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# E3 intends to hide 'miserable incompetence'

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©file photo

## Iran to cooperate in renovating Syria's water, wastewater networks

**TEHRAN** — Iran and Syria signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Thursday for cooperation in renovating Syria's water and wastewater networks, IRNA reported.

The MOU was signed by Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian and Syria's Water Resources Minister Hussein Arnous on the sidelines of the 10th meeting of the

UNESCO Regional Centre on Urban Water Management (RCUWM)'s governing board in Tehran.

As reported, the MOU is going to determine the framework of cooperation between the two countries in the field of water and wastewater and draws a roadmap for the presence of Iranian companies in Syria. **→4**

## Remaining nuclear deal parties meet in Vienna

**TEHRAN** — The remaining parties to the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the JCPOA, met in Vienna on Friday to discuss issues surrounding the multi-lateral accord.

The meeting was chaired by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi and Helga Schmid, secretary general of the European Ex-

ternal Action Service (EEAS).

This was the first meeting by representatives from Iran, UK, France, Germany, Russia and China since July.

The landmark agreement is on the verge of collapse as the Trump administration withdrew the U.S. from the deal on May 8, 2018 and slapped the harshest sanctions in history against Iran.

## Ayatollah Sistani says new PM must be chosen without foreign interference

Iraq's top Shia Muslim cleric said on Friday that a new prime minister must be chosen without foreign interference after Adel Abdul Mahdi announced his resignation a week ago.

Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani urged political leaders to abandon partisan politics in choosing a new head of government and said he would have no involvement in efforts to replace Abdul Mahdi.

"We hope a new head of govern-

ment and its members will be chosen within the constitutional deadline" of 15 days since the resignation was formalized in parliament on Sunday, a representative of Sistani said in his Friday sermon in the holy city of Kerbala.

"It must also take place without any foreign interference," he said.

Addressing worshipers during Friday prayers in the holy city of Karbala, **→13**

## Jordan seeks to restore diplomatic relations with Syria: minister

Jordan plans to restore full diplomatic relations with neighboring Syria in a further sign of Arab states embracing President Bashar al-Assad after a UAE diplomat praised him for "wise leadership" this week.

Jordanian Minister of State and Agriculture Samir Habashneh said Thursday he will travel to Syria later this month as part of a nearly 30-strong delegation, Arabic-language Amman news website reported.

Former Prime Minister Taher al-Masri will head the delegation to restore Amman-Damascus bilateral relations to the level prior to the outbreak of foreign-sponsored Syrian conflict, it said.

Habashneh said Jordan and Syria actually have common areas of interest, stressing that the visit should have taken place much earlier

in order to enhance communication between the two countries.

Commenting on a possible meeting with President Assad, he stated that the matter is in the hands of the Syrian side, and that the Jordanian delegates would like to sit for talks with the 54-year-old Syrian leader, senior officials and representatives of the Syrian people.

Jordan's official Petra news agency, citing Foreign Ministry spokesman Sufian Qudah, reported earlier this year that the Amman government had appointed a new chargé d'affaires to its embassy in Damascus.

"It was decided to appoint a Jordanian diplomat at the rank of charge d'affaires in the Jordanian embassy in Damascus," the Jordanian official said.

He underlined that the "decision has been made

in line with Jordan's stance since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011 to keep the Jordanian embassy in Damascus open."

Jordanian lawmakers first asked for the improvement of Jordan-Syria ties to the level before the start of the Syrian crisis last year, stressing that the relations are beneficial to both nations, Arabic-language Rai al-Youm newspaper reported last December.

Around the same time, Bahrain announced that work at the kingdom's embassy "in the Syrian Arab Republic is going on whilst the Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Kingdom of Bahrain is carrying out its duties and flights connecting the two countries are operational without interruption."

(Source: Press TV)

## Iraqi demonstrators condemn foreign intervention in the country

Iraqis on Friday announced their support for peaceful protests for the second day in a row on the streets and reiterated opposition to foreign intervention.

On the second day in a row, demonstrators in Baghdad declared their support for peaceful protests and condemned any acts of sabotage and violence during the protests.

Meanwhile, Iraq's top Shia cleric said Friday he had no role in talks on a new premier for the protest-hit country, where apprehensive protesters remained on the streets despite widening intimidation campaigns.

Addressing worshipers during Friday prayers in the holy city of Karbala, Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani said protests are effective in hastening needed reforms on the condition that they "are

not drawn to violent acts, chaos and destruction."

"Conserving the peaceful nature of the protests and keeping them far from violence and destruction is very important and everyone needs to unite in achieving such," a representative of Ayatollah Sistani said as he delivered the top cleric's sermon.

The top cleric added that the protesters should not allow rioters to infiltrate the rallies and target "security forces and destroy public and private property" just as protecting the lives of protesters is the responsibility of the security forces.

During his statements, Ayatollah Sistani also said that a new prime minister must be chosen "without any foreign interference" and partisan politics after the incumbent Adel Abdul-Mahdi

tendered his resignation a week ago.

"We hope a new head of government and its members will be chosen within the constitutional deadline" of 15 days since the resignation was approved in parliament on Sunday, Ayatollah Sistani said.

Abdul-Mahdi announced his resignation last week after the top cleric called for the country's lawmakers to "reconsider" their options amid ongoing demonstrations and the government's inability to address them effectively.

On Thursday, a mass rally was held in the country's capital city of Baghdad to show support for the top cleric's earlier calls for peaceful protests.

The protesters also chanted slogans and carried placards decrying US, Israeli and Saudi meddling in the country. **→13**

**PERSPECTIVE**  
**Mostafa Mousavi Sabet**  
Head of the Tehran Times  
Art & Culture Desk

## Artists' tax exemption a just decision?

Cultural and artistic activities are one of the eight categories exempted from paying basic tax under Iran's tax law.

However, in the country's budget bill for the upcoming year, the government announced its plan to reduce the tax exemption to 50 percent.

A number of cultural figures and artists criticized the plan and said that by the elimination of the tax exemption, artists and others working in the cultural fields would be squeezed by the consequent higher living expenses more than ever.

Meanwhile, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi officially asked the government to continue the tax exemption for cultural and artistic activities.

Following the request, the administration retracted its decision and Vice-President Mohammad-Baqer Nobakht, who is also the director of the Management and Planning Organization, said that the government is extending the tax exemption for artistic and cultural activities.

The retraction of the decision was also criticized by a number of people working in the artistic and cultural activities.

"Many people working in these fields are not artists or cultural figures at all," actor Payam Dehkordi has said in an interview.

"These people earn high incomes in other fields, while pretending to work in the artistic and cultural activities in order to evade tax," he added.

Film producer Manijeh Hekmat also attacked the decision.

"If the artists' tax exemption is not an election bribe, it is absolutely the government's confusion and its misunderstanding of tax functions and aims," she said.

"Making this decision during the deep economic recession in the country is sign of the government's misunderstanding of this situation," she lamented.

"This extravaganza will lead into widening the already-growing gap between rich and poor and an increase in poverty, while only people with a high income will make a huge profit from the exemption," she noted. **→16**

**ARTICLE**  
**Quayyum Raja**  
East Asian analyst

## My observations and experience in Iran

The cost of an air ticket from Lahore to Mashad was around 38000 rupees in March 2019, but as soon as Imran Khan came into power in Pakistan, the price of the same ticket jumped up to 70 000. I did not want to pay so much money. So, I decided to go by road. Everyone who heard of it, warned me that the journey by road from Pakistan to Iran was very dangerous.

They also scared me that the people on Pakistan-Iran border were very aggressive and I may be looted. I relied on Allah and joined 3 strangers in a private car from Islamabad to Pakistani Balochistan. The strangers were Balochi who first kept chatting among themselves, but at one stage during the journey, they asked me to introduce myself. I told them I was a Kashmiri writer, but when they became friendlier, I told them I was also a political activist who served a long time in prison for the reunification of Kashmir.

The friendly Balochs became sympathetic. They entertained me during the 14 hours long journey. I recalled Sardar Muhammad Aslam Kashmiri who was a custom inspector in Quetta. He booked a hotel for me and paid all my bills. He then made sure that my next journey from Quetta to Taftan was fully comfortable and it was. It took me 12 hours to reach from Quetta to Taftan. I didn't know why but the driver paid for my lunch.

I knew only a few words of Farsi. An Iranian immigration officer looked up at me and asked if I was a Punjabi, Pathan or Kashmiri? I said: Kashmiri. He asked: Education? I said, Master. He asked occupation? I said, writer. He smiled and put an entry stamp on my passport. I took a taxi from Taftan to Zehaidan and a coach from Zehaidan for Mashad. It was another 14 hours journey during which I had no Iranian sim card, but when I asked the coach driver if the wi-fi was available, an Iranian student offered me the wi-fi connection.

He was very friendly and helpful during the whole journey chatting with me about pan-islam. I reached Mashad at half past two in the morning. I failed to get a hotel room, but I left my luggage in the Amanatkhana of Imam Raza holy Shrine. **→11**



©Tehran Times/ Mohammad Mohsenifar

## Journalists killed in 2005 plane crash commemorated

A ceremony was held at Behesht-e Zahra cemetery in Tehran on Thursday in memory of the journalists and media persons who were killed in a plane crash incident in 2005.

On the 6th of December 2005, a Lockheed C-130 Hercules military transport aircraft of the Iranian air force crashed into a ten-floor apartment building in a residential area of Tehran, killing all 94 people on board, of whom 68 were journalists bound for the southern port city of Bandar Abbas to report on a series of military exercises.



## Jahangiri wants peaceful protests guaranteed

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iranian First Vice President **d e s k** Is'haq Jahangiri said on Friday that the people are entitled to stage peaceful protests to seek their rights, urging the three branches of the government to draw up a mechanism for that purpose.

"All officials in the three branches of the government as well as the country's officials and elites are committed to not only compensate the people's losses but also they must embark on preparing the required mechanism to allow the people to protest peacefully," Jahangiri wrote in his Twitter account in reference to the protests that followed an increase in gasoline prices on November 15.

"The mentioned mechanism will allay the society's concerns, bolster social wealth and in the meantime will open new horizons for the society's better future," Jahangiri remarked.

The protests over gasoline prices turned violent in some cases, leaving a number of protestors and security forces killed.

Touching upon the National Student Day in Iran, which falls on December 7, the vice president said, "This year, our university students are marking the Day differently because the country has been experiencing bitter days (in the past recent weeks)."

"We are still affected by the recent days' developments which inflicted heavy material and spiritual damages (on the country) and left unfortunately a number of the people and security guards killed," the vice president lamented.

Student Day is the anniversary of the murder of three students in the University of Tehran on December 7, 1953 (16 Azar 1332 in the Iranian calendar) by police in the Pahlavi era. Every year there are local gatherings at many universities organized by students to commemorate the day.

Iran's constitution's chapter III (Article 19 to 42) refers to the rights of the people, saying, "Article 27 provides for freedom of assembly, provided that arms are not carried and the assemblies are not detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam."

## Zarif welcomes peaceful solutions to Yemen crisis

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister **d e s k** Mohammad Javad Zarif underscored on Thursday that diplomatic solutions are the best ways possible out of the crisis in Yemen.

"Iran sees no benefit in continuation of war and siege in Yemen, but it welcomes peaceful solutions," Zarif wrote in Arabic on his Twitter account.

Officials from both Yemen and Saudi Arabia told the Associated Press on November 13 that both sides are holding indirect, behind-the-scenes talks to end the devastating five-year war in Yemen.

The news agency said the negotiations are taking place with Oman, a Persian Gulf Arab country that borders both Yemen and Saudi Arabia, as mediator.



Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi back to power and crushing the Houthis Ansarullah movement.

The U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past four and a half years.

The war has also taken a heavy toll on the country's infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, and factories. The UN says over 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger.

The Western-backed military aggression, coupled with a naval blockade, has plunged Yemen into "the world's worst humanitarian crisis", according to the United Nations.

## Commander: Iran self-sufficient in defense industry

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri said the Islamic Republic has gained full self-sufficiency in the field of defense.

"Today, we can declare that we have achieved full self-sufficiency in defending the country, and these achievements have given the great Iranian nation effective might and deterrence, security, and sustainable defense," the top commander said at an exhibition of military products in Tehran on Thursday.

He assured the Iranian people that the Defense Ministry does not rely on foreigners to supply the defense and combat equipment, noting that all military gear for ground, naval and aerial combat, and weapons for air defense and electronic warfare are manufactured by Iranian experts.

He also highlighted the effectual strategy to take advantage of Iranian knowledge-based companies for manufacturing defense equipment.

During Major General Baqeri's visit to the exhibition, the Defense Ministry unveiled a smart communication system used by the country's military forces.

The homegrown system, comprised of four subsystems, creates a safe online communication channel among military units.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great headways in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment.

Iran maintains that its military capabilities pose no threat to regional countries, stressing that the Islamic Republic's defense doctrine is entirely based on deterrence.

# Tehran raps U.S. interference in China's affairs

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Tehran has **d e s k** slammed Washington for interfering in China's internal affairs after the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill for sanctions against Chinese officials over alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

In a statement on Friday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi referred to the United States' genocide of native Americans, the enslavement of African Americans, massacre of Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Palestine and Yemen, and pardoning war criminals, saying with such shameful record, the U.S. is not qualified at all to make comments about the ethnicities, races and Muslims.

"The repetition of such brazen violation of the well-recognized principles of international law is simply a reminder that interference in the internal affairs of other nations has become a tenet of the U.S.'s norm-violating foreign policy," he said, according to the Iran Front Page.

The spokesman further denounced the recent bill the U.S. House of Representatives passed against China, warning the international community against a growing



trend in such measures which threaten the global peace and stability.

Mousavi also advised independent countries to react to the U.S. government's re-

**The Iranian Foreign Ministry says the U.S. is not qualified at all to make comments about ethnicities, races and Muslims.**

## Zarif: E3 intends to hide 'miserable incompetence' Hook admits Iran's missile testing not violating Resolution 2231: Zarif

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Foreign **d e s k** Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote on his Twitter account on Friday that even Brian Hook has acknowledged that the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 has not banned missile testing by Iran.

"Brian Hook has given our E3 JCPOA partners a timely reminder, openly admitting that missile testing is not prohibited in the Security Council's Resolution 2231," Zarif wrote.

Hook, who serves as U.S. special representative for Iran and senior policy advisor to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, had announced, "One of the deficiencies of the Iran nuclear deal is that it ended the prohibition on Iran's ballistic missile testing."

Resolution 2231, adopted unanimously

by the UN Security Council (UNSC) in July 2015, endorses the nuclear agreement between Iran, the 5+1 group, and the European Union. However, the United States, under Donald Trump, unilaterally withdrew from the agreement in May and ordered sanctions on Iran.

The resolution "calls upon" Iran not to test nuclear-capable missiles; it does not ban Iran to conduct missile tests.

In a tweet on November 30, Pompeo

claimed that Iran had just test-fired a medium-range missile "that is capable of carrying multiple warheads."

In an interview with ICANA published on Tuesday, Zarif said Pompeo needs to study the resolution 2231.

In another tweet on Thursday, Zarif said that the three European states' letter to the UN chief on Iran's missiles is an attempt "to cover up their miserable incompetence" to implement the nuclear deal.

**Zarif says, "If E3 want a modicum of global credibility, they can begin by exerting sovereignty rather than bowing to U.S. bullying."**

## Hormuz peace initiative a step forward in reducing regional tension: Araghchi

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Deputy Foreign Minister **d e s k** Abbas Araghchi who visited Kuwait on Thursday said Iran's Hormuz peace initiative is a step in line with reducing tension in the region.

During a meeting with Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaleed al-Jarallah, Araghchi said that the regional countries' "constructive" approach towards Iran's initiative will help alleviate tension.

He added that Iran is ready to find mechanisms to implement the peace plan, which is known as the Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE).

The littoral states to the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf have many capacities to help prosperity of the future, he said.

He also noted that Iran attaches great importance to the regional countries' collective cooperation to maintain security in the region.

The Kuwaiti official highlighted the importance of dialogue and cooperation to maintain peace and security.

At the United Nations summit in New York in late September, Iran officially unveiled the proposal for regional security.

"Based upon the historical responsibility of my country in maintaining security, peace, stability and progress in the Persian Gulf region and Strait of Hormuz, I would like to

invite all the countries directly affected by the developments in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz to the 'Coalition for Hope', meaning Hormuz Peace Endeavor," President Hassan Rouhani told the UN delegates.

During a meeting with Omani Foreign Minister Yusef bin Alawi on Tuesday in Tehran, Rouhani said all the regional countries should play an active role in maintaining security in the region and in this line Iran proposed the Hormuz peace initiative.

"We should maintain security in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz through expanding cooperation and we should not let foreigners interfere," the president pointed out.

Foreign Minister Zarif has invited all regional states to join the peace plan for securing the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

In a tweet in September, Zarif said the initiative entails "dialogue, confidence-building, freedom of navigation, energy security, non-aggression, and non-intervention".

In a post on his Twitter account on October 15, Zarif renewed Iran's call to all countries bordering the Persian Gulf to join Tehran to "forge a blueprint for peace, security, stability, and prosperity" in the region.

In a press briefing on November 25, the Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi announced that three countries have accepted to join Iran's Hormuz peace plan.



"Three countries have given written response to Iran's invitation and other countries are studying it," he said.

He also called on certain Persian Gulf Arab states to abandon reliance on foreign forces for their security, saying dependence on foreigners is just an "illusion"

"We called on the countries to respond to Iran's peace-seeking call and abandon illusions. We have stressed that the presence of foreign countries undermines security and stability. We hope this initiative of Iran would face with a positive response," Mousavi stated.

## Iran won't relinquish right to oil export, ambassador says

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — **d e s k** Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, said on Thursday that Iran will not relinquish its right to export oil now that the country is under U.S. illegal sanctions.

"Iran will not back down on upholding its right to produce and export oil after imposition of sanctions," he told reporters on the sidelines of 177th Meeting of the OPEC Conference.

U.S. President Donald Trump quit the 2015 nuclear deal in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions on Iran as part of the "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran.

Since April 2019, the Trump administration has gone beyond the pre-nuclear deal sanctions to impose measures that would reduce Iran's oil export income "to zero."

U.S. secondary sanctions now apply to virtually every civilian sector of Iran's economy

Washington has been pressuring countries not to buy oil from Iran.

Many analysts and think tanks believe that the maximum pressure



policy has failed to achieve concrete results.

First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri said on Monday that the United States could not cut Iran's oil sale to zero despite pressure and sanctions.

"Despite maximum economic and psychological pressure, the United States could not cut export of Iran's oil to zero and we sell our oil through other methods," he said during a speech at a ceremony held to mark national day of exportation.

He said that Iranians have stood on their own feet and have resisted economic pressure.

## Iran should call for Israel's disarmament in response to EU power's letter: analyst

**(Press TV)** — A political commentator says, Iran — "one of the few subjects of missile war" — has full justification to develop its missiles programs, while Israel and Saudi Arabia have constantly been threatening the country with their missiles.

Author and analyst at Foreign Policy in Focus, Ian Williams, made the remarks on Thursday, commenting on a letter written by three European countries to the UN chief about Iran's missiles program.

Having failed to fulfill their commitments to Iran under the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran, the European signatories of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) wrote the letter to UN chief Antonio Guterres.

Circulated on Wednesday, the letter accused Tehran of possessing "nuclear-capable ballistic missiles" and claimed that the country's latest missile activities were "inconsistent" with a UN resolution that endorsed the accord.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in response that the letter is aimed at hiding their "miserable incompetence" in fulfilling their commitments under the nuclear deal.

"I wish foreign minister had said 'hay, if Israel disarms, so will we,'" Williams told Press TV's 'The Debate' program on Thursday.

Williams said Iran was "one of the few subjects of missile war".

current violation of norms and its unbridled unilateralism.

The U.S. House of Representatives on Tuesday overwhelmingly approved a bill that would require the Trump administration to toughen its response to China's alleged crackdown on its Muslim minority in Xinjiang, drawing swift condemnation from Beijing.

The Uighur Act of 2019 is a stronger version of a bill that angered Beijing when it passed the Senate in September. It calls on the president, Donald Trump, to impose sanctions for the first time on a member of China's powerful politburo even as he seeks a trade deal with Beijing.

In a statement released shortly after the Uighur Act of 2019 was passed, China's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday condemned the move, saying the bill "wantonly smears China's efforts to eliminate and combat extremism."

"We urge the U.S. to immediately correct its mistake, to stop the above bill on Xinjiang from becoming law, to stop using Xinjiang as a way to interfere in China's domestic affairs," said the statement.

"Latest E3 letter to UNSG on missiles is a desperate falsehood to cover up their miserable incompetence in fulfilling bare minimum of their own JCPOA obligations," Zarif added.

Zarif added, "If E3 want a modicum of global credibility, they can begin by exerting sovereignty rather than bowing to U.S. bullying," Zarif said.

His remarks were in reaction to a letter penned by France, Germany and Britain, known as EU trio, to the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in which the three European signatories to the JCPOA made the allegation that Iran's ballistic missile activity is "inconsistent" with the call in a council resolution endorsing the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.



# Cleric: Petrol plan would have fallen without Leader's support

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The implementation of the petrol subsidy reform plan would have failed if it was not for the Leader's timely support, said an interim Friday prayer preacher.

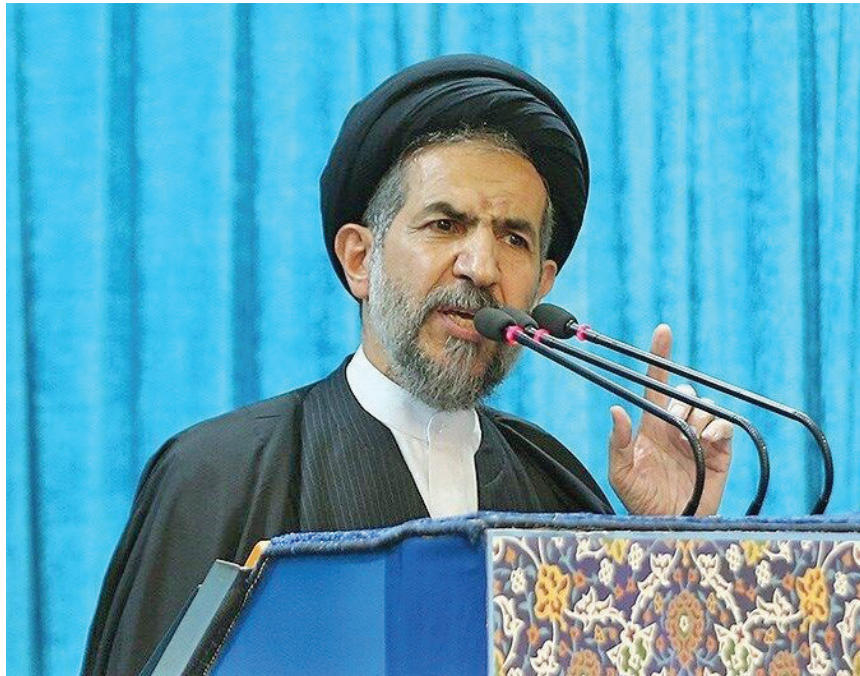
"If it was not for the timely support of the Leader of the Revolution, which came out of his wisdom, bravery, tactfulness, piousness and justice, the implementation of this plan would have faced defeat," Mohammad-Hassan Aboutorabi Fard told worshippers in Tehran on Friday.

The remarks came a few weeks after protests erupted in some cities in Iran against increasing gasoline price. In certain cases, the protests turned violent as some rioters clashed with police, using knives and guns.

Rioters damaged public and private property and put banks and state buildings on fire.

The protests lasted just for a few days. Soon after the protests erupted, Ayatollah Khamenei supported the government's decision, putting an end to doubts and possible moves to reverse the decision.

The Leader said he had previously announced that since he was not an expert on



the issue, he would support any decision made by heads of the three branches of government and the experts.

Aboutorabi Fard said authorities should not allow foreign intelligence agencies to take advantage of the decision, voicing regret over the hasty implementation of the plan, which he said could have gained the support of the elite and the people before being put into force.

On Wednesday, the Leader urged relevant state bodies to practice Islamic mercy when dealing with those who committed acts of violence or caused insecurity in the protests.

He said those who were killed without being involved in provoking riots should be considered martyrs and their families should receive stipends.

Ayatollah Khamenei also called for Islamic mercy in dealing with those suspects involved in sabotage acts.

Aboutorabi Fard pointed to the Leader's remarks, saying, "The world should know that this is how the Revolution looks at the society."

The cleric also called on officials and clerics to attend to the families of victims of the unrest.

## Intelligence Ministry foils dorm explosion plot ahead of Student Day

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The Intelligence Ministry says it has foiled a sinister plot to blow up the kitchen of an Iranian university's dormitory.

Extremist elements were after blowing up a dormitory of Iran University of Science and Technology and killing its residents, the ministry said in a statement on Thursday.



The plot, however, was foiled thanks to the awareness of the residents and the help of the building's security personnel, it added. "Following comprehensive intelligence activities, the elements engaged in the sinister plot have been arrested," the statement reads.

The Intelligence Ministry said the criminals were trying to carry out the plot to provoke unrest and disrupt the events marking Iran's National Student Day, set to be held on Saturday.

The National Student Day marks the anniversary of the murder of three students of the University of Tehran on December 7, 1953, by Iranian police in the Pahlavi era.

Every year, national demonstrations are organized to honor the occasion.

Earlier this week, the Intelligence Ministry said it had arrested the top members of an anti-Islamic Revolution network who intended to create chaos in universities during the National Student Day ceremonies.

The ministry said the network intended to foment insecurity in Tehran and some other cities.

In the recent protests against partially rationing gasoline and increasing its price, the network intended but failed to incite students of the University of Tehran to disrupt the country's security, it added.

Sporadic protests erupted in Iran on November 15 after the government announced an increase in the price of gasoline, a subsidized commodity that is still cheaper in Iran than other countries in the world.

Rioters damaged public and private property and put banks, gas stations, and state buildings on fire.

## Judiciary chief visits UCF nuclear site

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi has visited the UCF nuclear site in Isfahan, central Iran, ISNA reported on Friday.



Speaking on the sidelines of the visit, Raisi referred to the applications of nuclear technology in different fields, saying great steps have already been taken by Iranian scientists and that the technology will improve to reach the desired level.

The Judiciary chief wished success for the scientists in the field.

He also lauded the efforts made by scientists and staff of the nuclear facility and commemorated the memory of Iranian nuclear scientists martyred by foreign agents inside the country.

The Isfahan Uranium Conversion Facility (UCF) is one of the pivotal facilities for producing nuclear fuel, wherein the conversion of yellowcake to uranium hexafluoride (UF6) takes place.

## Government sympathizes with victims of gas cylinder explosion in Kurdistan

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The spokesman for the Iranian government in a tweet on Thursday offered his condolences to the family members of the victims of a gas cylinder explosion in a wedding ceremony in the town of Saqez in Kurdistan province on Thursday night.

"Unfortunately, a sum of 11 of our Kurdish compatriots, who had gathered to celebrate the beginning of a new life, lost their lives due to the gas explosion. Some others were also wounded in the blast. I, as the government spokesman, express my condolences to our Kurdish compatriots and the victims' family members," Ali Rabiei said.

"The government will do its best for treatment of the injured," Rabiei vowed.

A sum of 11 people, including 5 children, 5 women and a man lost their lives in the explosion and the following fire in the wedding hall.

In the meantime, Hossein Khosh Eghbal, Kurdistan's deputy governor general for social, security and political affairs, said, "11 invitees to the wedding ceremony were killed and 38 more were wounded. The injured were transferred to the nearest medical centers by the emergency and rescue staff."

Eghbal added three of the wounded people are in critical condition.

Kurdistan governor general Bahman Mordnia, for his part, sent a message of condolence to the bereaved families and announced a day of public mourning in the province.

He also visited the scene of the incident to see the reasons behind the blast and meet the families of the victims.

## Diplomat says Iran's priority is protecting independence



**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Ambassador to Russia Mehdi Sanaei said on Friday that relying on domestic capacities and protecting independence are Iran's priorities.

"In this situation, protecting independence and power of the foreign policy and also relying on domestic economy and capacities are Iran's important priorities," Sanaei said in a press conference in Moscow.

Iran's top diplomat in Moscow also said it was "natural" that Iran decided to reduce its commitments to the JCPOA, the official name for the 2015 nuclear deal.

Iran has started to partially reduce its commitments to the JCPOA in response to the United States which abandoned the landmark deal in May 2018 and reinstituted sanctions.

And, since April 2019, the Trump administration has gone beyond the pre-JCPOA sanctions to impose measures that would reduce Iran's oil export income "to zero." U.S. secondary sanctions now apply to virtually every civilian sector of Iran's economy.

"The United States violated the JCPOA and the Europeans do not take enough actions to preserve the deal. So, how do you think Iran should behave?" the ambassador asked.

So far, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has taken four steps to cut back commitments in accordance with paragraph 36 of the JCPOA which "allows one side, under certain circumstances, to stop complying with the deal if the other side is out of compliance."

Top officials in Tehran have repeatedly said if the European Union shields Iran's economy from the sanctions effect the country will reverse its decision.

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

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

to the agreement at bi-monthly intervals.

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

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

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

In the latest step, which started on November 6, Iran began injecting uranium gas into 1,044 centrifuges at the Fordow nuclear site. It was done at the presence of inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi said on Monday that no one can question Iran for deciding to scale down its commitments to the JCPOA.

In a panel discussion in Tokyo, he said that Iran's action in reducing nuclear commitments does not mean quitting the JCPOA.

"The current situation is the result of the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA and the only solution to it is removal of sanctions and return to diplomacy," the top diplomat noted.

## China urges U.S. to stop maximum pressure against Iran

By staff and agency

Hua Chunying, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, has urged the United States to stop policy of maximum pressure against Iran.

"The United States is not only unilaterally withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action [JCPOA] and exerting maximum pressure on Iran, but is also imposing sanctions or threatening to impose sanctions on other parties within the agreement ... We urge the United States to correct its erroneous policy of exerting pressure on Iran, to leave room for diplomatic efforts by other parties and create conditions to mitigate the situation in the region," UrduPoint quoted her as



saying in a press conference on Friday.

Hua said that Washington's decisions, such as leaving the JCPOA, were only serving to complicate the situation in the region.

"We hope that all parties in the JCPOA will be able to fully implement the agreement," she added.

U.S. President Donald Trump quit the 2015 nuclear deal in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions on Iran as part of the "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran.

Addressing a ceremony marking International Day for the People with Disability on Tuesday, President Hassan Rouhani highlighted once again the key role of the people's maximum resistance against the

U.S. maximum pressure in thwarting plots aimed at bringing the Iranians to their knees.

Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Sunday that maximum pressure is a "wrong policy" and the U.S. must stop it.

"There has always been political will to solve issues and there is no dead end... The issue is that policy of maximum pressure is wrong and must be changed. We have not closed the door, however, the United States must come to the understanding that this policy is not right," he Larijani told a press conference.

He noted that current U.S. officials should be "wise" enough to learn from past experiences.

## Expert says maximum pressure has not weakened Iran

Defense officials and reports indicate that the maximum pressure campaign has not weakened Iran strategically or caused a reduction in Iran's regional influence, the Atlantic Council said in a commentary published on Thursday.

A summary of the article, written by Kenneth Katzman, a specialist on Iran at the Congressional Research Service, is as follows:

The effectiveness of any U.S. policy needs to be measured against the primary objective it is seeking to accomplish.

A policy might be changing some conditions in a target country, but not others. The conditions that are being changed by U.S. policy might be material to U.S. interests, or they might not. The key question is whether the policy is affecting the core variables the United States seeks to affect, and in the ways sought by the United States.

With respect to Iran policy, in May 2018, the Trump Administration withdrew the United States from the multilateral nuclear accord with Iran (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA) and articulated specific demands for Iran to change its behavior in exchange for a new JCPOA and normalized relations with the United States. The demands pertaining to Iran's regional activities, as stipulated in a May 21, 2018, speech by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at the Heritage Foundation are that Iran:

- \* Ends support to Middle East groups, including Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.
- \* Allows the disarming and demobilization of militias in Iraq.
- \* Ends military support to the Houthi movement in Yemen.
- \* Withdraws all forces under Iranian command throughout Syria....



To pressure Iran to accede to U.S. demands, the administration re-imposed all secondary sanctions that were eased in accordance with the JCPOA. And, since April 2019, the administration has gone beyond the pre-JCPOA sanctions to impose measures that would reduce Iran's oil export income "to zero." U.S. secondary sanctions now apply to virtually every civilian sector of Iran's economy. The sanctions:

- \* Exclude from the U.S. financial system foreign banks that conduct transactions with the several hundred sanctioned Iranian entities or persons, and additional entities are designated for sanctions virtually every week.
- \* Penalize firms that invest in Iran's energy sector or sell Iran goods to expand that sector.
- \* Penalize banks of any country that fail to reduce oil purchases from Iran, and sanction firms that ship Ira-

nian oil. As of May 2, 2019, the administration ended a U.S. sanctions exception for any country that does reduce purchases, essentially requiring all of Iran's oil customers to stop buying Iranian oil.

- \* Penalize transactions with Iran in precious metals, certain minerals, Iran's currency, automobile production equipment, shipping, shipbuilding, shipping insurance, Iran port operations, and industrial software.

- \* On September 20, 2019, the Treasury Department designated Iran's Central Bank as a terrorism-supporting entity under Executive Order 13224. The new sanctions go beyond existing provisions that bar all U.S. transactions with Iran's Central Bank or penalize foreign banks that deal with it. This new designation does not convey a humanitarian exemption.

The administration's "maximum pressure" campaign has hurt Iran's economy. In October 2019, the International Monetary Fund revised downward its estimates for Iran's GDP for the March 2019-March 2020 period to a shrinkage of about 9.5 percent. In October 2019, Brian Hook, the State Department's top Iran official, said the administration's own estimates indicate Iran's economy could shrink as much as 14 percent in that same period.

The termination of oil purchase sanctions exceptions has driven Iran's vital oil exports to lows not seen since the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War. Absent any oil-related sanctions, Iran's baseline crude oil exports are about 2.5 million barrels per day. But, for all of October 2019, Iran exported about 250,000 barrels per day.

Defense officials and reports indicate that the maximum pressure campaign has not weakened Iran strategically or caused a reduction in Iran's regional influence.



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	322527.9
IFX	4159.68

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,549 rials
GBP	55,081 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$63.12/b
WTI	\$58.04/b
OPEC Basket	\$63.39/b
Gold	\$1,477.75/oz
Silver	\$817.02/oz
Platinum	\$903.70/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Saudi, Russia win over oil producers to deeper cuts

Saudi Arabia and Russia won backing for deeper output cuts from OPEC and allied oil producers on Friday as they look to head off global oversupply in 2020 and sustain prices.

The group of more than 20 producers agreed to an extra 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) in cuts for the first quarter of 2020, sources told Reuters, taking the total to 1.7 million bpd, or 1.7 percent of global demand.

OPEC and allied producers, the so-called OPEC+, pump more than 40 percent of the world's oil. They began a closed-door meeting at around 1130 GMT to thrash out how the additional cuts will be distributed.

OPEC is likely to shoulder approximately 340,000 bpd in fresh cuts and non-OPEC producers an extra 160,000 bpd, one source said on Friday.

Benchmark Brent oil prices were steady on Friday near \$63 per barrel.

"Despite the deeper potential cuts, we view most headlines so far as falling short of consensus expectations," Goldman Sachs said in a note citing factors including the short duration of the deal.

OPEC+ will deepen cuts for the first three months of 2020, shorter than the six- or 12-month scenarios some OPEC members wanted.

The cuts offset an expected increase from countries that are not part of OPEC+, including top producer the United States.

OPEC met on Thursday in Vienna, deliberating policy for more than five hours. The length of the meeting prompted the cancellation of a news conference and a gala dinner for delegates aboard a boat on the Danube.

Eleven of OPEC's 14 member states are participating in the supply curbs. Iran, Libya and Venezuela are exempt.

OPEC+ adds Russia and nine others - Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, South Sudan and Sudan.

One sticking point has been compliance, with Saudi Arabia cutting more than required in order to offset overproduction from Iraq and Nigeria.

"A scenario where the Saudis 'absorb' the majority of a 500,000 bpd cut and formalize their target at current output levels would not be impactful to the market - unless Iraq and Nigeria come into compliance with their targets," said analysts from Jefferies.

ING bank analysts said the key question was whether the new cuts were real or just a matter of Saudi Arabia formalizing its current over-compliance.

"Obviously, if it is the latter, the market will be disappointed, as this will do little to eat into the surplus over the first quarter," ING said.

Saudi Arabia needs prices of at least \$80 per barrel to balance its budget, much higher than most other producers, and also needs to support the share flotation of its national oil company Saudi Aramco.

Shares in Aramco are expected to begin trading this month following pricing on Thursday that made it the world's biggest IPO. (Source: Reuters)

Stagnant local economy concerns state pension fund

Despite South Africa's slow local economic growth, the Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF), which invests over 90% of its assets in the country, said it is not in a rush to increase its exposure to international markets.

Africa's largest pension fund, which manages R1.8 trillion in pension savings of state workers, released its annual report for the financial year to the end of March. The GEPF recorded sharp declines in returns from its domestic equities (JSE-listed shares) and bonds, which account for over 80% of its asset allocation in its investment portfolio.

Returns from domestic equities declined from an annual return of 9.41% as at March 2018 to 0.43% as at March 2019.

Meanwhile, returns on local bonds were 3.5% as at March 2019 compared with 16.1% as at March 2018.

On the other hand, the GEPF's offshore investments - mainly global equities and bonds - saw returns of 26.28% and 19.39% respectively, which were "enhanced" by the rand's depreciation against the dollar. In 2018, global equities and bonds penciled in returns of 0.31% and -6.45% respectively.

The "GEPF's allocation to offshore investments is relatively small, at 5% of total assets [of R1.818 trillion], thus the strong performance of offshore investments did not make a large impact on the fund's overall return," the annual report reads.

However, the state pension fund's overall annual return on investments was 2.6%, which slightly exceeded its 2.3% benchmark.

Asked if the fund would diversify its investments by increasing its exposure in offshore assets, GEPF principal executive officer Abel Sithole said a decision would not be "taken overnight". This implies that the GEPF would carefully consider the move. (Source: citizen.co.za)

Iran to cooperate in renovating Syria's water, wastewater networks

➔ According to Ardakanian, signing of the mentioned MOU would create a mechanism for Iranian companies to participate in the construction of dams, hydropower plants and the construction of water and wastewater treatment plants in war-torn Syria.

Iranian companies will be awarded a special priority in the post-war Syria's reconstruction projects, the official said.

Ardakanian further noted that a joint technical committee at the level of deputy ministers will be delegated to work out the mechanisms and follow up implementation of the projects in Syria.

The Iranian minister expressed hope that

expert teams from the two sides would visit each other's projects as soon as possible, and then start taking practical measures.

Arnous, who travelled to Tehran to take part in the RCUMW conference, said Tehran and Damascus have strategic relations.

He welcomed using Iranian potentials and expertise for the reconstruction of the water projects in Syria.

"The Syrian water sector is in dire need of reconstruction and Iranian companies can help," he said.

The 10th meeting of the UNESCO Regional Centre on Urban Water Management (RCUWM)'s governing



Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian (L) and Syria's Water Resources Minister Hussein Arnous talking to the press after a meeting in Tehran on Thursday.

board was held in Tehran on Thursday, during which urban water issues and expansion of cooperation between the region's countries were discussed.

Tehran, Baku stress expansion of banking ties

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejpasand said on Thursday that Iran and Azerbaijan should take necessary measures to expand their economic ties, especially in the banking sector, IRNA reported.

The official made the remarks in a meeting with Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev in Tehran.

Underlining the two countries' great potentials for economic cooperation, Dejpasand said the two countries should develop their banking ties, accelerate creation of joint economic projects and further develop their relations.

He mentioned Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's recent visit to Azerbaijan and noted that the agreements



Iran, Kyrgyzstan confer on boosting trade up to 10 folds

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian trade minister said Iran and Kyrgyzstan have agreed to boost they trade turnover to \$500 million, ten times more than the current level, in short term.

Reza Rahmani made the remarks after a meeting with Kyrgyzstan's Economy Minister Sanzhar Mukanbetov in Tehran on December 4. IRIB reported.

"The current volume of trade and economic exchanges between the two countries is not very good considering the existing capacities, but given the two countries' membership in Eurasia, the value of trade between the two countries is projected to reach \$500 million in the short run and even more in the long run," Rahmani said.

The official said, "Facilitating the issuance of visas, in particular for businessmen, facilitating the exchange of trade delegations, holding international exhibitions and establishing direct flights between the two countries were among the areas agreed at today's meeting that would increase trade between the two countries."

The Kyrgyz minister for his part noted that in the meeting the two sides have determined potential areas for mutual cooperation, saying "during the meeting we have been able to determine many industrial and commercial areas for enhancing relations.

"Although the volume of trade between the two countries has been growing over the past few months, but of course we are further working to fix the existing issues and restrictions to facilitate this growth,"



Kyrgyzstan's Economy Minister Sanzhar Mukanbetov (L) held talks with Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejpasand in Tehran on December 4.

■ **Establishing a joint insurance company**

During his visit to Tehran, Mukanbetov also held talks with his Iranian counterpart, Farhad Dejpasand, during which the Iranian minister suggested the two sides establish a joint insurance company to support the activities of their traders in both countries.

In the meeting, Dejpasand mentioned the two countries' positive political relations and called for the two sides to take necessary measures to boost the trade ties to match the political relations.

Referring to the implementation of the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) since late October, he said, "In this context, we must work together to increase the volume of our trade relations with the union, and it should be done through the countries in the region, including the Kyrgyz Republic."

German industry slump sparks renewed economic growth fears

Germany's industrial output unexpectedly dropped in October, reviving worries about its economic growth outlook as its manufacturing backbone takes a blow from global trade conflicts and disruptions in the auto sector.

Industrial output dropped 1.7% on the month against expectations for a 0.1% rise, Statistics Office figures showed on Friday. Production of capital goods slumped by 4.4% on the month, the steepest decline in more than five years.

Europe's biggest economy is going through a soft patch as its export-oriented manufacturers struggle against a backdrop of trade friction, an ailing car industry and uncertainties over Britain's planned departure from the European Union.

"Now the trepidation starts again about GDP growth in the final quarter," said Jens-Oliver Niklasch, economist at Landesbank Baden-Wuerttemberg. German industry now expects output in the coming months to fall more slowly than was foreseen a month ago, a survey of 2,300 firms in the sector by the (Ifo) an acronym from Information and Forschung (research).

In its 10th successive year of growth, Germany's economy has been relying on strong consumption as exports weaken, which resulted in a second-quarter GDP contraction of 0.2%.

■ **The negative growth**

The economy grew by just 0.1% in the third quarter, narrowly avoiding recession, which economists usually define as two

consecutive quarters of negative growth.

"Trade conflicts, global uncertainty and disruption in the automotive industry have put the entire German industry in a headlock, from which it is hard to escape," said Carsten Brzeski, economist at ING.

The Automobile Association VDA said on Wednesday that it expected global car sales to fall by 5% this year and that the crisis would force German companies to cut more jobs in 2020.

Many economists have been urging the government to ditch its policy of incurring no new net debt, saying it should instead borrow to finance a stimulus package.

Conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel's right-left coalition government has rejected calls from industry groups and economists for a stimulus package to put the economy firmly back on a growth trajectory.

However, the new leftist leadership at the helm of the Social Democrats, Merkel's junior coalition partner, wants more investment in schools, infrastructure and digitalization.

The coalition parties must now decide how far they will compromise to preserve their governing alliance until a 2021 election.

The "economic weakness in industry remains" the ministry said in a statement. "However, the latest developments in new orders and business expectations indicate that a stabilizing trend could emerge in the coming months."

German business morale rose in November, Ifo said late last month. (Source: reuters.com)

How China can set the record straight about its GDP figures

By Logan Wright

Given its trade war with the U.S. and slowing domestic activity, many economists anticipate that China will report its first quarter of growth below 6% in 29 years in the period that ends December 31.

While the pace of expansion has been on a long, slow decline, what has stood out most about China's gross domestic product figures in recent years is how unnaturally stable they have been.

The country's economic momentum is a matter of significance to more than just statisticians and national officials. Over the past decade, China has become the biggest factor in global growth, nearly matching the combined contribution of all advanced economies. Thus, how fast China's economy is expanding is relevant for businesses from Bali to Berlin.

What Beijing needs to do is to build credibility in its numbers. The best way to do this would be to simply let the numbers move up and down more.

China's GDP data has barely moved over the past four years, with year-on-year growth rates varying between just 6.2% and 7% until the most recent announcement of 6% growth in the third quarter. Looking at data from the other 19 largest global economies, none have ever reported such a narrow range of GDP figures across a four-year period.

The reasons for China's official record of stability are well-understood. Economic performance is a critical component of the Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy. Stable and high growth rates project efficiency in economic management. They also speak to China's rise as an increasingly prosperous and powerful country.

■ **Supporting the economy**

But there are significant costs in projecting such stability, primarily for China itself. Bad data produces bad decisions. An internal perception of stability can cause leaders to hold off from supporting the economy even when downside risks are building and loan and bond defaults are becoming far more common. This might help explain China's current hesitant stimulus efforts in response to slowing growth momentum.

The Rhodium China Activity Tracker, or R-CAT, of industrial



output produced by my company and other published data series point to significantly more volatility in China's economic activity over the past five years. Moreover, according to official figures, imports have fallen much more than exports over the last two years, suggesting a sharper slowdown in domestic demand and industrial activity than the GDP data would indicate.

Outside of rapidly rising pork prices, China is facing deflationary pressure, indicating that regardless of official growth rates, domestic demand for major raw materials and commodities is insufficient to move prices.

Fundamentally, the most important consequence of China's careful management of its GDP data is a continued deterioration in Beijing's credibility: in domestic and international financial markets, in international policy circles and even among the media and general public.

To improve the credibility of its published GDP growth rates, Chinese policymakers should ponder changing the past for the sake of the future.

Specifically, trust in the National Bureau of Statistics would probably improve should the agency make a high-profile announcement of a thorough revision of recent years' GDP levels and growth rates.

This would involve reducing GDP growth rates for 2014-2015, revising 2016-2017 rates slightly higher and reducing 2018's growth rate. This would produce a correspondingly

lower level of 2018-2019 nominal GDP for the Chinese economy as a whole and bring the trendline into better alignment with the pattern of aggregated components from the country's industrial output statistics.

■ **Output growth rates revised**

The logic of such a revision would be to bring China's economic volatility more in line with those of other economies and to increase the credibility of each subsequent GDP release. Local governments in China have already revised down 2014-2015 output growth rates themselves and the sum of these revisions represents around 2%-3% of 2014 GDP.

However, Beijing is now moving in the other direction. In late November, the authorities revised 2018's nominal GDP figure up by 2.1%. While it is true that service sector activity was probably undercounted for many years, the change had the added benefit of moving the country closer to achieving a 10-year goal of doubling GDP by 2020.

The authorities have not revised 2018's growth figures so far. So there might still be an opening to publish more widely ranging rates for last year. That would look more realistic and enhance Beijing's credibility. Every quarterly GDP release that continues on the current ever-so-gradual glide path toward sub-6% growth becomes increasingly difficult for observers to believe.

A more volatile past growth trajectory would also help policymakers downplay the significance of rigid GDP targeting in the future by showing that China has missed targets in the recent past without economic or social calamity. Moreover, demonstrating that China's economic growth has already slowed sharply could reinvigorate internal debates about the importance of structural reform for more sustainable growth over the long term.

China's credibility problem with its economic statistics will persist as long as the political priority on evincing stability continues to influence published GDP growth rates. Beijing can help start afresh and virtually without cost simply by admitting to a higher degree of past economic volatility. (Source: asia.nikkei.com)



# No limitations on Iran's oil output acceptable: Zanganeh

ENERGY

**TEHRAN** – Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said Iran would not accept any limitations on its oil output and will produce at its full capacity when the U.S. sanctions are removed, Shana reported.

Speaking to the press prior to the 177th meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in Vienna on Thursday, Zanganeh said he and his team would never forfeit Iranian nation's rights.

"In the future, those who are currently producing more will have to make more cuts; this is a matter of rights for our nation and our people, and I insist on it," he said, adding "No one must expect Iran to reduce its output in the wake of eased sanctions in the future."

Asked about the OPEC decision on extending or deepening the cuts, the officials said OPEC is currently emphasizing more on adherence and if all the OPEC and non-OPEC parties of the deal conform to their



agreed levels of production and cuts, it would be good enough.

He further noted that Tehran supports the decision of the majority of the OPEC member states on output cuts.

He further mentioned a letter he wrote to OPEC Conference President Manuel Quevedo, saying "Yesterday, I wrote a letter to the conference president and asked him to inform other OPEC members that Iran has involuntarily reduced its output and produced less than its historical quota. Those who produce more oil must cut their output deeper."

Asked whether Iran is going to negotiate with the U.S., Zanganeh said we will negotiate if they remove all "oil and banking sanctions" against Iran.

He also mentioned the Europe's Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), saying "we can't say anything positive has happened unless oil money is transferred through INSTEX."

## RCUWM-Tehran to increase Iran's role in region's water projects

ENERGY

**TEHRAN** – Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said the UNESCO Regional Centre on Urban Water Management (RCUWM-Tehran) has offered new solutions for increasing the role of regional companies, including Iranian firms, in water and energy projects.

Speaking to the press on the sidelines of the 10th meeting of the UNESCO Regional Centre on Urban Water Management (RCUWM)'s governing board in Tehran, Ardakanian said the RCUWM regional center in Tehran was established as a hub for cooperation among the countries of the region.

"It has been largely welcomed as we are in an arid region which has been plagued by wars in recent years. Wars that have caused extensive damage to the infrastructure of some countries in the region," he said.

"Of course, transferring knowledge and experience from other parts of the world and attracting investment are also on our agenda, and we have started various programs with the goal of capacity building and transferring experiences," he added.

He further noted that RCUWM-Tehran has been inviting other countries, international organizations and even countries outside the region that are interested in helping in this area, adding "Many countries responded positively and participated in the 10th RCUWM meeting; including Syria, Tajikistan, Oman, Iraq, Armenia, Egypt, India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Switzerland and Germany."

"World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), The International Development Bank and Japan's Middle East Partnership Development

Center also attended the gathering," he said.

RCUWM has been established under the auspices of UNESCO since 2002 in Tehran-Iran. The agreement between the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and UNESCO regarding RCUWM has been recently renewed, signed and exchanged for its third period of activities as for 2018-2023.

RCUWM is guided and overseen by its Governing Board (GB) as the most important decision making constituent at the highest level according to the agreement. The Centre's GB member states were ministers from Iran (Chair), Afghanistan, Armenia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Germany, India, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Syria, Tajikistan, and Yemen as well as UNESCO Director-General during the period of 2002-2017.

## BP boosts stake in solar firm amid clean energy plan for its offices

BP has increased its stake in the British solar venture Lightsource BP as it prepares to strike a deal to power its offices with renewable energy from next year.

The companies announced plans to set up a 50:50 joint venture almost two years after BP made its return to the solar market by snapping up a 43% stake in Lightsource for £200m.

BP will increase its stake in the company by buying new shares for an undisclosed price to help accelerate Lightsource BP's solar power targets. It had hoped to grow its portfolio to 6GW of capacity by 2023 but plans to reach 10GW over the same timescale.

BP has used the UK solar startup to re-establish a presence in the solar sector after it backed out of the market in 2011. It plans to use more solar power in its own offices too.

Dev Sanyal, the boss of BP's alternative energy division, said the oil company was in conversation with the venture to source solar energy to power BP's global offices next year.

BP's commodity traders will also sell more renewable energy from Lightsource BP projects to other companies that want to run on clean energy.

Sanyal said: "BP is committed to helping meet the world's rapidly growing demand for low-carbon energy. Solar, which is predicted to increase by a factor of 10 by 2040, plays a key role in this energy transition. That is why we want to invest more in Lightsource BP and to deepen our partnership."

Lightsource BP has grown its pipeline of solar projects almost 10-fold across nine new



countries in the last two years by harnessing BP's international networks and energy trading expertise.

The company has also been experimenting with ways to boost the financial rewards of solar power projects, including trials that use double-sided panels or help to balance the energy system at night.

Nick Boyle, the group chief executive of Lightsource BP, said: "Two years ago, we were in four countries and we're now in 13. We had a global pipeline of 1.6GW and today it's over 12GW. It's that sort of additional momentum which has been facilitated (by BP)."

BP's fresh investment in the solar company came as environmental lawyers prepared to take action against a multimillion-pound BP advertising campaign.

ClientEarth said the company was misleading the public with claims of being committed to a low-carbon future. The charity is calling for the ads to be banned unless they include a health warning that BP's oil and gas spending is contributing to the climate crisis.

(Source: theguardian.com)

## Wind power in Spain, Enel Green Power connects the wind farms of Campoliva II and Primoral

The wind energy plants of Campoliva II and Primoral have a capacity of 39.37 MW and 34.65 MW, may generate 119.34 GWh and 107.58 GWh respectively and add an investment of 75 million euros.

The development of these wind farm plants responds to Endesa's strategy of reaching 10.2 GW of renewable installed capacity in 2022 thanks to an investment of 3.8 billion euros, to achieve, in 2050, a generation mix without emissions.

Enel Green Power España (EGPE), the renewable energy subsidiary of Endesa, has connected to the network the wind farms of Campoliva II and Primoral, of 39.37 megawatts (MW) and 34.65 MW respectively, which have meant an investment which amounts to 75 million euros. They are located in the municipalities of Villamayor de Gállego and Alfajarín, in the province of Zaragoza, and represent the third and fourth park of the Company that goes into production in Aragón, after the Sierra Costera I (Teruel) and Campoliva plants I (Zaragoza).

José Bogas, CEO of Endesa, said that "Endesa is already finalizing the connection to the network of the 879 renewable MW awarded in the 2017 auction, which demonstrates the company's commitment to fulfill the commitments acquired in the Tenders This is another step in Endesa's commitment to the production of clean energy, one of the pillars of the national energy transition policy."

EGPE was awarded 540 MW of wind

power and 339 MW of solar energy at government auctions held in May 2017, with a total investment of more than 800 million euros. At this time, the company has already connected to the network the 339 MW of solar and some 160 MW of wind turbines, and the construction and connection of the remaining wind farm projects, which will be ready by the end of the year, is finalized.

The Campoliva II wind farm, consisting of 15 turbines, may generate 119.34 GWh per year and its entry into operation will prevent the emission of approximately 78,500 tons of CO2 annually into the atmosphere.

The Primoral wind farm consists of 10 wind turbines that provide a total power of 34.65 MW. It will produce about 107.58 GWh per year and avoid the annual emission of 71,000 tons of CO2 into the atmosphere. Its construction began on May 15, 2019 and ended on October 4, 2019.

The construction of Primoral has been the result of a long-term energy purchase and sale agreement (PPA) signed by Endesa and BBVA and does not correspond to the MW awarded in the auctions. The Primoral wind farm will supply 30% of BBVA's energy consumption in Spain, while Endesa will provide the remaining 70% through the traditional supply model based on green certificates, both in corporate buildings and in the bank's branch network.

(Source: binarybusinessbay.com)

## FRV to develop energy storage projects globally

Fotowatio Renewable Ventures (FRV), part of Abdul Latif Jameel Energy, has announced its first battery project as a part of its long-term investment plan to develop energy storage projects globally.

The plan includes long-term investments in battery energy storage projects that play a central role in the market, supporting the increasing penetration of renewables in the global energy mix.

The project is located at Holes Bay, Dorset, UK, in collaboration with the British developer Harmony Energy.

The Holes Bay project will be comprised of lithium-ion batteries with a combined capacity of 15 MWh, connected to the Southern Electric Power distribution network, with the capability to store energy and provide flexibility to the grid.

Construction will start in January 2020, with commissioning expected within three months.

Harmony Energy, with the backing of FRV, has also conditionally pre-qualified 300 MW of new battery energy storage systems in the UK Capacity Market, with this pre-qualified capacity making up 16% of the total 1.8 GW battery energy capacity.

The UK has been a pioneer in deploying these systems in a competitive and open market, creating perfect conditions for integrators, developers and investors to embrace the benefits of incorporating these clean technologies into the energy mix.

(Source: energyglobal.com)

## Asian LNG prices drop for second straight week on mild winter

Asian spot prices for liquefied natural gas (LNG) dropped for a second consecutive week as supply flooded the market, overshadowing demand subdued by a winter that has been milder than average.

The average LNG price for January delivery into northeast Asia is estimated to be about \$5.50 per million British thermal units (mmBtu), down 10 cents from the previous week, several industry sources said.

"It's still looking pretty bearish for January," a Singapore-based LNG trader said. "There are some pockets of demand, but way too much supply."

Russia's Sakhalin 2 plant probably sold a cargo for loading on Jan. 22 at \$5.70 to \$5.90 per mmBtu, an industry source said, although this could not immediately be confirmed.

Angola LNG offered a cargo for delivery over late January to mid-February in a tender that closes next week.



GAIL (India) has also offered up to 10 cargoes on a free-on-board (FOB) basis from the Sabine Pass and Cove Point LNG plants in the U.S. for loading from early next year to early 2021, industry sources said.

In the United States, Cheniere Energy asked U.S. energy and safety regulators to approve a process to return to service a storage tank that leaked at its Sabine Pass LNG export plant.

The lower spot prices appeared to stoke some demand from China, Japan and India.

China's Guangzhou Gas and Japan's Tohoku Electric Power each sought a cargo for delivery in late January, industry sources said.

In India, Gujarat State Petroleum Corp (GSPC) is seeking a cargo for delivery in January while Reliance Industries sought a cargo for delivery over the second-half of January, industry sources said.

Pakistan LNG is seeking a cargo for delivery over Feb. 16 to 17 in a tender that closes on Dec. 17, a tender document showed.

Still, temperatures in Tokyo, Beijing and Seoul are expected to be mostly warmer than average over the next two weeks, according to weather data by Refinitiv Eikon.

South Korea's LNG demand is also set to slow over the next two years, despite a number of coal plant closures, the boss of Power Company SK E&S said this week.

Chief Executive Jeong Joon Yu expects at least 10 coal plants to be shut down by spring, but the drop in coal power production will be offset by weaker electricity demand and new nuclear output, he said.

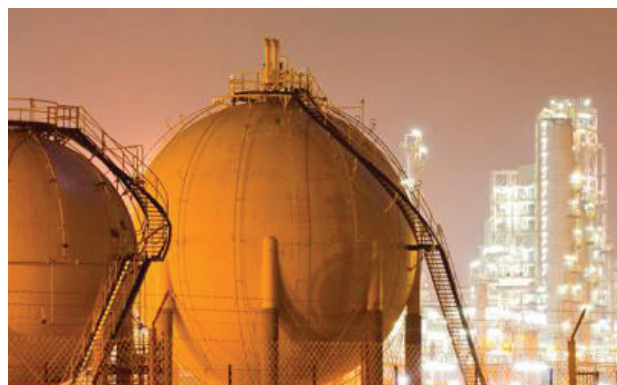
(Source: in-reuters.com)

## Natural gas outpaced renewable energy in reducing greenhouse gases

Natural gas outpaced renewable energy options in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, according to a recent report published by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA).

While energy and electricity production has changed substantially over the years, natural gas is emerging as the cleanest, lowest-impact fossil fuel source for generating power, the report indicates.

The shift in the U.S. to building more natural gas power plants has led to the reduction of more than 2.8 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions since 2005.



The analysis examines economic trends and changes in fuel mix that influence energy-related carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions in the U.S. As a result, most of the CO2 emissions being discussed are the result of fossil fuel combustion or their use in the petrochemical and related industries, the report states.

In the short term, energy-related CO2 emissions are influenced by the weather, fuel prices and disruptions in electricity generation. In the long term, CO2 emissions are influenced by public policy, reduced costs and improved efficiencies of new technology, demand-side efficiency gains and economic trends, according to the report.

A major factor in recent reductions in the carbon intensity of electric generation in the U.S. is the reduced generation of electricity using coal while increasingly using natural gas. Natural gas emits less carbon dioxide for the same amount of electricity generated, and non-carbon generation (including renewables), which don't emit the gas.

Between 2005 and 2018, EIA has calculated that cumulative U.S. CO2 emissions reductions attributable specifically to shifts from coal to natural gas and to non-carbon generation totaled 4,621 million metric tons (MMmt). Of this total, 2,823 MMmt resulted from decreased use of coal and increased use of natural gas; 1,799 MMmt resulted from decreased use of coal and increased use of non-carbon generation sources.

Between 2005 and 2017, total U.S. electricity generation increased by almost 4 percent while related CO2 emissions fell by 27 percent. During the same period, fossil fuel electricity generation declined by roughly 9 percent, and non-carbon electricity generation increased by 35 percent.

(Source: thecentersquare.com)

Second Announcement



1398.5449

**NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY AHVAZ-IRAN**

**TENDER NO. : 31-32-09999-9009-8**

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

Material Description	Quantity
CHT 815-H 2-10' HYDRAULIC HOT TAPPING MACHINE. MAX DESIGN OPERATING PRESSURE 5000 PSI. HYDRAULIC POWER PACK UNIT. STANDARD HOT TAP CUTTER STANDARD HOT TAP PILOT DRILL BRAZED INSERT #2500 & #600 RF FLANGE ADAPTOR MHT4-20 4-20" HYDRAULIC HOT TAPPING MACHINE. MAX DESIGN OPERATING PRESSURE 1480 PSI. STANDARD HOT TAP CUTTER STANDARD HOT TAP PILOT DRILL BRAZED INSERT #300 & #600RF FLANGE ADAPTOR HTM 100 1/2"-4" HOT TAPPING MACHINE(FOR FREE) HOT TAP HOLE SAW #150 FLANGE ADAPTOR HOLE SAW HOLDER & PILOT DRILL	30 NO

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their " Intention to participate" letter via Fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: WWW.nisoc.ir , not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 17,059 EURO or 804 ,835,069 RIAL, in favor of NISOC

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

The ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P. NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI-IRAN PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D. SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC' S MATERIAL APPROVAL NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

**FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT**  
**Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex**  
**Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran**  
**Tel. No.: 061 341 23455 Fax No.: 061 3445 7437**

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## U.S. favors 'Regime Change' not diplomacy with Iran: Ex-U.S. senate candidate

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — Mark Dankof, a former US Senate candidate, said the US administration is interested in “regime change” not diplomacy with respect to Iran.

“They are obviously interested in ‘regime change,’ not diplomacy, with the interests of Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Central Banks, Oil-Gas Consortiums, and Armament Manufacturers being paramount,” Dankof told Tasnim.

Mark Dankof is a broadcaster for The Ugly Truth Podcast. Born in Wiesbaden, Germany, the son of a United States Air Force Colonel, he graduated from Valparaiso University in 1977 and from Chicago's Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in 1983. In recent years, he has pursued post-graduate work in systematic theology and theological German at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Formerly the 36th District Chairman of the Republican Party in King County/Seattle and later an elected delegate to Texas State Republican Conventions in 1994 and 1996, he entered the United States Senate race in Delaware in 2000 as the nominated candidate of the Constitution Party against Democratic candidate Thomas Carper and Republican incumbent William Roth.

Following is the full text of the interview.

■ In an interview with BBC Persian on Nov. 21, the US special representative for Iran, Brian Hook, said Washington is “very pleased” with protests over a fuel price hike in Iran, adding that the maximum pressure against Iran will continue. US President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also took to Twitter to express support for the protesters. Open support for rioters has just reinvigorated the Islamic Republic's official narrative that the real goal the United States pursues through maximum pressure is not to bring Iran to the negotiating table but to cause “regime change” in the country. What do you think? What is behind this kind of US policy?

A: It is clear that “regime change” in Iran is the goal of the Neo-Conservative, Zionist foreign policy of the Trump Administration. As I stated in an interview on the Republic Broadcasting Network this afternoon, and on UK EuroFolkRadio yesterday morning, the situation in Iran must be understood not only in light of what the CIA and British intelligence did in Tehran with Operation Ajax in 1953, but in contemporary terms in the 4 decades since the overthrow of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi in 1979 with ongoing American and Israeli subversion in various cities and provinces of Iran, along with the current American Empire machinations in Ukraine, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Bolivia, Venezuela, and now Hong Kong among others. Pompeo's recent announcement giving Israel the green light to steal the West Bank along with solidifying their theft of East Jerusalem (al-Quds) must also be added to this demonic mix and overview. Jewish settlement in Hebron (al-Khalil) alone has now tripled, as but one example of the ramifications. The American backed horrors in Gaza and Yemen amplify a very blood-soaked picture.

■ Reports by Iranian intelligence services say that the US and its allies in the region meddled to stoke recent unrest in Iran. They say clues have been found proving that they intervened to create the turmoil. Bahman Reyhani, a military commander in Kermanshah, said “the rioters belonged to anti-revolutionary groups and America's intelligence services”. What are your thoughts on this?

A: All of the published reports over time indicate that the Saudi-backed terror groups are involved in (Sistan and) Baluchestan Province terrorist operations coming across the Pakistani-Iranian border. In Khuzestan Province, where unofficial reports indicate Iran has discovered a new potential deposit of oil in southwestern Iran, both groups and the nefarious Muhajadeen-e-Khalq (MEK-MKO) are apparently involved in the ignition of violent incidents. The MEK is clearly involved in the troubles in Tehran, and in Golestan Province and Iranian Azerbaijan.

The MEK headquarters in Tirana, Albania, has been regularly entertaining leading American Neo-Conservatives and Zionists in public photo-ops. The New York Times has extensively covered the Neo-Conservative, Zionist politicians who have been on the MEK payroll, and who helped remove them from the American State Department list of Officially Designated Terrorist Organizations. The money of the MEK is traceable to Saudi Arabia, and Israeli players in this New Great Game. It is fascinating to note the absolute silence over the recent Albanian earthquake and the report of the Balkans Post and Iran Interlink that the MEK headquarters there was devastated. I'm fishing for more information on this report, and what the damage and casualties there might mean to this key asset in the American-Israeli-Saudi war on Iran.

As far as Kermanshah, (military commander) Bahman Reyhani's initial report may later lead to more information publicly on these “anti-revolutionary” groups, in terms of specific identification of the organizations involved. Dr. Philip Giraldi has already confirmed to your agency (Tasnim) that American, Israeli, and Saudi fingerprints are all over these operations. I concur.

■ Last Wednesday, the director-general of the anti-espionage department of the Iranian Intelligence Ministry said a number of elements that were seeking to collect information on the riots and transfer it to foreign countries were identified and arrested before they could carry out their mission. “These elements that had received CIA-funded training in various countries to gather information under the guise of citizen-journalists had been monitored for quite a long time,” the official said. How much do you think the CIA, Mossad and Saudi spy agency were involved in the riots?

A: As I have already indicated, I believe it to be logically indisputable that the CIA, Mossad, and Saudi are involved in funding these subversives and provocateurs, and providing legends and covers for those operationally active in these incidents. The use of “citizen-journalists” and fake NGO “human-rights” activist profiles is a regular feature of these “spontaneous” uprisings and “color revolutions.” One presumes the interrogations of those apprehended yielded all kinds of additional information and evidence for Iranian intelligence and the internal security apparatus.

■ Iranian officials have repeatedly said that US sanctions against Tehran have dealt a blow to the prospects of talks between Washington and Tehran. It seems that Trump administration has closed the door to diplomacy. Do you share the opinion that the White House is not interested in diplomacy when it comes to Iran?

A: They are obviously interested in “regime change,” not diplomacy, with the interests of Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Central Banks, Oil-Gas Consortiums, and Armament Manufacturers being paramount. Trump unilaterally and illegitimately abrogated the multilateral JCPOA, P5+1 nuclear treaty being adhered to by Iran. The Treasury and State Department have instituted economic sanctions on Iran that are a literal declaration of war on Iran by other means. This has led to predictable political unrest in Iran, exacerbated by the wartime gasoline rationing designed by the Iranian government to bring national consumption of gasoline down from 110 million liters to 70 million annually. Once the economic distress led to more publicly expressed political dissatisfaction and unrest, American, Israeli, and Saudi intelligence began unleashing the MEK/MKO terrorists and subversives within the country, with an assist from the Saudi Wahhabist groups, depending on the region and location involved. It is as simple as that.

But it may get worse. The economic sanctions and deployment of terrorists and provocateurs in cities and provinces must be seen as the last stage in “regime change” endeavors short of an overt military attack on Iran. The endgame may well be a False Flag event somewhere, falsely and deliberately attributed to Iran, that would provide the cover for such an attack. This is how evil and ruthless these people are.

# East Asia at the glance

## U.S. should not test China's patience on HK



**GLOBALTIMES**— China has suspended reviewing applications by US warships and aircraft to make port calls in Hong Kong and will impose sanctions on five NGOs, including the National Endowment for Democracy and Human Rights Watch, which are involved in the Hong Kong unrest. These countermeasures were announced by China's Foreign Ministry on Monday as a response to US so-called Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, which was signed into law by US President Donald Trump on November 27.

The US legislation stipulates that it will evaluate Hong Kong's “autonomous decision-making,” based on which Washington will decide whether to continue the city's special customs status. In addition, the bill said the US should impose sanctions on officials from the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong involved in violating so-called human rights.

China's retaliatory measures showed the Chinese government's resolve to safeguard its sovereignty, security, development, to follow the “one country, two systems” principle, and to resist external interference. To stop violence and restore order is what Hong Kong needs most now. As Article 23 of the Basic Law, which states that “the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government... to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region,” is not yet implemented in the city, such countermeasures are stern warnings to disruptive forces.

The US so-called Hong Kong bill is overt interference in China's domestic affairs. But we can see the Chinese side has been restrained considering the bigger picture of China-US ties. The countermeasures are meant to warn the US to stop interfering before it is too late. It is not the first time China has suspended reviewing applications for US warships and aircraft to make port calls in Hong Kong, the US side should be aware of the signal such suspensions have sent. On the other hand, although Beijing's sanctions against the US NGOs, which are as a matter of fact supported by Washington and even US intelligence agencies, will give US far-right forces an excuse to step up their anti-China rant, it has saved the face of the Trump administration, since after all, they are NGOs.

Trump was reluctant to sign on the Hong Kong bill. He was aware that his signature would scupper the chances of a phase one trade deal with China, but in the face of “political correctness” in terms of Hong Kong issue, which is formed by both chambers of the Congress, and mounting pressure of presidential election, his signing could be argued as a rational choice from his own perspective. However, as if offering a sweet pill, he immediately issued a statement after signing on the bill to send a friendly signal to China, implying that the provisions of the bill won't be enforced immediately. He hedged full support for the legislation, saying that “certain provisions of the act would interfere with the exercise of the president's constitutional authority to state the foreign policy of the US.”

Trump obviously wished not to push China too hard by showing that his attitude toward Hong Kong is not totally consistent with that of the Congress. But if the US ignores China's warning, continues interfering, and even slaps sanctions on China citing the legislation, the Chinese government will certainly step up its countermeasures. China-US relations are then bound to be affected.

■ **With ties fraying across the Atlantic, will Europe realize futility of toeing the US line?**

The recent row between a German high-ranking official and the US is emblematic of the state of US-Europe relations.

During a program on Germany's ARD TV show, German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier defended Berlin's decision not to ban Chinese telecom titan Huawei by saying his country had “not imposed a boycott” on US tech companies in the wake of the National Security Agency spying affair, when it was revealed that US authorities had tapped Chancellor Angela Merkel's phone. He also questioned the US record by saying “the US demands from its companies that they pass on certain information needed for fighting terrorism.”

Clearly, Washington will not tolerate this comment. The US Ambassador to Germany, Richard Grenell, has issued a statement on the embassy website, saying Altmaier's comments equating the US with China are “an insult to the thousands of American troops who help ensure Germany's security and the millions of Americans committed to a strong western alliance,” as “there is no moral equivalency between China and the US.”

Though Ambassador Grenell is known for being a champion of US President Donald Trump's foreign policy, this new episode involving China is particularly revealing of a dimension of US-Germany relations and to some extent US-Europe ties. A US that puts great power competition at its heart and targets China in every way, expects its allies to fall in line. Therefore, US allies' national interests should all make way for US national interest. But it is too high a demand for US European allies, simply because since Trump took office, Washington has done too little to make Europe happy and is therefore close to overdraft of the support and trust it built in Europe after the WWII. It is well expressed in a remark made by then president of European Council Donald Tusk, “With friends like that, who needs enemies” and in the comment by French President Emmanuel Macron, NATO is “brain dead” as US is “turning its back on us.”

However, the US is clearly still unaware of the level of dam-

age it has done to its alliance with Europe. It is quite true that with security consideration weighed in, the US still has commanding influence over Europe, however its moral standing has depleted in the continent as well as the world in the last couple of decades. It is a trend going on for quite a while but clearly exacerbated by Trump. Most of the time after the WWII, the US-Europe alliance has been anchored by a shared goal, which was combating the Soviet Union. After the end of the Cold War, a narrative was created - the US-Europe alliance is a three-in-one relationship, built upon security cooperation, woven together by economic interdependence, and bonded by shared values, which in their opinion denote “universal values.”

Though the security cooperation is in reality intact, the other two pillars are under assault from no one but the US itself. Economic interdependence, which is measured by trade and investment volumes, used to be a good thing, but since Trump assumed office, it is no longer relevant, trade deficit is what truly matters.

Thus EU, Germany in particular, is not that friendly anymore. The US has lost its moral compass in other parts of the world from time to time, but Europe was not directly affected. Since Trump took power, Europe has met the moral decline of the US head on, be it withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal or the Paris climate deal.

What's more, the US has shown a tendency of browbeating Europe over the security connection. Former head of US Homeland Security Tom Ridge once said if the UK uses Huawei equipment for its 5G network, intelligence sharing with the US will be harmed. The situation has forced Europe to grow up. It is true that there are still quite a lot of ideological Atlanticists who believe in the moral perfection of the US-Europe alliance itself and who expect transatlantic relations to go back to the honeymoon period once there is a new occupant of the White House. But there are more and more pragmatic Atlanticists who know that the security aspect of the US-Europe alliance is still valid and important for Europe, but the continent needs to look after its own interests. To make decisions that suit its own interests regardless of diktats from Washington is what many European countries have opted for in the case of Huawei and 5G, because the volatility of the Trump administration is a harbinger of a changing world, in which only self-help is best for the long run.

■ **China's political system predates the West's**

Han Dynasty (206BC-AD220) plays an important role in Chinese history. The dynasty was built on past achievements and opened up the future. Qin Dynasty (221BC-206BC), the dynasty before Han, was the first unified state in Chinese history. In China, there is a saying that the governmental system of Han Dynasty followed that of Qin Dynasty. Nowadays, it takes only about three hours on a high-speed train to travel from Beijing to Xuzhou, East China's Jiangsu Province, which offers an insight into the Han Dynasty.

The Tomb of Chu King, probably the third-generation king of the State of Chu during the Han Dynasty, on the Shizi Mountain, is located in Xuzhou. In 1994, a large number of Chinese seals and ink pastes were excavated from the tomb. If these seals and ink pastes are arranged in order, a generally complete bureaucratic system of the Han Dynasty emerges. In Xuzhou Museum, there is an introduction to Han Dynasty's bureaucratic system organized in the order of seals and ink pastes. In 1995, a large number of ink pastes from Qin Dynasty were found in Xi'an, Northwest China's Shaanxi Province, becoming an important original material to study the bureaucratic system of Qin Dynasty. From these Chinese cultural relics, it can be argued that China had a mature bureaucracy even 2,000 years ago, which had formed a set of systems to govern the country and society. US political scientist Francis Fukuyama once said, “China really invented modern bureaucracy at the time of the Qin and Han dynasties.”

Therefore, compared with Western Europe, China has a longer history of developing national strength and national systems. China's political system has become the focus of global attention in recent years. All China-related topics, including the country's economy, trade, technology and military, may eventually lead to analyses of its political system. And all estimates of China's economic and social development will be, in the end, connected to its system.

If one opens textbooks on politics and history in the West, one will find that the description of China's political system is dated and stereotyped, as if China is still in the 1950s. Taking a glance at Western media's reports, one may feel that the Cold War is not yet over. An apparent problem is that plenty of Western scholars still judge China's political system by Western standards. They rank political systems in accordance with Western theories, and believe China's centralized setup lags their democratic system and must evolve into democratic one. With the expansion of Western civilization in the past five centuries, such an understanding is considered reasonable. But actually, China's system existed long before the West formed its own, and has developed in China's own way.

When China had not opened up to the world, the difference in political systems did not matter much. However, China has become powerful through its own system, one that is different from the West's. Thanks to constant reforms, the system radiates energies and remarkable achievements that many Western countries have dreamed of but failed to realize. The influence of China's political system has already spread to the entire world. It is clear that analyzing China and its political

system based on outdated theories and stereotypes reaches nowhere. What it only leads to is the fear of China.

But how to set people free from such shackled mind-set? This is something both Chinese and Western scholars need to work together on. Addressing this problem could be difficult, but under the circumstances that China is opening up to the world widely, it can be much easier than ever. For example, scholars can take a field trip to Xi'an or Xuzhou, and start to re-recognize China's political system from there. While the problem remains — whether the West would like to drop their sense of superiority and understand China's history with sincerity?

■ **Most countries will rebuild a world order the U.S. can't stop**

Political chaos has become a new normal for the US. As the presidential election approaches, confusion has worsened while the country's foreign policy has become the focus of political games between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. This has severely restricted US foreign policy from being rational, and has victimized China-US ties. The impeachment inquiry against US President Donald Trump launched by the Democrats has intensified friction between the two political parties, and the Republicans have fought back.

The Republican base on Tuesday drove fundraising to a pro-Trump super political action committee America First Action, which is dropping \$2.26 million in ads against “27 Democratic House members the group sees as most politically vulnerable in the impeachment fight,” according to an Axios report. But the move could “get the base even more fired up.”

Both parties upgraded their moves and countermeasures to knock off the other, but have only drawn themselves into a vicious cycle. Trump described China as a strategic competitor and launched a trade war against it. He has taken advantage of the trade war to create an image that he is fighting for Americans, and thus to gain more votes. As the two countries strive for a phase one trade deal, Trump once again hinted to delay the deal as he likes “the idea of waiting until after the election for the China deal.”

Where did that “idea” come from? Maybe it was from the polarized US Congress. Both parties are using China as a token to gain the upper hand. Hence, Congress won't let Trump make a trade deal with China easily. From the so-called Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act to the so-called Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, when one party interferes in China's domestic affairs, the other won't allow itself to be left behind.

In this context, two forces in the US are colluding. One force is the anti-China group represented by Republican senators Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz, who use anti-China legislation and statements to enhance their own political careers. The other is an anti-Trump group who opposes anything Trump supports, including hindering him from reaching a trade deal with China. This is what US politics is really like. We can predict right now that the 2020 election campaign will be unprecedentedly fierce. It is pathetic for Democrats and Republicans to get where they are. Both parties have gone too far, and so has Washington's foreign policy. In addition to the trade wars it launched against China, India and Japan, the US has pointed its tariff gun at its ally France and Latin American “friends” Brazil and Argentina, not to mention its reckless policies toward Europe and Russia.

Given such a mind-set of the US, not only China-US trade talks but also many other international agendas have been affected. After World War II, the US grasped the opportunity to establish a US-dominated world order, but it has also been damaging the system by breaking rules. More impact to the already fragile world order is coming. As most countries pursue stability and development, they will join hands to rebuild the world order. It will take a long time to shape a new order, which will certainly be different from the US-dominated one. If the US doesn't stop harming the world and join rulemaking, some other countries will make the rules.

■ **Young US adults lean toward socialism**

Socialism is as popular as capitalism among young adults in the US, according to a survey by Gallup, a US-based polling organization. Forty-nine percent of Americans aged 18 to 39 view socialism positively while it is 51 percent for capitalism. This seems inconceivable. But given that the Gallup poll was mainly about respondents' views in economic fields, the attitudes actually reflect Americans' pragmatism and the return of individualism. Hence, the candidates vying for the presidency should pay more attention to social issues like the wealth gap.

As the bellwether of capitalist countries, the US has been very confident about its liberal democracy and takes it as the foundation from which all its power emanates. Washington has also been dedicated to promoting its liberal democratic model. However, repeated domestic problems have exposed the flaws of the US system. In the political sphere, democracy hasn't worked well in the US. US President Donald Trump, once a political nobody, blew away political elites by winning the presidential election. Economically, the middle and lower classes are becoming increasingly dissatisfied as the wealth gap is widening. In addition, populism is thriving in the US. Americans are concerned by the worsening split in society and fiercer infighting among political parties: both Democrats and Republicans are only busy figuring out a way to gain more votes in the presidential election in 2020.

Trump assuming office was a body blow to the establishment camp. US political elites and mainstream media used to pay more attention to the appeals of middle and upper classes, but Trump, who has been to some extent representing the demands of white men from the middle and lower classes, was elected. The latter group cares more about individual or family financial situation rather than the country's international responsibility or values. This is why the “America First” policy can get sustained support. The Gallup survey has further reflected that individualism has the upper hand and thus to some extent pushes forward populism in the US.

Since the founding of the US, individualism has been the impetus for the country's innovation and liberalism. US political system is designed to limit public power and show the supremacy of individualism. The skewed distribution of household wealth has triggered various social and political problems in the US with tardy progress in implementing welfare measures for the middle and lower classes. The richest 10 percent of US households represented 70 percent of all US wealth in 2018, compared with 60 percent in 1989. In 2016, the richest 1 percent of households held more than half of all outstanding stock, financial securities, trust equity, and business equity, and 40 percent of non-home real estate. And the richest 10 percent of households controlled 93 percent share of directly owned stocks and mutual funds. In the meantime, the bottom 90 percent of households was responsible for 72 percent of total indebtedness. ➔



# East Asia at the glance

The wealth gap will inevitably affect the ethos and political ecology of the US. The US poor believe the wealth gap is a result of an unfair distribution system and capitalism is in favor of magnates. On the contrary, they think socialism can somewhat limit crony capitalism and lead to fairer distribution of household wealth and improve the poor's economic welfare. For US election candidates, their approval ratings will decide their political career. Amid a surge of populism, anyone who wants to win the election needs to take ethos into consideration. Americans, particularly the young, have shown their concerns about living standards by viewing socialism positively. As social classes solidify, young Americans wish to have a better future, and this is why younger adults have shown increasingly positive attitudes toward socialism since 2010.

In recent years, young Americans have been more proactive in politics. About 28.2 percent of young Americans aged 18 to 29 voted in the 2018 midterm elections - more than double the national youth turnout in the 2014 midterms. The turnout of Americans aged 30 to 44 was about 49 percent in the 2018 midterm elections, up by 13 percent compared to 2014.

Due to the higher turnout among 18 to 29-year-olds and 30 to 44-year-olds, the percentage of voters under the age of 45 rose to 35.4 in 2018, up from just 30.3 percent in 2014, according to the Brookings Institution. Young people have gradually become the main voters in US presidential elections. Therefore, for any candidate, to listen to what young people want will be increasingly important.

## ■ South Korea unlikely to let US deploy missile

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi kicked off his two-day South Korea visit on Wednesday, for the first time in five years as the two countries seek to improve ties since a spat over the installation of the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) anti-missile system in South Korea. What is the significance of the visit? What are the stumbling blocks in China-South Korea relations and how to get rid of them? Global Times reporter Yu Jincui talked to two scholars.

China-South Korea relations are in a transitional period. The ice is melting between the two countries but spring has not yet arrived. The toughest time for bilateral relations has passed, but some problems caused by the deployment of the THAAD system in South Korea remain.

An urgent task for the two coun-



tries is to solve the problems left over by the THAAD deployment while at the same time preventing bilateral ties from being affected by new issues. For instance, US Defense Secretary Mark Esper said the US wants to deploy an intermediate range conventional missile in Asia after the US withdrew from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty. There were reports that South Korea has been singled out as a place for the deployment. Whether South Korea hosts the US intermediate-range missile is a potential challenge for China-South Korea relations. Rounds of negotiations between the US and South Korea on sharing the cost of maintaining US troops on the Korean Peninsula have ended without an agreement. The US has piled pressure on South Korea, if the latter doesn't compromise over the cost-sharing issue, it might make concessions over other issues such as allowing the US to deploy the intermediate-range missile on its soil.

But as South Korea has already suffered a lot because of the deployment of THAAD, it would deal with the intermediate-range missile deployment issue very prudently. In the foreseeable future, I believe the chance that it allows the US missile deployment is very slim. One important reason is that once it agrees, it is going to completely ruin China-South Korea relations and have unbearable consequences for Seoul. Li Jiacheng, research fellow at the Research Center for the Economics and Politics of Transitional Countries, Liaoning University

Wang's visit indicates that China-South Korea relations are recovering. It sends out a signal that bilateral ties are going back on track and will continue to move forward. South Korea expects President Xi Jinping to visit Seoul next year and hopes bilateral relations battered by the THAAD row could become normal after Xi's visit. Therefore, whether the two countries could pave the way for Xi's visit would be on the agenda of Wang's two-day trip.

It's unlikely that Seoul would agree to Washington's deployment of intermediate-range conventional missiles on its soil. Compared to THAAD, such missiles are offensive weapons, which will cause greater harm to China's strategic security. There is no doubt that China would take stronger countermeasures once South Korea allows the US to deploy the missiles. This is not what South Korea wants to see. Seoul is unwilling to upset the thaw in China-South Korea relations.

Wang's visit comes amid a simmering row between Japan and South Korea. Japan-South Korea conflicts are still controllable as Seoul has reversed its decision not to renew the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), but further follow up is needed to alleviate tensions. The China-Japan-South Korea trilateral summit is to be held in China this month. China could play a mediating role between South Korea and Japan so as to prevent bilateral conflicts jeopardizing trilateral cooperation.

Besides, December is a critical month. In April, it was reported by North Korean media that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un said in a speech he would wait until the end of this year for the US to change its approach to denuclearization talks. It's possible Kim would take adventurous steps after the year-end limit, bringing new uncertainties to the Korean Peninsula issue. It's particularly important for China and South Korea to conduct strategic communications at this juncture to try to keep North Korea willing

leged sector - billionaires.

In the 2016 election, US President Donald Trump's Twitter account propelled his rise as defined by a Republican primary with over a dozen opponents the media deemed more credible and qualified. Despite losing the popular vote to former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, Trump could garner about 63 million votes and win the electoral college.

Trump's rise was helped by the free airtime he received from news commentators of major cable networks who consistently covered his campaign and its appeal to white nationalists. His tweets then, as they do now, disseminated right-wing fanaticism. Mainstream commentators nonetheless widely publicized them. They emphasized the nature of his viral performance, calling it "unpresidential," instead of spending time accurately covering the proposed policies of other candidates.

Trump's far-right, xenophobic sentiments were acknowledged, but only in the context of the way he communicated them. Racism in past presidential campaigns, such as George H.W. Bush's Willie Horton ad or Richard Nixon's use of the Southern Strategy, was more discreet. US history shows past presidents, including many Democrats, have implemented many of Trump's policies. The difference was that in 2016, a country changed by social media finally had a sobering look at itself.

In this climate, Bloomberg's use of traditional media may swing the pendulum away from online platforms. It is certain that Bloomberg, a media mogul, will keep his informational arsenal. Bloomberg News sent a memo to its 2,700 employees telling them not to investigate the former mayor's campaign. The network's coverage will steer clear of covering Democratic rivals, but focus on Trump, keeping with the practice of mainstream media holding the president's spectacle in the spotlight. Spin will play a focal part in Bloomberg's media spectacle regardless of how the media he doesn't own spin his campaign.

The rest of the media, just like Bloomberg News, will likely ignore the substance of Bloomberg's agenda or his record of controversial policies such as the racist stop-and-frisk practice and his support for the Iraq War. Corporate social media will especially generate stories on Bloomberg's character as removed from his career. Their algorithms are made for creating a spectacle, and are not meant for principled policy discussion.

Social media has taken presidential politics by storm. Facebook has collaborated with Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg's campaign while traditional mainstream media outlets openly attack candidates like Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard and Senator Bernie Sanders for rejecting the Washington Consensus. Sanders has accumulated the most individual donors of any candidate in the Democratic primary but struggles to gain the social media coverage of a front runner. Bloomberg's international recognition that arguably predates Sanders' will likely contribute to that

to talk to the US.

## ■ Clever use of media can promote Bloomberg

Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg entered the US presidential race last week. The billionaire's quest for the White House began with an ad funded by his \$31 billion campaign corpus. At a time social media is playing an integral role in US politics, Bloomberg's use of television demonstrates how wealth is still the horse that powers the mass media cart.

Presidential candidates with the strongest grasp of media have shaped the political landscape for some time. In 2007, a junior US senator from Illinois managed to market hope and change to a cynical electorate. Directing campaign staff to spearhead outreach online and offline, then-senator Barack Obama was adept at using the tools of 21st century new media. With backing from Goldman Sachs, it wasn't long before the neoliberal politician was able to clinch the Democratic nomination. Obama knew where to focus when selling a political platform in the age of Facebook and Twitter. The "Yes We Can" music video propelled the Obama phenomenon.

Distinguishing himself as a candidate against Wall Street recklessness and a critic of "mind-set that got us into the [Iraq] War," his campaign was bolstered when John McCain, then presidential candidate for the Republican Party, picked then Alaska governor Sarah Palin to be his vice president. Palin was widely seen as an incompetent candidate after an interview where she seemed unfamiliar with the names of major media outlets. Despite starting another war in Libya and having an administration made up of career politicians from the Bush and Clinton dynasties, Obama was able to retain the aura of political change when he beat his Republican opponent Mitt Romney in 2012. Lackluster debate performances lowered his 2012 election margins over Romney, but his campaign's mass marketing expertise delivered another four years of power.

And now, enter Bloomberg. The unprecedented digitalization of the political landscape has been naturally used to empower the US most privi-



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**Contacts:** You can contact any of the addresses below:

**Email:** [Moradpour.a@stpc.ir](mailto:Moradpour.a@stpc.ir) **Tel:** 061 521 – 72045 **Fax:** 061 521 – 72043

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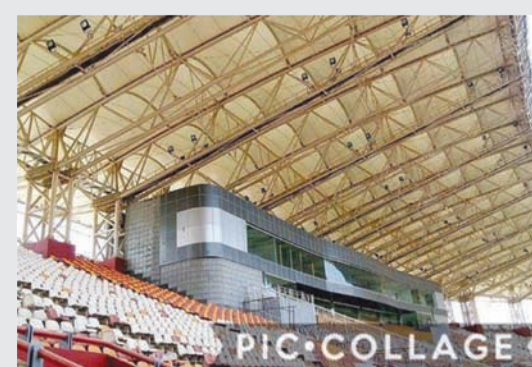
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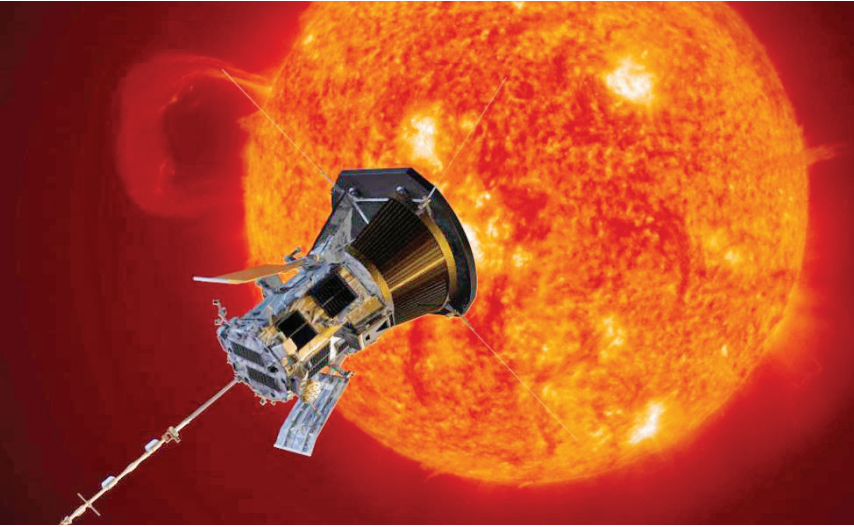
# NASA’s probe soaring near Sun reveals surprises about solar wind

Troves of new data from a NASA probe's close encounters with the Sun are giving scientists unique insight about the solar wind and space weather more generally as the spacecraft zooms through the outermost part of the star's atmosphere.

Researchers on Wednesday described the first published findings from the Parker Solar Probe, a spacecraft launched in 2018 to journey closer to the Sun than any other human-made object. The findings, offering fresh details about how the Sun spawns space weather, are reshaping astronomers' understanding of violent solar wind that can hamper satellites and electronics on Earth.

"We were certainly hoping we'd see new phenomena and new processes when we got close to the Sun- and we certainly did," Nicola Fox, director of the U.S. space agency's heliophysics division, told reporters. "Some of the information that we found pretty much confirmed what we expected, but some of it is totally unexpected."

Earth is roughly 93 million miles from the sun. The probe ventured as close as 15 million miles (24 million km) to the Sun to



gather the data used in the studies published in the journal Nature. The probe eventually will travel within about 4 million miles (6 million km) from the sun's surface, seven times closer than any previous spacecraft.

The probe has endured extreme heat while flying through the outermost part of the sun's atmosphere, called the solar corona, that gives rise to solar wind - the hot, energized, charged particles that

stream outward from the Sun and fill the solar system.

Oscillations in the speed of these charged particles beaming outward from the solar corona have previously been thought to dissipate gradually, much like the waves seen after plucking a guitar string fading from the middle.

One of the probe's "really big surprises," according to one of the researchers, was the detection of sudden, abrupt spikes in the speed of the solar wind that were so violent that the magnetic field flips itself around, a phenomenon called "switchbacks."

"We're finding these discrete, powerful waves that wash over the spacecraft, kind of like rogue waves in an ocean," said Justin Kasper, a principal investigator whose team at the University of Michigan built a solar wind-sensing instrument on the Parker probe. "They carry a tremendous amount of energy."

"This will dramatically change our theories for how the corona and solar wind are being heated," Kasper added.

(Source: Reuters)

## Emotion-sensing robot launches to assist space station astronauts

An intelligent robot equipped with emotion-sensing voice detectors was headed to the International Space Station after launching from Florida on Thursday, becoming the latest artificial intelligence-powered astronaut workmate in orbit.

The Crew Interactive Mobile Companion 2, or CIMON 2, is a spherical droid with microphones, cameras and a slew of software to enable emotion recognition.

The droid was among 5,700 pounds (2,585 kg) of supplies and experiments aboard SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket, whose midday launch had been delayed from Wednesday due to high winds.

"The overall goal is to really create a true companion. The relationship between an astronaut and CIMON is really important," Matthias Biniok, the lead architect for CIMON 2, told Reuters. "It's trying to understand if the astronaut

is sad, is he angry, joyful and so on."

Based on algorithms built by information technology giant IBM Corp (IBM.N) and data from CIMON 1, a nearly identical prototype that launched in 2018, CIMON 2 will be more sociable with crew members. It will test technologies that could prove crucial for future crewed missions in deep space, where long-term isolation and communication lags to Earth pose risks to astronauts' mental health.

While designed to help astronauts conduct scientific experiments, the English-speaking robot is also being trained to help mitigate groupthink — a behavioral phenomenon in which isolated groups of humans can be driven to make irrational decisions.

"Group-thinking is really dangerous," Biniok said. In times of conflict or disagreement among astronauts, one

of CIMON's most important purposes would be to serve as "an objective outsider that you can talk to if you're alone, or could actually help let the group collaborate again," he said.

Engineers have said CIMON's concept was inspired by a 1940s science fiction comic series set in space, where a sentient, brain-shaped robot named Professor Simon mentors an astronaut named Captain Future. CIMON 2 also parallels HAL, the sentient computer in Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey" film.

SpaceX is the first private company to fly to the space station, a \$100 billion project of 15 nations. Along with CIMON 2, the cargo aboard its 19th resupply mission to the orbital research lab included 40 live mice that will show scientists how muscles change in the microgravity of space.

(Source: Reuters)

## Centuries of inbreeding to blame for 'Habsburg jaw' among European royals, study finds



Centuries of inbreeding are to blame for a facial deformity prevalent among European royals, known as "Habsburg jaw", scientists have said.

The condition, medically known as mandibular prognathism, causes the lower jaw to protrude significantly and affected the Habsburg dynasty of Spanish and Austrian kings and their wives, who secured their influence across a vast swathe of Europe for more than 200 years through intermarriage.

While these genetically compromising tendencies are known to have eventually led to the family's demise, with the final Habsburg monarch, Charles II, unable to produce an heir as a result, no studies had conclusively linked the distinctive facial condition to their inbreeding.

"The Habsburg dynasty was one of the most influential in Europe, but became renowned for inbreeding, which was its eventual downfall," said the study's lead researcher, Professor Roman Vilas, from the University of Santiago de Compostela.

Habsburg descendants ruled over the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, and in Spain until the heirless death of Charles II, also known as "the Bewitched", which led to the 13-year War of the Spanish Succession in 1701.

"We show for the first time that there is a clear, positive relationship between inbreeding and appearance of the Habsburg jaw," Professor Vilas said.

"While our study is based on historical figures, inbreeding is still common in some geographical regions and among some religious and ethnic groups, so it's important today to investigate the effects.

"The Habsburg dynasty serves as a kind of human laboratory for researchers to do so, because the range of inbreeding is so high."

During the study, published in the Annals of Human Biology, researchers recruited 10 specialist facial surgeons, who used 66 portraits to diagnose the condition in 15

members of the Habsburg dynasty.

Despite differences in artistic style, the portraits are characterized by a realistic approach to the human face.

The surgeons were asked to diagnose 11 features of mandibular prognathism, as well as seven features of maxillary deficiency, the most recognizable of which are a prominent lower lip and an overhanging nasal tip.

The portraits are held by some of the world's most esteemed art museums, including the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and Madrid's Prado Museum.

The surgeons gave scores for the degree of mandibular prognathism and maxillary deficiency in each member of the Habsburg family.

Mary of Burgundy, who married into the family in 1477, showed the least degree of both traits. The Habsburg jaw was most pronounced in Philip IV, who was king of Spain until 1665.

Maxillary deficiency was diagnosed to the greatest degree in five members of the family, including Charles II.

Detecting a correlation between the two conditions, the researchers speculated that they share a genetic basis.

The extent of inbreeding was calculated from a large-scale family tree, including more than 6,000 individuals belonging to more than 20 generations.

The researchers detected a strong relationship between the degree of inbreeding and the extent of the Habsburg jaw. The relationship to maxillary deficiency was also positive, but it was only statistically significant in two of the seven features diagnosed.

The cause of the relationship between the inbreeding and facial deformity remains unclear, but the study's authors suggest it is because mating between relatives increases the chance of offspring inheriting identical forms of a gene from both parents.

This reduces someone's genetic fitness — meaning the Habsburg jaw should be considered a recessive condition.

(Source: The Independent)

## How brightly the Moon glows is a mystery, but maybe not for long



By Maria Temming

The lunar dark side may be the Moon's more mysterious face, but there's something pretty basic scientists still don't know about the bright side — namely, just how bright it is.

Current estimates of the Moon's brightness at any given time and vantage point are saddled with at least 5 percent uncertainty. That's because those estimates are based on measurements from ground-based telescopes that gaze at the moon through the haze of Earth's atmosphere.

Now, scientists have sent a telescope beyond the clouds on a high-altitude airplane in hopes of gauging the Moon's glow within about 1 percent or less uncertainty, the National Institute of Standards and Technology reports in a Nov. 19 news release.

Knowing the exact brightness of Earth's celestial night-light could increase the reliability of data from Earth-observing satellites that use the Moon's steady glow to check that their sensors are working properly. Those satellites keep tabs on things like weather, crop health and dangerous algal blooms.

The new moonbeam-catching mission, called the Airborne Lunar Spectral Irradiance Mission or air-LUSI for short, performed a series of demonstration flights from late November 12 (right after a full moon) to the wee hours of the morning on November 17, NASA said in a Nov. 14 news release. During each flight, a telescope was bathed in moonlight for half an hour while riding on the wing of a NASA airplane about 21 kilometers above ground — around twice the cruising altitude of a commercial airliner.

"When we're up there, the atmosphere is not an issue," says air-LUSI team leader Kevin Turpie, a remote sensing scientist at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. With the plane flying above about 90 percent of the atmosphere, "it's getting much closer to viewing the Moon as you would from space."

Researchers can't just launch a satellite up into space to get a clear view of the moon,

because that probe would be "basically facing the same problems as all the other Earth-observing satellites" that aim to use the Moon's brightness to check their function, Turpie says. Namely, instruments degrade in the harsh environment of space. By sending air-LUSI on a short flight rather than into orbit, scientists can manually examine the instrumentation after landing to make sure it continued operating correctly throughout its observations.

Turpie's team is still analyzing results from its initial observing run. But if the air-LUSI measurements are as accurate as expected, observations from those and future flights could be combined with ground telescope data to create a more accurate model of the Moon's appearance at various times and locations. Shaving uncertainty about the Moon's brightness down to about 1 percent or less would require making air-LUSI observations during different phases of the Moon over at least three years, Turpie estimates.

In the future, moonlight-seeking experiments that fly even higher than air-LUSI, potentially on high-altitude balloons, may help measure moonlight with even greater accuracy, says lunar calibration researcher Hugh Kieffer. He is not involved with air-LUSI but has modeled the Moon's brightness using ground telescope observations for the U.S. Geological Survey.

By pointing a satellite at the Moon and comparing its observations with the Moon's true brightness, scientists can test whether the satellite is seeing things correctly — and tweak data coming from it to compensate for any errors. It's difficult to run the same kind of test using other celestial objects as reference lights, because "stars are too dim and pointy, and the sun is too bright," Kieffer says.

More advanced models of the Moon's brightness could not only help clean up data from current Earth-facing satellites, but also refine observations from past satellites that peered at the Moon.

## Why mammals are so good at hearing

By Sarah Zhang

One hundred and twenty million years ago, when northeastern China was a series of lakes and erupting volcanoes, there lived a tiny mammal just a few inches long. When it died, it was fossilized down to its most minuscule ear bones. And it is these ear bones that have so intrigued scientists: They are evidence of how evolution created the unique ear of mammals, giving modern mammals—including us—a finely tuned sense of hearing.



Today, mammals have three small bones in the ear that transmit sound from the eardrum: the malleus, incus, and stapes. A wealth of evidence from fossils and developing embryos suggests that two of these ear bones were once jaw bones. Over millions of years of evolution, they shrank in relative size and detached completely from the jaw. Reptiles—like our nonmammalian ancestors, probably—hear by placing their jaw on the ground to pick up low-frequency vibrations. But mammals, with their three ear bones, can hear high-pitched sounds in the air: insects buzzing, wind rustling, birds squawking, music, speech.

The fossilized mammal found in northeastern China, named *Origolestes lii*, has an ear that looks close to modern. While parts of its body still look quite ancient, its ear bones, according to the study's authors, have moved away and detached from the jaw. "That separation is critical because it allows the separation of hearing and chewing," says Jin Meng, the curator of fossil mammals at the American Museum of Natural History and an author of the paper. And thus, the ear and the jaw could evolve separately in mammals, each specializing in what it does.

In fact, it may have been chewing that initially drove the detachment of the would-be ear bones and the jaw, says Vera Weisbecker, who studies mammalian evolution at the University of Queensland and was not involved in the study. Chewing is actually unique to mammals. It requires a jaw that can move side to side in addition to up and down, teeth that can grind, and lips to keep food inside the mouth while masticating. (Consider a crocodile, says Thomas Martin, a paleontologist at the University of Bonn. It doesn't have lips. "If it would chew, all the food would fall out of the mouth.") The ability to chew may have unlocked additional nutrients and food sources for mammals. Ruminants today, such as cows, for example, can eat tough plants because they chew and chew. And the detachment of extra bones in the jaw helped create a more flexible joint for chewing.

Those extra bones, it happens, ended up being co-opted for hearing in the middle ear. Scientists who study mammalian embryos have also noticed that two of the tiny bones of the middle ear start off attached to the jaw. "The ear develops by first developing as part of the mandible," says Neal Anthwal, a developmental biologist at King's College London who studies the mammalian jaw and ear. It is only later in embryonic development that the ear bones detach and the piece of cartilage that connects them, called the Meckel's Cartilage, dissolves. Scientists have in fact found ways to mutate mice so that their ear bones remain connected to their jaw—essentially reversing a step in mammalian evolution.

This separation of the middle ear appears to have, interestingly, happened at least three independent times in the evolution of mammals—in the ancestors of monotremes (a group of egg-laying mammals that includes the platypus and echidna), of therians (a group including marsupials and placental mammals), and in another group of mammals that has gone entirely extinct. Somehow, all three groups converged on the same adaptation of separating their chewing and their hearing. *Origolestes lii*, Meng says, belonged to a group of animals that eventually evolved into placental mammals and into us humans.

The first of the *Origolestes lii* fossils in this study was actually found in 2003. But Meng says the team waited a long time to analyze the fossils, because they were so tiny and difficult to extract from the rock around them. "It's not until recently we have high-resolution CT scan," he says, which can be used to look inside the fossils without breaking them apart.

Zhe-Xi Luo, a paleobiologist at the University of Chicago who specializes in the evolution of the middle ear, says it is possible that the ear bones were actually connected to the jaw and fractured apart only after the animal died—as he has found in a fossil of a closely related mammal from the same time period and region in northeastern China. He agrees that ear bones must have completely detached from the jaw at some point in the evolution of mammals, though. "The only way this can be resolved is, we get another fossil that shows it," he says.

This area of China, close to the North Korean border, is in fact a hotbed of fossil-hunting activity. The lake beds and volcanic eruptions that rained down ash 120 million years ago created fantastic conditions for fossil formation. Since the 1990s, amateurs and professionals alike have been unearthing exquisite fossils from this region. (Several of the six *Origolestes lii* fossils presented in the paper were originally found by local villagers.)

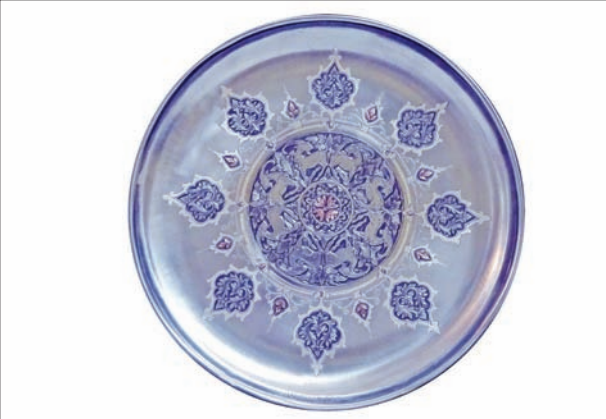
Fossil hunters in northeastern China have most famously found dinosaurs with delicately preserved feathers—as well as dozens of new species of birds, plants, mammals, and fish. Together, they are clarifying and complicating the story of life on Earth in the Mesozoic era, some 252 million to 66 million years ago. "We have these complete Mesozoic skeletons in the last 20 years or so, which really dramatically changed our picture of mammalian evolution," Martin says. "We live in exciting times." If the story of the mammalian ear is to get any clearer, it will likely be because of fossils found there.



## Iranian crafter fuses Seljuk, Qajar eras into artwork

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** — An Iranian artisan has recently completed a lavishly-decorated tray using know-hows typically practiced during the Seljuk era (1037–1194) and Qajar epoch (1789 to 1925) of the Iranian history.

According to the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Research Center, the iron tray, which measures 30 centimeters in diameter, is embellished with embossed motifs and richly enameled with silver, IRIB reported on Wednesday.



Carried out by crafter, Kourosh Qanouni, the project was implemented through a special silver-enameled method, which uses extremely thin layer of silver, the report said.

Currently, the method is almost forgotten and the project is aimed to revive the technique.

Iran's handicrafts exports reached \$289 million in the past Iranian calendar year 1397, showing three percent growth year on year, based on data released by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

Traditional ceramics, pottery vessels, handwoven cloths as well as personal ornamentations with precious and semi-precious gemstones are among Iranian exports to Iraq, Afghanistan and Germany, the U.S., the UK, and other countries.

## New airplane seat design will make it easier to sleep in economy

A new seat design comes with an innovative solution to this in-flight issue, using “padded wings” that fold out from behind both sides of the seat back -- allowing both for additional privacy and a cushioned spot to rest heads for some shut-eye.

This new idea from Universal Movement, a spin-off from London-based design company New Territory, is called “Interspace.” It premiered in London this week as part of the Aircraft Cabin Innovation summit 2019.

Interspace is the brainchild of Luke Miles, New Territory's founder and chief creative officer. He spent three years working as Head of Design at Virgin Atlantic, so he knows his aircraft interiors inside out.

The designer tells CNN Travel he'd noticed how innovative airplane cabin designs usually focus on business or first class experiences and he wanted to come up with a way to make the cheap seats comfier.

“We're really keen as a business on trying to -- it sounds a bit cliché -- but trying to push some innovation back into the majority,” says Miles.

The wings on Interspace fold manually in and out of the chair. This allows for a streamlined look, and easy access to move up and down the row.

(Source: CNN)



### ROUND THE GLOBE

#### Citadel of the Ho Dynasty

The 14th -century Ho Dynasty citadel, built according to the feng shui principles, testifies to the flowering of neo-Confucianism in late 14th century Vietnam and its spread to other parts of East Asia.

The Citadel of Ho Dynasty built in 1397, composed of the Inner Citadel, La Thanh Outer Wall and the Nam Giao Altar covers 155.5 ha, surrounded by a buffer zone of 5078.5 ha.



It is located in accordance with geomantic principles in a landscape of great scenic beauty between the Ma and Buoi rivers in Vinh Loc district, Thanh Hoa province of Vietnam.

The Inner Citadel constructed of large limestone blocks represents a new development of architectural technology and adaptation of geomantic city planning in an East Asian and South-east Asian context.

It demonstrates the use of architectural elements in terms of space management and decoration designed for a centralized imperial city in order to show a concept of royal power, based on the adoption of the Confucian philosophy within a predominantly Buddhist culture.

Being the capital of Vietnam from 1398 to 1407 and also the political, economic and cultural center of North Central Vietnam from the 16th to the 18th century, it bears exceptional testimony to a critical period in Vietnamese and South-east Asian history when traditional kingship and Buddhist values were giving way to new trends in technology, commerce and centralized administration.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Azerbaijan willing to receive more tourists from Iran

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — The Republic of Azerbaijan intends to receive more arrivals from Iran so as to attain a balance in tourist exchange rate between the two neighbors.

Azerbaijan is not satisfied with the unbalanced tourism exchange rate between the two countries. Over the past year, about 1.5 million Azerbaijani citizens traveled to Iran, while [some] 241,000 Iranians visited that country,” ISNA quoted Fuad Nagiyev, the head of the State Tourism Agency of Azerbaijan, as saying on Wednesday.

Nagiyev made the remarks in a meeting with the head of the Association of Iranian Travel Agencies Hormatollah Rafiei. A number of administrative officials and tour operators from the two sides also attended the meeting.

As a solution, the Iranian side suggested the Republic of Azerbaijan to waive visa requirements for Iranian travelers, the report said.

Iran abolished visa requirements for nationals of the Republic of Azerbaijan three years ago, while Iranian citizens still have to obtain visas to visit the country. Azerbaijan's visa fees cost \$26 for an airport visa, \$24 for an electronic one, and \$51 for an instant visa, according to the report.

“The Republic of Azerbaijan is willing to increase the number of Iranians traveling to Azerbaijan, as Iran is a friend and brother country, and it is of great importance for our country to develop relations in tourism and trade with it,” Nagiyev noted.

Rafiei for his part said, “On one hand, airports of the country [Azerbaijan] receive 50 euros as the [arrival] fee, which is calculated on the flight ticket price and makes it expensive. On the other, every Iranian citizen has to pay 26 dollars to obtain a visa from the Republic of Azerbaijan. These increase the cost of traveling to this country.”

Therefore, it is requested that the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan revoke the visa [requirements for Iranian nationals], Rafiei added.

Iran welcomed some four million foreign nationals during the first five months of the current Iranian calendar



*Statue of Nader Shah (on horseback) and his soldiers at the Naderi Museum, Mashhad, northeast Iran. Born Nader Qoli Beyg, he was one of the most powerful Iranian rulers in the history of the nation, ruling as Shah of Iran (Persia) from 1736 to 1747 when he was assassinated during a rebellion.*

year (March 21 – August 22), which shows 30 percent hike, compared with the same period last year, according to official data compiled by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

The Islamic Republic attracted 7.8 million foreign travelers during the last Iranian year, which shows 50 percent growth year on year, the ministry announced

earlier in September. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, the country aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

The country boasts hundreds of historical sites such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 22 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list

## French nationals top list of foreign tourist arrivals in Fars

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — French nationals composed the largest source of foreign arrivals in the southern Iranian Fars province during the first two months of autumn, provincial tourism chief has said.

During the months of Mehr and Aban (Sep. 23 –Nov.21), 92,683 foreign nationals visited historical and cultural sites [and museums] of the province, with French citizens at the top of the list, Mosayyeb Amiri said on Wednesday.

International tourists visiting Fars province's historical and cultural sites during the period were mostly from France, Germany, Switzerland, China, Russia, Poland, India and Oman, the official noted.

During the aforementioned period, a total of 580,670 people visited cultural and historical sites in Fars, of whom 487,987 were Iranians, he explained.

Hafezieh (mausoleum of Hafez, an illustrious 14th-century Persian poet), the UNESCO-registered Persepolis, and Sadi mausoleum were respectively the most- visited sites in the period, Amiri added.

The ancient region of Fars, also spelled Pars, or Persis, was the heart of the Achaemenian Empire (550–330 BC), which was founded by Cyrus the Great and had its capital at Pasargadae. Darius I the Great moved the capital to nearby Persepolis in the late 6th or early 5th century BC.

The capital city of Shiraz is home to some of the country's most magnificent buildings and sights. Increasingly, it draws more and more foreign and domestic sightseers flocking into this provincial capital which was the literary capital of Persia during the Zand dynasty from 1751 to 1794.



*Foreign travelers take photos of the 19th-century Nasir al-Mulk Mosque, also known as the Pink Mosque, in Shiraz, southern Iran.*

## Tehran, Bishkek agree to ease visa rules, resume direct flights

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — Iran and Kyrgyzstan have agreed to facilitate visa issuance and resume direct flights by the end of the current Iranian month of Azar (Dec. 21), YJC quoted Iran's deputy transport minister Shahram Adamnejad as saying on Wednesday.

“The two countries are willing to improve transport ties, so necessary measures have been taken to ease visa rules and we will resume direct flights by the end of Azar,” he explained.

He made the remarks on the sidelines of the 12th

Iran-Kyrgyzstan Joint Economic Committee meeting which was held in Tehran on December 3-4.

The event was co-chaired by Iranian Minister of Transport and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami and Kyrgyzstan's Minister of Transport and Roads Janat Beishenov.

In a meeting with Kyrgyz Prime Minister Mukhammed-kalyi Abylgaziev in November, Iranian First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri said his country is ready to ease visa regulations for Kyrgyzstani nationals in a bid to boost tourism.

## How to travel car-free with a family

By Lauren Motison

When I moved to New York and started a car-free travel blog in 2007, I was a recovering Los Angeles transplant, keen to ditch driving and atone for my environmental sins. I hiked the Appalachian Trail off the Metro-North train, surfed via the Queens-bound A subway and biked into the Hudson Valley from the Bronx's South County Trailway. No car? No problem!

Then I became a mother, breastfeeding on buses and potty training on trains. I'll admit I felt less like a weekend warrior and more like a pathetic peripatetic parent. However, seeing how much my son loves riding the rails and engaging with different people continues to be more rewarding than any adventure in an automobile.

Here are a few tips, for biking and using public transit, that have helped me avoid the simple mistakes and fuel the fun.

#### ■ Pack less, see more

After a bit of trial and error, you'll find car-free travel is a liberating choice that forces you to schlep considerably less. Take only two pairs of shoes, bid adieu to the car

seat and gain back the time wasted mulling over “just in case” outfits or scavenging for souvenirs. My son, now 3 and a half, and I share a 100-liter hybrid duffel backpack and he enjoys carrying the essentials in his own “Kikki” backpack. Using packing cubes and choosing lightweight, water-resistant and convertible luggage can also make life easier. If possible, leave the stroller at home — the peer-to-peer rental marketplace goBaby rents strollers and other baby gear from more than 100 locations throughout North America.

#### ■ Pass the road test

Before committing to a long vacation, get the entire family in a go-with-the-flow groove to better handle the inevitable car-free setbacks: delayed buses, stuck trains, no available seats, overly ambitious parents. A few summers ago, with our then 1-year-old, my husband and I were hoping to shorten our cycling route through France's Pays de la Loire region and incorrectly assumed that the local trains would allow bike trailers on board. Following our France fiasco, we experimented with car-free excursions closer to home, and now research policies for buses and trains ahead of time and carry information

for just-in-case taxis and tour companies.

#### ■ Before all aboard, check the tourism board

Cities with efficient mass transit systems and widespread bike share programs are a boon to car-free travelers. Destinations like Los Angeles, Connecticut, Banff and Scotland are part of a growing tourism movement celebrating the road less driven with digital car-free brochures. You can continue your research with Bikabout, which offers family guides to bike-friendly towns, hotels and Airbnbs in North America.

For other places to go and apps to use, Wanderu, a car-free booking site, finds the most affordable transit options in addition to providing handy travel tips such as under \$20 getaways from major cities in the United States, and the bus companies that accept mobile tickets. And Hipcamp, an app with more than 300,000 public and private campsite listings, has a search tool that allows you to filter for sites that don't require a car.

Once the destination has been selected, plan for what could be big travel snafus: Are guides needed to reach certain attractions?

Does the bus have a bathroom or require a booster seat? I also strategize ways to make the transition between modes of transit less stressful.

#### ■ Put the children in charge

Your children, believe it or not, can help with those transition points.

On a recent outing to Chautauqua Park in Boulder, Colo., I designated my son as our guide, “Ranger Remy.” When we switched from bike to shuttle bus, he couldn't wait to lead the way, first stopping at the ranger center near the Chautauqua Trailhead to borrow a goodie-filled discovery backpack. But in San Francisco, we had to jump from the BART train to Amtrak and my son wasn't in the mood to be the station navigator. So I successfully teased the journey with Amtrak's Trails & Rails program, when National Park Service guides give on-board show-and-tell presentations about landmarks along the route. Older children can keep things running smoothly as snack supervisors or travel planners, charged with picking out the next activity from the guidebook.

(Source: The New York Times)

## Hidden Tattoos found on Egyptian mummies change our knowledge of the ancient practice

Three thousand years ago, the village of Deir el-Medina in ancient Egypt was home to a community of artisans, all living and working together on the tombs of the Valley of the Kings necropolis. But new evidence has emerged that tombs were not their only creative outlet.

Infrared imaging has revealed a range of tattoos on the previously unstudied mummified corpses of seven women. The ink was scattered across their bodies, with a range of different motifs.

According to University of Missouri anthropologist Anne

Austin, this represents evidence that in ancient Egypt, the practice of tattooing may have been more widespread than we knew. She presented her findings at the American Schools of Oriental Research annual meeting in November.

The work has been several years in the making. It started in 2014, when Austin and her colleague Cedric Gobeil noticed markings on the neck of a female Deir el-Medina mummy. Closer inspection revealed that the marks were not, as she first thought, painted on - they were tattoos.

But, as we saw with the 5,000-year-old mummies from Gebelein, which had been sitting in a museum for over 100 years before their tattoos were discovered, tattoos on mummies aren't always easy to see. Mummified skin becomes discoloured and darkened, especially with mummification resins added to the mix; and tattoos can lighten over time.

Such hidden tattoos can, however, be revealed with infrared photography, which works in wavelengths usually invisible to the human eye.

(Source: Science Alert)



# Cuban foreign ministry releases statement in reaction to U.S. destabilizing policies

**TEHRAN** – The most recent events in the region confirm that the US government and the reactionary oligarchies bear the primary responsibility for the dangerous unrest and political and social instability that broke out in Latin America and the Caribbean, reads part of the statement released by Cuban foreign ministry.

Entitled “Our America in The Face of The Onslaught of Imperialism and the Oligarchies”, the whole text of the declaration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cuba, which was released on December 3, reads as follows:

As was anticipated by the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba, Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, on January 1, 2019: Those who entertained the illusion of the restoration of imperialist domination in our region should understand that Latin America and the Caribbean have changed and so has the world (...) The region resembles a large prairie in times of drought. A single spark could cause an uncontrollable fire that would damage the national interests of all.”

President Donald Trump proclaims the validity of the Monroe Doctrine and resorts to McCarthyism to maintain the imperialist domination over the natural resources of the region; prevent the exercise of the national sovereignty and the aspirations of regional integration and cooperation; attempt to re-establish his unipolar and hemispheric hegemony; eliminate progressive, revolutionary and alternative models to wild capitalism; revert political and social achievements and impose neo-liberal models, with full disregard for International Law, the rules of the game of representative democracy, the environment or the wellbeing of peoples.

This Monday, December 2, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo threateningly accused Cuba and Venezuela of benefiting from and helping to stir up unrest in the countries of the region. He distorts and manipulates reality and conceals the main reason for the instability in the region, which is the US permanent interference in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The legitimate protests and peoples' massive demonstrations that are going on in the continent, particularly in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Brazil are caused by poverty and the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth; the certainty that neo-liberal formulas are worsening the exclusive and unsustainable situation of social vulnerability; the absence or precarious situation of health care, education and social security services; the abuses against human dignity; unemployment and restriction of labor rights; privatization; the increasing cost and cancellation of public services and the increased public insecurity.

They reveal the crisis of political systems, the lack of true democracy, the discredit of traditional conservative parties, the protest against the typical historical corruption of military dictatorships and right-wing governments, the scarce popular support to official authorities, the lack of confidence in institutions and the system of justice.

They also protest against the brutal police repression, the militarization of it using as a pretext the protection of critical infrastructures; the exemption of repressors from criminal liability; the use of military and anti-riot weapons that cause deaths, serious injuries, including hundreds of youths suffering from irreversible eye injuries caused by shotgun pellets; the criminalization of demonstrations; violations, beatings and violence against detainees, among them minors; and even the assassination of social leaders, demobilized guerrillas and journalists.

The United States advocates and supports repression against demonstrators under the pretext of safeguarding the alleged “democratic order”. The complicit silence of several governments, institutions and personalities, that turn out to be very active and critical against the left, is a shame. The complicity of the big corporate media is shameful.

Peoples are very rightly wondering: Where is democracy and the rule of law? What are the institutions that are supposedly devoted to the protection of human rights doing? Where is the justice system whose independence is so much trumpeted?

Let's review some facts. In March, 2015, President Barack Obama signed an unheard-of Executive Order declaring the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as an “unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, the economy and foreign policy” of that big power. In November, 2015, the costly electoral defeat of the left-wing in Argentina occurred.

The neo-liberal offensive had its momentum in August, 2016, with the judicial and parliamentary coup in Brazil against President Dilma Rousseff; the criminalization and incarceration of the leaders of the Workers' Party and later on of ex Presi-



dent Luis Inacio Lula Da Silva himself; the prompt participation of the Department of Justice of the United States, by virtue of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, to install a dependent government, ready to revert important social achievements through neo-liberal adjustments, introduce a nefarious change in the development model, allow the destruction of national businesses and a predatory privatization and sell the resources and infrastructure of the country to American transnationals at a cheap price.

By the end of 2017 there was a protest against the electoral results in Honduras that was terribly repressed.

In January, 2018, the United States aborted the signing of an agreement between the government of Venezuela and the Washington-controlled opposition. One month later, the Secretary of State proclaimed the validity of the Monroe Doctrine and called for a military coup against the Bolivarian and Chavista Revolution.

In March, 2018, the Brazilian councilwoman Marielle Franco was atrociously murdered. This action aroused a wave of anger in her country and the whole world. The obscure involvement of the powers that be in this event has not been disclosed. In April, Lula is sent to prison through spurious judicial maneuvers. There is abundant evidence of the US interference in the Brazilian elections through specialized companies using technologies such as “big data” and polymetry to manipulate, on a case by case basis, the will of voters, such as the ones used by the ultra-reactionary Steve Bannon and others designed by Israel.

During this period, legal proceedings were initiated against ex presidents Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and Rafael Correa. In April, 2018, there was an attempt to destabilize Nicaragua through foreign interference and the implementation of unilateral coercive measures.

On August 4, 2018, an attempt against the life of President Nicolas Maduro Moros was perpetrated. In January, 2019, the self-proclamation of the barely-known and corrupt Juan Guaidó, organized in Washington, took place. In March, 2019, president Trump ratified the Executive Order considering Venezuela a threat. On April 30 there was an attempted military coup in Caracas, which happened to be a resounding failure, and the United States, in revenge, escalated its non-conventional war against that South American nation that has been putting up a tenacious and heroic resistance based on the civic and military union of its people.

During this whole period, the US government has been applying savage anti-immigrant policies and has adopted an aggressive behavior, full of hatred, to fuel fear and division among voters. It is attempting to build a xenophobic wall in the border with Mexico and is threatening this country and the entire Central America with the imposition of terrible tariffs and sanctions if they do not stop those who flee from poverty and insecurity. It has also increased deportations. It cruelly separates thousands of children from their parents; it has arrested 69 000 minors and is trying to expel the children of immigrant parents who were born and raised in the US territory.

The ultra right-wing government of Brazil, headed by Jair Bolsonaro, showing a shameful subordination to the United States, has resorted to lies and a xenophobic, racist, misogynist and homophobic discourse, combined with delirious projections about social and political phenomena, such as climate change, indigenous populations, the Amazon fires and emigration, which have aroused the rejection of numerous leaders and organizations. Under his government, the social policies

that led Brazil to dramatically reduce the levels of poverty and social exclusion under the Workers' Party governments are being dismantled.

Since May, 2019, tens of thousands of demonstrators have taken to the streets to protest against budget cuts in education, the reforms to the pension system, the discriminatory policies and gender violence.

The Brazilian government has interfered in the internal affairs of neighboring countries, such as Venezuela, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay and has adopted hostile positions against Cuba in violation of International Law. As was published by the Brazilian media in April, 2019, the foreign ministry of that country instructed 15 of its embassies to coordinate with US embassies with the purpose of encouraging recipient governments to condemn Cuba at international fora.

For the first time since 1992, Brazil, only joined by the United States and Israel, voted this year against the UN General Assembly Resolution calling for an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade -that the US has further tightened against Cuba-, and the cessation of the extraterritorial implementation of U laws against third States.

In the same vein, the government of Colombia abstained in the vote of the resolution it had supported since 1992 which calls for the ceasing of the genocidal blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba –at a moment when it is being tightened- and its extraterritorial character. In order to justify such reprehensible decision, the authorities of that country has resorted to the politically motivated and ungrateful manipulation of the altruistic, dedicated, discreet and unquestionable contribution of Cuba to peace in Colombia, for which our country's behavior has received universal recognition. It is well known that this decision generated a broad and critical debate in that nation but, despite all odds, we will continue to accompany that nation in its efforts to achieve peace.

The US slander attributing Cuba alleged responsibilities in the organization of popular demonstrations against neo-liberalism in South America is a barely credible excuse to justify and tighten the blockade and the hostile policy against our people. It is likewise useless to conceal the failure of the capitalist system, protect teetering and repressive governments, conceal parliamentary, judicial and police coups; and stir up the ghost of socialism to terrify peoples. By doing this it also intends to justify repression and the criminalization of social protests.

Cuba's only responsibility is the one that emanates from the example set by its heroic people in the defense of their sovereignty, in their resistance against the most brutal and systematic aggressions, in the invariable practice of solidarity and cooperation with all sister nations of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Imperialism is hurting because Cuba has proved that another world is certainly possible and that it is indeed possible to build an alternative model to neo-liberalism, based on solidarity, cooperation, dignity, a fair distribution of wealth, equitable access to professional upgrading, citizens' safety and protection and the absolute freedom of human beings.

The Cuban Revolution has also been a proof that a people that is closely united, that has become the owner of their country and institutions, living in a permanent and profound democracy, can successfully resist and develop in the face of the longest-lasting aggression and blockade in history.

The coup d'état in Bolivia, orchestrated by the United States, using the local

oligarchy and the OAS as an instrument, is an evidence of the aggressive character of the imperialist onslaught. Cuba once again condemns the coup d'état and the brutal repression that has been unleashed in that country and expresses its solidarity with comrade Evo Morales Ayma and the Bolivian people.

While the US government continues its non-conventional war to attempt to overthrow the legitimate government of President Nicolás Maduro Moros and invokes the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR), Cuba ratifies its unshakable determination to maintain its cooperation with the government and the people of Venezuela.

We reiterate our solidarity with the Sandinista government and people of Nicaragua, led by President Daniel Ortega, who is facing the US attempts of destabilization and unilateral coercive measures.

The legitimate government of the Commonwealth of Dominica and its Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit deserve international solidarity and can, as from now, count on the solidarity of the Cuban people at a moment when that island nation is a victim of foreign interference that is already causing violence and is attempting to thwart the electoral process.

In this complex scenario, the government headed by Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico is coping with neo-liberalism and defending the principles of non-interference and respect for the national sovereignty, while the election of Alberto Fernández and Cristina Fernández as President and Vice-president of Argentina evidence the unequivocal rejection of that nation against neo-liberal formulas that impoverished and indebted that nation and seriously harmed its people. Lula's release from prison is a victory of all peoples and Cuba, once again, calls for a global mobilization to demand his complete freedom and the reinstatement of his innocence and his political rights.

The corruption that characterizes the behavior of the current US administration can be hidden no more. Its impact on the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean has taken a toll on human lives and has caused hardships, instability and economic damages.

In view of the tragic juncture that the region and the world are going through, Cuba reaffirms the principles of sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and the right of every people to freely choose and create a political system of their own, in a climate of peace, stability and justice, without threats or aggressions or unilateral coercive measures; and encourages compliance with the principles enshrined in the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace.

Cuba will continue to work towards the integration of Our America, which includes all efforts so that the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which will be very soon presided over by Mexico, would continue to promote the common interests of our nations by strengthening unity amidst diversity.

In the face of the implacable onslaught of the most reactionary forces in the hemisphere, Cuba will oppose the unshakable resistance of its people and its determination to defend the unity of the nation, its social achievements, its sovereignty and independence and socialism whatever the cost. We do it with the unswerving optimism and confidence in victory that we inherited from the Commander in Chief of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz, under the leadership of the First Secretary of our Party, Army General Raúl Castro and the guidance of President Miguel Díaz-Canel.

## My observations and experience in Iran

**1 →** I was very tired of 50 hours journey from Azad Kashmir to Mashad, but as soon as I entered Imam Raza Shrine, I felt as if I had woken up from a sweet dream. I prayed and read the Holy Qur'an.

My next priority was to buy a sim card and ring my wife and daughters. They were very worried of my safety, but I told them that the Iranians were guiding me like angels on both of my sides. I felt of Imam Raza Shrine as the safest and most comfortable place in the city. This holy shrine was named after the 8th Shiat Imam. Many people have either misunderstanding or misperception of Shiat lineage and the hierarchy of the Imams. The misunderstood people think that Shiats are deviants or self-projected dissenters, but in fact, the Shiats are Alhe-Bait.

The Prophet (PBUH) had no son and his dearest daughter Hazrat Fatima married to Hazrat Ali Alaisalam who was the first Imam and Imam Raza was the 8th one in the line of Shiat Imams. Imam Raza was born on 1st January 766 CE in Madina and martyred on 6 June 818. It is said that The Abbasi ruler Mamoon conspired the invitation of Imam Raza to Mashad, where he poisoned him in a pomegranate. The previous name of Mashad was Khorasan. The meaning of Mashad is the place of shahdat result of the martyrdom of Imam Raza.

The total area of Mashad is 267079 square meters and the population is three million. 600 000 people can pray at a time in this holy shrine, which has 16 main gates and 41 meter high 8 minaret. Imam Raza Shrine houses Astan Quds Library with 1.1 million books. This library has 35 branches including one in India. I was honored with several visits in this wonderful library. There are several other departments in the shrine. This is a place where one never feels lonely.

My accommodation was arranged in Ferdowsi University, but it was closed for a few days on my arrival. I met with an Afghan shopkeeper whom I requested him to find me a reasonable hotel, but he took me to his house where I stayed for a few days until the University was reopened. His mother looked after me like a brother. I joined the Ferdowsi University on 6th of July 2019 where I spent 3 months with very compassionate staff and friendly fellow students from all over the world. The Persian and Arab students were very hospitable.

Most of the lectures were delivered by cool minded Dr. Zahra Hamadi, a sportive and inspiring Dr. Elham Ikhlaiqi and very diligent, meticulous, brisk and a considerate Masha Azmoodehe. The head of department was Dr. Zeinab Moazenzade assisted by her competent Assistan Ms. Merghadi, who spoke excellent English. Although I met with several decent people in the department of Adbiyat, Muhammad Karimi was the most considerate Iranian, who gave me so much of his time.

On occasions, he lent me money as my cash was kept in my department where I had no access at weekends. A number of students took me to historical places such as Tuss, which is the resting place of Imam Ghazali and Abu al Qasim Ferdowsi. I felt so satisfied and elated while standing by the graves of these spiritual personalities. The city of Tuss had been destroyed by the anti knowledge Mughul invaders, but they failed to destroy the thoughts and ideas left behind by the Persian thinkers. Abu al Qasim Ferdowsi is credited with protecting and promoting the Persian language and culture.

The Ferdowsi University is named after him, while Imam Ghazali is followed globally. I was introduced to a Dr. Hosseini, who asked me to teach him journalistic skills and I subsequently connected him with the Tehran Times becoming a regular contributor. He introduced me to two Muslim brothers Muhammad Sabri and brother Rajee, who among other things guide people on al-Mustafa Education system set up at the instruction of Imam Khomeini, the Father of Islamic Revolution. These two brothers are very well-versed with English. Brother Sabri also speaks Urdu.

Before I went to Iran, I was told the minorities were oppressed, mainly the Sunni, but the Iranian sunnis denied it. I attended once a big sunni mosque near the historical Park-e-Mellat, where hundreds of people do exercises in mornings. I was also invited to Iranian weddings, which were similar to Kashmiri weddings in many ways.

My plan was to keep low profile in Iran and concentrate on Persian language and research, but the Iranian government and students reacted very strongly against Indian government's decision to revoke Jammu Kashmir's special status. I joined their several activities. The spiritual leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei issued a number of statements against India correctly terming the Kashmir tragedy as a British conspiracy.

The Iranian parliament passed a resolution in support of Kashmir. The Iranian Foreign Office made 3 briefings and students were allowed in all major cities to protest against India and the United Nations.

I had a special meeting with a member of Iranian Parliament, Dr. Nasrollah Pezmanfar arranged by Fareedon Zindadil and Tehmina Muzaffari. The Iranian press nationally highlighted the Kashmir Issue and the daily Tehran Times published several of my articles and Khorasan published an interview. I also had an opportunity to attend a meeting of a Peace and Reconciliation Organisation headed by Dr. Arabshahi. A Khanum Moeeni in Shiraz is also very active on human rights abuses in Kashmir. I spoke over the phone but not met with her as Shiraz was a full day journey from Mashad.

Despite 40 years long economic sanctions on Iran as an unfair reaction to Islamic Revolution, the Iranian infrastructure is still remarkable and inflation balanced. The roads are big and cities clean. The main complaint I heard in Iran was about the immigration law because of which many Afghan refugees children born and brought up in Iran had no right to nationality. I met with a number of Afghan social workers, including an active and acclaimed lady Tehmina Muzaffari, who helped so many vulnerable Afghans. She is well connected with influential Iranians and get things done for the Afghans.

The most important thing in Iran is the wealth of knowledge and rich culture and heritage. The people are very polite, positive and well-mannered. It is the Iranian scientific knowledge, natural beauty and friendliness of the people that pulls a stranger like me back though there is something internal that binds me with Farsi as well. While Pakistan is importing unislamic syllabus in the name of modern education with western funding as well, there are many people like me who want to tie together Farsi, Arabic and Urdu for this is the only way to bring the Muslims closer. For this specific purpose, I wish to improve my Farsi and desire to visit the resting place of the great Saadi Shirazi whose wonderful poem titled “Bani Adam” hangs on the main gate of the United Nations.

In Bani Adam, Saadi Shirazi describes that all human beings are from the same essence. May Allah give me a chance to visit Shiraz!



## Victoria Falls at risk of drying up because of climate change, warns Zambian president

One of the world's natural wonders, the Victoria Falls, could one day dry up unless urgent action is taken to tackle the climate crisis, the Zambian president has warned.

Edgar Lungu said drought had reduced water levels at the falls – which border Zambia and Zimbabwe – to their lowest in 25 years.

Both countries have suffered power cuts as they are heavily reliant on hydropower from plants at the Kariba Dam, which sits on the Zambezi river upstream of the waterfalls.

While the falls typically dry up occasionally during the dry season, officials said this year had brought unprecedented decline in water levels.



The average flow over the falls in 2019 is down by almost 50 per cent, according to Zimbabwe's Ministry of Environment, Climate and Tourism.

In an interview with Sky News in Zambia's capital Lusaka, Mr Lungu said: "Do we want to want to pass on the Zambezi without the mighty Victoria Falls?"

"Do we want to pass on Africa and the next generation without the mighty Victoria Falls? Is that what we want? There are practices and measures we can take now."

In October, the Zambian president tweeted a picture of the falls with barely a trickle of water descending the dry rock face. The scene is more famously known as a wall of cascading water – up to a kilometre wide – which draws hundreds of thousands of tourists a year.

"These pictures of the Victoria Falls are a stark reminder of what climate change is doing to our environment and our livelihood," wrote Mr Lungu. "It is with no doubt that developing countries like Zambia are the most impacted by climate change and the least able to afford its consequences."

"It's normal to have low water this time of the year but the falls will never dry in our lifetime. We haven't had as much water as we have had in the past years but it's not dry," said board member Blessing Munyenyiwa, in comments reported by The Chronicle newspaper.

But Elisha Moyo, principal climate-change researcher at the country's environment ministry, said the disappearance of the falls was a "serious possibility".

"It's a worry," he told the BBC's Hardtalk last month. "Maybe one year there will be no falls completely, no water."

He added the falls drying up would mean the loss of Zimbabwe's "tourism trump card" but would also affect animals reliant on the Zambezi's water supply.

Droughts in southern Africa have also affected crops, leaving millions of people facing food shortages

Zimbabwe's finance minister Mthuli Ncube said in October that water in the Kariba dam was so low "we are dangerously close to a level where we have to cut off power generation".

Water and power shortages are set to shrink the county's economy by 6.5 per cent this year, he added.

(Source: The Independent)

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### Round-World Balloon Trip

(June 19, 2002)

Millionaire American adventurer Steve Fossett has successfully taken off from an airfield in western Australia. He is hoping to become the first person to complete a solo balloon navigation of the earth. This is his sixth attempt at capturing the record. This report from Dominic Hughes.

After a long and anxious night waiting for just the right **conditions** for launch, Steve Fossett and his **ground crew** decided to go ahead with his latest attempt at a solo **circumnavigation**. Thousands of cubic meters of helium were pumped into the towering silver canopy of his balloon. After **meticulous** pre-flight checks and the loading of last-minute **supplies**, the balloon finally lifted off from the airfield at Northam in western Australia.

Steve Fossett will spend the next fifteen to twenty days living in a tiny **capsule** suspended beneath the balloon, getting little sleep and eating army **rations** he describes as disgusting. But the millionaire financier believes this is his best chance to capture the **record** that has **eluded** him on five previous attempts.

Last year, he got as far as Brazil, but was forced to abandon the flight because of deteriorating weather conditions. In 1998, he was lucky to survive when his balloon **plummeted** into the sea. So, having safely launched his latest attempt in western Australia, everything now depends on the weather.

■ **Words**

**conditions:** things which can affect the flight - here, the weather

**ground crew:** the team of people working on the ground to assist the flight

**circumnavigation:** travelling around the world

**meticulous:** with a lot of attention to detail

**supplies:** necessary food, drink, etc. taken on a journey

**capsule:** here, a compartment hanging beneath the balloon, where the balloonist can travel

**rations:** the amount of food allowed each day on an expedition

**record:** a record is usually the fastest or best attempt at something; here, to travel round the world in a balloon

**eluded:** if something eludes you, you just can't reach it

**plummeted:** fell very fast and very hard

(Source: BBC)



## Without earth no birth!

# Decade of 'exceptional' heat likely to be hottest on record, experts say



The last decade has been one of "exceptional" heat around the world, and was almost certainly the hottest on record, while the oceans have also warmed to record levels and grown markedly more acidic, the World Meteorological Organization has said.

Temperatures for the years from 2010 to 2019 were about 1.1C above the average for the pre-industrial period, showing how close the world is coming to the 1.5C of warming that scientists say will cause dramatic impacts, extreme weather and the loss of vital ecosystems.

The preliminary findings of the State of the Global Climate, an annual publication by the WMO, show that this year is on course to be the second or third warmest since records began.

Over land, the impacts from January to October have included severe droughts, heatwaves and floods across all inhabited continents, and over the seas there have also been heatwaves.

During the past year, the upper levels of the oceans, measured since the 1950s, have exceeded previous records so far this year, and the ocean experienced about 1.5 months of unusually warm temperatures, with large areas of the north-east Pacific showing severe heatwaves. The Arctic sea ice minimum in September was the third smallest on record. The final version of the report will be published in March.

Petteri Taalas, the WMO secretary general,

said the impacts of rising concentrations of carbon in the atmosphere were becoming ever more harmful, as demonstrated in this year's extreme weather events.

"Heatwaves and floods which used to be once-in-a-century events are becoming more regular occurrences. Countries from the Bahamas to Japan to Mozambique suffered devastating tropical cyclones. Wildfires swept through the Arctic and Australia," he said.

He warned that more erratic rainfall pat-

terns posed a threat to crop yields, which, combined with population increases, would mean "considerable food security challenges for vulnerable countries in the future".

The findings came as the world's governments gathered in Madrid for a critical UN conference on the climate. On Monday, the UN secretary general, António Guterres, warned that though the technology and economic means to fight climate chaos were available, political will was lacking.

He called on world leaders and govern-

ments to pay heed to young people, who were "showing remarkable leadership and mobilisation".

The latest WMO figures showed the pattern of warming was growing stronger, warned Keith Shine, regius professor of meteorology and climate science at the University of Reading.

"Each of the past four decades has been 0.1 to 0.2C warmer than the decade before. Carbon dioxide levels have continued their relentless rise, and methane levels have grown much more rapidly than in the previous decade. Unless things start to change markedly, it is going to get harder and harder to meet the goals of the Paris agreement."

While average temperatures may seem to be only gradually creeping up over decades, this disguises the true impact on lives, explained Grant Allen, professor of atmospheric physics at the University of Manchester.

"This [temperature rise] does not simply mean slightly warmer summers, it means an increased frequency of extreme weather globally – droughts, heatwaves, flooding and changing patterns in the frequency and intensity of tropical cyclones.

"These impacts are real and happening now and place huge pressures on communities and countries – put simply, these impacts make for a more unstable world, and are already having profound impacts on our ecosystems and biodiversity."

(Source: The Guardian)

## 50C heat could become the norm in Australia, experts say



Hundreds of climate records were broken in just 90 days in Australia as temperatures soared and rainfall dried up, according to a new report.

The findings are detailed in a report by the Climate Council of Australia (CCA), which says climate change is "supercharging extreme weather events, putting Australian lives, our economy and our environment at risk".

By 2040, researchers warn, temperatures of 50C could become commonplace in Sydney and Melbourne unless global warming is limited to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels – the most ambitious target set under the Paris Agreement.

The UN's landmark IPCC report warned humanity now has less than 12 years to achieve this aim, which cannot occur without "unprecedented" change.

The hottest temperature on record for Melbourne is 46.4C, logged in February 2009.

While the CCA report found 206 climate records were broken last summer – including record-high temperatures and record-low rainfall – it says that "the summer of 2019-20 is shaping up as another terrible trifecta of heatwaves, droughts and bushfires".

Temperatures have already soared to a record 40C this spring, sparking deadly bushfires in New South Wales and south Queensland that killed at least six people and up to 1,000 koalas, which are vulnerable to extinction.

Fire season is starting earlier and lasting longer, according to the report, with bushfires seen as early as August this year.

"Climate change is supercharging the extreme weather events we are witnessing," said the report's author, Professor Will Steffen.

"We have seen temperature records smashed, bushfires in winter and a prolonged drought. Climate change is influencing all of these things."

Eastern Australia is currently plagued by drought, said the Climate Council's chief executive, Amanda McKenzie, with no significant rain in sight to dampen its impact on rural and regional communities, farming, water supplies and the natural environment.

It is the third year in a row that crops have been threatened by drought, with national summer crop production forecast to fall by 20 per cent to 2.1 million tonnes.

"These heatwaves can have severe effects on human health, including both direct heat illnesses such as heat exhaustion and indirect illnesses such as cardiovascular failure," said Ms McKenzie.

Echoing a message from UN director general Antonio Guterres on Monday ahead of the UN's climate change conference (COP25) in Madrid, in which he berated world leaders for their inaction on climate change, the report attacks a decade of "rancorous and divisive politics".

"Nowhere is this tension between the need for urgent action and ideologically driven? denial and inaction more evident than in Australia," Professor Steffen writes.

(Source: The Independent)

## Tackling degraded oceans could mitigate climate crisis – report



Halting overfishing and the plastic pollution of the oceans could help tackle the climate emergency by improving the degraded state of the world's biggest carbon sink, a report has found.

The oceans absorb both the excess heat generated by our greenhouse gas emissions, and absorb carbon dioxide itself, helping to reduce the impacts of climate chaos. But we are rapidly reaching the limits of the oceans' absorptive capacity as our pillage of marine life is disrupting vital ecosystems and the natural carbon cycle.

Creating ocean sanctuaries and forging a new treaty to protect the oceans, with a target of safeguarding at least 30% of the oceans by 2030, could restore many areas to health and combat global heating, according to the report entitled Hot Water: the climate crisis and the urgent need for ocean protection, published by Greenpeace International on Wednesday.

Phytoplankton such as algae, for instance, transform dissolved carbon dioxide into organic carbon, which then forms part of the food chain. Gradually some of this sinks to the sea bottom where it is buried in sediment. Without the biological carbon pump that this entails concentrations of carbon in the atmosphere today would be about 50% higher, according to estimates cited in the report.

Krill – a species of small fish – also form a vital part of the carbon cycle in the seas as they move through levels of the ocean, and play a big role in the diet of larger species. But krill populations have been in long-term decline since the 1970s due to pollution, overfishing and climate change.

Marine life at the other end of the scale also plays an important role. Large baleen whales are estimated to store 910m tonnes

less carbon than they did before commercial whaling began, Greenpeace noted, while working to rebuild key whale populations would remove 160,000 tonnes of carbon every year.

"The ocean's biology is one of our best allies in the fight against climate change," said Louisa Casson, oceans campaigner at Greenpeace UK. "But over-exploitation and our addiction to fossil fuels have pushed our ocean to the brink of collapse. Ocean protection is climate action – if we can save our ocean, it can save us."

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recently highlighted the perils the oceans face from climate chaos, in its first report to focus solely on the marine environment. That also sounded the alarm over ocean acidification. The seas are now about 26% more acidic than in pre-industrial times, with damaging impacts on shellfish in particular.

Oceans are scheduled to be a key topic at the UN climate change meeting in Madrid, where governments are now discussing progress on the Paris climate change agreement. COP25, as the meeting is known, was scheduled to take place in Chile, a country with a coastline that stretches for more than 4,000 km and has a heavy reliance on the oceans. But political unrest meant COP25 was moved from Santiago to Spain.

(Source: The Guardian)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## \$7b to be allocated to retrofit, rebuild flood-devastated houses

A budget of 290 trillion rials (nearly \$7 billion) will be allotted to reconstruct and repair housing units destructed by flood in 18 provinces across the country, Mehdi Jamalinejad, deputy interior minister for urban and rural development has announced.

Flood has devastated some 169,377 housing units, 68,333 of which are beyond repair and must be reconstructed, he stated.

Moreover, household appliances of 109,832 families also have suffered damages, he further regretted.

He went on to say that 20,000 housing units, undergone devastation by recent flooding in Aq-Oala county in northern Golestan province, are under construction.

Non-repayable loans amounting to 25 trillion rials (nearly \$600 million) will be provided for retrofitting of houses, 7.4 trillion rials (around \$177 million) will also be earmarked to compensate for the infrastructure damages, he explained.

**PREFIX/SUFFIX**

**“co-, col-, com-, con-, cor-”**

■ **Meaning:** with or together

■ **For example:** What will it take for us to **coexist** in peace?

**PHRASAL VERB**

**Nose out**

■ **Meaning:** to find out or discover information, secrets, etc.

■ **For example:** He nosed out their plans.

**IDIOM**

**Crocodile tears**

■ **Explanation:** To shed crocodile tears means to shed false tears or show insincere grief

■ **For example:** Caroline pretended to be sad but we all knew her tears were crocodile tears.

اختصاص بیش از ۲۹ هزار میلیارد تومان برای بازسازی خانه های سیل زده

معاون عمران و توسعه امور شهری و روستایی وزیر کشور گفت: براساس مصوبه اخیر هیات وزیران مبلغ ۲۹ هزار و ۱۳۰ میلیارد ریال برای بازسازی و جبران خسارات ناشی از سیل در بخشهای مختلف ۱۸ استان پرداخت می شود.

بر اساس ارزیابی های انجام شده در ۲۱ استان کشور، بیش از ۱۶۹ هزار و ۳۷۷ واحد مسکونی شهری و روستایی در سیل های اخیر در کشور آسیب دیده اند که باید دوباره احداث شوند. جمالی نژاد بیان داشت: در اثر سیل به ۱۰۹ هزار و ۸۳۲ واحد مسکونی نیز خسارت معیشتی وارد شده است.

وی اضافه کرد: امروز ساخت ۲۰ هزار دستگاه واحد مسکونی که در سیل آسیب دیده بودند نیز در آق قلا شروع شد.

دبیر کمیته نوسازی و بازسازی قرارگاه بازسازی مناطق سیل زده در ادامه گفت: ۲۵ هزار میلیارد ریال تسهیلات قرض الحسنه و همچنین مبلغ ۷ هزار و ۴۶۰ میلیارد ریال برای مرمت زیرساخت های آسیب دیده از سیل پرداخت خواهد شد.



# Massive chaos as largest strike in years hits France for 2nd Day

A nationwide general strike has hit France for a second day in a row over planned pension reforms by the government, causing chaos across the country.

Schools remained closed on Friday and hospitals were understaffed. Reports said the cancellation of rush-hour trains into Paris has caused a huge traffic jam around the capital.

According to traffic app Styadin, traffic jams totaling more than 350 kilometers clogged the main roads in and around the capital as many commuters took to their cars.

On the first day of the general strike on Thursday, about a million workers held protests that later turned violent after police tear-gassed demonstrators in Paris.

The strike, the largest since 1995, was started against President Emmanuel Macron's plan to overhaul the pension system that would see workers retiring later or facing reduced payouts.

Hundreds of thousands of strikers paralyzed the transport system on the first day of industrial action which prompted closure of schools across the nation.

According to union leaders, more than 1.5 million people turned out across the country, with police using tear gas to disperse them.

Just in Paris alone, tens of thousands of



people took to the streets, while more than 6,000 police officers were deployed with a decree to forbid the protesters from gathering on the Champs-Élysées or at police stations.

Police in riot gear used tear gas and truncheons to disperse protesters near the Place de la République. The judiciary 57 people

were detained on Thursday.

Strikers on Friday were set to continue a similar pattern across the country, with widespread rail cancellations and disruption to flights expected across the nation.

In Paris, most of the metro system shut

down and hundreds of flights were expected to be cancelled.

Union leaders warned that the strike could last at least until Monday if the government did not take the right action.

"The strike is not going to stop tonight," said Philippe Martinez, secretary general of the CGT union, on Thursday.

Paris's bus and metro operator have said their walkout will last until Monday at the very least.

President Macron is already faced with a major challenge to his rule from "Yellow Vest" protesters, who have been holding weekly demonstrations for more than a year.

Trade union leaders are now calling on Macron to abandon his campaign promise to overhaul the retirement system.

The president has said he wants to simplify the country's complex retirement system, which comprises more than 40 different plans, many with different retirement ages and benefits.

The new system will introduce a "points system" for retirement, which will have a significant impact on the public sector.

Until now, the sector had enjoyed special retirement systems to compensate for difficult working conditions.

(Source: agencies)

## U.S. lawmakers work on articles of impeachment against Trump

Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives on Friday deliberate over what charges to bring against President Donald Trump, after Speaker Nancy Pelosi ordered the Judiciary Committee to draft formal articles of impeachment.

The committee could draft and recommend the articles by Dec. 12, after more than two months investigating, interviewing witnesses and holding hearings into whether the Republican president abused the power of his office.

In a televised announcement on Thursday, Pelosi said she had directed Jerrrold Nadler, the Judiciary panel's chairman, to draw up the formal charges, which will subsequently be put for a vote in the full House.

She called it a historic day.

"It was taking us across a threshold on this that we just had no choice. I do hope that it would be remembered in a way that honors the vision of our founders, what they

had in mind for establishing a democracy," Pelosi told CNN later Thursday.

At the heart of the Democratic-led House impeachment inquiry is Trump's request that Ukraine launch an investigation targeting Joe Biden. The former vice president is a top contender for the Democratic nomination to face Trump in the November 2020 presidential election.

Trump denies wrongdoing and has not cooperated with the investigation, which he calls a hoax. He could face an impeachment charge of obstruction of Congress in addition to one alleging abuse of power. Some lawmakers and legal experts have speculated that he could also face charges of bribery or obstruction of justice.

After refusing all requests to hand over documents and ordering administration officials not to testify, Trump faces another deadline on Friday.

(Source: Reuters)

## The lady and the hague: Myanmar leader Suu Kyi courts home audience

The last time Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi traveled to western Europe, she was feted as the freshly elected civilian ruler of a fledgling democracy who had brought an end to half a century of military dictatorship.

When the Nobel peace prize laureate returns next week, her first trip to the region since a 2017 military crackdown on Rohingya Muslims in western Myanmar, it will be to face accusations of genocide, alongside the army she spent much of her life battling.

According to Reuters, Gambia, a tiny, mainly Muslim West African state backed by the 57-nation Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), lodged a lawsuit at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) last month against Myanmar for genocide, including mass murder and rape.

Myanmar denies the allegations, and Suu Kyi's office said she would fly to The

Hague for the first hearings, from Dec. 10, to "defend the national interest".

"There is a discrepancy between the opinion of Myanmar and the international community," said Myo Nyunt, the senior spokesman for her National League for Democracy Party. "She has to explain what has really taken place in northern Rakhine."

Her decision to attend took some by surprise. People close to her with strong international connections voiced concerns it could further tarnish her image abroad, according to two people familiar with the discussions.

But at home the announcement has unleashed a wave of popular support, with the leader who spent 15 years under house arrest for defying the army lauded as once again championing the interests of the people against a common enemy.

## Revealed: Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib targeted in far-right fake news operation

Two Muslim U.S. congresswomen have been targeted by a vast international operation that exploits far-right pages on Facebook to inflame Islamophobia for profit, a Guardian investigation has found.

A mysterious Israeli-based group uses 21 Facebook pages to churn out more than a thousand coordinated fake news posts per week to more than a million followers around the world. It milks the traffic for revenue from digital advertising.

Ilhan Omar of Minnesota and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, who earlier this year became the first Muslim women to serve in the U.S. Congress, have been singled out for vicious attacks by the coordinated effort.

Somali-born Omar is the most frequent target. She has been mentioned in more than 1,400 posts since the network began two years ago. Tlaib has been mentioned nearly 1,200 times. Both totals are far higher than any other member of Congress.

Omar and Tlaib are members of a group of progressive women of color known as "the squad" that also includes Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts. They have been subject to racist insults from Donald Trump.

The Guardian uncovered contacts between a group of mysterious Israel-based accounts and 21 far-right Facebook pages across the U.S., Australia, the UK, Canada, Austria, Israel and Nigeria.

The posts exacerbate Islamophobia by amplifying far-right parties and vilifying Muslim and leftwing politicians. Their content is a blend of distorted news and pure fabrication.

An analysis by Queensland University of Technology's digital media research centre indicated a single entity is coordinating the publication of content across the Facebook pages.

Using web archiving services and domain registry information, the Guardian has been able to confirm a key figure in the network is Ariel Elkaras, a thirtysomething jewelry salesman and online operator living on the outskirts of the Israeli city of Tel Aviv.

Several of the network's websites were either taken down

or had large amounts of content removed soon after the Guardian approached Elkaras for comment. Public posts on his Facebook profile were also deleted.

Elkaras did not respond to multiple requests for comment via email and phone, but the Guardian was able to track him down in the Israeli town of Lod, near Tel Aviv, where he denied involvement in the network. "It's nothing related to me," he said through a translator.

The uncovering of the network is likely to fuel concerns that Facebook is failing to tackle disinformation and hate groups ahead of next year's presidential election in the U.S.

Abbas Barzegar, director of research and advocacy at the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said: "Spreading disinformation and faux-reporting through pre-networked social media accounts and pseudo-news websites has been the preferred tactic of the Islamophobia industry for a very long time."

"These actors create entire media and information ecosystems that inscribe dangerous ideas and narratives in audiences across the world. The impact isn't personal prejudice, alone. Rather, such disinformation impacts our political climate, actual laws, policies and overall culture."

Somali-born Omar, the first member of the House of Representatives to wear a hijab in the chamber, has been subject to hundreds of online death threats. In September she accused Trump of putting her life at risk after the president retweeted a post that falsely claimed she partied on the anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Omar told the Guardian: "As this report makes clear, foreign interference – whether by individuals or governments – is still a grave threat to our democracy. These are malicious actors operating in a foreign country, Israel, spreading misinformation and hate speech to influence elections in the United States. The goal of these anti-Muslim hate campaigns is clear – they put Muslim lives here and around the world at risk and undermine our country's commitment to religious pluralism."

She also slammed Facebook for its role in allowing users to spread misinformation.



"I've said it before and I'll say it again: Facebook's complicity is a threat to our democracy. It has become clear that they do not take seriously the degree to which they provide a platform for white nationalist hate and dangerous misinformation in this country and around the world. And there is a clear reason for this: they profit off it. I believe their inaction is a grave threat to people's lives, to our democracy and to democracy around the world."

"When private corporations don't act, we as a nation need to think seriously about ways to address the spread of misinformation while protecting core values like free speech."

When the Guardian notified Facebook of its investigation, the company removed several pages and accounts "that appeared to be financially motivated", a spokesperson said in a statement.

"These pages and accounts violated our policy against spam and fake accounts by posting clickbait content to drive people to off-platform sites," the spokesperson said.

"We don't allow people to misrepresent themselves on Facebook and we've updated our inauthentic behavior policy to further improve our ability to counter new tactics."

(Source: Guardian)

## Sudan's new PM wants to withdraw troops from Yemen

Sudan's new Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok has vowed to withdraw troops from the Saudi-led war in Yemen, saying his country's role should be limited to assisting in a political resolution of the conflict.

"The conflict in Yemen has no military solution, whether from us or from anywhere in the world," Hamdok told the Atlantic Council, a U.S.-based think tank, on Thursday.

He added that the war "has to be resolved through political means," and that his country will seek to "help our brothers and sisters in Yemen and play our role with the rest to help them address this".

Sudan has been one of the main contributors to the so-called Saudi coalition against

Yemen, formed in 2015 in a bid to install a pro-Saudi government in Sana'a and crush Yemen's Houthi Ansarallah movement.

According to reports, up to 40,000 Sudanese troops were deployed in the country during the peak of the conflict in 2016-2017.

Late October, however, Sudanese officials said the country had withdrawn thousands of troops from Yemen, with only a "few thousand" remaining.

Speaking on Thursday, Hamdok said "not many" Sudanese forces remain in Yemen.

Hamdok, who is leading the country's transitional government in a power-sharing pact with the military, further stated that he will be "absolutely" able to withdraw the

remaining troops from Yemen.

The new prime minister said his government had "inherited" the deployment in Yemen from Sudan's former president Omar Hassan al-Bashir who was ousted following a popular uprising against his rule in April.

Hamdok pledged to "address" the country's involvement in the Saudi-led war "in the near future" without further elaborating on the matter.

While Sudanese officials have abstained from publishing official casualty numbers in Yemen, Yemen's armed forces have said a total 4,253 Sudanese troops have been killed in the conflict.

The developments come as the Saudi-led

mission in Yemen has come to a standstill due to the resistance and increasingly sophisticated attacks of Yemeni forces.

Earlier this year, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Riyadh's most influential partner in the war, was reported to have withdrawn most of its troops from Yemen.

UAE officials have reached the conclusion that the war has become "unwinnable" and that the Houthis will eventually "have a role in the future in Yemen", reports said.

Fearing a long-lasting quagmire in Yemen, Riyadh has also been reportedly seeking to negotiate an end to the conflict through discussions with the Houthis.

(Source: Press TV)

## Ayatollah Sistani says new PM must be chosen without foreign interference

➤ Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani said protests are effective in hastening needed reforms on the condition that they "are not drawn to violent acts, chaos and destruction."

"Conserving the peaceful nature of the protests and keeping them far from violence and destruction is very important and everyone needs to unite in achieving such," a representative of Ayatollah Sistani said as he delivered the top cleric's sermon.

The top cleric added that the protesters should not allow rioters to infiltrate the rallies and target "security forces and destroy public and private property" just as protecting the lives of protesters is the responsibility of the security forces.

During his statements, Ayatollah Sistani also said that a new prime minister must be chosen "without any foreign interference" and partisan politics after the incumbent Adel Abdul-Mahdi tendered his resignation a week ago.

"We hope a new head of government and its members will be chosen within the constitutional deadline" of 15 days since the resignation was approved in parliament on Sunday, Ayatollah Sistani said.

(Source: agencies)

## Iraqi demonstrators condemned foreign intervention in the country

Similar protests were being held in Baghdad and other cities on Friday.

The developments come as nearly two months of protests have rocked primarily Baghdad and the southern areas of Iraq. The protesters have been expressing frustration with a failing economy and have demanded reforms.

The rallies have, however, turned into violent confrontations on numerous occasions.

Since October 1, more than 300 people have been killed in the country, according to the Iraqi parliament's human rights commission.

(Source: agencies)

## UK's Labor leader says leaked report exposes PM Johnson's Brexit "fraud"

British opposition Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn said Friday he had a confidential government report which showed there would be customs checks between Northern Ireland and mainland Britain under a Brexit deal negotiated by Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

"This is the cold, hard evidence that categorically shows the impact Johnson's damaging Brexit deal will have on large parts of our country," Corbyn said in a speech in London.

Johnson's main campaigning message ahead of next week's election is that he would 'get Brexit done' three years after the 2016 referendum, but Corbyn said the slogan was misleading.

He said the prime minister wanted Britons to vote blind of the facts, saying the leaked government document revealed that there would be customs declarations and security checks between Britain and Northern Ireland which he argued contradicted Johnson's claim there would be no border in the Irish sea.

Labor's Brexit plan is to negotiate a new deal with the European Union to include a customs union and then hold another referendum on whether to accept it, although Corbyn himself has vowed to remain neutral.

"Once the decision has been made we will need a prime minister able to speak to both sides if we are to bring the country together," Corbyn said. "I think we've had just about enough of this division."

(Source: daily Star)

## Russia, Turkey working on new S-400 missile contract

Russia and Turkey are working on a contract for the delivery of a new batch of Russian S-400 missile systems, the Interfax news agency cited a senior official at a Russian military cooperation agency as saying Friday.

Moscow hopes to seal a deal to supply Turkey with more S-400 systems in the first half of next year, the head of Russian state arms exporter Rosoboronexport said last month.

Amid already strained bilateral ties, Washington has suspended Ankara from the U.S. F-35 stealth fighter jet program, in which it was a producer and buyer, to penalize it for buying S-400 batteries this year.

(Source: Interfax)

## France to convene meeting to mobilize support for Lebanon

France plans to convene a meeting of an international support group for Lebanon Dec. 11 to mobilize assistance for the country as it grapples with an acute economic crisis, a Lebanese government official said Friday.

A European official said invitations had been sent out for the Dec. 11 meeting in Paris. The Lebanese official said Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were expected to be invited.

"It is a meeting to attempt to mobilize assistance to help Lebanon deal with the acute crisis that it is facing," the Lebanese official said.

(Source: Reuters)



## Man Utd announce tie-up with China online giant Alibaba

Manchester United on Friday announced a partnership with China's technology giant Alibaba Group, boosting the club's engagement with its Chinese fanbase.

The partnership will see Manchester United content, including selected first-team matches, highlights and localised original productions, available to around 700 million consumers across Alibaba's platforms, according to the Premier League club.

There will also be a dedicated Manchester United channel on Alibaba's video-streaming platform, Youku.

It will feature Academy, women's and first-team tour games, plus first-team matches shown on-demand and global and China-specific content.

The partnership will also involve collaborating to create a future Manchester United flagship store on Tmall, Alibaba's online retail platform, which will become the official online marketplace store selling Manchester United merchandise to Chinese fans.

"We're proud of our passionate and loyal following around the world and our Chinese fans are a huge part of that," said Manchester United Group managing director Richard Arnold.

"We are always looking for new ways to engage with fans there and this partnership with Alibaba enables them to connect with the club directly through one of China's most popular video streaming platforms."

Alibaba Group president Michael Evans said: "Manchester United is one of the most popular and successful football teams in the world, with a sizable and passionate fan base in China.

"We share the same goal, which is to provide fans with one-of-a-kind online content consumption and shopping that leverages the latest technology."

(Source: Mirror)

## Pele's last Brazil jersey sells for 30,000 euros in Italy

The jersey worn by Brazilian football legend Pele during his final match for the five-time world champions has sold for 30,000 euros (\$33,000) in an auction in Italy.

The three-time World Cup winner wore the jersey in a friendly against Yugoslavia at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro in July 1971, the last time he played for Brazil.

Pele, 79, regarded as among the greatest footballers of all-time, scored 77 goals for Brazil in 92 appearances.

The shirt was the highlight of objects which went under the hammer at the Bolaffi auction house in Turin on Thursday.

Other sporting memorabilia included the yellow jersey won by Italian cycling star Fausto Coppi on his way to victory in the 1952 Tour de France, which sold for 25,000 euros.

A rare blue Juventus jersey worn by Italian defender Luciano Spinosi in the final of the 1971 UEFA Cup sold for 9,400 euros.

Another shirt worn by Argentina legend Diego Maradona during his time playing for Napoli in the 1989-90 season sold for 7,500 euros.

A bat used by US basketball great Michael Jordan during his brief foray into baseball fetched 425 euros.

(Source: Goal)

## Silva sacked as Everton manager

Everton have sacked manager Marco Silva after 18 months, with the club in the Premier League relegation zone after their Merseyside derby humiliation.

Wednesday's 5-2 defeat by Liverpool at Anfield was their ninth of the season and leaves them 18th in the Premier League after three successive losses.

Silva, who took charge in May 2018, won 24 and lost 24 of his 60 games.

Shanghai SIPG boss Vitor Pereira is a contender to succeed Silva, while David Moyes' return can not be ruled out.

Former striker Duncan Ferguson has been put in temporary charge and will manage the side against Chelsea on Saturday.

The club said they aim to appoint a new manager "as swiftly as possible".

Everton are now searching for their fourth permanent boss since Roberto Martinez was sacked in May 2016.

Former Everton manager Moyes has been considered as a potential interim successor, but the suggestion has sparked a largely negative reaction from supporters and it remains to be seen whether majority shareholder Farhad Moshiri and his boardroom colleagues ignore that and invite the 56-year-old Scot to return.

Moyes spent 11 years as Everton manager, and his return has been seen by fans as a retrograde step given his lack of success since leaving for Manchester United in 2013.

(Source: BBC)

## Amazon 'thrilled' after Premier League debut

Amazon Prime has declared its first foray into the Premier League market a success, saying its coverage of the midweek programme was one of the biggest-ever streaming events in the United Kingdom.

The streaming giant made its debut in English top-flight football this week by showing all 10 matches, breaking up the duopoly of Sky and BT Sport.

Amazon said the biggest day ever for Prime sign-ups in the UK was set on Tuesday before the record was broken 24 hours later.

A six-game fixture list on Wednesday included the Merseyside derby between Liverpool and Everton at Anfield and Jose Mourinho's return to Manchester United as Tottenham manager.

"We're delighted that millions of football fans enjoyed watching Amazon's first ever round of Premier League matches on Prime Video," said Alex Green, managing director of Prime Video Sport Europe.

"We are excited to be the first ever broadcaster to bring fans all 10 games live in a fixture round.

"We are thrilled and humbled by the positive response from Prime members."

As well as the six games on Wednesday, the Crystal Palace-Bournemouth and Burnley-Manchester City games were broadcast on Tuesday and the Arsenal-Brighton and Sheffield United-Newcastle matches were shown on Thursday.

(Source: Eurosport)

# Romelu Lukaku & Chris Smalling criticize 'Black Friday' headline

Inter Milan striker Romelu Lukaku says the 'Black Friday' headline used by Italian newspaper Corriere dello Sport is "one of the dumbest" he has seen, while Roma's Chris Smalling condemned it as "wrong and insensitive".

The headline accompanied pictures of Lukaku and Smalling prior to last night's match between their two sides.

"You guys keep fuelling the negativity and the racism issue," Lukaku said.

Smalling urged the newspaper's editors to "understand the power they possess".

Roma, along with Inter's rivals AC Milan, announced later on Thursday they will not work with Corriere dello Sport until January.

A joint statement released at the same time by Roma and AC Milan said: "We have decided to ban Corriere dello Sport from our training facilities for the rest of the year and our players will not carry out any media activities with the newspaper during this period.

"Both clubs are aware the actual newspaper article associated with the 'Black Friday' headline did portray an anti-racist message and for this reason we have only banned Corriere dello Sport until January.

"We remain totally committed to tackling racism."

Smalling is on loan from Manchester United, whose Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said the club had been in touch with the England



defender.

At a news conference on Friday, Solskjaer said: "When you see that paper, you say: 'Wow. Really? Is that possible?' It's the worst front page I've ever seen. It has to be.

"Of course we have been in touch with Chris, just so he knows that we'll back him and we support him, and with Romelu as well."

Corriere dello Sport defended the "innocent" headline in a comment piece on its website.

"It was only a way to celebrate diversity,"

the newspaper said.

Earlier on Thursday, Roma's chief operating officer Francesco Calvo said he did not think the headline was a "clear case" of racism, but called on people in positions of authority - including clubs, players and media - to be more careful with the language they choose.

"This isn't like the racism we've experienced many others in Italy in the recent period, this is superficial and unfortunate of people not understanding of how messages can be mixed up in words and perceived in

## SEA Games: Athlete finally wins gold - 38 years after debut



It was a 38-year wait - but the hard work paid off for Christina Tham at the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in the Philippines this week.

Tham first represented Singapore at the SEA Games - a regional Olympic-style event - in 1981, winning silver in swimming at the age of 12.

Now aged 50, she returned to the games and finally went one better.

Tham won not one, but two gold medals in underwater hockey - a sport making its debut in the games.

"I never thought I would be back [at the] SEA Games and winning golds and scoring goals," she said.

"I never thought I could perform at this level again."

Tham got into swimming aged seven, when her father had a near-miss while canoeing on a lake during a family trip to Malaysia.

Her father, who was in his late 40s, could not swim and initially resisted wearing a life jacket - but relented on her mother's insistence.

"I remember I was in another canoe across the lake when I heard a loud shrill," Tham told the BBC. "I saw my dad floating on the water, held up by the life jacket. That saved his life."

After her dad was rescued, he quickly signed up the whole family for swimming

lessons - and Tham hasn't stopped swimming since.

At the age of 12, she represented Singapore at the 1981 SEA Games in Manila, claiming her first silver in the 4 x 100m medley relay.

The SEA Games, which are held every two years, sees athletes from the region compete in a variety of events.

"I was very young and didn't appreciate the significance [of my] achievement. I come from a typical Singaporean Chinese family where [you're] expected to [accept] achievements with modesty," she says.

"It was only after I became an adult that I realized the enormity of my achievements - I was 12 and had won a medal in the SEA Games and was in the top 10% in the country in the [national examinations that year]."

Two years later, she was back at the SEA Games, clinching another silver in the 200m breaststroke.

But that's where her journey as an athlete stopped - at least for the next three decades or so.

Tham pursued a career in the legal industry, training as a solicitor and eventually heading up her own section of a legal department within a real estate company.

It wasn't until 2005 that her sporting career resumed.

(Source: BBC)

## Chelsea transfer ban cut by CAS, club free to sign players in January



Chelsea are free to sign new players in the January transfer window after a FIFA-imposed ban was reduced on appeal by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Friday.

The ban, imposed following violations in the recruitment of minors, was reduced from two transfer windows to one, which Chelsea already served in the summer.

A fine was also reduced from 600,000 Swiss francs (\$607,000; £462,000) to half that amount by the Lausanne-based court.

A CAS statement said that Chelsea were guilty of violating rules related to the international transfer and registration of minors, "but for a significantly smaller number of players", concluding that they were only guilty of one third of the violations found by FIFA.

In addition, the breaches of other transfer rules "were found to be less serious than those attributed to Chelsea FC by FIFA".

The initial ban was announced by football's world governing body in February, but Chelsea had always denied wrongdoing.

It followed a FIFA probe into Chelsea's signing of foreign under-18 players, including the club's former forward Bertrand Traore, a Burkina Faso international who now plays for French Ligue 1 club Lyon.

Traore signed professional forms for Chelsea in 2013 at the age of 18 but was not registered until January the following year.

At first they appealed to FIFA who par-

a bad way," Calvo told BBC Radio 5 Live.

"All of us who work in football have a bigger responsibility, which is giving the right message to people, being a role model and trying to educate people.

"This is what everyone should do, including this newspaper. We should be very careful with the words we use.

"This only allows people to talk about racism in Italy instead of giving a message against racism because people will only read the headline and not the article."

■ Solskjaer brands 'Black Friday' headline 'worst front page ever'

Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has branded Corriere dello Sport's "Black Friday" headline "the worst front page" he has ever seen and offered support to Chris Smalling and Romelu Lukaku.

Solskjaer says it is "incredible" that the newspaper decided to go ahead with the headline.

"When you see that paper you say: 'Wow. Really? Is that possible?'. It's the worst front page I've ever seen. It has to be," said the Norwegian at his press conference on Friday.

"Of course we have been in touch with Chris, just so he knows that we'll back him and we support him, and with Romelu as well.

"Wow, that's incredible, and at least we don't see that here... that has to be stamped down (on)."

(Source: Staff & Agency)

## Russia braces for four-year Olympic ban over doping scandal

Russia could be hit with a four-year Olympic ban on Monday for flouting anti-doping rules, a punishment local officials have said would be unfair and part of a malicious Western attempt to destroy sport in the country.

Russia, which has tried to showcase itself as a global sports power, has been embroiled in doping scandals since a 2015 report commissioned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) found evidence of mass doping in Russian athletics.

Its doping woes have snowballed since, with many of its athletes sidelined from the past two Olympics and the country stripped of its flag altogether at last year's Pyeongchang Winter Games as punishment for state-sponsored doping cover-ups at the 2014 Sochi Games.

Russian sport could enter four more years of gloom on Monday when WADA's executive committee convenes in Lausanne to rule on whether to ban the country from hosting major sporting events and to force its clean athletes to compete without their flag or anthem for four years.

WADA has accused Moscow of tampering with laboratory data by planting fake evidence and deleting files linked to positive doping tests that could have helped identify drug cheats.

Sports Minister Pavel Kolobkov last month attributed the discrepancies in the laboratory data to technical issues. Other senior officials have likened the proposed punishment to broader attempts by Western countries to hold Russia back.



"The more these types of decisions are made, the better it is... for their anti-Russian argument," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov complained last week.

■ 'Unhealthy culture'

International sports bodies and officials have heavily criticised Russia over its latest doping offences, alleging that the country has once again violated the ethos of sport.

"Russia has not learned, and is not prepared to learn, from its serious indiscretions," the Institute of National Anti-Doping Organizations (iNADO) said in a statement this week.

Yuri Gansu, the head of Russian anti-doping agency RU-SADA, has been one of the few critical voices inside Russia.

"The problem is that we have four years ahead of us and for now, judging by the reaction of the current sports authorities, I don't see any prospect of resolving these issues," Gansu told Reuters.

RUSADA is set to be stripped of its accreditation for the second time in four years as part of the same doping sanctions.

Gansu pointed to what he said was an unhealthy culture among Russia's sporting authorities which he said was resistant to change. Officials had used destructive methods to handle a crisis that could have been resolved by honestly addressing issues, he said.

"I don't think we need to... try to find those guilty in other countries and say that the main source of evil is the West or the East, or anyone else," he said. "That's nonsense. The main problem is our culture, the culture inside the sports world."

Gansu said he hoped President Vladimir Putin, who has yet to comment on WADA's recommendations to punish Russia, would order serious reform of the country's sports administration.

"In our country with these traditions, autocratic and bureaucratic, the presidential level is needed to make decisions to change," he said. "I really hope that the time has come for serious changes."

(Source: Reuters)



# Iran discover AFC Futsal Championship 2020 fate

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran have **d e s k** learned their fate at the AFC Futsal Championship Turkmenistan 2020 at the official draw which was conducted at Ashgabat’s Olympia Hotel on Friday. The ceremony separated the 16 qualified teams into four groups ahead of next year’s competition, where the best in Asian futsal will compete for the title of Continental champions. Defending champions Iran were drawn in Group D alongside Korea Republic, Saudi Arabia and Southeast Asian champions Thailand. Host nation Turkmenistan will begin the competition with what is sure to be a hotly anticipated clash against tournament debutants Oman on February 26, before rounding their Group A commitments with matches against Tajikistan and Vietnam. The final will be played on March 8, the-afc.com reported. Newly crowned AFC Futsal Player of the Year Tomoki Yoshikawa will lead Japan in an intriguing Group B, which also includes Lebanon, Kyrgyz Republic and Kuwait, while four-time runners-up Uzbekistan will begin their campaign against Indonesia after both sides were drawn in Group C, which also contains Bahrain and China PR. The AFC Futsal Championship is Asia’s flagship international futsal competition,

AFC FUTSAL CHAMPIONSHIP TURKMENISTAN 2020			
GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D
 TURKMENISTAN	 JAPAN	 UZBEKISTAN	 IR IRAN
 VIETNAM	 LEBANON	 BAHRAIN	 THAILAND
 TAJIKISTAN	 KYRGYZ REP.	 CHINA PR	 KOREA REP.
 OMAN	 KUWAIT	 INDONESIA	 SAUDI ARABIA

also serving as the final stage of FIFA Futsal World Cup qualifying, with the top five sides in Turkmenistan to represent the Continent at Lithuania 2020. With 12 titles in the 15 previous editions of the competition, Iran are the most successful side in AFC Futsal Championship history, with three-time champions Japan the only other nation to have lifted the trophy.



## IPL: Persepolis defeat Zob Ahan in Isfahan after nine years

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team **d e s k** defeated Zob Ahan in Iran Professional League (IPL) in Isfahan after nine years. On Thursday, the Reds earned a 3-0 win over their hosts at the Fooladshahr Stadium. Mehdi Torabi gave the visiting team the lead from the penalty spot in the 16th minute. Ali Alipour made it 2-0 in the 58th minute and Torabi was on target once again in the 65th minute. Earlier on the day, Esteghlal moved to top of the table with

a 1-0 win over thanks to Cheick Diabate’s second-half goal. Sepahan were held to a 2-2 draw by Nassaji in Ghaemshahr and Tractor played out a goalless draw against rock-bottom Shahin Bushehr in Tabriz. Gol Gohar Sirjan drew 0-0 with Naft Masjed Soleyman and Sanat Naft defeated Paykan 3-2. Esteghlal sit atop the table with 25 points. Sepahan are second with 24 points and one game in hand. Shahr Khodro and Persepolis are third and fourth with 23 and 22 points, respectively.

## Iran victorious over S. Korea at Asia-Pacific Goalball Champs



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran **d e s k** defeated South Korea 9-7 at the IBSA Goalball Asia-Pacific Championships on Friday. Team Melli, who had started the competition with a 16-10 win over Thailand at the Chiba Port Arena in Chiba, Japan, will take on Indonesia and China on Saturday. In the men’s event seven teams will be in action until Dec. 10, while six women teams will compete together. The winners of each of the men’s and women’s competition, if not already qualified, will secure a ticket to Tokyo 2020. Iran will hope to better their silver medal from 2017 when they lost out to China 10-2 in the final.

The team were also the top ranked Asian side from the 2018 Worlds, finishing just one place ahead of their rivals in sixth. “The team’s ultimate ambition is to get a Tokyo 2020 slot and stand on the podium. Securing the gold medal last year improved our motivation but needless to say, any winning sets expectations higher for the athletes and the team,” Mohammad Tabe, the Technical Director of the Iranian National Paralympic Committee, told IBSA. “Japan and Australia could be named as the strong teams, and of course, China, considering their presence in the final round of the 2018 Asian Para Games, despite our win against them, could be one of the strongest teams,” he added.

## Wilmots denies amicable agreement with Iran



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Belgian **d e s k** coach Marc Wilmots confirmed he has terminated his contract with the Iranian federation, but he denied a resolution had been reached. The ex-Ivory coast coach has left his role as coach of the Iran national team, just seven months after replacing Carlos Queiroz at the helm of the three-time Asian champions. He was appointed in May to lead Iran in their quest for a sixth World Cup appearance after Queiroz had secured back-to-back qualifications for the first time in the country’s history. “Contrary to the information apparently published in the Iranian press, no amicable agreement was reached between the Iranian Football Federation and me and my staff,” Wilmots said on Twitter.

“We are negotiating to find an amicable solution following the non-respect of the contractual obligations by the Iranian Football Federation and following my justified termination of the contract. The file being in the hands of my lawyers, I will not make any other comment,” he added. Under coaching of Wilmots, Iran have defeated Hong Kong and Cambodia and lost to Bahrain and Iraq in the 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asia Cup qualifiers. Team Melli sit in third place in Group C with six points, five points adrift of leaders Iraq. A source close to Iran football federation said the federation has negotiated with former Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic. The Croatian coach led Team Melli in 2006 FIFA World Cup and the federation has expressed an interest in bringing him back.

## Bento expects normal service from Korea Republic in regional meet

The likes of Son Heung-min and Hwang Hee-chan may not be a part of the Korea Republic squad but the target for the Taeguk Warriors in the 2019 EAFF E-1 Championship will be the same - playing their best. Head coach Paulo Bento’s squad for the regional tournament consists of players who play their club football in Korea Republic, China and Japan. The lone exception is Vancouver Whitecaps FC midfielder Hwang In-beom while the Europe-based players were not called up to allow them to focus on their club commitments. Bento, however, believes this is a chance for him to blend more players into the national team set-up ahead of Korea Republic resuming their Asian Qualifiers campaign in March for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023. Korea Republic ended the year second in Group H of the Asian Qualifiers following consecutive draws with DPR Korea and Lebanon. “We’ll maintain our philosophy and try to play the

best we can,” Bento said. “This is an important competition. We’ll try to figure out how some of the new faces blend in with the rest of the team. No matter which tournament you play, you have to work to get the best result possible.” Korea Republic will be defending the title they won in the last two editions and seeking a fifth overall but Bento said he is looking at the big picture heading into the tournament. “The biggest motivation for me is to continue developing this team. And if it brings the results and gives us the third straight championship, then so much the better.” The championship kicks off on Tuesday in Busan, with Korea Republic playing Hong Kong on Wednesday followed by China (December 15) and Japan (December 18). China will face Japan in the tournament opener on Tuesday. The women’s championship will see Korea Republic playing China on Tuesday with Japan and Chinese Taipei the other teams in the competition.

(Source: AFP)



## Iran wheelchair basketball team advance to Paralympic Games

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s men’s wheelchair basketball team booked a place at the 2020 Paralympic Games.



Team Melli defeated China 84-51 at the 2019 International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF) Asia Oceania Championships in Thai city Pattaya. Iran qualified for Tokyo as one of top four finishers. Iran’s women’s team also defeated Afghanistan and finished in fifth place. The IWBF Asia Oceania zone has four spots available for men and three for women at Tokyo 2020, with one spot in each already allocated to Japan as the host nation. Fourteen men’s teams and an event-record eight women’s teams will compete at the competitions, taking place at the Eastern National Sports Center and are scheduled to conclude on December 7.

## A bright future ahead of Iranian women footballers: Khosrowyar

Iranian football coach Katayoun Khosrowyar says the future is bright for the Iranian girls. The former Iran U-19 women football coach vied with Japan’s Asako Takakura for AFC Women Coach of the Year. In the 2019 AFC Annual Awards held in Hong Kong on Monday, Takakura was women’s coach of the year for a record seventh time. Khosrowyar is currently coaching Reign FC Academy in the U.S. but says the Iranian girls can earn more in the upcoming years. ■ It was a big step to be among the best Asian coaches. Did you ever think that you would be here? **Khosrowyar:** I’ve always tried to coach at the highest level possible in Asia and in the world. I knew that I could achieve my dreams with the Iranian girls team. I’ve always wanted to add my information and learn new tactics, not only in football but also in my life. ■ What did you talk about with AFC President Sheikh Salman in the ceremony? I told him the Iranian girls require more consideration because they can have a bright future. He confirmed that and said he is sorry since our team failed to qualify for next stage in the Asian championship. ■ Asako Takakura was named as the best Asian coach for the seventh time. Did you talk with him? She has been named as the best Asian coach in the past years. I’ve met him in the AFC meetings several times and she has always supported me. Japan is a good country in many aspects, especially in grassroots football. Experienced Takakura will promote growth of Iranian girls if she comes to Iran and I hope that this will happen despite US sanctions on our country. Iran has recently started in this section but can achieve more success in the future. (Source: the-afc)

## Four taekwondokas to represent Iran at World Grand Prix Final

**TASNIM** — Iran has participated at the World Taekwondo Grand Prix Final in Moscow, Russia with four representatives. A total of 128 athletes from 42 countries are competing at the Dynamo Sports Palace on December 6 and 7. The competition is the last opportunity for vital ranking points prior to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Arman Hadipour in men’s under-58 kilograms, Mirhashem Hosseini and Soroush Ahmadi in under-68kg and Sajad Mardani in over-80kg represent Iran in the prestigious competition.

## Squads revealed ahead of Qatar 2019 kick-off

The seven contenders at the FIFA Club World Cup Qatar 2019 have named the 23-man squads they hope will catapult them to global glory. It’s less than a week until kick-off, with fans across Qatar eagerly awaiting seeing the likes of Liverpool, Flamengo, Monterrey, Esperance Sportive de Tunis, Al Hilal SFC, Hienghene Sport and host side Al Sadd SC. The latter pair will get the tournament under way on Wednesday at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium. The announcement of the squads has revealed that we’ll have Europe, Africa and Asia’s top players, as according to UEFA, CAF and AFC, in the shape of Virgil van Dijk (Liverpool), Mohamed Salah (Liverpool) and Akram Afif (Al Sadd). With 161 players from 32 different countries, the tournament will certainly bring with it a global feel. As many as 18 of those have been here before, with the likes of Al Sadd and Monterrey captains Hassan Al Haydos and Jose Maria Basanta appearing at editions as far back as 2011. (Source: FIFA.com)



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## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The nearest people to prophets are those who are the wisest and most informed of their mission from God.

Imam Ali (AS)

## WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

### Painting



■ An exhibition of paintings by Aziz Anzabi is underway at Ehsan Gallery.

The exhibit named "One Way Trip" will run until December 11 at the gallery located at No. 22, East 14th St. in the Ajudanieh neighborhood. ■ Sohrab Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by a group of artists, including Mohammad Ehsai, Parvaneh Etemadi, Reza Bangiz, Iraj Zand, Jazeh Tabatabai and Farideh Lashai.

The exhibit titled "Along the Imagination" runs until December 12 at the gallery located at 142 Somayyeh St.



■ Paintings by Mina Mokhtarzadeh are on display in an exhibition at Golestan Gallery.

The exhibit will be running until December 11 at the gallery that can be found at 34 Kamasai St. in the Darus neighborhood.



■ A collection of paintings by Forugh Reyhani is currently on view in an exhibition at Shirin Gallery.

The exhibit entitled "Archetypes" will run until December 18 at the gallery located at No. 5, 13th St., Karim Khan Ave.

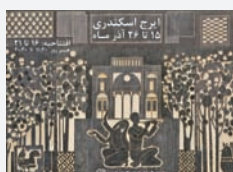


■ Amin Mirmoqaddam is showcasing his latest paintings in an exhibition at Saye Gallery. The exhibit named "Personification" will be running until December 11 at the gallery located at 3 Aqakhani Alley, Omidvar St. in the Niavaran neighborhood.



■ An exhibition of paintings by Hesam Dashti is underway at Shalman Gallery.

Entitled "Amnesia", the exhibit will run until December 11 at the gallery located at 27 Kavusi Alley, West Rudbar St., off Mirdamad Blvd.



■ Art Center Gallery is hosting an exhibition of paintings by Iraj Eskandari.

The exhibition runs until December 17 at the gallery, which can be found at 145 North Salimi St., Andarzgu Blvd. in the Qeitarieh neighborhood.

### Sculpture



■ An exhibition of sculptures by Goli Tavakkoli is underway at Elaheh Gallery.

The exhibition will continue until December 16 at the gallery located at 47 Golfam St., off Africa Ave.

### Multimedia



■ Paintings and sets of installation by Sudeh Davud are on display in an exhibition at Moon Gallery. The exhibition will be running until December 24 at the gallery located at 26 Golestan Blvd., Africa Ave.

### Installation



■ Sets of installation by Mona Shirazi, Mahsa Fathi, Mehri Seraj, Leili Ameri, Saba Kafil and three more artists are currently on display in an exhibit at Vaali Gallery. The exhibition titled "Backyard" runs until December 17 at the gallery located at No. 71, Khoddami St. off of Vanak Square.

### Drawing



■ A collection of drawings by Mehdi Hamed is on display in an exhibition at Homa Gallery. The exhibition named "Atrium" will run until December 17 at the gallery that can be found at No. 8, Fourth Alley, Sanai St., Karim Khan Ave.

# Gunther Uecker's "Tribute to Hafez" to move to Bushehr

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — After five showings in Tehran, Shiraz, Isfahan, Kerman and Rasht, German sculptor and op artist Gunther Uecker's exhibition "Tribute to Hafez" will move to the southern Iranian city of Bushehr for another showcase.

The exhibit is due to open in one of the historical sites of the city on December 31, the director of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Ehsan Aqai, said in a meeting with Fatemeh Karampur, the director of the Bushehr Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance Office, on Thursday.

Karampur also said that an exhibition of visual arts by Iranian artists will open on the sidelines of the exhibit.

"Tribute to Hafez" is currently on view at the Rasht Central Hall and will be running until December 21.

The collection has been inspired by the ghazals of Persian poet Hafez. Uecker has created a collection of graphical works in which the ghazals are transformed into colors and the sound of the poems into written images.

This method to translate spoken language into pictorial expressions has characterized the artist's oeuvre since the 1970s.

In 2016, Uecker first displayed his collection in Shiraz where the Mausoleum of Hafez lies. The Imam Ali (AS) Religious Arts Museum in Tehran, Isfahan Museum of Contemporary Art and Kerman Museum of Contemporary Art hosted the exhibition afterwards.



TMCA director Ehsan Aqai (C) and some cultural officials visit Gunther Uecker's exhibition "Tribute to Hafez" at the Rasht Central Hall. (Gilkhbar)

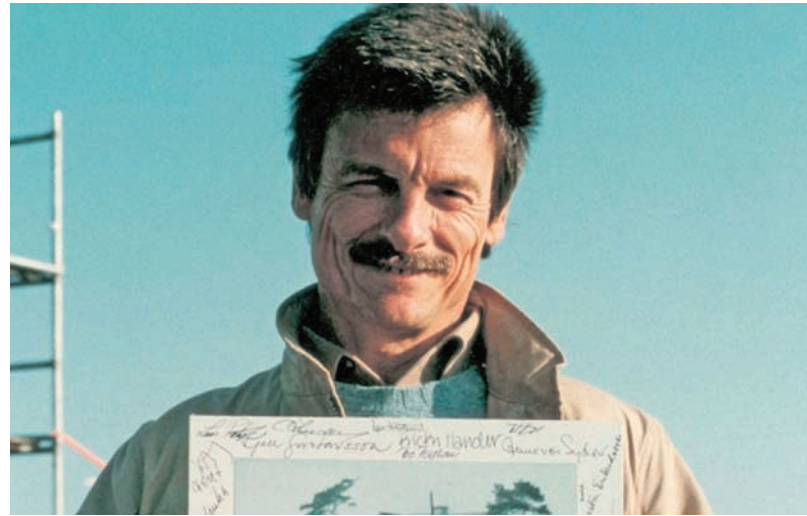
The 88-year-old Uecker is a member of the ZERO movement, best known for his signature use of nails arranged into tactile, sculptural paintings.

Uecker's oeuvre includes paintings, art

objects and installations as well as stage designs and films. He is mainly interested in the Eastern European avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s, but he is likewise fascinated by Asian cultures and their ideas.

His works can be seen in collections and at large fairs in both the West and the East. Uecker's artistic creativity reached a climax in 2000 with the prayer room he designed for the rebuilt Reichstag building in Berlin.

## Cinéma Vérité to screen eight biographical docs



A scene from "Andrey Tarkovsky, a Cinema Prayer" by Andrei Andreyevich Tarkovsky

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A lineup of eight biographical documentaries will go on screen in the Portrait section of the 13th Cinéma Vérité, Iran's major documentary film festival, the organizers announced on Friday.

"Andrey Tarkovsky, a Cinema Prayer", a documentary that chronicles the life story of the legendary Russian filmmaker by his son Andrei Andreyevich Tarkovsky, is the highlight of the lineup.

"Fellini Never-Ending", about the prominent Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini by his assistant Eugenio Cappuccio and "Flavioh - Tributo a Flavio Bucci", about the famous Italian actor Flavio Bucci and people who had an influence on his personal and artistic life by Riccardo Zinna, are among the films.

The lineup also includes "Forman vs. Forman", a co-production between the Czech

Republic and France by Czech directors Helena Trestikova and Jakub Hejna, "Talking about the Trees", a co-production of France, Sudan, Germany and Chad by Sudanese director Suhaib Gasmelbari and "The Ghost of Peter Sellers" by the Hungarian-born British director Peter Medak.

Also included are "Unstoppable: Sean Scully and the Art of Everything" by Nick Willing about the life of the extraordinary abstract British painter Sean Scully and "What We Left Unfinished", a co-production between the U.S. and Afghanistan by Afghan director Mariam Ghani about five unfinished fiction feature films from the Communist era in Afghanistan.

Organized by the Documentary and Experimental Film Center, the 13th edition of the Cinéma Vérité festival will open at Tehran's Charsu Cineplex on Monday and will continue until December 16.

## Iranian association honors writers Nahid Motamedi, Batul Momen, Manuchehr Salimi



A poster for honoring children's book writers Nahid Motamedi, Batul Momen and Manuchehr Salimi at the Iranian Association of Writers for Children and Youth on December 4, 2019.

**C U L T U R E d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Veteran children's book writers Nahid Motamedi, Batul Momen and Manuchehr Salimi were honored for their lifetime achievements by the Iranian Association of Writers for Children and Youth during a ceremony on Wednesday.

Speaking at the ceremony, director of the association Fereidun Amuzadeh-Khalili said that children's writers should build the wishes and dreams of children.

"Imagining children without wishes and dreams is unpleasant and indefensible," he added.

"Children's book writers have always written the most beautiful and most affectionate stories even during times of evil and wickedness.

Even during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, when people were suffering from the conflict, the writers narrated the pain and sorrow of the children from the southern region of the country in their stories for our children," he explained.

In her brief words, Motamedi expressed thanks to the association for organizing the ceremony and hopes that she can be serving children and young adults throughout her life.

Researcher and Persian antique tale collector Salimi next talked about his activities in children's literature.

Momen, who writes under the pseudonym of Azarmehr, recited one of her poetry for the participants.

The ceremony came to an end with the screening of a short film about the cultural activities of the honorees.

## Hoorakhsh unveils "The Last Fiction" game



A scene from the animated movie "The Last Fiction" by Iranian director Ashkan Rahgozar.

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Hoorakhsh Studio, the producer of Iranian director Ashkan Rahgozar's award-winning animation "The Last Fiction", has unveiled a video game based on the movie Tehran, the studio announced on Friday.

"The Last Fiction" recounts a story from Persian poet Ferdowsi's epic masterpiece Shahnameh. It is about Zahak's treacherous rise to the throne in Jamshid in Persia. The young and naive hero Afaridoun will have to save the kingdom and

its people from darkness. But he must first conquer his own demons in this portrayal of Persian mythology that reveals human nature.

The game includes ten characters of the Shahnameh with their own superpowers, and can be downloaded from Café Bazar and Sib Apps for free.

The animated movie "The Last Fiction", which is among the submissions for the 2020 Oscars consideration, is currently on screen at Iranian theaters.

## Artists' tax exemption a just decision?

**1 →** Addressing Nobakht, Hekmat said, "Mr. Nobakht! We are facing a serious situation; don't make it harder by your inept decisions. Collect taxes and spend them properly like all other countries in the world with prudence, if there still remains any prudence."

The storm of criticism caused the Culture Ministry to comment on the issue. Deputy Culture Minister for Legal Affairs Ali-Asghar Karandish said last Wednesday that artists and cultural organizations with high incomes are excepted from any tax exemption.

"We as the major cultural organization of the country believe actors, singers, institutes or any other organizations with a high income must pay tax," he added.

Everybody knows that taxes are levied to lead society

toward justice and balance. In Iran, there are people who live in houses, one of which is valued at about 10 trillion rials (about \$240 million) and there are also many people who cannot afford to eat a loaf of bread.

In such a society, the tax exemption should be more specific. The tax exemption for cultural and artistic activities may include people working in the entertainment industry, which makes enormous profits for them. Many of these people live in houses located in Busty Hills, a neighborhood in the town of Lavasan near Tehran, which is called the Beverly Hills of Iran.

The government lacks the necessary measures to prevent tax evasion activities by members of the private sector. However, workers and others with low incomes must pay their tax before they receive their salaries!



People visit the exhibition of the 7th Tehran Auction at the Parsian Azadi Hotel on July 4, 2017. (Honaronline)