Thursday, amid tensions between the kingdom and the Trump administration over oil production.

The official said the decision removes two batteries that were guarding oil facilities in Saudi Arabia but leaves two Patriot batteries at Prince Sultan Air Base in the Saudi desert, along with other air defense systems and jet fighters.

The decision scales back the American presence in Saudi Arabia just months after the Pentagon began a military buildup there to

purportedly counter threats from Iran. About 300 troops that staff the two batteries would also leave Saudi Arabia, according to the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military operations.

Two other Patriot batteries that are in the Middle East region are also heading home to the U.S., in a planned redeployment for maintenance and upgrades, the Associated Press reported.

It's not clear, however, whether the ongoing oil dispute or the struggle to parcel out the Patriot systems was the key factor in the U.S. decision to pull systems out of the kingdom, it added.

When Saudi Arabia ramped up oil production and slashed prices this year, Republicans accused the kingdom of exacerbating instability in the oil market, which was already suffering because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The volatility and price crash in oil hurt U.S. shale producers, leading to layoffs in the industry, particularly in Republican-run states.

Some Republican senators warned in late March that if Saudi Arabia did not change course, it risked losing American defense support and facing a range of potential “levers of statecraft” such as tariffs and other trade restrictions, investigations and sanctions.

The U.S. official said a THAAD anti-ballistic missile defense system will also remain in Saudi Arabia. The THAAD complements the Patriots by providing a defense against ballistic missiles traveling outside Earth's atmosphere.

Over the past eight months, the United States has poured more than 20,000 additional troops into the Middle East after escalating tensions that peaked with the terrorist assassination of Iran's top commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

The Pentagon announced last year that it would begin deploying forces and Patriot batteries to Prince Sultan Air Base, a former U.S. military hub. The move was one of the more dramatic signs of America's decision to beef up troops in the Middle East.

When Gen. Frank McKenzie, top U.S. commander for the Middle East, visited the base earlier this year, the American troop presence had grown to roughly 2,500. At the time, McKenzie told reporters with him that the base was a key strategic location, but that continued presence of troops and weapons there would depend on other national security needs around the world.

In a further sign of frictions, a U.S. official said on Thursday Persian Gulf Arab states should consider their relationship with the United States when dealing with China, as tensions flare between Washington and Beijing.

Persian Gulf Arab states have developed close ties with Beijing (Continued on Page 7)

Situation Stable After Quake Rocks Tehran

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Two people died and 38 were injured when a 5.1 magnitude earthquake struck northern Iran in the early hours of Friday and people fled their homes in panic.

There were at least 40 milder aftershocks, but no serious damage from the quake that struck after midnight on the border of the provinces of Tehran and Mazandaran, it added.

The epicenter was south of Iran's highest peak, the snow-capped Mount Damavand. The 5,761-meter (18,900-foot) mountain is volcanic, but Iranian officials said the quake was not triggered by volcanic activities.

Press TV reported boulders blocking the road leading to the mountainous Damavand area.

Soon after the quake struck at 00:48 local time Friday (2018 GMT on Thursday), officials

urged people who spent the night outdoors for fear of aftershocks to observe social distancing to limit spread of the new coronavirus.

The tremor struck as Iranians were either sleeping or resting after iftar, the meal breaking the daytime fast observed by Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan.

“We were sitting down when the earthquake struck,” said 45-year-old Tehran resident Ahmad.

“We felt it completely shaking (the building), and then we all went out of the house together to be outside and not to be in danger if an aftershock struck,” he said.

His wife Maryam, who like him was wrapped in a blanket, said they escaped the apartment using the stairwell. “We quickly

(Continued on Page 7)

Group Plotted to Seize Venezuela Presidential Palace U.S. Mercenary Says Had Orders From Trump

CARACAS (Dispatches) -- A U.S. soldier captured during a botched attempt to seize Venezuela's leader has claimed his group had plotted to raid Nicolás Maduro's presidential palace before spiriting him away “however necessary”.

Airan Berry, 41, was one of two U.S. mercenaries captured by Venezuelan security forces this week after what appears to have been a catastrophically executed attempt to topple Maduro by sneaking into the South American country in a pair of weather-beaten fishing boats.

In a televised confession, broadcast by Venezuelan state television on Thursday, Berry said one of the group's key objectives was to commandeer the heavily fortified Miraflores palace in the capital,

Caracas. Asked how they planned to extract Maduro from the 19th-century building, the Iraq veteran answered: “I'm not exactly sure – however necessary.”

Berry said the group had also planned to “secure the airstrip” at La Carlota, a military airbase at the heart of Venezuela's capital, in order to fly Maduro out of the country.

The base is six miles west of the Miraflores palace and was the scene of a failed attempt to spark a military uprising against Maduro on April 30 last year.

Asked where the plane would have taken Maduro, Berry, a former special forces engineer sergeant in the U.S. army, replied: (Continued on Page 7)

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In the Name of the Most High Viewpoint

Would the New Iraqi PM Succeed in Expelling US Troops?

By: Kayhan Int'l Staff Writer

The Iraqi parliament has finally given its vote of confidence to a new prime minister, six months after Adel Abdul-Mahdi was forced to resign after only a year in office, mainly because of the political immaturity of certain seemingly influential quarters who did not allow him to serve his full term.

The reason the parliament took such a long time to reach consensus on Mustafa al-Kazemi was due to undue US meddling in the internal affairs of Iraq, coupled with sharp differences amongst the MPs regarding the two earlier nominees for the prime minister's post – Mohammad Tawfiq Allawi and Adnan az-Zurfi.

Now it remains to be seen how long the new prime minister would be at the helm of affairs given the volatile situation of Iraq.

However, the support expressed for Kazemi openly by the US, including that of the gangster who poses as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo doesn't augur well for the new Iraqi prime minister, whose first and foremost duty is to ensure that all American troops leave the soil of Iraq.

Kazemi, who since 2016 was serving as Director of National Intelligence and whose real name is Mustafa Abdul-Latif Mshatat, had fled Saddam's reign of terror in 1985 to seek asylum in the Islamic Republic of Iran, before leaving for Britain, where he developed skills as a journalist – a profession that propelled him to prominence on his return home following end of the repressive Ba'ath minority regime.

He thus knows fully well that the main reason for his approval as prime minister is the support given by country's majority on condition to expedite the expulsion of US troops from Iraq, to facilitate the mission of the Popular Mobilization Units for eradicating the country from all vestiges of terrorism, and to arrange for national elections – in not less than two years.

This means, whatever the duration of his tenure, he has to avoid pressures from Washington as well as from reactionary Arab regimes which do not want a strong, stable and independent Iraq.

One wrong step and Kazemi will surely exit from the scene as was the fate of his more capable predecessors including Nour al-Maliki, remembered for his refusal to extend the mandate of the US occupation forces.

The Islamic Republic of Iran for its part will always stand beside the fraternal and friendly people of Iraq, and help them materialize their aspirations.

It is time, Iraq became fully aware of its past as the cradle of civilization, its present geopolitical importance as an oil-rich land on the crossroads of three continents, and its future greatness as prophesied in Islamic texts – as the centre of the global government of peace, prosperity, and justice of the Awaited Saviour of mankind, Imam Mahdi (AS).

Iran: U.S. Regime Must End Abject Unilateralism



According to the Financial Times, U.S. President Donald Trump's unilateralism is a cry of pain.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran on Friday hit out at the United States for seeking to secure short-term interests at the cost of other nations' long-term prosperity.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi touched on U.S. unilateralism, citing Washington's withdrawal from the nuclear agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran and many other international agreements.

"JCPOA is neither the first nor the last of the multilateral achievements Trump withdrew from," he said in a tweet.

Mousavi said, "The U.S. regime has sought to secure its short-term interests at the cost of nations' long-term prosperity."

"The regime must END its abject unilateralism," he added. Mousavi ended his message with the hashtag, "Never Trust Irresponsible U.S."

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is publicly arguing that the United States is still a participant in the Iran nuclear deal despite President Donald Trump's stated withdrawal from the accord in 2018.

Trump and his aides have repeatedly characterized the reimposition of bruising U.S. sanctions on Iran as a "withdrawal" from the accord. But by asserting that the United States is still a party to the accord, the Trump administration seeks to use the UN Security Council resolution that formalized the 2015 deal to snap back multilateral sanctions against Iran.

A former Iranian diplomat said Friday the U.S. bid to "return" to the JCPOA is part of a wider plot to extend its pressure on the Islamic Republic after the failure of its "maximum pressure" policy.

Abolfazl Zohrehvand, a former Iranian ambassador to Italy and Af-

ghanistan, said Washington's from the nuclear deal has caused troubles for the U.S.

"Now the Americans seek to re-enter the JCPOA to create a fresh round of pressure, and are in fact seeking to use the JCPOA capacities to further arms sanctions on the Islamic Republic," he said.

On the anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said Thursday Washington has through its withdrawal forfeited all rights to address the issues concerning the landmark deal.

"The U.S. despises the JCPOA, has quit it, violates it, and punishes all those who commit to the deal," the ministry wrote.

"The U.S. is in no position whatsoever to address issues related to the JCPOA," it said, marking the tweet with "the U.S.' non-commitment" hashtag.

Russia Declares 'Full Solidarity' With Iran Against U.S.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- In a letter to his Iranian counterpart Muhammad Javad Zarif, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has announced Russia's full solidarity with Iran against unilateral U.S. sanctions.

"I would like to remind you of our full solidarity against Washington's anti-human policy of expanding illegal and unilateral sanctions against Iran, which, like many countries around the world, has been severely affected by the outbreak of Coronavirus," Lavrov wrote.

"This approach was emphasized in a telephone conversation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on April 21 this year," he added.

Lavrov said Russia has consistently denounced the illegal nature of unilateral U.S. sanctions against Iran. "We have always called on the United States to lift these sanctions and not to prevent a full-scale fight

against the coronavirus. We also call on Western European countries not to be influenced by Washington's intimidation and threats and to continue to interact with their Iranian partners."

Lavrov further said given the great importance of Iran-Russia relations, "we will continue our active diplomatic work in the future".

"At the same time, we will continue to implement major economic programs and projects in Iran, despite the pressure of sanctions and difficult conditions, and will provide practical support to the friendly people of Iran."

President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the nuclear deal with Iran in May 2018 and announced the most draconian sanctions ever against the Islamic Republic.

The United States has defied international calls for a

(Continued on Page 7)

Senate Fails to Curb Trump's Warmongering Powers

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The Senate failed on Thursday to overturn President Trump's veto of a resolution seeking to block him from taking further military action against Iran without explicit approval from Congress, falling short in its latest effort to curtail his unilateral moves on matters of war and peace.

The unsuccessful override attempt, the second in two years aimed at limiting Trump's war-making powers, was defeated on a 49-to-44 vote, a margin well below the constitutionally required two-thirds majority that would have been needed to enact the measure

over his veto.

But the bipartisan support for doing so underscored lawmakers' deep skepticism about the president's penchant for defying Congress on military matters and his expansive authority to wage war without consulting a coequal branch of government, the New York Times said.

Seven Republicans joined Democrats to support the measure.

"Congress needed to stand up in a bipartisan way to make plain that this president should not get into a war with Iran, or any war,

(Continued on Page 7)

The Holy Qur'an
Surely We have revealed it-- an Arabic Quran-- that you may understand. We narrate to you the best of narratives, by Our revealing to you this Quran, though before this you were certainly one of those who did not know.
The Holy Qur'an (12.2)

PRAYER TIMINGS

Noon (Zohr)	13:01
Evening (Maghreb)	20:18
Dawn (Fajr) "Tomorrow"	04:28
Sunrise "Tomorrow"	06:03

Ministry: Coronavirus Outbreak 'Relatively Stable'

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran has said its coronavirus outbreak was "relatively stable" as it announced another 55 deaths as well as more than 1,500 infections.

The Islamic Republic has battled to contain the outbreak of the COVID-19 illness since reporting its first cases in mid-February.

On Saturday the government's official tally of daily infections hit 802 -- its lowest level since March 10. Iran's count stayed below 1,000 again on Sunday, however its caseload has bounced back up above that mark on each day since then.

Health Ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour said the situation is "relatively stable" as he announced that the latest fatalities took the overall death toll to 6,541.

Jahanpour said there were 1,556 new cases of infection in the past 24 hours on Friday, putting the country's outbreak total at 104,691.

Many of the individuals, he said, had mild to moderate symptoms, or they were outpatients, or family members of infected patients.

Of all those infected, he added, 83,837 people had recovered from the illness and been discharged from hospital.

Ramadhan Day-to-Day Supplications

15th day

اللَّهُمَّ ارزُقني فيهِ طاعة الخائِصين، وَاشرح فيهِ صِدري
بِإِنَابَةِ الْمُجْتَبِينَ، بِأَمَانِكِ يَا أَمَانَ الخَائِبِينَ

"O Allah, bestow on me the sincerity of the worshippers. Expand my breast for sincere repentance. O Shelter of the scared."

This Day in History

(May 9)

Today is Saturday; 20th of the Iranian month of Ordibehesht 1399 solar hijri; corresponding to 15th of the Islamic month of Ramadhan 1441 lunar hijri; and May 9, 2020, of the Christian Gregorian Calendar.

1438 lunar years ago, on this day in 3 AH, Imam Hasan Mojtaba (AS), the eldest grandson and 2nd Infallible Heir of Prophet Mohammad (SAWA), was born in Medina. His name "Hasan", which means the "Most Excellent" was chosen by the Prophet on the commandment of God and is the Arabic equivalent of "Shabar" the name in Hebrew of the first born son of Aaron, the brother and vicegerent of Prophet Moses (AS). Imam Hasan (AS), along with his younger brother, Imam Husain (AS), was hailed by the Prophet as Twin Leaders of the Youths of Paradise. The two brothers along with their parents, Imam Ali (AS) and Hazrat Fatema Zahra (SA), were covered by the Prophet under his cloak as the Ahl al-Bayt on revelation of the Verse of Purity (holy Qur'an 33:33), and this immaculate group also accompanied the Prophet to the decisive debate of Mubahela with the Christians of Najran on revelation of ayah 61 of Surah Nisa in order to prove the truth of Islam. Six months after succeeding to the caliphate, following his father's martyrdom, Imam Hasan (AS), in view of the widespread sedition and hypocrisy in the society, agreed to relinquish political rule to the charlatan Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan in order to unmask him in his true heathen colours. Thus, his prudence and foresight saved Islam from civil war, at a time when the Byzantine Empire was waiting for weakening of Muslims to attack and occupy Syria and Bayt al-Moqaddas.

1058 lunar years ago, on this day in 383 AH, the famous literary figure, Abu Bakr Mohammad Ibn Abbas Khwarezmi, passed away in the northeastern Iranian city of Naishapour. He had a strong memory and was highly talented in memorization of Arabic poems and history. He had inclinations towards the household of Prophet Mohammad (SAWA) and has highlighted in his works the tyranny of the Omayyad and Abbasid caliphs. One of his famous works is "ar-Rasa'el", which is a masterpiece of Arabic literature. He was the maternal nephew (sister's son) of the famous Abu Ja'far Mohammad Ibn Rustum Tabari.

1056 lunar years ago, on this day in 385 AH, the famous scholar and Founder of the Islamic Seminary of holy Najaf in Iraq, Abu Ja'far Mohammad Ibn Hassan Tousi, popular as Shaikh at-Ta'efah, was born in Tous near holy Mashhad in Khorasan, northeastern Iran. He authored over 50 books on various topics such as jurisprudence, exegesis of the holy Qur'an, hadith, theology, history and biography of narrators. Of the four authoritative resources of hadith of the School of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt, two were compiled by Shaikh at-Taifah Tousi. These two basic reference books are: "Tahzeeb al-Ahkaam" and "al-Istibsaar". His exegesis on the holy Qur'an is titled "at-Tibyaan". On the Lord of the Age, Imam Mahdi (God hasten his reappearance) he wrote the book "al-Ghayba" (Occultation). His another work is "Mukhtasar Akhbar al-Mukhtar", a concise history of the uprising of Mukhtar ibn Abu Obaydah Thaqafi to avenge the martyrdom of Imam Husain (AS).

476 lunar years ago, on this day in 965 AH, the famous jurist Shaikh Zayn od-Din al-Juba'i al-Ameli, known as "Shaheed Thani" (Second Martyr), was martyred at the age of 54. He authored several books, and his masterpiece is the commentary on the jurisprudential manual "Lum'at-ad-Dimashqiyya" (The Damascene Glitter) of the First Martyr, Mohammad Jamal od-Din al-Makki al-Ameli, titled "ar-Rawdhat-al-Bahiyah ft Sha'rh al-Lum'at-ad-Dimashqiyya" (The Beautiful Garden in Interpreting the Damascene Glitter).

570 solar years ago, on this day in 1450 AD, Abdull-Latif "Pidarkush", the Timurid ruler of Central Asia and Khorasan, was assassinated after a reign of 6 months. The reason he is called "Pidarkush" by the people of Central Asia, was because of his killing of his own father, the famous scientist-king, Ulugh Beg – the son of Shahrugh Mirza and grandson of Amir Timur.

367 solar years ago, on this day in 1653 AD, the construction of Taj Mahal, which is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world and among the best examples of Islamic architecture in India, ended after twenty-two years. Shah Jahan, the 5th Great Moghul Emperor of the Timurid Dynasty of the northern part of the Subcontinent (present day northern India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the eastern part of Afghanistan) built it in memory of his wife of Iranian origin, Arjmand Banu Begum, who died while giving birth to her fourteenth child. This beautiful mausoleum in the city of Agra on the banks of the River Jamuna, is made of white marble, with ayahs of the holy Qur'an inscribed on its facade and interior. It incorporates and expands on design traditions of Persian architecture and earlier Mughal architecture. The best architects of the Mughal Empire along with those of Iran, like Eisa Isfahani, were employed to construct it. Today it is regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

215 solar years ago, on this day in 1805 AD, the German author, poet, and playwright, Friedrich Von Schiller, died at the age of 45. He became familiar with the celebrated German poet and writer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and like his friend, created a new style in German literature. His first play was "The Robbers", in which he exposed official oppression. He was subsequently banned from writing but continued to write in secrecy.

104 solar years ago, on this day in 1916 AD, the scandalous Sykes-Picot Accord was signed by representatives of Britain, France, and Russia in Paris for dividing up the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire and limiting the Turkish possessions to Anatolia or present day Turkey. Even before the formal defeat of the Ottomans in 1917, lines were drawn on paper to share the spoils by the two principal European colonial powers. The British took control of Iraq and the Hijaz. Shaam or Greater Syria was split up into four parts, with the British taking Jordan and Palestine, and the French taking Syria and Lebanon. The main goal of this plan was to set up in Palestine, an illegal entity called Israel as a homeland for European Jews.

93 solar years ago, on this day in 1927 AD, Iran issued an announcement on supposed revocation of capitulation.

48 solar years ago, on this day in 1972 AD, Ayatollah Kohistani Behshahri, passed away at the age of 83 in his hometown Kohistan near Behshahr, Mazandaran. A product of the Holy Najaf seminary of Iraq, where he reached the status of Ijtihad after studying under such prominent ulema as Grand Ayatollah Mirza Hussain Na'eni and Grand Seyyed Abu'l-Hassan Isfahani, he established the Islamic seminary in his hometown and groomed a number of students, including the Islamic revolutionary figure, Martyr Hojjat al-Islam Seyyed Abdul-Karim Hashemi-Nejad, who was a member of the Assembly of Experts.

32 solar years ago, on this day in 1988 AD, fifty days after Saddam's savage chemical bombardment of the Iraqi Kurdish town of Halabcheh to prevent its inhabitants from welcoming Iranian Muslim combatants as liberators from the repressive rule of the Ba'th minority regime, the United Nations Security Council approved a vaguely-worded Resolution 612.

30 solar years ago, on this day in 1989 AD, Iranian author, researcher, and lecturer, Hojjat al-Islam Dr. Seyyed Javad Mostafavi, passed away. An authority on Islamic sciences, following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, he served as chancellor of the University of Islamic Sciences in holy Mashhad. Among the works written by him are "al-Kashef" and "Miftah al-Wasa'el".

28 solar years ago, on this day in 1992 AD, Armenia invaded the Caucasus Republic of Azerbaijan and occupied Qarabagh region, where a sizeable part of the population was Armenian Christians. Armenian troops occupied 20% of Azeri soil, and despite the ceasefire between the two countries as of 1993, this part of the Azerbaijan Republic is still under occupation.

14 solar years ago, on this day in 2006 AD, Bosnia's war crimes court launched the trial of 11 Bosnian Serbs charged over the 1995 Srebrenica massacre of 8,000 Bosnian Muslims, its first genocide trial since it opened the year.

10 solar years ago, on this day in 2010 AD, the Islamic Republic of Iran opened the biggest car plant of the West Asia-North Africa region, set up by "SAIPA" the Iranian automobile company.

7 solar years ago, on this day in 2013 AD, Iran built a new, radar-evading drone that can do surveillance and fire on enemy targets. The new aircraft, dubbed "Hemaseh" or Epic, can fly at high altitudes.

(Courtesy: IRIB English Radio – <http://parstoday.com/en/>)

Fajr Int'l Festival Called Off Due to COVID-19



TEHRAN (MNA) – This year's edition of Fajr International Film Festival (FIFF) is canceled due to the spread of the deadly coronavirus that has negatively affected all cinematic events and activities in

the world.

According to the public rations of the festival, Mohammad Mehdi Asgarpour, the festival's secretary, said: "Following the outbreak of the respiratory disease globally about three months ago, it was primarily decided to postpone the 38th edition of the FIFF to early June."

FIFF is Iran's major international film event. This year it was scheduled to be held on 16-24 April.

The event's organizers were hoping to see a downward trend in the spread of the virus and final eradication of it in the near future.

"However, it didn't happen and the pandemic canceled or

postponed many major events across the world," Asgarpour added.

He said that this year's edition of the event has been canceled and the preparations have started to hold the event in next year's spring.

The new viral disease, named COVID-19, is affecting 212 countries. It has spread around the planet, sending billions of people into lockdown as health services struggle to cope.

As of Thursday, 3,822,951 people have been diagnosed with the novel coronavirus in various countries around the world, while 265,084 have lost their lives due to the disease.

Thousand-Year-Old Stone Carvings Unearthed in Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) – A new ancient region with about 10,000 historical stone carvings has been discovered in the Iranian city of Meshkinshahr in Ardabil province, northwest of the country.

Meshginshahr Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department announced the discovery of the site in the plains of this city saying 15 areas with

stone carvings have been identified so far.

Head of the department, Imanali Imani said on Wednesday that in the plains of Meshginshahr, there is a treasure trove of art belonging to thousands of years ago.

"This is an example of the oldest human habitat that help us to see the evolution of human life since thousands of years ago," he added.

He underlined that with the efforts and follow-ups of his department, the new regions of stone carvings have been identified and their files are being prepared to be registered in the list of national heritage.

"The petroglyphs, which are the best tools to decrypt the pre-historic era, are among the oldest documents of ancient human life and a manifestation of their community, culture, art, knowledge and ecology, as well as environmental representations, customs, beliefs, myths, dreams, prayers, hunting scenes and battles."

He stated that the images on the rocks indicate the period when humans turned to the first tools of hunting and taming animals, and then agriculture and planting.



Imani said these engravings belong to the Bronze Age stating that the customs and beliefs of the people of this period and the importance of some animals in agriculture, war, etc. are mentioned in these carvings.

Meshginshahr is located 90 km northwest of Ardabil with dozens of ancient monuments. The historical site of Yeri city with tens of stone statues belonging to eight thousand years ago is located in

this city.

The historical site of Yeri belongs to eras of the middle Paleolithic, bronze and iron ages, during which life began in this region about 8,000 years ago. This area has many historic places such as a large stone cemetery with about 300 graves, temple, castles, stone walls, gates, and ancient caves.

Picture of the Day



Jihadi forces in Qom province prepare more than 4,000 pre-dawn meals per day to be distributed among needy people. Pre-dawn meal, also called 'Sahari' in Persian, is the meal Muslims consume before fasting, early in the mornings of Ramadan.

Courtesy of Mehr News Agency

Vitamin D Deficiency Plays Role in COVID-19 Mortality Rates

NEW YORK (Dispatches) -- After studying global data from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, researchers have discovered a strong correlation between severe vitamin D deficiency and mortality rates.

Led by Northwestern University, the research team conducted a statistical analysis of data from hospitals and clinics across China, France, Germany, Italy, Iran, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States.

The researchers noted that patients from countries with high COVID-19 mortality rates, such as Italy, Spain and the UK, had lower levels of vitamin D compared to patients in countries that were not as severely affected.

This does not mean that everyone -- especially those without a known deficiency -- needs to start hoarding supplements, the researchers caution.

Northwestern's Vadim Backman, who led the research said this correlation might help explain the many mysteries surrounding COVID-19, such as why children are less likely to die. Children do not yet have a fully developed acquired immune system, which is the immune system's second line of defense and more likely to overreact.

Backman is careful to note that people should not take excessive doses of vitamin D, which might come with negative side effects. He said the subject needs much more research to know how vitamin D could be used most effectively to protect against COVID-19 complications.

U.S. Gives Iraq 120-Day Waiver for Iran Power Import



A customer looks at an Iranian-made washing machine at a store in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, on Aug. 8, 2018.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The United States will grant a 120-day waiver for Iraq to continue importing electricity from Iran to help the new Iraqi government succeed, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told the newly installed Iraqi prime minister.

"In support of the new government the United States will move forward with a 120-day electricity waiver as a display of our desire to help provide the right conditions for success," the State Department said in a statement on a call between Pompeo and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on Thursday. Washington had repeatedly extended the exemption for Baghdad to use crucial Iranian energy supplies for its power grid for periods of 90 or 120 days, but last month it granted an extension for only 30 days as Baghdad struggled to form a new government.

The Arab country relies on Iran for trade and natural gas that generates as much as 45% of its electricity.

Iraq is a major trade partner of Iran, much to the chagrin of the United States which is trying to pry Baghdad away from Tehran.

For their run-of-the-mill sustenance, Iraqis depend on Iranian companies for many things from food to machinery, electricity, natural gas, fruits and vegetables.

Iran's political ties with other allies in the Persian Gulf have been on the rocks, but commercial ties have chugged along quietly, despite the Trump administration's pressure on Arab states to reduce their relationship with Tehran to the minimum.

According to Arab-Africa director of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization Farzad Piltan on Tuesday, trade with the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan and

Bahrain which are in the U.S. orbit plus Iraq, Lebanon and Syria which are close to Iran stood at \$22 billion in the last Persian year which ended March 21.

Iran exported \$12.5 billion of goods to the countries and imported about \$9 billion from them in the period, Piltan told IRNA news agency.

Among the countries, Iraq was the top destination for Iranian goods and products worth \$9 billion. The UAE came next with \$2.5 billion worth of imports from Iran ahead of Oman with \$450 million.

Iran also exported \$200 million of goods to Qatar, \$180 million to Kuwait, \$160 million to Syria, \$30 million to Lebanon, \$21 million to Jordan and \$10 million to Bahrain which has an uneasy relationship with the Islamic Republic.

The UAE was the biggest exporter to Iran with \$8.7 billion, dwarfing the next export nations, Oman with \$167 million and Iraq with \$131 million.

The unilateral U.S. sanctions on the Islamic Republic have seen trade with the biggest partners witness massive drops, but commercial ties with some of them are still significant.

For example, the United Arab Emirates remains one of Iran's biggest trading partners despite Abu Dhabi's hostile foreign policy posture against the country and U.S. sanctions against Tehran.

This is because the two neighbors across the Persian Gulf have traditionally been dependent on each other for vast sums of trade.

The UAE and Iran have long had a special relationship, unusual even in the Arab world. A quarter of the citizens of the Emirates trace their roots to Iran.

During the former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's war on Iran in the 1980s, Dubai became a crucial transshipment point for

goods and supplies to the Islamic Republic as the late UAE president, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, argued for a more balanced relationship than that of the policies pushed by the United States.

Dubai, where home for Iranians is only a 45-minute flight across the Persian Gulf, hosted until recently one of the largest Iranian communities outside Iran, estimated at more than 400,000 who controlled some \$300 billion in assets, if not more.

New figures are scant, putting the number of Iranians still living in the UAE somehow above or below 100,000.

Thousands of Iranians have invested in real estate, started businesses and opened second homes, turning the desert country into an Iranian business hub.

The current de facto leader of the UAE, Abu Dhabi's crown prince Muhammad bin Zayed, however, is a hawk on Iran. He was one of the few rulers to welcome President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear accord with Tehran.

The complex relationship between Iran and the UAE is due to the individual dynamics of the seven emirates. Iran has a long history of trade and travel - particularly with the northern emirates of Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah and Dubai.

Abu Dhabi, however, has long taken a more hawkish anti-Iranian posture, also supporting Riyadh after 2016 protests outside the Saudi embassy in Tehran and downgrading diplomatic ties.

The position has in turn impacted trade relationship, undermining Dubai's role as a traditional hub for Iran-linked businesses.

Last year, UAE officials had projected trade with Iran to plummet by half from \$19 billion in 2018, but Piltan's figure of \$11.2 billion in bilateral trade shows commercial ties have fared better than expected.

That is an important indicator of how businesses in the UAE are generally adamant not to lose Iran as a massive market despite their government complying stringently with the US sanctions.

That, of course, comes with risks. In March, the United States imposed sanctions on five UAE-based companies, accusing them of having purchased hundreds of thousands of tons of petroleum products from Iran.

However, the cost of the compliance with the sanctions has hit across the board. The plunge in Iranian trade comes at a time when the UAE is grappling with several years of lackluster growth triggered by subdued oil prices and rising living costs.

Biggest Merger of Iran's Banks Due Soon: CBI

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati said Thursday a planned merger of several of the country's major banks is due to take place soon.

Hemmati said on his Instagram page that the CBI was finalizing plans for incorporating several banks affiliated with Iran's armed forces into second top lender Bank Sepah.

"The merger assembly of these banks will convene in the near future, closing the case for the most significant banking merger ever," said Hemmati.

The CBI governor made the comments after a high-profile meeting attended by Iran's Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri who reportedly gave the go-ahead for final moves on the banking merger.

The scheme involves Bank Sepah, the oldest bank in Iran and one of the three banks still owned by the government, and four banks and one credit institutes that are owned by various branches of the Iranian armed forces.

Iranian authorities say the merger,

originally planned to take place in late December, would lead to more efficiency in the way the banks operate in Iran while it would streamline the finances and help economies of scale for the banks.

Many bank branches are also planned to be sold off under the scheme helping create more resources for Bank Sepah in the future.

Hemmati described the merger as one of the most complicated and difficult projects in the history of Iran banking, adding that top echelons of the Iranian armed forces had contributed to efforts to speed up scheme.

Iranian banks are under pressure from U.S. sanctions which have cut off the country's financial system from the outside world. The embargo has touched every sector of the economy, including health care, where the lives of so many patients are at risk.

Some of the problems are related to mismanagement, however, with many Iranian banks reportedly saddled with outstanding and non-performing loans.

Critics say the government is oblivious to a bloated financial sector which has been thriving for years as banks and financial institutions have mushroomed and engaged more in speculative activities than finance.

Over the years, manufacturing corporations, pension funds, charity foundations as well as civil, military and state organizations have established their own banks.

These financial institutions have extended loans to some "bigwig" clients who are mostly engaged in speculative activities and refusing to repay their debts.

Borrowings of Iranian banks from the CBI have led to an overflow of money supply, which is blamed for galloping inflation and liquidity crisis.

"The reform of the banking system is a very important issue that cannot be done in the short term," Hemmati has said.

"The problems facing the banking system in terms of financial and asset imbalances, arrears and unsettled claims are important issues that are gradually being resolved."

Oil Heads for Second Consecutive Week of Gains

LONDON (Reuters) -- Oil prices rose on Friday and were on course for a second consecutive week of gains as more countries moved ahead with plans to relax economic and social lockdowns put in place to halt the coronavirus pandemic and as more output was shut in.

Brent crude was up by 27 cents, or 0.9%, at \$29.73 a barrel by 1220 GMT, having fallen nearly 1% on Thursday. U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude gained 17 cents, or 0.7%, to \$23.72 after a decline of nearly 2% in the previous session.

Both contracts are heading for a second week of gains after the lows of April, when U.S. oil crashed below zero, with Brent advancing more than 12% this week and WTI up 20%.

However, crude is still being pumped into storage, raising the prospect that any gains prompted by stronger demand will be capped. "The market remains very oversupplied, but OPEC+ cuts and voluntary curtailments are helping and the modest beginnings of demand recovery could be imminent as lockdowns begin to ease," said Jefferies equity analyst Jason Gamme.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies led by Russia, a group known as OPEC+, began implementing a deal on record supply cuts amounting to 9.7 million barrels per day (bpd) from the start of May.



A pump jack operates at sunset in an oil field in Midland, Texas U.S. August 22, 2018.

North American oil companies are cutting production quicker than OPEC officials and industry analysts expected and are on track to withdraw about 1.7 million bpd of output by the end of June.

Still, U.S. crude inventories at the Cushing storage hub in Oklahoma increased by about 407,000 barrels in the week through May 5, traders said on Thursday, citing Genscape data.

"Price-wise, we still expect to see some mild (if not wild) price swings as the traders get bullish on shut-ins and then again bearish on the stock builds that continue to pile up," said Rystad Energy oil markets analyst Louise Dickson.

Australia on Friday became the latest country to plan an easing of lockdown restrictions as infections from the coronavirus slow to a

trickle, aiming to relax social distancing restrictions in a three-stage process.

France, parts of the United States and countries such as Pakistan are also planning to ease restrictions instituted to stop the spread of the world's worst health crisis in a century.

In the United States, the biggest oil and oil products consumer, motorists are starting to take to the roads as the lockdowns ease. Gasoline supplied to the U.S. market rose to almost 6.7 million bpd last week, according to estimates from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Prices received further support after U.S. and Chinese officials discussed a trade deal agreed before the coronavirus outbreak, with both sides agreeing to implement the agreement.

Japan on Course for Deep Recession: Data

TOKYO (Reuters) -- Japan's household spending plunged in March and service-sector activity shrank at a record pace in April, reinforcing expectations that the coronavirus pandemic is tipping the world's third-largest economy into deep recession.

Overtime pay - a barometer of strength in corporate activity - also plunged at a record pace in March, data showed, a sign companies were hit by shrinking business even before the government announced a state of emergency in early April.

The weak readings make it a near certainty the economy suffered a second straight quarter of contraction in January-March, the technical definition of a recession, and was on track for a deeper decline in the current quarter as the health crisis kept shoppers home and businesses closed.

"Even without the virus, Japan's economy was very weak due to the hit from last year's sales tax hike. The pandemic has completely destroyed any chance of a recovery," said Taro Saito, executive research fellow at NLI Research Institute.

"The economy may rebound somewhat in July-September but won't return to pre-coronavirus levels for the rest of this year," said Saito, who expects the economy to contract an annualized 30% in the current quarter.

Household spending slumped 6.0% in March from a year earlier following a 0.3% fall in February, marking the biggest drop in five years, government data showed on Friday.

The decline, a tad smaller than a median market forecast for a 6.7% fall, was due largely to plunging demand for travel, clothing and eating out as the government asked citizens to refrain from going out and some businesses to shut down.



Shoppers wearing protective face masks, following an outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), are seen at a supermarket in Tokyo, March 27, 2020.

The data will likely drag on preliminary first-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) data due on May 18. Analysts polled by Reuters expect Japan's economy to contract an annualized 4.6% in the January-March period.

Many analysts expect the economy to plunge by at least 20% in the current quarter, piling pressure on the government to top up an already massive \$1.1 trillion stimulus package to cushion the economic blow from the pandemic.

With infections in Japan exceeding 15,000, the government extended a state of emergency on Monday through to the end of the month, pressuring companies to shut down factories and stores longer than previously expected.

Other data paint a similarly bleak picture on the outlook.

Japan's services sector shrank at the fastest pace on record in April as a huge blow to demand from the outbreak hurt business

activity, a business survey showed.

Inflation-adjusted real wages fell in March for the first time in three months as overtime pay slumped 4.1% from a year earlier, falling at the fastest pace on record.

Tom Learmouth, an economist at Capital Economics, expects Japan's job market to worsen sharply in coming months and push down wages of retailers hit by the pandemic.

"Looking ahead, leading indicators are pointing towards a spike in the unemployment rate - we think it will climb to 4.2% towards the end of this year," he said.

"Corporate profits are no doubt falling fast so total pay will be dragged down further by a slump in bonus payments."

Japan's jobless rate stood at 2.5% in March.

The health crisis hit an economy that already suffered a contraction in the final quarter of last year due to the hit on consumption from an October sales tax hike.

U.S. Loses Jobs at Highest Rate Since Depression

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. economy lost a staggering 20.5 million jobs in April, the steepest plunge in payrolls since the Great Depression and the starkest sign yet of how the novel coronavirus pandemic is battering the world's biggest economy.

The Labor Department's closely watched monthly employment report on Friday also showed the unemployment rate surging to 14.7% last month, shattering the post-World War Two record of 10.8% touched in November 1982.

The bleak numbers strengthen analysts' expectations of a slow recovery from the recession caused by the pandemic, adding to a pile of dismal data on consumer spending, business investment, trade, productivity and the housing market. The

report underscores the devastation unleashed by lockdowns imposed by states and local governments in mid-March to slow the spread of COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the virus.

The economic crisis spells trouble for President Donald Trump's bid for a second term in the White House in November's election. After the Trump administration was criticized for its initial reaction to the pandemic, Trump is eager to reopen the economy, despite a continued rise in COVID-19 infections and dire projections of deaths.

"Our economy is on life support now," said Erica Groshen, a former commissioner of the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics. "We will be test-

ing the waters in the next few months to see if it can emerge safely from our policy-induced coma," added Groshen, who is now a senior extension faculty member at the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast nonfarm payrolls diving by 22 million. Data for March was revised to show 870,000 jobs lost instead of 701,000 as previously reported. A record streak of job growth dating to October 2010 ended in March. The unemployment was forecast rising to 16% from 4.4% in April.

Economists say the economy entered recession in late March, when nearly the whole country went into COVID-19 lockdowns.



PARIS (AFP) -- The death toll from the novel coronavirus pandemic in Asia passed 10,000 on Friday, with just under half of the fatalities in China, according to an AFP tally compiled from official sources. With a total of 10,001 deaths and 269,025 infections, Asia has a far lower toll than Europe, which has recorded 151,576 deaths, or the United States and Canada with 79,328. China, which has officially recorded 4,633 deaths, has registered only one new death in the past three weeks, while the next hardest-hit Asian countries are India with 1,783 fatalities and Indonesia with 930.

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) -- Coronavirus cases in Pakistan surged past 25,000 on Friday, just hours before the government was due to lift lockdown measures, with the country reporting some of the biggest daily increases in new infections in the world. Officials reported 1,764 new COVID-19 cases over the past 24 hours on Friday, taking the total to 25,837. Deaths rose by 30 to 594. Prime Minister Imran Khan has announced plans to begin lifting Pakistan's poorly enforced lockdown from Saturday, amid fears for the country's economy as it sinks into recession. Khan said the easing of restrictions, aimed at helping the country's most impoverished citizens, would be lifted in phases and warned people that the epidemic could get out of control if they did not take precautions. He added that restrictions could be restored if the outbreak worsens.

RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP) -- Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro authorized the army Thursday to fight Amazon wildfires and deforestation, amid warnings the world's biggest rainforest is disappearing even faster than during record devastation last year. The far-right leader has faced criticism on the world stage for record-breaking wildfires in 2019, his first year in office. And though fire season will only start in late May with dryer weather, there are already worrying signs for this year. Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon for the first three months of the year increased by more than 50 percent from the same period last year, to 796 square kilometers. Bolsonaro signed a decree authorizing the armed forces to take "preventive and restrictive action against environmental crimes, namely illegal deforestation and wildfires." The order will be in effect from May 11 to June 10 in protected areas, indigenous reserves and other federal land in the Amazon region.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) -- An Indian train ran over migrant workers sleeping on the track on Friday, killing at least 14 of the group, who were apparently on their way to their home villages, the railway ministry and media said. Tens of thousands of people have been walking home from India's big cities after losing their jobs because of a lockdown to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus since late March. The driver tried to stop the freight train when he saw the laborers on the tracks in the western state of Maharashtra, the railway ministry said, adding it had ordered an inquiry. "I have just heard the sad news about laborers coming under the train, rescue work is underway," Railway Minister Piyush Goyal said on Twitter. Under the lockdown, all public transport has been suspended so migrant workers heading home often have to walk long distances to get there. The government has extended the lockdown until May 17.

BERLIN (AFP) -- A German journalist told AFP on Thursday that she has filed a case against former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, accusing him of sexual assault in 2018. Ann-Kathrin Stracke, 37, a journalist working for German public television WDR alleged that Giscard d'Estaing -- then aged 92 -- placed his hands on her backside three times while she was in his Parisian office for an interview in December 2018. "I decided to tell my story because I think that people should know that a French former president harassed me sexually after an interview," she told AFP. She took her case to Paris prosecutors on March 10 this year, backed by her employer which carried out an independent investigation into her claims. Giscard d'Estaing, now 94, led France from 1974 to 1981, ushering through a spree of radical reforms, legalizing abortion, liberalizing divorce and reducing the voting age to 18.

HONG KONG (Reuters) -- Rival lawmakers scuffled in Hong Kong's legislature on Friday in a row over electing the chairman of a key committee, a fresh sign of rising political tension as the coronavirus pandemic tapers off in the Chinese-ruled city. Lawmakers shouted and pushed one another at the legislative council meeting. Pro-Beijing lawmakers scuffled with pro-Western lawmakers, several clashing with guards attempting to eject a pro-Beijing lawmaker who sought to chair the meeting in a move that democrats said violated procedure. Beijing has accused the former British colony's pro-Western lawmakers of "malicious" filibustering to prevent some proposed bills from going to a final vote.

After Police Kill Two Men in Indianapolis: Angry U.S. Protesters: We're Being Hunted



Protesters listen during a rally outside of the City County Building on May 7, 2020, in Indianapolis after the fatal shooting by the police.

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Protesters crowded the streets of Indianapolis on Thursday to voice concerns about police treatment after officers shot and killed two men and fatally struck a pregnant pedestrian in three separate incidents just hours apart.

Officials said both men exchanged gunfire with officers, adding that the second shooting early Thursday morning could have been an ambush on police. Police did not have body camera or dash camera footage of either shooting. Both of the men were black, as were most of the protesters.

The pregnant woman, who was white, was walking along an expressway ramp when an officer driving to work struck her with his vehicle.

Events surrounding the first shooting were livestreamed on Facebook, including comments by a responding detective who is heard saying: "I think it's going to be a closed casket, homie," an apparent reference to a closed-casket funeral.

Protesters converged on the first shooting scene Wednesday night, and dozens more gathered Thursday at the City County Building in downtown Indianapolis. Many wore face masks aimed at reducing the spread of the coronavirus and at times shouted, "No justice, no peace." Several carried Black

Lives Matter flags and signs.

The Marion County coroner's office identified the man killed in the first shooting as Dreajson Reed, 21, and the man killed later as McHale Rose, 19. The pregnant woman was identified as Ashlynn Lisby, 23. Her fetus also did not survive.

Protests began after video of the events leading up to Reed's shooting appeared on Facebook. The video, which appears to have been recorded by Reed, shows him being pursued by police both in his car and on foot before incoherent shouting and popping sounds are heard. Later came the detective's comment, which also was broadcast live on social media.

Reed's father, Jamie Reed, said he had seen the video and was "crushed" by its contents.

"It just shows me that we're not really being protected and served. We're being hunted," he told reporters at Thursday's protest. "My son was a great son. I love him to death. He was just a typical young adult like anybody else. He didn't deserve to die like that."

Relatives said Reed, whose nickname was "Sean," had recently left the U.S. Air Force. Military records show he served less than a year, in 2017. Details of separations cannot be released under privacy rules.

WHO: Coronavirus Likely to Kill 190,000 in Africa



A police checkpoint is seen, after the government announced a lockdown for two weeks following a jump in confirmed coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases there, Nairobi, Kenya May 7, 2020.

KINSHASA (AFP) -- Up to 190,000 people in Africa could die of coronavirus in the first year of the pandemic if containment measures fail, the World Health Organization warned on Thursday.

The UN health agency cited a new study by its regional office in Brazzaville which found that between 83,000 and 190,000 could die and 29 to 44 million be infected during the period.

The research is based on prediction modelling and covers 47 countries with a total population of one billion, the WHO said in a statement.

Experts have consistently warned that Africa is particularly vulnerable to an outbreak, due to weak health infrastructure, high rates of poverty, numerous roiling conflicts and a proven susceptibility to previous epidemics.

But the virus has been slow to spread across the continent, which has yet not recorded the soaring number of infections or deaths seen in Europe, the United States and elsewhere.

"The model predicts the observed slower rate of transmission, lower age of people with severe disease and lower mortality rates compared to what is seen in the most affected countries in the rest of the world," the statement said.

"The lower rate of transmission, however, suggests a more prolonged outbreak over a few years."

WHO Africa Director Matshidiso Moeti said that "while COVID-19 likely won't spread as exponentially in Africa as it has elsewhere in the world, it likely will smolder in transmission hotspots."

"COVID-19 could become a fixture in our lives for the next several years unless a proactive approach is taken by many governments in the region," he added. "We need to test, trace, isolate and treat."

Smaller countries as well as Algeria, South Africa and Cameroon were at particularly high risk unless effective containment measures were in force, the WHO said.

Africa has so far recorded 53,334 cases and 2,065 fatalities -- out of a global death toll of nearly 267,000 -- according to an AFP tally.

Several countries have put confinement measures or lockdown in place, but others have not and some are considering lifting restrictions.

Nigeria lifted the lockdown in Africa's most populous city Lagos earlier this week, while South Africa started to ease its measures last week.

North Korea Blasts South's Military Drills

Kim Sends 'Warm Greetings' to China Leader



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, left, meets President Xi Jinping in Beijing in this photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on January 10, 2019.

SEOUL (Dispatches) -- North Korea lashed out at South Korea over recent military drills, while leader Kim Jong Un sent a personal message to China's Xi Jinping to congratulate him on that country's success in controlling the coronavirus, state media reported on Friday.

A North Korean military representative said on Friday that recent South Korean military drills were a grave provocation that demanded a reaction, according to a statement carried by Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

"The recent drill served as an opportunity which awakened us once again to the obvious fact that the enemies remain

enemies all the time," the statement said.

North Korea cited a military exercise by the Republic of Korea Air Force (ROKAF) Air Combat Command on Wednesday, and said the drills violated inter-Korean agreements aimed at reducing military tensions. "Everything is now going back to the starting point before the north-south summit meeting in 2018," the statement said.

On Sunday, South Korea said North Korean troops fired multiple shots toward a South Korean guard post at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), which separates the two countries. South Korean troops responded by firing warning shots, but no casualties were reported.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

had said the shots fired by North Korea were likely "accidental".

Meanwhile, a U.S. think tank said North Korea is building a facility big enough to store its ballistic missiles.

The Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) said construction of the unit, near Pyongyang International Airport, "is nearing completion" and "is almost certainly related to North Korea's expanding ballistic missiles program".

"A high-bay building within the facility is large enough to accommodate an elevated Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile and, therefore, the entirety of North Korea's known ballistic missile variants," the CSIS report said.

"The facility has been constructed next to an underground facility whose likely size is also large enough to easily accommodate all known North Korean ballistic missiles and their associated launchers and support vehicles."

In a separate dispatch, KCNA said Kim sent a verbal message to the Chinese president about the coronavirus, KCNA said.

"Kim Jong Un in his message extended his warm greetings to Xi Jinping and congratulated him, highly appreciating that he is seizing a chance of victory in the war against the unprecedented epidemic," said KCNA.

Kim wished Xi good health and the KCNA report said the relations between Pyongyang and Beijing were "firmly consolidated."

UN Chief: Virus 'Continues to Unleash Tsunami of Hate'



Residents gather to protest against racism in the Chinatown neighborhood of San Francisco, Feb. 29, 2020.

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) -- UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called Friday for an "all-out effort" to end the "tsunami of hate and xenophobia" sparked by the novel coronavirus pandemic, by naming specific countries.

"The pandemic continues to unleash a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scaremongering," Guterres said in a statement.

"Anti-foreigner sentiment has surged online and in the streets. Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories have spread and COVID-19-related anti-Muslim attacks have occurred."

According to Guterres, migrants and refugees have been "vilified as a source of the virus -- and then denied ac-

cess to medical treatment." Meanwhile, "contemptible memes have emerged suggesting" that older people, some of the most vulnerable to the virus, "are also the most expendable," he said.

Additionally, "journalists, whistleblowers, health professionals, aid workers and human rights defenders are being targeted simply for doing their jobs," Guterres said.

The UN chief appealed for "an all-out effort to end hate speech globally," and singled out educational institutions to help teach "digital literacy" to young people -- whom he called "captive and potentially despairing audiences."

Guterres also called on "the media, especially social media companies, to

do much more to flag and... remove racist, misogynist and other harmful content."

Black Brazilians are exposed to greater risk than whites and are dying at a higher rate.

More than half Brazil's population of 210 million people is black, but they face deeply entrenched inequalities that are on full display during the pandemic.

As in the United States, where black people are also bearing the brunt of COVID-19, there are a range of underlying reasons that Afro-Brazilians are being disproportionately affected.

The death rate from the virus for blacks in the state is 15.6 per 100,000. For whites, it is 9.6 per 100,000.

Brazil's indigenous people are also facing a health crisis, as Bolsonaro has not included their communities, living in remote areas, in his national plans to fight the coronavirus outbreak.

Earlier this week, indigenous leaders wrote a letter to the World Health Organization (WHO), asking for an emergency fund for their people, who have no access to personal protective equipment and health services.

Last week, a study by the Guardian newspaper showed that areas with high ethnic minority populations in England and Wales tended to have higher mortality rates in the pandemic.

Meanwhile, India's Muslim population are being harassed by both the police and people in the streets across the country, as rumors, misinformation and videos on social media, accusing them of deliberately spreading Covid-19.

U.S. Navy Suffering From 'Failure in Leadership'

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- The handling of a coronavirus outbreak aboard the Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier was just another example of a "failure in leadership" in the Navy in recent years, President Donald Trump's nominee to lead the service said on Thursday.

The United States Navy has been hit with a number of crises in the past year, most recently the firing of the Roosevelt's captain after the leak of a letter he wrote calling on the Navy for stronger measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus on the ship.

"It saddens me to say that the Department of the Navy is in rough waters due to many factors but primarily the failure of leadership," Kenneth Braithwaite, currently U.S. envoy to Norway, told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Braithwaite, who would be the fourth civilian to lead the Navy in about five months, listed several incidents in recent years, including the Roosevelt, the "Fat Leonard" corruption scandal and deadly Navy ship collisions.

"They are all indicative of a breakdown in the trust of those leading the service," Braithwaite said, adding that he believed that the culture in the Navy was "tarnished."

In an otherwise friendly hearing where lawmakers largely focused on more narrow issues, Democratic Senator Jack Reed said the Navy's handling of the Roosevelt illustrated how the Navy was in "disarray."

More than 1,000 sailors on the Roosevelt, currently in Guam, have tested positive for the virus and one sailor has died.

Captain Brett Crozier was fired by the Navy's top civilian, then-acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly, against the recommendations of uniformed leaders, who suggested he wait for an investigation into the letter's leak.

Modly's decision backfired badly, as members of the crew hailed their captain as a hero for risking his career out of concern for their health, in an emotional sendoff captured on video that went viral on social media.

Embarrassed, Modly then compounded his problems by firing out to the carrier to ridicule Crozier over the leak and question his character in a speech to the Roosevelt's crew, which also leaked to the media. Modly then resigned.

Modly's predecessor Richard Spencer was fired over his handling of the case of a Navy SEAL who was convicted of battlefield misconduct in Iraq and later won Trump's support.

No Green Light for Premier League to Restart Yet



The Premier League does not yet have the 'green light' to resume but the government hopes that the season can be completed.

LONDON (Dispatches) – Britain's Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden has warned that the Premier League does not yet have the 'green light' to resume but restated the government's hope that the season can be completed.

Premier League clubs are due to meet on Monday to discuss the latest plans for "Project Restart" -- a day after an expected minor easing of coronavirus lockdown measures.

Clubs are understood to have been told that the use of a limited number

of neutral venues is the only way to complete the campaign, to limit the strain on essential services and discourage gatherings of supporters near stadiums.

But those at risk of relegation argue that the integrity of the competition would be compromised by the neutral-venue plan.

Brighton chief executive Paul Barber is opposed to the idea, with the Seagulls hovering two points above the drop zone. Brighton were scheduled to play five of their remaining nine games at home.

Despite extensive contingency planning, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Oliver Dowden warned the Premier League was yet to get the go-ahead, with testing and player welfare major hurdles.

However, in Germany, the Bundesliga announced this week that it would resume matches on May 16, behind closed doors and subject to extensive coronavirus testing.

Dowden's comments came as The Times newspaper reported that Football Association chiefs would block any attempt to declare the Premier League season null and void and abandon relegation.

At least one club reportedly wants relegation to be scrapped if neutral grounds are used.

But The Times said it was understood that the FA board supported the Premier League board's position that the league table should be decided on sporting merit even if it were cut short.

Former Manchester United and England defender Rio Ferdinand said there was no viable resolution that would satisfy all 20 clubs.

"People are going to feel at a disadvantage if certain decisions are made but I don't think the Premier League can have a wholehearted 100 percent win on this no matter what decision they make, which is unfortunate," he told the Press Association.

La Liga Players Returning to Training

MADRID (Dispatches) – Football teams in Spain's top two divisions are returning to training in the coming days to try to finish a season that was halted on March 9 amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sevilla, Villarreal, Leganes and Osasuna were the first four teams back in action on Friday.

Players underwent coronavirus tests at the installations of their respective clubs during the week after training facilities had been thoroughly disinfected, such as at Real Sociedad's Zubietta complex.

Once shown to be free of the virus, players are then able to start training individually, progressing into groups of six and then eight as the lockdown in Spain is slowly eased through four separate stages.

However, the government's plan to ease the lockdown will see some regions progress faster than others, with Catalonia and probably Madrid a step behind some other parts of Spain, meaning players at teams such as Real Madrid, Barcelona, Es-



La Liga teams were told they could to return to training provided they comply with protocols laid out by the Spanish government.

panyol and Atletico Madrid will not be able to train in groups as soon as other teams whose regions progress faster.

The FC Barcelona squad were able to start individual training on Friday after none of the club's first team players or coaches tested positive for COVID-19.

The players and coaches gave blood

and mucus samples for antibody tests and PCR tests to see whether they had the virus in their system on Wednesday as part of the protocols agreed with the Spanish Football League (LaLiga) and the Spanish government before they could return to training.

Catalan radio station RAC 1 reported that the tests showed that no member

of the squad is, or has been infected by the coronavirus and according to the regulations stipulated in the Spanish government's four-phase plan to relax the restrictions, will be able to begin training on their own.

The plan of the Spanish Football League is to play this season's 11 remaining rounds of matches without supporters in the stadiums.

Spanish media reports suggest the competition will restart on June 20 and that clubs will play two games a week with a view to finishing on July 26.

Given that playing two matches a week at the height of summer will present a physical challenge to players who have been unable to train or kick a ball in anger for two months, La Liga has proposed allowing each side to use five substitutes, rather than the usual three, in order to lower the risk of injuries, while many clubs will keep players at their training grounds for the remainder of the season to limit the risk of infection from elsewhere.

After Two-Month Lockdown

Inter, AC Milan Back Training

MILAN (AFP) – Italian football giants Inter Milan and AC Milan were both back training Friday two months after a strict lockdown which has hit the northern Italian city hard.

Inter said all their players and staff have tested negative for coronavirus on Friday, clearing the way for them to return to individual training in the afternoon.

"All the medical tests that the first team underwent have come back negative," the team said in a statement.

"Optional individual training sessions will begin this afternoon."

City rivals AC Milan resumed earlier in the week with club technical director Paolo Maldini warning on Friday "not going back on the pitch would be a disaster."

Former Italy captain Maldini, to-

gether with his 18-year-old son Daniel, a Milan youth team player, have both recovered from coronavirus.

"You have to be careful, but not to resume would be a disaster from all points of view," 51-year-old Maldini said during a live Instagram chat on Friday with former Milan teammate Filippo Inzaghi.

"France were wrong to decree the end immediately, but we will accept what will be the verdict of the government. There is so much uncertainty."

The city in the northern Lombardy region is the epicenter of Italy's outbreak, one of the worst in Europe in terms of deaths and infections.

Lombardy has suffered some 15,000 deaths, around half of Italy's 30,000 coronavirus fatalities, since the outbreak first erupted in early March.

Both Milan clubs insisted they were taking the maximum precautions.

"We have closed the common areas of Milanello," said Maldini. "The players are divided into four for each pitch and in 12 you can work well anyway."

Inter added: "The club maintains the utmost attention to preventive measures to safeguard the health of the players and all members of the club, in accordance with all the governmental and public health protection guidelines."

One by one stars have returned to Italy with Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo is in two weeks' coronavirus quarantine as his team got back training on Tuesday.

AC Milan were on Friday awaiting the belated return of Zlatan Ibrahimovic from a protracted exile in Sweden.

[VAR] system," Foolad General Manager Saeid Azari said.

The 30,000-seat stadium, located northeast of Ahvaz, was inaugurated in January 2019.

But opinions are divided on whether to follow France and the Netherlands and end the season or the Bundesliga and return behind closed doors.

The Italian Football Federation (FIGC) met on Thursday with the government's technical scientific committee to discuss details of the medical protocol for a return to group training.

"Tell us what we need to do to return to play," FIGC president Gabriele Gravina was reported to have told government officials.

Italian Sports Minister Vincenzo Spadafora said afterwards he was "hopeful" team training could resume on May 18.

"I don't want to risk forecasts at this time, we must be careful," said Spadafora. "If it is to be resumed, it will be behind closed doors."

In the VAR system, a group of referees review decisions of the head referee using video footage and headset communication.

NASCAR to Resume Season in Mid-May Without Spectators



NASCAR, which postponed racing in mid-March due to concerns over the novel coronavirus, said its season will resume on May 17 at Darlington Raceway in South Carolina.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – NASCAR will be the first major sport in the United States to return to action amid the COVID-19 pandemic after the organizers of the popular racing series say that the season will resume without fans in mid-May.

NASCAR, which postponed racing in mid-March due to concerns over the novel coronavirus, said its season will resume on May 17 at Darlington Raceway in South Carolina.

The race will be the first of seven over an 11-day span at Darlington Raceway and Charlotte Motor Speedway.

"NASCAR and its teams are eager and excited to return to racing, and have great respect for the responsibility that comes with a return to competition," Steve O'Donnell, NASCAR executive vice president and chief racing development officer said in a statement.

"NASCAR will return in an environment that will ensure the safety of our competitors, officials and all those in the local community."

NASCAR also said modifications to the events include health screenings for those entering and exiting the facility, strict limits of the number of people granted access, enforcement of social distancing and mandated use of

protective equipment.

The sanctioning body said that in-race competition procedures will be largely unchanged but it will eliminate practice for all seven races as well as qualifying for all except the May 24 Coca-Cola 600.

The Coca-Cola 600, which is run at the Charlotte Motor Speedway on the nation's Memorial Day holiday weekend, has in the past been held in the shadow of the Indianapolis 500 and Monaco Grand Prix with all three events held on the same day.

But this year the Coca-Cola 600 will have the spotlight to itself with Formula One and IndyCar still mapping out a return to action.

NASCAR had run four races, including the season-opening Daytona 500 in mid-February, before the series, like many other sports in the U.S., was forced into a hiatus by the coronavirus outbreak.

While no dates beyond May 27 have been announced, NASCAR has previously stated it intends to complete a full 36-race schedule in 2020.

The return to action was welcome news for drivers like 2012 NASCAR Cup Series champion Brad Keselowski, who like other competitors had filled his downtime racing in esports events.

Italy Kitesurfers Fly Again as Lockdown Loosens

LADISPOLI (AFP) – Italian kitesurfers shed tears of joy in the salty blue waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea as they returned to the wind and water after a seemingly interminable coronavirus lockdown.

"After two months, two and a half months, coming out today after the emergency phase was fantastic, just fantastic, we couldn't wait," said Cristian Somma, co-founder of the Tsunami Kite School outside Rome.

"I cried when I was on the water, big tears," he grinned as his friends and colleagues skimmed over the shimmering waves at Ladispoli.

"Because after two and a half months, it was really beautiful. We stayed home, we complied with all the decrees."

All group and individual sports were cancelled when the government imposed a nationwide lockdown in early March over a pandemic that has since killed nearly 30,000 people, according to Italy's official toll.

Italians could run or cycle within 100 meters of their home, but all other sports were prohibited.

Now, local councils can decide to authorize individual sports such as kitesurfing, provided that practitioners keep a safe distance from

each other.

Even though almost all of the shops and restaurants in this resort town remain closed, as does the teaching part of the kite school, surfing is once more permitted.

"We took all the precautions, we came wearing a mask in the van, I also wore it in the water although, as you can see, in the water, it is absolutely not necessary because the distance between one kiter and another is 24 meters," said Somma.

"We hope as soon as possible to return to work, taking all possible precautions," he said.

"We will work a lot with radio helmets so we will be as far away from the students as possible."

Italy's beaches remain officially closed to sunbathers but people can at least once more walk and wet their feet in the slowly warming waters.

"Finally we can come back after two months and 10 days or so, to practice our favorite sport, it's beautiful, the feeling of freedom," said the kite school's co-owner Salvatore Flaccovio.

"They did well to restart individual sports because we're no harm to anybody, we are at a safe distance, we respect all the rules."

Foolad Arena to Use VAR System Next Season

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iranian football club Foolad has announced that it will be equipped with Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system next season.

The Stadium could be the first Iranian stadium to use VAR next season.

"We have analyzed the situation and want to start using the

UN Agency for Palestinians Launches Corona Appeal

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) – The United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) has launched an emergency coronavirus appeal, saying Palestinians across the Middle East were suffering a devastating socio-economic impact.

The agency appealed for \$93.4 million for the next three months to provide food and cash assistance to the vulnerable.

While the number of Palestinian refugees infected with COVID-19 has so far been relatively low, they often work in informal sectors and are facing devastating economic repercussions from the crisis, UNRWA said.

In the Gaza Strip, where the majority of the two million population are refugees, unemployment could jump from 50 to 70 percent due to the crisis, said Matthias Schmale, UNRWA's head in the Palestinian territory.

UNRWA provides support for millions of Palestinian refugees across the Middle East, but primarily in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza.

This includes schooling and medical services, with the organization often operating as a de facto state in refugee camps.

Without the funds schools for millions of children may not be able to reopen, UNRWA officials said.

The United States, traditionally the largest individual donor to the organization



People queue to receive aid at a UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) aid center at the Jaramana Palestinian refugee camp in the Syrian capital Damascus, on September 2, 2018.

with around \$300 million annually, cut all funding to the body in 2018 as relations with the Palestinian government broke down.

UNRWA is not affiliated with the government and accused Trump of politicizing humanitarian aid.

Elizabeth Campbell, the agency's Wash-

ington director, told an online press conference they were launching the appeal "amidst the biggest financial crisis in our history".

In March, 59 U.S. Congress members wrote to Trump's administration urging him to reinstate the funding in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

the coronavirus. Crisscrossed by major fault lines, Iran is one of the most earthquake-prone countries in the world. In 2003, a magnitude 6.6 quake in Kerman province killed 28,000 people and flattened the ancient city of Bam. The latest quake was at a shallow depth of 7 km (4.3 miles), Tehran University's Seismological Center said.

Russia...

(Continued From Page 2)

halt to the sanctions in order to let Iran procure medicine and necessary equipment as it fights the coronavirus. Instead, Washington has intensified its sanctions regime even as it has claimed readiness to help Tehran with the pandemic. Iranian officials have dismissed the offer as hypocritical. On Wednesday, President Hassan Rouhani said the United States continues to impede Iran's efforts to supply its medical needs. "The U.S. administration strongly opposes even borrowing money from the International Monetary Fund to fight the virus," he said in a phone conversation with his Austrian counterpart Alexander Van der Bellen. Rouhani said Europe should help countries and end the illegal U.S. sanctions. Iran also expects Europe to put pressure on the occupying regime of Israel to stop its acts of aggression against Syria, Lebanon and the besieged Gaza Strip, he added. Rouhani said the European Union should take a more serious stance with regard to its commitments to international issues and the deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The Austrian president, for his part, said his country and the EU oppose the U.S. sanctions against Iran and will continue their cooperation with Tehran. "We are trying to improve relations between Iran and Europe without being influenced by the United States," he said, stressing that U.S. acts violate international law. He also underlined his country's interest in expanding cooperation with Iran in the fight against the coronavirus. In their talks, the two presidents stressed the need to strengthen INSTEX, a non-dollar direct payment channel officially called the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges — which aims to keep trade between Iran and Europe in the face of the U.S. sanctions.

U.S....

(Continued From Page One)

"I assume that it is the United States." Berry's declarations were broadcast one day after a similar video featuring the group's other North American member, Luke Denman. Denman, 34, told his interrogators his mission had been to apprehend Maduro and take him to the U.S. Berry named two other highly sensitive targets in his statement: the installations of Venezuela's military counter-intelligence service, DGCIM, and the Bolivarian national intelligence service, Sebin. Maduro said Thursday there is evidence U.S. President Donald Trump "personally ordered" the military raid. In an interview with a Uruguayan news outlet, Maduro said the newly-appointed Ambassador James Story — the first formal U.S. envoy to Venezuela in some 10 years — and other senior American officials, including U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, were also behind the plot. "James Story has his feet, his hands and his whole body in this armed incursion," the Venezuelan president said, adding confidential documents would soon be released proving their complicity. Maduro said it was impossible that after 48 hours, Washington had declined to share information about the mercenary attack. Before dawn on Sunday, a group of U.S. mercenaries tried to intrude into the northern state of La Guaira on boats, but Venezuelan authorities foiled the attack launched from Colombia, killing eight of the armed men and arresting several others. Maduro showed the U.S. passports and other identification cards belonging to Berry and Denman, saying they had been working with Jordan Goudreau, an American military veteran who leads the Florida-based security firm Silvercorp USA. Goudreau later admitted that Berry and Denman were working with him in the operation. Maduro said the Venezuelan authorities had been aware of the plot before its execution. While Guaido had previously denied any involvement with the Florida-based security firm Silvercorp USA, a partial copy of the contract Goudreau says he signed with the opposition leader has circulated online, and the Washington Post has since obtained the full 41-page document from the opposition itself, clearly listing Guaido as the operation's "Commander in Chief." "All of the above is conclusive evidence that Guaido was fully aware and part of this plot, even if he might have withdrawn from it at the last minute," the Washington Post said. Guaido plunged the oil-rich Latin American country into utter chaos after he abruptly declared himself "interim president" of Venezuela in January last year, challenging the outcome of the 2018 presidential election, which Maduro had won. Guaido later launched an abortive coup against the elected government.

Senate...

(Continued From Page 2)

without a vote of Congress," said Senator Tim Kaine, Democrat of Virginia and the sponsor of the measure. "Congress has expressed what is the popular will." Kaine introduced the resolution after the president ordered a strike against Iran's top security commander, Maj. Gen. Qassim Soleimani, a provocation that brought the United States to the brink of war with Iran and unleashed a bitter dispute in Congress. Lawmakers were furious about the White House's failure to confer with them before the strike, as well as a classified document notifying them of the move that provided no information on future threats or an imminent attack — the justification the president initially cited for the strike in the first in a series of shifting explanations. Trump vetoed the measure on Wednesday evening and used his formal veto message to frame the legislation as a personal affront, calling it "a very insulting attack, introduced by Democrats as part of a strategy to win an election on Nov. 3 by dividing the Republican Party." "We live in a hostile world of evolving threats, and the Constitution recognizes that the president must be able to anticipate our adversaries' next moves and take swift and decisive action in response," Trump said. "That's what I did!" The Pentagon has begun gradually reducing the military forces sent to the Middle East in the wake of the Jan. 3 strike on General Soleimani after anticipating either more retaliatory strikes directed by Tehran or a surge in attacks by resistance forces. Two Patriot missile batteries, weapons designed to down enemy aircraft and incoming ballistic missiles, were withdrawn from Saudi Arabia and two were pulled out of Iraq, according to a U.S. official. Four batteries still remain in the region. Two fighter squadrons have also returned to the United States, along with hundreds of soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division. The Wall Street Journal first reported the developments. In the Senate, Republicans were initially resistant to backing Kaine's resolution, but a small group eventually supported it after growing angry about the administration's apparent disregard for lawmakers' input. A small group of Republicans has crossed party lines in recent years to join Democrats in trying to curb the president's war powers, arguing that Congress must reclaim its authority as the branch of government empowered to make war. But legislative remedies have failed to garner the support necessary to survive a veto. A measure similar to Kaine's, passed by the Democratic-led House, was voted down in the Senate last year after lawmakers were spooked by the president's admission that he had called off a military strike against Iran. Since last May, the Pentagon had deployed about 14,000 additional troops to the Persian Gulf region, including roughly 3,500 more to Saudi Arabia. The military assets include early-warning aircraft, maritime patrol planes, Patriot air and missile defense batteries, B-52 bombers, a carrier strike group, armed Reaper drones, and other engineering and support personnel.

Swiss...

(Continued From Page One)

Steven Mnuchin said on Feb. 27. "No transactions have yet been carried out. Unfortunately, this whole process has been slower than expected because of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Fabian Maienfisch, a spokesman for Switzerland's State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), which oversees the channel. The moribund state of the channel contrasts with the fanfare with which the Trump administration announced it. To show that the "Maximum Pressure" sanctions campaign is not consigning Iranians to their fate during the pandemic, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on March 17, "We have an open humanitarian channel to facilitate legitimate transactions even while ensuring our maximum pressure campaign denies terrorists money." Knowledgeable observers say the way the channel is structured places substantial burdens in the way of companies looking to sell Iran humanitarian supplies. Set up through the Swiss bank BCP, compliance requirements for making use of the channel are elevated by design, to provide the U.S. with an assurance that the money won't be diverted into any Iranian military or other effort. The Treasury Department boasted in February of the "enhanced due diligence" participating financial institutions will need to perform. "The reporting requirements are overkill. If it takes three months for a company to get the paperwork in order to even use the channel, it's disingenuous for the administration to suggest it has done everything it can to ease humanitarian trade during a pandemic emergency," said Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj of Bourse & Bazaar, which tracks the Iranian economy.

11 Syrian Soldiers Killed in Daesh Attack

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – The Daesh terrorist group has carried out an attack in a desert region in eastern Syria, killing 11 Syrian soldiers and pro-government fighters, a war monitor has reported.

The Daesh attack took place in an area between the towns of Sukhnah and Shoula between the central province of Homs and the eastern prov-

ince of Dayr al-Zawr, said the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The UK-based monitor did not give further details about the attack, but warned that the causality toll could rise.

The attack is the latest in a series of offensives carried out by the sleeper cells of the Daesh group in the Syrian desert.

About a month ago, a similar Daesh attack claimed the lives of at least 27 Syrian government forces and their allied fighters in the same area.

Observers say that border closures and mobilization of security resources due to the COVID-19 global pandemic could give rise to attacks by Daesh, which has already lost all of its urban strongholds in

Syria and neighboring Iraq after receiving crushing defeats from government forces in both countries.

However, every so often, remnants of the terror group, hunkered down in desert hideouts, launch hit-and-run attacks against government forces and their allied fighters as well as on civilians in both courtiers.

Sparking Rights Concerns

Egypt's Sisi Ratifies Emergency Law Amendments

CAIRO (Dispatches) – President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has ratified a host of amendments to Egypt's emergency law which an international rights groups says expands "repressive powers" as the country's battles the coronavirus.

Egypt has been under a state of emergency since April 2017 when twin church bombings claimed by a Daesh terrorist group affiliate killed dozens of people.

The amendments, published in the official gazette after their approval by parliament, give Sisi and security agencies "additional sweeping powers", according to Human Rights Watch.

They allow the president to close schools, suspend public sector work, ban public and private gatherings and quarantine inbound travelers.

Sisi will also be able to restrict the trade of certain products, order private medical facilities to assist with general healthcare and turn schools, youth centers and other public facilities into field hospitals.

The military prosecution meanwhile will be allowed to assist the public prosecution in probing crimes reported by armed forces personnel tasked with law enforcement under the state of emergency.

In a report, the New York-based HRW warned that the amendments first announced in late April to fight the coronavirus were a "cover for new repressive powers" and "could curb rights in the name of 'public order'".

"President al-Sisi's government is using the pandemic to expand, not reform, Egypt's abusive Emergency Law," said Joe Stork, HRW's deputy Middle East and North Africa director.

Stork said that while some of these measures could be needed in public health emergencies, "they should not be open to abuse as part of an unreformed emergency law".

"Resorting to 'national security and public order' as a justification reflects the security mentality that governs Sisi's Egypt," he added.

Egypt's health ministry has so far recorded 7,981 COVID-19 cases in the population of 100 million.

Of those, 482 have died while 1,887 have recovered.

The state of emergency gives security forces broad powers of arrest and detention and curtails constitutional rights such as freedom of speech and assembly.

What...

(Continued From Page One)

despite their longstanding relationship with key ally the United States as they seek capital and technology to diversify their economies away from hydrocarbon revenues. "These (Persian Gulf) states have to weigh the value of their partnership with the United States," said U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Schenker. "We want our partner nations to do due diligence," he told Reuters by phone. President Donald Trump has blamed Beijing for the coronavirus pandemic and his administration is weighing punitive actions against China over its early handling of the outbreak as economic damage mounts. A German intelligence report casts doubts on U.S. allegations that COVID-19 originated in a Chinese laboratory and says the accusations are an attempt to divert attention from U.S. failure to rein in the disease. Der Spiegel magazine reported on Friday. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said

on Sunday there was "a significant amount of evidence" that the coronavirus had emerged from a Chinese laboratory, but did not dispute U.S. intelligence agencies' conclusion that it was not man-made. Spiegel said Germany's BND spy agency had asked members of the U.S.-led "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance for evidence to support the accusation. None of the alliance's members, the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, wanted to support Pompeo's claim, it said. An intelligence report prepared for German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer concluded that the U.S. accusations were a deliberate attempt to divert public attention away from President Donald Trump's "own failures". Deaths in the United States, the epicenter of the pandemic, have averaged 2,000 a day since mid-April. Several Persian Gulf officials have praised China's efforts to combat the virus, which originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Beijing has recently stepped up its Middle East diplomacy efforts. It has sent medical experts and supplies to countries around the world, including several

Persian Gulf states and Egypt to help combat the disease. The State Department's top diplomat for the Middle East said countries in the region should be wary of Chinese aid, which he said was often "predatory". Schenker also said there was concern about the participation of Chinese firm Huawei in building part of the 5G infrastructure in the Persian Gulf, which hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet and the largest American military base in the region. That would make it "difficult" for American and Persian Gulf forces to communicate, he said. Huawei has long been a target of the U.S. administration, which says the firm could be exploited by Beijing. China and Huawei have repeatedly denied the accusation. The U.S. was looking at providing countries with alternatives to dealing with China and their companies, Schenker said, though admitted it was "behind on 5G". No U.S. firm makes 5G technology.

took the children by their hands and got out," said the 37-year-old housewife. Authorities also assured the public there was no shortage of petrol as people rushed to gas stations to fill up after the quake. Among the dead were a 21-year-old woman in Tehran who suffered heart failure, and a 60-year-old man in the city of Damavand, east of the capital, killed by a head injury, officials said. Tehran governor general Anoushirvan Moheeni-Bandpey said that only four of the 38 injured were hospitalized. The Iranian Red Crescent said its staff were on standby but that so far there were no reports of any collapsed buildings in which to carry out search and rescue operations. "The situation is now stable, but we are still completely on alert" in the provinces of Tehran, Alborz, Mazandaran, Qom and Semnan, said Hamed Sajjadi, head of the organization's rescue operations. "We were ready to accommodate people in stadiums with respect to social distancing, but it was not necessary," he said, referring to health guidelines aimed at stemming the spread of

Situation...

(Continued From Page One)

Syria Postpones Parliamentary Elections

DAMASCUS (MEMO) – The Syrian authorities announced the postponement of parliamentary elections scheduled for this month for the second time, within the framework of a series of precautionary measures taken by the government to combat the coronavirus pandemic. The presidency office stated in a post on social media: "As part of the state's precautionary measures to combat the coronavirus pandemic, President Bashar Al-Assad issued a decree to postpone the legislative elections of members of the People's Assembly for the third legislative round scheduled for 20 May to 19 July." In March, the Syrian authorities postponed the legislative elections, which had been scheduled for 13 April, to 20 May.

Thought for Today

Blessed is the man who always kept the life after death in his view, who remembered the Day of Judgment through all his deeds, who led a contented life and who was happy with the lot that Allah had destined for him.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

VOL NO: LV 11151 TEHRAN / Est.1959

Saturday, May 9, 2020, Ordibehesht 20, 1399, Ramadhan 15, 1441

Iraq Won't Be Used as Launching Ground Against Others: New PM

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Iraq's new Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi says his country will never allow outsiders to use the Arab country's territory for any act of aggression against others.

Kadhimi made the remarks while addressing a parliamentary session on Wednesday, when lawmakers approved his government and ended months of political deadlock.

Kadhimi promised to organize early and healthy elections and form a transitional government that takes the country out of the crisis and toward stability.

Prior to the vote, he said, national sovereignty must be exercised in accordance with the constitution in all aspects of the country.

He underlined the necessity to bring all armed groups and militias under control of the prime minister as the commander in chief of the armed forces, and prevent Iraq from being used as a battleground between regional and international forces.

The Iraqi parliament voted in January to expel foreign forces led by Washington from the country.

The decision came in response to the U.S. assassination of Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units deputy commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis,



U.S. troops around at the K1 Air Base northwest of Kirkuk in northern Iraq, on March 29, 2020.

alongside Iran's top anti-terror Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, in the capital city Baghdad earlier in January.

Iraqi resistance groups have vowed to take up arms against U.S. troops if Washington fails to comply with the parliamentary order.

Countering U.S. meddling in the country is regarded as one of the main challenges to the new government of Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

Kadhimi's cabinet was approved by parliament on Wednesday, ending six months of political uncertainty in the Arab country.

A senior Iraqi cleric says that American forces do not intend to leave the Middle East region and have to be consequentially expelled forcibly by means of resistance.

"The Americans have to be ousted because they do not intend to leave by themselves. Only resistance can expel them," Baghdad Friday prayers leader Sayed Yasin al-

Mousavi said.

"One who seeks the continuation of U.S. presence in the region, and for no resistance to take place against it, is actually seeking to delay the end of injustice over the world," he said.

Citing certain Muslim prayers during the holy month of Ramadan, al-Mousavi added that it was necessary to pray for the expulsion of U.S. troops.

On Thursday, the CNN reported that the U.S. has suspended "significant aspects" of its so-called anti-terrorism operations in the region due to the coronavirus.

Washington deployed troops to Iraq as part of a so-called international coalition to fight Daesh in 2014.

Many have, however, questioned the true motives behind such deployments, arguing that the U.S.-led troops have not targeted Daesh effectively and have in certain cases provided the terrorists with assistance.

U.S. failure to assist the Iraqi government in anti-terrorism operations comes as U.S. President Donald Trump said that American presence in the country served to "watch Iran" in a speech last year.

Saudi TV Promoting Normalization With Zionist Regime

RIYADH (Dispatches) – Two Saudi television series airing during the holy month of Ramadan have caused an uproar in the Arab world as critics say the network behind the series is trying to change Arab views of the Zionist regime.

The Dubai-based, Saudi-owned MBC network has also received criticism for trying to cast Palestinians in a negative light on its programs, critics say.

MBC, a Saudi-owned network, was accused of "promoting normalization" with the Zionist regime despite its decades-long occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories, as well as its systematic abuse of Palestinians still under its military control.

The new "Umm Haroun" television series is one of such programs produced by the Dubai-based Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC).

The series directed by Egypt's Ahmed Gamal el-Adl in the United Arab Emirates stars a Kuwaiti actress who plays the role of a Jewish midwife of Turkish origin living in the Persian Gulf country before settling in the occupied Palestinian territories.

In the other show, a comedy called Makhraj 7, or Exit 7, Saudi actors Nasser Al-Qasabi and Rashid Al-Shamrani are seen discussing dealing with Zionists for business purposes.

The leader of Yemen's popular Houthi Ansarullah movement has slammed Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for using certain television programs to promote relations with the Zionist regime and demean the Palestinian struggle against occupation.

"Those who are directly coordinated with Israel, or through

intermediaries allied with Israel, are partners in their crime," Abdul-Malik Badreddin al-Houthi said in a speech, according to Yemen's al-Masirah television network.

Al-Houthi added that colluding in crimes committed by the Zionist regime was amongst "the most dangerous" of acts.

"The evils committed by the Zionists are the most significant. This is because the scope of their crimes extends to all of humanity given the large scope of Zionist influence over major countries," he said.

"People have to avoid providing any assistance to Israel, the United States or their supporters," al-Houthi added.

Hebrew-language outlet N12 reported on Sunday that many believe Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is involved in the series as he is

interested in closer relations between the kingdom and the Zionist regime.

The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas in Gaza denounced the TV series as a "political and cultural attempt to introduce the Zionist project to Persian Gulf society."

The airing of the series has taken place as Riyadh, along with certain other Persian Gulf states such as the UAE, have moved to embrace relations with the occupying regime, specifically in the past year.

Numerous Zionist delegations have consequently visited certain Persian Gulf states in recent months. Arab delegations from Persian Gulf states have also visited the occupied territories.

No Arab country has formal relations with the Israeli regime, with the exception of Jordan and Egypt.

Palestine to Sue U.S. for Supporting Zionist Regime's Annexation Plans



In this file photo taken on January 31, 2020, Palestinian protesters perform the Friday prayer behind national flags during a protest against a so-called U.S.-brokered Middle East peace plan, outside the West Bank village of Tamun near the Jordan Valley, on January 31, 2020.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Palestinian justice minister intends to file lawsuits against the United States for supporting the Zionist regime's plans to annex Palestinian lands in the West Bank.

"We are looking for legal mechanisms to hold the U.S. government accountable in committing war crimes against the Palestinians together with Israel," Mohammed al-Shalalkeh told Xinhua.

The U.S. support for the Zionist regime's plan to annex Palestinian lands in the West Bank is one of these crimes, he noted.

"Recognizing the occupier's sovereignty on the occupied lands is a war crime in itself, and according to the international law, no state has the right to recognize the sovereignty of any occupying state on others' land," al-Shalalkeh explained.

A high-ranking Palestinian official said the UN Security Council was scheduled to convene later this month to discuss the Zionist regime's controversial plan to annex much of the occupied West Bank, and to rally international pressure on the regime to abandon the decision.

Palestinian Ambassador to the UN Riyad Mansour told the official Voice of Palestine radio station that a meeting will be held on the 20th of this month, with the rotating President of the UN Security Council, Sven Jürgenson, and President of the UN General Assembly, Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, in attendance, Palestine's official Wafa news agency reported.

Mansour highlighted that the State of Palestine is resolved to form "a powerful and broad international front of all components of the international community to confront the [Zionist regime's] policies of annexation."

Moreover, Malta has expressed serious concerns over the regime's decision to annex parts of the West Bank.

The Southern European country's foreign ministry said in a statement the plan violates the international law and the existing global order.

Separately, Turkey on Thursday strongly condemned the regime's plans to construct thousands of new housing units in the West Bank.

In a statement, the Turkish Foreign Ministry described the move as a "continuation of Israel's policy of occupation and oppression."

It said the plan indicated "Israel's drive to continue usurping the rights of Palestinians through blatant illegal settlement activity."

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres condemned the Zionist regime's controversial plan, saying the move will shut the door on possible "peace negotiations" with the Palestinians.

Turkey Still Delivering Parts for U.S. F-35 Jets

ANKARA (Reuters) – Turkey is still producing and delivering parts for U.S. F-35 jets despite being suspended from the program nearly a year ago over its purchase of a Russian anti-aircraft defense system, Defense Industry Director Ismail Demir says.

Washington announced last July, when the first Russian S-400 units arrived in Turkey, that it was suspending Ankara from the F-35 program and expected to "wind down" Turkey's involvement by March 2020.

The United States also said the purchase meant Turkey could be subjected to sanctions under U.S. legislation aimed at discouraging defense purchases from Moscow.

Turkey was both a parts manufacturer and major buyer of the Lockheed Martin F-35 stealth

jets. Washington says the S-400s jeopardize the jets - which Ankara denies - and are incompatible with NATO defense systems.

"There was an understanding in the United States that nothing would be bought from Turkey for the F-35s after March 2020, but that approach is no longer there," Demir said. He suggested the global coronavirus pandemic meant the March deadline no longer applied, without elaborating.

"Our companies continue their production and delivery," Demir said in an online interview, adding that Turkey remained a "loyal partner" of the F-35 program.

Taking Turkey out of the project would cost other members of the program up to \$600 million, he said.

Over 900 Taliban Freed So Far in Afghan Prisoner Swap

KABUL (Dispatches) – The Kabul administration has released more than 900 Taliban fighters since the militants signed a deal with the United States to end the war in Afghanistan, an official says.

The release is part of a prisoner-exchange program included in the U.S.-Taliban deal agreed on February 29, which has also seen the Taliban free dozens of Afghan security personnel.

"So far 933 Taliban detainees have been released from Afghan jails," Javed Faisal, spokesman for Afghanistan's National Security Council, said. In return the Taliban have released 132 Kabul administration prisoners, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said.

The deal stipulated the Afghan government would release 5,000 Taliban prisoners, while

the militants would free 1,000 Afghan security force personnel.

The swap was supposed to have taken place by March 10 but has hit several hurdles, with Kabul claiming the Taliban want 15 of their "top commanders" released.

The militants have accused Afghan authorities of needlessly dragging their feet on the exchange, which is supposed to be completed before talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban can start.

Those Kabul has so far released are low-risk Taliban prisoners who have vowed to abstain from fighting, officials said.

The militants also insist Kabul should expedite the release of its members given the growing threat of Covid-19 outbreaks in Afghan jails.

Under the U.S.-Taliban agreement, the militants promised not to strike troops from the U.S.-led coalition — but made no such pledges toward Afghan troops.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 shortly after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington. While the invasion ended the Taliban's rule in the country, it has failed to eliminate the militant group.

American forces have since remained bogged down in Afghanistan through the presidencies of George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and now, Donald Trump.

Amid the continued occupation, the Daesh terrorist group has emerged in the Asian country more recently.