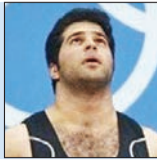




Judiciary chief bans arresting suspects to gather evidence **2**



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Destroyers to be armed with vertical launch missiles



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Copper cathode output to rise 100,000 tons in 3 months

TEHRAN — Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani inaugurated a plant and a processing unit in Sungun Copper Complex in East Azarbaijan Province on Saturday, Shata reported.

The newly inaugurated units, which are aimed to complete the production chain in the copper complex, will increase the country's copper cathode output by 100,000 tons to 400,000 tons by the end of the current

Iranian calendar year (March 19, 2020), which is also planned to reach 500,000 tons soon after that. Rahmani was accompanied by Ardeshtir Sa'd-Mohammadi, the managing director of Iran's National Copper Company, and Khodadad Gharibpour, the head of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), during his trip to the northwestern province. **→4**

Iran elected member of IFSW's UN Commission

TEHRAN — Iran has been elected as a member of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) UN Commission, IRNA reported, quoting Hassan Mousavi Chelak, the head of the Iranian association of social workers.

Moreover, Iran has been selected to host the IFSW's Asia-Pacific Regional Conference in 2023, Mousavi Chelak, who also serves as the IFSW's Asia and Pacific Regional Commissioner, said.

IFSW has been granted Special Consultative Status by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). In addition, IFSW is working with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). **→12**

Muslim nations consider gold dinar to beat sanctions

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad says Iran, Malaysia, Turkey and Qatar are considering using the gold dinar and barter trade as a way of protecting themselves against any future economic sanctions.

At the end of the Kuala Lumpur Summit 2019 in the Malaysian capital on Saturday, Mahathir praised Iran and Qatar for being independent and capable of standing on their own feet despite economic sanctions and embargoes.

He also said such sanctions and embargoes are not affecting only Iran and Qatar, and, therefore, it is important for the Muslim world to be self-reliant in order to face future threats.

"With the world witnessing nations making unilateral decisions to impose such punitive measures, Malaysia and other nations must always bear in mind that it can be imposed on any of us," Mahathir said. **→13**

Iran-Russia-China naval drill: Another piece of the geopolitical puzzle

By Abbas Aslani

There is a point where Iran, Russia and China see eye to eye in holding the manoeuvre, and that is sending a message to their common adversary or rival, namely the United States. The US, in some ways, has applied a triple containment policy toward China, Russia and Iran. This would be enough to unite these three countries on some fronts.

Iran, Russia and China are expected to hold a joint naval exercise in the Sea of Oman and northern Indian Ocean on December 27 this year, which is of its first kind since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. The timing, in addition to the nature of the manoeuvre is of paramount significance for Iran, and probably for Russia and China as well.

As tensions rose in the region as a result of

attacks on oil tankers in the Persian Gulf and on Saudi Arabia's Aramco oil facilities last summer, the United States tried to put the blame on Iran in order to isolate the country in the region and to exert "maximum pressure" against Tehran. Washington attempted to take advantage of the opportunity so as to create a naval coalition against Iran in the region.

Having denied any role in the attacks, Iranian officials made an effort to nix the American strategy by taking some initiatives. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, during his United Nations General Assembly address in September, unveiled his Hormuz Peace Endeavour (HOPE) for ensuring the security and the stability in the region through cooperation between Iran, Iraq and six countries in Persian Gulf, as well as in coordination

with the United Nations. A short time later, Iran brought up the idea of a joint naval exercise with Russia in the region. Weeks later, China also expressed that it was ready to join the drill.

This joint naval exercise with Russia and China is an important step for Iran. Tehran wants to make a case for what it terms "resistance" to US pressure, saying that the American strategy, despite being an economic burden on Iran, has failed to isolate Tehran in politics and security.

Russia sees this cooperation as being in line with the concept of collective security in the Persian Gulf that it proposed to the UN in July. Although the concept includes other regional and international players, this can contribute to the idea if joined by others. **→6**

Nigeria's pressure on Zakzaky increased: IHRC head

By Ramin Hosseinabadian

TEHRAN (MNA) — In an interview with Mehr news agency, Head of the London-based Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), Massoud Shajareh, said that Nigerian government's measures prove that the pressures are increased and the conditions are not set for having the leader of Nigerian Shiites, Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, released.

Following is text of the interview with Mr. Shajareh:

■ Sheikh Zakzaky is in a hospital in Katona. Please inform about his present conditions.

A: Yes, Zakzay has been sent to the central jail of Kantona, Nigeria. It is worth noting that the named prison does not meet the standards

to guarantee the health of the prisoners. It is among the most dangerous prisons not only in Nigeria but in Africa.

All its prisoners are dealing with terrible conditions. Sheikh was transferred to that prison while Kantona court did not issue the order to send him to the hospital. We believe that being under tough conditions, Zakzaky had to be sent to hospital but due to the Nigerian government's decision, he was transferred to prison.

■ Have the measures taken by IHRC been fruitful? What barriers have you been faced?

A: Despite the made efforts in the long-run, we could not reach any conclusions. We sought to transfer Sheikh to a hospital in other countries than Nigeria but we did not become successful.



ARTICLE

Mahdi Garshasbi
Tehran Times journalist

A new wave of strange claims about Iran and the FATF

New media warfare has recently been launched about the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Some claims have also been stated in this regard that are far away from truth.

An assertion regarding the issue states that if Iran cooperates with the FATF, a global coalition against the Islamic Republic will not be created and the possibility of applying more pressure on the country will be eliminated. Can such assertions be accepted?

■ **Cooperation, a wrong address by the FATF supporters to people**

In response to the assertion, it should be noted that cooperating with the FATF is basically a side issue to the Iranian economy. Currently, the main problem of Iran's economy is not the country's non-cooperation with the FATF, but the U.S. extraterritorial sanctions. As long as the sanctions remain in place, the cooperation cannot resolve any problem.

For example, although Iran has been in the counter-measure list of the FATF from 2009 to 2016, it was only after the U.S. sanctions on the financial and banking sectors in 2012 that Iran's financial transactions with foreign countries faced a problem. The matter shows well that foreign banks have refused to cooperate with Iran, not because of the FATF's counter-measure list, but because of the U.S. sanctions and its heavy fines.

The remarks by authorities of foreign companies and banks are another proof of this matter. For instance, following the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal, the CEO of Total Company Patrick Pouyanné abandoned the implementation of the South Pars phase 11 development scheme and said that the company is no longer able to stay in Iran due to the U.S. sanctions.

■ **Why the U.S. insists Iran join the FATF-related conventions?**

Contrary to some statements, if Iran joins the conventions related to FATF and becomes legally committed, it will be most likely that an international consensus against Iran be formed. **→11**



REPORT

Fatemeh Salehi
Mehr News Agency
journalist

Behind-the-scenes of the dangerous UAE projects in Iraq

Al-Mayadeen TV recently reported that the remarks by Izzat al-Shabandar have revealed the truth about the Israeli plan in Iraq, which is to be carried out with the involvement of the United Arab Emirates.

Al-Shabandar exposed the role of the UAE in backing seditious moves in the Iraqi protests and arming four tribal groups in al Anbar province to form a military force in order to turn the province into a confederation. The UAE also intends to involve the province in the Deal of the Century.

According to the TV channel, the UAE is trying to separate al Anbar, where it aims to settle the displaced Palestinians. Al-Shabandar appears to have been informed about the Israeli plan through Qatar. As al-Mayadeen reported, Iraqi security forces have arrested a UAE-affiliated group that has funded subversive elements in the recent unrest.

Following the revelation, al-Shabandar was arrested by UAE security forces in Abu Dhabi and transferred to a hotel in Dubai.

■ **Hostile plan by the sheikhdoms to undermine the Iraqi economy**

Mohammad al-Baldawi, a representative of Al-Sadiqoun Bloc in the Iraqi parliament, revealed the destructive role of the sheikhdoms in meddling in Iraq's domestic affairs. The representative stated that a seditious plan is being carried out by the Persian Gulf Arab states against Iraq to undermine the country's economy and political system. The plan also aims to trigger a secession to create a civil war.

Al-Baldawi insisted that the countries are seeking to obstruct the agreement signed between Iraq and China. The countries also are trying to complete the al-Faw project, as it has direct impact on the Persian Gulf states.

Qais al-Khazali, the chief of the Iraqi political group Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), recently slammed the UAE role in Iraq, saying we demand the UAE to step playing seditious role in Iraq. The UAE is the only country that has closed its embassy in Iraq, and it is Abu Dhabi that knows and plans what will happen in Iraq.

The secretary general insisted that the U.S. and Zionist regime are acting in coordination to make Lebanon and Iraq unstable, an issue that the Israeli prime minister has also affirmed.



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World Wrestling Clubs Cup held in Iran

The 2019 World Wrestling Clubs Cup was held in Bojnurd, in North Khorasan Province in north-eastern Iran.

Iran's Bazar-e Bozorg freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling teams won the title.

World Wrestling Clubs Cup is an international wrestling club competition among teams representing member nations of the United World Wrestling (UWW) the sport's global governing body.

The tournament was held on the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran Wrestling Federation in 2014 in Iran.

Judiciary chief bans arresting suspects to gather evidence

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raeisi said on Saturday that it is banned to arrest suspects in order to gather evidence.

"First gather evidence, then arrest if necessary," he said during a meeting with a group of judges from the public prosecutor's office and the Tehran Revolution Court.

Elsewhere, he said that rulings issued by the judges and their fair decisions can reduce social and economic tension in the society.

Implementing JCPOA 'only correct, effective' way to solve Iran nuclear issue: China envoy

(Press TV) — China's permanent representative to the United Nations says the implementation of a nuclear deal signed between Iran and major world powers in 2015 is the "only correct and effective" way to handle the current circumstances.

Addressing a UN Security Council meeting Thursday on nuclear non-proliferation, Zhang Jun said the Iranian nuclear issue may be entering a critical stage and noted that the implementation of the deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), faces a severe test.

He called on all parties concerned to work together to restore the "balance of rights and obligations" under the JCPOA, stressing crucial importance of the deal for safeguarding the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East.

Zhang also expressed concern over Washington's withdrawal from the nuclear accord and re-imposition of unilateral sanctions on Iran.



U.S. President Donald Trump, a stern critic of the landmark deal, unilaterally pulled Washington out of the JCPOA in May 2018, and unleashed the "toughest ever" sanctions against the Islamic Republic in defiance of global criticism in an attempt to strangle the Iranian oil trade.

In response to the renewal of the sanctions, Tehran has so far rowed back on its nuclear commitments four times in compliance with Articles 26 and 36 of the JCPOA, but stressed that its retaliatory measures will be reversible as soon as the European signatories — France, Britain and Germany — find practical ways to shield mutual trade from the U.S. sanctions.

Speaking at a press conference in Beijing earlier this month, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying called on the United States to stop its so-called maximum pressure campaign on Iran and making threats of deploying additional troops to the Middle East, saying Washington should find a diplomatic solution to reduce tensions in the region.

"The United States is not only unilaterally withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and exerting maximum pressure on Iran, but is also imposing sanctions or threatening to impose sanctions on other parties within the agreement," she said.

Elsewhere in his address, Zhang said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres also believes the US behavior remains in contradiction to the goals set out in the JCPOA and Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorses the deal.

The Chinese diplomat warned that such behavior may impede Iran's capability to implement certain provisions of the JCPOA and Resolution 2231.

■ JCPOA remains cornerstone of international peace and security: UN

Briefing the same Security Council meeting on Thursday, UN political affairs chief Rosemary DiCarlo stressed the importance of implementing the nuclear deal, which, she said, remains a "cornerstone of international peace and security."

DiCarlo said the "full and effective implementation" of the JCPOA was "key to ensuring the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program and to secure tangible economic benefit to the Iranian people."

She expressed "regret" about the U.S. withdrawal as well as "the recent steps taken by Iran to reduce its nuclear-related commitments."

"Certain actions taken by the United States, since its withdrawal from the plan (JCPOA), are contrary to the goals of the plan", she said.

DiCarlo said the UN chief considers the full implementation of Resolution 2231 by all member states "as an integral component of our collective conflict prevention efforts."

■ Europeans likely to trigger dispute resolution process but shy away from sanctions: Diplomats

Meanwhile, diplomats said on Friday that the three European parties to the nuclear deal are likely to trigger a dispute resolution process in January but would stop short of rushing to restore UN sanctions that would kill off the accord, Reuters reported.

Six European and Western diplomats said Britain, France and Germany had agreed in principle to begin the process but they would still wait to see how significant Iran's steps were before taking a final decision.

"Launching the process aims to resolve the problematic issues and save the deal," said a European diplomatic source. "It's not automatic that UN sanctions will follow. If we decided to do that (reimpose UN sanctions) it would mean that we have decided to put the final nail in the coffin."

European members have begun raising the possibility of triggering the JCPOA's "dispute resolution mechanism" since last month. The measure is also known as the trigger mechanism and its activation can lead to the return of the UN sanctions against Iran.

Iran has criticized the trio for failing to fulfill their obligations under the JCPOA and to salvage it.

Diplomats said the Europeans would focus on extending the process rather than pushing towards sanctions unless Iran's upcoming steps crossed an unacceptable threshold.

Three diplomats said the E3, particularly France, were lobbying Russia and China to get them on board to show unity between the five but Moscow and Beijing have expressed opposition so far to launch the process.

In an interview with China's CGTN TV channel on Tuesday, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi censured the European signatories to the deal for their inaction to save the agreement after the U.S. withdrawal.

Araqchi said that Iran could have pulled out of the accord after Washington quit last year but Tehran was convinced not to do so when the other participants promised to offset the U.S. withdrawal.

Doors are open to Japanese companies to invest in Iran: Rouhani

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani underscored on Saturday that his country considers no restriction for the Japanese state-run or private sectors to invest in Iran's large economic projects.

Addressing a large number of senior Japanese managers ahead of leaving Tokyo, Rouhani said, "Iran and Japan, as two old friendly nations, should not allow a third country disrupt their friendly relations."

"There are very good capacities for expansion of relations which can benefit both Tehran and Tokyo," he said, adding, "I don't see any barrier in front of bolstering Iran-Japan ties unless the U.S. illegal sanctions about which you are aware as a violation of the international regulations as well as the United Nations Security Council resolution 2231."

"Resolution 2231 has called on the entire world nations to maintain a normal trade relation with Iran. No one should cast doubt. We had a pact (nuclear deal) agreed by seven signatories. All of us were committed to the deal but the U.S. quit it without any reason," the president added.

■ Nuclear Deal is to the benefit of all nations and governments

Rouhani went on to say that the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), benefits the entire world.

"We believe that the nuclear deal is to the benefit of all nations and governments. To solve the difference there is no way but the U.S. realize its mistake and return to the



correct path."

The president called Iranians tough negotiators who do not easily accept an agreement but if they do they will not violate it.

"We Iranians are somehow hard to reach an agreement but if we sign the agreement we will not violate it in any condition," Rouhani underlined.

He pointed to two achievements of the nuclear deal and said, "The first achievement was that we proved to the world that we have not been after possession of atomic weapon and voiced readiness to comply with any international monitoring. The second achievement was that we proved to the world that we are resolved to adhere to our commitments under the deal."

■ Iran to revise policy if interests are not materialized

The president went on to say that if Iran

cannot reap the benefits of the nuclear deal there will be no reason to remain committed to the JCPOA.

"Of course, after a long time of patience, if we see that there is no benefit for us under the deal and we (alone) have to fulfill our commitments, naturally our next decision won't possibly be continuation of the undertakings."

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

■ Iran has not waged war against any nation in the last two centuries

The president also called Iran a peaceful nation which has not initiated a war over the last two centuries.

"Iran is located in a very key geographical place. We are fully committed to restoration

of security to the region and waterways. In the last two centuries, Iran has not been a beginner of any war or aggression."

■ Japan and Iran have been WMD victims of

The president also called Iranian and Japanese people victims of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) who dearly value peace.

"We hate any war. We intend to solve our possible problems with others via dialogue. We are not and will not be after (producing, possessing or using) any weapons of mass destruction. You (Japanese) as well have been victims of such weapons. You were victim of atomic bomb and we were victim of chemical weapons," the president stated.

Saddam Hussein's army used chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers and civilians in the 1980s. The United States also dropped atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in the summer of 11945.

■ Japanese companies enjoy good reputation in Iran

Rouhani also said, "The Japanese companies enjoy good records in Iran whose people trust the Japanese industry. We can cooperate in various infrastructure projects, environment and humanitarian arenas, including food and medicine."

On Thursday, President Rouhani paid a two-day landmark visit to Japan, calling on the country to help confront the United States' bid to wreck the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran.

During his visit to Tokyo, Rouhani held a high-profile meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Friday.

Iran, Japan to continue close consultations on key issues: Araqchi

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araqchi announced on Saturday that Tehran and Tokyo are resolved to continue their consultations over key international and regional issues more closely than ever.

The remarks by the top diplomat came one day after President Hassan Rouhani held talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo on Friday.

"Bilateral ties, regional and international subjects, the issues surrounding the JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) and the U.S. sanctions were vastly discussed during meetings of senior Iranian and Japanese officials, and it was agreed that consultations between the two nations to continue more closely," Araqchi explained.

In his visit to Tokyo, Rouhani was accompanied by a senior delegation including Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi, and presidential advisor Hesamoddin Ashena.

On the reasons why Rouhani visited Tokyo, Araqchi said, "The president's trip was in response to the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Tehran. On the other hand, we are in the 90th anniversary of resumption of diplomatic relations between the two nations, that is why our president and Abe managed to hold three meetings in Tehran, New York and Tokyo in the current year."

Araqchi, who served as Tehran's ambassador to Tokyo in the second half of 2000s, said Iran has been continuously holding diplomatic talks with Japan but consultations between the countries is now of paramount importance as Iran has come under "unfair pressures and sanctions" by the United States.

"We have always had close diplomatic consultations with Japan. This year, due to the current developments, including the U.S. unfair pressures and sanctions on Iran, it was necessary to hold closer and tighter talks with Japan which is an old trade partner of Iran," the deputy foreign minister remarked.

Iran equips choppers with modern night vision system

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The commander of the Army Airborne announced on Saturday that Iran's military helicopters have been equipped with night vision system, noting few countries enjoy such technology.

Second Brigadier General Yousef Qarbani said, "It took only one and a half years for the army's airborne to access the technology of equipping its helicopters with night vision system."

"Only a few advanced countries enjoy helicopters capable of night vision," he added.

"A number of countries have thus far spent a hefty amount of money to purchase night vision system for their aircrafts, but we indigenousized this technology," the commander announced, hailing the country's military experts.

"From A to Z of planning and producing the night vision system for our helicopters has been carried out inside the country," Qorbani stated.

Earlier this month, Yousef Qorbani had announced that his forces mounted modern cannons and rocket-launchers on transport helicopters.

"Previously, helicopter 214, which is a transport helicopter, could not defend itself and that was a weak point for the said helicopter. Today, the Airborne unit's helicopters have been equipped with 20mm cannons and rocket-launchers," Qorbani said at the time.

The commander went on to say that the Airborne unit has attained self-sufficiency in producing its spare parts. "We are producing nearly 240,000 different parts inside the country."

He said, the Airborne unit turned sanctions into an opportunity."

In recent years, Iran has made great strides in the defense sector and become self-sufficient in producing essential military hardware and defense systems.

Iran has made it clear that its military might is merely defensive and that it poses no threat to other countries.

Iran has continued to progress despite sanctions: Mahathir Mohamad

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said on Friday that Iran has continued to progress and develop despite sanctions.

"It is important for me to point out that Iran, in particular, despite years of sanctions had been able to continue to progress and develop and it proudly stands as a nation with great numbers of engineers in the world," he said at a closing speech at the Kuala Lumpur Summit 2019.

However, he said that sanctions and embargos are not going to be exclusively for Iran.

"With the world witnessing nations making unilateral decisions to impose such punitive measures, Malaysia and other nations must always bear in mind that they can be imposed on any of us," he said.

He added, "I have suggested that we revisit the idea of trading using the gold dinar and barter trade among us. We are seriously looking into this and we hope that we will be able to find a mechanism to put it into effect."

During a speech at the inauguration ceremony of the Kuala Lumpur Summit on Thursday, President Hassan Rouhani suggested that the

Muslim world should take measures to put an end to the domination of the United States' dollar and financial regime.

According to Free Malaysia Today, Mahathir Mohamad has accepted Iran's proposal on using cryptocurrency as an alternative to the dollar.

"We are hearing this for the first time — that Iran and Turkey are of the opinion that we should use an alternative to the U.S. dollar. We can use our own currencies or have a common currency," Free Malaysia Today quoted Mahathir as saying on Thursday.

"It looks like sometimes when we use



the U.S. dollar, there are sanctions that can curb economic development," the Malaysian prime minister added.

Civil Defense Organization warns of plots by enemies to access infrastructure data

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran's Civil Defense Organization on Saturday warned engineering-technical institutions to be vigilant in the face of plots by the enemies to access infrastructure data, vowing that his organization will do its best to thwart such hostile acts.

Brigadier General Gholameza Jalali's remarks came in the seminar of officials of executive bodies who are in charge of civil defense issues.

Jalali said, "In engineering concepts, we face an issue titled trade of infrastructure, technical and engineering data. In fact, foreign

companies managed to access the data of our country's infrastructure and consider them as data assets which they can sell to the customers."

"Therefore, trade of infrastructure data is itself an issue whose accurate protection is a national commitment. The customers of such data are usually some enemy countries, including the U.S., the Zionist regime of Israel and Saudi Arabia," Jalali added.

He went on to say, "We must prepare a technological-based modern pattern for civil defense against non-military threats. We must institutionalize the new pattern in our pro-

grams' nature."

In late November, Jalali said that the Intelligence Ministry was responsible for an investigation into a possible infiltration of enemies into the management system regarding the implementation of the rise in gas price. The general said the plan was conducted very badly.

"The plan was implemented so badly that some people believe that the enemies had possibly have infiltrated into the country's management system."

He further said that the Intelligence Ministry must come to a conclusion and release its

of missiles, and are easier in application and maintenance," he added, according to Mehr.

The propulsion systems of the destroyers have also been improved in a bid to bolster the Navy's reaction speed in critical marine situations, he explained.

"We have achieved the technology to manufacture phased-array and optical radars, and we will install such systems on Dena and Damavand," he added.

The commander went on to say that the mentioned radars are now offered to several foreign buyers, a number of which

are among the industrialized countries.

Highlighting the vital role the marine industries and the naval forces play in defending the country, which is linked to the free waters, the military official noted that the Defense Ministry has geared up to become self-sufficient in this field by developing different strategic marine equipment, such as new propulsion systems, gasoline and diesel engines, power transmission systems, and monitoring systems.

He stressed that destroyers and giant submarines will become a big part of the Iranian Navy's flotilla in the near future.

Candidates not disqualified for criticizing Leader: Guardian Council

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Guardian Council would not dismiss as ineligible the candidates who have criticized the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the council's spokesman Abbasali Kadhodaei said on Saturday.

"We have a free country and merely criticizing an individual or body would not lead to disqualification," Kadhodaei told a press conference, Mehr reported.

However, he added, insult, defamation and inflammatory remarks, which are clearly different from criticism, will be probed into when vetting candidates.

Under Iran's constitution, the Guardian Council is tasked with vetting candidates running for office.

Article 99 of the constitution states that the council "is responsible for supervising the elections of the Experts Assembly, the President of the Republic, the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and referrals to the public vote and referenda."

The Guardian Council has been criticized for the way it vets and disqualifies candidates.

Responding to criticisms, Kadhodaei said, "We have a free country and it is possible that some individuals speak in



favor or against the Guardian Council."

"But our criterion for the elections is only the law and we strive to put the proper implementation of the law on

the agenda," he added.

The spokesman explained that the council mulls a candidate's qualification by consulting a number of state bodies,

so as to reach a fair decision.

Iran's next parliamentary elections will be held on February 21.

The Iranian parliament has 290 members who are elected by the people for four-year terms.

The upcoming parliamentary elections will be held in over 200 constituencies across the country's 31 provinces.

The midterm elections of the Assembly of Experts will also be held on the same date in Tehran, Khorasan Razavi, North Khorasan, Fars and Qom provinces.

Earlier this month, Kadhodaei said that the council is the only body responsible to supervise the elections.

"Sometimes questions arise over whether we are the only supervisor of the elections or not," Kadhodaei said, adding, "I emphasize that the Guardian Council is the only supervisor of the elections."

He said the Judiciary is tasked with investigating offenses and the Interior Ministry has an executive responsibility.

"This separation of supervision and execution is very important," the spokesman remarked. "We should be able to implement our legal responsibilities properly."

Russian Baltic Fleet warships set off for joint drills with Iran

KALININGRAD (TASS) — The Baltic Fleet guard ship Yaroslav Mudry accompanied by the tanker Yelnya and the sea tug Viktor Konetsky has set off for Iran after wrapping up the Indra-2019 joint drills with India, the Fleet's press office reported on Friday.

«The Baltic Fleet's naval group currently continues accomplishing long-distance deployment missions and is heading for the Iranian port of Chabahar,» the press office reported.

The naval component of the Indra Russian-Indian multiservice force drills ran in the Arabian Sea on December 16-19. The naval exercise involved warships and auxiliary vessels of the Russian and Indian navies.

During the joint maneuvers, the naval groups from both countries practiced various types of logistic support at sea, anti-terror and anti-piracy assignments. The combat ships struck targets at sea with artillery systems, detected and notionally destroyed air tar-

gets and held helicopter drills with landings on the warships' decks.

The warships embarked on their long-distance deployment from the Baltic Fleet's main naval base of Baltiysk in the westernmost Kaliningrad Region on October 1. The warships are carrying anti-terror squads from the Baltic Fleet's marine infantry force. Also, the Yaroslav Mudry is carrying a deck-based Ka-27 helicopter.

Huge turnout at Feb. polls would strengthen national security, says MP



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — People's huge turnout in the upcoming parliamentary elections would strengthen national security, an MP has said.

Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi, who represents Mashhad and Kalat electoral district at the parliament, also predicted a "warm" and "strong" turnout at the polls scheduled for February 21, 2020, Press TV reported on Saturday.

"Naturally, because the establishment is a democratic one arisen from people's votes, the people's participation

[in the elections] and support for the establishment will help increase its power and will also improve national security," said Ghazizadeh Hashemi.

He said people created the Islamic establishment, therefore they should support and preserve it.

As long as people's support continues, he continued, the enemies' efforts to undermine the country will fail. The MP also noted that the Iranians have always actively participated in elections because of the important role the parliament and the government play in their lives.

The parliamentary elections, which are the 11th since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, will be held in over 200 constituencies across the country's 31 provinces.

February 21, 2020 will also feature an interim election for Iran's Assembly of Experts, whose members are directly elected to office by the people for an eight-year term.

Government spokesman Ali Rabiei told reporters on Wednesday that the Interior Ministry has approved the competency of 91 percent of the candidates registering to run for the parliamentary election.

Rabiei said the figure was given by Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli in a cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

"The interior minister briefed the cabinet of ministers

over the trend of registration of Majlis candidates and assessment of their competency," the government spokesman stated.

"Based on the report, 16,033 candidates had registered for the 11th Majlis election out of which 848 candidates submitted their withdrawal in a 10-day period adopted for relinquishment," Rabiei added.

From the remaining 15,185 candidates whose inquiries had been assessed, he said, competency of a sum of 13,849 was approved by the election boards.

"Accordingly and totally, competency of 8.8 percent of candidates was rejected due to different reasons," the spokesman added, quoting the interior minister.

Candidates should be confirmed by the Guardian Council before they can officially run for a seat in the parliament.

The candidates' background checks includes reviewing candidates' military service, as well as their records with the police, judiciary, intelligence bodies and census registry.

Article 99 of the constitution states that the council "is responsible for supervising the elections of the Experts Assembly, the President of the Republic, the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and referrals to the public vote and referenda."

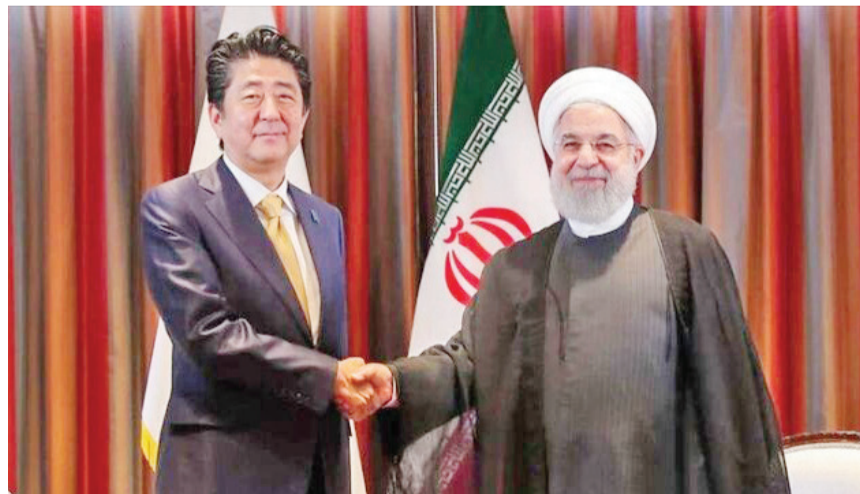
'Rouhani, Abe held hour-long private talks'

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Alireza Moezi, the communications and information director of the president's office, said on Saturday that President Hassan Rouhani and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had a private meeting which lasted for an hour, describing it as an important event.

"Talks between Rouhani and Abe with the presence of the two countries' teams was also long and detailed and almost every bilateral, regional and international issue was discussed in the meeting, 'but what makes this meeting more important is the private talks between the two behind closed doors which lasted for more than an hour,'" Moezi said in a tweet on Saturday, according to ISNA.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, President Rouhani paid a visit to Tokyo to hold talks with Prime Minister Abe and other senior officials of the country on issues of mutual interest.

When he landed in Tokyo, Rouhani be-



came the first Iranian president to visit Japan since 2000.

Despite being a military ally of the U.S.,

Japan has traditionally maintained friendly relations with Iran as a major source of energy. In 2017, Iran supplied 5.2 percent

of Japan's crude oil imports.

Iran's oil exports, however, have been disrupted by unilateral American sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

Japan also relies on the Middle East for nearly 90% of its oil needs, but tensions have risen to new highs amid U.S. deployment of new troops and military assets to the Persian Gulf.

Tensions have escalated since President Donald Trump's decision last year to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as the international nuclear agreement with Iran is officially called.

"The nuclear deal is an extremely important agreement, and we strongly condemn the U.S. withdrawal, which was one-sided and irrational," Rouhani said in the meeting with Abe on Friday.

"We hope that Japan and other countries in the world will make efforts toward maintaining the agreement," the Iranian president added.

'China, Europe support implementation of nuclear deal'

By staff and agency

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang said on Friday that China and Europe support implementation of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.



"China and Europe, as two major forces for multilateralism, agreed to strengthen communication and coordination, carry out the consensus reached at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the Iranian Nuclear Issue in September, and ensure the full and effective implementation of the JCPOA," Geng told a press conference, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry website.

He added, "Both sides support diplomatic mediation efforts and stand for resolving compliance issues through consultation within the JCPOA Joint Commission. We stand ready to work for the easing of tensions to uphold the international nuclear non-proliferation regime as well as peace and stability in the Middle East."

Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said on Wednesday that if the Europeans fail to fulfil their commitments under the nuclear deal, Iran will have no choice but to continue reducing its commitments to the pact in order to create a balance.

Josep Borrell, the new EU foreign policy chief, said on December 7 that "collective responsibility" is needed to stop the JCPOA from breaking apart.

"We have a collective responsibility to preserve #IranDeal," Borrell tweeted.

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

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

On May 8, exactly one year after the U.S. abandoned the deal, Tehran announced that its "strategic patience" is over and began to partially reduce its commitments to the agreement at bi-monthly intervals.

Iran's moves are based on paragraph 36 of the JCPOA which "allows one side, under certain circumstances, to stop complying with the deal if the other side is out of compliance."

In the first stage, Iran announced that it will not limit its stockpile of the nuclear fuel to 300 kilograms allowed under the deal. On that date (May 8) Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) said if the remaining parties to the JCPOA, especially Europeans, devise a mechanism to protect Iran from the sanctions' effect in the two-month deadline it will reverse its decision.

But since European parties missed the deadline, on July 7 Iran announced that it has started enriching uranium to a higher purity than the 3.67%, thereby starting the second step.

Again, as Europe missed the second 60-day deadline, Iran moved to take the third step, removing a ban on nuclear research and development (R&D).

In the latest step, which started on November 6, Iran began injecting uranium gas into 1,044 centrifuges at the Fordow nuclear site. It was done at the presence of inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Iran has said it will reverse its decision if its economic interests are guaranteed.

Drug trafficking band dismantled in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari Province's police have dismantled a drug trafficking band in Boroujen, foiling their attempts to smuggle narcotics into Iran's central areas.

Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari Police Chief Gholam Abbas Gholamzadeh said on Saturday that 293 kilograms of opium and 7 kilograms of heroin were confiscated during the operation, Mehr reported.

Gholamzadeh said three smugglers were arrested and handed over to the Judiciary, and three vehicles were seized.



The anti-narcotics police of the province have busted a total of 2,046 tons of different narcotics and dismantled 29 drug trafficking bands in the past nine months to December 21, he added.

According to the commander, the confiscation of narcotics in the province has witnessed a 10% growth in comparison with the corresponding period of last year.

Iran, which has a 900-kilometer common border with Afghanistan, has been used as the main conduit for smuggling Afghan drugs to narcotics kingpins in Europe.

Despite high economic and human costs, the Islamic Republic has been actively fighting drug-trafficking over the past decades. The country has spent more than \$700 million on sealing its borders and preventing the transit of narcotics destined for European, Arab and Central Asian countries.

Eskandar Momeni, chief of Iran's drug war commander, said last week that the Islamic Republic of Iran has been fighting against illicit drugs on behalf of the world.

Iran has seized over 12,000 tons of drugs within the past four decades, Momeni said.

He said 3,800 anti-drug forces have been martyred when fighting drug-trafficking.

Iran hails UN support for realization of Palestinians' rights

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The senior advisor to the Iranian parliament speaker on Saturday lauded a new UN General Assembly resolution adopted unanimously in support of the Palestinians, calling the move a giant stride in line with realization of the Palestinians' rights to decide their own fate.

Hossein Amir Abdollahian, who is also the secretary-general of the international conference in support of the Palestinian Intifada (uprising), said the only realistic solution for the Palestinian issue is revitalization of the "untied Palestinian state".

Touching upon the UN move in registering Iran's recent initiative to hold a referendum in the occupied territories to enable the Palestinians to decide their own fate, Amir Abdollahian said, "The world's nations have realized that

the instability and insecurity that are threatening the region as well as Europe have roots in the occupation of Palestine by the Israeli forces, continuation of aggression and massacre of the oppressed people of Palestine by the Zionist regime of Tel Aviv."

He further called on the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to ratify and provide support for a referendum in the occupied lands which is a basic move to settle the most important issue of the Islamic world.

"The referendum will cover all Palestinians, including Muslims, Christians and Jews," he underscored.

Iran has proposed a referendum among the native inhabitants of Palestine that includes Jews descended from Jewish citizens of Palestine before 1948, Christians and Muslims.



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	353996.7
IFX	4564.21

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,525 rials
GBP	54,600 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$65.20/b
WTI	\$60.44/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.93/b
Gold	\$1,480.30/oz
Silver	\$817.29/oz
Platinum	\$914.75/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Value of trades at IME rises 25% in a week

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Some 677,999 tons of commodities worth 32 trillion rials (about \$761.9 million) were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) during the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

As reported by IME International Affairs and Public Relations Department, the volume of trades experienced seven percent rise at this market in the past week.

The report said that 409,017 tons of industrial commodities and minerals worth 17.409 trillion rials (about \$414.5 million) were traded at IME during the previous week.

Fitch cuts India's GDP growth to 4.6% as credit crunch cripples economy

Fitch Ratings on Friday cut India's economic growth forecast to 4.6 percent from its earlier projection of 5.6 percent for the financial year 2019-20 (FY20) as credit squeeze and deterioration in business and consumer confidence over the past few quarters hurt growth.

The move includes the expectation of moderate slippage in the fiscal deficit target of 3.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in FY20, it said in a statement.

Fitch, however, retained India's sovereign rating at the lowest investment grade of 'BBB-' and outlook as stable.

The rating agency expected the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to cut policy rate by another 65 basis points (bps) in 2020 as up-tick in the consumer price index (CPI)-based inflation rate to 5.5 percent in November appears to reflect a temporary spike in food inflation.

It said pressure on core inflation, which remained stable at 3.5 per cent, seems limited in the current environment. The RBI has cut the rate by 135 bps cumulatively since February this year, but refrained from any reduction in its December policy review because of hardening food inflation.

Fitch said banks have thin buffers to deal with continued stress in the non-banking financial companies (NBFC) sector. Banks exposure has already reached 7.4 percent in FY19.

It estimated that banks are \$7 billion short of the capital required to meet 10 percent weighted-average common equity tier 1 ratio by FY21 — the level that would give them an adequate buffer above regulatory minimum.

A medium-term growth

The rating agency attributed its move has factored in the economy balancing a strong medium-term growth outlook and solid foreign-reserve buffers with high public debt, a weak financial sector and some lagging structural factors, including governance indicators and GDP per capita.

Fitch said the measures announced to support NBFCs have not fully arrested liquidity crunch and hoped that the Modi government 2.0 is likely to focus on reforms.

Fitch's growth forecast is lower than what the economy clocked in the first half at 4.6 percent, meaning the expectation is that the economy may slow further in the second half of the current financial year. The projection is lower than what Moody's Investors Service estimated, at 4.9 per cent. Fitch is also more pessimistic than the RBI which predicted the economy to grow by 5 per cent in FY20.

"Our outlook on India's GDP growth is still solid against that of peers, even though growth has decelerated significantly over the past few quarters, mainly due to domestic factors, in particular, a squeeze in credit availability from NBFCs and deterioration in business and consumer confidence," Fitch said.

It expected the growth to gradually recover to 5.6 percent in FY21 and 6.5 percent in FY22 with support from easing monetary and fiscal policy and structural measures that may also support growth over the medium term.

The positive impact of the reforms recently undertaken on growth is likely to materialize in the medium term, rather than the near term, and will depend on the details and implementation, Fitch said.

The government is again facing a trade-off between stimulating the economy and reducing the deficit in the medium term. Some fiscal slippage has occurred in recent years against government targets, even during periods of sustained stronger growth, it said. The "FY20 deficit target had already been exceeded by end-October due to a weak revenue intake, and deceleration of nominal quarterly growth suggests further revenue pressure for the rest of the financial year," it said.

(Source: business-standard.com)

Copper cathode output to rise 100,000 tons in 3 months

1 → The minister also inaugurated the administrative building of the copper complex.

Sungun Copper Complex, located in Varzaqan County, has been set up with the aim of stable supply of copper concentrate and molybdenum, promotion of equipment and technical knowledge and transfer them to the small mines to support them, completing copper production chain and gaining more value added.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony on Saturday, Rahmani said, "We will hit a new record in production of copper in the current [Iranian calendar] year (ends on March 19, 2020)."

Last month, the minister said €2.5 billion

worth of projects in the copper industry are underway across the country including Kerman, Yazd and East Azarbaijan provinces.

Rahmani made the remarks in the inauguration ceremony of five copper projects in Sarcheshmeh Copper Complex in the central district of Rafsanjan County in Kerman Province, southeast Iran, in which over 750 billion rials (about \$17.8 million) has been invested.

According to IMIDRO's latest reports, major Iranian copper producers produced an aggregate of 1.17 million tons of copper concentrate in the last Iranian year to register an increase of three percent year-on-year.

Sarcheshmeh Copper Complex was the

Trade balance with Turkey positive in 10 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** —Trade balance between Iran and Turkey was \$1.1 billion positive in favor of Iran during the first 10 months of 2019, ISNA reported on Saturday, citing the data released by Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA).

Iran exported \$3.1 billion of commodities to Turkey and imported \$1.9 billion of goods from its neighbor during the 10-month period.

Turkey has been the major trade partner of Iran, after China and Iraq, in the current year.

During the 27th meeting of Iran-Turkey Joint Economic Committee, which was held in Ankara in mid-September, the two sides investigated different ways of reaching the targeted \$30-billion bilateral trade and reiterated that reaching this figure is



possible despite the pressures of the U.S. sanctions.

During the meeting, the Iranian president's chief of staff, Mahmoud Vaezi, who is the Iranian chairman of the committee, mentioned expediting the process of implementing bilateral agreements on trade and economic issues as the most prioritized objective of the joint committee and said Iran has no limitation for expanding and deepening cooperation with Turkey.

In 2020 Asia will have the world's largest GDP

In 2020 Asia's GDP will overtake the GDP of the rest of the world combined. By 2030, the region is expected to contribute roughly 60% of global growth. Asia-Pacific will also be responsible for the overwhelming majority (90%) of the 2.4 billion new members of the middle class entering the global economy.

The bulk of that growth will come from the developing markets of China, India and throughout South-East Asia and it will give rise to a host of new decisions for businesses, governments and NGOs. The pressure will be on them to guide Asia's development in a way that is equitable and designed to solve a host of social and economic problems.

While these estimates paint a picture of massive growth in consumption, the reality is that consumption patterns will emerge differently across markets, with growth rates dependent on local demographics and other macro factors. For example, as the World Economic Forum's Future of Consumption in Fast-Growth Consumer Markets work demonstrates, China's ageing population will negatively impact the population dividend, but rising wages, urban migration, service jobs and an anticipated drop in household savings rates will boost consumption.

India's massive demographic dividend and burgeoning middle class will spur consumption and aid economic growth.

Meanwhile, Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia are set to grow their labor

forces significantly, leading to a rise in per-capita disposable income. The rapidly advancing digital economy in the region will provide additional access to the previously unserved and deliver on consumer demands for convenience and efficiency.

Bi-polarization of consumption

All these macro forces are leading to a bi-polarization of consumption, where consumers will have more power and simultaneously demand both premium and value-for-money goods and services.

One trend that will play an increasingly important role is local and insurgent businesses outgrowing incumbents and beginning to disrupt the market – it's visible across developed and developing markets alike. Nimble local players are winning as they take advantage of proprietary access and local familiarity. For example, Wardah has captured a 30% market share in Indonesia by focusing on halal-compliant cosmetics.

Another advantage to local companies is a commitment to weather short-term turbulence. At one Indonesian conglomerate, the C-suite view is to take a secular view, invest it and stay the course – and not worry about the quarterly or yearly fluctuations in results.

We are also seeing the continued emergence of Asian multinational corporation – Huawei in technology, DBS in Banking, Unicharm and Kao in personal care; and



Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani cuts the ribbon on a plant and a processing unit in Sungun Copper Complex in East Azarbaijan Province on Saturday.

biggest producer with 701,700 tons, up four percent year-on-year; followed by Sungun Complex with 324,203 tons, and Miduk with 148,583 tons.

Sarcheshmeh Copper Complex and Khatoun Abad Copper Complex produced an aggregate of 313,784 tons of copper anode during the year, up 56 percent on year.

Adequate basic commodities reserved for next year: trade min.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani said the basic goods that the country needs in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 19, 2020) and also in the next year have been reserved, IRIB reported on Friday.

The minister said the government and private sector's warehouses are already filled up with the basic commodities and there is no concern in this due.

Earlier this month, Iran's deputy finance and economic affairs minister said the government has provisioned \$14 billion of official-rate foreign currency in the next Iranian calendar year (March 2020-March 2021)'s budget bill for imports of basic goods.

Importers of rice, barley, corn, edible oils, oilseeds, and livestock feed, as well



as medicines and a few other items, are going to receive the government support, according to Mohammad-Ali Dehqan Dehnavi.

"The government has identified these goods as the basic needs of the people and has decided to keep the prices of such items low in the market, so \$14 billion of currency with official rate will be provided to the importers of these commodities next year," Dehnavi said.

In sharing economy's bad year, Japan startup goes out with a bang

In a year that saw sharing-economy unicorns Uber Technologies, Lyft and WeWork struggle, a small Japanese startup closed 2019 with an impressive stock market debut.

Space Market, which brokers meeting venues, more than doubled its offer price in its Tokyo market debut Friday.

The success of Space Market's initial public offering shows how investors are growing selective about startups in the sharing economy, where barriers to entry are low and competition is high.

"We've entered a phase in which we can achieve self-sustaining growth while reining in sales and administrative costs," President and CEO Daisuke Shigematsu said Friday.

Space Market's platform matches users seeking locations to hold business meetings and other events with owners of available space. Space Market does not own any of the properties but charges a 5% fee to users and a 30% commission to property owners.

Roughly 12,000 spaces are registered on the platform, including residential properties. Members have exceeded 400,000.

Big corporate names have come on board as shareholders, eyeing synergies with their own operations. Leading Japanese travel agency JTB uses the service to arrange business trips. Real Estate Company Tokyo Tatemono lends out unused model rooms by the hour, as well as shared lounges in condominiums.

Space Market expects to report sales of about 800 million yen (\$7.3 million) for the year ending Dec. 31, up nearly 40% on the year. It also expects to move into the black with a net profit of 6.65 million yen.

The Tokyo Stock Exchange

The company began trading Friday on the Tokyo Stock Exchange's Mothers market at 1,306 yen, more than double its 590 yen offer price, and ended at 1,600 yen.

"This is the first listing for this sector," said Tatsunori Kawai of au Kabucom Securities. "Even if rivals emerge, (Space Market) will have the first-mover advantage."

Japan's sharing economy is projected to grow to as much as 11 trillion yen in 2030, according to data from Sharing Economy Association, Japan, or nearly six times the market in 2018. The total enterprise value of companies tied to the sharing economy surged 25% over a year, according to the Next Unicorn survey published by Nikkei in November.

Parking lot operator Park24 has achieved profitability for its car-sharing service, which builds on its existing business.

The mobility segment raked in 34.8 billion yen in sales during the fiscal year ended October and enjoyed an operating profit margin of around 20%. Park24's share price has jumped about sixfold since 2008, before it entered the car-sharing business.

But matching third-party users with an on-demand service does not guarantee instant success. Barriers to entry are low, and such ventures tend to lose money, owing to hefty

system development and advertising costs.

A number of sharing ventures have gone nowhere. Online flea market operator Mercari's bike-sharing arm, Merchari, struggled to make headway against a competing service from mobile carrier NTT Docomo, which has achieved nationwide reach and the top market share. E-commerce group DMM.com folded a housecleaning gig app in 2018 after less than two years in service.

Osaka-based Akippa, a money-losing app for shared parking spaces, has survived by accepting investment from insurance group Sampo Holdings. Akippa looks to streamline sales operations by making use of Sampo's network of offices and insurance information.

(Source: asia-nikkei.com)

Vacancy Announcement

A reputable Humanitarian Organization in Tehran is looking for an HR Manager.

Applications close on **December 31, 2019.**

For further details, please refer to following link:

<https://un.org.ir/en/jobs/item/6034-hr-manager.html>

NDF allocates €250m to prioritized water, electricity projects

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — National Development Fund of Iran allocated €250 million to implementation of water, and electricity projects with high priority in the country, ILNA reported on Saturday quoting an official with the Energy Ministry as saying.

Mohsen Bakhtiar, the deputy energy minister for planning and economic affairs, said of the mentioned figure some €150 million has been earmarked for expediting implementation of water-supply projects in the rural areas, €50 million for improving quality of drinking water and stable supply of water in the cities where there is water crisis, and €50 million to beat the haze and reduce its effect on the electricity network.

The official further said that the budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (starts on March 20, 2020) has allocated 450 trillion rials (about \$10.7 billion) to Energy Ministry.



On December 8, President Hassan Rouhani submitted the administration's draft of the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1399 to the Majlis.

The proposed budget amounted to about 1.988 quadrillion rials (about \$473.5 billion at the official rate of 42,000 rials), with a 14-percent rise from the current year's approved budget.

Like the current year's budget, the next year's proposed budget requires the government to pay 20 percent of its oil revenues to the National Development Fund (NDF).

As previously announced by Mohammad Baqer Nobakht, the head of Iran's Planning and Budget Organization (PBO), the government intends to invest as much as it can in development sector in the next Iranian year, so it has increased the budget for this sector by 53 percent in the budget bill to achieve significant growth.

Despite initial trade deal, analysts still project plentiful crude in 2020

By Amrith Ramkumar

Energy-market analysts are adjusting their oil supply-demand forecasts after an initial U.S.-China trade deal and OPEC supply cuts, but many still see global oil output keeping up with consumption next year.

The projections for supply to match or exceed demand, despite recent bullish events, underscore how production from places like Brazil and Norway coupled with steady U.S. output are keeping many investors cautious on crude prices. U.S. crude-oil futures fell 1.2% to \$60.44 a barrel Friday, dropping from a three-month high. Brent crude, the global gauge of oil prices, edged down 0.6% to \$66.14.

Oil has staged a powerful rebound this year since tumbling in the fourth quarter of 2018, a recovery that has put crude back into a sweet spot that analysts say is high enough to let energy producers make money without leading to gasoline-price spikes

that threaten consumer spending.

Few analysts, though, see a repeat of 2019's outsize gains ahead. Some investors remain skeptical that every member of the cartel will comply with the deep output cuts announced earlier this month by the Saudi Arabian-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies.

And demand still isn't expected to outpace supply even with the U.S. and China reaching an initial trade deal that could relieve pressure on the world economy, supporting fuel consumption.

"Global supply and demand should reach a fine balance on an annualized basis next year with the market ebbing and flowing on either side of equilibrium," RBC Capital Markets analysts said in a recent note to clients.

Like many other analysts, RBC sees oil staying in its current trading range and trading roughly sideways moving forward.

Wall Street has pared back previous forecasts for an outsize supply surplus next year, an encouraging development for en-

ergy bulls. Strong compliance to the OPEC production cuts and progress on the next phases of a trade deal between the world's two largest economies could help keep crude prices supported.

At the same time, plentiful inventories in developed countries have eased fears of shortages that could lead to significantly higher prices over a long period.

Earlier this month, Commerzbank analysts forecast that Brent crude will hover around \$60 next year.

"If it were to fall more sharply below this level, Saudi Arabia would respond by cutting production further," they said in a note. "If it were to rise more noticeably above this threshold, additional oil would be pumped onto the market from non-OPEC countries."

Elsewhere in commodities Friday, natural-gas futures advanced 2.4% to \$2.328 a million British thermal units, paring some of their recent decline on easing fears of excess supply. (Source: wsj.com)

Delays loom for LNG and deepwater oil and gas projects

A dark cloud of capacity constraints is casting a shadow over the oilfield service industry heading into 2020, mirroring the sharp growth in the number of new projects being brought forward by oil and gas operators.

Approximately 250 new oil and gas projects are likely to be sanctioned for development in 2020, up from 160 in 2016, and bottlenecks among suppliers appear inevitable.

According to Rystad Energy's latest market report on the global service market, floating production contractors, subsea installation players and fabricators of liquefied natural gas facilities will all likely struggle to keep up with the surge in demand for their services, thus causing projects schedules to slip.

Exploration and production companies will thus find themselves in a fierce competition to secure capacity.

Contractors, having secured 13 new orders for floating production, storage and offloading vessels (FPSOs) in 2019, have thus raised the total number of units currently under construction or on order to 28.

This means FPSO players will not be able to handle all 12 of the additional units that operators aim to move forward with in 2020. Likewise in the installation market for subsea umbilicals, risers and flowlines (SURF), orderbooks are swelling and players are racing to keep pace given the vast number of Christmas trees — nearly 600 in all — that were ordered in 2018 and 2019.

■ The subsea oil and gas

Furthermore, marine contractors are already scheduled to install about 4000 km of subsea oil and gas flowlines and umbilicals in 2020.

"Deepwater projects are now in a challenging situation as they are heavily dependent on SURF and FPSO contractors," says Audun Martinsen, Head of Oilfield Services at Rystad Energy.

"Deepwater fields have been among the most sought after supply sources in recent years, next to the shale bonanza, and the increase in massive contract awards to players in the deepwater industry now could put constraints on further field sanctioning activity."

Another complicating factor is the massive push by certain offshore energy companies to

move ahead with offshore wind projects.

Rystad Energy observes that 25 GW of offshore wind capacity is now operational, and this is poised to double to more than 50 GW by 2022. This implies a massive increase in demand for installation of offshore wind power cables, climbing from 1800 km in 2019 to an unprecedented 4300 km in 2022 — thereby surpassing the amount of subsea cable installation work from the oil and gas industry.

"Major SURF players like Subsea7 and Saipem are in a great position to capitalize on this trend, having managed already to diversify from being pure oil and gas players to become substantial drivers within the energy transition. This segment will increasingly occupy vessel capacity from the installation fleet, likely causing a significant jump in service prices and exacerbating the contractual challenges faced by operators," Martinsen explains.

■ The LNG projects

"Offshore gas and LNG projects will also add to the rising demand for services, as we forecast that these projects will require the installation

of about 1000 km per year of export pipelines linking offshore fields to onshore facilities over the next few years."

Rystad Energy forecasts capacity constraints among key vendors in the LNG market, as well, implying new projects could risk significant delays.

With 10 LNG projects sanctioned this year, and with seven more on the drawing board for 2020, the few established engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contractors that are qualified to tackle the mega-projects planned in such a specialized sector are already close to being fully booked and short of manpower.

"We expect to see pricing power strengthen further among service providers in 2020, particularly within certain segments. This will drive up prices but also delay projects and production targets for E&P companies," Martinsen predicts. "We have seen that ambitious operators with a long-term focus have been able to secure vital capacity within the supply chain, but many other players will face difficult bottlenecks in 2020." (Source: ingindustry.com)

Turkey introduces new tariff scheme for renewable electricity consumption

By Elif Binici Ersen

Turkish electricity consumers, whether corporate or individual, will have a chance to meet their demand purely from renewable resources thanks to a new tariff scheme that will be launched soon.

The global trend to ensure carbon-free electricity generation has been one of the main items on Turkey's energy agenda for the last couple of years, forcing the country to ramp up its renewable capacity. As part of the policy to embrace that trend, Turkey's energy ministry is preparing a new tariff scheme for consumers who want to use renewable resources to supply their electricity, Energy and Natural Resources Fatih Dönmez announced Friday.

"We have launched works to introduce a new tariff program for Turkish consumers who want to utilize renewable energy resources in their electricity consumption. The new tariff model will allow the consumers to solely use renewable resources if they wish," Dönmez said in his address at the launch of the 10th Sabanc? University Istanbul International Center for Energy and Climate Conference for the International Energy Agency's World Energy Outlook 2019.

Although the details of the subsidized model for the new scheme are yet to be disclosed, the ministry is expected to propose a certificate to be issued by electricity authorities to measure how much consumers utilize renewables in their electricity consumption. The new tariff scheme will also enable consumers to choose suppliers whose energy portfolios consist entirely of renewable resource plants.

With the effort to encourage electricity consumers to meet their demand from renewables and offer them the opportunity to become producers, Turkey also introduced a new metering scheme in May, which allows homeowners to receive a monthly credit for solar exports to the grid, which can be used to offset their electricity bill.

The program replaces a previous net metering scheme and complements feed-in tariffs that end up benefiting much larger installations than solar rooftops for individual consumers. The plan is expected to launch a large-scale growth in rooftop solar photovoltaic (PV) applications. According to a World Bank report released last year, Turkey has the capacity to reach 4 GW in rooftop solar PV installation.

■ A diverse average energy basket

Turkey has a diverse energy basket when it comes to



electricity generation, yet coal is still the top source of power generation. In 2018, coal accounted for 37.3% of the total production. Electricity generation from natural gas and hydroelectric power totaled 29.8% and 19.8%, respectively. Wind power plants generated 6.6% of Turkey's electricity, while solar power provided 2.6%.

In the first half of this year, Turkey's installed power was at 90,421 megawatts (MW). Hydroelectric power plants accounted for 31.4% of the aggregate power while 29% came from natural gas. Coal made up 22.4% of the installed power while wind and solar constituted 8% and 6%, respectively. Geothermal power, for which Turkey ranked fourth worldwide with over 1,500 MW, accounted for 1.5% of the installed power while the remaining came from miscellaneous sources.

In his presentation at the conference, IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol drew attention to a wide range of disparities in the global energy markets. He said that an interesting development in the oil market is the relatively serene environment despite a number of incidents that fueled geopolitical tensions throughout the year. Birol stressed that geopolitical tensions, particularly in the Middle East where the biggest producers are clustered, used to be a major reason behind the changes or fluctuations in the prices.

In reference to major developments throughout this year, Birol said: "Venezuela's oil production has seen a steep fall this year. Iran's crude exports have nearly become zero because of the sanctions. Saudi Arabia had a major attack on Saudi Arabian Oil Co. (Aramco) facilities. Despite all these problems, the oil prices remained around \$60 per barrel. After the meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum

Exporting Countries (OPEC), no major change has occurred in the prices. Since the oil production in OPEC and Russia continues to increase, their capability to dictate and shape the prices has shrunk."

Another major disparity has been observed in the issue of climate change — to which there is a global commitment. The energy industry still accounts for 80% of global emissions. Although countries pledged to reduce the emissions at the Paris Climate Summit in 2015, the carbon and greenhouse gas emissions have continued to rise steadily, increasing 1 gigaton. The "global carbon emissions have reached historic highs," Birol remarked. While there is a serious political commitment to reducing emissions, the current reality of the increase demonstrates considerable divergence, he added.

■ Showing a slight slowdown

In the period of 2009 to 2018, emissions rose by 1.5% per year, with only the years 2014-2016 showing a slight slowdown. Preliminary data for 2018 suggests that global greenhouse gas emissions grew by 1.9%," according to the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI).

The European Commission's Joint Research Center 2019 report on global carbon emissions revealed that the world's two largest economies, the U.S. and China, account for the highest emissions as they are responsible for more than 40% of the global emissions. Before the Industrial Revolution, levels of atmospheric carbon were around 280 parts per million (ppm). By 2013, that level had breached the 400ppm mark for the first time.

There are huge disparities between the world's top 15 carbon emissions generating countries. China creates almost double the emissions of the second-placed U.S.

The report revealed that China accounts for 29.7% of global emissions, followed by the U.S. with 13.9%. European Union member countries are responsible for 9.1% of the total global emission and India ranks fourth with 6.9%. Turkey ranks 15th, responsible for 1.1% of the total carbon and greenhouse gas emissions.

Moreover, the global developments in energy efficiency presented another contradiction of the markets. "Efficiency improvements posted the lowest increase in 2018. The 1.2% rate in 2018 is around half the average seen since 2010 and remains far below the 3% rate that would be needed," Birol said.

(Source: dailysabah.com)

Corporates going 'green' sees Europe renewable deals rocket

By Kelvin Ross

Increased pressure on corporate companies to have better 'green' credentials and the end of government incentives has seen the number of subsidy-free renewable energy projects increase by more than 1000 per cent since 2013.

That's the findings of new research from global law firm DLA Piper, which used data gathered by analytics company inspiratia.

The study found that the number of purchase power agreement deals in Europe has increased from just four in 2013 to more than 45 in July this year, which have either been signed with a utility, an energy trader or a corporate.

DLA Piper states that "while the energy transition towards renewables has been enabled by governments through support mechanisms such as feed-in-tariffs, the baton has now been passed into the hands of the private sector."

The report finds that corporates across the globe have been under increasing pressure from consumers and investors to "green" their businesses, leading them to radically change the way they purchase electricity either as signatories of PPAs or even, in many cases, as owners of renewable energy plants.

DLA Piper says renewable energy projects "have blossomed around the world, driven primarily by government subsidies".

The report states that Europe has been at the forefront of this energy transition, accounting for 36 percent of the global share of renewable energy capacity, with 536 GW of total installed capacity by the end of 2018.

■ The fossil fuels in markets

However, DLA Piper says this phase of the transition to renewables is set to come to an end, as capital costs have declined sufficiently to enable such projects to be economically viable on the basis of grid-parity with fossil fuels in several European markets.

Solar PV is the most notable success story regarding the role that capital cost reductions have played in decreasing the levelized cost of energy of this sector. Some countries have achieved cost reductions of more than 80% and as a result, grid-parity is close to becoming a reality.

Despite the emerging transition of responsibility from government to corporate, DLA Piper warns that in order to deliver on Europe's climate objectives policymakers should not take a backseat.

Natasha Luther-Jones, Partner and Global Co-Chair of Energy and Natural Resources at DLA Piper, said: "At first glance it may appear that the role of policymaking would take a back seat with a subsidy-free and market-driven environment, however, governments and regulators still have a clear role to play in a grid-parity world.

"For example, regulators still have the power to affect investment decisions through market design, tax framework, and grid legislation."

She said another notable example "is the role of the government in the permitting and planning process. Support for renewables is needed both from the national and regional government in order to remove barriers that do not allow projects to get off the ground."

(Source: powerengineeringint.com)

Malawi's first solar energy project reaches financial close

One of Malawi's first solar projects has reached financial close after attracting investment volume totaling \$67 million D. Initial site works have begun in Nkhotakota, and construction of the first phase is targeted for completion by March 2020. Once complete, the project will add 46 MW of clean energy to the local power supply.

Developed by UAE-based Phanes Group (PhanesGroup.com) in collaboration with responsAbility Renewable Energy Holding and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), the project was the result of the first Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) signed with Malawi's national utility (ESCOM) in February 2019. This was Malawi's first competitive tender in the power sector, and the PPA is projected to last 20 years.

Phanes Group and its partners were awarded the project in May 2017 following an international tendering process which attracted bids from 21 companies globally. Phanes Group will work closely with its partners throughout development of the project: responsAbility is supporting with the provision of equity financing, while also taking on the role of co-developer. OPIC is contributing debt financing, and Natsons is the local development partner.

"This project will empower underserved communities in some of Africa's poorest regions through access to affordable, reliable, and diversified energy," commented Tracey Webb, OPIC Vice President for Structured Finance and Insurance. "OPIC is proud to play a role in the growth of Malawi's budding solar industry, which will advance our efforts to foster prosperity and stability in Sub-Saharan Africa."

■ Using the solar power

The Nkhotakota project is part of a push by the Malawian government to use solar power to strengthen the country's electricity infrastructure. Currently only 15% of the population has access to power, and the national capacity is estimated at 362 MW. The new capacity added will make a significant contribution to the government's target of increasing power access to 30% of the population by 2030.

The project will also move Malawi away from its traditional reliance on hydropower, which currently comprises over 95% of the country's energy mix. This has left the country vulnerable to droughts, particularly considering a recent drop in the water level of Lake Malawi which has threatened the region's supply of power. The new plant will address this challenge and play a critical role in securing Malawi's daytime electricity supply.

Joseph Nganga, Managing Director at responsAbility Renewable Energy Holding remarked: "Access to reliable and affordable electricity is a key prerequisite for economic development — when power is out, organizations either shoulder high opportunity costs from lost output, or resort to much costlier backup power, usually from diesel. Our aim in supporting this project is to simultaneously contribute to climate change mitigation and accelerate the development of Malawi."

"Lack of power has been a real obstacle to Malawi's social and economic development," added Phanes Group's CEO, Martin Haupts. "This project demonstrates that solar energy offers a viable path to bringing power to those communities which need it most. We are thankful to our partners responsAbility and OPIC, who have been instrumental in realizing our aim to electrify new markets in Africa. We hope the Nkhotakota project will serve as a model for future private investment into the local solar sector."

(Source: evwind.es)

Report: Israeli spyware allegedly used to target Pakistani officials' phones

TEHRAN (FNA) — The mobile phones of at least two dozen Pakistani government officials were allegedly targeted earlier this year with technology owned by the Israeli spyware company NSO Group, The Guardian reported.

Scores of Pakistani senior defence and intelligence officials were among those who could have been compromised, according to sources familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The alleged targeting was discovered during an analysis of 1,400 people whose phones were the focus of hacking attempts in a two-week period earlier this year, according to the sources.

All the suspected intrusions exploited a vulnerability in WhatsApp software that potentially allowed the users of the malware to access messages and data on the targets' phones.

The discovery of the breach in May prompted WhatsApp, which is owned by Facebook, to file a lawsuit against NSO in October in which it accused the company of "unauthorised access and abuse" of its services.



The lawsuit claimed intended targets included "attorneys, journalists, human rights activists, political dissidents, diplomats, and other senior foreign government officials".

NSO has said it will vigorously contest the claim and has insisted that its technology is only used by law enforcement agencies around the world to snare criminals, terrorists and paedophiles.

The alleged targeting of Pakistani officials gives a first insight into how NSO's signature "Pegasus" spyware could have been used for "state-on-state" espionage.

The details also raise fresh questions about how NSO's clients use its spyware.

"This kind of spyware is marketed as designed for criminal investigations. But the open secret is that it also winds up being used for political surveillance and government-on-government spying," said John Scott-Railton, a senior researcher at the Citizen Lab, an academic research group located at the University of Toronto that has worked with WhatsApp to help identify victims of the alleged hacks.

"Spyware companies are clearly contributing to the proliferation of state-on-state technological espionage. No government seems particularly immune. This is probably further stretching the patience of governments around the world with this industry," he added.

The Pakistani embassies in London and Washington declined multiple requests for comment. WhatsApp declined to comment.

Representatives for NSO declined to comment on questions about whether the company's software had been used for government espionage.

The company has previously said it considered it a "misuse" of its product if the software was used for anything other than the prevention of "serious crime and terrorism".

While it is not clear who wanted to target Pakistani government officials, the details are likely to fuel speculation that India could have been using NSO technology for domestic and international surveillance.

The government of the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, is facing questions from human rights activists about whether it has bought NSO technology after it emerged that 121 WhatsApp users in India were allegedly targeted earlier this year.

The figure included about two dozen alleged victims who are journalists, activists and human rights lawyers, a fact that prompted Modi opponents in the Indian National Congress to seek a supreme court inquiry into the matter.

Pakistan has not publicised the alleged hack, but there are signs the government, led by the prime minister, Imran Khan, is taking steps to address the matter.

Dr Arslan Khalid, who serves as Khan's top adviser on digital issues, has said in local press reports that the government is working on developing an alternative to WhatsApp to be used for sensitive government data and other classified information.

Government officials in Pakistan's ministry of information technology have also reportedly advised officials to stop sharing classified information over WhatsApp and replace smartphones that were purchased before May 2019, according to local press reports.

NSO has repeatedly said that its spyware is only meant to be used to combat terrorism and other crimes, such as child abduction and sex crimes. The company has claimed that the use of its spyware by governments has saved "thousands of lives".

NSO has also put a new human rights policy in place that is meant to "prevent and mitigate" abuse of its spyware. The policy states that NSO customers have "contractual obligations" to limit the use of the company's products to the "prevention and investigation of serious crimes, including terrorism, and to ensure the products will not be used to violate human rights".

NSO has not commented on whether it has pursued any internal investigations into the alleged WhatsApp hack.

India was first linked to NSO in 2018, when a report by the Citizen Lab identified 36 Pegasus "operators" who were found to be using the malware in 45 countries. One operator, which the Citizen Lab identified and codenamed "Ganges", was found to have been active since 2017 and had infected mobile phones in five locations: India, Bangladesh, Brazil, Hong Kong and Pakistan. The Citizen Lab did not identify who it believed was behind "Ganges" but the data in its report indicated that most of the networks with infections were in India.

Apar Gupta, the executive director of the Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF), said in an interview with The Guardian that the Modi government had been evasive in answering questions by activists about whether or not the government had ever bought or licensed NSO technology.

Ravi Shankar Prasad, the Indian technology minister, said in a tweet on 31 October after news of the alleged Indian victims emerged that India was "concerned at the breach of privacy" on WhatsApp. When pressed about whether the government had any contracts with NSO, the Indian ministry of home affairs said that "no information" existed about the government ever ordering Pegasus, according to local reports.

The Indian embassy in Washington declined to comment.

Iran-Russia-China naval drill: Another piece of the geopolitical puzzle

1 → China, as the world's largest oil importer, relies on Persian Gulf suppliers for a great amount of its energy needs. So the country would be vulnerable to any volatility in Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. As a result, Beijing would do anything short of direct confrontation with the US to diminish the likelihood of any military conflict between Iranians and Americans in the region. In so doing, if Iran seems less isolated, the chance of a war with Iran in Persian Gulf would also seem less likely.

While the naval exercise may benefit Iran in the regional balance against some Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, it seems that it might not share this motivation with Russia and China in conducting the drill. Due to the economic interests they share with the Arab countries, Moscow and Beijing are likely to assure Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations in the region that the drill is not aimed at working with Iran against them.

However there is a point where all three countries — Iran, Russia and China — see eye to eye in holding the manoeuvre, and that is sending a message to their common adversary or rival, namely the United States. The US, in some ways, has applied a triple containment policy toward China, Russia and Iran. This would be enough to unite these three countries on some fronts against a common foe. Beijing, Moscow and Tehran are more than willing to undermine American hegemony in the region, hindering its presence and influence. For Iran, evading a likely isolation, and for China and Russia, a stronger presence in the region so as to benefit more, will be sufficient for them to bring a counterbalance against the US in the region. The Astana process on Syria has given Iran and Russia the confidence that they need that they can meet



targets independent of the US.

All in all, Iran believes that the US intention to create a naval coalition is more aimed at securitizing the region than bringing security to it. Proposing the HOPE initiative, as well as conducting joint war games with the other countries, are a piece of a puzzle where Iran, along with

friend and allies, may want to be guardian and guarantor of security and stability in the region, even if the US is not a company. The fate of such an action can depend upon the presence of new members and the durability of the current members in doing so.

(Source: Valdaiclub)

Tactical defeats' plus 'political confusion' behind Saudis' transient tone change in Yemen: expert

By Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

TEHRAN (MNA) — Professor of political science Colin S. Cavell says what has temporarily relaxed the Saudi war on Yemen is defeats of the coalition on the ground combined with political confusion among the coalition's leaders.

In an interview with Mehr News Agency, Colin S. Cavell, a full professor of political science at Bluefield State College in Bluefield, West Virginia, talked about the latest developments in Yemen.

Here is the full text of the interview:

■ Reports indicate that Saudi Arabia has softened its tone towards Yemeni forces, is this the result of their defeats on the ground or pressure from other countries?

A: Tactical defeats on the ground combined with logistical infighting and political confusion have temporarily relaxed the Saudi war on Yemen while the aggressor regroup its forces. The Saudi-UAE designed pincer movement was to divide Yemen and allow forces from both the south and the north to bring the Yemeni people to submission. While establishing the so-called Southern Transitional Council (STC) in the south in April of 2017, the KSA continued its attacks on Yemen from the north, which they have done since the commencement of this war in March of 2015. The pincer movement was not working but, rather, impeding their war on the Yemeni peoples led by the Houthi liberation movement. Thus, recently, on November 5, 2019, the STC signed an agreement in Riyadh to merge with the Saudi-installed president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

With the reunification of the pro-Riyadh forces in addition to the continuing US buildup of its military forces in the Persian Gulf and surrounding region, as well as the upcoming November 2020 US presidential campaign, one should expect to see renewed major attacks by the Saudi vassal regime forces of Hadi in the new year, albeit the Saudi forces will continue their indiscriminate aerial bombardment of Yemen in addition to their arbitrary detentions, torture, and selected disappearances of Yemenis in the meantime.

■ Despite reports of behind-the-scenes negotiations and prospects of peace, Saudi Arabia is still launching attacks at the war-torn country. How do you assess these developments?

A: The aggressors, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, suffered notable attacks on May 12, 2019 when explosives on four ships anchored off the Fujairah coast in the Gulf of Oman blew holes into their hulls. While the US blamed Iran for these explosions, no evidence as yet has conclusively revealed the source of the explosions. However, on September



14, 2019, two pre-dawn drone attacks knocked out more than half of the KSA's oil output at its state-owned facilities at Abqaiq and at Khurais. KSA's global oil output amounts to approximately five percent of global supply or about 5.7 million barrels per day, so this was quite a wake-up call to the Saudi Kingdom and its imperial allies, the US and the UK, as it demonstrated the vulnerability of Saudi oil facilities to Yemeni liberation rebel attacks. Despite the Yemeni liberation movement claiming responsibility for these attacks, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo instead blamed Iran, which Iran denied. Having demonstrated the weakness of Saudi defenses around its oil facilities, the Saudi Crown Prince and de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman has had to restrain his onslaught on Yemen until he and the KSA's imperial sponsors can devise a strategy to deal with these developments.

■ Five years into this devastating war, reports indicate a deep and concerning human crisis in Yemen. Millions of civilians are on the brink of famine and the UN has even described the situation as the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. However, the Saudi-led coalition is still imposing a blockade which hampers humanitarian aids. Why is the world remaining almost silent to what is going on in Yemen?

A: In February of 2019, the United Nations declared the war in Yemen to be the world's worst humanitarian crisis as nearly 80% of the population or nearly 24 of a total population of 28 million people lack food, medicine, and security protection. Faced with widespread starvation, largely due to the Saudi blockade of the Yemeni port city of Hudaydah, a blockade buttressed by US support, has resulted in the worst outbreak of cholera in recorded history, millions of Yemeni children being deprived of schooling, healthcare, and safety, and an international crisis that could trigger a world conflagration. The imperial

powers of the USA and the UK operate on a hierarchical basis reflecting one's power and wealth, meaning the ruling classes of these regimes retain power only so long as they subjugate others, particularly countries that supply raw materials, natural resources, and other commodities deemed essential. As well, these countries are able to get away with international crimes, crimes against humanity, or, simply, theft, bribery, murder, and genocide so long as they keep their actions hidden or obscured from their own populations. Thus, in the United States, for example, few people know anything about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or that they are one of the USA's closest allies. Much less know even that the country of Yemen exists. With control of the mass media, the country can choose what information it will present to its populace, how to portray the information, and, as well, direct the populace how to feel about a certain situation, people, country, war, etc. at specified times. Because the US is allied with the monarchical kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it will, since it cares not if the kingdom systematically engages in criminal activity, gloss over or ignore any faults or crimes—like the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi or the war in Yemen or its ill-treatment of its female population, etc.—committed by the KSA. In return, the Saudi royal family, which depends upon its imperial protectors to stay in power and alive, will gladly sell the kingdom's resources at a discount to the US, the UK, and assorted allies while acting as an appendage of the western imperial war machine. Consequently, only specialists and interested observers are able to avail themselves of the truth of what is going on in Yemen, though they, too, are subjected to the imperial guardians and gatekeepers.

■ How do you see the future of Yemen's politics after a probable peace is established?

A: The United States and the United

Kingdom are, internally, not so united these days. Though the leaders of both countries share collective interests, both countries' ruling elites are waging war on their domestic populations. Britain is divided severely over whether to remain apart from or a part of the European continent, though the British capitalist class will strongly push through their country's exit from the European Union. The United States is facing an impeachment trial of its president. Both countries are faced with severe economic difficulties which are not being highlighted by both countries' media. And, of course, both countries are at war in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world, attempting to retain their imperial realms of control. The war in Yemen is a war being waged by one of their primary vassals, Saudi Arabia, in order to retain hegemonic control in the region. Given the current correlation of forces both in the Middle East region as well as internationally, I do not believe this conflict will resolve itself with a temporary peace or a cessation of violence by the warring protagonists. Instead, this conflict is a presage or indication that the immediate conflicting combatants are only proxies of larger entities that have irreconcilable demands and interests. As such, the immediate war in Yemen will either continue on as is indefinitely so long as a balance is maintained amongst the contending great powers. However, while this stalemate is being played out, the structure, organization, character, and distribution of the various forces on the ground in Yemen may ebb and flow depending on a number of subjective determinations which are undertaken.

Born and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Colin S. Cavell earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Louisiana State University in 1982, his Masters of Arts degree in Political Science from the University of New Orleans in 1987, and his Doctorate of Philosophy degree in Political Science from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Massachusetts in February 2001. Dr. Cavell is a tenured Full Professor of Political Science at Bluefield State College in Bluefield, West Virginia, having previously served as Chair of the Department of Social Sciences. Dr. Cavell is also an Adjunct Professor of Political Science at Holyoke Community College in Holyoke, Massachusetts and has taught at the University of Bahrain in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Junior Statesman Foundation Summer Program at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, Merrimack College in North Andover, Massachusetts, the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Massachusetts, as well as at the University of New Orleans in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Nigeria's pressure on Zakzaky increased: IHRC head

1 → Presently, there is no sign of improvement in their behavior with Sheikh. In general, the conditions are not going on in his favor.

■ What about Sheikh's wife, Zinat Ibrahim? How high are the possibilities for her freedom?

The chances are low for her, too. Her

health conditions are tough and the put restrictions has worsened the situation for her, as well.

Sheikh and his wife have been coping

with terrible conditions in the prison for the past four years and based on our estimations, their conditions are getting tougher incrementally.

Clinton email scandal: Poor Judgment-Yes. Criminal Intent-No. Not guilty

By Bob Budahl

The Clinton “Email Scandal” was long and damaging to the Democratic Party with a final decision that she would not be charged with violations of federal law regarding the use of a personal email server for both personal and government emails in her role as U.S. Secretary of State. For prosecution to occur the FBI would need to prove intent that she willfully divulged classified information to our adversaries and that clearly was not present. Secretary Clinton may have experienced lack of procedural knowledge and poor judgement but she did not willfully break United States law.

I find it very important to note that the Senate Committee that issued a report on the issue in its summary concluded that the “The FBI did not use a grand jury to compel testimony and obtain the vast majority of evidence, choosing instead to offer immunity deals and allow fact witnesses to join key interviews.” Because of this occurrence of not utilizing the standard Grand Jury procedure the confidentiality of an investigation was compromised and with compounding factors and procedures, did detrimentally affect the Clinton Presidency election campaign.

In an article by Dan Roberts on October 31, 2016 he noted that as Election Day became near Clinton was losing support and Trump was surging. And a week before it had been Clinton who was enjoying a high in the polls after Trump foundered in different matters. At this point it seemed certain of a Clinton victory. The timing of the FBI Director's new vigor into investigating the Clinton email scandal was condemned by the Congressional Democrats and even to the extent that the NV Senate Minority Leader Harry Reidsaid this partisan action had broken the law, including the “Hatch Act” which limits political activity of Federal employees including trying to influence or interfere with an election.

Secretary Clinton was left with a daunting task to prove her innocence with just one week to the election. Her polling showed damage to her lead. And the new interest in candidate Clinton was aided by another email controversy which may have involved Russian hackers and released by WikiLeaks. These emails to and from Clintons to campaign chair John Podesta were not necessarily damaging content but were embarrassing with revelations mostly about Secretary Clinton's husband, Bill Clinton.

Her polls continued to decline as Trump had no negative news being newly released and negative information from Clinton was divulged. Just turning the attention from Trump to Clintonshifted public polling significantly. During this time polling showed support wavered for Clinton by 1/3 of respondents which were wavered from FBI Director Comey's disclosures.

The Hillary Clinton email controversy did leave open the possibility of access to national security from classified information contained within or referenced to in emails that she had used her private email server for. There is no evidence of damage to national security. The investigation did reveal flaws but she should not have or currently face criminal prosecution.

The fact that the State Department's own email system was hacked in November 2014 and deemed one of the most severe ever is a counterpoint against blaming a private server for security lapses. It required the State Department IT workers to close down its entire unclassified email system for a weekend which shows the extent of capability that the Russians and other have.

It is also noteworthy that a different event involved the disclosure of Clinton's personal correspondence which had been accessed via the hacking of a confidante of hers, Sidney Blumenthal. This was conducted by a hacker known as Guccifer who was later revealed to be a Romanian with the name of Marcel-Lehel Lazar. There are numerous means and methods of transmitting of classified materials including direct contact, cryptographic systems, courier services, designated hand couriers.



The partisan views, opinions and actions show the controversy involved in the email scandal. The FBI re-started its investigation and resulting negative polling ensued for Secretary Clinton. The State Department did release a large set of emails which were sent on her personal server in May of 2015 which were related to the 2012 Benghazi U.S. Consulate attack. During Secretary Clinton's term as Secretary of State 62,320 emails were received or sent from her personal server.

About half of these were determined official and turned over to the State Department. Her decision to use the personal server in lieu of an official Government email was something that others utilized including predecessors. The Inspector General found that others including the former Secretary of State Colin Powell had not been in compliance with Federal recordkeeping. And the New York Times reported the Mr. Powell had suggested to Clinton to utilize private email unless it was classified information.

He later denied issuing that statement. The NYTimes also reported that the former Governor of Florida Jeb Bush who was also a 2016 candidate for the U.S. Presidency utilized a private email address. And a poll within a magazine showed 33% of federal workers utilized personal email occasionally for government business. Secretary Clinton said there had been no security breaches of the system she utilized and that it was well protected and the July 2016 FBI report concludes that there was no direct evidence of Secretary Clinton's server system being hacked.

But technology experts conclude that experts can hack without leaving an evidence trail, not to mention that commercial firewalls and security systems are no match for high tech foreign government systems. In May of 2016 a hacker from Romania who was jailed in the U.S. for hacking told news sources he had accessed Clinton's email numerous times. Secretary Clinton said she only emailed one foreign official which was a United Kingdom destination.

The Inspector General of the Intelligence Community however found that she had sent four or more messages which contained classified material. Later it was known that two of the emails sent were classified “top secret.” Two-thousand emails receiving the classified designation had been identified by the time the final batch of Secretary Clinton's emails were released in March of 2016.

A controversial article appears on the internet which does present assessments and ideas that some or possibly most people will label as partisan politics but it does present a couple of good concepts in my opinion. One is that the U.S. intelligence community did not conduct a thorough investigation of the email scandal and of the national security. This is counterproductive in my opinion as the FBI is one of the top intelligence agencies the nation has and utilizes. It alleges that ultra-secret information on U.S. drone strikes could have been disclosed from Secretary Clinton utilizing a private server for her email use.

James Clapper who had been Director of National Intelligence thought it was not needed and said since the details of the ultra-secret information on drone strikes had already been disclosed in earlier leaks, which were unrelated to Clinton's use of a personal email server, a national security assessment was not needed. Some say his decision was politically motivated. Then U.S. Representative Mike Pompeo, Republican, Kansas who was a House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence strongly argued in favor of a DNI investigation.

The Senate Committee even during the initial time of the investigation found a considerable amount of important information. It concluded that Secretary Clinton did set up a private server in her home, which was in violation of the State Department policy and Federal IT standards, according to the Inspector General and State Department. The FBI director James Comey described this as “grossly negligent” which was softened with up slightly with a slight legal distinction.

FBI Director, Comey also indicated the Secretaryutilized her personal email outside of the United States and did send and receive work related emails while in the countries of U.S.adversaries. His comments werethat adversaries had “possible” access to the information. The FBI did find 110 emails in different email chains which contained classified information that was confidential at the time sent or received. Of these eight were with Top Secret information, 36 chains of Secret and eight with confidential.

It is my conclusion that mistakes or lack of judgment were made with the utilization of a personal email server but in no way did she possess intent to purposely release or leak information.

(Source: Modern Diplomacy)

Nationalism, a potential threat to modern Capitalism

By Musfirah Rashid

MODERN DIPLOMACY — With the deteriorating contemporary world order the question of what will be the next world order examined more. Since the WWII ended capitalist ideology dominate the world and according to Francis Fukuyama argued in his book “End of History” that Western liberal democracy won a decisive victory and emerged as a final form of Human government. But now as Nationalism is roiling politics on every continent. On contrary to Liberal Capitalism- Nationalist favor nation before individual.



Nationalist ideology based on the premise that the individual's loyalty and devotion to the nation-state surpass other individual or group interests. Nationalism is a particularistic rather than Universalist ideology, and when it takes its most radical form, its consequences are terrible – more violent than those resulting from any other major capitalist ideology. In the history, we look at the most extraordinary feat of political engineering, the construction of European Union as a negation of Nationalism.

Nazi Germany and its nationalist ideology of Superior German race resulted in Holocaust. Nationalism is the fruit of capitalist revolution that raise the bourgeois class. Nation and nationalism, a form of society, the latter, and an ideology are two complementary social realities that emerged from the capitalist revolution.

Nationalism is, of course, not a force of its own, it's a man-made theory. Conventionally, nationalism has been divided into two forms ethnic and a civic variant. But with the time number of factors emerged to shape nationalism as literacy, communication and technology. Nationalism appears to be on the rise globally, but we have to analyse different elements that whether we genuinely witnessing a rise of nationalism. The change in the attitudes and behavior of people all around the world, that citizens give priority to the nation over individual identities.

And how these change attitudes affect their political choices. Nationalism is notoriously difficult to measure as it differs from state to state. While observing the rise of nationalism at global level there are four things to be noted 1) Attitudes 2) Rise of Nationalist parties 3) Nationalist policies 4) Nationalist violence and hate crimes.

With the election of Donald Trump in USA and the emerging power of populist right wing parties in Europe, Nationalist leaders in China and Turkey, Hard line extreme right party in Cyprus, France National Front promoting the principle of “National priority” and the biggest of all is the UK voted to left European Union (EU). Liberals across the world are having a hard time responding to populist nationalist. Liberal elites globally are under attack for putting foreign states above their people's interest.

And now nationalist force them to put their national, rather than global, interest first. The populist onslaught has force many liberal conclude that nationalist itself is a threat to US led liberal order. The postwar order was based on strong democratic and institutional order. Like as World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and economic policies of Free market which most of the political scientist comprehend as “embedded Liberalism”.

Philosopher George Santayana once mentioned “Those who can't remember the past are condemned to repeat it”. And his words are ringing true on the current rise of nationalist policies all around the world. United State, the global power of the world known as the leading force behind Liberal capitalism itself facing the rise of Nationalism. With the Trump coming to office with his slogan of “America First” and an abrupt change in the foreign policy of America is visibly seen.

After post-cold war era US opted for the policy of Global dominance coming out of the isolationist history. But Trump again pushes America towards isolationist policy which seems utterly impossible with US excessive involvement in the global politics. Taking control of office the first, thing Trump does is to announce that they will withdraw from all conflictual areas and didn't involve in any foreign war; they only focus on their economy.

Besides war Trump also exits many high level international treaties such as Paris climate agreement, Iran nuclear deal, Trans-pacific partnership, UN Human Rights council and many more. The issue of immigrants which make most fractions of US population and how Americans are superior then other people and states.

Similarly, UK's pull out from EU under “Brexit” is a clearly seen as the nationalist policies as it has long term economic consequences but they said they want to work for their national interest. Likewise, India claimed to be the biggest democracy of the world but under Modi's administration it opted for the nationalist policies and strong Human rights violation. The abrogation of article 370 and try to merge internationally declared disputed territory.

The Ayodhya verdict, the oppression of minorities and statements of Indian politics that India is only the home of Hindus and no other religion is accepted especially Muslims. These all examples depict how nationalism is rising not just in the western world but all around the globe. In the Middle East the situation is quite different as being in the constant phase of war and oppression they still related to the extremism.

Nationalism is powerful force. It's a glue that holds the folks together especially in the complicated times. It installs the sense of pride mainly in the states involved in rivalry, celebrates traditions, history and religion. The failure of frame work of international institutions from UN to EU put capitalist ideology also under threat. As the credibility of these institution decline the capitalist system also become a question as it was claimed as the final form government.

The democratic backsliding around the world, from Hungary to Turkey, from Venezuela to the United States has repercussions for nationalism especially when economies fail to perform. While global economic crisis did affect the whole world but states having strong nationalist parties varies greatly. There is no panacea for nationalism unless it becomes indigenous to the global social system. Although there are strategies to reduce its disastrous and exclusionary. And the biggest is to make democracy as it was claim to behave.

Putting Syria on the path of recovery

TEHRAN (FNA) - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad says his country is secure for international reconstruction efforts, including to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's modern Silk Road that passes through Iran and Iraq, and is a prospect that will rapidly transform Syria and put it on the path of recovery after nearly a decade of war.

According to the Syrian president, there are mutual interests, it is beneficial to Russia, China, Syria and all the countries on this project.

This was long overdue. Syria is strategically placed at the crossroads of oil and gas pipelines that connect resource fields in the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf and Iran with European markets, and on a wider scale is located on the crossroads between Africa, Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

We can identify the strategic position of Syria as a hub for pipelines as early as 2009 when President Assad unveiled a “Four Seas” policy that hoped to create a unified economic bloc between Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran, thereby linking the Mediterranean Sea, Caspian Sea, Black Sea and Persian Gulf into one economic bloc.

The problem is that the establishment of a successful economic nexus among these states threatens the US hegemonic plan for the region, a motivating factor for its backing of anti-government terrorists, including ISIL, when the Syrian war broke out in 2011.

Iran has consistently supported Syria not only in military and security terms, but also diplomatically and economically during this difficult war and now that the reconstruction process is about to begin, it is likely that al-



though several Chinese companies are ready to participate, they are afraid of a possible negative effect of the US sanctions.

However, there is a formula to circumvent US sanctions imposed on Syria, which will allow foreign companies to do business in Syria. Although Syria has already proposed six infrastructural projects to China that could become part of the BRI, Syria is waiting for the Chinese government to determine which projects are in line with their thinking.

Adding Syria into the BRI means that China can now strategically place itself to rejuvenate the “Four Seas” initiative and allow further connection of trade and transportation networks with Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran and Jordan, while having easier access to the oil rich region, and promote stability and cooperation among these countries. Most of the oil produced in the Middle East

is destined for East Asia, effectively meaning China has a strong interest to promote stability in the region.

According to the United Nations, the total restoration of Syria will cost about 260 billion dollars, creating opportunities for Iran, Turkey, Russia and China to engage in reconstruction projects.

The European Union and the US have economically and militarily challenged Syria and they will not be welcomed in the reconstruction efforts. China however has identified the port of Tripoli in neighboring Lebanon, only 35 kilometers from the Syrian border, as the logistics center for the reconstruction of Syria.

China Harbor Engineering Company has been significantly investing into the port since 2012. This now allows China to connect the Eastern Mediterranean region with the BRI.

To connect with the Lebanese port, China plans to build a railway line between Tripoli and the Syrian city of Homs, a corridor that Beijing needs to reduce transportation times and avoid having to transit the Suez Canal.

China and Syria have also signed cooperation agreements on trade issues and more than 200 Chinese companies participated last summer at the international trade fair in Damascus. In addition, China has granted 2 billion US dollars to invest in Syrian industry and an additional 23 billion dollars through the Cooperation Forum between China and the regional states.

This is in addition to the National Petroleum Corporation of China becoming the shareholder of two of Syria's largest oil companies: the Syrian Oil Company and Al-Furat Petroleum.

The time is now for Syria to formally join the BRI initiative to integrate into the network. Iran has already done so. As the war has entered its final phase, Iranian and Chinese investments and interests will only increase as Syria, an important center on the historic Silk Road, is strategically placed to further connect these countries through the BRI with the region and is also a hub for energy transportation, something of great interest to Iran and China.

Long story short, Syria needs true partners and some 260 billion dollars to rebuild itself. To this end, it will rely on its Iranian, Russian and Chinese allies. Syria effectively needs these allies for recovery just as much as they need Syria to ensure their own security and at the same time facilitate regional and international trade, including energy transport to global markets.

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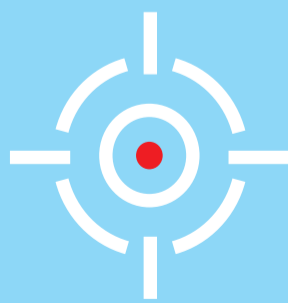
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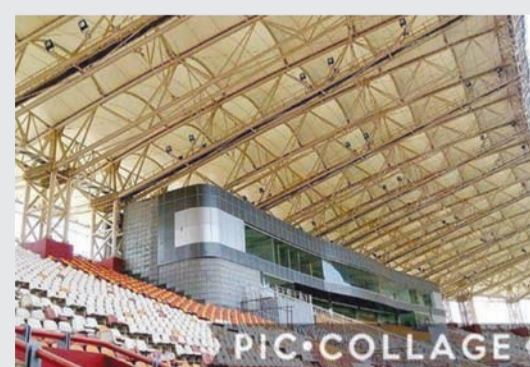
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China-Brazil satellite launched into space to monitor Amazon rainforest

An Earth observation satellite jointly developed by China and Brazil was launched into space on Friday under a bilateral program seen as a template for broader cooperation among BRICS nations.

The China-Brazil Earth Resource Satellite-4A was launched on a Long March-4B rocket in the northern Chinese province of Shanxi, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

The satellite was the sixth developed under the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) program that began in 1988. The satellites are designed for Earth observation from orbit for non-military use.

The CBERS-4A will support the Brazilian government's monitoring of the Amazon rainforest and changes in the country's environment, according to Xinhua.



Another eight satellites were put into orbit by the same rocket, including a wide-range, multi-spectral, remote-sensing microsatellite donated to Ethiopia.

Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - collectively known as BRICS - have been in talks on a framework agreement to create a constellation of satellites for Earth remote-sensing and share data obtained by each others' satellites.

Each country will provide one to two satellites to the constellation, according to the China National Space Administration in 2018.

The CBERS satellites would be included in the constellation program.

Currently, only South Africa in the BRICS bloc does not have satellites of its own.

(Source: Reuters)

Researchers have identified 100 mysteriously disappeared stars in the night sky

Across the Milky Way there are vacant spaces where a star once brightly shone. Some left clues in a dramatic death, or faded into retirement. Others simply moved into a new neighborhood.

Not all vacancies have such convenient explanations, though. Some were there one moment and gone the next, inviting speculation over rare types of star death, extreme astrophysics, and, of course... advanced alien technology.

By comparing star catalogues dating back to the 1950s with more recent datasets, researchers with the Vanishing & Appearing Sources during a Century of Observations project have identified around 100 bright dots that seem to have vanished without a trace.

The search is an ongoing one for lead researcher Beatriz Villarroel and her colleagues, one that started several years ago as part of a hunt for potential signs of alien intelligence.

"Finding an actually vanishing star – or a star that appears out of nowhere! – would be a precious discovery and certainly would include new astrophysics beyond the one we know of today," says Villarroel, a theoretical physicist from Stockholm University.

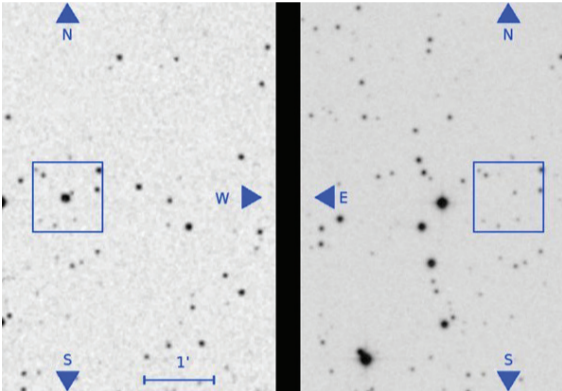
In an earlier study Villarroel and her team compared the positions of some 10 million objects recorded in the US Naval Observatory Catalogue (USNO) with their counterparts in the Sloan Digital Sky Survey (SDSS).

They were left with about 290,000 missing objects, most of which could easily be accounted for on closer inspection. Eventually they found a single star that genuinely seemed to have disappeared, and even that discovery came with lingering doubts.

It was an intriguing find, but hardly constituted compelling evidence of new kinds of astrophysics.

In this latest study they compared 600 million objects in the USNO catalogue with a collection put together by the University of Hawaii's Pan-STARR system.

The naval catalogue spans around 50 years of sky surveys, capturing details of the entire sky in five colors down to a visual magnitude of about 21. The cosmic objects in the Pan-



STARR data release include slightly dimmer objects, down to a magnitude of roughly 23 as compared to the SDSS's 22.

Having more stars to compare means potentially more 'missing' stars, while capturing objects of a lower magnitude means making extra sure there's nothing sitting in the star's place.

The comparison revealed 151,193 candidates for missing stars. This number was whittled down to 23,667 possibilities by widening the search field, cutting away stars that seemed to have moved farther than expected.

That short list was visually inspected, excluding around 18,000 images that were messed up by flaws or artefacts. Lastly, the team removed images where the missing star was towards the edge of the field, just to reduce risk of any false positives.

One final sweep using yet another method for comparisons removed other possible flaws in data collection, or unclear results. That left 100 dark shadows where a star once shone.

When a star dies, it usually goes out with a bright shout as a super nova, or quietly fades into a softly glowing ember like a white dwarf. They don't tend to just stop shining.

There could be some clues in the fact that the pool of

candidates were in general a little redder in color than the typical USNO catalogue object, and were generally faster moving. Working it out will take further research.

"We are very excited about following up on the 100 red transients we have found," says Villarroel.

There are plenty of explanations that need exploring before we can be confident this represents anything exotic, something the team hopes to accomplish with citizen science projects.

One possibility is that the object occasionally flares enough to be seen before dimming again a few magnitudes. Another explanation – although very unlikely – is they're all just scratches after all, and never existed to begin with. It could also be a dull star we assumed was farther away and has just moved too far to be noticed.

A more exciting thought is that a few might be super-rare failed supernovas, forming black holes without the fireworks display. As cool as that would be, it's a stretch to think this would explain all of the observations.

If the disappeared stars turn out to be none of these things, we may need to entertain new physics.

"We believe that they are natural, if somewhat extreme, astrophysical sources," says Martin López Corredoira from the Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias in the Canary Islands.

There is that other explanation. The one we'd all like to be true, but can't take seriously until we have a lot more evidence: Aliens could be covering these stars up to absorb their light, converting it into useful energy before shedding it as low grade radiation. Or the initial flares might be short lived, intense signals from alien technology.

In moments like this, we can all let our imaginations run a little wild, even if the researchers are hesitant.

"But we are clear that none of these events have shown any direct signs of being ETI [extra terrestrial intelligence]," says Corredoira.

Which might just be what the aliens want us to think.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Scientists create dazzling color-changing chocolates



A research team led by scientists at ETH Zurich University in Switzerland have created shimmering chocolates that seem to radiate rainbows. They didn't add any colorants to the chocolates, but they did figure out a clever way to imprint a structure on the surface of the candy to give the treats a magical glow.

"The effect is achieved simply through a surface imprint that produces what the scientists refer to as a structural color," ETH Zurich said in a statement on Thursday.

"The process is similar to a chameleon,

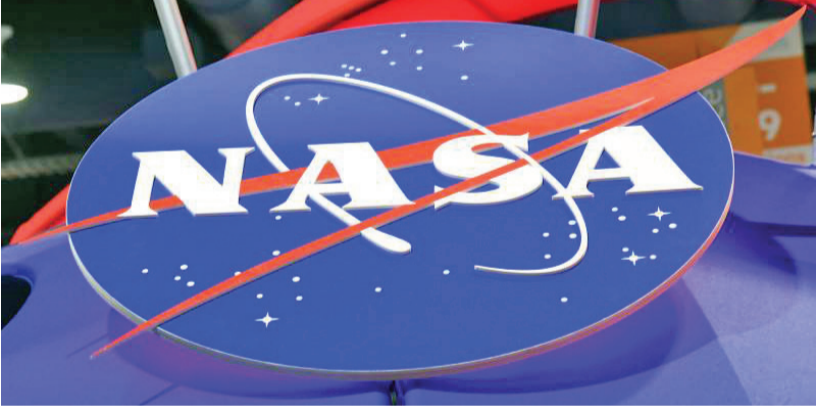
whose skin surface modulates and disperses light to display specific colors."

This is one of those brilliant inventions you may be able to experience for yourself soon. The team is developing a mold that can imprint the surface of multiple chocolates. The scientists are already in talks with chocolate companies to bring the shimmering delectables to market.

In a world obsessed with colorful foods, these scintillating sweets are destined for stardom.

(Source: msn)

Massive 2,034-foot asteroid will zoom past Earth just after Christmas



A gigantic asteroid will zip past Earth just after Christmas, NASA reports.

The massive space rock, which is known as 310442 (2000 CH59), will be closest to our planet on December 26 at 2:54 a.m. EST, according to NASA.

The space agency's Center for Near Earth Object Studies (CNEOS) estimates its diameter will be in the range of 919 to 2,034 feet. At the higher end, that means it could be as large as One World Trade Center in New York City, which tops out at 1,792 feet, including the tip.

"Over many centuries and millennia [these asteroids] might evolve into Earth-crossing orbits," Paul Chodas, director of CNEOS, told Newsweek. "So it is prudent to keep tracking [them] for decades to come and to study how their orbits might be evolving."

The asteroid will travel past our planet at around 27,500 miles per hour.

Although the giant rock will be close to Earth in astronomical terms, it will still be far enough away that we shouldn't be worried, Chodas explained to Newsweek.

(Source: msn)

Ancient whale species sheds light on shift from limb- to tail-powered swimming

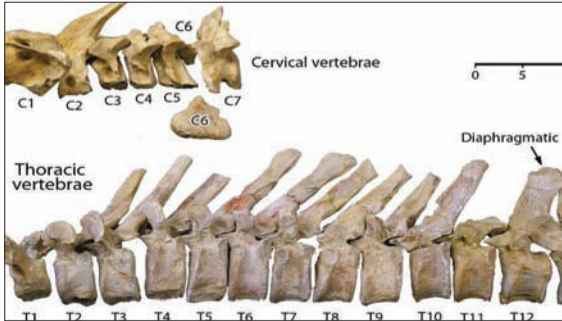
Modern whales use their tails to swim, but their earliest ancestors, a group of semi-aquatic species known as protocetids, swam with their limbs.

Due to gaps in the fossil record, the transition from limb- to tail-powered locomotion among whales isn't well-understood. But a newly discovered species of ancient whale, unearthed in Egypt, has offered scientists some clarity on the matter.

"The biggest gap is that we lack associated skeletons of whale intermediates between land mammals and the earliest of early known whales to document the transition to foot-powered swimming," researcher Philip Gingerich, professor of earth sciences, evolutionary biology and anthropology at the University of Michigan, told UPI in an email. "We also need more late middle Eocene skeletons to fully document the transition to tail-powered swimming."

The protocetid species Aegicetus gehennae -- newly named and described this month in the journal PLOS One -- has helped scientists begin the fill in the latter of the two gaps.

The fossil skeleton is the most well-preserved protocetid whale specimen from the late middle Eocene. Gingerich and his colleagues used 3D photogrammetry to image the



skeleton and took standard measurements of all of the whale's bones. Their data suggests later protocetids were different from their earlier relatives in important ways.

"It has the first 39 vertebrae preserved in sequence, and the mid-body and tail vertebrae are longer than expected for a protocetid of its size," Gingerich said. "The pelvis shows that it and the hind limbs no longer articulated directly with the vertebral column. The feet are as small as the hands, and

smaller than expected for an earlier protocetid of its size."

"All of these features -- elongated vertebrae, loss of a connection of the pelvis to the backbone, and relatively small feet -- all point to a whale swimming, more or less eel-like, with its body rather than its feet or just its tail," he said.

Scientists first found the skeleton in 2007, but it took over a decade for the whale to make it into the scientific literature. During the first few years after the initial discovery, researchers made several trips to the dig site to ensure they had indeed gotten the entirety of the skeleton.

"Then it took time to remove the hard rock matrix from the fossil, time to study and measure it, time to compare it to fossils known previously, time to illustrate it, time to write a full report, and time to have the report reviewed by peers and published," Gingerich said. "This is just the nature of the process."

Researchers hope future protocetid discoveries will help them fill in the other gap in the record of whale locomotion, the transition from land-dwelling ancestors to the earliest whale-like species.

(Source: UPI)

Boeing's Starliner astronaut capsule fails key test to reach space station

Boeing Co's (BA.N) new astronaut capsule failed after liftoff on Friday to climb high enough in orbit to reach the International Space Station, cutting short a critical unmanned test mission in the embattled aerospace giant's race to send humans to the orbital outpost.

The CST-100 Starliner astronaut capsule was successfully launched from Cape Canaveral in Florida, but an automated timer error, which Boeing could not immediately explain, prevented the spacecraft from attaining the orbit that would have put it on track to rendezvous and dock with the space station, NASA said.

The Starliner's debut launch to orbit was a milestone test for Boeing, which is vying with SpaceX, the privately held rocket company of billionaire high-tech entrepreneur Elon Musk, to revive NASA's human spaceflight capabilities. SpaceX carried out a successful unmanned flight of its Crew Dragon capsule to the space station in March.



The Starliner setback came as Boeing, whose shares dropped 1.6% on the day, sought an engineering and public relations victory in a year punctuated by a corporate crisis over the grounding of its 737 MAX jetliner following two fatal crashes of that aircraft.

The implications for any further design and testing requirements before Starliner is approved for its first crewed mission also remained unclear. The prospect that Boeing might need to repeat an unmanned orbital test flight could substantially delay NASA's timeline and drive up costs.

The plan now is for the capsule to return to Earth on Sunday, about a week ahead of schedule, parachuting to the ground at its designated landing site in White Sands, New Mexico, Boeing's space chief executive, Jim Chilton, said.

The craft, while stable, has already burned too much fuel to risk further maneuvers trying to dock with the space station at this point, NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said at a news conference.

Boeing officials said they were still seeking to pinpoint the cause of Friday's glitch.

"The spacecraft was not on the timer we expected her to be on," Chilton told reporters. "We don't know if something happened to cause it to be that way."

The spacecraft, a cone-shaped pod with seats for seven astronauts, lifted off from Cape Canaveral at 6:36 a.m. (1136 GMT) atop an Atlas V rocket supplied by Boeing-Lockheed Martin Corp's (LMT.N) United Launch Alliance.

Minutes after launch, Starliner separated from the two main rocket boosters, aiming for a link-up with the space station on Saturday some 254 miles (409 km) above Earth. But difficulties ensued with thrusters designed to boost the capsule's orbit to the proper altitude.

"When the spacecraft separated from the launch vehicle we did not get the orbital insertion burn that we were hoping for," Bridenstine said.

Bridenstine said the timer error caused the capsule to burn much of its fuel too soon, preventing it from reaching the desired orbit. NASA and Boeing tried to manually correct the automated errors, but mission control commands sent across NASA's satellite communications network were inexplicably delayed.

"The challenge here has to do with automation," Bridenstine said, adding that astronauts on board would have been able to override the system that caused the malfunction.

Bridenstine said he would not rule out the possibility of allowing Boeing to proceed directly to its first crewed Starliner flight, depending on findings from the investigation of Friday's mishap.

Nicole Mann, one of three astronauts slated to fly on Boeing's first crewed flight test, told reporters, "We are looking forward to flying on Starliner. We don't have any safety concerns."

?NASA astronaut Mike Fincke added, "Had we been on board, we could have given the flight control team more options on what to do in this situation."

Friday's test represented one of the most daunting milestones required by NASA's Commercial Crew Program to certify a capsule for eventual human spaceflight - a long-delayed goal set back years by development hurdles at both Boeing and SpaceX.

The U.S. space agency awarded \$4.2 billion to Boeing and \$2.5 billion to SpaceX in 2014 to develop separate capsule systems capable of ferrying astronauts to the space station from U.S. soil for the first time since NASA's space shuttle program ended in 2011. NASA has since relied on Russian spacecraft for hitching rides to the space station.

NASA initially had expected to begin crewed flights aboard the Starliner and the Crew Dragon capsules in late 2017. Both companies are currently aiming for next year, a time frame reinforced in a statement on Friday from the office of U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, who chairs the National Space Council.

"Vice President Pence was assured that NASA will continue to test and improve, in order to return American astronauts to space on American rockets in 2020," it said.

In a message of sympathy for his Boeing rival, Musk said on Twitter, "Orbit is hard," adding, "Best wishes for landing & swift recovery to next mission."

Occupying one of Starliner's astronaut seats on Friday was a mannequin named Rosie, outfitted with sensors to measure the pressure a real astronaut would endure on ascent to the space station and during hypersonic re-entry back through Earth's atmosphere.

(Source: Reuters)

Media help alter mental image of travelers towards Sistan-Baluchestan

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Media have helped change the mental image of people towards Sistan-Baluchestan province, which was being shunned by many potential foreign and domestic travelers.



“In recent years, a [mainstream] mental image that was influenced by people’s attitude towards Sistan-Baluchestan for years has changed with the help of the media so that we have been able to introduce a number of attractions in the province but there are still that should be introduced, and we have to work hard in this regard,” provincial tourism chief Mojtaba Mirhosseini said on Saturday, Mehr reported.

“The media represent the people and they can be regarded as a bridge between people and authorities, and certainly fair critical reports will lead to amendments.”

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

The vast province is home to several distinctive archaeological sites and natural attractions, including two UNESCO World Heritage sites, namely Shahr-e-Soukhteh (Burnt City) and Lut desert, parts of latter is situated in Kerman province.

Notre Dame Cathedral will skip its first Christmas mass in more than 200 years after devastating fire

Paris’ famed Notre Dame Cathedral will not hold a Christmas mass for the first time 200 years following the fire that engulfed the famed church.

“This is the first time since the French Revolution that there will be no midnight Mass,” Patrick Chauvet, the cathedral rector, told The Associated Press, explaining that it will take place at nearby Saint-Germain l’Auxerrois. “We have the opportunity to celebrate the Mass outside the walls, so to speak... but with some indicators that Notre Dame is connected to us.”

The iconic church remains under construction following a massive fire there in April that destroyed the more than 850-year-old cathedral’s roof and caused parts of the building to collapse, including the spire. It will take several years to reconstruct what was damaged in the blaze, which shocked onlookers all over the world.

Throughout history, the cathedral has been a beacon of hope, holding Christmas mass even through WWI — as Chauvet described, “the canons were there and the canons had to celebrate somewhere” — and during WWII when Paris was occupied by the Nazis. It was last closed for the holiday after 1789 when French revolutionaries turned it into “a temple of reason,” according to The AP.

(Source: [travellandleisure.com](#))



ROUND THE GLOBE

“Forts and Castles, Volta, Greater Accra, Central and Western Regions”

“Forts and Castles, Volta, Greater Accra, Central and Western Regions” is a collective designation by the UNESCO of European-style fortifications and outposts.

These fortified trading posts, founded between 1482 and 1786, and spanning a distance of approximately 500 km along the coast of Ghana between Keta in the east and Beyin in the west, were links in the trading routes established by the Portuguese in many areas of the world during their era of great maritime exploration.



A view of St. George’s d’Elmina in Ghana

The castles and forts were built and occupied at different times by traders from Portugal, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Holland, Germany and Britain. They served the gold trade of European chartered companies. Latterly they played a significant part in the developing slave trade, and therefore in the history of the Americas, and, subsequently, in the 19th century, in the suppression of that trade.

The property consists of three Castles (Cape Coast, St. George’s d’Elmina and Christiansborg at Osu, Accra), 15 Forts (including Good Hope at Senya Beraku; Patience at Apam; Amsterdam at Abandzi; St. Jago at Elmina; San Sebastian at Shama; and Metal Cross at Dixcove) and two sites with traces of former fortifications (Frederiksborg at Amanful, Cape Coast and Augustaborg at Teshie, Accra).

The castles and forts constituted for more than four centuries a kind of ‘shopping street’ of West Africa to which traders of Europe’s most important maritime nations came to exchange their goods for those of African traders, some of whom came from very far in the interior.

(Source: [UNESCO](#))

Yalda is a beautiful manifestation of Iran’s cultural heritage: tourism minister

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Iran’s tourism minister has said that Yalda Night is a beautiful manifestation of Iran’s intangible cultural heritage.

“In the Iranian culture, Yalda is of high importance because it is the aftermath of a long darkness, [it’s an] illumination, and the symbol of the dominance of the light over the darkness. Yalda is a symmetry of our geography and culture,” Ali-Asghar Mounesan said on Thursday.

Of all the ancient Persian festivals, only two are commonly celebrated by Iranians worldwide -- Yalda Night (the birth of a new sun) and Noruz or Persian New Year (the birth of a new day).

Mounesan made the remarks addressing the 4th Yalda Commemoration, which was held at the Niavaran Cultural-Historical Complex in northern Tehran.

The event was attended by foreign envoys and diplomats from China, Austria, Bangladesh, Russia, Turkey, Brazil, South Africa, South Korea and several other countries, CHTN reported.

“We are blessed that there is so much cultural richness in the country and many of those are being shared with the rest of the world.”

The minister said that such cultural affinities helps neighbors becoming closer. “There are Yalda themes in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Armenia and some other countries, which is a source of Iran’s proximity to its neighbors.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mounesan pointed to Iran’s dotar (meaning “two strings”) instrument, which its traditional skills of crafting and playing was added to UNESCO’s list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity earlier this month.

“I congratulate the entire Iranian people on the registration of another intangible heritage of our country, the Iranian dotar, in the [UNESCO list of] Intangible Cultural Heritage. A nation with ancient civilization, unique and striking background that are messengers of a mystical and transcendent culture.”

“In today’s tumultuous world, which unfortunately is mingled with spreading cruelty and oppression, the only thing that can promote peace and friendship is such arts and culture [of the various nations],” he noted.

Yalda is celebrated on the last evening of autumn that falls on December 21 this year. It’s a time for pleasant family reunions that entails laughter, merriment, and good cheer. Hearts move



Tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan addresses the 4th Yalda Commemoration at the Niavaran Cultural-Historical Complex in northern Tehran, December 19, 2019.

closer to one another in the company of loved ones on Yalda.

Called “Shab-e Yalda” or “Shab-e Chelleh”, it literally means the night of the forty. This refers to the first forty days of winter that are often the coldest and toughest to bear. The story of Yalda may perhaps be interpreted as a tale of courage and effort during darkness, a triumph of light and human warmth that ultimately causes the spring to bloom in heart.

People on Yalda Night are usually served with fresh fruits and colorful Ajil (a mixture of dry fruits, seeds and nuts) in floral bowls. To Iranians, fruits are reminders of abundance

in summer. Watermelon and pomegranates, as symbols of bounty, are the traditional fresh fruits of this night. It is believed that eating watermelon before the arrival of winter can immunize the body against illness.

According to UNESCO, Yalda ceremonies, in a best way, point to cultural diversity and human creativity, especially when one considers the wide range of the communities that celebrate it.

Iran seeks to register the ancient festivity of “Yalda” on UNESCO’s list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021.

Historical potteries, human bones unearthed in Iranian town

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Fragments of potteries and human bones have accidentally been discovered during a construction project in Damghan, an ancient town in northcentral Iran.

The discovery was made in the premises of a religious shrine, which dates over one millennium, Damghan’s tourism chief Mehdi Qasemi said on Saturday, IRNA reported.

The newly-discovered objects suggest that the area was home to ancient tombs and burial sites, a notion that needs more investigation to be confirmed, the official explained.

Unfortunately, the potential ancient layers in this area have been vanished due to construction operations by endowment



How to pivot from a dud of a destination

■ Know when to walk away

Ross Belfer, the founder of the travel and hospitality public-relations firm Xhibition, found Dubrovnik, Croatia, to be a bust, or, as he described it, “a charmless tourist trap with generic restaurants and gridlock on the beaches and at sites.” A drive to the less-crowded Montenegro led to a budget-friendly hotel and pristine beaches. “Vacation time is precious,” he advises. “If you are unhappy, don’t wait it out. Move on.”

Marley Blandori, a manager with the luxury tour operator Indagare, took the same tack when an algae bloom interfered with her bohemian beach vacation on the Mexican island of Holbox. She cut her losses mid trip and decamped to Tulum, some 90 miles away. Since it was a Sunday in mid-January, Ms. Blandori felt confident she could show up at one of the many beachfront hotels and score a room. She did.

■ Leave if it feels dangerous

Looking for “edge” on a trip to St. Petersburg, Russia, the travel journalist Hillary Eaton booked lodging through a travel agent in an up-and-coming neighborhood. Even before they arrived, she noticed nearby buildings spray-painted with swastikas and other red flags.

They had traveled more than 20 hours to find they booked a bare-bones hotel. The amenities were nonexistent: no hot water, no sheets and ‘blankets’ that were itchy pieces of carpet. And a lot of uninformed guests.

“Our room had a fist-size hole in the wall opening to the street, so there were swarms of bugs,” she said. “We toughed it out for one night. But when my friends’ laptop was stolen from the room, we decided it was too dangerous and uncomfortable and splurged on a night at the Grand Hotel Europe to regroup.” She disputed the charges and was refunded by her credit card company.

■ Rely on an ally: your credit card company

Credit card companies can perform miracles extricating travelers from sketchy travel situations. During one vacation in France, after we discovered the villa we booked was an insect-ridden horse farm with a septic problem, I contacted American Express. There are more than 5,000 travel-specific support staff globally (one reason I often

book through them) and the staffer I spoke with opened an investigation. We were refunded by American Express.

According to the American Express spokeswoman Melanie Backs, the most effective way to handle a dispute is with evidence.

“If a card member feels that their experience was not as promised, they can file a dispute for the charge,” she said. “Items like receipts, correspondence with the hotel or merchant, or website screen grabs that detail the experience promised, as well as written descriptions and photos, are helpful in conducting the review.”

■ Tap into rewards points

Credit card, airline and hotel reward programs are currency that can help you pivot from a disaster. Hotel bookings can be easily executed with points online (if nothing is available, always call and plead your case). Flights, especially last-minute ones, can be more challenging.

Erin Murray of Points.com suggests that it can be more effective to book the least expensive flight available and use your credit card points to pay down the balance when your statement arrives (versus trying to use points for the entire redemption with a participating airline). She is also quick to point out that if you are a few thousand points short of redemption, all is not lost.

“Most programs have an option to buy points to top off your accounts,” she said. “For example, if you need 4,000 points to complete a flight redemption, these can be purchased for roughly two to four cents a point. This would mean that a last-minute flight can be executed for approximately \$100 plus mileage.”

Another option? Transform a travel dud into a road trip by renting a car with rewards points.

And what happened to us in Sweden, you ask? I used the one bar of cell service available to nab flights out of Lulea. Then I logged on to the app Hotel Tonight and booked Grand Hotel Stockholm, where cozy down comforters and a hygge-inducing spa helped blunt the memory of the tree-house nightmare.

(Source: [The New York Times](#))

The historical evolution of Christmas decorations

The idea of hanging up decorations in the middle of winter is older than Christmas itself. Decorations are mentioned in ancient descriptions of the Roman feast of Saturnalia, which is thought to have originated in the 5th century BC.

Some 900 years later, a Christian bishop in Turkey wrote disapprovingly about members of his congregation who were drinking, feasting, dancing and “crowning their doors” with decorations in a pagan fashion at this

time of year.

The 6th-century Pope Gregory the Great took a different line. The Venerable Bede, an English monk, records that English pagans had celebrated the start of their year at the winter solstice and called it “the night of the mothers”.

Gregory recommended that these celebrations should be reinvented rather than banned. So the construction of green boughs and natural adornments was instead focused on churches — using plants that have retained

their festive significance to this day.

Nature, of course, has a role to play. In countries like the UK, midwinter greenery is limited. The leaves that are available — holly, ivy and mistletoe — became obvious choices for decorations. Mistletoe had long been revered by druids, while holly and ivy were celebrated in English songs at least from the 15th century.

King Henry VIII composed one which begins: “Green groweth the holly, So doth

the ivy, Though winter blasts blow never so high, Green groweth the holly.” (I have modernized the spelling, but it was never very catchy.)

Greenery was cheap and perhaps for that reason is not mentioned in descriptions of domestic decorations from medieval Europe. Aristocratic households preferred to display their wealth by bringing out their best tapestries, jewels and gold platters.

(Source: [science20.com](#))

Say no to Western media’s double standards

By Chen Ping

GLOBAL TIMES — The declaration of the fifth summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), entitled “Shared Vision for a Secure and More Prosperous CICA Region,” explored the possibility of establishing appropriate events for sectors including the media community to expand the scope of people-to-people contact, and the CICA Non-Governmental Forum is just such an event where media outlets from different CICA state members have a wonderful opportunity to share views with each other.

Against the backdrop of “a world undergoing profound changes unseen in a century,” Asian countries share mutual interests, are confronted with common challenges and face common tasks, so it is important to promote mutual understanding and mutual trust among regional players. With 27 member states and 13 observers, the CICA is a pan-Asian multilateral cooperation mechanism that seeks to promote peace, security and interaction in Asia, so it constitutes a perfect platform for promoting multilateralism in an age when unilateralism is threatening to change and even to destroy the current world order. Multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization are also under threat. There is huge room for the Asian media to make its due contribution in promoting multilateralism and opposing trade protectionism.

It is well known that in today’s world, the Western media has more influence than the media in developing Asian countries. This is a fact that we have to acknowledge, and this is also a reality that the Asian media should make joint efforts to challenge and change. We need to get our voices heard in the world.

The world community continues to face numerous traditional and non-traditional challenges and threats. To be specific, some Asian countries are constantly confronted with terrorism, extremism and separatism. While governments of these countries are making great efforts to fight these elements, some members of the Western media have shown double standards in their coverage of such events. A recent example that illustrated the Western media’s hypocritical double standards came when CGTN (China Global Television Network) aired, in early December, an English-language documentary entitled “Fighting Terrorism in Xinjiang,” which exposed the trauma that violent terrorism and religious extremism have brought in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. To the great surprise of the Chinese audience, the Western media was suspiciously silent about it. They simply turned a blind eye to the documentary, ignoring its existence. I cannot help but ask: Does the Western media really care about Xinjiang? Or do they think some of the scenes of attacks committed by terrorists against innocent people in Xinjiang are too bloody and cruel to be broadcast?



I am sure China is not the only victim of such unfair practices by the Western media. If the government of a country is disliked by the West, especially by the US, it will surely fall victim to the double standards of the Western media. I propose that the Asian media should make joint efforts to expose and denounce such unprofessional and unethical practices. The Asian media should explore and report the measures that each country has taken in accordance with its own domestic situation to meet non-traditional security challenges as well as the results these measures have achieved.

We have to keep in mind that the media, no matter what its political tendency or affiliation is, does not have the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, in the internal affairs of any other state. Also, we should oppose any attempts by the media to try to instigate unrest or riots in any other country.

The declaration of the fifth CICA summit also called for the promotion of inclusive and sustainable development and economic cooperation. I think this is where the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) would fit, as economic development is part of the effort to build a community with a shared future for Asia.

Almost six years after Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the proposals to build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, the BRI is not just a vision anymore. It has seen fruitful outcomes in many parts of the world where countries have enthusiastically participated. Some key foreign guests talked about the great importance

that their countries have attached to the BRI when they made speeches at the plenary session of the third conference of the CICA Non-Governmental Forum. This demonstrates the popularity that the BRI has enjoyed across Asia.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) should also be mentioned if we are talking about the BRI. With the CPEC having made outstanding progress in infrastructure, energy and employment, it should be regarded as a model for other countries when they decide how to integrate the BRI with their own development strategies. The media should pay great attention to the development of the BRI in various parts of the world in general and Asia in particular. We should explore the benefits that the BRI has brought to different participating countries.

In the context of the CICA, media outlets from different member states should have more extensive communications and frequent exchanges of views and ideas. The concept of “seeing is believing” is true for the sharp eyes and ears of news reporters. Events such as this roundtable should be organized regularly. This will definitely boost mutual understanding and trust among CICA member states.

The author is deputy executive editor of the Global Times. This is an excerpt from remarks he made about “The Role of the Media in Building the ‘Belt and Road’ and the Asian Community of Shared Future” at the Media Roundtable of the Third Conference of the CICA Non-Governmental Forum held in Chongqing on December 19, 2019.

A new wave of strange claims about Iran and the FATF

1 → By joining the conventions, Iran will be committed to report those transactions that are suspicious to any parties, including the United States. Therefore, if Iran fails to fulfill to the request of the other party, it will be accused of violating the convention, and the possibility of forming an international consensus against Iran will increase.

But if Iran accept the request for the transparency of a

suspicious transactions, it should in fact expose the unofficial ways of bypassing the sanctions to the Western parties.

■ How the cooperation with the FATF results in more economic problems?

It should be noted that discovering ways to bypass the sanctions on Iran is costly for Washington. Brian Hook, U.S. Special Representative for Iran recently announced

a \$15 million reward for disrupting the IRGC’s financial operations. In such circumstances, the U.S. seeks to reduce and legitimize the cost of discovering ways of bypassing sanctions.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has explicitly claimed in July that, through the FATF, the U.S. is trying to discover that how Iran bypasses sanctions.

Given \$738 billion, U.S. war budget hits the motherlode (again)

By Robert Koehler

ANTIWAR — The annual defense budget, passed recently by both the House (377-48) and Senate (82-8), came in at \$738 billion for 2020, up from last year a sweet \$22 billion.

War hits the motherlode every year. “The money just isn’t there” for virtually anything that matters – you know, health-care for all, free college tuition, clean water, eco-sustainable energy production – but we’ve sold the national soul to the war god so long ago that the perfunctory, bipartisan passage of the National Defense Authorization Act comes and goes every year with, at most, a few marginal cries of outrage and a big shrug from the media.

This year the NDAA came with a few extra stocking-stuffers for the warmongers and profiteers. It bequeathed the world an upgraded possibility of nuclear war and guaranteed the universe a future of bellicosity beyond the confines of Mother Earth.

The temptation for me as I write about this is to hide behind a façade of sarcasm as I hurl my scathing little criticisms at the politicians, the mainstream media and the corrupt bureaucratic farce known as the Pentagon. The alternative is to stand naked and vulnerable to what is being done: lobotomizing humanity’s collective thought process, killing the future.

Consider these words of Charles Edward Jefferson, published in the March 1909 issue of The Atlantic – at the dawn, my God, of the 20th century, before World War I set the world on fire:

“Militarism has foisted upon the world a policy which handicaps the work of the church, cripples the hand of philanthropy, blocks the wheels of constructive legislation, cuts the nerve of reform, blinds statesmen to dangers which are imminent and portentous, such as poverty and all the horde of evils which come from insufficient nutrition, and fixes the eyes upon perils which are fanciful and far away. It multiplies the seeds of discord, debilitates the mind by filling it with vain



imaginings, corrodes the heart by feelings of suspicion and ill-will. It is starving and stunting the lives of millions, and subjecting the very frame of society to a strain which it cannot indefinitely endure.”

A hundred and ten years later, the truth in his essay, called “The Delusion of Militarism,” has merely intensified. How hot do they have to get before they can no longer be ignored? Our militarized political focus remains fixed “upon perils which are fanciful and far away.”

Thus the NDAA officially created a sixth branch of the American military, the Space Force, “establishing,” in the words of Donald Trump, “space as a warfighting domain” and guaranteeing that “the United States will dominate in that environment just like all others.”

The Hill explains it further: American corporations will eventually start building factories in outer space and mining “the moon and the asteroids for their mineral wealth.” But have no fears: “The United States Space Force will ensure that no unfriendly power

can impede these activities through military attack. The new service branch will have to be so strong and capable that no other country would think of trying to bring fire and destruction to American and allied space infrastructure.”

So, apparently, expanding the human enterprise into the great beyond will not in any way unify the planet or free political minds from the nationalism and hubris that engages them – not if Trump has anything to say about it (and he does).

Jefferson, discussing The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 – where “everybody conceded that it was better to settle international disputes by reason rather than by force” – points out that “as soon as the legal machinery was created, by means of which the sword could be dispensed with, there was a fresh fury to perfect at once all the instruments of destruction. After each new peace conference there was a fresh cry for more guns.”

But he sees hope on the horizon: “The old policy is wrong. The old leaders are dis-

credited. The old program is obsolete. Those who wish for peace must prepare for it. Our supreme business is not the scaring of rivals, but the making of friends.

“Will America become a leader? . . . Will she, by setting a daring example, arrest the growth of armaments throughout the world?”

Is Jefferson’s irony-saturated question dead and buried, beyond any possibility of exhumation? It certainly seems that way. Militarism – American militarism in particular – keeps claiming the future and seems intent on doing so until there’s no future left to claim. One of the provisions of the newly passed NDAA, for instance, allows the deployment, on U.S. Trident submarines, of the W76-2 tactical nuclear warhead, a low-yield nuclear warhead that puts it in the realm of being a “usable” nuke: possibly the most insane concept in the history of warfare.

Ken Kimmell, president of the Union of Concerned Scientists, writes with alarm: “This bill accelerates the growing nuclear arms race with Russia. It fully funds almost every element of the Trump administration’s trillion-dollar plan to replace the entire US nuclear arsenal with new, more deadly weapons that we do not need, and cannot afford. Most immediately, the bill will allow the Trump administration to quickly deploy the new W76-2 nuclear warhead – a lower yield weapon specifically intended to be more useable in a nuclear conflict. Weapons such as this one make nuclear war more likely and do nothing to enhance our security.”

“ . . . there was a fresh fury to perfect at once all the instruments of destruction.”

Oh, Mother Earth! As soon as we move incrementally toward peace, our soul snaps and all we can envision is war. Nuclear weapons once sat smugly as agents of deterrence. But the W76-2, which is slightly smaller than the bombs actually dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is a weapon to be used – to murder and contaminate, not simply to intimidate. It is not surprising that such a weapon would find its way into the global arsenal.

How would a Pence oval office look on the world stage?

By Andy Corbley

The U.S. House of Representatives, after several months of hearing testimony on the potential abuse of executive power within the Trump administration, voted along party lines, with the Democratic majority succeeding in impeaching the President of the United States for just the 3rd time in the nation’s history.

Taking charge after Barack Obama, analysts wobbled this way or that on what sort of policy Donald Trump would implement. A complete lack of a voting record, combined with the “drain the swamp” rhetoric of his campaign in the run-up to his election, suggested to some that Trump would not preserve the Bush-Clinton status quo of ever-increasing government spending, revolving occupational doors in Washington and seemingly endless warfare.

However the early appointments into his cabinet suggested business as usual, with several key positions being given to neo-conservative politicians who fit right in among the Karl Rove and Dick Cheney’s of yesteryear.

State went to Michael Pompeo, while several neo-cons have cycled through Secretary of Defense and National Security Advisor, each more hawkish than the last. Finally the Vice Presidency was given to Mike Pence, who would take over the presidency if Trump is removed.

■ Who is Mike Pence?

There’s an argument to be made that perhaps Trump’s campaign rhetoric about the wars in the Middle-East being a waste of time and money, many of which being based on lies, is something he truly believes. For example, he has so far succeeded in bringing the United States to the cusp of a peace agreement with the Taliban. However he has not accomplished anything particularly anti-interventionist yet.

Previous members of his cabinet holding national security positions have resigned or been fired based on disagreements with Trump regarding national security issues, the most recent being John Bolton resulting from diverging opinions on Iran.

Vice presidency is not as influential over foreign policy as Sec. of State or Defense for example, but the presidency is more powerful than all of them combined, and Mike Pence could very well find himself in that chair in the not too distant future.

Who is Mike Pence, and what is his stance on national security/forever wars?

■ How bloody these talons

Using data from Justfacts.votesmart and Govtrack, World at Large has put together a picture of Mike Pence’s voting record on foreign policy, defense, and monster slaying since 2003.

■ National surveillance and Homeland Security

In 2002 Mike Pence voted yes to the establishment of the Homeland Security Department and all budget growth appropriations thenceforth until present day. He also voted yes for the creation of the PATRIOT Act, and every reauthorization and extension thenceforth until the present day.

In 2012, Mike Pence voted nay on a bill that “prohibits the Armed Forces of the United States from detaining individuals captured or arrested in the United States without trial, or from transferring such individuals to military custody,” AKA as “Repeals Indefinite Military Detention Provisions”.

As Vice-president, in 2016 Mike Pence signed into law a bill that limits legal public access to body-cam footage of police.

■ Bush’s Wars – Iraq and Afghanistan

In 2002, Mike Pence co-sponsored the AUMF (authorization for the use of military force) in Iraq – a war fought entirely based on lies about alleged-ownership of WMDs by the Hussein dictatorship, and perhaps a measure of revenge for being unable to crush the Islamic Revolution in Iran decades earlier.

Two years later, Pence cosponsored another piece of legislation that gave the army and the presidency a great big pat on the back for disposing of the Hussein regime and liberating Iraq – a country still torn by strife and war to this day. On Thanksgiving 2019, President Trump snuck into Iraq to surprise the troops there, leaving a few hours later before anyone learned of his visit, citing “security concerns”.

In 2006, Pence voted yes on the “Global War on Terror Act” reaffirming America’s commitment to her fallen sons and daughters as well to the mission to create a sovereign, free, united, and secure Iraq.

Pence has never voted for an end to either the Afghanistan or Iraq wars, including legislation that would increase military funding in order to do so. He also voted nay on legislation to remove American troops from Pakistan.

■ Obama’s Wars – Libya and Syria

In a quick succession of months, Mike Pence voted yes, first to deploy US troops to support Obama, Clinton, and Kerry’s foolhardy toppling of the Libyan government, and then nay to remove them.

He also voted nay on a bill that would limit the involvement of US forces in Libya to 1 year.

Pence was not in Congressional office for many of the most significant pieces of legislation relating to Syria.

■ Military funding and budgetary expansion

Mike Pence’s record of voting yea or nay on budgets is a mixed bag, but direct increases in defense spending and R&D are always supported by the former-congressmen/governor from Indiana.

In 2010 and 2011, bills to hack \$420 million away from the congressional budget – held for the purpose of acquiring new and additional planes for the army and navy, as well as another \$500 million for R&D on F-35 propulsion systems. Mike Pence voted nay on both.

Finally, Pence voted to prohibit the dismantling or decommissioning of any nuclear weapons until the President of the United States can confirm Russia is making similar movements.

It may have been unclear what manner of president Donald Trump would be, but it’s painstakingly obvious, based on voting record, what America should expect from her possible future leader in the short time he might have before elections – unending war and defense spending increases.

Andrew Corbley is founder and editor of World at Large, an independent news outlet. He is a loyal listener of Antiwar radio and of the Scott Horton Show. Reprinted with permission from World at Large.

(Source: Worldatlarge)

Cancer mortality in Iran declining over past decade

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** – Over the past decade, the rate of mortality as a result of cancer has been declining in Iran, a senior advisor to the Iranian health minister has said.

A study conducted over the past ten years on 840,000 patients suffering from cancer in the country shows that the rate of mortality has decreased, Mohammad Esmail Akbari told IRNA on Wednesday.



Fortunately, the quality of cancer care in Iran is high and is comparable with other countries in the world, he stressed.

In August, Ali Qanbari-Motlaq, head of the Health Ministry's cancer control department, said a total of 75 centers for early cancer detection were established across the country during the past Iranian calendar year (March 2018-March 2019).

The Health Ministry plans to increase the operating early cancer detection centers to 137 as soon as possible, he added, ISNA reported.

■ Cancer, the third cause of death in Iran

Qanbari-Motlaq noted that after road accidents and cardiovascular diseases, cancer has been the third leading cause of death among Iranians during recent years.

The rate of cancer in Iran is 149.74 per 100,000 population (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) which is less than the global rate of 182 in 100,000 population, he added.

According to the latest data released by the Health Ministry in early June, a total of 108,798 new cases of cancer were diagnosed during the calendar year 1394 (March 2015-March 2016) in Iran, of which 58,092 ones (53.4 percent) were men and 50,706 (46.6 percent) were women.

There were 112,000 cancer patients in the year 1393, including 60,432 (53.9 percent) men and 51,628 (46.1 percent) women. According to the statistics, 149.74 per 100,000 population suffer from cancer, including 156.95 men and 134.43 women per 100,000 population.

Breast cancer (32.9 percent), prostate cancer (16.93 percent), nonmelanoma skin cancer (14.6 percent), gastric cancer (13.70 percent) and colorectal cancer (13.31 percent) are the most common cancers in the country.

World leaders given an F on climate as Thunberg joins Swedish school strikers

Greta Thunberg joined other young climate activists protesting outside the Swedish parliament on Friday for the first time since she embarked on a four-month overseas voyage to attend climate conferences in New York City and Madrid.

At the protest, taking place at the end of the school term in Sweden, activists presented a report card giving politicians an F for "failed" in tackling climate change at UN-led summits over the past decade and the verdict "Needs to try harder!".

Thunberg, the 16-year-old Swede whose solo "School Strike for the Climate" outside parliament, begun in August 2018, swelled into the global Fridays for Future movement, took a low profile as other activists spoke.

"I would give them an F, actually. I know they did try, but they didn't try hard enough," activist Isabelle Axelsson, 18, told Reuters of politicians' work on climate change this year.

Axelsson said she thought Fridays for Future deserved an A for effort, but added: "We haven't accomplished convincing our politicians to act on climate, so I don't think we should pass either, really."

In 2020, weekly school strikes and larger protests aimed at persuading politicians to act would continue, she said.

(Source: The New York Times)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Grown in space

(August 12, 2002)

Plants which spend time in space grow bigger and stronger than their earth bound equivalents, according to researchers in China. This report from Rachel Harvey:

In recent years, Chinese scientists have sent more than thirty kinds of plant seeds into space, including many varieties of vegetables and **medicinal herbs**. The seeds are **sown** in **unmanned spacecraft** before being sent **into orbit** to grow as best they can in **zero gravity**. Now scientists at the Kewei Space Plant Propagation Base in northern Hebei province say they have successfully retrieved some of the space **seedlings** and replanted them back on earth. And the plants **appear** to be **flourishing**.

The researchers say plants grown from space seeds have larger leaves, stronger stems and are more **resistant** to pests than plants grown in the conventional way. The research could have **profound implications** for China which is struggling to feed **a burgeoning population**. And plants may not be the only items on the menu. China announced in April that three eggs which had been sent into space in an unmanned capsule had hatched successfully, to become the first space chickens.

■ Words

medicinal herbs: plants which can be used to make medicines
sown: when seeds are put into the ground to grow they are 'sown'
unmanned spacecraft: a spaceship which does not have any people on board
into orbit: parked a fixed distance in space rotating around the planet earth

zero gravity: gravity is the force causes objects to fall to earth; zero gravity means there is no gravity

seedlings: seeds which have just begun to grow

flourishing: doing very well

resistant: if something is resistant it means it is not easily damaged

profound implications: important future results

a burgeoning population: a growing population

(Source: BBC)

Iran elected member of International Federation of Social Workers UN Commission

1 → The commission supports IFSW representatives and IFSW members to act as facilitators and bridging the gaps between community's aspirations and UN agendas. At the same time, the knowledge of the UN's work shall flow back to the IFSW board and the IFSW members with the goal to create a partnership and realising a social change.

The overarching objective of IFSW representations to the UN is to represent a social work perspective to the UN and the UN Agencies and to work towards joint action based on social work principles.

Representatives will highlight the social solutions that can be achieved through applying the profession's principles and methodologies as a framework for achieving social justice, inclusive participatory democracy, sustainable peaceful societies, social transformation for equality and rights. Representatives are bound to constitution, definition, ethical principles and the policies of IFSW.

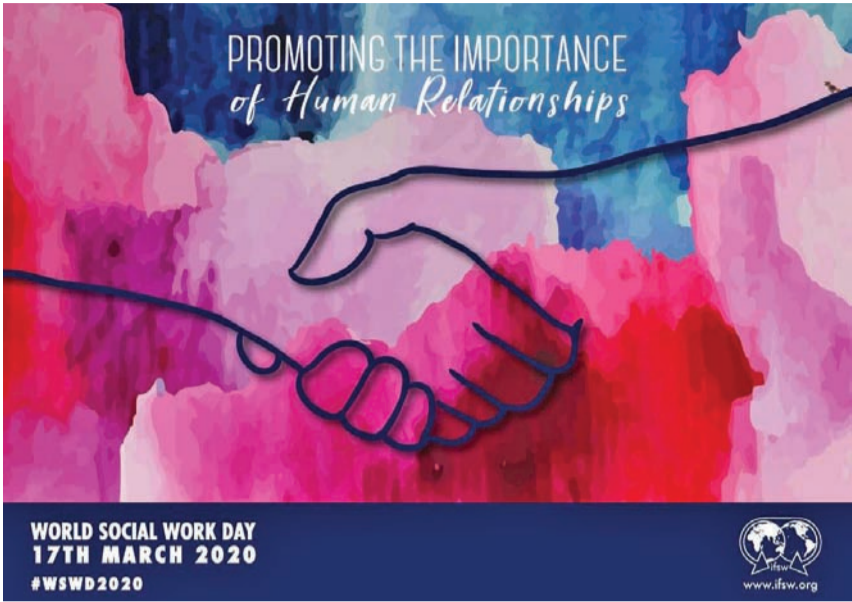
The Commission and the representations work as a part of the wider IFSW body and the work of all Representatives should link with the above objective, vision and work agenda of IFSW UN Commission. Representatives are requested to focus on one or two themes (such as children's rights, health...) that are relevant for global social work and coordinated within the Commission.

■ World Social Work Day

World Social Work Day is on the 17th March 2020. It is the key day in the year that social workers worldwide stand together to advance our common message globally.

This year, the 2020 World Social Day highlights 'Promoting the Importance of Human Relationships'. This is the fourth and final theme of the 2010 to 2020 Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development.

Promoting the Importance of Human Relationships: This theme was established to build international focus on the interdependence of people and the need for change in policies and social service delivery.



5 green reasons to stay hopeful as the hottest decade on record ends

There's no sugar-coating it: as far as the climate is concerned, the 2010s were grim. Global average temperatures for the decade indicate it was the warmest on record. Extreme weather events have increased in both severity and frequency: according to the European Academies' Science Advisory Council, floods have quadrupled since 1980, while droughts and wildfires have more than doubled in that period. In May this year, NOAA recorded the highest concentration of atmospheric CO2 seen in human history, at 414.7 parts per million.

As a letter signed by 11,000 scientists in the journal of the American Institute of Biological Sciences last month made clear, mankind is on the brink of global catastrophe brought on by years of inaction and irresponsibility by the world's largest economies. Yet in their conclusion, the authors of the letter reject fatalism, noting that a recent surge of concern across the world could lead to the transformative changes required.

Here, then, are five positive climate stories that remind us we have the power to turn things around:

■ 5) The ozone layer is healing

A colossal, continent-sized hole in the Earth's protective ozone layer was discovered in 1985 by the British Antarctic Survey. This led, just two years later, to 196 states and the European Union signing the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which regulated ozone-depleting gases such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). As a result, scientists at NASA expect Antarctic ozone to recover to its 1980 levels by 2070.

■ 4) Green energy is now the top pick among investors

The outdated belief that renewable energy is not compet-



Ethiopian girls take part in a national tree-planting drive intended to plant up to 4 billion trees this year. (AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES)

itive is being blown away on the breeze. As reported in this column, recent research in the U.K. found that investments in renewable energy are regarded as the hot pick for 2020 among investors looking for long-term growth. The survey by U.S. firm GraniteShares revealed that renewable energy investments are the top pick among all age groups, beating "conventional" long-term investments such as property and gold, as well as technology. Renewables were also shown to be as popular among women (31%) as they were among men (29%).

■ 3) Renewables are growing faster than any other form of energy

In 2015, more than 500,000 solar panels were installed

Fighting fatbergs: 'This is now a huge environmental issue'



It looks like a 5ft-long grey sausage made of hundreds of scruffy pieces of fabric. On closer inspection, brightly coloured plastic, condoms and rubber bands can be identified in the bizarre-looking mass.

This is known in the water industry as "rag", the technical term for items that do

not degrade once they have been flushed down the toilet. The greyish material that dominates the mass is wet wipes, now the scourge of the UK's sewers. Combined with fat and grease that has been tipped down sinks, it is already starting to build up into a fatberg.

In the runup to the Christmas season of eating and drinking, the UK's largest water and wastewater services company, Thames Water, is urging consumers not to feed fatbergs and to be more careful about what they flush down the loo or wash down the sink.

It is stepping up its "Bin it, don't block it" campaign with a seasonal twist, advocating correct disposal of discarded cooking fats used for the Christmas turkey and roast vegetables. Its latest research reveals that a fifth of consumers confess to pouring fat and grease down the plughole, with those aged 18-34 most likely to do so.

The company typically clears 10-15 tonnes of material a day that has the potential to build up into fatbergs, and this time of year is when blockages tend to be at their worst and can lead to equipment being damaged. More than half of all sewer blockages are caused by fat, oil, grease and wet wipes and other "unflushables". More than 6,500 properties a year nationwide

are flooded as a result.

At Thames Water's 140-acre sewage treatment site near Twickenham – one of its largest – the operations manager, Dina Gillespie, is inspecting the first screening of wastewater and raw sewage that has been pumped into the station. It is filtered by a series of huge screens with rotating roller brushes that pick out the rag – although cotton buds often escape the filters. By this stage the material is untreatable and is put into skips and sent to landfill.

"The festive period is when we're most likely to see fat and grease from Christmas dinners go down the sink, and by around January or early February this can build up and turn into a fatberg," explains Gillespie. "With wet wipes it's a lethal combination. Once they've built up they grow fast. The numbers of blockages fluctuate during the year but peak at about 50% higher in December/January, compared to lows in July/August."

(Source: The Guardian)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ج

Cabinet disapproves production of carbureted motorcycles

While the ministries of industry and interior have demanded the cabinet to reconsider its decision to ban the production of carbureted motorcycles and allow issuance of license plates, the cabinet of ministers rejected the proposal on June 17, ISNA reported on Friday.

Resuming the production of carbureted-motorcycles and issuing license for carburetor motorcycles is against the law, Tehran city councillor Zahra Sadr-Azam Nouri has said.

Referring to the fact that the interior and industry ministers' request was against the law, she said it seems that supporting the private sector and manufacturers as well as employment and income generation is prioritized over public health.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-et, -ette”

■ Meaning:

■ **For example:** This **marionette** performance was the best school program I have seen in my 21 years of teaching.

PHRASAL VERB

Think back

■ **Meaning:** to think about things that happened in the past

■ **For example:** Thinking back, it amazes me how we survived on so little sleep.

IDIOM

Bury your head in the sand

■ **Explanation:** to refuse to face the unpleasant reality by pretending that the situation doesn't exist

■ **For example:** It's no good burying your head in the sand. We've got a problem on our hands.

تولید مجدد موتورسیکلت‌های کاربراتوری خلاف قانون است

به گزارش روز جمعه خبرگزاری ایسنا با وجود درخواست به وزیر کشور و وزیر صنعت و معدن مبنی بر تولید موتورسیکلت‌های کاربراتوری هیات دولت هفته ی گذشته شماره‌گذاری این موتورسیکلت را ممنوع اعلام کرد.

زهرا صدر اعظم نوری رئیس کمیسیون سلامت شورای اسلامی شهر تهران با اشاره به مصوبه هیات وزیران مبنی بر ممنوعیت تولید و شماره‌گذاری موتورسیکلت‌های کاربراتوری، گفت: تولید مجدد موتورسیکلت‌های کاربراتوری خلاف قانون است.

وی با اشاره به اینکه درخواستی که وزیر کشور و وزیر صنعت و معدن در این زمینه از هیات دولت دارد خلاف قانون و مصوب هیات دولت است و نباید مجوز داده شود، گفت: بیشتر نگاه حمایت از بخش خصوصی و تولیدکنندگان است و به نظر می رسد اشتغال و درآمدزایی بر مباحث سلامت افراد ارجح است.

West blocks Syria aid resolution after Russia, China veto rival plan

The Western countries have blocked a UN Security Council resolution sponsored by Russia and China on cross-border aid deliveries to Syria, after the pair vetoed a rival motion.

In 2014, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2165 allowing humanitarian convoys, headed for Syria, to cross four border crossings of Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa in Turkey, al-Ya'rubiya in Iraq and al-Ramtha in Jordan.

It is extended every year and its current mandate will expire on January 10.

On Friday, the Security Council voted on a Russian draft resolution that would have extended deliveries for six months and kept the two crossing points in Turkey.

It received five "yes" votes, six "no" votes and four abstentions, failing to get the required nine "yes" votes for adoption.

France, Britain and the US were among the UNSC member states that opposed the resolution while Belgium and Germany abstained.

It came after Russia and China vetoed a rival resolution, drafted by Belgium, Kuwait and Germany, that would have authorized humanitarian deliveries for a further 12 months from two points in Turkey and one in Iraq. The remaining 13 UNSC member states voted in favor of the motion.

The initial Western-backed draft sought to add a new crossing point to the four existing points and extend the mandate for aid deliveries for a year.

It was, however, watered down, dropping



the Jordan crossing point and allowing the other three for six months.

The three countries, which had drafted the resolution, claimed in a joint statement that the Security Council had failed the more than four million Syrians in need of cross-border assistance.

In response, Russia's UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya estimated that currently only one million Syrians are receiving cross-border aid.

He also noted that the humanitarian situation in Syria had improved and that the council had to recognize that change.

The Jordan crossing point has not been used "for a lengthy period of time" and the volume through the Iraqi crossing "is insignificant ... and could be done from Syria," he added.

Nebenzya further expressed Moscow's readiness to provide humanitarian aid where it was vitally needed.

"Who won today? Nobody," he said referring to the failure of rival resolutions. "Who lost? Those who lost are the Syrian people."

He also criticized the co-sponsors of the Western-backed draft resolution for

seeking "political goals."

Similarly, China's Ambassador to the UN Zhang Jun said cross-border aid was actually meant to be temporary and that the situation had improved.

"Syria has primary responsibility for improving the humanitarian situation in Syria and we should prioritize providing humanitarian assistance from inside of Syria," he said.

■ Syria slams 'hypocrisy' of some UNSC members

In another development on Friday, Louay Fallouh, acting charge d'affaires of Syria's permanent mission to the UN, denounced the political and moral hypocrisy of certain UNSC members, which talk about the Syria humanitarian crisis but launch an aggression and impose a siege on its nation.

He also thanked China and Russia for foiling the Western-backed resolution that exploited the situation in Syria and violated its sovereignty.

He further complained that Jabhat al-Nusra terrorists in Idlib Province take the humanitarian aid that enters Syria through the Turkish territories.

Additionally, Fallouh called for the immediate lifting of unilateral, coercive economic measures imposed on the Syrian people.

He wondered why some Security Council member states remain silent about the U.S. occupation forces' looting of the Syrian gas and oil.

(Source: agencies)

Twitter suspends accounts linked to Saudi spying case

Weeks after U.S. authorities brought a spying case against three Saudi nationals for digging up dissidents' personal data at Twitter, the company suspended tens of thousands of accounts that appear to be linked to one suspect's company.

Twitter announced the suspension of the accounts, saying only that they were linked "to a significant state-backed information operation" originating in Saudi Arabia.

It named as the source of the activity a Riyadh-based social media marketing company called Smaat, which has ties to several high-profile Saudi figures and news outlets.

Smaat is run by Ahmed Aljbreen, according to his LinkedIn account and other social media profiles. The FBI complaint, announced in November, said a man also known by that name controls a Saudi social media marketing company that does work for the royal family.

Twitter and the Department of Justice declined to say whether the two referred to the same person, although a federal source familiar with the matter said U.S. law enforcement

believes that to be the case.

Aljbreen, who is also known as Ahmed Almutairi, could not be reached for comment.

The spying case pointed an unusually public finger at Saudi Arabia, a staunch U.S. ally, and cast an uncomfortable light on the practices Twitter uses to protect its users' personal data.

Aljbreen is accused of acting as a go-between for the Saudi officials and two former Twitter employees who used their positions to access email addresses, phone numbers and internet protocol addresses of government critics.

Twitter learned of the unauthorized access in late 2015, according to the U.S. complaint. A Twitter spokesman declined to comment Friday on why the company did not take down Smaat's information operation earlier.

In its blog post Friday, Twitter said it had removed about 5,929 accounts which targeted discussions about Saudi Arabia and sought to advance the kingdom's geopolitical interests, saying they violated its "platform manipulation policies."

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. report on Khashoggi murder must reveal individuals involved: UN official

The United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, Agnes Callamard, says a U.S. intelligence report on the murder of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi must reveal the individuals involved in the killing.

On Thursday, Callamard told the Middle East Eye (MEE) news portal that those behind the murder of Khashoggi must be identified, and the possible involvement of the Saudi crown prince must be investigated too.

"Mr. Khashoggi's killing constituted an extrajudicial killing for which State responsibility attaches," Callamard said.

"Now, we need to move to the second question: Who within the state commissioned the killing, incited the killing, failed to prevent the killing or created the conditions that made the made the killing possible?" Callamard said. "These are the questions I would expect this intelligence report to answer."

Earlier this week, Congress passed a law ordering the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to present a report to legislators revealing details of the

probe into who ordered the killing and attempted to cover it up.

Callamard said the DNI's report should include the CIA's classified briefings on the murder to Congress late last year - which pointed to the involvement of the Saudi crown prince.

In November last year, The Washington Post reported that the CIA had concluded that Mohammed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) had personally ordered the assassination.

However, Washington has attempted to whitewash the Saudi crown prince's role in the gruesome assassination of Khashoggi despite the CIA report.

Khashoggi - a U.S. resident, The Washington Post columnist, and a leading critic of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman - entered the Saudi consulate in Turkey's Istanbul on October 2 to obtain documents for his pending marriage, but he never left the mission.

Audio tapes that the Turkish government later shared with the world verified that he had been killed and then dismembered by 15 Saudi hitmen.

(Source: agencies)

Muslim nations consider gold dinar to beat sanctions

► "I have suggested that we re-visit the idea of trading using the gold dinar and barter trade among us," he said.

"We are seriously looking into this and we hope that we will be able to find a mechanism to put it into effect."

The prime minister said he had proposed an alternative to the U.S. dollar for trade a long time ago, but added, the efforts to that end have been hampered by world powers.

Earlier, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani had proposed the use of cryptocurrency among Muslim nations as an alternative to the U.S. dollar.

His proposal for an alternative currency is not the first as, in 2002, Malaysia had pressed for the use of the gold dinar for trade among Muslim nations.

The event, which was snubbed by Saudi Arabia, was criticized for undermining the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which represents 57 Muslim-majority nations and organizations.

Malaysia said all the OIC members had been invited to the Kuala Lumpur summit but only about

20 showed up.

Some 450 delegates comprising leaders, intellectuals, politicians and non-governmental organizations from 56 countries have attended the four-day summit.

The summit discussed major issues affecting Muslims, including the displacement of Muslims worldwide, food security, national/cultural identity, and Islamophobia, technology, trade, internet governance, and security.

By the final day of the summit, no joint statement had been released.

"The idea was to come together - assess our strengths and weaknesses as well as our assets. Then, we will use the strengths of one another to overcome the weaknesses we have," Mahathir said in his speech at the closing ceremony of the summit.

"Simply put, if one of us has expertise in a particular area, we offer it to another or all the other participating countries and establish a realistic collaboration."

Mahathir reiterated that the summit was mainly focused on its objectives of finding solutions and



programs to assist Muslims.

"That is what we hope to do. We want to save ourselves and the Muslim ummah and we will persevere in this effort. We hope from this point onwards, our other Muslim brethren will see for themselves that what we intend to do is to unite the ummah on strategic and advanced technologies," he said.

(Source: press TV)

Israeli spyware allegedly used to target Pakistani officials' phones

The mobile phones of at least two dozen Pakistani government officials were allegedly targeted earlier this year with technology owned by the Israeli spyware company NSO Group, the Guardian has learned.

Scores of Pakistani senior defence and intelligence officials were among those who could have been compromised, according to sources familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The alleged targeting was discovered during an analysis of 1,400 people whose phones were the focus of hacking attempts in a two-week period earlier this year, according to the sources.

All the suspected intrusions exploited a vulnerability in WhatsApp software that potentially allowed the users of the malware to access messages and data on the targets' phones.

The discovery of the breach in May prompted WhatsApp, which is owned by Facebook, to file a lawsuit against NSO in October in which it accused the company of "unauthorised access and abuse" of its services.

The lawsuit claimed intended targets included "attorneys, journalists, human rights activists, political dissidents, diplomats, and other senior foreign government officials".

NSO has said it will vigorously con-

test the claim and has insisted that its technology is only used by law enforcement agencies around the world to snare criminals, terrorists and pedophiles.

The alleged targeting of Pakistani officials gives a first insight into how NSO's signature "Pegasus" spyware could have been used for "state-on-state" espionage.

The details also raise fresh questions about how NSO's clients use its spyware.

"This kind of spyware is marketed as designed for criminal investigations. But the open secret is that it also winds up being used for political surveillance and government-on-government spying," said John Scott-Railton, a senior

researcher at the Citizen Lab, an academic research group located at the University of Toronto that has worked with WhatsApp to help identify victims of the alleged hacks.

"Spyware companies are clearly contributing to the proliferation of state-on-state technological espionage. No government seems particularly immune. This is probably further stretching the patience of governments around the world with this industry," he added.

The Pakistani embassies in London and Washington declined multiple requests for comment. WhatsApp declined to comment.

(Source: The Guardian)

ICC wants to probe alleged war crimes in Palestinian territories

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has said she would launch a full investigation into alleged war crimes in the Palestinian territories as soon as the court's jurisdiction had been established.

The announcement by Fatou Bensouda on Friday was welcomed by the Palestinian leadership as a "long-overdue step" but prompted an angry response by Israel.

"I am satisfied that there is a reasonable basis to proceed with an investigation into the situation in Palestine," Bensouda said in a statement.

"In brief, I am satisfied that war crimes have been or are being committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip," she added, without specifying the perpetrators of the alleged crimes.

Bensouda said before opening a full probe, she would ask The Hague-based tribunal to rule on the territory over which it has jurisdiction, as Israel is not a member of the court.

She urged judges to rule on the court's jurisdiction "without undue delay". The prosecutor added however that she did not require any authorization from judges to open a probe as there had been a referral from the Palestinians, who joined the court in 2015.

The Palestinian government welcomed Bensouda's announcement.

(Source: agencies)

N. Korea: U.S. could 'pay dearly' for human rights criticism

North Korea has criticized the United States for taking issue with its human rights record, warning that Washington's "verbal abuse" would only aggravate the already tense situation on the Korean Peninsula, state news agency KCNA reported.

The KCNA statement on Saturday, attributed to a foreign ministry spokesperson, warned that if the U.S. tried to take issue with the North's system of government by citing human rights problems, it would "pay dearly".

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on Wednesday condemned North Korea's "long-standing and ongoing" violations of human rights in an annual resolution sponsored by dozens of countries including the U.S., that Pyongyang's UN envoy rejected.

The North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement is its first since U.S. special envoy for North Korea, Stephen Biegun, publicly urged Pyongyang on Monday to return to talks. There has been no direct response from North Korea to Biegun's entreaty.

Tensions have been building between North Korea and the U.S. in recent weeks, prompting China to call for restraint and compromise. Beijing is Pyongyang closest ally.

In recent weeks, North Korea has been taking provocative actions against the US, calling President Donald Trump and "erratic old man" while launching a series of missile tests.

The rhetoric and tests have stoked fears the two countries could return to the collision course they had been on before diplomatic initiatives got under way last year.

Pyeongyang has also recently promised an ominous "Christmas gift" if the US does not come up with concessions by the end of the year.

North Korea has been demanding the US make concessions to break the deadlock in their nuclear negotiations.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has held three meetings with Trump since June 2018 but little progress has been made in efforts towards denuclearization since then.

Washington has opposed any removal of sanctions against Pyongyang until it agrees to denuclearize.

The U.S. has veto power in the 15-member Security Council. It is unclear when or if the draft resolution will be put to a vote.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Hundreds arrested in India during days of protests over citizenship law

More than 1,500 protesters have been arrested across India in the past 10 days, officials said, as police try to quell sometimes violent demonstrations against a citizenship law that critics say undermines the country's secular constitution.

Additionally, some 4,000 people have been detained and then released, the officials said.

Those arrested and detained had been resorting to violence during the protests, said two senior federal government officials overseeing the country's internal security who spoke on condition of anonymity.

At least 19 people have been killed in clashes between police and protesters since parliament passed the law on Dec. 11. Critics of the law say it discriminates against Muslims and threatens India's secular ethos because it makes religion a criteria for citizenship.

The law aims to grant citizenship to minorities of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Sikh, Jain and Parsi faiths from Muslim-majority Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, deemed as suffering persecution there. The applicant should have entered India on or before Dec. 31, 2014.

Hundreds of protesters and police have been injured in the protests, the strongest show of dissent against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government since he was first elected in 2014.

Modi met his council of ministers on Saturday to discuss security measures related to the protests, government sources said.

Demonstrations continued on Saturday despite curfews and tough measures aimed at shutting down the protests.

India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, has seen the worst violence with nine people killed and several more in critical conditions in hospital. The state, which has long seen clashes between majority Hindus and minority Muslims, is ruled by Modi's nationalist party.

Rights activists in the state said police had raided their houses and offices to prevent them from planning fresh demonstrations. Authorities also shut schools across the state as fresh protests erupted on Saturday.

(Source: Reuters)

Siakam, Gasol sidelined indefinitely for NBA Raptors

Toronto Raptors forward Pascal Siakam of Cameroon and Spanish center Marc Gasol, key players in last season's NBA championship run, will be sidelined indefinitely with injuries, the Canadian club announced.

Siakam suffered a groin strain after awkwardly landing in the fourth quarter of a 112-99 victory at Detroit while Gasol suffered a left hamstring injury in the same contest and will miss at least two weeks.

Also hurt in the fourth quarter against the Pistons was US reserve guard Norman Powell, who is out indefinitely with a left shoulder injury.

The setbacks come with the Raptors, who lost NBA Finals Most Valuable Player Kawhi Leonard to the Los Angeles Clippers in the off-season, sitting fourth in the Eastern Conference at 19-8 after a three-game win streak.

Siakam, 25, has become Toronto's top scorer with 25.1 points a game and best rebounder with 8.0 per contest. He and Gasol, 34, also each average one blocked shot a game.

Gasol is averaging 6.6 points, 6.6 rebounds and 3.4 assists a game while Powell, 26, has produced 14.4 points a game in a largely reserve role.

(Source: AFP)

Barca fined for Clasico beach ball incident

Barcelona have been fined 1,500 euros (\$1,660) and warned the Camp Nou could be closed after beach balls were thrown on to the pitch during this week's Clasico against Real Madrid, the Spanish football federation announced on Friday.

Inflatable balls were tossed on to the field Wednesday in a politically charged fixture which originally had to be postponed due to violent demonstrations across Catalonia.

The match, which finished goalless, was held up for 90 seconds as Barca made a substitution in the 55th minute due to the objects on the field.

After the game 10 people were arrested and more than 60 injured in clashes between Catalan separatists and police outside the ground.

Some 3,000 police officers and private security agents had been deployed for the match amid calls for separatists to protest outside Camp Nou during the fixture.

(Source: Goal)

Struggling Fiorentina fires manager Montella

Fiorentina announced on Saturday that they had fired coach Vincenzo Montella with the club struggling in 14th in Serie A.

"Vincenzo Montella has been relieved of his duties as head coach of the first team," the club announced on its web site. "The decision was taken following a long and detailed analysis of the team's performances and results."

"Given the need to rediscover the necessary grit and determination on the pitch and produce an immediate turnaround, the owners and management decided that a change of coach was the best option," the club continued.

Fiorentina promised a new coach would be announced "in the next few days".



Montella, a 45-year-old former Italy winger, managed Fiorentina from 2012-15 leading the club to two fourth-place finishes in Serie A before he was fired. After spells in charge at Sampdoria, AC Milan and Sevilla, he returned to Florence in April.

Fiorentina lost 4-1 at home to Roma on Friday and have taken just two points from their last seven games.

Buoyed at the start of the season by the arrival of Franck Ribery, the team has been struggling since the Frenchman suffered a serious ankle injury that will keep him out until February.

Fiorentina have started their winter break and do not play again in Serie A until January 6.

(Source: Goal)

Pogba knows Real Madrid won't come for him in January

Paul Pogba hasn't played in three months, he wants to leave Manchester United and he's made that very clear.

However, with the Manchester United board refusing to let him go, his attempts to find a route out of Old Trafford didn't come off in the summer.

The midfielder still wants to move on and his agent Mino Raiola has been on the phone to Real Madrid looking for a positive response that hasn't come.

Real Madrid aren't thinking about signing Pogba right now, and they've told this to Raiola, who has let the player know.

The dynamic has changed at Los Blancos in recent months and, with 200 million euros still to make up after a summer of spending, they won't consider his signing in January.

Zinedine Zidane is still a fan of Pogba, but, with the rise of Fede Valverde in recent months, there is less of a need for the Frenchman at the Estadio Santiago Bernabeu now.

The rest of Zidane's midfielders have also upped their game, while Martin Odegaard is proving his qualities on loan at Real Sociedad.

Manchester United know they have to deal with an incredibly uncomfortable situation and, with 18 months left on Pogba's contract, they know they'll have to sell.

Despite this instinct to cash in on the player, the Red Devils would still demand 100 million euros for him in January.

(Source: Marca)

Nadal aims to carry momentum into 2020 after short break

Rafael Nadal has a shorter than usual offseason this year but he believes he can work it to his advantage as he looks to carry his Davis Cup-winning form into 2020.

The world No.1 led Spain to the Davis Cup title just over three weeks ago then went on a short break before beginning his preparations for the new season.

On Friday, Nadal picked up right where he left off as he surprised himself by putting together a devastating 6-1, 6-3 performance against Russian world No.17 Karen Khachanov in an exhibition match in Abu Dhabi.

"That was a good masterclass. Rafa needs to tell me how much I need to pay him," Khachanov joked after the match.

Nadal feels it was a victory that proved he can keep up his momentum from his strong finish to the 2019 season well into the new year.

"I was a little bit surprised the way that I played. I have been playing well at the end of the season. And it was just 15 days ago, a little bit more that I was winning the Davis Cup with Spain with the rest of the guys, so things went quick," Nadal told reporters in the UAE capital on Friday.

"And at some point it's negative that we didn't have a lot of time (between seasons)



but on the other hand I finished playing well and that helps to keep going playing well."

Nadal's reward is a Saturday showdown with ATP Finals champion Stefanos Tsitsipas, who defeated Novak Djokovic 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 earlier in the day.

The 21-year-old Tsitsipas, ranked No.6 in the world, told the press ahead of the action in Abu Dhabi that one his main

goals for 2020 is to end the year among the top three, which means he would need to squeeze out one of the current 'Big Three' of Nadal, Djokovic and Roger Federer.

■ **Tsitsipas 'has got the game'**

"It's good that he has a good ambition," Nadal said of the young Greek.

"It's important to have clear goals, and then you have to do it, and it's something difficult because being in the top three is

not easy. There are a lot of players that will fight to be in the higher positions of the ranking, but of course he had a great season and he will fight for important things."

Djokovic also sees great potential in Tsitsipas, who has already claimed two wins over the Serbian world No.2 in four career meetings.

"Definitely he's got the game, he's got a really good approach, I think, to tennis, he's very professional, very determined, he's got all the elements he needs in order to reach that," said Djokovic. "So now of course it's a big task for anybody really to be top three in the year. It means you have to be playing consistently well throughout the entire season, really not having any too many fallbacks, or God forbid injuries. "But he's definitely matured a lot and results are proving that."

Djokovic was not discouraged by his loss to Tsitsipas on Friday and is certain he has time to hit his best level ahead of next month's Australian Open, where he hopes to win a record-extending eighth title.

"The offseason wasn't that long and I just recently started playing tennis, but for the level that I kind of thought I'd be on, this is positive," Djokovic said.

(Source: Eurosport)

'I'm 100% Spurs': Mourinho plays down emotions ahead of Chelsea clash



Tottenham Hotspur manager Jose Mourinho says there is no chance he will suffer from conflicting loyalties when he faces his former club Chelsea in the Premier League on Sunday.

Mourinho has won three league titles in two spells at Chelsea but now faces a coaching duel with Frank Lampard, who became one of the finest midfielders in the world under the Portuguese coach at Stamford Bridge.

"I am 100% Tottenham," Mourinho told a news conference on Friday. "No space at all for my previous clubs."

"I gave everything to all of them, but they are my previous clubs. My club is Tottenham so it's so, so easy for me. Not difficult from the emotional side of things."

Former England midfielder Glenn Hoddle, who has played for and managed both London clubs, says Spurs are now bigger than Chelsea in terms of fanbase, training ground and stadium.

Asked about Hoddle's view, Mourinho said: "My club is always the best club in the world, the best, the biggest in the world. Always my club, always."

Lampard got the better of his former mentor last season when his Derby County

side knocked Mourinho's Manchester United out of the League Cup.

The Portuguese said there will be a big hug waiting for Lampard but he will not be inviting him for a post-match drink.

"I don't think so because our stadium is built in the way that our office is completely on the inside our private headquarters," Mourinho added.

"Until now I didn't invite any managers to go there and I don't think I'll do that with Frank."

"I'll always be grateful to him for what he gave me as a player. Nothing is going to change that. I love the guy, I will always love the guy. I hope he loses on Sunday."

Mourinho will be aiming to make it five wins from six league matches that would mean his side leapfrog Chelsea into the top four.

Tottenham's France midfielder Tanguy Ndombele has returned to training and will be available after a groin injury.

However, Mourinho said goalkeeper Hugo Lloris will be out until February as he recovers from surgery on a dislocated elbow picked up in a 3-0 defeat by Brighton & Hove Albion in October.

(Source: Reuters)

Carlo Ancelotti appointed Everton manager



Everton appointed Carlo Ancelotti as the club's new manager on Saturday, with the experienced Italian taking charge at Goodison Park on a four-and-a-half year deal.

Ancelotti, 60, will attend Saturday's Premier League clash with Arsenal, but will not take charge until the Boxing Day visit of Burnley.

The three-time Champions League winning coach was sacked by Napoli earlier this month but comes with a trophy-laden CV from spells at a clutch of Europe's top clubs, including Juventus, AC Milan, Chelsea, Paris Saint-Germain, Real Madrid and Bayern Munich.

His arrival is a coup for the Toffees, who are languishing in 16th place in the Premier League, just three points above the relegation zone.

"This is a great club with a rich history and a very passionate fan base," Ancelotti said in a club statement.

"There is a clear vision from the owner and the board to deliver success and trophies."

"That is something that appeals to me as a manager and I am thrilled at the prospect of being able to work with everybody at the club to help make that vision a reality."

Caretaker manager Duncan Ferguson, who took charge against Arsenal, will be part of Ancelotti's coaching staff after impressing in beating Chelsea and drawing at Manchester

United in his two previous Premier League games.

"I have seen from the performances in the last two weeks that the players are capable of so much," added Ancelotti.

"The work Duncan has done is a great credit to him. Strong organisation, strong discipline and the right motivation are some of the key ingredients in football and I'm pleased that he will be part of my backroom team moving forward."

Ancelotti is used to dining at European football's top table, but his immediate task will be to guarantee survival before trying to fulfil the ambitions of Everton's majority shareholder Farhad Moshiri.

The British-Iranian businessman has ploughed in hundreds of millions of pounds over the past three years.

However, that investment has not reaped much reward on the pitch as Everton have finished seventh, eighth and eighth in the three full seasons since Moshiri's takeover.

"It is a pleasure to now welcome Carlo Ancelotti to Everton. He is one of the finest managers in world football and a proven winner," said Everton director of football Marcel Brands.

(Source: Guardian)

Dressel, Seto clock world records in swim league final

Daiya Seto and Caeleb Dressel clocked short course world records Friday as the International Swimming League brought its high-octane brand to Las Vegas for the season one series finale.

Japan's Seto, who figures to be a star of the Tokyo Olympics next year, made a splashy ISL debut, clocking 3min 54.81sec to win the 400m individual medley -- breaking the previous record of 3:55.50 set by American Ryan Lochte at the short course world championships in Dubai in 2010.

"I was going for it," said Seto, who said the time confirmed his preparations for Tokyo are right on track.

Dressel, whose eight medals at last July's long course world championships included six golds, clocked 20.24sec in the 50m free to break the previous record of 20.26 set by France's Florent Manaudou at the 2014 short course worlds in Doha.

Manaudou, who returned from retirement this year in a comeback aimed at the Tokyo Games, settled for second on Friday in 20.69.

Seto, swimming for the Energy Standard team, was making his first appearance in the series, which was launched this year with eight teams swimming in six meets -- the top four teams advancing to the final.

Vegas, the US gambling haven known for glitz and risk-taking, was hailed as the



perfect venue for a league aiming to shake up the sport, stepping out from under the umbrella of international governing body FINA and offering significant prize money in a quick-paced format aimed at exciting swimmers and fans alike.

"I think what is noticeable about this league is how much chatter it's creating. It's a disruptive force," said London Roar's Cate Campbell of Australia. "I have had people who don't follow swimming come up and

talk to me.

"And I think that really is the first step, getting the name out there and spreading the word and telling people it's swimming reinvented, it's a different way of looking at swimming."

"It's bringing swimming into the 21st century."

The finals are unfolding steps from the Mandalay Bay casino, in a high-tech temporary pool erected for the occasion.

"I remember going to basketball games as a kid and I'd be like 'Man, why can't we have the jumbotron? Why can't we have the lasers and the light show going on?'" said US Olympic gold medalist Nathan Adrian, calling the addition of such elements "awesome."

With a \$100,000 prize to be shared by the team that tops the final points standings -- and double points on offer on the final weekend -- Dressel's Cali Condors roared off the blocks, winning the first five events before Seto's dominant victory.

"We knew we were coming in hot," said Cali's Nic Fink, who beat world champion Adam Peaty of London Roar in the 50m breaststroke.

Dressel opened his day with a victory in the 100m butterfly, with Cali teammate Kelsi Dahlia upsetting Energy Standard's Sarah Sjöström in the women's 100m fly.

Cali's Lily King maintained her perfect record in ISL, winning the 50m and 200m breaststrokes to improve to 11-0 in the series. Dressel would add a runner-up finish in the 4x100m free to lead the meet Most Valuable Player standings heading into the final day on 52 points ahead of Cali teammate Fink, who also won the 200m breaststroke and headed into Saturday with 41 points.

(Soruce: AFP)

IOC President Bach thanks Hassan Rouhani for active support

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — The President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Thomas Bach, has lauded Iran President Hassan Rouhani for government's active support for the Olympic Games.

In a letter sent to Presidential Administration of Islamic Republic of Iran, Bach thanked Rouhani and wished the Iranian athletes all the best.

"Please accept my heartfelt gratitude for your government's active support for the Olympic Games by co-sponsoring the UN Olympic Truce Resolution. The resolution «Building a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, thereby laying the foundation for the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 to take place in peace," Bach said.

"This result contributes to making these Olympic Games a great success and to providing the stage for athletes from your country to shine. They will be competing alongside athletes from all 206 National Olympic Committees, as well as the IOC Refugee Olympic Team," he added.

"The IOC can ensure this universality only by strictly adhering to the principles of political neutrality and solidarity. In this context, I am pleased to enclose a copy of the speech that I gave at the UN General Assembly elaborating on their principles," the Olympic President stated.

"I trust that you and your government will continue to support these principles of political neutrality and solidarity so that the

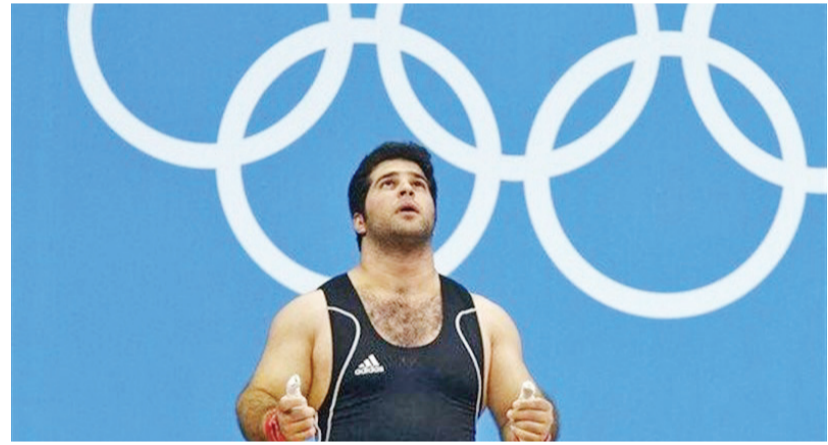


Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 and beyond will be a true celebration of unity in diversity of

all humankind. With my renewed thanks for your support, please accept. Your Excellency,

the assurances of my highest consideration and personal esteem," Bach concluded.

Iran's Nasirshelal awarded Olympic gold medal



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian weightlifter Navab Nasirshelal has been awarded a London 2012 Olympic Games gold medal.

Ukrainian weightlifter Oleksiy Torokhtiy was stripped of the gold he won at the 2012 Olympics and banned for doping.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) said Thursday that Torokhtiy tested positive for the banned substance when his sample from the 2012 London Games was retested using modern methods.

Re-analysis of Torokhtiy's samples from

London 2012 resulted in a positive test for the prohibited substances Dehydrochloromethyltestosterone.

Torokhtiy gets a two-year ban backdated to start from December 2018, when the International Weightlifting Federation first announced he was under suspicion and placed him on provisional suspension. Torokhtiy is the fifth weightlifting gold medalist from the London Games to test positive.

Nasirshelal will inherit Torokhtiy's gold in the men's 105-kilogram category.

Gianni Infantino to travel to Iran in early 2020



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — FIFA President Gianni Infantino has said he is going to Travel to Iran early in the New Year.

He is in Doha, capital of Qatar to attend the 2019 FIFA Club World Cup final match between European champions Liverpool and Brazil's Flamengo.

Infantino wants to travel to Iran to watch the club games.

"I will go back to Iran early in the New Year. I want to watch or witness club games as well where women can enter a stadium.

Does it change a lot in terms of women's rights in Iran or anywhere in the world? Well it is a step, it is a step, in the right direction," he said.

"I think it has a big symbolic value, and certainly it changes the lives or many, many women, who can enjoy their passion which is football as well in Iran," Infantino added.

In October, Iranian women watched the country's national team, when they were given access to a women's section of the stadium for the World Cup qualifier against Cambodia in Tehran.

Iranian athletes banned for doping

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran's National Anti-Doping Headquarters (NADO) has issued final decrees for its doping athlete, which has been approved by the World Anti-Doping Agency.

The organization announced the first phase of the doping athletes' names of the year, whose final verdicts have been endorsed by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

The definitive rulings issued for these various athletes are as follows:

1. Ali Qasemi was banned from weightlifting for four years due to the use of the prohibited substance Stanozolol.
2. Behnam Ebrahimi of volleyball was banned for four years due to the use of the prohibited substance Stanozolol.
3. Yazdan Mirzaei was banned from Wushu for four years for using the prohibited substance Stanozolol.
4. Alireza Nayeb Pashai was banned from weightlifting for four years due to the use of the banned substances Clustabol and Methadone.
5. Mohsen Fayazbakhsh was banned from playing football for four years due to consumption of banned clenbuterol for four years.
6. Jassim Tavousi was banned from cycling for four years due to the banned substance methadoneone.
7. Ali Shariati was suspended from the weightlifting for four years due to the use of the banned substance clenbuterol and methadone.
8. Bahram Harirchi was banned from weightlifting for four years due to the use of trenbolone banned for four years.
9. Morteza Norouzi was banned from Wushu for four years for consuming the clomiphene banned substance.
10. Hamed Talebi Zarrin Kamar was banned from wrestling for four years due to the use of the banned substance Oxandrolone.
11. Blind athlete Mohammed Bakhshi was banned due to the use of the prohibited substance Stanozolol for four years.
12. Blind athlete Arezoo Khorshidi was given a mere reprimand due to use of the prohibited substance Dorzolamide.

South Korea dominate at 6th Fazza Boccia 2019 Championships

South Korea's Youngjin Roh and Yongjin Lee clinched the Individual gold medals in BC1 and BC2 finals respectively at the 6th Fazza Boccia 2019 Championships held at the Shabab Al Ahli Club in Dubai.

Later, in the BC4 category, Seongyuk Jang settled for silver while Yejin Choi and Hyeon Seok Seo claimed bronze in BC3 and BC4 events, respectively.

In a dramatic BC1 final, Roh, a rookie and Seoul Regional Championships gold medallist, rallied from behind to beat Indonesia's Muhammad Syafa 4-3.

Trailing 1-3 until the last minute, the Korean got the better of Syafa on his last throw. Malaysia's Chew Wei Lun took bronze with a 3-2 win over Dohyun Kim of South Korea.

In the BC2 final, Lee stormed to a 5-1 win over Indonesian Felix Ardi Yudha to take the top honor.

"This is the last competition for the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics quota. We have already got BC1/2 Team and BC3 quota. This the first competition in which the Korean National Team and Korean Regional Team came together. So, it was a meaningful



competition for us," said an elated Korea Team Manager Gwangtaek Im.

Ximei Lin claimed the only gold for China on the day, emerging the winner in BC4 final overcoming a fighting Jang 4-2. Korea's Seok Seo took the bronze with a 3-2 win over Hong Kong's Yuen Cheung.

■ Dream debut for Indonesia Indonesian duo Syafa and Yudha also

made an impressive debut by making it to the finals of the BC1 and BC2 events. They ended up settling for silver, but the experience would have done a world of good to their confidence.

"Our main target is Paris 2024. Next year, we have the ASEAN Para Games which will be a good competition," said Indonesia coach Islahuzzaman.

■ BC3 Gold- Silver for Australia

The BC3 final was an all-Australian affair with Daniel Michel overcoming compatriot 3-2 Spencer Cotie for the title.

Team manager Kristy Tannebring, speaking about his team's showing, said: "More than the ranking points, the Championship was important in terms of the team's preparation for the Tokyo 2020 Games.

"We are hoping that our BC3 team qualify for the Tokyo 2020. They are doing good this season and they did well here. It's exciting that the BC3 final was between our players. Daniel has been very consistent while Spencer has great potential."

"The sport in Australia is getting bigger and we also have support from various government organisations and the Australian Paralympic Committee," she added.

The bronze medal was claimed by South Korea's Yejin Choi who beat fellow player Jong Ho Kwon 5-1 in the third and fourth place play-off.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Mehdi Taj meets QFA President Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa

TASNIM — President of Iran Football Federation, Mehdi Taj, and President of Qatar Football Association (QFA) Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Al -Thani held a meeting in Doha, Qatar on Saturday.

Taj has traveled to Doha to attend the 2019 FIFA Club World Cup final match between European champion Liverpool and Brazil's Flamengo.

Two parties emphasized on mutual cooperation to further develop the sport in both countries.

Taj and Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa also discussed about the bilateral cooperation for the 2020 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

Iranian female football referees to officiate Olympics qualifiers

MNA — Two Iranian female referees will officiate the third stage of the 2020 Olympics qualifiers in Asian football.

Mahsa Ghorbani (referee) and Ensieh Khabbaz Mafinejad (assistant referee) will go to China's Wuhan to judge Group B of the third round of qualifiers.

Eight teams have made it into the third round of 2020 AFC Women's Olympics Qualification. The teams have been drawn in two groups of four to play a round-robin format. Matches of the Group B, which comprises Australia, China, Thailand and Chinese Taipei, will be held in China's Wuhan on Feb. 3 to 9.

North Korea, South Korea, Vietnam and Myanmar constitute Group A and will compete in South Korea's Jiju in the same date as Group B.

Winners of each group will take on the runner-up of the other group in two legs and the winners of this play-off games will win the Olympics quota. Japan has already secured its spot in the games as the host country.

Esteghlal, Sepahan match canceled due to air pollution

TASNIM — A match between Esteghlal and Sepahan in the Iran Hazfi Cup's quarterfinals has been canceled due to air pollution.

The match was scheduled to be held on Monday in Tehran's Azadi Stadium but the Iranian Football Organization has announced that the match has been postponed.

Severe air pollution has already forced authorities to shut schools in Iran's capital on Saturday and Sunday.

Iran win two gold medals at 2019 Asian Rowing Cup

MNA — Iranian rowers gained two gold medals on Saturday in the 2019 edition of the Asian Rowing Cup underway in Thailand.



In men's single scull, Bahman Nassiri won the gold medal while rowers from Thailand and Vietnam ranked next.

The next gold was snatched by Nazanin Malaei in women's single sculls. She will also compete in the final of lightweight single sculls on Sunday, according to Iran's rowing federation website.

Both athletes have earlier won gold medals in the 2019 edition of Asian Rowing Championships in South Korea in late October.

The 2019 Asian Rowing Cup kicked off on Dec. 18 in Pattaya and will wrap up on Dec. 22.

Iran U23 football team arrive in Doha for training camp

TASNIM — Iran U23 football team arrived in Doha, Qatar to hold a nine-day training camp ahead of the AFC U-23 Championship Thailand 2020.

Their first friendly against a Qatari club is scheduled for December 25, before challenging the Qatar U23 side three days later.

Iran will be making their return to the Continental tournament after missing out in the 2018 edition. Iran qualified for their third Championship after finishing as one of the four best second-placed teams.

Hamid Estili's team have been drawn in Group C and will have defending champions Uzbekistan, Korea Republic and China PR for company.

Thailand 2020 also serves as qualification to the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, where the top three teams, aside from host nation Japan, will represent Asia.

The AFC U-23 Championship Thailand 2020 is on January 8 to 26.

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

■ Managing Director: Mohammad Shojaeian
■ Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com

» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000

» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450

» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807

» Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603

» www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433

» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com

» Printed at: Jame Jam Barta Borna - 44197737

Tehrantimes79

Tehrantimesdaily

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

GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

He who is generous places himself in the rank of men of high aspiration.

Imam Ali (AS)

Book City Institute to screen “From Music into Silence”

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — Tehran’s Book City Institute is scheduled to screen Australia-based Iranian director Farshid Akhlaqi’s documentary “From Music into Silence” today.

The 2018 movie is the story of a man who changed his life to offer peace and calmness to people influenced by the 13th-century Persian poet and mystic Molana Jalal ad-Din Rumi.



A scene from “From Music into Silence” by Australia-based Iranian director Farshid Akhlaqi.

For the last 23 years, Peter Roberts has the most unusual job in Australia. He is the only Australian music thanatologist. He plays the harp for people who are facing their last moments of life. Peter’s focus is on the dying process, and he helps people to die in peace when often everyone wants them to stay.

Akhlaqi is scheduled to attend the screening of the film, which took him over three years to complete.

“From Music into Silence” has been screened in several international festivals, including the 13th edition of Cinéma Vérité, Iran’s major international documentary film festival, which came to an end last week.

National Museum of Iran to display rare calligraphy works

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — A collection of rare works by Iranian masters of calligraphy will be put on display in an exhibition at the National Museum of Iran in Tehran today.



A calligraphy work by Malek Muhammad Qazvini.

The collection, which belongs to the former mayor of Tehran Mohammad-Hassan Malekmadani, contains works by Mohammad ibn Seyfi Qazvini (1553-1615), who is known as Mir Emad, Malek Mohammad Qazvini (1800–1899) and several other Persian calligraphers.

Master calligrapher Gholamhossien Amirkhani, Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Seyyed Mojtaba Hosseini, and former director of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism Mohammad Beheshti will attend the opening ceremony of the one-day exhibit.

Apple held talks to add James Bond, live sports to streaming service: WSJ

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Apple Inc (AAPL.O) executives met James Bond franchise-owner MGM Holdings Inc and the collegiate athletic conference Pac-12 earlier this year as part of its efforts to boost the Apple TV service, the Wall Street Journal reported on.wsj.com/2PEGhH7 on Thursday.

The tech behemoth’s Apple TV app and TV+ services were launched in November at \$4.99 per month with nine original programs, marking the iPhone maker’s entry into the crowded streaming TV market.

Apple declined to comment to a request by Reuters.

The conversations with MGM and the Pac-12 were preliminary and have yet to reach an advanced stage, the WSJ reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

Artist laments poor quality of Iranian graphic designs

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — The head of the Board of Directors at the Iranian Graphic Designers Society, Fatemeh Karkeabadi, has criticized the poor quality of Iranian graphic designs showcased at the 6th Silver Cypress Exhibition.

Speaking during the closing ceremony of the biennial exhibit held at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran on Friday, she said, “In any case, this biennial is an effort made by the society members despite all the obstacles that were put in the way of the artists who were trying to organize the event.”

However, she added, “The graphic designs are not in their best shape but, certainly are effective and will prepare the ground for improvement in the future.”

Mohammad-Javad Haqshenas, the director of the Cultural-Social Committee of the Tehran City Council also attended the ceremony.

“At the Tehran City Council, we believe that urban graphic designs can help society achieve a visual tranquility,” he said.

“Today, environmental graphic design has been changed into a major factor in social and urban life, and is a key instrument to influence behavior patterns in urban social life,” he added.

Haqshenas asked graphic designers to help the city council create a good mood for people in Tehran.

A number of top works in various categories at the Silver Cypress Exhibition, which is organized by the Iranian Graphic Designers Society, was honored during the closing ceremony of the exhibit.



Winners and the organizers pose during the closing ceremony of the 6th Silver Cypress Exhibition at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran on December 20, 2019.

Alhoda publications to display latest offerings Monday



A logo for the Alhoda International Cultural, Artistic and Publishing Institute.

C U L T U R E d e s k TEHRAN — The Alhoda International Cultural, Artistic and Publishing Institute plans to display a collection of nine new titles published in various languages in an exhibition that will open on Monday.

“The books mostly cover topics such as the position of women in Islam, the theory of salvation in Shia theology as well as historical and religious topics,” Alhoda Managing Director Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Asadi-Movahhed said in a press release published by the Islamic

Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) on Saturday.

“Research works and studies in the fields of humanities, sciences and religious studies can help introduce the real Islam and modern civilization to the world,” he added.

He also said that people from the neighboring countries welcome books published by Alhoda in Turkish, Arabic and Pashto.

He noted that the publisher is eager to collaborate with experienced and knowledgeable writers and researchers.

Tehran gallery holds retrospective of painter Hossein Mahjubi



Iranian artist Hossein Mahjubi in an undated photo.

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — A retrospective of painter Hossein Mahjubi opened at Tehran’s Mehrsan Gallery on Friday.

Ali Shirazi, Taher Sheikhlohokama, Iraj Eskandari, Jalal Motevalli, Fatemeh Chavoshinasab and several other veteran artists attended the opening ceremony of the exhibit entitled “Mahjub’s Days”.

One of the highlights of the exhibition, which will run until January 17, 2020, is Mahjubi’s first painting created in 1949 when he was 19.

Born in 1930 in the northern province

of Gilan, Mahjubi is most famous for paintings featuring flowering trees, loose horses in nature and tiled rooftops in northern Iran.

During his career that spans over a half a century, Mahjubi has arranged over 100 individual and group exhibitions in Iran and other countries across the world.

He has also produced about 6000 works in sketches, watercolors, oil paintings and calligraphic paintings.

Many of his works are preserved by museums and private collectors around the world.

Artist at center of Italian anti-racism row defends ape pictures

MILAN (Reuters) — Artist Simone Fugazzotto defended on Tuesday a widely criticized anti-racism campaign launched by Italy’s Serie A soccer league which features his paintings of apes.

Racism has long plagued Italian soccer, with black players frequently targeted by insults at stadiums, and the media showing little sensitivity to the issue.

“I am proud of what I have done because maybe for the first time... we can really confront this problem,” Fugazzotto told Reuters.

Looking to tackle the problem of racism head on, Serie A has promoted a series of three paintings of chimpanzees by Fugazzotto beneath the slogan “No To Racism”.

The initiative has drawn a firestorm of criticism on social media, and major Serie A teams distanced themselves from the campaign, but Fugazzotto said he had been looking to challenge prejudices.

“I sought to turn around the words of racists. At the stadium they shout ‘monkey’, they throw bananas on the pitch and make monkey noises so I said... I will turn around this monkey theme and I will say we are all monkeys,” he said.

The artwork first appeared on Italian TV and newspapers in the summer and drew no reaction, but there was a fierce kickback on Monday when it was presented at an event in Milan, with negative comments rapidly tearing through social media.

“I expected some controversy, but not



Italian artist Simone Fugazzotto, who designed an anti-racism artwork featuring three side-by-side paintings of apes that was presented by Italian soccer league Serie A, poses for a photograph in Milan, Italy, December 17, 2019. (Reuters/Flavio Lo Scalzo)

like this,” said Fugazzotto, describing the response as a “complete madhouse”.

Anti-racism group Fare described the use of chimpanzee images as a “sick joke” while leading Serie A clubs AS Roma and AC Milan condemned the campaign.

“We understand the League wants to tackle racism but we don’t believe this is the right way to do it,” Roma wrote on Twitter. Milan said they strongly disagreed with the decision to use monkeys.

The two clubs this month denied access to their training centers to reporters from Italian daily Corriere dello Sport, after the newspaper splashed a frontpage headline “Black Friday” above a picture of two black players.

Netflix says “Klaus” is a hit with nearly 30 million views worldwide

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Netflix Inc’s (NFLX.O) animated holiday movie “Klaus” has been watched in nearly 30 million households worldwide during its first month, landing among the streaming service’s most-watched original movies, according to data the company provided to Reuters.

“Klaus,” a story of how Santa came to be, is Netflix’s first original animated film and part of an effort to build a library of family programming as it competes with new streaming rivals including Walt Disney Co (DIS.N).

Netflix only selectively releases viewership figures for programming it considers a hit, and the numbers are not verified by a third party. The company counts a view when an account streams at least 70% of a movie.

“Klaus” has attracted high repeat viewing that is not included in the nearly 30 million figure, Netflix said. The number reflects viewership over the first 28 days since its Nov. 15 debut.

Made mainly using hand-drawn animation, the film tells the story of a selfish postman and a reclusive toymaker who form an unlikely friendship. It was written and directed by Spanish animator and “Despicable Me” creator Sergio Pablos and features the voices of J.K. Simmons and Jason Schwartzman.

The world’s largest streaming service, Netflix boasts more than 158 million subscribers around the world. But it is



A still image from the animated film “Klaus” is seen in this undated handout received on December 18, 2019. (Netflix/Handout via Reuters)

facing new competition, particularly from Disney, which has been removing its movies from Netflix and putting them on the Disney+ streaming service.

Netflix has disclosed other data to show the appeal of its children’s and family programming. It previously announced that live-action movie “Tall Girl” was watched by more than 40 million accounts during its first four weeks, and Indian animated series “Mighty Little Bheem” has been viewed by 27 million.

The company plans to release several animated films for kids and families next year, said Melissa Cobb, Netflix’s vice president of original animation. They include comedy “The Willoughbys,” an adaptation of a children’s book, and musical “Over the Moon.”