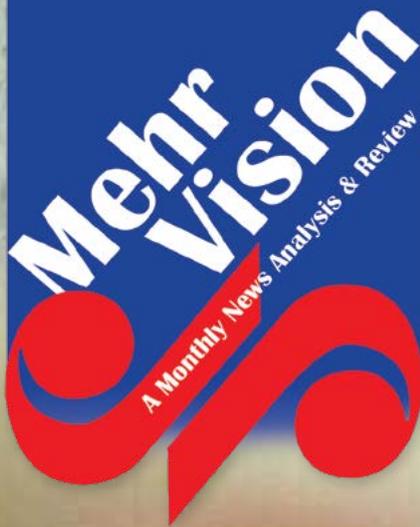
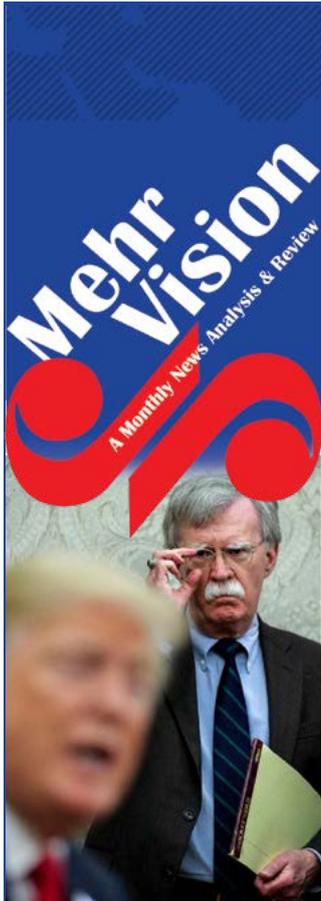


Mehr Vision | No.13 | May 2019



US anti-Iran hostility ramps up under Trump Administration



Mehr Vision

Managing Director: Ali Asgari
Editorial Board:
 Seyed Amir Hassan Dehghani,
 Mohammad Ghaderi,
 Payman Yazdani, Majid Rafiee
Editorial Coordinator:
 Marjohn Sheikhi
Contributors:
 Payman Yazdani, Mohammad Ghaderi,
 Marjohn Sheikhi, Mohammad Ali
 Haqshenas, Haniyeh Sadat Jafariyeh,
 Morteza Rahmani, Lachin Rezaian,
 Kamal Iranidoost, Hanif Ghaffari,
 Javad Heirannia, Zahra Mirzafarjouyan
Art Director: Mahboubeh Azizi
Phone: +98-21-43051350
Email: English@mehrnews.com
Address: No. 18, Bimeh Alley,
 Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
*Mehr Vision welcomes contributions by
 readers which can be sent via email.*

Contents

Cover Story	Trump's decision on IRGC has nothing to do with international law	3
	US move to bludgeon Iran into submission to US demands may boomerang	3
	Brandishing IRGC as terrorist group an act of terror itself	4
	Sanctions aimed at bringing Iran to negotiating table with US	4
Politics	What are main aims of Imran Khan's Iran visit?	6
	New government formation in West Bank is great betrayal	7
	S. Arabia would be different if it faced consequences for its actions	8
	Execution of 37 Saudi citizens a major crime	9
	S. Arabia has not really demonstrated nuclear transparency	10
	Ansarollah not to allow aggressors' control over Al-Hudaydah	11
	Assad's visit to Tehran sign of unwavering Syrian-Iran ties	12
	Transferring nuclear technology to al-Saud is the most destabilizing development	13
	US wants to make Venezuela another Syria or Libya: ambassador	14
	Iran may be gearing up to reduce nuclear coop. under JCPOA	15
	S Africa, Iran to 'weather the storm together': amb. Khumalo	16
Economy	EGFI to issue guarantees for oil purchasers of IRENEX	18
	Impossible to drive Iran's oil export to zero	20
	TSE official uncovers reasons for stocks boom	21
	World financial bodies, tools for imposing US policies	22
	IME suitable platform of economic prosperity	25
Op-ed	How Trump's oil plans backfire on him	29
	Assad's message while in Tehran	30
	Macron at political deadlock	31
Culture	The 'Verve' of melancholy; "It's just a feeling I carry inside"	34
	Iran tourism sector thriving despite US sanctions	36
	Success in artificial insemination in Persian leopards may raise hopes for rare big cats	37
Dossier	Tehran begins playing host to over 100 films at 37th FIFF	40
	'Do not go gentle into that good night'; FIFF celebrates free, fighting spirits	41
	2019 Fajr Intl. Filmfest. names winners; 'A Russian Youth' wins grand prix	46
	Fajr Intl. Film Festival gives you a cinema of all flavors	47
Sport	Perspolis main goal is to qualify for next stage at AFC Champion League, coach says	49
	What are Carlos Queiroz legacies in Iranian football?	50
	Major achievements of Iranian athletes in the past year	51

Trump's decision on IRGC has nothing to do with international law: Prof. Zonis

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Professor of international political economy in the University of Chicago believes Trump's move against the IRGC is based on the advice of his evangelical supporters and hardline advisers.

The White House's increasingly aggressive approaches towards Iran came to a head as the administration of US President Donald Trump designated the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization through an official statement.

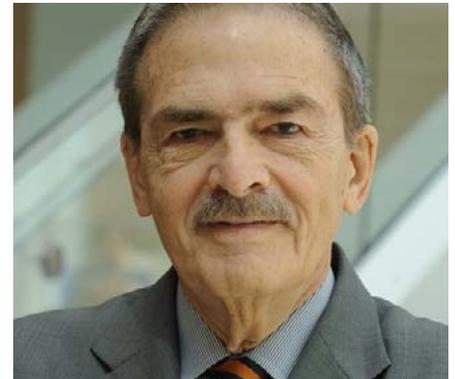
In light of this development, we reached out to Marvin Zonis, Professor of international political economy and leadership in the University of Chicago.

Commenting on the legitimacy of the President Trump's decision to des-

ignate the IRGC as a terrorist group and the reasons behind his unprecedented move, he said, "The US President's decision is based on the advice he has been receiving from his hardline advisers — most especially from John Bolton. Bolton seeks the overthrow of the clerical establishment and the new sanctions are meant to diminish the business success that the IRGC has enjoyed."

He went on to add, "The decision is also a communication to his evangelical supporters who seek a powerful Israel to prepare for the return of the Christ. It is also a communication to Israel and Saudi Arabia that the US remains an enemy of their enemy. It has nothing to do with international law."

Zonis also emphasized that the reflection of Trump in 2020 US presidential election is another reason behind his



decision on the IRGC.

Touching upon the consequences of the White House's move and its effects on the security and stability of the region he noted, "Iran is left with bitter choices. It may take steps that would provoke Trump to retaliate with the real possibility of an escalation to a shooting war."

US move to bludgeon Iran into submission to US demands may boomerang: Entessar

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Following US' recent hostile move against the IRGC Nader Entessar says there is nothing more the US can gain by its most recent decision that it has not already achieved.

The United States' increasingly aggressive approaches towards Iran came to a head last night as the administration of US President Donald Trump designated the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization through an official statement.

In light of this development, Mehr News Agency reached to Nader Entessar, professor emeritus of political science from university of South Alabama.

Commenting on the effects of the Trump's move on the IRGC, he said, "The IRGC has been under complete US sanctions regime for some time now. Therefore, there is nothing more the US can gain by its most recent decision that it has not already achieved. This is generally a political move or-



chestrated by certain elements of the Trump administration to appease the neocon thirst for forceful, American-induced regime change."

He referred to unprecedented illegal move of Trump and said, "This is the first time in the history of international relations when the government of one nation-state single-handedly has designated a military segment of another recognized nation-state as a terrorist organization."

He called the possible consequences of the White House decision "dangerous" and said, "This is a move with many dangerous consequences. Iran's Supreme National Security Council has already reciprocated the latest US moves against Iran by issuing a statement declaring the US Central Command (CENTCOM) and forces under its command in Southwest Asia as terrorist entities. Such tit-for-tat moves may indeed generate uncontrollable spiraling consequences. More specifically, Trump's latest move, which is intended to bludgeon Iran into submission to US demands, may boomerang."

Turkish politician:

Brandishing IRGC as terrorist group an act of terror itself

Interview by: Payman Yazdani

In an interview with MNA following US' recent hostile move against the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, a senior member of Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP), Faruk Logoglu, said "brandishing IRGC as a terrorist group is essentially an act of terror itself."

The United States' increasingly aggressive approaches towards Iran came to a head last night as the administration of US President Donald Trump designated the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization through an official statement.

In light of this development, Mehr News Agency reached to a senior member of Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP), Osman Faruk Logoglu, who believes that "brandishing IRGC as a terrorist group is essentially an act of terror itself."

He called the move as "unprecedented, unlawful and devoid of any credibility or legitimacy," adding that the "step



is supposedly designed to increase the pressure on Iran and opens a new frontier beyond the realm of economic sanctions."

"Trump continues to stoke the fires of tension and conflict in the region," the Turkish diplomat stressed, adding "this step will only serve to entrench the determination of the Iranian people to resist US efforts to force Iran into submission."

About the consequences of this move, Logoglu maintained that an immediate one was the "reported response from

Iran, declaring, in turn, the US armed forces a terrorist organization."

He went on to add, "the broader danger is that these reciprocal and counter-productive steps will only escalate tensions in the MENA and Persian Gulf, and vastly raise the chances of armed encounters between the two sides."

Any such event, he went on to note, "if and when it occurs, would be extremely difficult to keep from leading to a wider military confrontation between the two adversaries."

"This US move on IRGC follows in the footsteps of President Trump's decisions on Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, all presumably serving Israeli interests just as much as American interests," said Logoglu, adding, however, that "this is a misconception because all three steps potentially pave the way for new conflicts while relegating the prospects of peace and security in the region into a very distant future."

"By remaining calm and calibrated, I believe Iran will defeat American designs and provocations to subjugate it," he concluded.

Frmr. envoy to Norway tells MNA:

Sanctions aimed at bringing Iran to negotiating table with US

The former Iranian ambassador to Norway and Hungary Abdulreza Farajirad has said that the US sanctions are aimed at bringing Iran to the negotiating table with the United States once again.



Speaking to Mehr News Agency (MNA) correspondent, Abdulreza Farajirad referred to the latest US move in designating the IRGC a terrorist organization, saying that the US seeks to impose maximum pressures on Iran to bring it to the negotiating table.

The former Iranian ambassador to Norway and Hungary said that as the US President Donald Trump has repeatedly said, the Americans want to change Iran's behavior.

The diplomat added that the US terrorism designation of IRGC was also aimed at helping the Israeli regime's prime minister be reelected in the general elections. He said that Trump attaches great importance to Netanyahu remaining in power, adding "the Zionist regime's prime minister was able to main-

tain relations with Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, but it was unclear whether someone else in his place could equally match the US hardliner policies."

Farajirad added that the US move against IRGC was not a symbolic move and the Americans sought to inflict losses on Iran economy by sanctioning IRGC and its related companies.

The diplomat added that the United States blacklisted the IRGC to limit its activities in the region and its relations with the Houthis, Iraqis, Lebanese and other nations of the region. He added that the IRGC has gained a lot of support among the nations of the region during the fight against terrorism.

At the end, he noted that the countries in the region have shown opposition to blacklisting IRGC because they are not so sure about their future and that whether terrorist groups will threaten them again in the future.



Politics

What are main aims of Imran Khan's Iran visit?



By: **Mohammad Ali Haqshenas**

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan is slated to undertake an official visit to Iran on April 21 and there are different speculations about the aims of this visit.

The two-day visit will be made upon the official invitation of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and can start a new era of ties between Tehran and Islamabad.

This will be Khan's first official visit to the western neighbor after assuming power. He has already paid official visits to some regional countries, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates but his visit to Tehran was reportedly postponed after border security issues, including the abduction of Iranian border guards in Mirjaveh and also terrorist attack near Zahedan which killed 27 IRGC personnel.

On March 21, Iran announced that four other abducted guards had been released with the efforts of the Pakistani Army. Islamabad has vowed to gear up the fight against terrorism and its measures to provide western borders with increased security can have a significant effect on the development of ties with Iran.

Certainly, one of the main topics of

Iran-Pakistan discussions during the upcoming PM's visit will be ways to enhance border security which is essentially required if the states are determined to boost cooperation in different political, economic, and cultural spheres.

There are also reports which point to Pakistan's close relationship with Saudi Arabia, saying that Imran Khan may try to mediate between Tehran and Riyadh. In a meeting with Iranian ambassador to Pakistan Mehdi Honardoost in early August 2018, Imran Khan said that Pakistan is ready to play a constructive and positive role between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Experts believe that the much-awaited Iran-Pakistan pipeline project will also be on the agenda of negotiations. Pakistan has not adhered to its commitments to complete the pipeline on its side with the excuse of international sanctions and pressures from countries such as US.

Some reports also speculate that the two sides will also confer on the future of Afghanistan, as well as inking probable economic agreements.

Imran Khan has proved to be courageous in supporting Iran. He and his party are among the defenders of Iran's peaceful nuclear activity. He also, alongside Iran, strongly condemned Trump's measure to ban Muslim's immigration to

the United States.

Cementing ties with Pakistan will also be beneficial for Iran since this leads to a decrease in security threats in the south-east of the country, furthermore, paving the way for an enhanced economic presence of Iran in Pakistan and benefit from its great potential market.

Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan as an independent state in 1947 and two years later, they signed a treaty of friendship. The two countries have always maintained good and friendly relations based on mutual respect for each other's sovereignty. Some experts believe Iran-Pakistan ties can be a model for relations between other regional countries.

In a statement, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry announced that the country's "relations with Iran are marked by close historic and cultural linkages and strong people to people exchanges," adding that PM's visit to Iran will further enhance the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Imran Khan will meet with Islamic Revolution Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei besides holding 'detailed consultations' with President Rouhani, reads the statement, noting that the PM will be accompanied by a host of high-ranking officials and ministers.

Hamas senior member:

New government formation in West Bank is great betrayal

Co-founder of Hamas and member of the Hamas leadership Mahmoud al-Zahar stressed that the Palestinian Authority doesn't belong to the Palestinian people and also does not represent them.

The new Palestinian Authority cabinet, headed by Mohammad Shtayyeh, recently swore before Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Formation of the cabinet by Mahmoud Abbas's order and without the Palestinian National Consensus has been opposed by the majority of the Palestinian factions. In the new Palestinian Authority cabinet, 16 new ministers came to power and five ministers from the former government headed by prime minister Rami Hamdallah remained in Power.

On the other hand, we witnessed the Knesset election 2019 in Israel and the victory of Likud party under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu which was also required to form a new cabinet of the regime.

Accordingly, Mehr News Agency had an interview with Mahmoud Al-Zahar, a senior member of the Hamas leadership as follows.

*** What is the effect of formation of a new administration in the West Bank on the internal conflicts of Palestine?**

The Palestinian Authority has not naturally belonged to Palestinian people and also does not represent them. The organization separated Gaza from the West Bank and the occupied territories from the Palestinian issue. In fact, this is a major project for betraying Palestine, which began with the Oslo Accords (a set of agreements between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO): the Oslo I Accord, signed in Washington, D.C., in 1993; and the Oslo II Accord, signed in Taba, Egypt,



in 1995) and led to the formation of this administration in the West Bank.

This administration is not even dominant over the entire West Bank and does not manage areas that are becoming Zionist settlements.

*** What is your analysis of the outcome of the Israeli regime's parliamentary election and its impact on Gaza?**

First of all, the enemy's nature is aggression, and this is the case with the criminal attacks of this regime over the past ten years, four consecutive wars on Gaza. Accordingly, in the future the occurrence of conflict and war is not unlikely between us and Israel. In particular, this spectrum of Zionists has taken place among Israeli citizens over the past four years so they are not concerned about the general or partial failure in the election. Of course, at the next stage, all Israeli regime parties will work on making coalition.

***How do you evaluate the implementation process of the so-called 'Deal of the Century'?**

When we reject this project, the project will actually be cancelled. They are going to solve the problem of Gaza in this way, which means that the West Bank has no problem?! or Occupied lands and camps of the Palestinian refugees in Syria and Lebanon don't make difficulties for them? Their problem is Gaza, and if Gaza opposes it, it will certainly not be implemented.

*** What is your position toward US designation of IRGC as a terrorist group?**

Labeling an organization as a terrorist group is totally rejected by us. IRGC is part of the Iranian government. Is the Iranian government a terrorist?! If they are terrorist, why did the former US administration (Barack Obama) agree with Iran on the nuclear issue?

So labeling IRGC as a terrorists group is a lie and it's for satisfying the Zionist regime. People and even some Europeans oppose this move. IRGC is a genuine part of the Iranian establishment and has challenged the Zionists' projects in the region.



S Arabia would be different if it faced consequences for its actions: Geopolitical expert

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Commenting on the reasons behind violation of human rights by Saudis, Anthony Cartalucci says the US doesn't base its ties with other nations on human rights, but rather obedience and utility which Riyadh has both in abundance.

The Saudi Interior Ministry recently issued a statement on the execution of 37 people in the Saudi Arabia. It has been claimed that the executed individuals were sentenced to death for involvement in terrorist cases.

The fact is that the executed people are not terrorists. They were Shias who have been oppressed by the Saudi regime for decades. This is not the first time that the Saudi regime has committed such terrible crimes against Shias, and it is clear that it won't be the last.

Accordingly, we reached out to Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher Anthony Cartalucci.

Following is the full text of our interview with him:

What is your assessment of execution of 37 Saudi citizens by the rulers of the country?

Saudi Arabia - a nation that readily aids and abets Western interference and even military interventions around

the globe - finds itself once again guilty in reality of what the West and Riyadh have accused nations like Syria and Iran of in fiction. The executions were done without fair or transparent trials and were motivated by politics, not justice.

If there are truly international standards regarding human rights, Saudi Arabia is blatantly in violation of them - not that it would seem so considering the deafening silence coming from many of the self-appointed arbiters of such standards including Western governments and the army of "international bodies" they have funded to allegedly confront such human rights abuses.

After brutal killing of Khashoggi in Saudi Consulate in Istanbul the international community's reaction especially the White House's to Saudi rulers' crime was not serious enough. Would Saudi rulers dare to commit such crimes if they had faced with strong reaction from Washington?

Saudi Arabia would obviously be a different nation today if it faced consequences for its actions both abroad and at home. Of course, the White House doesn't base its ties with other nations on human rights, but rather obedience and utility - and Riyadh has both in abundance. For the US and other Western nations - human rights is merely a convenient pretext for political and even

military intervention abroad - selectively enforced reflecting Western interests and opportunism, not any sort of principled stand.

What is the responsibility of international bodies to stop Saudi crimes?

In theory, we would imagine "international bodies" be they nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or institutions like the United Nations - would be very vocal over Saudi Arabia's human rights abuses. But these same bodies are mute over Saudi Arabia's current war in neighboring Yemen, and Riyadh's sponsorship of terrorism including the arming and funding of groups like Al Qaeda and Daesh. So to expect these bodies to speak up or act in response to the recent executions is unrealistic.

Ultimately Riyadh will be held accountable when the "might" component of the "might makes right" basis of US foreign policy ebbs, and emerging global powers assume more influence and responsibility over regional politics. Without US protection, Riyadh would not only be unable to commit the crimes it does today both at home and abroad - it will be too costly politically and economically for it to continue doing so. It is ironic that the self-proclaimed underwriters of global human rights - the US and Europe - are in fact the greatest enablers of human rights abuses - with Saudi Arabia as "Exhibit A."

Haitham Abu Said:

Execution of 37 Saudi citizens a major crime



Condemning the execution of Saudi citizens, High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Middle East Dr. Haitham Abu also emphasized that US sanctions against Iran does not comply with international fundamental rights.

The Saudi Interior Ministry recently issued a statement on the execution of 37 people in the Saudi Arabia. It has been claimed that the executed individuals were sentenced to death for involvement in terrorist cases.

The fact is that the executed people are not terrorists. They were Shias who have been oppressed by the Saudi regime for decades. This is not the first time that the Saudi regime has committed such terrible crimes against Shias, and it is clear that it won't be the last.

Accordingly, Mehr News Agency interviewed Dr. Haitham Abu Said, High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Middle East and Secretary General of the European Organization for security and information as follows.

What is your analysis about the execution of 37 Saudi citizens by the Saudi regime?

These executions are condemned in my personal opinion as well as in the

United Nations Human Rights Committee. The United Nations Human Rights Council has also condemned the executions and issued verdict about the necessity of adhering of all the countries that have signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948.

Recent executions in Saudi Arabia are major crimes and unacceptable in accordance with law; however, the Saudis have the reason for their action.

Despite the reactions of the international community and various governments to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, why have the Saudis carried out new executions?

Why do the Saudis commit executions in Saudi Arabia despite the open case of Khashoggi? Because they are comfort and confident about the reaction of the US President Donald Trump. He has so far delayed the prosecution and investigation of Saudis and satisfied by the name of suspects given by Saudis.

How effective do you consider the laws of the international judicial institutions in deterring these type of crimes?

These laws are not only deterrent, but also painful for the perpetrators of

crime, but if we want to see the effectiveness and speed of the actions; first of all, these laws should be away from political affairs and common interests.

Secondly, it is necessary to refer to the judicial institutions and international tribunals which are under the policies of UN Security Council. What the world needs today is accelerating the separation of authorities and criminal cases and deliberate murder.

How do you evaluate US sanctions against Iranian people from the perspective of human rights?

US sanctions against Iran does not comply with international fundamental rights. The sanctions are declaration of the world war in which US does not benefit from it.

We can hear the voice of countries which protest and condemn US sanction. On the other hand, position of US will be also damaged and confronted with these countries.

US is losing and it must make decisions that are hard to implement, as Iran has options to continue the oil export. Of course, the price of oil may be lower than OPEC. It also causes a lot of dismay for US and its allies, and will eventually put pressure on the US itself through oil traders.

S. Arabia has not really demonstrated nuclear transparency: Heinonen

Interview by: Javad Heirannia

Olli Heinonen, the former deputy director general for safeguards at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), says that Saudi Arabia has not really demonstrated nuclear transparency, by concluding and ratifying, for example, the IAEA Additional Protocol.

Heinonen, now a senior advisor on science and non-proliferation at Foundation for Defense of Democracies, also believes that “We have also not seen clear nuclear energy plans other than stating numbers of nuclear reactors to be built.”

“They have also not been open on their plans to construct research reactors. The statements of the Saudi authorities are also worrisome with regard to the technologies, which they may acquire,” he added.

Following is the text of the interview with Heinonen:

Top Trump administration officials advocated for a plan to build dozens of nuclear power plants in Saudi Arabia despite warnings that the move could pose ethical concerns and violate federal law, according to a report released by House Democrats. Which group in the US is trying to sell this sensitive technology to Saudi Arabia?

There are several countries in the Middle East with programs to tap to nuclear energy as one of the sources to meet increasing electricity and water desalination requirements. Iran, Turkey, the Emirates, and Egypt are proceeding with concrete plans. Participation in these developments in the Middle East is attractive to the nuclear industry when they see their ordering books getting thinner elsewhere. The US nuclear technology providers are not an exception from that.

Democrats raise concerns that the Trump administration aiding this effort would allow the Saudi regime have ac-



cess to “sensitive US nuclear technology” that could in turn “allow Saudi Arabia to produce nuclear weapons contributing to the proliferation of nuclear arms throughout an already unstable Middle East.” What is your opinion?

Nuclear energy is a dual use technology, which can contribute to the development goals of nations, but some aspects, uranium enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing, are technologies, which can in a fairly short time be turned to produce fissile material, enriched uranium, and plutonium for nuclear weapons. States, which own such kind of capabilities, are nuclear threshold states that can change their nuclear intentions, and proceed to nuclear weapons when they see that their security concerns so require.

There are no economic and technical reasons today for a newcomer nuclear state to embark for uranium enrichment or reprocessing. There is no shortage of nuclear fuel services on the well-functioning global market in the years to come. This is why we should support the policy of no reprocessing and uranium enrichment in the Middle East, which has enough security problems.

Do you think Trump administration will allow Saudi Arabia to enrich urani-

um and reprocess plutonium by itself?

In my view that is out of question. This is probably something where a bi-partisan agreement can be reached. An agreement, which includes restrictions to uranium enrichment and reprocessing.

The report alleges those involved in the planning were aiming to enrich themselves and possibly violated the Atomic Energy Act, a federal law that lays out the preconditions of any nuclear deals with another nation and requires Congressional approval. What is the result of the confrontation of the Congress and President Trump administration in this case?

The dilemma arises from the statements of the Saudi Arabian officials, who have stated that “what Iran gets, we will get” including uranium enrichment. The question is whether the US can pursue Saudi Arabia to conclude a bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement similar to the one with the Emirates, where the UAE foregoes uranium enrichment. The negotiations will be complicated due to that fact that other technology providers – Russia, The Republic of Korea or China – do not require such guarantees.

In May 2018, Trump unilaterally withdrew the US from the Iran nuclear agreement. Trump logic for the withdrawal was Nuclear Non-Proliferation. But the transferring “sensitive US nuclear technology” that could in turn “allow Saudi Arabia to produce nuclear weapons that contribute to the proliferation of nuclear arms throughout an already unstable Middle East.” How can explain this contradiction?

There is no contradiction here. I have not seen any US officials stating publicly that Saudi Arabia should have uranium enrichment or reprocessing. However, those understandings should be enshrined to a legally binding agreement

between the US and Saudi Arabia.

But there is more to that. Saudi Arabia has not really demonstrated nuclear transparency, by concluding and ratifying, for example, the IAEA Additional Protocol. We have also not seen clear nuclear energy plans other than stating numbers of nuclear reactors to be built. They have also not been open on their plans to construct research reactors. The statements of the Saudi authorities are also worrisome with regard to the technologies, which they may acquire.

I would have also expected from the IAEA a bit stronger scrutiny to the Saudi Arabian plans. It is true that the current safeguards agreement puts

limitations to the IAEA activities in Saudi Arabia, but investigations and follow-ups on intentions of Saudi Arabia, in the light of the statements of its leadership, calls for tighter monitoring using other tools such as analysis of open source information and satellite imagery. When the safeguards reports show that the IAEA expenditures for Saudi Arabia have in last five years been about the same order of magnitude as spent, for example, for the Vatican, some intensification of monitoring is required. If this is not done, concerns of countries regarding the true intentions of Saudi Arabia will prevail, and may contribute to a proliferation cascade in the region.

Ansarollah not to allow aggressors’ control over Al-Hudaydah: Yemeni minister

Ahmed Al-Qana, Yemen’s Minister of State for National Reconciliation says that the Yemeni people will continue to resist against Saudi-led aggressors, stressing that the Yemeni Ansarollah will not agree to hand over the control of Al-Hudaydah to the other side under the UN-supervised deal.

Speaking to Mehr News Agency (MNA) correspondent, Ahmed Al-Qana, Yemen’s Minister of State for National Reconciliation, said that the Yemeni nation will continue to resist the Saudi and UAE-led aggressors, saying that Yemenis have been taught by holy Quran to resist and stand against aggressors.

Al-Qana said that victory is theirs, saying that after four years of aggression, the Saudi and UAE-led aggressors with the support of Israel and the United States have not achieved their goals. He also declared that when the resistance enters its fifth year, it will be different from the past four years, as their leader Abdul-Malik Badreddin al-Houthi had previously predicted.

Furthermore, the Yemeni national reconciliation minister referred to the UN-brokered peace talks in Sweden, saying that other side of the negotiating table do not have power and willingness and are completely under the influence of Saudis and Emirates.

“In fact, we are talking with the Saudis and Emirates. The talks will either lead to peace or we will respond to them by missiles, UAVs and our popular committees,” Al-Qana underscored.

“Anyway, we will continue negotiating with them in order to encourage them to return to their roots and preserve their Yemeni identity,” he said.

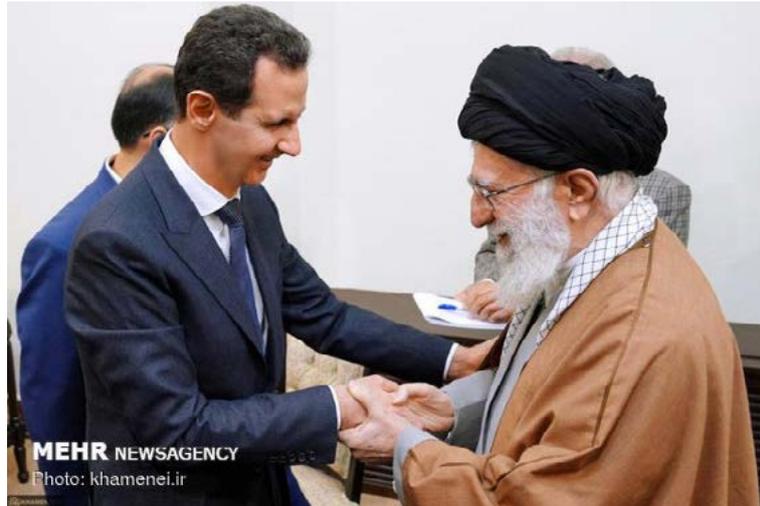
Regarding the partiality of the United Nations in the peace



talks, the Yemeni official said “we count on the UN to put an end to the aggression and we hope the UN and its secretary general, as the ones who brokered the talks, could appear on media and reveal the side that throws obstacles on the way of the peace talks.”

He further noted that while his side keeps extending their hands for the sake of reaching peace, the other side keeps throwing hurdles on the way of peace talks and asks them to hand over Yemen’s territories to the enemy and their mercenaries.

“We agreed to form the UN-supervised group to monitor the Al-Hudaydah agreement, but the other side interpreted the agreement in their own favor and called for the full hand-over of the port. But we do not accept that,” the Yemeni national reconciliation minister underlined.



Assad's visit to Tehran sign of unwavering Syrian-Iran ties: Geopolitical expert

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Touching upon Iran's important role in Syrian victory over Washington's destructive proxy war, Anthony Cartalucci says Assad's visit to Tehran is a sign of unwavering Syrian-Iran ties.

Syrian President Bashar Assad made an unannounced visit to Iran, he met with the leader of Islamic Revolution Seyed Ali Khamenei and other top Iranian officials including President Hassan Rouhani to discuss the planned US troop withdrawal and efforts to set up a buffer zone in northern Syria.

Assad's visit to Tehran was one of his rare trips to abroad since the crisis broke out in the country in 2011.

His visit to Tehran had many clear message. To know more about the issue we discussed President Assad's visit to Iran with Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher Anthony Cartalucci.

Here is full text of his interview with Payman Yazdani:

What is the message of Assad's visit to Iran?

Syrian President Bashar Al Assad's visit to Iran - the first visit anywhere except for Russia since the war began in 2011 - is highly significant. It is a sign of unwavering Syrian-Iranian ties. It is also a very public message

about the central role Iran has played in what is essentially a Syrian victory over Washington's destructive 8 year proxy war. It says that Iran is a regional player - that it played a role in defeating terrorist organizations including Al Nusra and the self-proclaimed Islamic State in ways the nearly 20 year US-led "War on Terror" has categorically failed to do.

What is the significance of Iran and Syria cooperation in foiling the US plots for the region?

This is one of many key setbacks signaling the irreversible decline of Washington's unipolar international order. More specifically, Washington's failure in Syria exposes its declining influence in the region and should have Washington's traditional allies in the region reevaluating their commitments and investments in aiding and abetting US agendas. The US' inability to overthrow Syria after serial regime change wars across the Middle East is a sign of weakness Washington has tried and failed to reverse. It will be important for Syria and Iran to consolidate this victory and ensure the patient, systematic eviction of the US from the region continues without allowing an opportunity for a resurgence of the sort of violence and chaos that swept the region in 2011.

Could the US and its allies reach their goals in Syria?

It is likely that as US capabilities degrade in the region, its "goals" will change from achieving hegemony to preserving what little influence it has remaining. It will do this through subversion, terrorism, and interventionism whenever and wherever the weakness or miscalculations of its adversaries allow. The US is still capable of prolonging the Syrian conflict - it is still attempting to shield terrorists from their final reckoning in Idlib and has dragged its feet in withdrawing from eastern Syria - and may possibly never withdraw.

Thus while its initial goal was the complete overthrow, division, and destruction of the Syrian state before moving onward to Iran, the US may still be able to prolong the conflict and leave Syria partially divided. This also serves the purpose of forcing Iran to invest heavily in defense spending that could be better used in protecting and growing its economy in the face of persistent US sanctions and economic warfare. Syria and its allies - especially Iran - still have a long fight ahead of them. The US may have failed in its original plans, but its overall objective of eliminating Iran and its allies still drives its Middle Eastern policy.

Transferring nuclear technology to al-Saud is the most destabilizing development: Entessar

Touching upon Trump's attempt to transfer sensitive nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia, Prof. Entessar says this is the most destabilizing and dangerous development that will embolden Takfiri extremists.

The US President Donald Trump is rushing to transfer sensitive nuclear power technology to Saudi Arabia, according to a new congressional report.

To shed more light on the consequences of such act, we reached out to Nader Entessar, professor emeritus of political science from university of South Alabama.

Following is the full text of our interview with him:

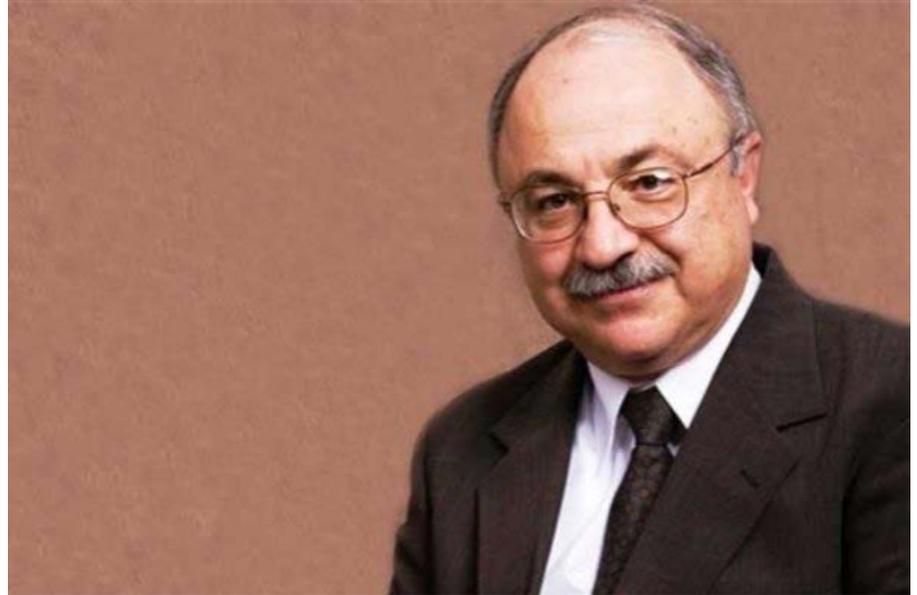
What can be the consequences of such an act for the region?

As the recently-released report of the U.S. House of Representative's Committee on Oversight and Reform indicated, selling and transferring sensitive nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia could allow that country to produce nuclear weapons and thus contribute to a potential nuclear arms race in an already unstable region. Transferring sensitive nuclear technology to the al-Saud regime will be the most destabilizing and dangerous development in the long and cozy relationship between Washington and Riyadh.

As the Saudi Kingdom is the main sponsor of Takfiri extremism all around the world, what can be consequences of such act globally?

At a minimum, such an act will embolden the Takfiri groups to accelerate their terrorist activities in the region and beyond. They may reason that since their chief sponsor is on its way to becoming a nuclear power with added muscle, it is safer for them to put their criminal acts in overdrive.

The US is committed to Israeli regime's security. Can such a move create



possible threats to the security of Tel Aviv despite current cooperation between Riyadh and Tel Aviv?

One of the pillars of Israeli foreign policy in the region is preventing the emergence of another nuclear-capable state in the region. In other words, Israel's regional foreign policy emphasizes that country's nuclear monopoly and supremacy. Notwithstanding close Israeli-Saudi ties, Israel will not welcome the development of nuclear weapons capability in Saudi Arabia. Such a development will challenge the burgeoning relations between these two regional hegemon.

Comparing the US reaction to the Saudi missile and nuclear programs with its reaction to Iran's ones, isn't the US policy enjoying double standard?

Of course, it is. But this is not the point. Washington's regional foreign policy has always been characterized by double standards. There are many reasons countries pursue certain foreign policy goals. Fairness, even-handedness, and morality are not among them.

What is Trump after in the region by such destabilizing acts?

Transferring sensitive nuclear tech-

nology to Saudi Arabia without a proper review by Congress may indeed be a violation of the U.S. Atomic Energy Act let alone its destabilizing regional impact. But the Trump administration's obsession with undermining Iran's interests and national security has led to adopt irrational foreign policy decisions that will have unsavory consequences in the long run.

How do you see Trump's son in law role in selling sensitive nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia.

The report by the House Committee on Oversight and Reform does indeed allude to the role of Jared Kushner in this episode. It also indicates that strong private commercial interests have been pushing for the sale of sensitive U.S. nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia for their own private gains. Iron-Bridge Group In., a subsidiary of IP3, has been one of these private entities, which through its "advisor" General Michael Flynn has been a key proponent of the nuclear technology sale to Saudi Arabia. In other words, several influential private individuals and groups with strong ties to the Trump administration have been working on this scheme for some time now.

US wants to make Venezuela another Syria or Libya: ambassador

Interview by Negar Asadi & Javad Heirannia

Venezuelan Ambassador to Tehran Carlos Antonio Alcalá Cordones says the US is seeking to create a situation similar to Syria and Libya in his country.

In an interview with the Tehran Times and Mehr news agency on Wednesday in his office, the ambassador said that the US plots against the Maduro government are intended to find access to Venezuela's abundant natural resources.

Here is an excerpt of the interview:

Opposition leader Juan Guaidó questioned legitimacy of President Maduro's government on January 30 and took the people to streets that caused the current developments in Venezuela. What is your analysis of the crisis and the US role in it?

Guaidó was an MP, however, Amazonas State and three of the MPs cheated in parliamentary elections in 2016 and the National Assembly of Venezuela was dissolved. So, this parliament has not been valid since 2016 and it is obvious that Guaidó has no legal credibility in the parliament.

As you know, developments in Venezuela were guided by US President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Vice President Mike Pence and National Security Advisor John Bolton. They plotted chaos and violence and coup on January 23 and introduced Guaidó as the president.

After the Bolivarian Revolution, we have been experiencing many attempts by the US to harm the revolution. The destructive efforts of the US against the Bolivarian Revolution have been continuing since 1998 and currently the pressure has been intensified by the Trump government.

They [the US officials] seek to find control over Venezuela's oil, gold and diamond resources.

The current government has prevented them and the US is making efforts to be accompanied by the governments



which are against Maduro and undermine legitimacy of the government to have access to the natural resources of Venezuela.

Documents have been presented to the UN Security Council proving the US actions against Venezuela.

There is an initiative presented by Mexico and Uruguay and supported by Russia which proposes direct dialogue between the government and the opponents. What is the Venezuelan government's position in this respect? In your opinion, what is the solution to the current crisis?

Based on the UN Charter, all the interfering actions against Venezuela are illegal. Certain organizations like the Mercosur and countries like Mexico, Uruguay, Cuba, Russia, China, Iran and Turkey have supported dialogue and peaceful ways within the framework of international law to solve the crisis. We also support such initiatives to achieve consensus in Venezuela.

However, the Trump government has always tried to deceive the international community by saying that military action is unavoidable. It is upon them to decide whether they seek to treat with the Venezuelan peo-

ple with peace or war.

Russia has decided to present a draft resolution to the UN Security Council to resolve the crisis in Venezuela. The US is also making efforts to topple Maduro's government through early election by preparing a draft bill to the Security Council. Do you think Russia can prevent a possible U.S. military action by this draft?

We praise Russia's actions at the UN for supporting the Venezuelan people. Russia supports our constitution and opposes military action against our country. It is not just Russia, China has also supported the Venezuelan government at the Security Council.

Since 1998, Mr. [Hugo] Chavez and Maduro have encouraged dialogue between the government and the opposition. However, the opposition has always ignored results of the talks.

Guaidó is not committed to any dialogue. In fact, it is the U.S. which decides for Guaidó. A high ranking U.S. official announced that it is not the time to hold talks and we should take practical action against Venezuela. They seek to enact scenarios similar to Libya and Syria in Venezuela. We use all our force to stop their actions.

Given that the US actions and pressure violate the Organization of American States' charter, what do you think about the organization's role in this crisis?

Fidel Castro had once said that this organization is actually the U.S. colonial office. Secretary general of this organization does not take decisions independently.

Recently, they held a meeting to issue a resolution against Maduro's government to harm the Bolivarian Revolution. However, we have the people's supports who elected Maduro in May 2018.

The governments which are against Venezuela are making efforts through the Lima Group and other organizations to interfere in our country's affairs. However, countries such as Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Uruguay and certain other Caribbean countries did not accompany the US, being aware that such acts violate UN laws.

On the contrary, countries like Argentina, Chile, Columbia and Paraguay have remained silent and have not supported Venezuela. They are following the White

House's orders. Presidents of Brazil and Guyana are exerting pressure against Venezuela through the U.S. and the opponents.

What is the best way out of the crisis?

The best way is the one that the people chose and elected Nicolas Maduro. The way that countries recognized Maduro.

So, the only way that we propose is peace and diplomacy. We can solve all problems through peace and dialogue. The best way is to respect Venezuela's independence and sovereignty and also respect the government which has been formed by the people's votes.

Mr. Maduro and the foreign minister [Jorge Arreaza] are making any efforts to show the world the realities in Venezuela.

We are ready to defend (the country) despite all the sanctions and pressures. We are ready to counter military attack by the US.

It is obvious that no one wants war. War has consequences as it has had in

the Middle East. We never seek war. We seek a dialogue which respect the people's right to determine their destiny.

What is your opinion about Guaido's remarks on resuming ties with the Zionist regime of Israel?

It is obvious that Guaido supports Israel, because Israel is an ally to the US and we would be surprised if he did not make such remarks.

The US sees Guaido as a tool to reach Venezuela's natural resources. The main objective of the US is access to our country's resources.

How do you evaluate Iran's position on developments in Venezuela?

First of all, I congratulate the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. We have always see Iran's advances as role model. I praise Iran's supports for the Venezuelan government and people.

Both Iran and Venezuela are victims of the US hostile actions and I congratulate the Iranian people who have resisted against such acts.

Iran may be gearing up to reduce nuclear coop. under JCPOA

In the light of recent developments, Iran may be gearing up to reduce the level of its nuclear cooperation commitments under the JCPOA following the US' re-imposition of sanctions and further restrictions on Iran's nuclear activity.



The 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), reached between Iran and six world powers – the US, the UK, France, Russia, China and Germany, has been in shambles ever since Donald Trump pulled the US out of the agreement and re-imposed all the nuclear-related sanctions that had been removed under the deal.

Despite the US' withdrawal since May 2018, Iran has remained committed to the deal as confirmed in all of the 14 reports issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency. The other sides to the deal have been trying to keep Iran interested in the agreement by proposing an alternative payment channel that would facilitate trade with Iran and bypass the US sanctions. The mechanism, known as INSTEX, has yet to become operational, and even then, many are skeptical about the effectiveness of the channel in safeguarding Iran's economic interests.

Meanwhile, Trump has vowed to drive Iran's oil exports to zero by ending sanctions waivers to eight of Iran's biggest oil

clients. His administration said in a statement on Friday that it has also imposed sanctions on Iran's export of enriched uranium at the same time as renewed three key waivers that will allow European allies, Russia and China to cooperate with the Islamic Republic on civil nuclear program.

In the light of US' continued restrictions on Iran, the country may be gearing up to reduce the level of its nuclear commitments according to paragraphs 26 and 37 of the JCPOA; the measures would still fall within the framework of the agreement and would not be considered as a violation of Iran's nuclear-related commitments and abandoning the JCPOA.

Iran's possible measures may include 3.67% uranium enrichment at Fordow enrichment facility; installation of IR2M and IR4 centrifuges at Natanz nuclear facility; production and storage of heavy water in quantities over 130 tons; unsealing the fuel tablets of Arak's old reactor; and leaving the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which Iran has been implementing voluntarily.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif recently said that Tehran is weighing various options, including leaving the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), in response to the US sanctions.

S Africa, Iran to 'weather the storm together': amb. Khumalo

Reported by: Marjohn Sheikhi

South African embassy in Tehran celebrated the country's Freedom Day on Wed., during which Ambassador Khumalo stressed the two countries' resolve to continue developing relations in the face of all existing challenges.

South Africa celebrates its national day on April 27, designated as Freedom Day to mark the day in 1994 when the first democratic election was held in the country and ushered in a new era after a long period of colonialism and White minority domination, known as apartheid.

To commemorate the 25th anniversary of their Freedom Day, the South African embassy in Tehran held a ceremony on Wednesday evening, with representatives and diplomats from a number of embassies in Tehran in attendance.

The ceremony was opened by a speech by South African Ambassador to Tehran, V. M. Khumalo, followed by a speech by assistant to Iranian Foreign Minister in African Affairs, Mehdi Agha-Jafari. The two then proceeded to cut a South African flag cake in honor of the country's Freedom Day.

Addressing the attendees, Ambassador Khumalo said Freedom Day ushered in a new beginning of hope for a transformative future for all South Africans, as everyone for the first time in 25 years finally had the opportunity and freedom to exercise their democratic right to participate in the governance of the country.

He thanked Iran for its contribution and support towards the struggle for freedom in South Africa, noting the visits by former President Mandela to Iran in 1992 and 1999.

"For the past 25 years, Iran has remained an important friend to South Africa. Through the Joint Commission of Cooperation our countries have expanded engagements in a number of sectors such as tourism, trade and investment, science and technology, arts and cul-



ture, health, education, to name a few," he said.

The ambassador then expressed his country's continued support to Iran, saying the two countries would "weather the storm together."

He also noted the visit of Iranian President Rouhani to South Africa this year, maintaining that the visit would serve to further strengthen the existing bilateral relations and mutual support.

He concluded his speech by offering condolences to the families of the victims of the recent floods that have affected at least 23 of the country's 31 provinces since heavy downpours began on March 19. According to reports, the floods have taken the lives of at least 67 people and destroyed over 25,000 homes around the country, with Lorestan and Fars provinces having the highest number of casualties.

The ambassador called on everyone to commit to the global efforts to combat climate change and its devastating effects on the environment.

Also speaking at the ceremony was the assistant to Iranian Foreign Minister in African Affairs, Mehdi Agha-Jafari, who highlighted the strong relations between Iran and South Africa, by noting the high number of political talks

and exchange of delegations and visits of high-ranking officials between the two sides, as well as the two countries' cooperation in international areas such as the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), human rights and peace in the Middle East region.

After the South African general elections on May 8, Iran and South Africa will be planning for the 14th round of joint economic commission, as well as technical committee meetings, Agha-Jafari announced.

He also noted the state visit of President Rouhani to South Africa in 2019.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, as an independent state, remains resolute on its principal positions on promoting multilateralism, committing to JCPOA as a valid international document as long as Iran's interests are covered, benefiting from nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and supporting the rights of the oppressed people of the world," he said.

He further voiced confidence that the future of relations between Iran and South Africa is "bright", and the leaders of both countries are keen on developing cooperation despite the existing challenges and unlawful pressures, such as the imposition of sanctions by the United States.



Economy

EGFI to issue guarantees for oil purchasers of IRENEX

The CEO of the Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) announced that the fund is to issue guarantees for oil purchaser of Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX) and related negotiations with the Iranian oil ministry are underway.

According to Afroz Bahrami, who spoke with Mehr News correspondent on Sunday, "EGFI is in charge of covering trade and political risks of oil and non-oil exports, therefore, it provides services to domestic stocks market including IRENEX and Mercantile Exchange Market (IME)."

"In future transactions of the named markets, EGFI will act as a facilitator by issuing guarantees," she said, "At IRENEX we will ease oil sales, thus."

"We are resolved to tighten ties between the purchasers from the private sector and the Iranian government and



will cooperate with the oil ministry considering the recent decision of the US about ending waiver grace period for Iranian oil customers," she described.

"As the exports fund of the country, which is in contact with counterparts across the globe, we try to compensate for the blocked channels," Bahrami said.

Answering a question about the EGFI's wages for issuing exports guarantees, the official explained that "wages for issuing guarantees for exporters to Iraq and Afghanistan are less than one percent presently and we are to re-reduce the wages for exports to neighboring countries."

Iran losing regional, world gas market: energy expert

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Touching upon the necessity of Iran's more active foreign and energy diplomacy to keep and increase its share in regional and world gas market, Omid Shokri believes Iran is even losing Turkey's gas market.

In near future, gas refineries of phases 13, 22, and 24 of South Pars will be inaugurated officially. This means Iran's greater share of gas field against its rival Qatar, but situation of Iranian gas exports is not very good.

To know more about the issue we reached out to Washington-based Senior Energy Security Analyst Omid Shokri Kalehsar. He is currently serving as a Visiting Research Scholar in the Schar, School of Policy and Government at George Mason University.

Why Iran has not been successful in exporting gas despite its success in gas production so that the project of exporting Iranian gas to Pakistan and

Oman have not been fruitful after many years?

Exporting natural gas to neighbors is Iran's priority. According to strategy of Ministry of Oil, after all phases of South Pars will be online, Iran would be able to exports about 200 mcm natural gas to neighbors. Iran has some natural gas projects. Iran-Pakistan pipeline will be one of Iran natural gas projects. Iran completed required infrastructure by 2014 to deliver natural gas to Iran-Pakistan border. But Pakistan due to financial problems and capabilities did not build pipeline to Iran-Pakistan border. Saudi is trying play important energy diplomacy in Pakistan. And during Bin Salman's visit to Pakistan they signed some agreements in energy sector and it seems that it will not be easy for Iran to export natural gas to Pakistan in short-term.

Iran has also planned to deliver natural gas to Oman by 2020, but by March 2019, there is going to be a major development in Iran-Oman pipeline. According to the agreement Iran must export

1.5 bcm natural gas to Oman. Iran also is interested to use Oman LNG facilities to produce LNG and export LNG. By October 2018, Oman Ministry of Oil set a tender to choose a company for construction pipeline in Oman territory.

Only %20 of Iran's gas export pipeline capacity to Basra, Iraq is active. Why Iran has not been able to utilize the full capacity of the pipeline?

The major problem is due to sanctions. Iraq can't pay for natural gas which imported from Iran. I think there is no major problem in natural gas production. During Summer Iran export more natural gas rather than Winter. During winter domestic consumption is high and Ministry of Oil has to transit more natural gas to domestic pipeline network. It can be expected by coming months' capacity of natural gas export to Iraq to be increased. Domestic consumption in Iran is too high. Iran needs to use energy efficiency in all sectors to increase domestic consumption. At present majority of natural gas agree-



ments are long term (20 or 25 years) and it is not clear why Iran-Iraq natural gas pipeline period is just for six year. It possible for Iran to get oil and gas debt with Iraq currency Dinar.

Only 5 to 6 years remain to termination of the contract for the sale of Iranian gas to Turkey and Iraq, and on the other hand, Iran has not been able to find new markets for its gas. What should Iran do for exporting regarding to the increase of gas production?

Exporting natural gas to EU market is Iran second priority. Natural gas export to Europe requires a much longer pipeline than the Persian Gulf states. As you know, the only logical route to export gas from Iran to Europe is Turkey, although in the past, several transit routes were considered, including Iraq, Syria, the Islamic pipeline, Armenia and Georgia, but at present, Turkey is the right option for Iran to export gas exports to Europe.

The pipeline needed to transport gas from Assalouyeh to the Turkish border is about 2,000 kilometers. Exporting gas from Turkey to the first European country also requires at least another 2,000 kilometers of pipeline, which is much longer than the 200-kilometer pipeline to the Persian Gulf states. Turkey, on the other hand, is not willing to transit Iran's

gas because of its adoptive policies. It wants to be the gas hub itself, the recipient and distributor of gas, which is by no means accepted by Iran. In addition to the logistical and geopolitical issues associated with Iran's gas exports to Europe, there is also a price dispute.

During past year Iran and Turkey hold a round of negotiations to extend Iran-Turkey natural gas pipeline period. But there is no major progress in negotiations. Iran asked Turkey to import more natural gas and Turkey asked Iran to give more discount in natural gas price. Turkey is importing natural gas from TANAP project from Azerbaijan and by 2019 and Turkey will begin to import more natural gas from Russia via Turk Stream project. Turkey also increase LNG import from Qatar and doubled importing LNG from US. Turkey also made huge investment in renewable energy. It means that Iran natural gas in Turkey energy market is losing its importance. Iran needs more active foreign policy and energy diplomacy to keep its share in regional market and also increase its share.

What will be the possible effect of completion of the North Stream II project on the future of Iranian gas exports?

In EU market there is major competi-

tion between Russia, Qatar, US and Australia. Russia is using different pricing system and export policy for every country in EU market to keep and increase its share in EU market. US is against EU's more dependency on Gazprom. Last December US asked EU members to import more LNG from Qatar instead of importing natural gas from Russia. At present Russia has two major projects to deliver natural gas to EU market. Turk Stream and North Stream II. US is against North Stream II.

US due to shale gas revolution is trying to export more natural gas and LNG to neighbors and its allies. Germany needs Russia natural gas and has welcomed North Stream II project. All developments show that Iran will face major challenges to be a key player in natural gas market in both regional and world natural gas markets and also in short term or midterm it will be hard to Iran to be natural gas exporter to EU.

Due to US sanctions no major foreign energy firms are interested to invest in Iran energy sector. In my opinion the major problem in Iran energy sector is that to attract foreign investment you need a legal framework, an efficient and fast decision process and political stability (especially in the international context). These variables are far from being achieved as we speak,".



Turkish politician:

Impossible to drive Iran's oil export to zero

Interview by Payman Yazdani

Condemning the US move to force Turkey to buy oil from Saudi Arabia and UAE instead of Iran, Faruk logoglu says the US move is flagrant violation of international law and he sovereign right of nations to trade freely.

In continuation of the US hostile policies against the Iranian nation, the White House recently announced that it has decided not to reissue waivers on Iranian oil after they expire in May. The statement went on to say that the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have pledged to ensure that the global market will have sufficient oil supply following Washington's decision to terminate sanctions waivers for countries importing Iranian oil.

To know more about the issue we reached out to Dr. Osman Faruk Logoglu, a senior member of Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP). Following is the full text of our interview with him:

Are the US moves to slap unilateral sanctions against Iran and not extending waivers for Iran's oil importers in compliance with international law and regulations?

The US sanctions against Iranian oil exports are in flagrant violation of in-

ternational law and regulations as they transgress the sovereign right of nations to trade freely. The sanctions are illegal also because they have been imposed unilaterally without a mandate from the UN Security Council or by any other authorized body. The US is certainly entitled not to import Iranian oil or goods itself but has no right to prevent others from engaging in what is legal and proper.

The US is making efforts to drive the export of Iranian oil to zero. Is it possible? If no, why?

The US effort to drive Iranian oil exports to zero is not possible. There will certainly be buyers of Iranian oil who will not comply with US sanctions. China has already declared that its trade with Iran is legal and normal. Turkey has also taken a stance against the US move. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that the US decision will not serve regional peace and stability, yet harm the Iranian people and added that Turkey rejects unilateral sanctions and impositions on how to conduct relations with neighbors. Iran's exports might be curtailed for some time to come in the near future, but over time the volume of its exports could/should rise. We should expect adverse reactions to the US decision to

grow in time and this could also help Iran to sell more of its oil.

The US is forcing Turkey to stop buying oil from Iran and replace Saudi and Emirati oil instead of Iranian oil. What are the advantages of Iranian oil for Turkey?

Iran is our neighbor. We have a broad range of economic relations. Oil is one major element in the nexus of our ties with Iran. The physical proximity is also an important asset as far as Iranian oil is concerned. Given the state of our problematic relations with both Saudi Arabia and the UAE, there is no incentive for Turkey to buy oil from them.

Considering the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and UAE from one side with Turkey and their differences, Can't US request threaten Turkey's energy security and maybe consequently it national security due to the fact the UAE is one of the supporters of the PKK terrorist separatist group?

Even if Turkey reduces its Iranian oil imports and starts to look for other sources, the alternative for Turkey will be neither Saudi Arabia nor the UAE. Current conditions will not allow Turkey to turn in that direction. In any case, the US is not in a position to ask Turkey where it is to buy its oil from.

TSE official uncovers reasons for stocks boom

By Haniyeh Sadat Jafariyeh

Under the conditions that Iran is experiencing the toughest US-led sanctions ever and its oil exports and international banking transactions are under a high pressure, the stock market indices including TEDPIX (Tehran Stock Exchange's main index) and IFX (the main index of Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market, also known as Iran Fara Bourse), are enjoying their green days, registering growth.

The experts believe that the growth is due to the increase in forex rates at domestic free market besides the rise in goods prices in the global market which have brought Iranian export companies listed at stock market a good profit and pulled the indices up.

To have a clear overview about the issue, Mehr news agency conducted an interview with Roohollah Hosseini Moghaddam, deputy head of Tehran Stock Exchange's (TSE).

"Iran's capital market including Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) have registered a growth of 15 percent as of the beginning Iranian calendar year 1398 (March 21, 2019), i.e. the prices of different companies' stakes have averagely increased by 15 percent," Hosseini Moghaddam confirmed, "The positive trend has started since a month before the new year and is continuing by the present time."

"Above 250 trillion rials (about \$1.78 billion) of securities were traded at TSE and FIB as of the new Iranian year," he said.

"This growth has occurred simultaneous with the rise in liquidity and transactions' turnover, in the way that the average total value of daily transactions has grown up to six times more, in comparison with the same time in the preceding year," he explained.

Being asked about the reasons of the registered growth, the stock market official said that "there are many reasons for the prices increase at stock market."

"The listed companies registered good yearend reports. They could earn remarkable interests during the past year and paid them to the shareholders at the end of the financial year, which, in



Iran, matches the calendar year," he said, "Price-to-earnings ratio (P/E ratio), determining stock valuation, for the investors is expected to stand below 3 for majority of the shares in the said time span, i.e. the stock market has been highly efficient and its efficiency is higher than the interest rates for investors."

Addressing the US sanctions impact on Iran's economy and market, Hosseini Moghaddam explained that "despite the expectations which suggested that the listed companies would experience a decrease in selling their shares following the implementation of the final round of US sanctions [in November, 2015], what happened in reality was totally different."

"The listed companies continued registering growth in their sales, this assured and lured investors to the stock market in where they could experience a predictable and analyzable market," he added.

"There are many attractive markets available for investors in Iran, including foreign exchange, real estate and gold, those which absorbed a high volume of liquidity in 1397 and the last months of 1396 since they had experienced inflated prices in the said time," he noted.

"The registered growth in the past recent months can be due to the fact that the named lucrative investing markets were saturated in this period," he said, "This made the stock market seem more profitable than the other ones."

"As predicted, Iran is to witness a negative economic growth, however, according to the available documents of the listed companies at stock market, production level is experiencing no decrease in quantity but increase in sales prices is obvious," he added expressing content.

Answering a question about the im-

part of forex rate fluctuations and rial depreciation on the growth of stock market indices, the official said that "foreign exchange rates have had a significant role, or in better words the most influential one, in domestic stock market during the past two years."

"The impact can be described by many reasons. First, the majority of the listed companies are export ones. Their assets and products are traded at international markets. This lets them experience a level of increase in the value of their sales due to rial-depreciation during the past year. They could also benefit from exemptions and incentives provided to exporters," he described.

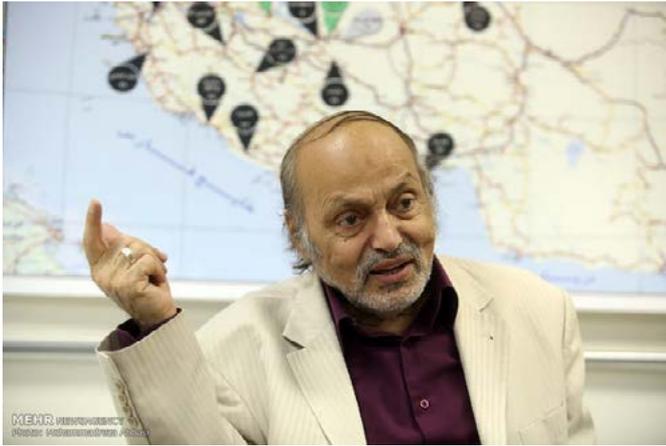
"It is worth noting that, among the 40 industries listed at Iran's stock market, some have been negatively affected by the increase in forex rates," he said, "In particular, those who were mere import companies or those who had previously received currency facilities faced some difficulties."

"Although the forex market has re-started a rising trend in the past few days, during the past three or four months, the rates did not fluctuate severely, the factor that brought stability to the stock market and let the investors to feel secure and find a relative predictability in the market," he said underlying the transparency of stock market in comparison with other unofficial markets.

Answering a question about the role of stock market in protecting domestic production and exports of non-oil exports under the present circumstance, Hosseini Moghaddam called for the government to provide incentives or exemptions for the present production companies at the stock market, which enjoys a relative transparency, to make producers improve the capacity of production units and production volume.

"Granting incentive packages to listed export companies can spur other production companies to start their activities at the stock market," he underscored.

"The stock market is presently capable of supplying the required fund for production prosperity regarding the planned financing tools. It is capable of providing production units with cheap financial resources," he added.



Former ambassador to Germany, Alireza Sheikh Attar, said the EU's trade mechanism for Iran, dubbed 'INSTEX', will not solve Iran's economic problems, because the majority of those problems stem from 'internal mismanagement'.

Speaking to Mehr News correspondent, Alireza Sheikh Attar said there is no serious disagreement between Europe and the United States on the trade mechanism called 'INSTEX', designed by the EU for legitimate business with Iran in the face of US sanctions.

INSTEX won't solve Iran's economic woes: fmr. amb.

EU's deep economic and military reliance on the US causes Europe to be willing to limit its economic relations with not only Iran but all Middle Eastern countries in order to avoid US punitive measures, he said.

He went on to add that assuming that INSTEX could solve Iran's economic problems is wrong, adding "because the majority of those problems are caused by internal mismanagement, and only a small part of them are due to foreign sanctions."

He also noted that the EU's payment mechanism does not have much confrontation with the US sanctions.

He further reminded that Europe relies on free trade, and if European companies and the private sectors feel that cooperating with Iran would threaten their interests, they would definitely stop their cooperation with Tehran.

World financial bodies, tools for imposing US policies

Translated by Zahra Mirzafarjouyan

America's monetary ammunition refers to the coordinated collection of US secondary banking sanction laws, the FATF recommendations and Swift Services for imposing sanctions, which Iran has been one of its most important targets in recent years.

The US monetary ammunition refers to the coordinated collection of US secondary banking sanction laws, the FATF recommendations and Swift Services for imposing sanctions relying on power of the dollar and its domination over global transactions seeking materialization of American domination over the world. Iran has been one of the main targets of this ammunition in recent years.

A look at the mentality and practical framework behind the designing of the sanctions against Iran shows that there has been a turning point in how US imposed sanctions around 2010.

Triangle of the US monetary ammunition

US secondary sanctions, the standards of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and Swift Services, are three sides of the monetary triangle that contain the global financial system or the global banking system that can be called "monetary ammunition triangle".

Secondary bank sanctions at the top of monetary ammunition triangle

The US secondary bank sanctions are at the top of monetary ammunition triangle. The implementation of US banking secondary sanctions is divided into two generations based on the way they were enforced. The first generation, which were created and implemented before 2010 on the basis of the executive orders of the President. These sanctions enjoy a posteriori approach and targets the end of the banking service chain.

All of the financial institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran were affected by this kind of sanctions, including the

Bank Melli Iran, Export Development Bank of Iran and Bank Saderat Iran.

This generation of banking sanctions defines a series of individuals, transactions and institutions and then slaps sanctions against them and stipulates that anyone who offers financial services to sanctioned institutions or individuals; it will be sanctioned or placed on the America's Specially Designated Nationals (SDN's) list.

But the second generation of banking sanctions imposed by US after 2010 aimed to force the world's largest banks to be coordinated with US in imposing sanction. It means that it will force these banks not to provide banking services to individuals and entities that are sanctioned.

Therefore, the focus was on the beginning of the banking services chain, i.e. the big international banks, and the access to dollar payment system is the main leverage. The approach of this generation of sanctions is a priori (de-



terrent) and aims to isolate sanctions targets in the global banking system.

This sanction strategy was followed by the laws of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA), Iran's Freedom of Law Act and the Coping with Iran's (IFCA) activities. The rules stipulated that banks either knowingly or unknowingly provide sanctioned targets with services, will encounter restrictions on their brokerage accounts in US.

FATF's position in imposing US secondary sanctions

If the the second-generation of secondary banking sanctions is going to be successful, the banks should be able to track transactions that are being made by sanctioned targets. This requires that the actual beneficiaries of each transaction be identified.

According to David Cohen, the US Treasury's undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence in the years 2011 to 2015, there must be enough infrastructures in order to create financial transparency so that it can be found out whom the sanction targeted countries are working. so they can be prevented from continuing their activities. This transparency is essential for both generations of secondary banking sanctions.

The FATF or the Financial Action Task Force plays a role in this regard. The FATF's 40 recommendations, which have been developed with US engagement, all seek to enhance global financial transparency. Providing credible information to identify customers and validating this information, and then sharing this information with banks and foreign entities, are examples of recommendations from this group that can lead to the distinguishing of sanction targets from non-sanctioned ones.

The FATF's standards have focused on two dimensions of producing accurate information about economic relations and their sharing. These two dimensions are very effective in completing the sanctions puzzle.

Swift role in monetary ammunition triangle

There is a need for a series of simplifications and fluctuations as imposing sanctions and subsequently implementing FATF standards, create barriers in the process of global business, cause difficulties for economic and global interactions, and ultimately make no attractiveness and cost to the world's banks.

In this case, SWIFT is engaged in facilitating and simplifying the enforcement of sanctions standards and trying to

reduce costs for sanctions by providing services including sanction screening, know your customer (KYC REGISTRY), and know your customer's customer.

SWIFT's new service is being developed in this regard and It can no longer be considered as a simple messenger. In fact it is becoming a tool for projecting power in line with US administration policies.

Dollar domination on global exchanges, an effective factor for US monetary ammunition

What has made the US sanctions to be implemented through FATF and SWIFT standards is size of the US economy which is bigger that the size of the world economy and also US dollar's domination on global exchanges.

According to statistics, US owns about 25 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and about 65 percent of SWIFT exchanges are traded at US dollar. This issue has led the world's largest banks to obey US sanctions, due to their urgent need for the dollar.

It should be noted that the countries will not have problem wit dollar domination issue over the next few years, but they will face the US monetary ammunition triangle that they have to look for ways to get rid of it.



Iranian, Turkish transport mins. bolster ties at joint commission meeting in Tehran

By: Haniyeh Sadat Jafariyeh

The 8th meeting of the Joint Transport Commission between Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey was held on Monday at the place of Iran's Ministry of Road and Urban Development and with participation of Iran's Road Minister Mohammad Eslami and the Turkish Transport Minister Mehmet Cahit Turan.

Addressing a joint press conference after the meeting, the Turkish minister expressed content about the ever-increasing mutual relations between Iran and Turkey and said that the two countries are determined to expand their common ties on the way to pursue the common interests.

"During the Turkish-Iranian High Level Cooperation Council (HLCC) meeting, held four months ago in Ankara, the Presidents of the two countries ordered ministers to develop all-out ties and under the framework of our duties we pursue joint interests as well as mutual cooperation and confidence," Turan said.

Calling the held meeting the most comprehensive and important mutual meeting between Iran and Turkey in transportation sector, he added that the two sides are determined to reach the set annual \$30-billion-trade transactions.

As the Turkish minister informed, during the meeting the two sides have signed an MOU, and important decisions have been made in sectors of road railway, marine, and air transportation as well.

Turan also underlined the role that Iran and Turkey play in the region and the significance of their cooperation, which would guarantee interests of both sides and the region, as well.

The Turkish minister added that Turkey and Iran can act as a bridge to connect Europe to west Asia, and related bilateral negotiations for development of new transportation ways are underway.

The Iranian minister, for his turn, named four pivotal points of the talks and agreements between Iran and Turkey during the held two-day meeting

as expansion of transit ties between West Asia and Europe, establishing Tehran-Ankara railway, following up measures for implementing the trilateral Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul agreement, and launching a new railway for developing mutual transit between Iran and Turkey.

"This meeting is held after seven years in this period of time and also after four months after HLCC meeting," Eslami said, "It reveals the message of the two countries' officials for development of mutual cooperation and reaching the targeted \$30 billion trade transactions."

As he further explained, worthy agreements have also been signed on modifying the working hours of the offices at mutual borders and also shortening the long queues of trucks at the joint borders to facilitate mutual transit at Bazargan and other borders.

In his remarks, Eslami thanked the Turkish government for their dispatched aid to flood-stricken regions of Iran as well as its political stance against the US unilateralistic policies about Iran.

IME suitable platform of economic prosperity

BY: Haniyeh Sadat Jafariyeh

Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has named the current Persian Year, 1398, as the 'Year of Boosting Domestic Production', calling on all officials to make the issue of production the pivot of their activities.

"If production is boosted, it can solve livelihood problems, it can ensure the country's independence from foreigners and from the enemies, it can eliminate unemployment and it can solve the problems related to the decrease in the value of the national currency to a great extent," the Leader said in his message on the occasion of the start of the new year on March 21, 2019.

The issue comes of the highest importance than before, due to Trump's decision about cutting all waivers of Iranian oil which will dramatically decrease oil-reliant country's oil revenues.

The need for an indigenous economy and boosting production is more highlighted, now.

Production prosperity is the fuel for the economy engine to run. It entails growth, job creation, improving the nation's livelihood as well as combating recession, inflation and unemployment. It increases non-oil exports of the country and will consequently boost foreign exchange revenues; having more foreign exchange income, injected back to domestic financial system, will have domestic production enhanced and the formed loop will go on and on. Protecting domestic production will also lure foreign and domestic investments and improve the available infrastructure, which will result in scientific and industrial growth and again boost in production. Any improvement in Gross domestic product (GDP) will consequently reinforce Iran's depreciated currency, rial, and competitiveness of its products at international markets. Thus, lubricating the production wheel, Iran can compete with foreign rivals.

The initial key factor to reach a booming economy is supporting production units and small and medium-sized enter-



prises (SMEs) which ignite prosperity of other production sectors.

While, injecting liquidity and supplying working capital via granting banking facilities is the dire need of production units in Iran, opening their way to stock market, where they can offer their manufactured products, is the other element that can help production units and SMEs increase productivity, ability to create more jobs and play their role as they should in the economy cycle.

In Iran, mercantile offerings at domestic stock market are done at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME). Directly and without participation of middlemen, domestic products' prices are set via the contribution of sellers and purchasers, i.e. demand and supply, the mechanism that guarantees interests of the Iranian producers.

IME redirects the profits of selling the products and the earned added value to the real producers, which is an important factor in setting proper cushions for economic prosperity. Cutting the hands of the middlemen and their minions, IME has the ability to cool down the inflated prices and bring tranquility and transparency to the market.

The significant role of transparency in economic activities should not be compromised on the way to boost domestic production. In a bid to impede rents and corruption and spur transparency and competitiveness among production units it seems efficient to offer their products at mercantile exchange market. Transparency acts as a proper bed for creation of the circle of income, saving, and investment, since it lets producers easily earn, save or invest in development and infrastructure

projects. The conditions, similar to which cannot be provided by unofficial markets.

Under the conditions that the country is dealing with the toughest sanctions ever and unpredictable foreign exchange rate fluctuations and these factors are directly influencing the prices of basic goods and raw materials, unofficial markets, on which the government has no observation, exacerbate the difficulties.

Producers can easily supply their required raw material at IME at real prices. Participating in IME would spur competitiveness among producers to improve quality of their products, as previously mentioned.

On the consumer side, the offered products at IME come with reasonable prices. IME is trying to issue new financial instruments to support domestic production, supply raw materials, and cover price fluctuation risks.

In fact, the road to make production prosper is bumpy. Supplying liquidity of production units, the present banking restrictions in monetary transactions with other countries, the arrears of the Iranians banks to CBI, the value added taxes levied mostly on producers, the unstable foreign exchange rates, the increased prices of the raw materials, the decrease in purchasing power and the increase in production prices are considered as threatening factors to the goal.

For the newly started Iranian calendar year the government is determined to review and modify its monetary policies about setting foreign exchange rates, curb the rampant inflation and high liquidity volume and supply the present budget deficit via relying on stock market.

Offering crude oil and gas condensates at Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX) is being done on a regular basis now and it is hoped that the international ring of IRENEX would find a way to give a breath to the oil sales and revenues of Iran, following Trump's removal of Iran oil waiver exemptions.

IME, as the other pillar of Iran's stock market, can play a key role in rescuing the country from Trump's draconian sanctions.



How did the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) foil foreign plots against the rial?

By: Kamal Iranidoost

While in early autumn, the Iranian national currency-the rial-was plunging against the US dollar on a daily basis, the volatile foreign exchange market has been brought under control through proper measures that the Iranian central bank has taken since then.

In early autumn 2018, the price of each US dollar had risen to more than 190,000 I rials while it has been now for more than 5 months that the price is standing at 120,000 rials each dollar, which indicates a remarkable recovery. What matters more here is the fact that foreign pressures with the aim of destroying the Iranian economy have increased much more since then. The

rial has regained more than 40% of its value. In fact, through the measures the Central Bank of Iran took in coordination with other apparatuses of the Iranian government, the prices started to fall and in fact, reversed the course.

The recovery of the rial comes at a time when the new round of US sanctions came into force in the middle of autumn and many had a lot of savings in US dollars for the fear of further depreciating of the rial and with the false hope that they could sell their dollars in the free market at higher prices soon after.

The recovery has been attributed to new CBI's forex policies and restrictions on banking transactions and purchases of dollars as well as a ban on money send-outs by unauthorized foreign exchange shops.

The other measures that the CBI took to quell the volatile exchange market included removing all restrictions on the import of foreign currencies and gold into the country in addition to instructing the market through injecting hard currency into the market through licensed exchange shops at lower prices than those of the free market.

Launch of NIMA

The integrated Iranian FX platform, the integrated Iranian FX platform, also known as the 'NIMA' was launched by the CBI to facilitate currency trades between market participants who include exporters and importers who need foreign currencies. The CBI launched NIMA, which is a CBI-administered online trading platform through which

the exporters are obliged to sell their foreign currency earnings to importers in need.

Although there have been complaints against the exporters who did not bring their dollar earnings to NIMA, it has relatively played an effective role in calming the volatile situation along with other CBI measures.

When the prices were plunging, the CBI ordered the banks and exchange shops to buy the US dollars that people were bringing to sell in the market to avert further losses. According to Mehr News Agency report in late November, the CBI-sponsored exchange shops and banks would buy people's dollars at higher prices than the free market in order to help the ordinary people not lose more value of their properties. There was time when the prices in the free market went down below the prices offered by CBI-sponsored forex exchange shops. The more hurriedly ordinary people rushed to the market to sell their dollars, the lower the US dollar prices went down in the market.

The downfall of US dollar against the rial accelerated as the EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini announced few days after the US sanctions took effect on November 5, 2018 that the promised financial mechanism to Iran would be in place before the year's end. Furthermore, the China's Bank of Kunlun resumed receiving payments from Iran despite the risk of US sanctions.

An organized FX market

On November 22, 2018, the newly appointed Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati stressed the need for bringing the free and official markets into a one single organized market to fill the gap between the prices in the free and the official markets in order to bring the market oscillation under further control. Hemmati said that the government recognized the existence of the free market but, he said that it needed to be organized and the gap between the prices of the free and the official

markets needed to be filled in order to help both the importers and exporters.

He said that people must be able to refer to the exchange shops and bring their banknotes into the market freely to contribute to the formation of the organized market.

The governor added that establishing an organized foreign banknotes market will remain a significant goal of the CBI, an aim that has yet to be materialized.

As it was mentioned above, there was time when the prices by CBI-administered exchange shops were lower than those of free. This shows that the CBI governor had achieved his goal of bringing the differences between prices in the free and official markets in order to set up an organized market.

Speaking to Iranian state TV-channel 2 (IRIB 2) last week, Hemmati said that the organized market would be launched within a month or so, while he added that all the necessary steps have been taken so far to launch the organized market within next two weeks. But, he said that the central bank preferred to postpone the launch of the new mechanism until the final days of the first month of the new year of 1398, which begins on March 21.

EU's breach of promise had no negative impact on rial's recovery

As time passed, the EU delayed its promised payment system to help European countries to get around US sanctions with the hope of keeping Iran nuclear deal alive, but the delay did not stop the trend of recovery of the rial against the foreign currencies. The CBI continued to interfere in the market as it still does, a policy which has proven to be very effective in stabilizing the volatile market. By the end of autumn and start of the winter each US dollar fell as low as 98,000 rials in spite of huge foreign plots against the economy, especially the rial.

Finally, the EU three major power launched their previously-promised business channel to continue legal trade with Iran under the US sanc-

tions as part of their commitments to Iran nuclear deal. The Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) was the special-purpose vehicle (SPV) which was established in January 2019 by France, Germany and the United Kingdom to facilitate non-dollar trade with Iran. The INSTEX is headquartered in Paris, France, and is headed by German national Per Fischer, who formerly served as Head of Financial Institutions at Commerzbank, between 2003 and 2014.

The EU trade mechanism has yet to be launched. Meanwhile, Iran has repeatedly warned Europe against the delays in its launch. While the European countries have not taken any practical steps to help Iran circumvent US secondary sanctions, the Iranian central bank with the help of other economic apparatuses have been able to thwart the plots by the US Treasury against the rial.

Conclusion

All in all, one can say that the CBI has brought the forex market under control despite some recent increase in the prices of foreign currencies against the rial. When this contribution is being typed down, the price of each US dollar is oscillating between 120-130,000 rials, which still is much lower than the prices in early last autumn despite the fact the US harshest economic sanctions. The recent increase can be attributed to an increase in demands for foreign currencies, most notably the US dollar, by Iranian citizens who travel abroad on new year vacations.

The CBI governor recently blamed the increased demands for foreign currencies by the Iranian citizens for holidays purposes abroad as well as the lack of action in approving the FATF-related bills by the Iranian Expediency Council so far for the recent slightly increased prices.

Hemmati has expressed hope the launch of the above mentioned organized foreign currencies market would further help the CBI to keep the prices down and prevent any other shocks in the market in the future.



Op-ed

How Trump's oil plans backfire on him

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

As expected, Donald Trump, the US president didn't extend sanctions exemptions to nine countries importing oil from Iran including India, China, Turkey, South Korea and Japan.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the decision was intended to bring Iran's oil exports to zero and dial up economic pressure on the country.

The decision led to grave consequences from the very beginning: oil price jumped by 3% and the oil experts expressed strong doubt that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates can make up the difference in oil to ensure that global markets were not unsettled.

Here there are some point that are worth mentioning:

1. The Washington's recent blatant move to hamper Iran's oil sales was based on Washington's unilateral sanctions against Iran, rather than universal multilateral sanctions; this will not only undermine the legality and credibility of the Trump's decision but it will also restrain its real practical effects. In such an environment, the Islamic Republic of Iran will have more freedom to sell oil "indirectly" or "with using mediators" and this means that Trump, Pompeo and Bolton will not reach their goal that is to reduce Iran's oil exports to zero.

2. Washington's move to end sanctions exemptions has led to objections from countries importing oil from Iran. Even countries such as Japan and South Korea that are Washington's allies in East Asia have voiced their objections to this decision and insist to continue negotiating with the White House, so that importing oil from Iran will get back to its normal routine.

Countries such as Turkey and China have taken a stronger stand, saying that they will not follow Trump's scandalous decision. They are, on one hand, worried about the oil market's future conditions and on the other hand think that the White House decision is against the



principle of making multilateral decisions in international arena.

3. The story doesn't end here! Even though it seems that the conflict between Iran, US and its two followers, Saudi Arabia and UAE, is only about oil but the conflict can expand to other fields as well. Washington, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi can't possibly expect that after their activities against Iran in oil market, Iran's response will be limited to "oil and energy sector"! Iran will make smart, calculated moves to ensure that US and its allies will face the consequences of their activities in other fields. The Islamic Republic of Iran's meaningful silence is just a preliminary stage when Iran prepares its serious and effective response for the ones who devised this oil scheme against it.

4. The US recent move against Iran by ending sanctions exemption is an official end to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). After Trump unilaterally abandoned the JCPOA in May, the agreement lost most of its effects, but it was still in place; anyhow, now that the US has imposed extensive sanctions against Iran's oil, there is no reason for the Islam Republic to stay in this agreement.

On the other hand, the reaction of European Union to the US recent decision shows that the European troika has no intention to maintain its nuclear agreement with Iran. In the meantime, Federica Mogherini, the president of the UN Foreign Affairs Council and the chairwoman of JCPOA Joint Commission, had the audacity to remain completely silent. This indicates that there has been a clandestine agreement between Washington and the European

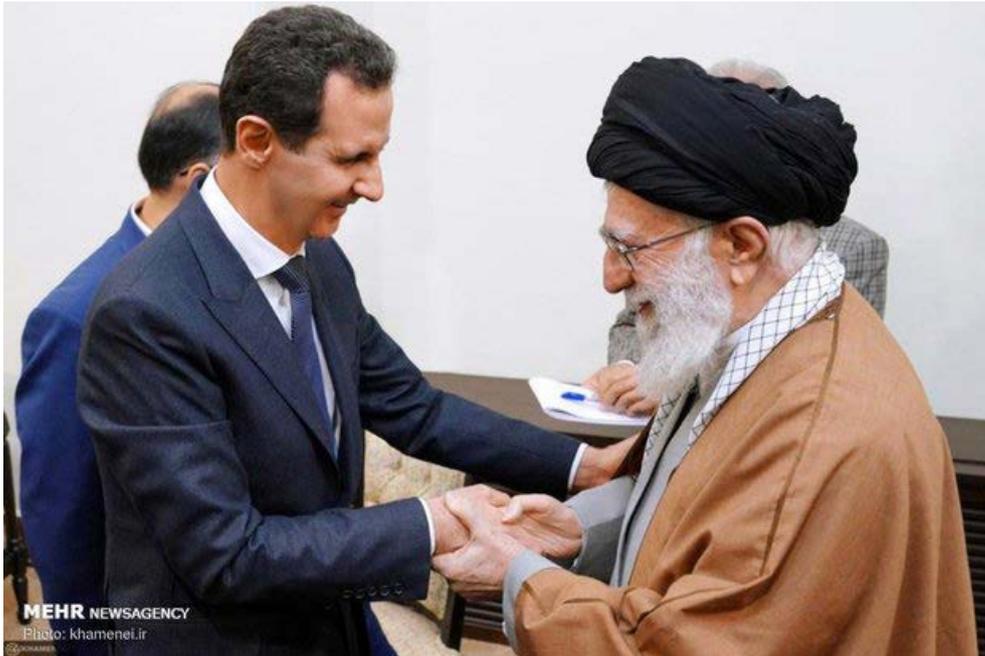
Union member states in regard to sanctions against Iran's oil. Clearly, in this situation, Iran's foreign ministry should officially stop JCPOA talks with the Europe and prepare to totally withdraw from JCPOA.

5. Considering the strong role of "mediators" in selling Iran's oil in unofficial international markets, it seems that under current circumstances, approving the four bills to join the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) will only strengthen the West in using repressive measures and controlling tools to further prevent Iran from selling its oil.

Ending the sanctions exemptions to countries importing oil from Iran and designation of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps as a terrorist organization by Trump administration leaves no room for anybody in Iran to defend the approval of FATF bills.

In this regard, Iran needs to take a strong stand and rule out the possibility of approving the UN Convention on Transnational Crime (Palermo bill) and Combatting the Financing of Terrorism (CFT), unless US revise its two recent anti-Iran measures.

6. Evidently, Trump has started a dangerous game against the Islamic Republic of Iran; a game that the White House started but its end will not be determined by Trump or his allies. Let's remember that Washington has already made wrong predictions about reaching its goals with pressuring Iran's economy. Following Washington's withdrawal from JCPOA in May, Trump had claimed two critical time periods that would force Iran into economic collapse, predicting that they are likely to be in August and November. Washington high-ranking officials had also claimed that based on realistic and expert analysis that they have made, Iran will experience a major economic and political collapse by November 2018! It goes without doubt that once again Washington is doing another ill-fated attempt in starting an oil conflict with Iran. However, this failure will have far heavier costs for the US compared to the last year.



Assad's message while in Tehran

By: Mohammad Ghaderi

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran and his meeting with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and our President Hassan Rouhani, has terrified once again the enemies of the axis of resistance and regional security, especially the axis of evil – the West, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

But the occurrence of this important event, especially at the present time, is very important.

The fact is that the US is no longer able to cover over increasing deficits in Syria and, in general, in southwest Asia. Damascus, Sanaa and even Kabul mark the obvious defeat of US regional policy. Thus, Donald Trump has fewer and fewer options.

The bloody and dangerous game that Barack Obama launched in Syria in 2011 is near an end. Although Washington's conspiracy is likely to continue in Syria, the failure of Takfiri terrorism that the US supported is already largely apparent. The problem is clear in Syria. The western media announced outright the failure of the West and Arab moves in Syria and Takfiri terrorist groups in Syria continue to find themselves in much more difficult

situation, a process that will continue until their total destruction.

With the defeat of US plans in Syria, the backbone of Takfiri terrorism has been broken, a fact that has upset the Saudis, too. If Syria was the only symbol of hostility against the sworn enemies of the resistance front, today it has become the symbol of "stability and victory" for those seeking regional peace.

These days, not only Western media but the American and European politicians cannot deny their defeat in Syria. Since 2011, the US has begun to play a dangerous game against the Syrian government and people using its Arab reactionary pawns to challenge the process of the domino effect of the Arab revolutions in the region. Also, the Western moves might have provided more security to Zionists. Today, however, after about eight years, we are witnessing the defeat of the Washington game.

In 2013, Barack Obama set up ISIS in Syria, along with First Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and even some of the allegedly rival White House senators (such as John McCain) went along with this.

This bloody legacy came to Donald

Trump at the end of 2016. Trump, who, like Obama, had a particular attachment to ISIS and other terrorist and insurgent groups in Syria, did not hesitate to act to support them. However, the triumph of the resistance front in Syria destroyed Trump's dreams and imposed a historical defeat on them. The failure, with the wise leadership of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution and allies, will always be recorded in the shameful US foreign policy record.

Therefore, Bashar al-Assad's visit to Iran, in the wake of his victory and his meeting with the Supreme Leader, who is the most reliable support for the oppressed people in the world and the most significant theoretician of the resistance against the invasion of the cruel West in the present century, suggest many messages. First of all, for those who stand in the great devil's side, relying on money and the power of weaponry, have committed this great crime and are still not willing to accept their mistakes. Secondly, for those who, on their own front, sometimes did not see the power of God and questioned the divine promise of "If you help God, he will help you and he will take your steps solid" and they spoke of settlement with the devil.

Macron at political deadlock

By: Hanif Ghaffari

On April 27, French protesters came to the streets again and challenged the capitalist system. The protests continue as Emmanuel Macron, the weak and failed president of France, has failed to take action to contain the protests and satisfy the protesters. French protest rallies are on the 24th week.

French President Emmanuel Macron has given a long-awaited response to the yellow vest protest movement with promises of tax cuts, higher pensions and a reform of the civil service. Despite insisting that order must return, he acknowledged a "lack of trust" in the establishment. Protests, sometimes violent, started in November over rises in fuel costs but widened to cover a range of grievances over economic inequality. Macron said he stood by his reforms.

His speech was originally scheduled for 15 April but was postponed after the devastating fire at Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris.

As RFI reported, President Macron's speech on Thursday addressed many

concerns of the Yellow Vest movement. But some are still dissatisfied and had called for demonstrations on Saturday. Militants on social media networks called for street protests in Paris, Strasbourg and Toulouse. In Paris, some protesters called for a 'Media March', and plan to do a tour of South-Eastern Paris, where the headquarters of France's main media companies are based. Interior Minister Christophe Castaner remarked that "the Yellow Vests' statements had been written before the President spoke on Thursday,".

"The President was addressing the French people and not the 30,000 who demonstrate on Saturdays", Castaner added. Thursday evening, President Macron announced long-awaited reforms in a televised press conference. This may be seen as the President's final answer to the Yellow Vest protests that began six months ago. Local paper Ouest France spoke to Yellow Vest protesters about Macron's proposed changes. In Saint-Lô, Normandy, a few of them concluded that the French President had said nothing to reassure them. "Nothing's moving," they said, unconvinced.



However, Macron did announce measures to improve purchasing power for France's low-income population, and lower tax rates from next year. He also admitted that he may have been arrogant, unjust or tough at times when faced with the people's claims or reservations. According to AFP, who spoke to a dozen Yellow Vests in the south of France, those reservations have not gone away their reactions were summed up in one word - "rubbish" as they described Macron's attitude as condescending.

More measured, Jérémy Clément, regularly cited as a spokesperson for the movement, said that "the President has understood our claims, but he hasn't provided the answers to them."

He added that some of the measures had already been announced, and others didn't go far enough.

Trump seeks to destroy the EU

By: Hanif Ghaffari

During the 2016 presidential race, the President of the United States officially and explicitly supported the withdrawal of Britain from the European Union. However, Trump is currently worried about how London is leaving Europe.

Trump has repeatedly blamed the British prime minister for failing to conclude appropriate agreements with Europe. The issue is how the British government has become a passive player in the world.

Republicans in the White House and Congress are renewing their support for a US-UK trade deal after Britain leaves the European Union -- even as Brexit is facing significant delays across the Atlantic.

"If the UK regains control over its national trade policy, our two nations will have a once-in-a-generation chance to forge an ambitious trade pact - a truly free, fair, and reciprocal agreement that will foster economic growth, spur innovation, and define a new global standard in trade," Rep. George Holding, R-N.C., wrote in an op-ed for the Daily Telegraph this week.

Holding, who is the ranking Republican of the British American Parliamentary Group and co-chair of the Congressional UK Caucus, wrote that a US-UK free trade agreement is a "top priority" for the

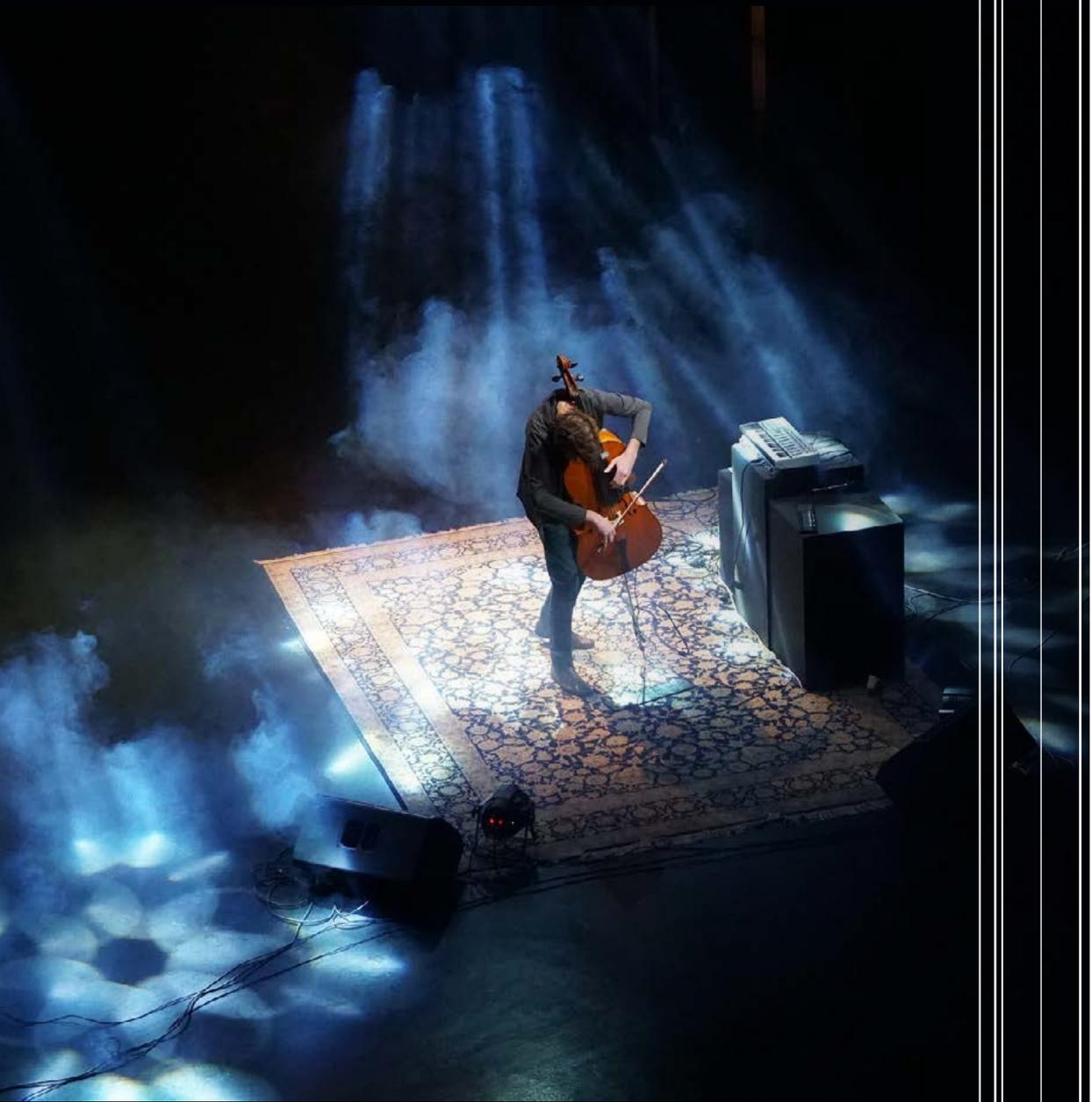
US. He said that President Trump is "extremely supportive of such a deal as are many Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress."

BREXIT has become a major riddle in the country. Many English citizens do not have a complete understanding of the EU, the British government and the UK Parliament's move to leave the European Union. However, the British authorities seem to have planned a tentative game.

The fact is that the president of the United States is still looking to destroy the European Union. One of the main reasons for Trump's concern about how Britain leaves the EU is precisely this. Trump knows well that if the British exit experience is negative, then other European Union countries will not be excluded.

It should be noted that the White House has repeatedly and openly denied its opposition to the nature and existence of the European Union and the euro area, but people like the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the French President Emanuel Macron and the British prime minister still remain in the illusion of a good relationship with Washington! Undoubtedly, many European officials are once again seeing the consequences of their game on the Trump ground, which is too late!

Finally, Trump and John Bolton will target the European Union more intense in the coming months. The White House officials are waiting for the full realization of British withdrawal from the European Union.



Culture

In Between Worlds: Sebastian Plano's sweet, melancholic melodies on Iranian stage

By: Marjohn Sheikhi

Argentinean multi-instrumentalist musician Sebastian Plano performed two shows for the Iranian audience on 7-8 March, taking them through a musical journey on the acoustic wings of somber cello and wheels of sweet electronic music.

I will probably be forever grateful to my discovery of the Icelandic musician Ólafur Arnalds and his somber neo-classical works, which carved a path for me on digital music services, paved with numerous suggestions of artists from all around the world, each unique in their own way, and yet sharing the same sweet vibe of melancholy and nostalgia, which I crave deeply with my battered, troubled soul.

Sebastian Plano was a late discovery, but definitely a case of 'love at first sound'. His 2018-released electro-acoustic single 'Purples' with those soothing and at the same time soul-searching melodies brought to life on a sampler, and then the bleeding, sober cries of the cello that wind tendrils of the purest emotions around your heart, was the first track I listened to that was composed by him, and I know many would agree that it is among his best and most powerful works.

Someone once aptly described the sound of violin at its best as a 'swan'; graceful, magnificent and elegant, with the serene feeling of being afloat in mid-air. Plano's magic on his cello makes the swan soar, and you feel like soaring with it. The sound of string instruments like violins and cellos can be grounding sometimes, if it bleeds too much and seeps in too deep, but Plano's cello melodies are liberating, at times even therapeutic, as they soar gratefully in the air and raise you up with them. Such might be the subtle distinction between intimately tragic and aesthetically melancholic. And Plano's music abounds in the latter.

Still, his studio-recorded music can't hold a candle to his live performance.



And I had the absolute pleasure to witness Plano's working miracles and weaving threads of magic on Friday in a small music hall in downtown Tehran.

Even though it is that time of the year in Iran when people are busy making the last minute arrangements for Nowruz holidays and making plans for New Year vacations, and despite the fact that the tickets for Plano's shows were quite pricey for someone on a tight budget and who probably had little to no idea how the performance would turn out, the Argentinean-born multi-instrumentalist musician opened his act to an almost full house.

Born into a family of musicians, which he calls "a string quartet", with two on violins, one on viola, and he himself on the cello, and having been classically-trained, the now Berlin-based Sebastian Plano has the solid foundation of a musical savvy to know what he is doing, even at times when his melodies come too close to this side of erratic, because the end result is always pleasant to listen to and smooth, like fine silk draped over bumps and jagged lines.

His works have been compared to, and said to be inspired by, Ólafur Arnalds, Sigur Rós, Arvo Pärt, Nils Frahm and Max Richter. With the release of his debut album 'Arrhythmical Part of Hearts' in 2013, which already earned

him international acclaim, Plano also became recognized as one of the pioneering artists who combine acoustic instruments and electronic music. His second album, 'Impetus' released in the same year, was mastered by Nils Frahm, and combines cello, piano, percussion and light electronics. His latest album, 'Verve', has just been released a few days ago. The gorgeous 'Purples' is on this album, and the soothing track 'Verve' that somehow still holds true to its title, is the artist's most favorite.

Plano performed for two consecutive nights in Tehran, both of which receiving an enthusiastic response and standing ovation. The concert, called 'In Between Worlds', was organized by 'RooBeRoo Mansion', an artistic-cultural institute in the heart of Tehran, as the third installment of the 'Resonance Project', an initiative started by RooBeRoo Mansion in December 2016 with 'Autumn Light' concert by Ólafur Arnalds, followed by 'Blue Hour' concert by Italian composer Federico Albanese in 2018.

The project's goal is to give a spotlight to artists working in the neo-classical genre for the Iranian audience, and it has already gained a great number of loyal followers. The project will pick up the tradition in a few months by introducing more of the best of the neo-classical music to Iranian music lovers.

Interview with Sebastian Plano;

The 'Verve' of melancholy; "It's just a feeling I carry inside"



Interview by: Marjohn Sheikhi

Argentinean multi-instrumentalist Sebastian Plano talked to MNA about his life as a neoclassical musician, and believes that the melancholic vibe to his compositions stems from having stepped into a rich world of experiences so young, and the need to create music at the time he couldn't.

The first thing you think you have learned from the young Argentinian-born, multi-instrumentalist Sebastian Plano by watching his live performance is that he is charismatic, self-assured and sophisticated. A first impression that may as well be true, given his impressive classical upbringing. It may somehow throw you for a bit though, catching the Berlin-based musician off the stage for a short, friendly talk, as you realize he is also incredibly down-to-earth and would as readily play a grand, extravagant venue for ostensibly highbrow audience as he would for a small, hungry crowd at a pizzeria.

Plano performed for two consecutive nights on 7th and 8th March in Tehran, both of which receiving an enthusiastic response and standing ovation from the

Iranian audience, who were bewitched by the sweet, and yet melancholic melodies that the young musician gave life to on stage. The concert, called 'In Between Worlds', was organized by the 'RooBeRoo Mansion', an artistic-cultural institute in the heart of Tehran, as the third installment of the 'Resonance Project', an initiative started by RooBeRoo in December 2016 with 'Autumn Light' concert by Ólafur Arnalds, followed by the 'Blue Hour' concert by Italian composer Federico Albanese in 2018.

First of all, how did you arrange all those sounds on the stage? Because from where I was sitting, things looked totally crazy. How did you make all that coordination look so easy and perfect?

That's a good question. It's a long work over the years in the way of trying out different things and finding things that don't work and sticking to things that work. Having one hand on the cello and the other on the keyboard...that makes the coordination rather tricky. But then, when it comes to having the audience watching your performance, it seems very natural, like some kind of a choreography that's being practiced over and over for several times, so then you get this natural flow of

playing the set.

There's another element that makes the performance tricky; I am moving all the time on the stage, and not sitting down to play the cello, which makes it a bit more difficult because you have to balance your body depending on if you have to play the cello, or if you have to press something with your foot, or if you are going to play the keyboard. It's a choreography in a way.

So how does it feel like to be in a one-man show as opposed to playing with a band? And why did you decide to go solo?

It's very fulfilling, because you're just by yourself, so everything is riding on you; all the, let's say, pressure, and in a way that's beautiful. Because it's exciting. I'm mostly playing by myself, but I have also played with a string quartet many times. So I have done it both ways.

There's a difference when you go on stage with a band. The whole ensemble lending you their support, and the music relationship that you maintain with other musicians on the stage is wonderful. I have to say both playing solo and performing with a band are really nice in their own ways.

You had a classical upbringing. How do you describe the transition into contemporary, minimalistic and electronic music?

Well, I started playing cello when I was seven. I come from a family of classical musicians, playing in symphonic orchestra at home. At the age of 11 or 12, I got into electronic music and I started making electronic music on software. But it was all a hobby, so I continued my studies. Writing electronic music was just a hobby for me at the time. I just made, like, ten copies of an album, and gave it to my friends, so it was a private thing. When I finished my master's degree in San Francisco, I decided not to continue that road of classical music. I didn't want to perform. I wanted to

make and release my own music. At that point, I started to collect the best tracks I had and released them as part of my debut album 'Arrhythmical Part of Hearts'. So basically, it all happened really organically. Because originally, I wasn't planning to release an album. I had other plans. But then suddenly I knew that I didn't want to perform classical music and wanted to make my own music.

Would you say that people nowadays connect more easily and readily with your kind of music than they would with the classical genre? Is this the reason why many musicians like you, with classical upbringing, decide to venture into electronics?

Yeah, definitely. There would be a difference with the audience. Speaking for myself, I didn't want to continue performing classical music, because I didn't want to be an interpreter. I wanted to become a writer. And I was writing music since I was 12, and it was always growing and growing, until there was a voice inside my head that said okay, you need to do this. You don't need to play Beethoven, Mozart, or Haydn anymore. You need to play your own music.

How long did that take for the voice to appear?

Long. It was a long process of ten years. Maybe even more; ever since I started playing music. I asked myself why I became a cello soloist, playing concertos with orchestras. I played those concertos, Dvorák, Elgar, etc. And then I started to notice that the whole thing, the whole world of the classical music, was not for me.

Your music has been compared to works by Ólafur Arnalds, Sigur Rós, Nils Frahm, Max Richter and the like. What do you think about the comparison? Would you call them as your inspiration?

Yeah, I was firstly inspired by a different type of musicians, such as Vangelis. And then later on, I was listening to Max Richter, and he was quite a strong influence on me. Of course, I got to listen to a lot of Sigur Rós, and my colleagues, like Ólafur and Nils. Definitely there is an influence, but I also pay attention to developing my own unique sound.

It's hard not to notice that most of the

music made in the neoclassical genre nowadays has this distinct 'melancholic' vibe to it. Why is that, exactly? What does this shared melancholy reflect?

Well, that's something I don't know for sure. It's just a feeling I carry inside. But it may have something to do with my life experiences. I left home when I was seventeen, and I have been going around the world ever since. The only thing that was taking me from place to place was the cello. It was always for music. I think, if you leave a place so young, there is going to be a lot of experiences, emotions and feelings following you. And how are you able to process all of those things? You're not, and you shouldn't. I mean, it's all of these that shape you as a human being. But then, the need to create has been always there. I remember getting anxious when I was 14 or 15, or even at 20 when I was not writing music for quite a while, but

they're quite different. But if I had to choose, then the one from the new album, 'Verve', has to be it. It has a lot of history behind it. This new album, 'Verve', that has just come out, I wrote it in 2013. And then I got my computer stolen, so I lost everything I had written, and I had to redo it all. And the track 'Verve' was the strongest one on my memory out of all the tracks that I had lost, so I thought I need to do that track first. I hadn't written any notes, hadn't recorded anything. It was just in my head. So it has that story behind it. And also, in my opinion, it came out as really different and interesting as a piece of music. The structure is pretty unique. I don't even know how it came to be. Because of the piano playing, it's frantic – there's three pianos going at the same time. I find it quite different from anything I've done so far, and for that, I liked it the best.



I needed to. So I think this sort of vibe comes from that need.

It's lovely, though, whatever the reason. This melancholy is something I always look for when I'm discovering new music. It's like it speaks more directly to people's hearts.

Life is short. And I look for things that move me; whether it's in a conversation, or a walk in the park, or a piece of music, a piece of art, a book, anything. I guess there is a lot of care in me for that quality, for finding things that are not just on the surface, but have depth.

What is your most favorite track that you have composed so far? And why is that your favorite?

It's very difficult to pick one, because

What brought you here to Iran, though?

(Points to a girl sitting with us during the interview) They brought me here (laughs). The RooBeRoo Mansion is doing these projects and different acts promoting neoclassical music. They got into contact with me and told me they want me to play in Tehran.

What was your first reaction when you were approached with that proposal?

I was surprised, yeah. But I also wanted to play. My wish is to share my music with people. It doesn't matter where, it doesn't matter how long it will take me to get there. I could even play at a pizzeria, for friends, you know? It was definitely exciting to come to Iran. It's a place that I've never been, and it's a

completely different culture. Then we kept talking and the project evolved and we got to make it happen.

How did you find the experience of playing for an Iranian audience?

It's great. I mean, you feel what you feel when you are on the streets and talking to people. There is a lot of heart in cultures like this. I was also in Morocco and I felt the same thing. People have so much care. And there is a lot of kindness. There is a difference when you compare these with, let's say, European countries, or North America. I noticed that on a personal level, but I also noticed that when I was on stage. It's beautiful. People release this energy that you feel. And it's the first time that I got someone in the audience shouting to hear a song. Remember that guy that called, 'we want All Falling Skies'? That never happened in my previous shows. It's amazing. I liked that. I like the audience to come out from being just an

spectator. This musical kinship has to be a mutual experience. So they should do whatever they feel like doing – even stand up and dance. It's not only about the stage. There is no musician and a stage without the audience.

How have you found your experience in Tehran so far?

I have found many similarities between Tehran and my hometown Buenos Aires in Argentina. You know, small similarities on the streets, the shops and the people. That's nice. Then again, I haven't had much time to go sight-seeing yet, but what I've seen so far has been really nice. Tehran is a massive city. I'm staying on the 12th floor of my hotel, and it's a horizon of houses from where I look (laughs).

If you were to compose a piece for Tehran based on the feedback you received from the audience, or the interactions you've had with the people

you've met here, what would you call it, and how would it sound like?

Well, I actually made one already, and you heard it.

The improvisation on the stage, you mean, right.

Yeah, the improvisation I played on the cello and the base notes I played on the keyboard. I prepared a piece for this concert based on what I felt the music to sound like in this place; how I imagined it to be, and how it resonates inside me. If I were to write something particular, though ... well, to write music, you don't have to think (laughs). It's one of those things that just comes to you. The most powerful tool is your intuition. Of course, your intuition can be surrounded by your experiences. When I go back to Berlin, I'm bringing back so many new experiences with me, and some of them are probably going into my creative process.

Any words for you fans in Iran?

Thank you! And I hope to come back.

Iran tourism sector thriving despite US sanctions

By: Morteza Rahmani

Figures disclosed by Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handcrafts and Tourism Organization show that more than 7.8 million foreigners traveled to Iran during the last Iranian year (ended on March 20), indicating a year-on-year jump of 52% or 2.1 million visitors.



According to Ali Asghar Mounesan, the head of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handcrafts and Tourism Organization, the inbound tourists brought some \$11.8 billion of revenue to the country during the period.

The big jump comes in spite of the fact that the reimposition of US sanctions poses a serious threat to the emerging sector, the ICHHTO chief said.

"Despite all the external restrictions, mostly from the US, we have managed to attract more foreign travelers to the country," Mounesan added.

According to Mounesan, the lower costs of Iran travel packages were a key factor in making the country more attractive to foreigners.

The huge depreciation of the rial, in the wake of the reimposed sanctions by the US, has made traveling to Iran for foreign tourists considerably cheaper. This seems to be an opportunity for fostering the promising industry of tourism in Iran.

The restrictions have also had some negative impacts to

the sector, but to combat the hurdles, Iranian authorities have introduced different initiatives, including the one that eliminates the need to put official stamps on passports of foreign tourists visiting Iran

In another step, the government has increased its focus on improving tourism infrastructures by expanding the number of high-quality hotels and providing cheap loans to players in the sector.

Iran has also strived to boost its marine tourism sector in recent months; two major passenger sea routes have been activated with the country's southern neighbors in recent months and as many as a half a dozen more are in the pipeline.

Besides, the 2019 Travel Risk Map launched by global risk experts International SOS in collaboration with Control Risks, has described Iran as safe as a majority of European countries when it comes to travel security. This has had a great impact on attracting travelers to the country in the past months.

The map shows the risk level in each country and territory based on the current threat posed to travelers by political violence (including terrorism, insurgency, politically motivated unrest and war), social unrest (including sectarian, communal and ethnic violence) and violent and petty crime.

Many experts, including Mounesan, believe that expanding tourism infrastructures could help the sector's income replace oil revenues.



MEHR NEWSAGENCY
Photo: Asghar Khamseh

Wildlife biologist:

Success in artificial insemination in Persian leopards may raise hopes for rare big cats

Interview by: Lachin Rezaian

Mohammad Farhadinia, a post-doctoral research fellow at University of Oxford, said the new move to use artificial insemination to breed Persian leopards could raise hopes for conservation of big cats.

Farhadinia said the leopard is widely popular species in the Iranian community, even losing an individual could cause a backlash in the media.

“As long as proper evidence of CVD prevalence in leopards is not available, calling it as a serious threat to Persian leopard might trigger the community’s emotions to react and to create expectation from conservation agencies to deal with the problem, when there is no evidence that the problem exists,” he added.

Here is the full text of his interview with Mehr News correspondent:

Is artificial insemination the right method for reproduction of Persian leopard? Do you think this will be successful?

Artificial insemination is an advanced technique to increase the chance of breeding for animals. It is usually applied to species facing danger of extinction in the wild while their capacity to breed naturally in captivity is limited.

There is an increasing interest in using captive Persian leopards for the recovery of leopard populations in West Asia and the Caucasus. Surely, the best candidates for such a recovery program can be those pure Persian leopards in Iran. Establishing a proper breeding program for Persian leopards in Iran can support recovery programs in other countries or even inside Iran.

Importantly, dozens of leopards, confiscated from poachers or rescued from traps over the past half century have never bred in captivity in Iran. In fact, many leopards spent years in captivity

without any proper conservation role in terms of contributing their genes to the Persian leopard population. Accordingly, during Iran-Russia exchange program in 2009, it was widely attempted to capture leopard from the wild.

Tehran Zoo has attempted natural mating in the past, sadly failed. I appreciate their efforts to keep up now with artificial insemination, fingers crossed for their success. If successful, the Iran Department of Environment can also establish a sperm bank for Persian leopards, because few leopards are every year rescued from traps, whose sperm can be sampled and properly stored for future applications.

Do you think any success in reproduction of Persian leopard by artificial insemination will raise hopes regarding the reproduction in cheetahs? Captive breeding will not help Persian leopard cubs to come back to the nature; what do you think is the

advantage of artificial insemination and reproducing cubs by this method, while they are not going to return nature?

Although artificial insemination can benefit leopard conservation in Iran, as well as other countries in the Caucasus, but learning the technique is equally important. For example, Iran Department of Environment is now considering the technique for the much rarer Asiatic cheetah. The Iran Department of Environment has announced that the cheetah population has decreased despite massive conservation investment, with a very tiny population now alive. Although it is globally announced that some 50 cheetahs are left in Iran, but many local conservationists cast a doubt over this number and consider it ambitiously overestimation. Therefore, captive breeding has been agreed by Iranian conservation agencies to be placed on the table, besides the on-going conservation actions in the wild.

Natural mating has been already tried for Asiatic cheetahs kept in captivity, which sadly failed. Now, artificial insemination is considered to be the major option for conceiving an adult female Asiatic cheetah, named Delbar. Nonetheless, the chance of pregnancy and survival of the cubs is extremely low. Any achievement of using artificial insemination to breed Persian leopards would raise hopes for Asiatic cheetahs.

What measures have been taken to deal with canine distemper, which is pervasive among Persian leopards living in habitats, where the dogs are suffering from the disease?

In contrary to general rumours about the prevalence of Canine Distemper Virus among Persian leopards in Iran, there is no evidence of CDV occurrence in any leopard, nor in Iran neither in west Asia. We have found high prevalence of the CDV among local dog populations around some key leopard areas, but blood tests from leopards captured near these injected dog populations did not show any evidence of CDV in leopards. Surprisingly, these dogs are widely killed by leopards, while no sign of the CDV was seen in leopards.

Leopard is widely popular species in the Iranian community, even losing an individual could cause a backlash in

the media. Therefore, as long as proper evidence of CVD prevalence in leopards is not available, calling it as a serious threat to Persian leopard might trigger the community's emotions to react and to create expectation from conservation agencies to deal with the problem, when there is no evidence that the problem exists.

What measures has the government taken to deal with cases related to attack of the Persian leopard on domestic livestock and people, regarding the insurance, for instance?

Raiding domestic animals, includ-

also endangered animals like Persian leopards would be certainly affected, due to shortage in resources.

How can we deal with the negative bottleneck effects which will hamper genetic diversity among leopards?

When the population of a species decreases drastically, there is a danger of inbreeding and consequently genetic drift which could hamper the long-term survival. Currently, there is no evidence of decreased genetic diversity in Persian leopards; conversely moderate genetic diversity is still seen in Persian leopards. Thanks to commitments and dedica-



MEHR NEWSAGENCY
Photo: Asghar Khamseh

ing dog, sheep, cattle, horse and even camels, are a major problem, both for people living alongside leopard areas, as well as conservation agencies in charge of protecting the leopards. As a result, affected people occasionally commit retaliatory killing of leopards, despite extremely high monetary fine of over 6000 \$.

Thus, Iran Department of Environment established an innovative insurance scheme for leopards a few years ago, aiming at compensating all verified cases of people losses to leopards. Hundreds of animals were compensated. I am not aware if the scheme is continued, as it was originally planned for five years. Nonetheless, with the rise in financial pressure to local people and the concerns over the re-imposed US sanctions against Iran, not only people but

tions of Iran government as well as civil society to leopard conservation, scholars perceive that at least 500 Persian leopards in Iran. Although relieving for conservationists in terms of number, but it reminds us that keeping up the good on-going conservation work will be crucial to avoid genetic problems in future.

Mohammad Farhadinia is post-doctoral research fellow at University of Oxford. In 2008, he was assigned as the deputy manager of the Conservation of the Asiatic Cheetah Project (CACP) – a comprehensive conservation program established by Iran's government and United Nations Development Program (UNDP). In 2013, he founded the Future4Leopards Foundation (www.future4leopards.org), dedicated to the conservation of leopards and other wild carnivores.

37th Fajr International Film Festival



By: Marjohn Sheikhi

Dossier

Tehran begins playing host to over 100 films at 37th FIFF

Curtains have raised on the 37th edition of Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran, inviting avid festival goers to its jam-packed screening program including 109 titles from 75 countries across the globe.

The 37th edition of Fajr International Film Festival opened at Felestin Cinema in downtown Tehran on Wednesday evening, with the screening of Ebrahim Hatamikia's classic movie 'The Scout', originally released in 1990.

The movie, which is also included in the Classics Preserved section of this year's cinematic event, is set during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq's war, and tells the story of a young scout who joins the front-line to help his comrades single-handedly.

Last year, the festival's curtain-raiser was Majid Majidi's 'Beyond the Clouds' (2018); produced by Zee Studios and Namah Pictures, and starring Ishaan Khatter and Malavika Mohanan, Majidi's India-set melodrama tells the story of a brother and sister who grew up in the slums of Mumbai. When Tara (Mohanan) is arrested on charges of attempted murder, her bond with her brother Amir (Khatter) is put to the test. AR Rahman composed the film score.

The 37th may be misleading. The Fajr has only started to grow comfortably into its own skin as an independent international event since 2016. Before that, the international section of Iran's biggest cinematic event was a part of the national one, sorely overshadowed by the intimidating presence of Iranian productions that attract movie-goers like moths to a flame.

With 52-year-old award-winning director Reza Mirkarimi in charge, the Fajr International Film Festival has already made a name for itself among other longer-running festivals in the region, despite its fourth year of having been able to stand on its own feet. As many as 1,400 titles were submitted to this year's secretariat, bespeaking the festival's popularity among filmmakers



MEHR NEWSAGENCY
Photo: Majid Haghdoost

across the globe. The line-up is neatly drawn for nine days of back-to-back screening of 109 titles from 75 countries from 11:30 in the morning to 22:15 for the last screening.

The international competition section, called 'Cinema Salvation', includes 30 foreign and Iranian feature and short films, from Russia, Denmark, China, Germany, Poland, India, Albania, Turkey, Argentina and many more countries whose cinematic trends are almost swallowed up by box-office darlings of Hollywood, as the largest and most profitable film industry in the world.

As such, Fajr film festival offers a breathing space for those high-quality productions from smaller film industries, many of which are either experiencing their global premiere, or are only screened at festival venues. Avid festival-goers may find joy and pride in the fact that they are among a lucky few who get the chance to watch a particular movie at Fajr.

The screening program, particularly for the competition sections, is focused on aesthetics and the message rather than entertainment; yet, the festival is not completely void of it. This year, a special section has been dedicated to contemporary comedies, including 'How

about Adolf?' from Germany, or 'Lajko – Gypsy in Space' from Hungary. The 35th edition of FIFF had a special section for horror movies, with the screenings all scheduled for late in the evening. Needless to say, all show times were sold out.

Fajr is by no means a red-carpet event. Yet, that does not mean that the event is averse to inviting A-listers. Last year, the festival made headlines by hosting three-times Oscar winner, American director Oliver Stone, and legendary Italian actor Franco Nero. This year, festival attendees will have the opportunity to catch renowned American screenwriter, director, and film critic Paul Schrader at his workshop on transcendental style in film during the festival time. Schrader is best known for his script about an obsessed New York City taxi driver in Martin Scorsese's film Taxi Driver (1976) or Raging Bull (1980).

Other special guests of the 37th FIFF include Italian cinematographer Luca Bigazzi, Dimitri Alips, international sales manager of Courant 3d Film Festival; Julie Bertucelli, who worked as assistant Director to a series of well-known directors including Krystof Kieslowski, Bertrand Tavernier, and Rithy Panh; Turkish writer and film critic Riza Oylum, Romanian director and screenwriter Ad-

ina Pintilie, and Chinese producer and director Liu Xuan.

The sideline programs include 15 academic sessions and panel discussions with national and international university scholars and A-listers of the movie industry as key speakers, discussing the place of the Iranian cinema after the 1979 Revolution, and other cinema-related topics with the attendees. Many workshops will also be held on screenwriting, producing, directing, cinematography, editing and set design.

This year, all proceeds from tickets and sales of Fajr International Film Festival will be channeled to the national flood donation collection, according to FIFF Media and Communications manager.

The recent floods, which hit many

provinces in Iran since March 19, have killed over 70 people, and caused damages to 438 urban houses and 87,000 village houses. The severity of the situation triggered widespread national and international humanitarian contributions.

Kassirian, the FIFF Media and Communications manager, said in response to the country's flood, and in collaboration with the Iranian Red Crescent Society, Fajr International Film Festival is extending a helping hand to fellow Iranians and families who are in dire need of help.

The Festival also plans to screen movies and teasers related to the works done by the Red Crescent Society and the difficulties its workers face

during relief efforts and natural disasters. "The annual event is now being held as a donation drive and this will continue next year in collaboration with the Red Crescent Society," he added.

The 37th Fajr International Film Festival, as Iran's most anticipated international cinematic event, will roll out tomorrow at Charsu Cineplex and Felestin Cinema in downtown Tehran, and come to a close on April 26.

Last year, 'Aga' by Milko Lazarov, a co-production from Bulgaria, Germany, France, won the festival's grand prix. Winners of this year's event will be announced during an award ceremony at Vahdat Hall on the last evening of the festival.

'Do not go gentle into that good night'; FIFF celebrates free, fighting spirits

Although Fajr is not a themed festival, some movies in this year's lineup for the intl. competition share something in common: strong characters, mostly women, who resist an outside force bent on changing them, and use their free, fighting spirits to change the force instead.

The 37th edition of Fajr International Film Festival, Iran's biggest cinematic event dedicated to world cinema, opened to avid festival goers on Thursday, screening from morning to midnight noteworthy productions from near and far – distance or culture wise – from Russia, Turkey and China all the way to Egypt, Norway and Argentina.

The overall screening program, comprising 11 sections, has as many as 109 titles from 75 countries. The international competition section, called 'Cinema Salvation', includes 15 feature films and 15 short films, with a jury panel of seven notable figures in the film industry.

After watching three films in the international competition, and one in the Festival of Festivals (Cup of Divinations), it became apparent that the selected movies in this year's line-



up, unlike the previous edition, enjoy a more coherent structure, with solid executions, breath-taking cinematography, award-worthy acting, and most importantly, thought-provoking, smooth-flowing subject matters, which make them both 'festival-worthy' and 'audience-friendly'.

While FIFF is not a themed festival, more focused on diverse representation

instead, it was difficult to ignore some shared characteristics between the selected movies in the international competition: all three had 'resistance' and 'resilience' at the core of their stories (with women being mostly the driving force behind it), and children played a significant role in introducing a fundamental change into the lives of the protagonists (even the film, 'As I Fall' from

Norway in the Festival of Festivals section dealt with the positive change in a young addict's life when he started to take care of his son and be a responsible father).

The main characters of these movies, mostly women, all faced a challenging situation that threatened to take something fundamental away from them. Instead of giving way under the pressure, and submitting to the outside force that sought to change, or at times, destroy them, the characters mustered up their free and fighting spirits to turn their situation into their own favor by any means necessary.

This attitude is a fresh and welcome perspective for the Iranian audience who are mostly used to watching home-made dramas in which a conflict is introduced and goes on to turn the lives of the characters upside down, but there is no way out of the situation, no solution, only a bleak realization that this is your life, you might as well get used to it, all in the name of 'realism'.



Joel (2018 | Argentina) by Carlos Sorin
Rating: 7.5/10

This simple, yet emotionally-complex, adoption drama, directed by Argentine film veteran Carlos Sorin, is easy on the eyes, introducing the audience to a snow-covered small town in Patagonia, deceptively tranquil and quiet under the muting blanket of the snow, hiding away ugly, festering wounds of prejudice, discrimination, selfishness, insecurity and the fear of the 'outsider'. The narrative sets a slow pace with silence at times revealing more truths than words, but the expected boredom is countered by great acting, beautiful cinematography, and the smooth execution of the complex moral issue that leaves the audience in a constant struggle between 'it's not worth the trouble,' and 'it's worth to fight for it.'

The story revolves around a young couple, piano teacher Cecilia (Victoria Almeida) and her forestry worker hus-

band, Diego (Diego Gentile) who have registered for adoption. When the call finally comes, they are told that the child is older than they expected. They still go through with the adoption program, although with some reservations, and find the 9-year-old Joel (Joel Noguera) to be quiet and withdrawn. The problem arrives when the school notifies Cecilia that the parents do not wish for their children to be in the same class as Joel, who is apparently more talkative among his peers, telling them wild tales about his adventures of doing drugs and threatening a man with a knife.

While Joel becomes the role model 'hero' of his class, parents are worried about the mental as well as physical well-being of their children and team up in a teacher-parent meeting that soon escalates into a heated argument, to force the headmaster to expel Joel, the outsider.

The movie is a cautionary tale about the consequences of isolating and rejecting the outsider, and subtly invites a celebratory welcoming of it. 'Joel', in the first steps, shows how the arrival of the child sets the family against the whole community, how the child isolates the mother among the people she used to know and be friends with, but gradually the very same child becomes for her a motivation to resist against a system that wants to dissolve and integrate her, a reason to strive for what she feels is the right thing to do, even if it clashes with conventions and comfort.

The movie ends with Cecilia finally making her decision, and leaves the consequences of her decision to the audience's imagination.

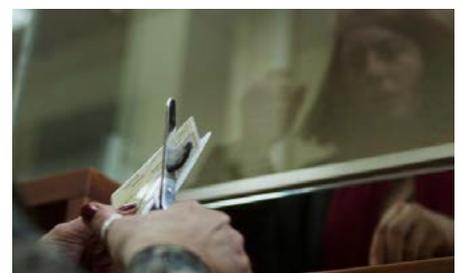


Wackersdorf (2018 | Germany) by Oliver Haffner
Rating: 8/10

Much like 'Joel', Oliver Haffner's 'Wackersdorf', set in a peaceful yet financially-challenged rural district of 1990's Germany, deals with a significant subject matter, maybe even more so, as

it involves the environment and the future of the next generations. The build-up is slow, and it takes a while to understand the various characters in their own unique set of behavioral and moral patterns. It is based on a true story, even infused at times with actual footage from the archives, which lends the story a heavier mood and more urgency. Resistance again is key here. Resistance against what is expected of you, from those above you and sometimes those around you, because your conscience has decided that some things are worth more than wealth and power, which are transient and unreliable at best.

In this small rural district of Wackersdorf, where widespread protests went on to make history, commissioner Hans Schuierer (Johannes Zeiler) strives for bringing back jobs, and hence prosperity, to his area, having an eye on the next election. Desperate for a way out and backed by his comrades and party members, he hastily falls for the plan for a nuclear reprocessing plant, promised by some Bavarian top-brass politicians and traders. Ignorant, at first, to the possible environmental hazards of this project and then awakened by harsh crackdown of the central government on the burgeoning local protests, the Commissioner's conscience, alongside his family, set him on the path to side with protesters against the state. The continued local protests then turn into an organized movement and finally force the Bavarian government to back off its plan. Today, the unfinished Wackersdorf nuclear reprocessing plant is just an industrial site.



Erased (2018 | Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia) by Miha Mazzini
Rating: 10/10

My personal favorite of the titles I have watched at the FIFF so far, 'Erased' is a novel adaptation by the same writer, Miha Mazzini, published in 2014. The movie, with its gorgeous cinematogra-

phy, gets its name from Izbrisani (Slovene for The Erased), which refers to a group of people in Slovenia that remained without a legal status after the declaration of the country's independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. According to reports, some 26,000 people were affected by the erasure, losing their residence rights, with no possibilities for work and social protection.

The movie's protagonist is a kindergarten teacher, Ana (Croatian star Judita Franković Brdar), who gives birth at a local hospital, only to be told that her files are missing and she has been erased from the system. What follows is a highly-tense and breathtaking narrative of a young woman's struggles with a Kafkaesque bureaucratic system to keep her baby and her identity. "When everything's fine, living alone is so easy,"

Ana says. "It's when things go to sh*t that you realize how dependent you are on others," and there's a bitter tone to her voice when she says it. Her situation has forced her to reconnect with her parents and the father of her child whose name she did not even put on the forms at the hospital.

One of the most powerful moments in the movie occurred during the 'wallet scene'. Ana and her divorced husband, who has connections with higher-ups and later helps her to make a live appearance on TV to talk about her situation, are sitting on a bench in this beautiful, autumn-themed, foggy park. The husband is cynical about the severity of Ana's problem. She asks him for his wallet, and begins taking out various cards – ID, insurance, driver's license, bank cards – and throwing them one by one

on the ground. All gone. "This is all you," she says with bitterness, motioning to the wallet. Then she takes out a small fragment of her broken ID, which barely shows her face, and says, "and this is all that's left of me."

Although her fight to take back her stolen identity is motivated by her need to protect her baby, who is put up for adoption, Ana and her resolve to be visible and her fighting spirit to expose the cruel consequences of what Slovenia's Ministry of the Interior had done to thousands of its citizens, becomes an inspirational, moving story. Much like 'Joel', the movie ends with Ana grabbing her baby and turning on her heels to leave the hospital as police sirens fill the air. We don't know if she could make it out with her child, but we would all like to think that she did.

Women have more powerful stories to tell, Indian director Praveen Morchhale says

Indian director and script writer Praveen Morchhale, whose 'Widow of Silence' is competing at 37th FIFF in Tehran, believes that women have more powerful stories to tell, and cinema can play a role to improve their situation in the world.

Indian director, script writer, and film producer, Praveen Morchhale, is competing at the main competition section of the 37th Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran with his latest movie, 'Widow of Silence'.

The film, which has recently snatched the Grand Jury prize for the 'Best Feature' at the 17th annual Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles, for its depiction of "a condition that most of the world doesn't get to see", is the story of a woman named Aasia (Shilpi Marwaha) who is a 'half widow' in the trouble-torn Kashmir. 'Half-widow' refers to a woman whose husband, like many other men in this Indian-controlled region, was arrested and never returned. The movie, which, apart from the lead actress, uses non-professional local actors, shows Aasia's struggles to obtain a death certificate for her husband as she goes

through her work and the caring for her family.

Mr. Morchhale was present at the FIFF venue in Charsou Cineplex in downtown Tehran, and he was gracious enough to give some of his time for an interview with Mehr News that will follow. He was also accompanied by Iranian cinematographer Mohammad Reza Jahan-panah, who worked

with him on 'Widow of Silence'.

The Indian director attaches great significance to "the human aspect of the cinema, which is universal and can be seen and understood by anyone in the world."

How were you introduced to Fajr International Film Festival?

I came here in 2015 as a guest for the festival when it was still held together





with the national event. Later in Kolkata, my film was chosen by Mr. Esfandari, who was a jury member in Kolkata where I won Best Film award. He told me to submit the film to Fajr and he would be happy to invite me. Beyond this introduction, I was also well aware of Fajr, since it is a very well-known film festival in Asia.

So, how does Fajr measure up to the other film festivals you have so far taken part in?

When comparing Fajr with other film festivals, one thing that immediately jumps to attention is the difference in the audience. Here in Iran, the festival goers are very knowledgeable about cinema, and I believe they have a deep understanding of cinema. Other than that, everything is well-organized here. The most important thing for any festival, though, is the selection of the movies, and I believe that Fajr's lineup is very high-standard. So, if you take these three factors into consideration – audience, organization and film selection – then you can say that Fajr is perfect, and very special in comparison to other festivals.

You are very knowledgeable about the Iranian cinema, so my next question concerns that. Do you, both as a filmmaker and a participant at various film festivals, believe that the Iranian cinema – with its recent remarkable popularity around the world – is just a 'festival-favorite', or do you think that

the productions also have what it takes to appeal to the taste of the general audience, for instance, those in India?

Nowadays, one can say with confidence that geographical boundaries no longer matter. Most of independent, high-quality films produced around the world are accessible to everyone on the digital platform and many other different mediums. In India, in particular, the Iranian cinema is held in high regard. It is a very 'human' and attractive cinema. On the other hand, it also depends on how you market your films. The independent cinema, for instance, needs a lot of money for a successful marketing, and in many cases, the filmmaker does not have that kind of money to publicize the film. But still, I think the Iranian cinema has been successful in spreading its influence throughout the world due to its high quality and appeal.

How do you compare the Iranian cinema to the contemporary cinema in India?

Discussing the Indian cinema, I believe, is a much wider topic, because Indian films are made in many languages, such as Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and there are many different film industries, with Bollywood being only one part of it. But as long as the independent cinema is concerned, I think the Iranian cinema is much ahead of its Indian counterpart, if you look at festival participation. But in the past three or four years, the Indian independent cinema has come a long way and made very fast progress.

Now we have Indian films in important film festivals around the world, such as Venice, Cannes, Busan, etc. We have different cultures, with different attitudes to cinema, and different stories to tell, so I think it won't be fair to compare the Iranian and Indian cinemas together. Each has its own unique identity, and both are flourishing.

Let's talk about your movie, 'Widow of Silence', which is participating at both the International Competition and 'Olive Branches' sections of this year's Fajr festival. Tell me about how it came to be.

Around two years ago, I came upon a piece of news about the situation of half-widows (whose husbands have disappeared but are not yet declared dead) in India. It really hurt me and I was quite surprised, because I've lived all my life in India and I never knew about this issue. So, I started doing research on the topic. It is a very human story, and sadly nobody knows about it. Here are these women who are suffering, and their struggles and strength should be brought to the world's attention. So, I decided to make a movie about it.

What were the challenges that you encountered along the way while making the movie?

I don't really think of any aspects of making 'Widow of Silence' as an actual challenge. The project was handled with great passion, and when you do something with passion and dedication, you

don't perceive any aspect of the job as a challenge. Whatever is thrown at us, we face it happily and try to solve it. If you focus on the challenge, then it starts to feel like a 'burden', and you most likely won't be able to enjoy the process of producing the film.

But there were physical challenges about the area where we filmed. At night, the temperature would drop to zero, and we had electricity problems, as well as logistic problems. There were no hotels, just very small guest houses, but despite all this, we were all very happy while making the film.

When we talk about Indian cinema, almost everyone just thinks about Bollywood, what with how imposing and profitable the industry is. What steered you away from that path and pushed you toward the independent cinema? What motivated you to take on such heavy subject matters, like the terrors of war and women's plights?

Bollywood, as you know, is very commercial, and its basic parameters is how much money they can make out of a story. If making more money means twisting the story or even diluting it, by putting in songs and dancing scenes that serve no purpose but entertainment, they will happily do it. For me, what matters is the human aspect of the cinema, which is universal and can be seen and understood by anyone in the world. I wanted to tell the story as it is from a neutral point of view; show what these women are going through. And for that I had to be true to the story and the subject matter, rather than creating something superficial. Bollywood may touch the surface of any subject, but the real issue will be lost somewhere.

So, does that mean that you see yourself as a filmmaker with a mission? The kind that feels the need to uncover the hidden truths and bring to attention what has been concealed or ignored?

As a filmmaker, you have some responsibility. Your cinema can be without a theme or a purpose, for entertainment only, or it can have some soul in it, something that makes the audience to think, and for me the latter is more important. I believe that my cinema should leave an impact or a deep impression on

the audience, make them think about the issue the narrative is talking about.

You chose to work with an Iranian cinematographer, Mohammad Reza Jahan-panah, on 'Widow of Silence'. How was the experience?

It was a wonderful experience. Mr. Jahan-panah is very humble, very knowledgeable, and very thorough in his craft and art, and very aesthetic. The most important thing that makes working with him very enjoyable is that he is very down-to-earth, without the usual arrogance you see in the film industry. His creativity added a lot to my film, and gave it a very good flavor. He also made a lot of contribution to bringing my vision into life.

I look forward to working with him on future projects. In a few months, probably, we will be shooting a new movie together. The story is again centered in Kashmir, but it's a very philosophical film, about life and death within a social and political community, from the point of view of a gravedigger. I hope the film will be a powerful representation about the situation in Kashmir, and that we will be able to commence the project very soon.

Women are at the center of your movie, 'Widow of Silence', as well as in several other films I had the opportunity to watch at this year's festival. Do you think cinema can do something to help improve women's situation in the world?

I strongly believe that women are being discriminated against everywhere in the world, even in the most developed countries in Europe. Women still don't have the kind of rights and status that they rightfully deserve. I believe that cinema has a strong role to play to bring these issues forward, and that women have more powerful stories to tell; they have a more powerful emotional, social and rational attitude toward everything rather than the men. They can have a very strong impact on the society, and through cinema they can achieve it very fast.

How was the audience feedback to your film at Fajr?

I received a very good feedback from my movie's screening the other day. I believe that the 'half-widow' phenomenon is very new to the audience in

Iran, because it is a very particular aspect in Kashmir only. At the same time, I think this human story is easily felt by everyone around the world, regardless of how particular the situation is. The movie was screened in Europe, America, Asia, and I believe everywhere the impact was the same. People have the same deep feeling and sympathy for the lead character. I had people coming up to me after the screening, whether in France or in South Korea or here in Iran, telling me how much the film had made them think about the situation of the half-widows. My kind of cinema is not too fond of words and the language barrier. I prefer to show the situation by images rather than by characters talking. This, I believe, helps the audience to feel like they are in the middle of the story, experiencing the situation alongside the characters. I take long shots, and use very little dialogue and camera angles, in a minimalist approach, to help the audience engage more closely with the images and feel like they are right there in the story.

What kind of filmmaker do you consider yourself? The kind that introduces a problem and throws his characters into the conflict just to watch how they react, or the kind that also shows the characters, and by extension the audience who are sharing the experience, a way out?

Some filmmakers may wish to put forward a problem and leave the solution to the audience, or some may wish to also provide the solution to that dilemma. When the film focuses on a particular solution, it runs the risk of limiting itself to a particular point of view, which may be right or wrong. I personally try to steer away from making judgments, and leave it up to the audience to decide what the right solution might be. On the other hand, when you provide the solution, there is nothing left to provoke the audience to think for themselves.

How has your experience been in Tehran and with your interactions with Iranians?

I've had a very nice experience in Tehran. People are very friendly and knowledgeable here, both the ones I interacted with at the festival venue and those outside.

2019 Fajr Intl. Filmfest. names winners; 'A Russian Youth' wins grand prix

The Fajr International Film Festival announced the full lineup of winners at Tehran's Vahdat Hall for their 37th year of celebrating independent, art house, alternate, fiction, documentary and animation films from across the globe.

Iranian and international officials, dignitaries, filmmakers and guests attended the closing ceremony on Thursday, April 25.

Addressing the ceremony, Festival Director Seyyed Reza Mirkarimi said the imposed unilateral sanctions have not only targeted Iran's economy but its culture as well: Despite these difficulties, we managed to organize the annual cinematic event. The good news is that many international filmmakers, critics, and scholars who love Iranian cinema didn't leave us alone.

The award-winning director and screenwriter added, "this is one of the oldest and the most important film festivals in West Asia. I would like to extend my gratitude to Ministry of Culture, Cinema Organization of Iran, Ministry of Communications, Tehran Municipality, as well as many others who helped us to hold this year's event."

Full Lineup:

International Competition (Cinema Salvation)

Golden Simorgh for Best Film: A Russian Youth directed by Alexander Zolotukhin, produced by Eduard Pichugin, Alexander Sokurv (Russia)

Silver Simorgh for Best Director: Soroush Sehat for Dance with Me! (Iran)

Silver Simorgh for Best Script: Gernot Kraa, Oliver Haffner for Wackersdorf by Oliver Haffner (Germany)

Silver Simorgh for Best Actress: Martina Apostolova for Irina by Nadejda Koseva (Bulgaria)

Silver Simorgh for Best Actor: Jesper Christensen for Before the Frost by Michael Noer (Denmark)

Diploma of Honor for Best Actor: Ali Mosaffa for Dance with Me by Soroush Sehat (Iran)



Silver Simorgh for Special Jury Prize: Best Costume Design for Spring Sparrow by Jingxiang Li (China)

Silver Simorgh for Best Short Film: Excess Will Save Us by Morgane Dziur-la-Petit (Sweden)

International Competition Jury (The Cinema Salvation): Wang Xiaoshuai (China), Mike van Diem (Netherlands), Muzaffer Özdemir (Turkey), Navid Mohammadzadeh (Iran), Labina Mitevska (Macedonia), Peter Fleischmann (Germany), Narges Abyar (Iran).

Asian Film Awards

Trophy for Best Asian Film: Without My Friend by Mohammad Ali Talebi (Iran)

Diploma of Honor for Best Asian Film: Rona, Azim's Mother by Jamshid Mahmoudi (Afghanistan)

Trophy for Best Asian Director: Huo Meng for Crossing the Border (China)

Trophy for Best Short Film: Sacrifice by Mehdi Mahmmad-Nejadian (Iran)

Eastern Vista Jury (Panorama of Films from Asian and Islamic Countries): Khosro Masoumi (Iran), Rusudan Glurjidge (Georgia)

Best First Film Award

Trophy for Best First Feature Film: A Russian Youth by Alexander Zolotukhin (Russia)

First Film Jury: Behrouz Shoeibi (Iran), Ghassan Salhab (Lebanon), Ammar Hadi Al-Arady (Iraq)

Muhammad Al-Ameen Award

Trophy and Diploma of Honor for Muhammad Al-Ameen Award: Hamid by Aijaz Khan (India)

Certificate of Peace

Amina by Iyman Zidan (Syria)

International Critics Award

Diploma of Honor to Best Feature Film in Eastern Vista Section: The Announcement by Mahmut Fazil Coskun (Turkey/Bulgaria)

International Critics Jury: Cüneyt Cebenoyan (Turkey), Robert Safarian (Iran), Barbara Lorey (Germany)

Interfaith Award

Diploma of Honor to Rona, Azim's Mother by Jamshid Mahmoudi (Afghanistan)

Interfaith Competition Jury: Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Navab (Iran), Inês Mendes Gil (Portugal), Douglas P. Fahleson (Scotland)

NETPAC Prize

Narrow Red Line by Farzad Khoshdast (Iran)

NETPAC Jury: Latika Padgaonkar (India), Seyyed Gholamreza Mousavi (Iran), Aijaz Gul (Pakistan)

The 37th Fajr International Film Festival was held in the Iranian capital Tehran from April 18 to 26, screening 107 titles from 75 countries around the world.

Fajr Intl. Film Festival gives you a cinema of all flavors

The 37th Fajr International Film Festival came to a close on Friday, after screening as many as 109 titles from 75 countries from near and far, offering the avid festival goers a cinematic concoction of all flavors.

After four years of having organized the international section of Fajr film festival as an independent event from its national section, one could now say with confidence that Tehran has come a long way in such a short span of time with its biggest international cinematic event and now is quite proud of it.

The Fajr International Film Festival has already proved its worth and credibility, establishing itself not just as a domestic venue for the Iranian festival goers who wish to experience a different kind of cinema, but also as a wider arena for hundreds of people around the world, who become guests for a two-week period to a diverse selection of movies from places that they have little to no exposure to. Fajr gives you a taste of high-quality, non-commercial movies from heterogeneous cultures, places that you have never been to, countries that you have had a stereotypical view on, or have been completely misinformed about.

This year, the overall screening program, comprising 11 sections, had as many as 109 titles from 75 countries from near and far – distance or culture wise – from Russia, Turkey and China all the way to Egypt, Denmark and Argentina. The international competition section, called ‘Cinema Salvation’, included 15 feature films and 15 short films, with a jury panel of seven notable figures in the film industry.

Personally, I found this year’s lineup to have a more coherent structure compared to the previous edition; selected movies generally had solid executions, breath-taking cinematography, award-worthy acting, and most importantly, thought-provoking, smooth-flowing subject matters, which made them both ‘festival-worthy’ and ‘audience-friendly’.

Movies such as ‘Erased’, a Slovenian-Croatian-Serbian production directed by Miha Mazzini, or ‘Before the Frost’ by Danish filmmaker Michael Noer, kept the audience on the edge of their seats, breathless with anticipation, with their tense, solid unfolding of the events, at the



same time as they painted a spectacular image of the sociocultural context of a particular period of time in a specific part of the world.

While Fajr is not a themed festival, more focused on diversity of representation instead, many movies in this year’s lineup shared a number of characteristics in common: children, adoption or future generations; environment; strong female characters; rejection of conventions and refusal to submit to a higher power; moving tales based on true stories, and characters with free, fighting spirits that didn’t give up, that kept looking for solutions in the face of challenges and dire situations.

My personal favorites in the International Competition section were ‘Erased’ and ‘Before the Frost’. ‘Erased’, the story of a Slovenian woman whose identity was erased, along with 26,000 others, in the wake of the country’s independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Refusing to be ‘invisible’, she did everything she could to get her identity, as well as her newborn baby, back, even going so far as to expose herself on national TV. ‘Erased’ was both informative of a historical incident that is possibly unknown to many people around the world, and it was at the same time a breathtaking story of a strong-willed character that kept pushing forward against a hostile tide.

‘Before the Frost’, a rural period piece taking place in a wretched part of backwoods Denmark, was noteworthy for its honest portrayal of an old father (played by Danish star Jesper Christensen) who would go to great lengths for the happiness of her daughter; yet, his own personal gains were not hidden from the watchful eyes of the viewer.

Still, the grand prix (Golden Simorgh for Best Film) went to ‘A Russian Youth’ by Alexander Zolotukhin; a unique take on the horrors of World War I from the viewpoint of a brave yet useless young boy, who keeps a steadfast grip on the falling world around him, even as he loses his sight and his hearing on the Eastern front.

‘A Russian Youth’ was supported by legendary director Alexander Sokurov’s own non-commercial film fund. Sokurov himself is no stranger to Fajr. He was a guest at the 34th FIFF, with his documentary ‘Francofonia’ (2015) in the screening program.

‘Before the Frost’ still managed to grab the Best Actor award for Jesper Christensen, who you might know from ‘Melancholia’ (Lars von Trier) or ‘Casino Royale’ (Martin Campbell).

The Best Script award went to Gernot Kraa and Oliver Haffner for ‘Wackersdorf’ from Germany; another wonderful tale about the environment, refusal to submit, and the power of public against the state wrapped neatly in a true story.

Martina Apostolova grabbed the festival’s Best Actress award for ‘Irina’ by Bulgarian director Nadejda Koseva; ‘Irina’ also features a strong female character that powers through the unpleasant surroundings of a small mining town. Her story is that of survival, as she needs to save her family from poverty by becoming a surrogate mother for money.

Last year, the festival made headlines by hosting three-times Oscar winner, American director Oliver Stone, and legendary Italian actor Franco Nero. This time, the guest of honor was the renowned American screenwriter, director, and film critic Paul Schrader, who held a workshop on transcendental style in film, and attended a press conference at Charsou Cineplex on April 24. The legendary American filmmaker compared the atmosphere of Fajr with that of Toronto, Venice and Berlin, voicing surprise by the sheer size and dimensions of it. Talking about the Iranian cinema, he praised the works of the late Palme d’Or Abbas Kiarostami and two-time Oscar winner Asghar Farhadi, saying the Iranian natural cinema shows growth and it is full of sense of life.

The 37th Fajr International Festival was presided over by 52-year-old award-winning director Reza Mirkarimi from April 18 to 26 in the Iranian capital Tehran.



Sports

Perspolis main goal is to qualify for next stage at AFC Champion League, coach says

Interview by: Kamal Iranidoost

Perspolis football team coach Branko Ivankovic paid a visit to Mehr News Agency headquarters in Tehran and sat down for an interview with MNA journalists.

Part of the Mehr's long interview with the manager of giant Iranian club Branko Ivankovic was conducted by the MNA English desk, while the most part of it was carried out by the Sports Desk of the MNA in Croatian through his translator. Here is the full text of the English part of the interview with Mr. Ivankovic:

Perspolis have not done very well so far at the group stage of the AFC Champion League and they have only gained one point in two matches. Do you think with this fairly poor results, your team will qualify for the next stage of the Asian competitions?

Our main aim is to qualify for the next stage of [the AFC Champions League]. Of course we lost against the Qatari Al Sadd, but I have to repeat that in the last two years of the AFC Champions seasons, we played in the semi-final and the last season in the final, and we expect to repeat these results... of course, the loss against Al Sadd was not so good, but in the last season, we again lost against the Qatari Al Sadd 3-1 but at the end of the group stage, we collected 13 points and we were the first of the table and qualified for the next stage. So, [qualifying for the next stage] is our main target and that is what we want to do.

Let's talk about the Iranian Persian Gulf Pro League. Do you think that Perspolis will come first at the end of the season again like the last two seasons?

It is very hard to make good results season by season. We took the last three seasons, we were runner-up by goal difference, and the next two seasons we became champion, and now also we are top of the table by the end of the Iranian



year. I know that repeating such results is very hard, especially because Esteghlal is a very good team and has brought more than fifteen players. Tractorsazi is the same, it has brought six to seven players, including three national team captains, like Dejagah, Shojaee and Hajsafi, also they have brought some [foreign players] and they have brought a goalkeeper.

Furthermore, there is Sepahan that have brought six to seven good players. So, the competitions will be very hard, very tough and very interesting for the football fans.

My third question deals with the probable financial problems that the US anti-Iran sanctions may have caused for the teams in the Iranian premier league, including Perspolis. Have the sanctions had any negative impacts on the performance of your team?

As you know, the financial problem is not only about Perspolis. It is a problem for all of the teams in the Persian League. The problem is not because of the sanctions and this problem has been there in the last few years. The main goal of the club is...to have financial discipline. The team tries to meet the financial needs of the players, their families, because they are professional players. So, solving the financial problems is a main goal of the club.

At the end of your contract with Perspolis, I do not know when it finishes, will you continue working with the team and resign the contract?

I have to say that I have one and half year contract, and for us, for coaches we never know what will happen tomorrow. We have some words, for example in all cases, we always try to move [forward] because one bad result can change everything. Of course, I feel excellent here in Tehran, in Iran, with Perspolis. We are very satisfied, but there is no guarantee for me and Perspolis who the coach will be, because we never know what happens, because we are professionals, and of course it depends on many things.

And as my last question, I would like to ask you about the difference between Iran and other regional countries football. What are the differences between Iranian players and their Arab rivals?

First of all, Iranian players are more talented players. They are more hard-working. I really enjoy working with my players because they try to do their best... they put so much energy, so passion on the field. So, they are totally different from. The only advantage with the Arab players is that they are better paid and their payment is better than here in Iran.

What are Carlos Queiroz legacies in Iranian football?

By: Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

During his 8-year stay in Iran, Queiroz managed to create a strong team which is standing at top of the Asian continent and wins the world's respect.

In April 2011, the Portuguese started his adventure in Iran with the aim of guiding Team Melli to 2014 World Cup in Brazil. And he achieved the goal with a historic 1-0 win against South Korea in the final match of qualification. His raised fist gesture pointed to the Korean manager at the end of the game best defined his level of enthusiasm for Iran.



Former Real Madrid coach managed to secure Iran's berth to back-to-back World Cup finals for the first time in Iran's history. He steered the team for 100 matches, gaining 60 victories, conceding 13 losses and having 27 draws.

His final match was in 2019 AFC Asian Cup semifinal against Japan which ended 3-0 for the East Asian team and also ended Iran's dream to win the continental trophy after some 43 years.

The 66-year-old coach then left Tehran with what he described as 'tears in his heart' and shortly after, took charge of Colombian national team.

Here in Tehran, I asked football jour-

nalists of Mehr News Agency, which is among leading Persian-language sports media in Iran, about Queiroz legacies in the Iranian football.

Reza Khosravi, the editor-in-chief of sports desk:

1) Fighting athletocracy 2) Team discipline; he created a team which had the least controversies in the history of Iran's football 3) Enhancing the status of and respect for Team Melli in the country 4) Introducing Iran as a growing power in football across the world 5) Helping to finalize Team Melli's special camp in Tehran dubbed as 'Performance Elite Center'

Ali Khalaf, football journalist:

Team discipline and international character

Morteza Ahmadi, football journalist:

Fighting athletocracy; there were always players in Team Melli who were after obtaining privileges. The expulsion of [goalkeeper] Mehdi Rahmati and [defender] Hadi Aghili and then putting aside [midfielder] Mojtaba Jabbari showed that Queiroz does not rely on star players.

Mehdi Mortazavian, football journalist, who was beside the team for almost 40

days in the 2019 Asian Cup campaign:

Thinking about this issue, many people are being reminded of 'Performance Elite Center', or simply PEC. Queiroz himself told that this center is his legacy. Maybe the construction of PEC had been started before Queiroz, but it was completed with his efforts and insistence. Also, one cannot neglect the discipline that he exercised over the team.

Masoud Hossein, sports journalist and editor in the Tehran Times Daily:

1) Fighting athletocracy but somehow just in early years 2) Discipline 3) Introducing contradictory statements and lies to Iranian football 4) Making a solid defense line so that Iranians would not worry about heavy losses 5) Having an arrogant look over Iranians who were working beside him 6) Boosting Iran's international character. These comments are by no means comprehensive and just were in response to one particular question. Of course, Queiroz had made some mistakes as well during his tenure.

He was somehow famous for his controversial remarks in times when the team needed to have more focus on the games ahead. One instance was verbal warfare between him and Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic; a dispute which actually and sadly distanced some Persepolis fans from Team Melli. Or during the recent campaign in UAE, Queiroz just stunned Iranian media by attacking the Iranian minister of sports. No matter his words were true or not, maybe that was not a good place to say such words and distract the focus of the team.

One of the failures of Iranian football federation was that it did not grasp this eight years of opportunity to train Iranian coaches by Sir Alex Ferguson's assistant. Almost all critiques of Queiroz in Iran praised his technical knowledge but now this asset is just gone.

Queiroz is still a highly popular character in Iran and he will remain so. If you doubt it, just check out his Instagram account and read the comments, most of which are coming from Iran.

Major achievements of Iranian athletes in the past year

By: Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

The Iranian calendar year 1397 (March 2018 – March 2019) was full of joyful moments for Iran's sports. Here we will take a look at major events and what came as a result.

2018 Asian Games

The 18th edition of Asian Games officially kicked off on August 18, 2018, in Indonesian cities of Jakarta and Palembang and closed September 2. Gaining a total of 62 medals (including 20 gold, 20 silver and 22 bronze medals) Iran finished the Asiad with the 6th rank. China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Uzbekistan topped the medals table ranking.

As far as the number of medals is concerned, Iran delivered a better performance than the last 9 editions by gaining 62 medals. However, the rank of the team in medal table dropped to 6 from 5 of 2014 games held in Incheon.

One of the historic scenes of the event was when both Iranian men's and women's teams of Kabaddi snatched the gold medals of the tournament.

2018 Asian Para Games

Under the motto of "We Can Do It with Trust and Effort," 209 Iranian para-athletes represented Iran in 2018 Asian Para Games in Jakarta, Indonesia from October 6 to 13.

The team won a total of 136 medals (51 gold, 42 silver, 43 bronze) which was enough to win the 3rd place of the medals table, for the first time in history. The phenomenon of this edition was certainly Iran's swimmer Shahin Izadyar who snatched six gold medals and one silver being named as the best athlete of the event.

Football

Surely this was a year of football with two major events; 2018 World Cup in Russia and 2019 AFC Asian Cup in UAE.

Let's start with Russia. Team Melli was drawn in Group B of 2018 World



Cup along with 2012 World Champion Spain, 2016 UEFA Champion Portugal and 2018 African Nations Champion Morocco. The team gained a 1-0 victory against Morocco in the first match to raise hopes for next round qualification. Team Melli then suffered a narrow 1-0 defeat against Spain and managed to hold Portugal in the last game, building a total of 4 points and finishing third in the group behind the two five-pointed European teams.

Iran caught the eyes during the tournament for its fierce and fighting defense capabilities and many experts praised the Iranian style. However, the team lacked the cutting edge in attacks and was unable to best use its rare opportunities during the games. Iran scored two goals in the campaign; one was an own goal by Moroccan player and the other was from the penalty spot.

Some six months later, Iran started a new campaign in UAE, this time to claim the 2019 AFC Asian Cup. Team Melli first hammered Yemen 5-0, then won Vietnam 2-0, before being held by Iraq with a 0-0 draw. With seven points, the team won the group as leader and face Oman in Round of 16 which ended with a 2-0 victory for the Persians.

Queiroz's side managed to gain a 3-0 victory over Marcelo Lippi's China in the quarterfinals, heading to face Japan in the next round. However, the Samurai Blue taught Iranian players the true meaning of being professional. When five Iranian players were objecting to referee for nothing, two Japanese players broke the deadlock in the game and

Team Melli could not manage the rest of the match; a bitter defeat but hopefully a good lesson.

Another great moment for Iranian football was when Persepolis secured a berth to AFC Champions League final match. Although the Iranian team lost the final matched 2-0 (on aggregate), it was highly praised for its good performance, considering that the team was banned from two transfer windows. And also the successful holding of the final match and cup ceremony in Tehran's Azadi Stadium proved Iran's high potentials for hosting major continental events.

Basketball

Iranian men's basketball team punched a ticket to the 2019 FIBA World Cup with a win over Australia in late February. Iran played the last games without two prominent stars, namely Hamed Haddadi, Samad Nikkhah Bahrami.

Weightlifting

Sohrab Moradi broke world records of men's 96kg category in 2018 IWF World Weightlifting Championships in Turkmenistan, collecting three gold medals as well. The Olympic gold medalist raised 186kg in snatch, and 230kg in clean and jerk and 416kg in total, breaking three world records.

Also another Olympic gold medalist of Iran, Behdad Salimi announced retirement after gaining the gold medal of men's +105kg category at 2018 Asian Games.

Futsal

There was two major futsal event in the past year, the trophy of both came to Iran. Iranian women's team retained the title of AFC Women's Futsal Championship with a 5-2 win over Japan in May 2018, in Thailand.

And Iran's Mes Sungun defeated Vietnam's Thai Son Nam FC 4-2 to clinch the title of AFC Futsal Club Championship.

Sports in Iran is demonstrating a growing trend and Iranian athletes are trying hard to keep these developments going.