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Syrian Prime Minister Imad Khamis(L) holds talks with Iran's top security official Ali Shamkhani in Tehran on Monday, January 13, 2020.

Real revenge will be expulsion of U.S. forces

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Iraqi Construction Coalition agrees that Abdul-Mahdi stay in power

The Construction Coalition, the biggest bloc in the Iraqi parliament, has agreed that caretaker PM Adel Abdul-Mahdi stay in power, the Iraqi media reported on Monday, quoting sources.

The coalition agrees that Abdul Mahdi continue to work as prime minister if the Iraqi Kurdistan authorities back the decision, the media said.

The sources said if Abdul-Mahdi succeeds to win the favor of Kurds for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, the Construction Coalition would agree that he stay in power.

On 5 Jan 2020, Iraq's parliament passed a resolution that asks the government to end the presence of foreign troops in the country. **->10**

Guardian Council releases list of candidates eligible to run for parliament

TEHRAN — The Guardian Council released on Sunday the list of candidates who are considered competent to run for parliamentary elections.

Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei, the spokesman for the Guardian Council, said in a tweet late on Saturday that the process of studying qualification of the candidates has ended.

The council announced on Sunday

that the candidates who opposes the result of the study can file complaint from January 12 to January 16.

MPs Ali Motahari, Mahmoud Sadeghi, Hossein Naghavi Hosseini, Nader Ghazipour, Mohammad Reza Tabesh and Elias Hazrati are among those candidates who have been found ineligible to run for the elections. **->2**

National steel festival, exhibition running in Tehran

TEHRAN — The 2nd National Iranian Steel Festival and Exhibition (N.I.S.F) kicked off at Milad Tower in Tehran on Monday and will run until Thursday, IRIB reported.

As reported, a number of deputies from Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade participated in the inauguration ceremony of the event.

Over 130 domestic producers and suppliers are showcasing their products,

services and technology in the national exhibition.

Focusing on the knowledge-based companies and startups and those production units expediting the process of indigenizing in the country is a major feature of this year's exhibition and conference.

Iran's Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani says the country has achieved a proper self-reliance in steel industry. **->4**

ARTICLE
Hadi Mohammadi
Political analyst

Great achievement of Operation Martyr Soleimani

In the morning of December 7, 1941, Japanese jet fighters attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor Island amid of WWII.

It has been 78 years since then until the morning of January 18, 2020, when Iran launched missile strikes against the Ayn al-Asad air base housing U.S. troops in a retaliatory operation following the assassination of commander Soleimani by Trump and officially claimed the responsibility.

The Islamic Republic of Iran proved to both the U.S. and all the countries that have been the target of U.S. aggression for the past 78 years that it is able to confront the so called world power and respond properly to its crimes.

However, the exact number of American casualties in the operation is not clear and the U.S. claimed there were no damage. One should bears in mind that we are living in a world that the U.S. has been attacking any country on any pretext for 78 years just because of having political and military power. No state has so far been able or willing to give a proper response to the aggressive nature of Washington.

We have been hearing for years that the U.S. occasionally turns the weddings or other civilian gathering into a battlefield on the pretext of fighting terrorism in our neighboring countries, some of which have strategic weapons of mass destruction. The notable point is that none of these countries have so far dared to counter such crimes.

With Operation Martyr Soleimani, the Islamic Republic of Iran showed Washington and all the states that have been under the aggression of this world power that it has the ability to respond harshly to its crimes.

So far Iran has won the gig battle and the Americans who believed that whenever their flag was mounted could not be targeted by any force, should take care of wounded troops and bodies in the Ayn al-Asad air base.

It is a great disaster that not only undermines America's reputation in the region further but will be an alarm for Trump's political future to remind him of Carter's fate more than ever.

Few U.S. presidents have been as amoral as Trump: Joseph Nye

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Joseph S. Nye Jr., former Dean of the Harvard's Kennedy School of Government says "Many judgments about ethics and foreign policy are haphazard or poorly thought through, and too much of the current debate focuses on the personality of Donald Trump."

Former U.S Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs says "some of Trump's actions are not unprecedented in the record of all our presidents since the Second World War."

"No presidents have been perfectly moral, but few have been as amoral as Trump," Nye tell in an exclusive interview to Tehran Times.

Following is the full text of the interview:
■ What has been your main question in the

book of "Do Morals Matter?"

A: Many people say morals play no role in foreign policy. States must provide for their own defense, and when survival is at stake, the ends justify the means. Where there is no meaningful choice there can be no ethics. As philosophers say, "ought implies can." No one can fault you for not doing the impossible. By this logic, combining ethics and foreign policy is a category mistake, like asking if a knife sounds good rather than whether it cuts well, or whether a broom dances rather than sweeps well. By this logic, in judging a president's foreign policy we should simply ask whether it worked, not also ask whether it was moral. While this view has some merit, it ducks hard questions by oversimplifying. The absence of

world government does not mean the absence of all order. Some foreign policy issues relate to our survival as a nation, but most do not. Since World War II, the United States has been involved in several wars but none were necessary for our survival. And many important foreign policy choices about human rights or climate change or Internet freedom do not involve war at all. Most foreign policy issues involve trade-offs among values that require choices, not application of a rigid formula of "raison d'état."

■ What Hypothesis did you use to answer this question? What is your central argument?

A: Since we are going to use moral reasoning about foreign policy, we should learn to do it better. **->7**

U.S. troops clear rubble from Iraq base days after Iran strike

U.S. troops cleared rubble and debris from a military base housing American soldiers in western Iraq on Monday, days after it was struck by a barrage of Iranian ballistic missiles

Meanwhile, Iraqi news websites have published leaked pictures from inside the U.S. Ain Al-Asad Airbase in the Iraqi governate of Al Anbar, following the Iranian missile strike, Arabi21.com reported.

The pictures show severe damage of the airbase, which hosts U.S. forces. Meanwhile, Iranians have also published videos on social media claiming to show the damage inside the airbase.

The pictures were published at the same time as other images captured by satellite were also published, showing the sites which were hit by the Iranian ballistic missiles.

This came following an announcement by Iran's

Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC), that it had launched 22 ballistic missiles at U.S. bases in Iraq, causing much damage and deaths among the US troops.

However, the U.S. have disclosed that no human losses were reported, and U.S. president, Donald Trump, tweeted that "all is well" after the attack.

An Associated Press crew touring the Ain al-Asad base Monday saw large craters in the ground and damaged military trailers as well as forklifts lifting rubble and loading it onto trucks from a large area the size of a football stadium.

The air base in Iraq's western Anbar province is a sprawling complex about 180 kilometers (110 miles) west of Baghdad shared with the Iraqi military and housing about 1,500 members of the U.S. military and the U.S.-led coalition fighting

the Islamic State militant group.

Although no soldiers were killed, he said several were treated for concussions from the blast and are being assessed by professionals. Myles added that troops received notification the missiles were on their way thanks to early warning systems, and troops were moved out of harm's way. He described soldiers who lived through the attack as "warriors."

The Ain al-Asad air base was first used by American forces after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, and later saw American troops stationed there amid the fight against the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria.

President Donald Trump visited the sprawling air base in December 2018, making his first presidential visit to troops in the region. Vice President Mike Pence has also visited the base.



Iran, Pakistan confer on deescalating tensions in the region

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mahmood Qureshi, in a meeting in Tehran on Monday, exchanged views over ways to reduce tension in the Persian Gulf region.

There was no detail of the talks.

The Pakistani minister arrived in the holy city of Mashhad in northeastern Iran. He further worshipped Imam Reza (PBUH) holy shrine before leaving Mashhad for Tehran. **->2**

'Iran missile strikes shattered U.S. invincibility myth'

A top official from the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement says Iran's precision missile strikes at US military bases in Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), shattered Washington's invincibility myth.

"Iran, by bombing the bases, exposed the American arrogance and put an end to the US invincibility myth. It demonstrated that it stands... prepared for any confrontation. The blood of Lt. Gen. Soleimani marks the end of American presence in Iraq and the region, so the United States no longer has a future in the region," Nabil Qaouk, the deputy head of Hezbollah's executive council, said at a memorial ceremony held in Lebanon's southern town of Khiam on Monday. He further noted that the Iranian attack on Ain al-Asad air base marks the start of a response, which will not conclude until the full withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and West Asia.

On Sunday, Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said the Iranian missile strikes sent the message that all American targets in West Asia are within the range of Iranian missiles.

"This attack was also a message to the Zionist entity... Let stupid [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu know the wrong spot he has put his entity in," Nasrallah said in a televised speech broadcast live from the southern Lebanese city of Baalbek as he addressed his supporters.

He added, "Look at the faces of the US leaders... Do they look like victorious faces?"

The Hezbollah chief then slammed mainstream Arab news networks for being far too pro-US over their attempts to underreport the Iranian strikes and the extent of damage caused.

The US military carried out a terrorist operation at Baghdad's international airport last Friday, assassinating Lt. Gen. Soleimani, along with his companions, including Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's PMU.

Both commanders were admired by Muslim nations for eliminating the US-sponsored Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

The US assassination has drawn a wave of condemnation from officials and movements throughout the world, and triggered huge public protests across the region. (Source: Press TV)

Government apologizes for mishandling of information about plane crash

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Government spokesman Ali Rabiei, in a press conference on Monday, acknowledged that the country's defective cycle of information was the cause of misinforming people about the crash of the Ukrainian passenger plane, expressing official apology for the shortcoming.

The plane, with 176 people aboard, was mistakenly downed on Wednesday morning by the IRGC air defense system. It happened a few hours after Iran fired dozens of missiles at the U.S. airbase inside Iraq in retaliation to the assassination of Iranian Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3. According to IRGC Aerospace Force Commander Amir Ali Hajzadeh, the operator at the airbase had mistaken the plane for an attacking cruise missile.

The victims of the crash included 82 Iranians, 63 Canadians, 11 Ukrainians, 10 Swedes, four Afghans, three Germans, and three British nationals.

Iran's Armed Forces issued a statement on Saturday morning announcing that the Ukrainian passenger plane was shot down near the Imam Khomeini Airport due to a "human error".

"The Ukrainian passenger plane was hit unintentionally and due to human error which unfortunately led to martyrdom of a number of our people and also a number of foreign nationals," the statement read.

Rabiei criticized the defective cycle of information, saying, "In fact, the government itself is wrapped in a defective cycle of providing and receiving information."

"Some people are criticizing that why the government did not conduct more studies before announcing its stance, but, we sent several inquiries to the relevant officials before releasing our view and the entire relevant officials, based on their information at the time, told us that there were no any missile fire," Rabiei explained.

"Hereby, we apologize to the dear Iranian nation, public opinion and journalists," he added.

Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said on Sunday that Iran had no intention to hide causes of the plane crash.

"From the beginning of the crash, we had no intention to hide its causes," he said during a memorial service for two victims of the crash.

It took time to announce the causes due to necessity to investigate all hypotheses, especially "possible actions of the enemies in jamming", "hack of the systems" and "the issue of infiltration", explained Shamkhani who served as defense minister in the Khatami administration from 1997 to 2005.

On Saturday, hundreds of people gathered in front of the main universities in Tehran to voice their protests over the late admission of downing the Ukrainian plane and misinforming the people.

Similar protest gatherings were held in the country's large cities on Saturday and Sunday.

Rouhani signs law designating Pentagon as terrorist organization

POLITICAL TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on Monday signed into law a bill designating the Pentagon as a terrorist organization.

Rouhani instructed the relevant bodies to implement the resolution, which was passed during an open session of the parliament on January 7 and was endorsed by the Guardian Council on the same date.

On April 8, 2019, U.S. President Donald Trump said he had designated the IRGC a foreign terrorist organization.

On January 7, the Iranian lawmakers unanimously voted for an emergency motion to designate the U.S. forces as terrorist in response to the assassination of top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3.

The triple-urgency bill is an amendment to the April 2019 law by which Iran had outlawed the United States Central Command.

The new law designates all members of the United States Department of Defense (Pentagon) and organizations or agencies affiliated with it as terrorist organizations.

Iran, Pakistan confer on deescalating tensions in the region

1 → On Sunday evening, the Pakistani foreign minister also held a meeting with President Hassan Rouhani.

In the meeting, Rouhani said Iran is willing to have close relations with all regional countries. "We believe that division in the Islamic community is not beneficial to anyone and we completely welcome Pakistan's efforts for promoting regional peace and stability in this regard."

The president also referred to the fragile situation of the region, saying, "In the current condition, we must all cooperate with each other to establish peace and stability and ease tensions."

Rouhani also emphasized that war and tensions in the region could be very dangerous, stating, "The Islamic Republic of Iran, while fully prepared to defend its own interests, has never sought to ignite a war in the region, so the operation against the American base was in fact a response to America's criminal act."

Tensions in the Persian Gulf region have entered a new phase as the United States assassinated top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3, a highly dangerous move which pushed the region closer to a hot war.

The assassination, which was committed upon direct order by Donald Trump, was considered as an act of war against Iran.

To avenge the death of General Soleimani, on January 8, on the dead of the night, Iran fired more than ten missiles at a U.S. airbase in western Iran from which the U.S. had flown drones to martyr Soleimani.

Interim Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi said Soleimani was visiting Baghdad to meet him on how to normalize ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Guardian Council releases list of candidates eligible to run for parliament

1 → Shahindokht Molaverdi, the former vice president for women's and family affairs in the Rouhani administration, has also been banned to run for the parliament.

The Guardian Council has rejected the competence of 120 sitting MPs who had registered to run in the February election. However, MP Ghasem Mirzaei Nikoo told ISNA on Monday that the competence of 30 of the 120 MPs were confirmed on Sunday night.

The elections for the 290-seat parliament will be held on February 21.

Real revenge will be expulsion of U.S. forces: Iran

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iranian First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri said on Monday that the real revenge for assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani will be expulsion of the United States troops from the region.

"The real revenge for the United States' criminal and illegal actions, at the top of which is assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, will be their expulsion from the region," he said during a meeting with Syrian Prime Minister Imad Khamis in Tehran.

Jahangiri said that interferences by certain Western countries, especially the U.S., have caused instability and insecurity in the West Asia region.

He also said that assassination of Soleimani has increased the people's hatred towards the U.S.

The Syrian prime minister was welcomed by Jahangiri, the first vice-president, in Sa'ad Abad complex on Monday morning.

Khamis was accompanied by a high-ranking delegation including Foreign Minister Walid Moallem and Ali Ayoub, the country's defense minister.

The visit by the Syrian delegation was primarily aimed to discuss bilateral ties and the latest regional and international developments as well as offering condolences to senior Iranian officials over the martyrdom of General Soleimani.

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

However, in a highly dangerous move, the



Syrian PM Khamis (L) meets VP Jahangiri in Tehran.

United States assassinated this anti-terror general in Baghdad on January 3. Iran retaliated to the hostile act by firing ballistic missiles at a U.S. airbase in western Iraq.

'Soleimani was symbol of fight for liberation'

For his part, the Syrian prime minister called Soleimani a "symbol of fight for liberation and regional security".

"Syria stresses Iran's right to defend itself and counter enemies' aggression," Khamis said in reference to Iran's retaliation to the

U.S. highly dangerous act.

He added, "We express sympathy with our brothers in the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The prime minister also called for closer cooperation to counter the U.S. plots.

'Shamkhani: Iran gave 'crushing' response to U.S. criminal act'

Khamis also held talks on Monday with the secretary of Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani, voicing Damascus's enthusiasm to broaden all-out ties with Iran. During the meeting, Shamkhani said Iran

gave a "crushing response to the U.S. criminal act" by showering missiles on the U.S. military base in Iraq and thereby proved that the Islamic Republic "never compromises on its security and national interests".

The top security official also said so long as the U.S. stays in the West Asia region there will be no durable security, adding the "evil exit" of Americans will be realized through cooperation and solidarity between regional countries.

'Soleimani assassination has empowered resistance front'

In a separate meeting with the Syrian prime minister, Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said that Soleimani's assassination has empowered the resistance front.

He also said that Soleimani's martyrdom boosted unity among the Iranians.

'Defense minister: Trump increases U.S. costs in the region'

In a meeting with his Syrian counterpart accompanying the prime minister, Iranian Defense Minister Amir Hatami also said Donald Trump has increased the "cost" of the U.S. presence in the region by the strategic mistake of ordering the Soleimani assassination.

'Reconstruction of Syria'

In the talks between Iranian and Syrian officials, the sides also called for efforts to expand bilateral relations.

"Iranian private companies are highly interested in having active participation in reconstructing Syria. Now that coordination has been made and agreements to reconstruct Syria have been concluded, I hope we would witness positive results in 2020," Vice President Jahangiri stated.

Iran's reaction to Trump's tweet: Don't dishonor our language

(Press TV) — Iran has called President Donald Trump's bluff on expressing support for Iranian protesters in Farsi just after he threatened to attack their cultural heritage, asking the U.S. president not to defile the Persian language.

"Hands and tongues smeared with threatening, sanctioning and terrorizing the #Iranian nation, are not entitled to dishonor the ancient #Persian_language," Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi tweeted late Sunday.

Trump's tweet came after dozens of people protested outside a university in downtown Tehran to denounce officials' belated confirmation of a Ukrainian passenger plane unintentionally downed outside the Iranian capital.

"To the brave, long-suffering people of Iran: I've stood with you since the beginning

of my Presidency, and my Administration will continue to stand with you. We are following your protests closely, and are inspired by your courage," wrote Trump.

The U.S. president had uncharacteristically remained silent as several million Iranians took to streets for days to honor General Qassem Soleimani who was assassinated on Trump's order in Baghdad.

"By the way, are you actually 'standing by' millions of Iranians whose hero you just assassinated or 'standing against' them?!", Mousavi asked.

Trump's reference to the suffering of the Iranian people was also ironical because it has largely been caused by his most draconian sanctions on the country.

On Friday, his administration announced new sanctions targeting Iran's construction, manufacturing, textiles, mining, aluminum, copper, iron and steel industries.

Apart from threatening to attack sites "very important" to the Iranian culture, the U.S. president has described Iran as a "terrorist nation" and outraged Iranians by referring to the Persian Gulf as "Arabian".

Trump's tweet in Farsi also drew denunciation from Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi.

"The Farsi language is a symbol of the Iranian culture. Until yesterday, the repeated threat of Iranian cultural sites and today dialogue with Iranians in Persian!" he tweeted.

Iran summoned the Swiss envoy representing

U.S. interests in Tehran this month to protest against Trump saying Washington would target Iranian sites if Tehran attacked Americans.

Trump wrote in a series of tweets that "if Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets, we have targeted 52 Iranian sites... some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD."

The U.S. president's appeal to protesters came after Iran defied those threats and made good on its promise to hit two American military bases in Iraq with a volley of ballistic missiles.

On Sunday, the Trump administration tried to stoke up and amplify protests in Iran by suggesting that the Islamic Republic was under internal threat.

Poll: 56% of Americans disapprove of Trump's Iran policy

56% of Americans say they disapprove of President Trump's handling of heightened tensions with Iran, according to an ABC News poll conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs.

52% of Americans said the Trump administration's decision to kill Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani in an airstrike makes them feel "less safe," despite assurances from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other top officials that the U.S. is safer with Soleimani gone.

Approval of the airstrike breaks down along party lines. 87% of Republicans approved of Trump's decision-making on Iran, and 54% said they feel safer. 90% of Democrats said they disapproved, and 82% feel less safe.



57% of independents — a key electoral target for both parties — disapprove of Trump's handling of the situation, with 51% saying they feel less safe.

This poll was conducted between Jan. 10–11 in English and in Spanish, among a random national sample of 525 adults. It has a margin of sampling error of ±4.8 points.

Venezuela's top diplomat to visit Iran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Minister of Foreign Affairs of Venezuela Jorge Alberto Arreaza Montserrat is planning to travel to Iran next week.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Arreaza, a former vice president, is scheduled to pay a three-day visit to the Islamic Republic on January 19-21.

He is expected to hold meetings with senior Iranian officials during the visit.

In October 2019, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani held a meeting with his Venezuelan counterpart Nicolas Maduro on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Baku.

In the gathering, the Iranian president lauded the resistance of the Iranian and Venezuelan nations against the U.S. bullying and pressure as "praiseworthy", saying Washington's plots against the



Islamic Republic and the Latin American country had failed.

Last week, following the American assassination of top Iranian commander Lt. General Qassem Soleimani, Venezuela's Defense Minister General Vladimir Padrino Lopez condemned the U.S. move as "a terrorist act", stressing that Caracas will side with Tehran in the campaign against the global arrogance.

China reiterates it is against U.S. sanctions on Iran

By staff and agency

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang said on Monday that Beijing is against the United States' unilateral sanctions on Iran.

"To begin with, our principled position is clear-cut. We are against unilateral sanctions and the so-called 'long-arm jurisdiction'," he said at a press conference.

He made the remarks when asked about the new U.S. sanctions on Iran's metals.

He added, "We believe wanton use or threat of sanctions won't solve any problem. We hold that purposes and principles of the UN Charter and basic norms governing international relations should be complied with in state-to-state relations; differences should be properly handled in peaceful ways through dialogue and negotiation."

"China calls on all parties concerned to view what has happened based on their own merits and stick to the general direction of political settlement. Concrete steps should

be taken to defuse the [Persian] Gulf situation and jointly uphold regional peace and stability," he said.

The Trump administration imposed new sanctions on Iran on Friday.

According to Aljazeera, the sanctions target the nation's steel industry, as well as eight senior Iranian officials and other sectors of the economy, including construction, manufacturing, textiles and mining, said Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Putin, Macron call for preserving nuclear deal

By staff and agency

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Emmanuel Macron, the French president, have called for continued efforts to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

"In view of the tense situation around Iran, the Presidents of Russia and France noted the need for all the sides to show restraint and called for continued efforts to preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," said a statement issued by the Kremlin after a phone conversation between Putin and Macron.

Also during a joint press conference in Moscow on Saturday, Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the JCPOA

is a matter of "tremendous importance" that should be kept by all means necessary.

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

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

Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China, and Iran have been trying to salvage the pact. However, Europeans' efforts to protect trade with Iran against the U.S. sanctions have yielded nothing concrete so far.

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 fourth 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).

In its fifth and final step on January 5, Iran suspended all limits under the JCPOA.

Iran's Judiciary chief vows justice on downed plane case

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi has vowed to fully implement justice when dealing the case of the downed Ukrainian plane. "In pursuing the case of the downed plane, justice will be implemented irrespective of any circumstances," Raisi said on Monday, Tasnim reported.

"People should be assured that all the material and moral rights of the deceased and their families will be fully fulfilled and the establishment is resolute with regard to this issue," he stated.

All 176 crew members and passengers, 147 of whom were Iranians, died in the Ukraine International Airlines (UIA) crash which came a few minutes after take-off from Tehran to Kiev on Wednesday.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces issued a statement on Saturday saying that the Ukrainian plane crash was caused by a "human error".

"The Ukrainian passenger plane was hit unintentionally and due to humane error, which unfortunately led to the martyrdom of a number of our people and also a number of foreign nationals," the statement read.

It came in the aftermath of a Trump-ordered U.S. attack at Baghdad's airport on January 3 that killed top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Iranian President Hassan



Rouhani spoke via phone Saturday about the Ukrainian passenger jet, according to a readout of the phone call from the Canadian government.

According to CNN, Rouhani expressed «profound regret for the shooting down of

the aircraft by the Iranian military.»

Trudeau insisted on the need for a complete and thorough investigation, saying Canada was ready to deploy air safety experts to facilitate black box examination and DNA specialists to assist with victim identification and the

return of remains to Canada.

Trudeau and Rouhani agreed «on the importance of de-escalation and dialogue to reduce tensions and promote stability in the region.» Trudeau said the incident is «an example of how heightened tensions can have tragic consequences for innocent civilians.»

The U.S. airstrike also martyred Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of the anti-terrorist Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

On Wednesday morning, Iran carried out the Shahid (Martyr) Soleimani Operation against an American aircraft in Iraq with more than ten missiles.

Iran had vowed to take "tough revenge" for Soleimani's blood.

Raisi said the martyrdom of General Soleimani broke the hearts of all Muslims and freedom-seekers of the world.

This terrorist act committed by the United States is an unprecedented violation of international norms and conventions, the top judge said.

"Since Lieutenant General Soleimani was a symbol of the fight against terrorism and support for the oppressed, the U.S. action of martyring him is pursuable," said the Judiciary chief.

He also said U.S. President Donald Trump must be brought to justice for carrying out this terrorist act.

Canadian CEO says Trump is responsible for Ukrainian plane crash

By staff and agency

The CEO of a Canadian company affected by the Ukrainian plane crash on Wednesday has said that U.S. President Donald Trump's actions in the Middle East were ultimately responsible for death of victims.

Michael McCain, chief executive of Canadian food packaging company Maple Leaf Foods, said Sunday night in a series of tweets posted on his company's verified Twitter account that he believes Trump's actions in the Middle East were ultimately responsible for their deaths, describing them as "the collateral damage" of an "ill-conceived plan to divert attention from political woes," CNN reported.



"The collateral damage of this irresponsible, dangerous, ill-conceived behavior? 63 Canadians needlessly lost their lives in the crossfire, including the family of one of my MLF colleagues (his wife + 11 year old son)! We are mourning and I am livid. Michael McCain," he tweeted.

He said in another tweet, "A narcissist in Washington tears world accomplishments apart; destabilizes region. US now unwelcomed everywhere in the area including Iraq; tensions escalated to feverish pitch. Taking out despicable military leader terrorist? There are a hundred like him, standing next in line."

"U.S. government leaders unconstrained by checks/balances, concocted an ill-conceived plan to divert focus from political woes," he said in another tweet.

The passenger plane, with 176 people aboard, was mistakenly downed on Wednesday morning by the Iranian military. It happened a few hours after Iran fired dozens of missiles at the U.S. airbase inside Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of Iranian Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3.

The victims of the crash included 82 Iranians, 63 Canadians, 11 Ukrainians, 10 Swedes, four Afghans, three Germans, and three British nationals.

Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the Aerospace Force of the IRGC, said Iran's air defense systems had been put on the "highest level of readiness" and alerted to possible cruise missile attack. Hajizadeh said the operator of the air defense system had mistaken the plane for a cruise missile.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Saturday expressed apologies and condolences to all those who have been affected by the tragic Ukrainian plane incident, saying "the U.S. adventurism" has led to this tragedy.

"A sad day. Preliminary conclusions of internal investigation by Armed Forces: Human error at time of crisis caused by US adventurism led to disaster," Zarif tweeted.

Schiff accuses Trump of fudging intelligence to justify Soleimani assassination

TEHRAN (FNA) — House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff accused President Donald Trump and top administration officials of "fudging" intelligence to justify the terror attack on Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.



"When you hear the president out there on Fox, he is fudging the intelligence," Schiff said Sunday on "Face the Nation", referencing an interview the president conducted with Fox News last week.

"When you hear the [defense] secretary say, 'Well, that wasn't what the intelligence said, but that's my personal belief,' he is fudging. When Secretary [Mike] Pompeo was on your show last week and made the claim that the intelligence analysis was that taking Soleimani out would improve our security and leaving him in would make us less safe, that is also fudging. That is not an intelligence conclusion, that's Pompeo's personal opinion," he added.

Trump and top administration officials have claimed that the president ordered the targeted strike against General Soleimani earlier this month in response to "imminent" threats to U.S. personnel in the region. The president then told Fox News in an interview Friday that General Soleimani was targeting four U.S. embassies.

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, however, told "Face the Nation" that he "didn't see" specific evidence that the embassies would be targeted, but rather insisted there was the belief that they could be.

Esper also stated that the intelligence was "exquisite" and detailed, a characterization Schiff, a member of the so-called "Gang of Eight", refuted.

"I don't quibble with it. I think it's just plain wrong," Schiff said, adding, "There was no discussion in the Gang of Eight briefings that these were the four embassies that are being targeted and we have exquisite intelligence that shows these are the specific targets."

IRGC chief wishes he had been on crashed plane

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has said that he wished he was on the downed Ukrainian plane so he could avoid the shame of making such a colossal mistake.

Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks during a closed session of the parliament on Sunday.

"Concerning the incident, we are saddened more than anybody else and never thought we would carry out an action that could harm people," Salami said, according to Mehr.

"The operator was informed of cruise missiles targeting some points in Iran, for few moments he was disconnected with SOC (security operations center)," he explained.

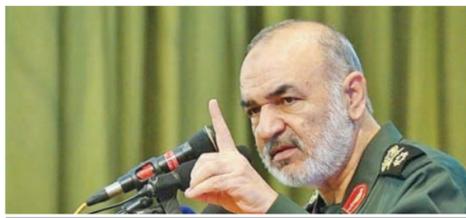
"Therefore, he mistook the passenger flight for a missile and shot it down," he added.

Salami told the Iranian lawmakers that it was the IRGC that initially raised the hypothesis of the passenger plane being mistakenly brought down by a missile.

"We had not been certain until Wednesday evening about what actually had happened," he said, expressing deep grief for the unintentional mistake.

"We will compensate for our mistake," he promised.

He told the MPs that after Iran's retaliatory attack



"We are saddened more than anybody else and never thought we would carry out an action that could harm people."

on the U.S. Ain al-Assad airbase in Iraq's Anbar Province, multilayered projections were made in case the Americans embarked on reprisals so that the IRGC could make necessary plans and predictions.

"What came to pass was that we had locked horns with a superpower, and naturally the country was not under regular conditions," he added.

He said that in its airstrikes to Ain al-Asad, the IRGC did not seek to kill U.S. soldiers but to deal

major damage to their weapons and equipment.

Salami added that the strikes were carried out due to the demand of the Iranian nation for taking a tough revenge for the martyrdom of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

He said that after the military operation, Iran started an electronic warfare, which forced all the American aircrafts away.

The United States assassinated Soleimani, Iran's top anti-terror commander, and his comrades-in-arms in an airstrike in Baghdad on January 3.

The U.S. airstrike also martyred Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of the anti-terrorist Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

Soleimani is recognized internationally as a legendary commander in the battle against terrorist groups, especially Daesh (ISIS). He commanded forces who resisted ISIS which was advancing toward the Iraqi Kurdistan and came close to Baghdad.

Officials in Tehran and independent generals in the world have said the Soleimani assassination amounts to an act of war against Iran.

On Wednesday morning, Iran carried out the Shahid (Martyr) Soleimani Operation against Ain al-Assad airbase with more than ten missiles.

It was the airbase from which the U.S. had flown drones and assassinated General Soleimani.

Kerry calls JCPOA the 'strongest' and 'most transparent' agreement in the world

By staff and agency

Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has said that the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the JCPOA, is the "strongest" and "most transparent" agreement on the planet.

"Britain, China, Russia are all still trying to keep the agreement in place because they recognize it's the strongest, most transparent, most accountable nuclear agreement on the planet," he told CBS News in an interview published on Sunday.

He said, "President Trump decided unilaterally to ignore all of our allies and move to get out of the agreement."

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

In another interview with CBS News in September, Kerry said, "France, Germany, Britain, China, Russia, all



still support a multilateral agreement that was a model of multilateral diplomacy. We came together, the world welcomed this, the United Nations Security Council ratified it, embraced it. And that still is there. Along comes President Trump and he pulls out. He broke the agreement... The escalation is the absolutely foreseeable and it was foreseen that this is what would happen. Why do I say that? Because we were ridiculed for saying that the alternative to what we were trying to do in making the agreement was war, was conflict."

Rouhani hopes for closer Tehran-Muscat ties

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani has congratulated Haitham bin Tariq on becoming the new Sultan of Oman, expressing the hope for the development of ties between Tehran and Muscat.

In a message on Monday, Rouhani said relations between Tehran and Muscat under Oman's late ruler Sultan Qaboos Al Said were based upon mutual trust, Tasnim reported.

He added, "I hope that the bilateral relations during the era of your leadership would further grow in all fields with wisdom and discernment."

The president wished health and success for the new sultan and prosperity for the brotherly nation of Oman.

He also expressed his condolences on Sultan Qaboos's demise.

Sultan Qaboos's death was announced by the official Oman News Agency. The announcement did not mention the cause, but Qaboos had been receiving treatment in Europe for cancer since at least 2014.



He was the Middle East's longest-ruling monarch who transformed his kingdom from an isolated enclave into a developed nation known for brokering quiet talks between global foes.

In a tweet on Saturday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif expressed his condolence to the Omani government and people over his demise.

In his Arabic-language tweet, Zarif said, "Sultan Qaboos' demise is a great loss for the region."

The chief Iranian diplomat also traveled to Oman on Sunday to attend the commemoration ceremony of Sultan Qaboos.

A number of MPs call for UK envoy's expulsion

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — A number of MPs have expressed alarm over the presence of British Ambassador Bob Macaire in a rally in Tehran on Saturday and called for his expulsion.

"The British ambassador took part in a small gathering that was against the Islamic Republic," MP Abolfazl Has-sanbeigi told Mehr on Monday.

"He took photos of the gathering and tried to organize it," he said.

Hassanbeigi, who is a member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, described the move as inconsistent with international norms and regulations.

He said Macaire has "interfered in the internal affairs of our country and acted against the security protocols by participating in an illegal gathering."

The MP urged the Foreign Ministry to expel the UK ambassador in order to prevent the repetition and normalization of such behavior in the future.

According to Mehr, Macaire was briefly detained during a protest in front of Amir Kabir University in downtown Tehran on Saturday when he was organizing and provoking



people angry at the government's handling of the aftermaths of a plane crash a few days ago.

He was summoned to the Iranian Foreign Ministry on Sunday for "unconventional behavior" inconsistent with his diplomatic status and being present in an "illegal gathering".

In separate remarks, a number of lawmakers condemned the British envoy's undiplomatic behavior.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	392038.4
IFX	5045.68

Sources: tse.ir, ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,745 rials
GBP	54,768 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$64.85/b
WTI	\$58.95/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.26/b
Gold	\$1,554.90/oz
Silver	\$18.04/oz
Platinum	\$976.00/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

National steel festival, exhibition running in Tehran

Steel industry is one of the industries in which some good investment has been made and today it has become a production advantage, according to Rahmani.

Iran's annual steel production is planned to reach 45 million tons by the Iranian calendar year 1400 (March 2021-March 2022).



The country's annual crude steel production is planned to rise to 30 million tons in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 19, 2020) from 25 million tons in the past year.

TPO to hold national conference on exports standards next week

Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) will hold a national conference on exports standards and quality on January 20 at the place of the organization, director general of TPO's office for expansion of commercial services announced.

Ehsan Qomri said the conference is aimed at investigating the problems and barriers in the way of Iran's exports, TPO website published on Monday.

The official said the exporters have been repeatedly referring to TPO complaining about the problems related to the quality and standards of exports; so the organization decided to hold such gathering to resolve the problems.

TEDPIX hits a new record after some drops

Iranian stock market which witnessed a downward trend during the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), started the current week with growth. Indexes rose on Saturday and Sunday and there was a record on Monday.

TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), jumped 16,388 points to 392,038, as 8.275 billion securities worth 39,306 trillion rials (about \$935.8 million) were traded at Iran's main stock market on Monday.

Also, IFX, the main index of Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), climbed 151 points to 5,045 when 1.949 billion securities valued at 12.954 trillion rials (about \$308.4 million) were traded.

African economies will outperform global growth in 2020 despite a lag from its biggest countries

Last year, Africa had some of world's fastest-growing economies and 2020 won't be very different.

A few of the countries on the top 10 list may have changed but the IMF, World Bank and other institutions all expect above global average GDP growth.

The top performers will be South Sudan (8.2%), Rwanda (8.1%) Côte d'Ivoire (7.3%), Ethiopia (7.2%), Senegal (6.8%), Benin (6.7%) and Uganda (6.2%) along with Kenya, Mozambique, Niger and Burkina Faso all expecting 6% growth.

While these countries help push up Africa's overall average economic growth rate forecast to 3.8% (or 3.6% for Sub-Saharan Africa), these averages are weighed down closer to the global average (3.4%) by the two largest economies, Nigeria (2.5%) and South Africa (1.1%).

Nigeria's outlook has improved after a strong end to 2019, but most economic watchers believe it needs to grow much faster to pull large chunks of its 200-million strong population out of poverty. Economic reform has been slower than expected since February 2019's presidential election. South Africa's meager growth rates are exacerbated by its ongoing electricity crisis and overall political stasis. Its leaders will likely spend part of the year dreading an inevitable debt downgrade.

(Source: qz.com)

Warehouse capacity, standards to be elevated in Chabahar Port

TEHRAN — Through construction of new warehouses and also renovating the existing ones, warehouse capacity and standards are planned to be elevated in Iran's southeastern port of Chabahar, according to the head of Ports and Maritime Department of Sistan-Baluchestan Province, where the port lies.

Behrouz Aqaei said that given the programs of the country for the imports of basic commodities the capacity of the warehouses in this port should be increased, the website of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) published.

The official put the cost of the project for renovating three multi-purpose warehouses of the ports at 540 billion rials (about \$12.8 million) to be provided through internal sources of PMO, saying that the project is under the tender, the contractor will be selected by the next month and renovation operation will begin.

He also announced that two multi-purpose warehouses are under construction in the port through private sector's investment



and under build-operate-transfer (BOT) contracts. Last week, the chairman of the board of Chabahar Free Trade-Industrial Zone

Organization said his organization is in talks with foreign investors for financing the project for the construction of an international airport in the port city.

According to Abdolrahim Kordi, Chabahar Free Trade-Industrial Zone Organization is going to invest 5.5 trillion rials (about \$131 million) supplied by domestic sources in the first phase of the mentioned project which is expected to be completed within two years, Tasnim news agency reported.

Located in southeastern Iran, Chabahar Port is the country's only oceanic port.

Although Iran has awarded the development project of this port to India and the South Asian country committed \$500 million to build two new berths in this port, several foreign countries are eager to contribute to the development of this strategic port.

Back in December 2019, the head of Ports and Maritime Department of Sistan-Baluchestan Province said that 17 countries had expressed willingness for contribution to the development of Chabahar Port.

Tehran to host Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Committee meeting

TEHRAN — The seventh meeting of Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Committee is planned to be held in Tehran within the next three months, the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced on Monday.

Hamid Zadboum also said that Qatar's Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali bin Ahmed Al Kuwari will attend the meeting, TPO website published.

In a joint press conference with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani in Tehran on Sunday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said that Iran has stood and will stand beside Qatar in the future.

"At a juncture of time, certain regional countries imposed restrictions on Qatar, but Iran stood beside Qatar and will

stand based on its duties as a neighbor," Rouhani added. He said that the two countries have very good relationship in various areas of economy, science and culture.

Referring to the next meeting of the two countries' joint economic committee, which is due in Tehran, the president said, "We hope that the two countries would reach agreements in economic cooperation, investment, technology and other areas during that meeting."

For his part, the Qatari emir said that Doha will never forget Tehran's help in difficult days.

"We praise the Islamic Republic of Iran's stance in recent years, especially when Qatar was under blockade," the emir said.

Sheikh Tamim also called for expansion of relations.



UAE commits \$23b to Indonesia infrastructure projects

The United Arab Emirates is to pump \$23b into Indonesia to help finance infrastructure and energy projects in Southeast Asia's largest economy.

The UAE investments will be made via Indonesia's new sovereign wealth fund, according to a spokesman for President Joko Widodo and will contribute to the building of the country's proposed \$31b new capital city. The fund, created by Mr. Widodo, is designed to support local start-ups and to boost economic growth.

The announcement followed a visit by Mr. Widodo to the UAE at the weekend. The deal will include "11 business agreements?... consisting of energy, oil and gas, petrochemical, seaport, telecommunication and research," said Luhut Pandjaitan, Indonesia's coordinating minister for maritime affairs and investment, in a statement.

The UAE's commitment comes after Mr. Widodo, who was re-elected in 2019, made increasing foreign direct investment a priority for his second term. FDI is critical for Indonesia, which runs a current account deficit and in 2018 resorted to import tariffs to keep it in check, but also to bankroll Mr. Widodo's \$400b infrastructure program, announced after his re-election.

This mega plan involves moving Indonesia's capital from Jakarta to East Kalimantan province on the island of Borneo, as part of efforts to invigorate an economy that is growing at about 5 percent a year. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2021 and relocation in 2024.

Yet, Indonesia has lagged behind its neighbors in terms of FDI, with investors historically lamenting red tape and protectionism, espe-



cially in the natural resources sector. But FDI showed signs of picking up in the third quarter of 2019 aided by a post-electoral boost, with volumes growing 17.8 percent year on year to Rp105t (\$7.6b), according to the Indonesia Investment Coordinating Board.

The UAE has joined other international players — including Masayoshi Son, chief executive and founder of SoftBank, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank — in helping to fund the proposed new capital. Indonesia wants to pass legislation to establish a plan for the new city in the first half of 2020.

As part of the deal the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) signed a series of agreements with Indonesia's oil and gas company Pertamina and Chandra Asri, a petrochemicals company. Adnoc also signed a memorandum of understanding with Pertamina to explore the potential for the development of a crude oil to petrochemicals complex in Balongan, Indonesia.

The "agreements signed with Pertamina and Chandra Asri will potentially help Adnoc to secure additional in-market presence in one of Southeast Asia's fastest growing economies," said Sultan Al Jaber, Abu Dhabi company's chief executive.

(Source: ft.com)

Italy's economy sees a trickle of upbeat news

The latest round of economic indicators are showing positive signs for Italy's slow-growing economy -- but just barely.

Italy's National Statistics Institute (ISTAT) on Friday released new data on domestic industrial output for November and the overall economic situation improved in December. A day earlier, the institute reported that the overall employment rate improved to its lowest level since 1977.

However, none of the aforementioned figures improved by significant amounts.

The institute said that industrial production in November increased 0.1 percent compared to the previous month, reversing a trend that saw small decreases in production the previous three months. It also said the overall economic situation was "leaning toward" the worldwide trend for "moderate" economic growth.

The unemployment figure released Thursday told a similar tale: the number of Italians with a job climbed 0.1 percent in November compared to the previous month. Though the overall figure is the best in more than 40 years, the indicator had been hovering around that level for the last several months and economists said the number may have been inflated by some workers dropping out of the workforce.

The "latest economic news has mostly been good, but it's not overwhelming," Javier Noriega, chief economist with Hildebrandt and Ferrar in Milan, told Xinhua. "I look at the latest data as what could be the start of a fragile economic recovery."

Still, the recent figures are positive news for an economy dogged by slow economic growth, high unemployment levels for

young workers, and a lack of investment in research and innovation.

Tariffs on European goods entering the United States, and the trade war between some countries are also weighing on the prospects of economic recovery, analysts said.

"It's too early to tell if this is the start of something," ABS Securities analyst Oliviero Fiorini said in an interview.

"It's obviously better than the contrary, which would be a slightly negative trend in the indicators. But there's no reason to think the underlying situation in Italy has changed. The economy still needs major structural reforms and worries about political instability still cast a shadow over everything. We won't know what these newest indicators mean until we can look back in a few months."

According to Noriega, the economy is benefiting from some external factors "like a relatively weak euro that is helping exports and low yields on government debt that help save the government money."

"But until there is a government with a solid majority and a desire to push through the right kind of reforms, I worry these small steps are the best the economy can hope for," he said.

The consensus estimates are that when the final data for 2019 is tallied that the Italian economy will have grown around 0.1 percent for the year as a whole. But official data from ISTAT said it expects the economic growth rate to increase to around 0.6 percent for 2020.

(Source: xinhuanet.com)

WB projects 7.2% GDP growth for Bangladesh in FY 19-20

The World Bank (WB) has projected 7.2% gross domestic product (GDP) growth for Bangladesh in the current fiscal year (FY2019-20), while 7.3% in the following fiscal year.

Bangladesh, the third-largest economy in the region, fared better than India and Pakistan, with the growth officially estimated at 8.1% in FY2018-19, said the World Bank in its Global Economic Prospects published on Thursday.

On July 31 last year, Bangladesh Bank in its one-year monetary policy statement (MPS) for FY2019-20 hoped to achieve the 8.2% GDP growth keeping the inflation rate within 5.50%, reports UNB.

On September 25, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) projected 8% GDP growth in Bangladesh.

The growth in Bangladesh is projected to remain above 7% through the forecast horizon.

A solid macroeconomic framework, political stability, implementation of planned public infrastructure projects, and ongoing reforms to improve the business environment



underlie this projection, said the report.

In South Asian region, the growth is expected to rise to 5.5% in 2020, assuming a modest rebound in domestic demand and as economic activity benefits from improved business confidence and support from infrastructure investments in Bangladesh.

According to the World Bank report,

Bangladesh's exports showed signs of softening in recent months, after a substantial increase in exports to major trade partners in the last fiscal year.

While regional exports softened in aggregate, Bangladesh's export growth accelerated, partly reflecting trade diversion amid trade tensions between

major economies.

Monetary policy was broadly accommodative amid weak activity and subdued inflation. Current account deficits narrowed with weakening imports, the report said.

Besides the GDP growth, there are some risks in Bangladesh, showed the report.

It said lack of progress in reforms to improve tax collection could result in more acute revenue shortfalls in Bangladesh and put further pressure on elevated fiscal deficits.

The World Bank report also showed that Bangladesh's apparel sector benefited substantially from tailored policies during the 1990s and 2000s, which lifted barriers to international trade and investment and enhanced participation in global value chains.

Bangladesh's duty-free access to the European Union (EU) from 2001 boosted knitwear exports to the EU between 2000 and 2004, enhanced the productivity of producers, and helped the country expand to other export markets.

(Source: dhakatribune.com)

Modification of refineries requires \$10b: Zanganeh

E N E R G Y TEHRAN — Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said modification and improvement of the country's refineries needs \$10 billion of investment, IRNA reported.

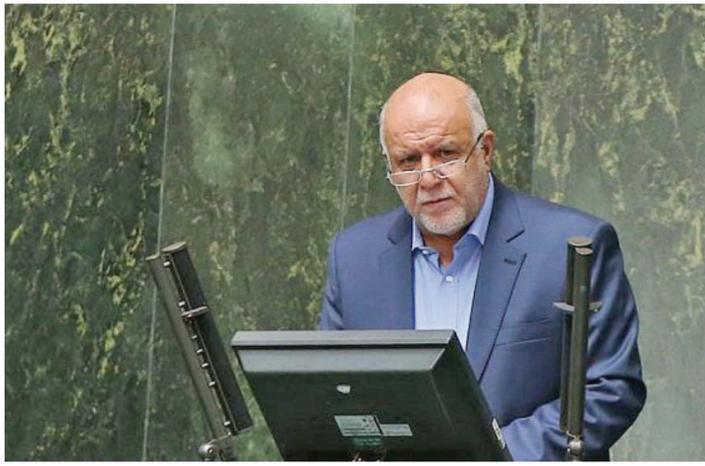
The minister made the remarks in an open session of the parliament on Monday answering a question about supplying low-sulfur fuel for the Iranian vessels.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) introduced new regulations to reduce air pollution

resulting from the use of high-sulfur fuels by vessels.

Based on the new regulations, sulfur will be cut drastically from global shipping transport fuels in 2020.

From 1 January 2020, ships have been allowed to use only fuel oil with very low sulfur content, under rules brought in by the International Maritime Organization. This cut in sulfur content has been more than a decade in the planning, and almost all shipping around the world is expected to comply, or face penalties.



Zanganeh said on Monday that securing the mentioned \$10 billion for modification of the country's refineries is impossible under the sanction condition. The minister although said that the

plan for modification of the refineries so that they can produce low-sulfur fuel is currently underway in Abadan Refinery, in southwest of the country, but the plan was halted in Isfahan Refinery.

Oil steady as fears over U.S.-Iran conflict ease, focus turns to trade deal

Oil prices held steady on Monday as fears of conflict between the United States and Iran eased, with investors shifting their focus to this week's scheduled signing of an initial U.S.-China trade deal, which could boost economic growth and demand.

Brent crude LCOc1 was up 1 cent at \$64.99 per barrel at 0737 GMT, while West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude CLc1 was up 5 cents at \$59.09 a barrel from the previous session.

Oil prices surged to their highest in almost four months after a U.S. drone strike killed an Iranian commander.

They slumped again as Washington and Tehran retreated from the brink of direct conflict.

Global benchmark Brent touched \$71.75 per barrel last week before ending on Friday below \$65.

The "possibility of the war between the United States and Iran has disappeared... for the week, the signing of the U.S.-China trade deal would lift oil prices on expectations for higher demand," said Kim Kwang-rae, a commodities



analyst at Samsung Futures in Seoul.

Backwardation in Brent LCOc1-LCOc2, a market structure where prices for near-term contracts are higher than those for later contracts, is currently at 72 cents per barrel, from 84 cent a week earlier, whereas the WTI backwardation

CLc1-CLc2 is at 4 cents a barrel from 23 cents last week. Backwardation tends to reflect tightening supplies, and the narrowing of the values indicate that worries over supply disruption are receding.

The "fundamentals for WTI remain weak for the coming months and stocks are expected to build at Cushing," said Virendra Chauhan, an oil analyst at Energy Aspects in Singapore.

"For Brent, which is a broader indicator of the global crude market, it is a combination of supply and demand," he added.

"Sentiment appears to have turned a corner on the trade-war front, while some green shoots regarding industrial activity and the start of fiscal stimulus, could mean demand surprised to the upside."

A U.S.-China trade deal is due to be signed in Washington on Wednesday.

(Source: reuters.com)

Gas in the energy transition: Bridge or the destination?

By David A. Wemer

The global surge in gas production has thrown into question the role this crucial energy source will play in the future energy mix, as the world community looks to limit carbon emissions and combat global climate change.

"There are some who believe that gas should play no role in the global energy mix," Ambassador Richard Morningstar, founding chairman of the Atlantic Council's Global Energy Center, said at the introduction of a panel on the future of gas at the Atlantic Council's Global Energy Forum hosted in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates on January 12, 2020. At the other end of the spectrum, he added, some have "called gas a destination fuel that provides a clean baseload energy needed for the developed world to grow."

The experts Morningstar talked to on January 12 seemed to agree that the key future role for gas will be somewhere between these two visions. ADNOC LNG Chief Executive Officer Fatima Al Nuaimi noted that "a couple of years ago, nobody raised this question. It was a given... that natural gas and liquefied natural gas (LNG) as the cleanest of the fossil fuels is an integrated part of the future energy mix." At the same time, she conceded, "there is a responsibility on the industry to address... that there are some emissions happening because of the burning of gas," and gas will have to work hand in hand with renewable energy to achieve the optimal energy mix for the future.

Marco Alverà, chief executive officer of Snam S.p.A., argued that the focus of gas right now should be to decrease the continued global use of coal, the most dangerous fossil fuel for CO2 emissions. "Switching today's coal (use) into gas would save 6 billion tons of CO2," he explained, making it critical that natural gas and LNG become cheaper and easier to consume in areas that continue to use coal, such as Asia. The "effort has to be to compress the cost of infrastructure liquefaction, get natural gas into the coal consuming countries at a price point which makes a switch happen the same way it happened in gas producing countries like the United States," Alverà said.

Gas is well underway
According to Venture Global LNG Chief Commercial Officer Tom Earl, the transition to gas is already well underway in some of the top coal consuming countries. "There is not a single existing regasification terminal in China that is not being expanded today and that is not to speak of the new terminals they are [also] building," he explained. He added that significant progress has also been made in Southeast Asia and Brazil, and India has made several initial steps towards increasing its ability to import gas. Earl agreed with Alverà that "one of the first jobs of gas is to improve its competitiveness to take the place as much as possible of coal."

While gas can be an important new source of energy for those who are still consuming coal, Adnan Amin, a distinguished fellow in the Atlantic Council's

Global Energy Center, argued that gas's importance in the future could be overstated. "There is an inevitability about bridges; sooner or later you get to the end of the bridge," he said, pointing out that renewable energy technologies have "decreased in cost by about 80 percent in the last decade" and now "clean energy portfolios are competing with new gas." He argued that "if we are going to decarbonize, we need to address how all hydrocarbon sources can be used more efficiently and less in the future."

Still, Amin admitted that getting to "100 percent renewables...is completely a fool's paradise" and that gas will still have an important role to play. "There is going to be a mix," he said, and "we need to ensure that that is an optimal mix." Al Nuaimi argued that gas can provide a critical backstop to renewable energy, as gas "is a source of energy that does not rely on the days of the month where the wind is blowing and the sun is shining."

Key challenge for renewables
Adequate storage remains a key challenge for renewables to overcome, Alverà added, as "what you can achieve in California and Australia with batteries you cannot achieve in other parts of the world." Additionally, countries and areas that do not have copious solar or wind resources will continue to rely on gas, according to Alverà, as countries should not "kid ourselves that you can transport energy over long distances," without considerable loss.

Although Amin pushed back that significant technological progress has been made

on both the storage and transportation questions, especially in China where the government has invested a lot of money into new renewable technologies, he agreed that gas will continue to play a role for those who cannot access renewable energy sources and even in places that depend mainly on renewable production, such as rural Africa, where solar panels can provide electricity, but "replacing firewood and coal for cooking" with gas "will be critical" to reducing emissions.

Technology could also make a transition from gas to renewable energies easier, Alverà explained, as new technology could "produce green hydrogen from renewables in the next five years." Hydrogen "behaves like natural gas," he said, but "has the beauty that it can be produced by electricity." If technology can perfect the process of creating hydrogen from solar, wind, or hydroelectric power, "we can turn the gas pipelines into essence free storage" for the green hydrogen, which would be perhaps ten times cheaper to store than green electricity.

The panelists all agreed that there will not be a one-size-fits-all solution for every country's energy mix. Renewables and gas will likely have to work together to achieve the ambitious decarbonization efforts needed to combat climate change. Technology, cost, and changes to demand will all be critical factors in determining the future of gas, either as a key bedrock of the future energy mix, or a bridge to increased reliance on renewable energies.

(Source: atlanticcouncil.org)

Double the share of renewables in the 'decade of action' to achieve energy transition objectives

The share of renewables in global power should more than double by 2030 to advance the global energy transformation, achieve sustainable development goals and a pathway to climate safety, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). Renewable electricity should supply 57 percent of global power by the end of the decade, up from 26 percent today.

A new booklet 10 Years: Progress to Action, published for the 10th annual Assembly of IRENA, charts recent global advances and outlines the measures still needed to scale up renewables. The Agency's data shows that annual renewable energy investment needs to double from around D 330 billion today, to close to D 750 billion to deploy renewable energy at the speed required.

Much of the needed investment can be met by redirecting planned fossil fuel investment. Close to D 10 trillion of non-renewables related energy investments are planned to 2030, risking stranded assets and increasing the likelihood of exceeding the world's 1.5 degree carbon budget this decade.

"We have entered the decade of renewable energy action, a period in which the



energy system will transform at unparalleled speed," said IRENA Director-General Francesco La Camera. To "ensure this happens, we must urgently address the need for stronger enabling policies and a significant increase in investment over the next 10 years. Renewables hold the key to sustainable development and should be central to energy and economic planning all over the world."

Renewable energy solutions
"Renewable energy solutions are affordable, readily available and deployable at scale," continued Mr. La Camera. To "advance a low-carbon future, IRENA will further promote knowledge exchange, strengthen partnerships and work with all stakeholders, from private sector leaders to policy makers, to catalyze action on the ground. We know it is possible," he concluded, "but we must all move faster."

Additional investments bring significant external cost savings, including minimizing significant losses caused by climate change as a result of inaction. Savings could amount to between D 1.6 trillion and D 3.7 trillion annually by 2030, three to seven times higher than investment costs for the energy transformation.

Falling technology costs continue to strengthen the case for renewable energy. IRENA points out that solar PV costs have fallen by almost 90 percent over the last 10 years and onshore wind turbine prices have fallen by up half in that period. By the end of this decade, solar PV and wind costs may consistently outcompete traditional energy. The two technologies could cover over a third of global power needs.

Renewables can become a vital tool in closing the energy access gap, a key sustainable development goal. Off-grid renewables have emerged as a key solution to expand energy access and now deliver access to around 150 million people.

IRENA data shows that 60 percent of new electricity access can be met by renewables in the next decade with stand-alone and mini-grid systems providing the means for almost half of new access. (Source: evwind.es)

China's natural gas demand growth in 2020 seen slowest in 4 years

China's natural gas demand in 2020 is expected to grow at its slowest pace in four years due to a faltering economy, according to a think tank at the country's largest energy producer, China National Petroleum Corp.

Slower demand growth in China would drag down global LNG markets already grappling with oversupply and low spot prices.

In its annual outlook report released on Monday, the think tank forecast natural gas consumption to rise 8.6% this year to 330 billion cubic meters.

That would mark the slowest demand growth since 2016. CNPC expects 2019 gas consumption up 9.6% year-on-year at 304 bcm.

"Chinese economy is in the process of structural upgrade while macro-economy will continue to bear pressure. Also, the coal-to-electricity and the use of clean coal will slow down the growth of gas demand," CNPC Research said.

China's natural gas output would hit 187.5 bcm in 2020, up 8.2% year-on-year, boosted by Beijing's push to increase domestic production, it said, adding that imports of the fuel is expected to reach 150 bcm, up 9.3% from a year ago.

The imports will partly come from Russia, driven by the landmark Siberian gas pipeline which was launched in December.



In 2020, LNG imports are expected to rise 9.5% year-on-year to around 94 bcm.

The think-tank also expects China's LNG receiving capacity to exceed 88 million tons per year.

China overtook Japan as the world's top importer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in November and December on a monthly basis, but on an annual basis Japan is still the No. 1 LNG importer worldwide.

The crude oil output
The national's crude oil output is forecasted to rise only 1.57% from 2019 levels to around 194 million tons in 2020, the CNPC outlook shows. But apparent crude oil demand is expected to rise 3.6% year-on-year to 719 million tons in 2020.

Crude oil imports are forecast to rise 4.4% to 525 million tons.

Having added 900,000 barrels per day of crude processing capacity in 2019, China is expected to add 27 million tons, or around 540,000 bpd of new refining capacity this year, which would worsen fuel supply in the country and put pressure on refineries to sell overseas.

"In 2020, oversupply of refined oil products will be intensified, and (we expect the) exports quota for refined oil products to continue increasing," CNPC Research said.

China has raised the volume of its first batch of 2020 fuel export quotas by 53% from a year earlier to 27.99 million tons.

China's total fuel demand is forecast to rise 2.3% to 393 million tons in 2020, while refined products exports is expected to surge 18.1% to 64.5 million tons in 2020.

The country's crude throughput is forecast to rise 3.9% year-on-year to around 675 million tons in 2020. China's total exports of refined oil products are forecast to rise 18.1% to exceed 64.5 million tons in 2020.

In 2020, gasoline exports are expected to rise 35.39% year-on-year to 23.68 million tons while diesel exports are forecasted to rise 10.69% to 25.8 million tons.

(Source: af.reuters.com)

Second Announcement



1398.6333

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY AHVAZ-IRAN

TENDER NO.: 08-21-9840003

National Iranian South Oilfields Company (NISOC) intends to purchase the following goods

items	Material Description	Quantity
01	CASING, API GRADE L-80, SEAMLESS, "VAM", "N.VAM" OR "SEC" THREAD, RANGE 3 (MAX LEN: 40.5 FT), AS PER API 5CT/ISO 11960, SIZE (OD), WEIGHT (PPF), AS SPECIFIED, MARKING: COLD DIE STAMPED IN ACCORDANCE WITH API 5CT, NOTE: LEVEL OF INSPECTION: 1 (L.O.I: 1) "QCP/MPS DOCUMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL TO REVIEW & CONFORM" "ITP DOCUMENTS IS ESSENTIAL FOR TECHNICAL EVALUATION" 5-1/2 IN. 20 PPF	2400 LE

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention to participate" letter via Fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 2, available at: WWW.nisoc.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 78,731 EURO or 9,868,000,000 RIAL, in favor of NISOC

Tender documents including the materials thorough technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: WWW.nisoc.ir-material procurement management tab

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Reading tea leaves: U.S. backs off support for regime change in Iran

By Dr. James M. Dorsey

MODERN DIPLOMACY — An Iran hawk who advocated killing general Qasim Soleimani, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has ordered his diplomats to limit contacts with militant Iranian exile and opposition groups that support either regime change or greater rights for ethnic groups like Kurds and Arabs.

Coming on the back of the Soleimani killing, Mr. Pompeo's directive appears to put an end to the Trump administration's hinting that it covertly supports insurgent efforts to at the very least destabilize the Iranian government if not topple it.

A litmus test of the directive by Mr. Pompeo, known to have a close relationship with Donald J. Trump, is likely to be whether the president's personal lawyer, Rudolph Giuliani, distances himself from the controversial National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an offshoot of the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, a group that was taken off the US Treasury's list of designated terrorists several years ago.

Mr. Giuliani is a frequent, well-paid speaker at gatherings of the group that has built a significant network among Western political elites. The council and the Mujahedeen openly call for regime change in Iran.

The Mujahedeen were moved with US assistance from their exile base in Iraq to a reportedly Saudi-funded secretive facility in Albania.

A New Jersey-based lobbying firm hired by the NCRI, Rosemont Associates, reported last year in its filing as a foreign agent frequent email and telephone contact on behalf of its client with the US embassy in the Albanian capital of Tirana as well as Brian Hook, the US Special Representative for Iran, and Gabriel Noronha, an aide to Mr. Hook.

In his directive, Mr. Pompeo said that "direct US government engagement with these groups could prove counterproductive to our policy goal of seeking a comprehensive deal with the Iranian regime that addresses



its destabilizing behaviour."

The secretary went on to say that Iranian opposition groups "try to engage US officials regularly to gain at least the appearance of tacit support and enhance their visibility and clout."

Mr. Pompeo's cable, while keeping a potential negotiated deal with Iran on the table, does not stop other US government agencies from covertly supporting the various groups, that also include Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of al-Ahwaz (AMLA), the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, and the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI).

Iran, which has long believed that the United States, alongside Saudi Arabia and Israel, supported the Mujahedeen as well as ethnic militants that intermittently launch attacks inside Iran, is likely to take a wait-and-see attitude towards Mr. Pompeo's directive that could be seen as a signal that the Trump administration is not seeking regime change.

The timing of the directive is significant. Iran responded to the killing of Mr. Soleimani with carefully calibrated missile attacks

on US facilities in Iraq in a bid to create an environment in which backchanneling potentially could steer the United States and Iran back to the negotiating table.

While it was uncertain that one round of escalated tensions would do the trick, potential efforts were not helped by the death of Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said, a key interlocutor who has repeatedly helped resolve US-Iranian problems and initiated contacts that ultimately led to the 2015 international agreement that curbed Iran's nuclear program.

In his directive, Mr. Pompeo, referring to Komala, acknowledged that "Iran's regime appears to assess that the United States and/or Israel support this group of militant Kurds."

Iranian perceptions were reinforced not only by calls for regime change by senior figures like Mr. Giuliani and Saudi prince Turki al-Faisal, a former head of the kingdom's intelligence service and ex-ambassador to Britain and the United States, but also the appointment in 2018 of Steven Fagin as counsel general in Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan. Shortly before moving to Erbil, Mr. Fagin

met in Washington as head of the State Department's Office of Iranian Affairs, with Mustafa Hijri, leader of the KDPI as it stepped up its attacks in Iranian Kurdistan.

Iranian perceptions were further informed by the appointment of John Bolton, Mr. Trump's since departed national security advisor and like Mr. Giuliani a frequent speaker at NCRI events, who publicly advocates support of ethnic insurgencies in Iran in a bid to change the regime.

As Mr. Trump's first director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Mr. Pompeo named Michael D'Andrea, a hard-charging, chain-smoking covert operations officer, alternatively nicknamed the Dark Prince or Ayatollah Mike, whose track record includes overseeing the hunt for Osama Bin Laden, as head of the CIA's Iran operations.

The appointment was followed by publication by a Riyadh-based think tank believed to be close to crown prince Mohammed bin Salman of a study for Saudi support for a low-level Baloch insurgency in Iran. Prince Mohammed vowed around the same time that "we will work so that the battle is for them in Iran, not in Saudi Arabia."

Pakistani militants have claimed that Saudi Arabia had stepped up funding of militant madrassas or religious seminaries in the Pakistani province of Balochistan that allegedly serve as havens for anti-Iranian fighters.

The New York Times reported this week that aides to Prince Mohammed had in the past discussed with private businessmen the assassination of Mr. Soleimani, an architect of Iran's regional network of proxies, and other Iranians as well as ways of sabotaging the country's economy.

Mr. Pompeo's directive is unlikely to persuade Iran that Washington has had a change of heart. Indeed, it hasn't. Mr. Trump maintains his campaign of maximum pressure and this week imposed additional sanctions on Iran.

Nonetheless, potentially taking regime change off the table facilitates backchanneling that aims at getting the two nations to talk again.

UK envoy 'breached diplomatic protocol' by attending illegal gathering: U.S. analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — An American political analyst said Britain's Ambassador to Iran Rob Macaire "breached diplomatic protocol" by attending an illegal gathering in Tehran and seeking to interfere in the country's internal affairs.

"Iran should recall its diplomatic mission from London then expel the British mission. The British Ambassador breached diplomatic protocol by interfering in the internal affairs of Iran and attending an illegal gathering. Given the British history in Iran and 1953, it should know better," Rodney Martin told Tasnim in an interview.

Rodney Martin is a retired Judge and a former Congressional Staffer. He was a Harry S. Trauma Scholar and Lyndon B. Johnson Congressional Fellow. Based in Scottsdale, Arizona, Martin has held several US Federal, State, and Local positions.

Following is the full text of the interview.

Tasnim: Britain's envoy to Tehran Rob Macaire was held for over an hour for organizing, provoking and directing suspicious acts in protests in Tehran Saturday night before being released following Iran's public announcement that its military unintentionally shot down a Ukrainian passenger plane. What are your thoughts on this taking into account London's long record in creating chaos in other countries?

Martin: Britain and the US have a long history of nefarious activity in Iran and other nations around the globe, often using their diplomatic missions as bases for espionage and as Pro Counsel's to direct puppet leaders. Both Britain and the US are having a hard time coming to terms with the fact they are declining Empires and in Britain's case a "has-been" Empire of little to no relevance beyond being the US lap dog. It should be noted that the 1953 coup that overthrew



Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister was directed from the US and British Embassy wherein they purchased and directed artificial street mobs. It would not surprise me at all if both are repeating counter-revolutionary activities again. The world held its breath just days ago when millions of Iranians turned out in outrage over the assassination of General Soleimani. The British Ambassador's presence at street demonstration fanning emotions is clearly an attempt to preserve the West's discredited narrative it attempted to spin in the immediate aftermath of the General's assassination of "celebrations" and "opposition" to the Revolution. In fact, as with the 2003 Iraq invasion, the West is again listening to subversive and criminal elements who left Iran with hidden wealth and today safely reside in London, Los Angeles and the suburbs of Washington D.C. whispering in

Zionists and NeoCons ears hoping to have them once again do their dirty work.

Tasnim: Officials and people in Iran are calling for the UK envoy to be expelled from the country. How do you think Iran should react to this? Is there any diplomatic process for this?

Martin: This would absolutely be the correct course. Iran should recall its diplomatic mission from London then expel the British mission. The British Ambassador breached diplomatic protocol by interfering in the internal affairs of Iran. Given the British history in Iran and 1953, it should know better.

Tasnim: The reason for Macaire's arrest was instigating the crowd and taking photos of the protest. A shop opposite Amir Kabir University in Tehran was the main place for the British ambassador's activities, according to informed sources. According to Iran's intelligence sources, Iranian employees of the British embassy played a key role in the post-election protests in 2009. What are the main reasons behind London's attempts to insecure Iran?

Martin: Britain is using its presence in Iran to do the US bidding because the US has no presence. It is as simple as that. BOTH Britain and the US have long sought to overturn the 1979 Islamic Revolution and return Iran to its days as a repressed Western vassal State that in addition to having its resources stolen by the West, also supplied the Zionist State in Tel Aviv. Britain has violated all norms of diplomatic protocol and does not operate a legitimate Embassy, but in reality operates an MI6 Base that seeks to undermine Iranian Society, Law & Order and has a complete disrespect for Islam and Iranian Culture & Traditions. Britain is a disrespectful guest.

Esper says he 'didn't see' intelligence that Soleimani was orchestrating attacks on four U.S. embassies

DAILYMAIL — Mark Esper said Sunday that he 'didn't see' intelligence that proved Iranian General Qasem Soleimani was planning attacks on four other U.S. embassies in the Middle East.

"The president didn't cite a specific piece of evidence. What he said was he believed," Esper said in an interview on Face the Nation Sunday morning. "I didn't see one, with regard to four embassies. What I'm saying is that I shared the president's view that probably — my expectation was they were going to go after our embassies. The embassy is the most prominent display of American presence in a country."

He also told CNN's Jake Tapper that there was intelligence that there was intent to target the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, Iraq, but wouldn't comment on intelligence regarding the other supposed plans.

"There was intelligence that there was an intent to target the U.S. embassy in Baghdad," the secretary of the Department of Defense said on State of the Union. "What the president said with regard to the four embassies, is what I believe, as well."

"He said he believed that they probably — that they could have been targeting the embassies in the region. I believe that as well, as did other national security team members," he continued. "That is why I deployed thousands of additional paratroopers to the region to reinforce our embassies in Baghdad and reinforce other locations throughout the region."

Donald Trump said Friday that there were "probably four" U.S. embassies in the crosshairs of the attack, which was being orchestrated by Soleimani.

"I can reveal that I believe it probably would've been four embassies," Trump told Fox News' Laura Ingraham in an interview Friday.

Trump's comments come after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo doubled down on the president's claims that embassies were Soleimani's targets.

"We had specific information on an imminent threat and those threats included attacks on U.S. embassies. Period. Full stop," Pompeo told reporters during a White House briefing Friday.

Pompeo was then asked if he was mistaken when he said he didn't know precisely when or where the attacks would take place.

"Nope. Completely true. Those are completely consistent thoughts," he answered. "I don't know exactly which minute was plotting a broad, large-scale attack against American interests. And those attacks were imminent."

Esper's comments Sunday are a continuation in the defense of Trump's decision to direct the drone strike earlier this month that took out Soleimani.

The strike came after the U.S. embassy in Baghdad was breached by a group of protesters who back pro-Iran Shia militia.

When Tapper asked Esper to expand on if there was intelligence to suggest follow-up attacks, the Pentagon chief said he wouldn't discuss specifics of the information on TV.

"I'm not going to discuss intelligence matters here on the show. Let me just say this —" Esper said, but was cut off by Tapper who brought up Trump's Fox News Channel interview.

"The president did though," Tapper said. "It's the president's prerogative," Esper shot back.

"The important thing is this: Soleimani orchestrated, resourced, directed the attacks, escalating up to December 1 that killed an American," Esper continued. "He orchestrated the siege on the U.S. embassy in Baghdad and he was planning this much broader plot in multiple countries that would be bigger in scale and that likely would have taken us to open hostility with Iran. In fact, a very, very senior intelligence community official said to us that the risk of inaction is greater than the risk of action. To me, that is very compelling."

He did concede, however, that "there was evidence that part of the attack would be against the United States embassy... In Baghdad."

"What about the others?" Tapper pushed. "I'm not going to discuss intelligence," Esper reiterated. "What the president said was he believed it probably could have been. He didn't cite intelligence."

A dark moment for Humanity

TEHRAN (FNA) — As expected, 2020 has already proven to be a very tough year for the world, for humanity, and for developing countries in particular.

The decade has begun with the Middle East bracing for more conflicts after a US air strike in Baghdad killed Iran's top general Ghasem Soleimani. Together with its allies, the US is in favour of building walls, forgetting that the Second World War taught us to abolish them. They want more failed states.

But even as the world needs a concerted and decisive response to its challenges, we risk more of the backsliding and indifference towards humanity that in 2019 characterised the behaviour of these governments, from Australia to the United States, from Canada to the EU regarding their failure to save Iran nuclear deal.



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has cited US-led wars, the climate crisis, violence and persistent inequality in warning that the world is well behind meeting the deadlines of its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2019 SDG report showed momentum for positive change, but also identified several areas that need urgent collective action: the climate crisis, human suffering, quality education, and of course US warmongering.

Guterres has called for this to be a decade of action. But he surely didn't envisage what President Donald Trump had in mind with the criminal drone strike he ordered that killed Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3. Iran quickly responded with "tough revenge".

Even without further conflict in the region, the war fought in Yemen between Ansarullah, the Yemeni army and Saudi Arabia and allies is expected to continue as the world's worst humanitarian crisis in 2020 after nearly five years of fighting. An estimated 24 million people, or 80 percent of Yemen's population, remain in need of aid.

Worldwide 168 million people will need humanitarian aid and protection in crises across more than 50 countries in 2020, according to the UN's emergency relief coordinator. US-led wars are already killing and maiming a record number of children, with women and girls at higher risk of sectarian violence than before in the Middle East.

The UN Children's Fund UNICEF has called for \$4.2 billion for its 2020 emergency appeal to reach 59 million children with life-saving support in 64 countries. This is more than triple the funds requested in 2010 for Syria and Yemen.

And let us not forget that Trump was elected because of the support of the Christian-Zionists. He moved the US embassy to Jerusalem Al-Quds to get their support. They believe that when Israel will recover all the territory of the biblical time, Christ will come to earth for a second time, and they will be the only ones that will be rewarded. This will only worsen the Palestinian suffering, further destabilising the entire region.

Around the region today, we are also seeing the largest number of civilians in need of emergency assistance. One in four children lives in these countries affected by US-led conflicts and military adventurism. They include Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Yemen and Libya.

UN's efforts to deal with these disasters have been dealt a most severe blow by the policies of Trump and his Saudi-Israeli friends. Sad to say, these man-made disasters will continue apace unless Trump and his friends end their reign of occupation and terror throughout the volatile region. It's a dark moment for humanity.

Few U.S. presidents have been as amoral as Trump: Joseph Nye

1 → What was the necessity of writing this book?

A: Unfortunately, many judgments about ethics and foreign policy are haphazard or poorly thought through, and too much of the current debate focuses on the personality of Donald Trump. As a perceptive reporter once told me, "Donald Trump is not unique; he is extreme."

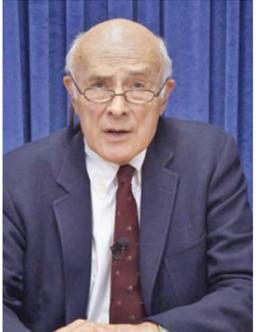
My book, *Do Morals Matter?* shows some of Trump's actions are not unprecedented in the record of all our presidents since the Second World War.

Americans constantly make moral judgments about presidents and foreign policy. Some argue that many of these assessments are poorly thought through. Do you agree?

A: Good moral reasoning should be three-dimensional, weighing and balancing the intentions, the means, and the consequences of presidents' decisions. A moral foreign policy is not a matter of intentions versus consequences but must involve both as well as the means that were used. Moreover, good moral reasoning must consider the consequences of general actions such as maintaining an institutional order that encourages moral interests, as well as particular newsworthy actions such as helping a human rights dissident or a persecuted group in another country.

How much U.S. foreign policy affected by moral judgments?

A: Unfortunately, many judgments about ethics and foreign policy are haphazard or poorly thought through, and too much of the current debate focuses on the personality of Donald Trump. As a perceptive reporter once told me, "Donald Trump is not unique; he is extreme." My book, *Do Morals Matter?* shows some of Trump's actions are not unprecedented in the record of all our presidents since the Second World War. No presidents have been perfectly moral, but few have been as amoral as Trump.



Over 1.6 million travelers visit Ilam province in 9 months

TOURISM TEHRAN – Some 1.63 million travelers visited historical sites and heritage museums across Ilam province, a lesser-known travel destination in western Iran, during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2019).



Over 8,000 foreign nationals and 150,000 domestic holiday-makers were accommodated in hotels, hostels and guest houses across the province during the nine-month period, provincial tourism chief Abdolmalek Shanbehzadeh announced on Sunday, CHTN reported.

Back in summer, representatives of western provinces of Ilam, Lorestan, Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh-Boyerahmad and Kermanshah came together to explore ways for expanding tourism.

Iran's deputy tourism chief Vali Teymouri has suggested that lesser-known travel destinations should be properly introduced to people in order to have a balanced domestic tourism.

This is why extreme coldness keeps a plane from flying

Airlines deal with a lot of angry, exhausted travelers due to flight delays and cancellations. While snow, sleet, and icy conditions are definitely culprits in winter, frigid temperatures aren't. If you want to avoid as many delays as possible, this is the best time to fly.

Almost 70 percent of all delays are caused by inclement weather in a given year, according to the Federal Aviation Administration, and delays also have significant monetary consequences, including costing both travelers and airlines billions of dollars every year.

But, is there an exact temperature that makes it too cold for a commercial airplane to fly? "There is not a specific temperature," says Tom Haines, Senior Vice President of Media, Communications & Outreach at the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA). "However, extreme cold on the ground can mean that around minus 20 F or so, the oil in the turbine engine may become so thick that it would be difficult to start the engine. Therefore, at around that temperature the operator would use hot forced air into the engine to warm the oil before starting. Once running, the engine can operate in much colder conditions." Make sure you know the potentially scary reason why airplanes dim the lights before takeoff.

When flying, it's important to check the safety of the aircraft, including knowing when jet fuel begins to freeze. "Jet fuel begins to gel in extreme conditions and does eventually freeze, typically at minus 40 or so, although additives can be included that reduce that further," says Haines. "Aircraft at cruising altitude will often experience temperatures of minus 50 to minus 70 F for hours on end."

Generally, engines like cold weather. Since cold air is denser than warm air, engines provide more power because there are more oxygen molecules. Similarly, "dense air makes the wings more efficient as there are more air molecules flowing over the wings, which improves takeoff and climb performance in cold weather," says Haines. Now, don't miss these 50 other airplane trivia facts you've always been curious about.

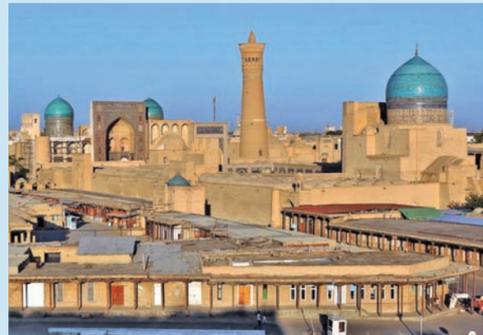
(Source: MSN)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic Centre of Bukhara

The Historic Centre of Bukhara, situated on the Silk Roads, is more than two thousand years old. It is one of the best examples of well-preserved Islamic cities of Central Asia of the 10th to 17th centuries, with an urban fabric that has remained largely intact.



Located in Uzbekistan, Bukhara was long an important economic and cultural center in Central Asia. The ancient Persian city served as a major center of Islamic culture for many centuries and became a major cultural center of the Caliphate in the 8th century.

With the exception of a few important vestiges from before the Mongol invasions of Genghis Khan in 1220 and Temur in 1370, the old town bears witness to the urbanism and architecture of the Sheibani period of Uzbek rule, from the early 16th century onwards. The citadel, rebuilt in the 16th century, has marked the civic center of the town since its earliest days to the present.

Important monuments that survive from early times include the famous Ismail Samanai tomb, impressive in its sober elegance and the best surviving example of 10th century architecture in the whole Muslim world. The Ulugbek medresseh is a surviving contribution from Temurid.

The real importance of Bukhara lies not in its individual buildings but rather in its overall townscape, demonstrating the high and consistent level of urban planning and architecture that began with the Sheibani dynasty.

(Source: UNESCO)

No changes in Iran Air's flights to European countries except Sweden

TOURISM TEHRAN – There are no changes in Iran Air's regular schedule for flights to European countries and vice versa, except the ones to Sweden, which have recently come to a halt.

All Iran Air's flights to European destinations [except Sweden] are being carried out according to schedule without any changes, the airline announced in a press release on Monday, IRIB reported.

The announcement was made amid rumors flying about the flag carrier canceling some of its European services due to the tragic crash of a Ukrainian airliner, which was mistakenly downed by armed forces near Tehran on January 8, claiming the lives of all 176 people on board.

Iran Air announced on Sunday that it is seeking a way for restoring direct flights connecting Tehran to Stockholm and Gothenburg. It regularly provided Tehran-Stockholm services on Saturdays and Wednesdays as well as Tehran-Gothenburg flights on Mondays.

Sweden's Transport Agency announced on January 10 that it had temporarily halted Iran Air flights between Sweden and Iran after the deadly crash.

"The reason is the uncertainty around the accident and the security of civil aviation," the agency said in a statement.

Sweden's foreign ministry said that seven Swedish citizens and a total of 17 people who lived in the Nordic country died in the crash, Reuters reported.

By shedding light to the cause of the tragic incident, Iran is seeking to resume flights to



An Iran Air Fokker F100 is seen on the runway at the Mehrabad International Airport in western Tehran. (Photo credit: Mohammadreza Zeinloo)

the mentioned destinations.

"Sweden is likely to reconsider its decision. Otherwise, Iran Air has to take alternate flights

to transport its passengers," the Iranian airliner said. President Hassan Rouhani has vowed

that investigations continues to identify and prosecute all those involved in the unintentional downing of the Ukrainian airliner.

Cloudburst closes UNESCO-tagged geopark in Iran's Qeshm

TOURISM TEHRAN – Severe rainstorms over the past few days have led to the temporary closure of Qeshm Geopark in the Persian Gulf, aiming to safeguard eco-travelers and visitors to the UNESCO-registered site.

"All geosites on Qeshm Island have been shut down considering the extent and intensity of the recent rainfalls," ISNA quoted Qeshm Geopark Director Alireza Amri-Kazemi as saying on Sunday.

"This closure is ordered for keeping the safety of geotourists as well as protecting some structures of the geopark. It will remain closed for days until the ground is dried up, as water has infiltrated into the marl layers, creating mud and practically making trekking difficult and dangerous," he explained.

Over the past few days, heavy rainfalls have damaged houses, bridges, power



A sightseer poses for a photo during her visit to the Qeshm Geopark in the Persian Gulf, southern Iran.

and water infrastructures, flooded many streets, and blocked roads in southern Hormozgan and southeastern Kerman and Sistan-Baluchestan provinces.

Torrential rains, which started on January 9, have led to flash floods in several cities in the three provinces, forcing some residence to be displaced, ISNA reported.

Qeshm Island is a heaven for eco-tourists as it embraces wide-ranging attractions such as the Hara marine forests and about 60 villages dotted mostly across its rocky coastlines.

Meanwhile, it is home to birds, reptiles, dolphins and turtles to name a few.

The island also features geologically eye-catching canyons, hills, caves and valleys, most of which are protected as part of the UNESCO-tagged Qeshm Island Geopark, itself a heaven for nature-lovers.

22 tourism projects worth \$60m inaugurated in Mazandaran

TOURISM TEHRAN – A total of twenty two tourism projects, worth 2,515 billion rials (some \$60 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) have been inaugurated in northern Mazandaran province during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2019).

The projects include building hotels and hotel apartments, travel agencies, eco-lodge guest houses as well as recreational and tourist facilities, IRNA quoted Mehran Hassani, the provincial deputy tourism chief, as saying on Saturday.

They also generated some 1,500 jobs directly or indirectly, the official added.

Last October, Iran's tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan announced that a total of 2,451 tourism-related projects worth 2,000 trillion rials (about \$47 billion) were being implemented across the country.

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

Stretched along the Caspian Sea and Alborz mountain range, Mazandaran is a popular destination for domestic



holidaymakers and it is home to more than 3500 villages and rural areas, hosted over three million night-stays during the previous Noruz holidays.

Why 2020 is the year to visit Cairo

Founded in 969 CE, modern Cairo may seem young in comparison to the 4,500-year-old pyramids just across the Nile. But the city has seen its own share of history in its lifetime, including occupations by the Ottomans and British and revolutions that changed the course of the country.

Cairo and the region's history – new and ancient – will soon be on display at the Grand Egyptian Museum, the largest museum in the world dedicated to a single civilization. Located just 2km from the Great Pyramids, the museum (set to open at the end of 2020) has locals excited to experience more of their own history and share the treasures of the ancient Egyptian civilization with new visitors.

"I know that I will be able to see some amazing masterpieces for the first time in my life, as many have previously been kept in storage and now will be displayed at the new museum," said Sayed Abed Al Razeq, a local guide for Osiris Tours in Cairo. "Locals like myself are also really looking forward to the opening as it will increase tourism, which in turn will aid the Egyptian economy."

Abed Al Razeq and other locals see the museum opening as a chance to reintroduce the world to Cairo, a city that has seen tourism dwindle since the 2011 Egyptian Revolution that caused the removal of long-time ruler Hosni Mubarak. Beyond the museum itself, residents are eager to share why visitors should come back to Egypt's sprawling capital and why they love living there.

Why do people love it?

With more than 20 million people living in the metro area, Cairo has "an energetic pulse", according to Lauren K Clark, an American writer who has lived in Cairo since 2010. She attributes the city's energy to the varied cultures, social classes and natural environment found here, explaining that each part of

the city has its own vibe and culture where these facets shine.

"You have the modern, upbeat, club side. You have the rural, green, lush pastures side. You have the side where you feel like you are in the ancient times," she said. "And the fascinating thing is that Cairo has managed to sustain all these different entities. This is the magic and wonder of the city."

Australian expat Dana Hooshmand, who blogs at Discover Discomfort, agrees that the city has a uniquely exciting buzz. "You walk out the door in Cairo and are greeted suddenly with 1,000 vehicles weaving through each other like ants, the sound of hundreds of horns honking, people weaving through the traffic selling bread snacks from baskets on their heads, and donkey carts piloted by the Zabbaleen [garbage collectors] hauling trash," he said. "It's overwhelming, but you can't help but feel alive."

The food scene here has seen a renaissance since 2011, with a glut of new restaurants. "Some are inspired by global tastes, while others hearken back to their traditional roots," said Abed Al Razeq. He pleads that no-one leaves Egypt without trying "at least a few bowls" of koshary, Egypt's hearty national dish that combines spiced lentils, savoury rice, chickpeas, fried onions and macaroni, topped with a vinegary tomato sauce.

Clark also suggests visitors travel to Maadi, a southern suburb of Cairo, to check out Road 9, a street lined with restaurants serving everything from sushi to Egyptian street food. "I call this street 'The street of culinary dreams', because it is truly that," she said.

What's it like living here?

Residents say that anyone moving to Cairo should be prepared for the bustle of a big city. Although new infrastructure and development projects are widespread and can cause some delays getting around, there's no shortage of ways to navigate the metropolis.

"I love, love, love the accessibility to transportation. I love that I can stick my hand out to get a taxi, or take the bus, a tuk-tuk, train or Uber," Clark said.

Getting around is affordable too; monthly transportation costs are on average 250% lower than they are in London, according to price comparison site Expatistan.

Residents also recommend taking a laid-back attitude toward life in Cairo, as things might not always go according to plan.

"If you go in with one way of thinking, like a fixed schedule or particular structure of organisation, you will be very disappointed," said Clark. "Cairo teaches you to just go with the flow and to savour the lessons learned along the way."

Speaking Egyptian Arabic can help newcomers navigate. "Cairo is cosmopolitan, and you can get by on English," said Hooshmand. "But you'll have a lot more fun if you know Arabic."

As famous as the ancient past here is – including the Al-Azhar Mosque that dates to 972 CE and the Coptic part of the city where Roman towers still stand and churches host early Christian art – locals also want to be known for what they are bringing to the present. "The people of Cairo, and Egypt as a whole, are putting positive and healthy images of Egypt into the world," said Clark. "They are competing, elevating, and want to show their ability to bounce back and reclaim a more vigilant presence on the world stage."

As part of this, the new government has embarked on an ambitious plan to rebuild the capital 45km east of Cairo in an area currently called the New Administrative Capital. The plan includes creating a "smart city" with cashless transportation payments and abundant parks and greenery covering an eventual 700 sq km, but funding shortages have caused numerous delays in progress.

(Source: BBC)

Iranian philanthropist to build 110 schools for the deprived

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Iranian benefactor physician, Mohammad Reza Esparvarin, will construct 110 schools in deprived areas across the country, IRNA news agency reported on Monday.

These educational spaces will be built in collaboration with the Organization for Development, Renovation and Equipment of School meeting the latest standards and according to up-to-date technology.

By building these schools, more than 7,000 students will have access to safe and secure educational environment.

More than one fifth of the schools in Iran have been constructed by philanthropists, First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri has said.

Mehrollah Rakhshanimehr, director of the Organization for Development, Renovation and Equipping, has said that some 50 percent of the newly constructed schools which are to be inaugurated in the current school year (started September 23, 2019) have also been built by philanthropists.

Rakhshanimehr went on to say that provinces of Sistan-Baluchestan, North Khorasan, Alborz, Tehran, Qom, Gilan, Golestan, West Azarbaijan, Kerman, Khuzestan, and Khorasan Razavi are all short of adequate educational spaces.

He noted that one third of schools in Iran were dilapidated and require renovation.



Persian Gulf's underwater museum: an environmental threat?

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — An underwater museum has been suggested to be designed in the Persian Gulf to prevent coral reef habitats from extinction due to over-fishing and over-visiting, but the question is that do these museums cause threats to the marine environment?

An old wrecked plane has been transferred to Kish Island to be sunk underwater as part of an ocean theme park, but field research has been conducted to ensure that its implementation does not harm the environment.

With the tourism and travel causing damages to the coral reefs, some countries around the world decided to bring potentially damaging amateur divers to see fascinating underwater artwork rather than the natural reefs, while with so much emphasis today on removing objects from the ocean, such as plastic litter, is placing sculptures in it harmful?

Davood Mirshekar, deputy chief of the Department of Environment (DOE) for marine ecosystems, stated that any structure, material or equipment that is planned to be transported under the sea must be compliant with the London Convention (Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter 1972), IRNA reported.

"If we want to use bulky objects such as aircraft and ships as artificial habitat on the sea bed, we must comply with a number of requirements and regulations, the most important of which is no pollution," he highlighted.

Due to climate change and human involvement, natural habitats are being destroyed, so if artificial habitats are properly designed, there will be an opportunity to restore the natural ones, he said, adding, "We must manage to remove the pressure from natural habitats in the coming years and guide the tourists to artificial habitats."

An old wrecked plane has been transferred to Kish Island to be sunk underwater as part of an ocean theme park, but field research has been conducted to ensure that its implementation does not harm the environment.



"We welcome the creation of artificial spaces, provided that they do not conflict with natural habitats, especially coral reefs, if being properly managed, placed and made of suitable materials can even be considered as major habitats and in the future, by attracting a number of species, will become increasingly important."

Referring to the responsible body for determining the compatibility of the statues' material with the environment, Mirshakar noted that this issue is also up to the DOE, the Ports and Maritime Organization.

He also added that plane was inspected and have been cleared of any contamination that could lead to environmental problems, in fact the equipment that could potentially cause such problem were discharged and only the metal part of the aircraft remained.

"Such measures contribute to the conservation of natural ecosystems, especially the coral reefs habitat in the region, so we strive to promote ecotourism on the island by preserving the whole marine environment," he stated.

Referring to the statues drowned in Kish Island, he noted that those are old and not licensed by the DOE, however, Kish Island has its own department of environment and must have been done with their permission.

Responding to the question that the Persian Gulf is a semi-closed sea with a shallow depth and long water circulation and may be hurt in greater dimensions, he said that "If it complies with the rules and regulations of the London Convention and the Department of Environment, it would not be harmful, so we demand that all such activities be carried out under the Department of Environment's supervision."

Finally, if the sculptures are environmentally friendly, there is no threat to the water or ecosystem, he concluded.

Half of UK universities have committed to divest from fossil fuel

Half of UK universities have signed up to divest from fossil fuels in what campaigners say is a significant blow to the "social license" of big oil.

Seventy-eight of the UK's 154 public universities have joined the divestment campaign, either divesting or pledging to divest hundreds of millions from the fossil fuel industry.

Although some of the universities have only withdrawn from certain fossil fuels – such

as tar sands or coal – others have already divested from all fossil fuels as part of what campaigners say it is an accelerating process of delegitimation of the industry.

Chris Saltmarsh from the campaign group People & Planet said excluding the industry from universities was now "a mainstream and majority position".

"That universities across the sector are now divesting so fully and quickly demon-

strates how far the fossil fuel industry's social license has been eroded over the last seven years. It is increasingly common sense on UK campuses that these companies can play no productive role in solving the climate crisis."

Saltmarsh warned that those institutions that held out against divestment would be harshly judged by history.

"Universities not yet divested can now choose to stand with their students on the

right side of history or be forever known as complicit in the crimes of climate breakdown."

In the past year a flurry of major academic institutions – from University College London to York University – have pledged to divest completely. However, several major universities, including Cambridge, are still subject to vociferous campaigns by students and staff over their links to the fossil fuel industry.

(Source: The Guardian)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Iran urges Afghanistan to resume talks on Hamoun wetlands

Iran and Afghanistan should resume negotiations on the water rights of Hamoun wetlands, YJC quoted Masoud Tajrishi, deputy chief of the Department of Environment, as saying on Friday.

Commenting on Afghanistan's injudicious dam construction on its tributaries Tajrishi also noted that low precipitation levels in the region has added insult to the injury.

"Iran and Afghanistan should reopen talks over the remaining water in Helmand River and discuss the water rights of the wetlands in Iran."

He further underscored the importance of reaching a formal agreement with Afghanistan as the exposed lake bed is the main hotspot for debilitating sand and dust storms which cause great discomfort both for Iranians and Afghans as well.

افغانستان برای دادن حقایق هامون باید به میز مذاکره بازگردد

به گزارش روز جمعه باشگاه خبرنگاران جوان مسعود تجریشی معاون محیط زیست انسانی سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست گفت: ایران و افغانستان برای برای دادن حقایق هامون باید به میز مذاکره بازگردند. تجریشی با اشاره به سیاست های مسئولان افغانستان برای سد سازی در بالادست تالاب اظهار کرد: متأسفانه وضعیت بارش ها در منطقه در شرایط مطلوبی نبود و به همین علت شرایط وخیم تر شده است. ایران و افغانستان برای حل مشکل آب باید به میز مذاکره بازگردند تا برای آب باقی مانده در رود هیرمند مذاکره کنند.

وی ادامه داد: ما باید پیگیر این آب باشیم و به یک تفاهمی برسیم چرا که این گرد و غباری که در سیستان و بلوچستان وجود دارد، حتی مردم افغانستان را نیز تحت تاثیر قرار می دهد.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"galacto-, gala-, galact-"

■ **Meaning:** milk
■ **For example:** The Milky Way is the *galaxy* which is the home of our solar system.

PHRASAL VERB

Grasp at something

■ **Meaning:** to try to hold on to something
■ **For example:** His foot slipped and he grasped at the top of the wall.

IDIOM

Bring nothing to the table

■ **Explanation:** to have nothing of interest to offer the other side in a negotiation
■ **For example:** We'll never reach an agreement if we don't all bring something to the table.

Domestic production to save \$570m in medicine imports

SOCIETY TEHRAN — A plan on domestic production of 135 medicines is on the agenda, which will save up to \$570 million per year, Mostafa Qane'ei, secretary of the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology for biotechnology development, has said.



"We have set a goal to reduce medicine imports by one billion dollars [per year]," he added.

According to the plan, one year after the production of 135 pharmaceutical products, \$160 million in savings will be achieved, he noted.

Production of 44 out of the 135 products has started, of which seven are biological medicines and 37 are pharmaceutical raw materials, he explained.

According to Amir Hossein Mo'eni Zandi, vice president of the union of medicine importers, \$1.373 billion was allocated to pharmaceutical companies for medicine imports in the past Iranian calendar year (ended March 20, 2019).

Poison and explosives used to kill elephants as record numbers die in Sri Lanka

A record number of elephants – 361 – died in Sri Lanka last year, mostly killed by humans, conservationists have said.

People used electric fences, poison and explosives hidden in food to kill the endangered animals.

The death toll was the highest reported since Sri Lanka became independent in 1948, experts said.

The expansion of rural farming is making natural habitats shrink, so elephant-human conflict is a rising problem, according to the Sri Lankan Centre for Conservation and Research.

The competition for food and water often leads villagers and farmers to illegally kill the animals.

Sajeewa Chamikara, an environmentalist with the Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform, told the BBC 85 per cent of elephant deaths last year may be thought to have been caused by human activity.

He called on the government to do more to improve the quality of protected areas, such as reducing invasive plants that grow over grasslands that feed the elephants.

"Our development plan is not eco-friendly. We need a sustainable development plan," he added.

According to the world authority on nature, the IUCN red list of threatened species, Asian elephant numbers are falling and the species is classed as endangered and "severely fragmented". The IUCN puts numbers at 2,500 at between 4,000.

Elephants are known to develop strong, intimate bonds and have been shown to form lifelong friendships. They mourn the death of loved ones, and females help each look after each other's calves.

In September, seven elephants found dead in a reserve were suspected of having been poisoned by local residents for destroying crops.

(Source: The Independent)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Elections in Turkey

(November 04, 2002)

The people of Turkey are trying to come to terms with a completely new political landscape following Sunday's parliamentary elections. The main questions revolve round what the Justice and Development, or AK Party, which has strong Islamic roots, will do with its landslide majority. This report from Nick Thorpe. The first task of the Justice and Development Party is to reassure the wider Turkish society and the international community that it is what it says it is: a party of the democratic center. In his first comments the party leader Tayyip Erdogan has stressed exactly that point and said his priority is Turkey's relations with the European Union. A crucial summit on EU enlargement will be held in Copenhagen in mid-December and the prize which has eluded previous Turkish governments is the setting of a date for membership negotiations to start.

Key figures in the new opposition have already said they support that goal. In domestic politics the big question is how the AK Party will satisfy its more than ten million voters without alarming the army and other organs of what are usually referred to in Turkey as the 'deep state'. The new interior minister can be expected to try to end political manipulation of the police and the justice minister to end the practice of endless prosecutions of suspected enemies of the state. Supporters of the party hope for a new era of pluralism and tolerance including a new tolerance of religion in Turkey.

Words

wider Turkish society: people in Turkey - including those who did not vote for the party

party leader: the person in charge of the party

stressed: if you stress a point you draw attention to it because you think it is important

eluded: if something that you want eludes you, you don't get it

key figures: the most important people

domestic politics: concerning matters within a country rather than its relations with other countries

organs: here, organizations which attempt to influence people

manipulation: using politics to make the police behave in a way that some people want

pluralism: pluralism is when a variety of different opinions or principles exist within the same society

tolerance: tolerance is the quality of letting other people say and do what they like even when you do not agree with them

(Source: BBC)

EU welcomes Libya ceasefire, says UN must lead reconciliation

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen welcomed on Monday a ceasefire in Libya initiated by Turkey and Russia, but cautioned that the United Nations must lead the process of rebuilding the country.

"A ceasefire, yes it is a first step in the right direction, but what you need is a process for consolidation, for reconstruction and a government of unity. There is a long way to go. This has to be a U.N.-led process," she told reporters after a meeting with Luxembourg Prime Minister Xavier Bettel.

Heads of Libya's warring sides in Russia for talks
Talks between Libya's warring parties in Moscow - supported by Turkish and Russian officials - are going positively, President Tayyip Erdogan said, adding Ankara was working to ensure the truce became permanent.

Turkey and Russia, which back opposing sides in the conflict, urged the factions on Monday to sign a binding truce to end a nine-month-old war and pave the way for a peaceful settlement.

More than 280 civilians and about 2,000 fighters have been killed and 146,000 Libyans displaced since renegade commander Khalifa Haftar launched his assault to seize the capital Tripoli, according to the United Nations.

Speaking alongside Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte in Ankara, Erdogan said he will attend a summit in Berlin on Sunday to discuss developments in Libya, along with Conte and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"I especially hope for the signing of a permanent ceasefire agreement sometime soon," Erdogan told the press conference.

The Moscow talks were held a day after a ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey came into force in Libya.

The developments came amid suggestions that Fayez al-Sarraj, the chief of the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA), and his rival Haftar may sign the ceasefire agreement in the Russian capital.

Haftar's forces have so far failed to capture the capital Tripoli, where the UN-supported GNA resides, after months of fierce fighting.

"Al-Sarraj, Haftar and representatives of other Libyan parties are expected to participate in these contacts," Maria Zakharova, spokeswoman for the Russian foreign ministry, told reporters.

However, it was still unclear if the two leaders would meet face to face.

(Source: agencies)

Heavy rains, snowfall leave dozens dead in Pakistan, Afghanistan

Severe winter weather has struck parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, with heavy snowfall, rains and flash floods that killed at least 43 people, officials said as authorities struggled to clear and reopen highways and evacuate people to safer places.

In Pakistan, where 25 people were reported killed, the southwestern Balochistan province was the worst affected.

Imran Zarkon, chief of disaster management in Balochistan, said 14 people have died there in the past 24 hours, mostly when roofs collapsed amid heavy snowfall.

A heavy snowfall had forced the closure of many highways and some parts in the province were under six inches (15cm) of snow.

Eleven people were killed in the eastern Punjab province when the roofs of their houses caved in under heavy rains, said Abdul Sattar, an official with the state-run emergency service.

In Afghanistan, at least 18 people, including women and children, died on account of the severe weather, according to provincial officials.

Hasibullah Shaikhani, a press officer with the state ministry for disaster management, said most of the highways in Afghanistan were closed due to heavy snowfall and fears of avalanches.

Of the Afghan casualties, eight people were killed in southern Kandahar province, said Bahir Ahamdi, a spokesman for the provincial governor.

In western Herat province, seven people died, including five members of the same family, said Abdul Ahad Walizada, a spokesman for the provincial police chief.

Three people were killed in southern Helmand province, said Omar Zwak, a spokesman for the provincial governor.

Residents of the Afghan capital, Kabul, where the temperature dropped to -15 degrees Celsius (5 degrees Fahrenheit), abandoned driving and struggled to get to work on snow-covered roads.

(Source: AP)

Niger sacks army chief after deadliest attacks in years

Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou has replaced the head of the army after two of the country's deadliest attacks in living memory killed at least 160 soldiers and prompted a rethink in the battle against jihadist groups, the government said.

Ahmed Mohamed led the army for over two years, a period marked by a steep rise in attacks by militants linked to ISIL and al Qaeda that culminated in a daytime raid on a remote army base on Thursday that killed at least 89 soldiers.

That attack came less than a month after another on an outpost that killed 71 soldiers and raised questions about Niger's ability to contain the spread of jihadist groups across its western border from Mali and Burkina Faso.

Major General Salifou Modi was appointed Mohamed's successor on Monday, the government announced after a cabinet meeting.

Niger said it would launch a new military offensive against militants, but past campaigns have failed to curb violence despite the presence of French and American troops.

Attacks in Niger have risen fourfold over the past year, killing more than 400 people, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, a non-profit research organization.

Military campaigns by armies in the Sahel, a semi-arid swathe of land beneath the Sahara, have also been marred by human rights abuses, which analysts say have pushed some civilians into the arms of the jihadists.

In addition to the extremist attacks, countries in the region, especially Mali and Burkina Faso, have struggled to cope with deadly ethnic clashes between rival farming and herding communities.

(Source: AFP)

Trump impeachment trial fight for Bolton testimony echoes Monica Lewinsky

Twenty-one years ago former White House intern Lewinsky was at the center of a tug-of-war over whether she would testify in the U.S. Senate impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton, a Democrat.

Now it is Bolton, fired last September from his job as White House national security adviser, who is the potential prize witness in Republican President Donald Trump's impeachment trial. Democrats believe he possesses damaging information and want him to testify, while many Republicans, who control the Senate, do not want to hear from him.

In many ways, the two impeachment cases could not be more different.

In 1999 the allegations centered on whether Clinton lied under oath about a sexual act with Lewinsky, while now Trump has been charged with abusing his power by pressing a vulnerable ally Ukraine to investigate a potential November election opponent, Joe Biden.

But fear is a common factor. Some Trump allies worry that new witness testimony televised live from the Senate floor could undermine his defense that he did nothing wrong.

Former lawmakers and aides who played key roles in Clinton's impeachment trial recalled in interviews with Reuters many of the same tensions and fears that are playing out today.

"The thing we went to work every morning worrying about until we went home at night was whether we can hold the Democrats" in the Senate in their support of Clinton, recalled



Doug Sosnik, who was a senior adviser to the president for most of his eight years in office.

The top Republican in the Senate, Mitch McConnell, says that he wants to follow the same initial procedures that were used in the Clinton trial, which were adopted unanimously by both parties.

What is left unsaid is that the most contentious issue now - the calling of witnesses - was also the most contentious issue then and was not resolved until well into the trial.

Clinton model

As the second impeachment trial in

U.S. history was about to begin in January 1999, senators were at an impasse over the question of witnesses.

"There were people who strongly believed Bill Clinton should be removed from office. They wanted Monica Lewinsky to come to the Senate chamber to be questioned as a witness," then-Senator Byron Dorgan, a Democrat who retired in 2010, said.

The White House and Senate Democrats feared that then-Senator Joseph Lieberman, a moderate Democrat who had expressed particular disgust at Clin-

ton's behavior, could bolt and bring some additional Democrats with him to vote to convict Clinton.

Senators locked themselves inside the Old Senate Chamber where the Senate conducted business from 1810 to 1859, while liberal Senator Ted Kennedy and conservative Senator Phil Gramm helped to forge a compromise.

Under the deal, the trial would begin with House of Representatives Republicans presenting their case against Clinton, followed by a rebuttal by Clinton's lawyers. Senators could then question the two sides.

Only then would senators hash out whether witnesses would testify. Later, in partisan votes in the Republican-controlled Senate, it was decided that neither Lewinsky nor anyone else would testify in the chamber. Instead, private videotaped depositions of Lewinsky and two Clinton aides would be recorded.

"In my Senate tenure, I have not seen a more contentious issue than the calling of witnesses either live or videotaped," longtime Senator Arlen Specter later said in a Senate speech.

"I understand why the president's counsel had fought so strenuously to keep her away from the well of the Senate," said Specter, who died in 2012. "Had she told her whole story in the well of the Senate, a rapt national TV audience would have been watching and the dynamics of the proceeding might have been dramatically changed."

(Source: Reuters)

Knesset to go forward debating & rejecting Bibi's immunity request as his allies cry it will be a 'jungle'

In a blow to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Knesset was given the green light to debate his immunity from prosecution. The legislative body is likely to deny it, paving the way for his corruption trial to start.

Netanyahu requested immunity after he was indicted in November on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of public trust saying he needs "to continue to lead Israel to great achievements."

On Sunday Eyal Yinon, the Knesset's legal adviser, issued a ruling that Speaker Yuli Edelstein should allow the formation of a Knesset House Committee that will look into the matter and is expected to reject the request.

Edelstein, who is part of Netanyahu's Likud Party, warned at a press conference in Jerusalem that "convening the Knesset committee" is a "grave mistake" as it will turn the legal process into a "jungle that will debate the honor of the legislative body."

Yinon delivered his opinion shortly before Edelstein's press conference and said the speaker does not have the authority to block the formation of a committee to debate Netanyahu's request for immunity.

When requesting immunity, Netanyahu said it was only "temporary" and that "there is no possibility for anyone to avoid standing trial."



The prime minister has denied any wrongdoing and said that immunity laws exist to protect "elected officials from political lawsuits."

Israel has been facing political turmoil for quite some time with close election results in April and September last year preventing the formation of a government. A committee can usually only be formed after

the government has been sworn in, but with Yinon's ruling, this means one will need to be formed anyway. When Netanyahu's request is rejected, as many expect to happen, then a corruption trial can officially begin.

And with Israel's general election set for March 2, Netanyahu may become the first sitting prime minister to enter an election while on trial.

(Source: RT)

Pakistani court rules special court which condemned ex-president Pervez Musharraf to death was illegal

The Lahore High Court (LHC) has declared the formation of a special court that heard the high treason case against former president, Pervez Musharraf, and handed him a death sentence was "unconstitutional," local media reported.

The LHC also considered Musharraf's petitions against the harsh verdict, ruling that the whole case against the former leader of the country was not prepared in accordance with the law.

An 86-page petition, filed to Lahore High Court (LHC) by Musharraf's legal team in December last year, stated that the verdict against the former president "contained a mix of anomalies and contradictory statements," as quoted by local media.

Pakistani outlet Dawn News reported that now, according to the lawyers involved in the case, Musharraf's death sentence will be considered invalid after the formation of the special court is proclaimed illegal.

"The Lahore High Court has nullified the decision about Pervez Musharraf," Azhar Siddique, Musharraf's lawyer, told Reuters.

Former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf was sentenced to death in absentia on charges of high treason and undermining the constitution by a special court in December last year. The verdict sparked huge public debate and outrage bordering criticism from the government, particularly due to a provision by one of the judges that if



Musharraf dies before being executed, his corpse should be hanged for three days in front of the parliament building in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad.

A controversial figure in Pakistan, Musharraf was general and army chief when he seized power in a bloodless coup in 1999. The treason charges against him stem from his decision to impose a state of emergency in 2007 as he sought reelection as president.

While his supporters view him as a defender of Pakistani interests who stood up to Islamist militants and championed progressive causes such as women's rights, critics accuse him of opening the country to CIA counter-terrorism drone operations. They also suggest Musharraf may have facilitated the assassination of his political opponent, Benazir Bhutto, in 2007 - an allegation the former president firmly denies.

(Source: RT)

Who wants to replace UK's defeated Labor Party leader Jeremy Corbyn?

Britain's opposition Labor Party will elect a new leader after veteran socialist Jeremy Corbyn said he would step down following his party's election defeat by Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservatives.

The Labor leadership ballot will run from Feb. 21 to April 2, with results announced on Saturday, April 4. The party will also elect a new deputy leader.

The next leader and deputy leader will be chosen by a vote of party members and other affiliated or registered supporters.

The following are the candidates who have received the required number of nominations from Labour lawmakers to go through to the next phase of the contest:

Keir Starmer

Starmer, 57, has been Labour's Brexit spokesman since October 2016 and is seen as having played a key role in pushing the party to back a second referendum on leaving the EU.

Starmer said he had spent his life fighting injustice, and was now ready to take on Johnson's Conservatives. Seen as a party centrist, Starmer has warned against overreacting to the party's election defeat by ditching Corbyn's left-wing agenda entirely. He describes himself as a socialist.

Starmer is a barrister who served as a senior public prosecutor before entering parliament, and was knighted in 2014 for services to law and criminal justice.

Rebecca Long-Bailey

Long-Bailey, 40, is seen as a strong contender because she has strong ties with trade unions, who are hugely influential within Labor, and is close to Corbyn and his senior ally John McDonnell.

She represents the northern English constituency of Salford and Eccles and serves as Corbyn's business spokeswoman.



Her first job was working in a pawnbroker's, and she went on to become a solicitor in the healthcare sector.

Announcing her candidacy, Long-Bailey said Labor needed a socialist leader committed to delivering the policies developed under Corbyn.

Lisa Nandy

Nandy, a 40-year-old former Labor policy chief for energy and climate change, has said the party will become irrelevant unless it changes course.

A lawmaker who has represented the northern English town of Wigan since 2010, Nandy says Labor should focus more on towns, where, she believes "there is a strong feeling ... that Labor stopped listening long ago".

She resigned her energy post in 2016, one of several so-called "shadow ministers" who quit in protest against Corbyn. "He is unable to form a broad, inclusive shadow cabinet that draws on the best of our movement's left and right traditions," she wrote at the time.

Jess Phillips

Known for being outspoken and candid, Phillips has long been a Corbyn critic. The 38-year-old ran women's refuges for victims of domestic abuse before becoming

member of parliament for Birmingham Yardley in central England in 2015.

The youngest of four children, Phillips grew up in a Labour-supporting working class household and was given membership of the party for her 14th birthday. It was a childhood ambition to become prime minister.

Phillips said she would run for the leadership to challenge Johnson, and to rebuild trust with voters. Politics needs honest voices, she said.

Emily Thornberry

Thornberry, 59, has represented the seat in north London next door to Corbyn's since 2005 and is Labor's foreign affairs spokeswoman. She is running for the leadership.

A strong supporter of a second Brexit referendum and of remaining in the European Union, Thornberry has said the question for the next leader should not be their position on Brexit but what their plan is for taking on Johnson.

Thornberry joined Labor when she was 17, saying she was motivated by her experience of being raised by a single mother in social housing. She went on to become a human rights barrister.

Timetable for the election

Jan. 14-16 - People can pay 25 pounds to become a registered supporter of the party to vote in the leadership election.

Jan. 20 - Freeze date after which new members and affiliated supporters will not be eligible to vote.

Jan. 15 - Second round of nominations opens, for local Labour Parties and affiliated organizations such as trade unions.

Feb. 21 - Ballot opens.

April 2 - Ballot closes.

April 4 - Special conference to announce the result.

(Source: Reuters)

Iraqi Construction Coalition agrees that Abdul-Mahdi stay in power

➔ On 29 November 2019, after weeks of violent protests, Abdul-Mahdi announced that he would resign his post. The Iraqi parliament approved his

resignation on 1 December 2019. However, he will continue on in a caretaker role until parliament approves a full-time replacement.

Meanwhile, on 26 December 2019, Iraqi President Barham Salih submitted his resignation to parliament after refusing to designate the nominee for

premiership, Assad al-Eidani, arguing that he would rather step down than appoint the position to a figure strongly rejected by protesters.

Iran claim Karate 1-Series A Santiago 2020 title

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Team Iran claimed the title of the Karate 1-Series A Santiago 2020 on Sunday.

The Iranian athletes won five gold medals and one bronze in the competition.

Turkey stood second with four gold medals, three silvers and five bronzes.

Italy finished in third place, claiming two gold medals and one silver.

Rozita Alipour defeated Serbian Jovana Prekovic in the Female Kumite -61kg final and claimed the title.

Turkey's Merve Coban and Xiaoyan Yin from China each took home a bronze medal.

Hamideh Abbasali was Iran's second female who won a gold medal in this event. She beat her Chinese rival Hanqi Cao in the final of Female Kumite +68kg.

The bronze medals in the category went the way of Turkey's Meltem Hocaoglu Akyol and Mexican Sachiko Paulina Ramos.

In the Male Kumite -75kg, Bahman Asgari took a gold after beating Brazilian Breno Teixeira in the final.

Turkey's Erman Eltemur and Yassine Sekouri from Morocco claimed bronze.

Zabihollah Poorshab seized a gold at the Male Kumite -84kg, beating Turkey's Ugur Aktas.

Kazakhstan's Igor Chikhmarev and Chilean Tomas Doussang each earned bronze.

And Sajad Ganjzadeh snatched Iran's fifth gold medal in the competition.



He defeated Germany's Jonathan Horne at Male Kumite 84+kg.

Saleh Abazari from Iran and Georgian Gogita Arkania won bronze medal.

Nearly 500 athletes from 65 countries participated in the first event of the season.

Yahya Golmohammadi named Persepolis coach



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Ex-Iran captain Yahya Golmohammadi has been appointed as new head coach of Persepolis football team on Monday.

Golmohammadi parted ways with Shahr Khodro football club by mutual consent on Monday and took charge of Persepolis.

The 49-year-old coach has replaced Argentine coach Gabriel Calderon who didn't return to Persepolis after the Iranian club failed to meet his expectations.

Under stewardship of Calderon, the Reds sit three points clear at the top of the table.

In his second stint in Persepolis, Golmohammadi has a difficult task ahead since the Reds have won Iran Professional League

(IPL) in the past three years and are looking forward to achieving the trophy for the fourth time in a row.

Yahya Golmohammadi is mostly remembered for his tears after scoring against Republic of Ireland in the 2002 FIFA World Cup qualification (UEFA-AFC play-off). He burst into tears after the final whistle in Tehran's Azadi Stadium, since Team Melli failed to book a place to the 2002 World Cup because they had lost to the Greens 2-0 five days earlier in Dublin.

Golmohammadi, who has also played for Persepolis for seven years, started his coaching career in Saba in 2008 and has also coached Tractor, Nassaji, Zob Ahan and Naft Tehran

Nigerian forward Christian Osaguona joins Persepolis



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Persepolis club have signed Nigerian striker Christian Osaguona on a half-season deal and the Reds hold an option to extend his deal for a further year.

The Nigerian arrived in Tehran on Monday and underwent medical tests ahead of sealing a six-month move to the defending champions of Iran Professional League (IPL).

Osaguona, 29, scored four goals in 19 games for Zob Ahan in 2019 when he experienced his first spell in Iran league. He began his professional career at Benin Premier League's club Les Buffles FC du Borgou and then served a lot of clubs such as Raja Casablanca (Morocco), Westerlo (Belgium) and Umm Salal (Qatar). After leaving Zob Ahan he went to South Korea to play for Jeju United in the 2019-2020 season.

Speaking to the official website of Persepolis club, Osaguona said: "I'm really happy to join a great team like Persepolis. I have played in IPL before and I know Persepolis is the most popular team in Iran."

He insisted that Persepolis will give him the best opportunity to shine.

"It's a great feeling. Playing in front of the numerous fans of Persepolis who support you is every player's dream. I want to help team to win the league at the end of season" he said.

Iran will participate at CAFA U19 Girl's Futsal Championship: coach

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran U19 Girl's Futsal coach Nilofar Ardalan says her team will take part at the CAFA U19 Girl's Futsal Championship 2020 Tajikistan.

The round-robin tournament will bring Tajikistan, Iran, Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan

together in Dushanbe from Jan. 24 to 29.

"The CAFA futsal competition will be held for the first time and the participating teams will compete in the event with a mix of football and futsal players," Ardalan said.

"I think we have to vie with Uzbekistan to win the title. We will participate in the competition with 14

players who play in Iran futsal league. The CAFA tournament can be a good preparatory tournament and we can identify what our strengths and weaknesses are," she added.

The Central Asian Football Association (CAFA) is an association of the football playing nations in Central Asia.

Estili: Iran switched off before half-time

Iran head coach Hamid Estili was left to lament a dip in his side's first half performance, after they put their AFC U23 Championship quarter-final hopes in jeopardy with a 2-1 defeat to Korea Republic on Sunday.

Team Melli Omid created early chances, but the Koreans took full control of the first half from the 20-minute mark onwards, controlling proceedings and scoring goals through Lee Dong-jun and Cho Gue-sung to take a 2-0 half-time lead.

Reza Shekari pulled a goal back after the interval, but it was a case of too little, too late for Iran, who must now overturn a three-point deficit to second placed Uzbekistan on Matchday Three if they are to salvage a place in the knockout stage.

"This was a really difficult match for us," reflected former senior national team stalwart Estili.

"I think we started the game very well. The first 20 minutes we played well, didn't make many mistakes, made a great chance for Mehdi Ghayedi and could have had the first goal, but after that I think some of the players fell asleep and forgot the rules (of the team)."

"In those minutes (at the end of the first half) Korea Republic scored two goals. Some of the players didn't run enough for us at that time.

"We had to make some changes for the second half, and in the second half everything was different. We had more control of the game and more of the ball. We made chances, we scored a goal and we could have scored others.

"I think we deserved to take a point from this match. I



think we played well in the second half."

The loss comes as a blow to Iran's hopes of ending their 44-year Olympic football qualification drought.

They will now need to win against already-eliminated

China on Wednesday to stand any chance of advancing in the tournament, but despite the damaging result suffered against the Koreans, Estili wasn't wholly dissatisfied with his team's performance.

"Between two matches we had just three days, and maybe our players were a little tired, but you need 23 ready players for this competition," said Estili.

"Korea Republic changed many players and had a really ready team, but my players were tired in the second half. They did their very best to come back and get the result, but unfortunately we finished the match with this defeat."

Korea Republic's squad depth was also the topic of their head coach's post-match remarks, with Kim Hak-bum praising his squad, who secured a place in the last eight with a game to spare thanks to Sunday's win.

Kim believes every player in his 23-man squad can perform at a high level, and he was content with a second successive win.

"We have a lot of depth in our squad, and anyone in our squad can go on the pitch and deliver," he said. "Even though some of our players played their first game of the tournament, I have faith all will do quite well in this tournament."

"It was a tough game. We played our first game of the tournament at night, but this was played in daytime and the players really worked hard.

"The goal we conceded was one that we shouldn't have, but we're still growing, and we will learn from what went wrong during this game."

(Source: the-afc)

Sara Khadem bids farewell to Iran chess national team

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Sarasadat Khademalsharieh, also known as Sara Khadem, has announced her retirement from Iran national chess team.



Khadem published a photo on her Instagram account and said she has retired from national team.

Khadem is an Iranian chess player who holds the titles of International Master (IM) and Woman Grandmaster (WGM). On Saturday, Iranian woman taekwondo athlete Kimia Alizadeh also announced her retirement from national team.

Alizadeh was 18-year-old when she won a bronze medal for taekwondo at the 2016 summer Olympics.

She is the only woman to ever win an Olympic medal for Iran.

Drulovic impressed by Uzbekistan's control

Uzbekistan head coach Ljubinko Drulovic was left satisfied by a dominant performance after his side beat China PR 2-0 to take a significant step towards the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 quarter-finals on Sunday.

Goals to Islom Kobilov — who scored a penalty before failing to convert a second spot-kick after half time — as well as substitute Nurillo Tukhtasinov, secured a win which took Uzbekistan to four points from two matches, and left China PR with no way of reaching the last eight stage.

After being held in a competitive 1-1 draw against Islamic Republic of Iran on Matchday One, Drulovic said he was pleased with his side's convincing display against Hao Wei's side.

"I'm very satisfied," said the 38-time international. "We started well and made three or four chances to score, but we just scored in the last minute of the first half, which was good for us."

"From there we played very well in the second half and I'm very satisfied with how we played the 90 minutes."

"I think we were better than China and we deserved the three points."

Uzbekistan ultimately claimed a comprehensive victory, but the match wasn't without the occasional challenging moment for the defending champions, particularly when China enjoyed a brief promising spell after Kobilov saw a penalty saved by Chen Wei with the score still at 1-0.

Drulovic said he was impressed by his side's ability to regain the ascendancy, and believes all Kobilov's penalty miss did was reduce the final winning margin.

"If we scored the goal from the second penalty with 30 minutes to go, maybe it would have been easier for us and we could score more goals," he declared.

"But (penalty misses) can happen. Kobilov lost the chance from the penalty. The goalkeeper made a big save, and he deserves credit."

"I believe we would have scored more goals, but we continued to control the game. China attacked and tried to score, but we controlled the game and scored the second goal. Even after the second goal, we had two more chances to score the third."

While Uzbekistan got their campaign very much back on track with their win, Sunday's match signaled the end to China's bid for a first men's Olympic football appearance since 2008.

Hao Wei believed his side had been unlucky to lose in the first meeting against Korea Republic last Thursday, but acknowledged his side were not at the same level as Uzbekistan.

"Obviously wasn't our best performance, and our opponent deserved the victory," said the former Chinese women's national team head coach.

"I hope in the next game we can improve and be better."

"Obviously there is a gap between us and the top teams who have higher leagues, and this is what we need to work on."

(Source: the-afc)

No clear favorite for Australian Open, says Djokovic

SYDNEY (Reuters) — Novak Djokovic says next week's Australian Open is wide open and while bookmakers see the seven-times champion as the hot favorite the Serb expects the current crop of young talent to push for glory at the season's opening Grand Slam.

Djokovic recorded a ninth consecutive hard-court win over world number one Rafa Nadal on Sunday as Serbia were crowned champions at the inaugural ATP Cup team event in Sydney.

Djokovic also downed 2019 U.S. Open runner-up Daniil Medvedev, former Wimbledon finalist Kevin Anderson and rising stars Denis Shapovalov and Christian Garin at the tournament, showing no signs of the elbow issues that resurfaced at the end of last season.

Despite his ominous form, defending champion Djokovic expects a stiff challenge from long-time rivals as well as the new generation. "I think it's really open, the Australian Open or any other slam," he told reporters.

"I don't think there are really clear favorites. You have obviously (Roger) Federer, Nadal, myself because of the experience and everything and the rankings that we get to be probably named the top three favorites."

"But then you have Medvedev, (Stefanos) Tsitsipas, Dominic Thiem that are really showing some amazing tennis."

The 'Big Three' of Djokovic, Nadal and Federer have shared the last 12 Grand Slam titles but the Serb said Tsitsipas' triumph at the ATP Finals in November showed the young guns are ready to battle for major honors.

"They showed that they matured on the big stage, that they can challenge the best players in the world and win against them," Djokovic added.

"So everybody keeps on talking about NextGen player winning a Slam. It seems like it's getting closer. Hopefully not this year. We'll see."

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

A wise jurisprudent is he who does not let people despair of God's grace and discouraged of His kindness and liberality, and ignorant of His reckoning and punishment.
Imam Ali (AS)

IIDCYA launches art competition on Martyr Soleimani

TEHRAN — Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) has launched a painting and calligraphy contest named "Like Father, Kind" with the central theme of the martyrdom of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.



Interested children and young adults are asked to create their calligraphy works inscribing the name of the martyr or phrases or sentences that narrate the bravery and different aspects of the commander's character.

Drawings on his funeral ceremony and the bravery and different aspects of his character will be considered in the painting section.

A poster for IIDCYA's painting and calligraphy contest "Like Father, Kind".

The applicants are asked to submit their artworks to the institute before February 24.

An exhibition of the selected works will be set up at the IIDCYA. Quds Force chief Soleimani was martyred in a U.S. air raid in Baghdad on January 3.

Austrian violinist to join Farnad Orchestra at Tehran concert

TEHRAN — Polish-born Austrian violinist Anna Gutowska will be in company with Iran's Farnad Orchestra during a concert at Rudaki Hall in Tehran on January 20, the Rudaki Foundation announced on Monday.



Polish-born Austrian violinist Anna Gutowska in an undated photo.

The Ava String Orchestra and Farabi Art Choir are also scheduled to accompany the orchestra during the concert, which will be conducted by Aria Bastaninejad.

Pieces by some 20th-century musicians as well as some film scores will be performed during the concert.

Gutowska, who has received several awards at several international events, is a lecturer at the University of Music and Dramatic Arts in Vienna.

Avam Symphonic Orchestra to perform pieces by Mahler, Preisner

TEHRAN — Iran's Avam Symphonic Orchestra is scheduled to perform pieces by Gustav Mahler and Zbigniew Preisner during a concert under the baton of conductor Sina Kheirabadi at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on Wednesday.



A poster for the concert of the Avam Symphonic Orchestra at Tehran's Vahdat Hall.

A repertoire of pieces by Austro-Bohemian Romantic composer Mahler and film scores from Polish composer Zbigniew Preisner will be presented during the concert. "Three Colors: Blue".

The ensemble will be accompanied by the Nilpar String Orchestra and Kook Children's Choir.

DEFC producing animation on preservation of Iranian historical sites

TEHRAN — The Documentary and Experimental Film Center (DEFC) is producing an animation on the preservation of Iranian historical sites.

Named "Parsa Guard," the short animation is being directed by Mahmud Saemin. It tells the story of a soldier from ancient Iran who tries to preserve the historical treasure of his time.

"Books of ancient stories and [Ferdowsi's] Shahnameh have always been my favorites, and I have previously portrayed 14 stories from the Shahnameh," Saemin said in a press release published by the DEFC on Monday.

"Parsa Guard" is also a screen adaptation of the literary sources, but it is not based on a true story," he added.

Located in the plain of Marvdasht some 57 kilometers northeast of the modern city of Shiraz, the acropolis of the city of Parsa was the dynastic center of the Achaemenid kings.



This combination photo shows scenes from "Parsa Guard", an animation by Mahmud Saemin.

"Amir", "First Autograph for Rana" to come to Iranian theaters



A scene from "First Autograph for Rana" by Ali Zhakan.

TEHRAN — Iranian films "Amir" and "First Autograph for Rana" will hit the theaters across the country on Wednesday, the Screening Council of the Culture Ministry announced on Monday.

Directed by Nima Eqlima, "Amir" tells the story of Amir, a man in his thirties who is beleaguered by other peoples' problems. His friend Ali's ex-wife and son have gone missing, his sister is desperately trying to break away from the family, and his parents are trying to keep the family together.

The film is about a generation whose private lives are determined more by the rules of society than by their own will.

"First Autograph for Rana" by Ali Zhakan is about a writer, Jahangir, whose three books have been published but he doesn't have any income.

Jahangir and his wife Rana and their 6-year-old son Nima live in one of Jahangir's friends' home but his friend needs his home and they have to move out while they don't have any money to rent a house.

Iranian agency says overseas publishers eager for books on commander Soleimani



Pol Literary and Translation Agency director Majid Jafari Aqdam in an undated photo. (Mehr/Mehran Riazi)

TEHRAN — The Pol Literary and Translation Agency, a Tehran-based institution that translates Iranian books and presents Persian-language publications around the world, has announced that publishing companies from several countries are seeking to publish books about Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

"Publishers from 13 countries, including Turkey, Egypt, Serbia, England, Syria, Lebanon, Italy and France, have asked for a book about Martyr Soleimani," Pol agency director Majid Jafari-Aqdam said in his

interview with the Iranian radio program Taqat-e Farhang on Sunday.

"However, there is still no comprehensive book about the commander to offer to the publishers," he added but made no reference to the names of the publishers.

"We are looking for a complete documented book to offer to the publishers; a book that can truly introduce the commander to the world," he noted.

Quds Force chief Soleimani was martyred in a U.S. air raid in Baghdad on January 3.

Kayhan Kalhor opposed to cancelation of concerts as protest movement

TEHRAN — Kurdish Iranian kamancheh virtuoso Kayhan Kalhor, who called off his Istanbul concert in protest of Turkey's assault on Kurds in Syria last October, has said that he is opposed to the cancelation of concerts by his fellow musicians in country as a protest movement.

Speaking to the audience before his performance along with Scheherazade Quartet at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on Sunday evening, he expressed his condolences over the deaths of the passengers of the Ukrainian jetliner, which was unintentionally shot down by Iran last week, and said that he has offered suggestions from his associates to cancel his concerts in Tehran due to the recent bitter events in the country, the Persian service of MNA reported on Monday.

"Under these circumstances, I think we should be beside



Kamancheh virtuoso Kayhan Kalhor performs in an undated photo. (ISNA/Mehdi Motamedi)

you, feeling the energy from each other and improve the harsh and violent situation by music instead of belligerence and anger," he said

"Serious music and serious art should never stop," he noted.

Earlier last October, Kalhor, talking to the audience before his concert with the Rembrandt Frerichs Trio at London's Royal Festival Hall, announced his decision to cancel his Istanbul concert in protest over Turkey's assault on the Kurds in Syria following the U.S. withdrawal from the country at that time.

The decisions by a number of top musicians, including Shahram Nazeri, Alireza Qorbani and Alireza Assar, to cancel their concerts in sympathy with the victims of the Ukrainian jetliner event have been viewed as a protest against the Iranian government's mishandling of information concerning the downing of the plane.

Riding Globes, "1917" ends "Star Wars" box-office reign

LOS ANGELES (AP) — It took the Great War to finally take down "Star Wars".

Director Sam Mendes' World War I story "1917" brought in \$36.5 million in its first weekend of wide release, easily topping the box office and ending the three-week reign of "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker", which brought in \$15 million, according to studio estimates Sunday.

Universal's expansion strategy worked beautifully for "1917", as the film went from just 11 screens in its first two weeks to more than 3,400 on the weekend after it won Golden Globes for best director and best drama film.

"This is the blueprint for how to perfectly execute the platform release for a potential Oscar nominee and Oscar winner," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore.

While the epic wartime feel of "1917", which was shot and edited to appear as though it was done in a single take, makes it a natural for major awards, its triumphs at the Golden Globes were a surprise over other dramas including "The Irishman" and "Marriage Story".

"I hope this means that people will turn

up and see this on the big screen, the way it was intended," Mendes said at the Globes ceremony. Those hopes weren't unfounded.

A good weekend was expected for the film, but it shot past those expectations.

"It's not like the kids were clamoring for a World War I trench drama," Dergarabedian said. "A film like this could have easily slipped off the radar."

With its previous two-week take, "1917" has now earned \$39.2 million in the U.S. and Canada and over \$60 million globally. That's of course dwarfed by Disney's total domestic take of \$478.2 million for "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker," which is on the verge of reaching \$1 billion globally after four weeks.

"Jumanji: The Next Level" was in third place in its fifth week of release for Sony with earnings of \$14 million, and has totaled more than \$257 million domestically.

"Like a Boss," Paramount's comedy starring Tiffany Haddish and Rose Byrne, finished in a fourth-place tie at \$10 million with "Just Mercy."

"Underwater," 20th Century Fox's deep-



This image released by Universal Pictures shows Benedict Cumberbatch as Colonel Mackenzie in a scene from "1917" directed by Sam Mendes. (Universal Pictures via AP/ François Duhamel)

sea adventure starring Kristen Stewart, brought in a tepid \$7 million and finished below "Little Women."

"For newcomers, this is usually not a bountiful time for the box office," Dergarabedian said. "It's usually about the holdovers and awards-season contenders."

The tied-for-fourth \$10 million finish was better news for Warner Bros.' smaller-budgeted "Just Mercy," which stars Michael B. Jordan in the true story of an attorney appealing a murder conviction, and like "1917" was expanded from just a few screens to a few thousand in its third weekend.