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Oman trying to expand economic ties with Iran

TEHRAN — Omani minister of commerce and industry said his country is trying to boost its trade and economic ties with Iran, stressing that this goal can be achieved through more cooperation between the two sides' private sectors.

Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, who has traveled to Iran on top of an Omani trade delegation, made the remarks during the

18th meeting of Iran-Oman Joint Economic Committee in Tehran on Saturday, Mehr news agency reported.

The minister further said, "Over 30 Omani traders and businessmen are present in our delegation; being active in different economic sectors they are trying to lay the ground for all-out cooperation with the Iranian partners." **→ 4**

Iran's Hajj organization chief in Saudi Arabia for talks

TEHRAN — Head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization Alireza Rashidian left Tehran for Saudi Arabia on Saturday to hold talks with Saudi officials over the next year's Umrah Hajj rituals.

According to IRNA, the visit comes after an invitation by the Saudi Hajj and Umrah minister.

Rashidian said prior to his departure that he will review arrangements with

Saudi officials to ensure the security of Iranian pilgrims performing the Umrah Hajj rituals.

He also hoped that the Iranian pilgrims will perform Hajj given that all conditions are met.

Tensions ran high between Tehran and Riyadh after Saudi Arabia's execution of prominent Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr in January 2016. **→ 3**

Berri says his bloc to vote for Khatib

Lebanon Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri asserted the need for an "emergency" government to help Lebanon out of the crisis, noting that his Liberation and Development Parliamentary Bloc will vote for the leading candidate for the post of Prime Minister, Samir Khatib, al-Joumhouria daily reported on Saturday.

"I was initially set to name PM Saad Hariri or any figure he supports to lead the new government. But since he backs engineer Samir

Khatib, my bloc and I will name Khatib," at the binding parliamentary consultations with the President, Berri told the daily.

"The real rescue for Lebanon takes place through the civil state," added the Speaker.

He also affirmed determination of the Parliament to approve the 2020 state budget before Christmas, "the Finance and Budget committee is set to finish the budget draft no later than next week," he said. **→ 13**



ARTICLE

Hamed Khani
Senior attorney-at-law

Effects of U.S. sanctions on Iranian citizens' health security

1 Problem statement
Sanctions are one of the punitive measures in international relations that have a lot of meanings. Sanction can be defined as cutting or restricting business and political ties as punitive action by one or more governments against a country that has violated international law.

In international law, sanctions are a series of compulsory actions aimed at forcing governments, international actors or noncompliant individuals to observe international law or to comply with the policy of the organization that imposes sanctions. Technically, the term is used for both military and civilian actions, but it is mostly common in civilian cases. Sanctions may be imposed as a response to violation of a norm or preventing the violation, but it also may be an act to achieve a foreign policy goal or certain concessions from the sanctioned country.

According to the power of the organization that imposes sanctions, they can be divided to unilateral, multilateral, and UN (international) sanctions. When sanctions are imposed by a single country they are called unilateral sanctions. Prominent examples of unilateral sanctions are those that have been imposed by the United States against Iran over the past four decades. If sanctions are imposed by a group of countries, they are called multilateral sanctions. Sanctions on Haiti imposed by the Organization of American States, and more recently sanctions by the EU against Syria and Iran are among multilateral sanctions. Finally, the restrictive measures that imposed according to Article 41 of the Charter of the UN are called UN sanctions.

What will be discussed briefly are the U.S. unilateral sanctions against Iran, which have been intensified in recent years. Some scholars and legal experts believe that in the case of sanctions imposed by the United States, international law and human rights are deliberately ignored. This issue has made us to briefly describe U.S. sanctions actions and decisions toward the Iranian nation, considering international law and human rights. **→ 3**

Qatar foreign minister: crisis has 'moved from stalemate'

Qatar's foreign minister has said he hopes for "progress" in the efforts to resolve the Persian Gulf diplomatic crisis following talks with Saudi Arabia, adding that the parties have "moved from a stalemate" in the two-year dispute.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani made the comments on Friday while speaking at a foreign policy conference in Rome amid signs of thawing tensions between Qatar and its neighbors.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, along with Egypt, imposed a land, air and sea blockade on Qatar and cut off diplomatic ties with it in June 2017, accusing Doha of supporting "terrorism". Qatar has repeatedly denied the accusations.

At the time, the quartet set 13 demands for lifting the blockade, including the closing down of Al Jazeera Media Network, shuttering a Turkish

military base and reducing ties with Iran.

"We have moved from a stalemate to some progress where ... some talks took place between us and specifically Saudi," the Qatari foreign minister said at the MED 2019 conference.

"We hope that these talks will lead to our progress where we can see an end for the crisis."

He added that several meetings had taken place between officials of both countries in different places, refusing to confirm reports that he has recently visited the Saudi capital, Riyadh, for talks.

The Wall Street Journal had previously reported that the foreign minister had made the unannounced visit in October. There, he met senior Saudi officials and made an offer to end the regional rift, an Arab official told the newspaper. It was the highest-level visit by a Qatari official to the kingdom since May when Qatar's prime

minister attended an Arab summit in Mecca.

Saudi King Salman also recently sent a "written message" inviting Qatar's emir to an annual meeting of the Persian Gulf regional bloc, which will be held in Riyadh next week. The 40th session of the six-nation Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) summit is scheduled to take place on December 10. The GCC is composed of Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait.

A Qatari delegation headed by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Soltan bin Saad Al-Muraikhi represented the country at last year's GCC summit, which was also held in Riyadh.

In another sign of possible de-escalation, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, in a last-minute about-face in November, reversed their decision to boycott the 24th Cup in Doha.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Iran missile program not in violation of JCPOA: prof. Entessar

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN (MNA) — Nader Entessar, Professor Emeritus of Political Science from the University of South Alabama, highlights that Iran's missile program doesn't violate the terms of JCPOA and that European countries seek other aims by their letters and threats.

"The letter of the E3 to the UN Secretary-General was not only provocative but also full of lies; Iran's missile program does not violate UNSC Resolution 2231," Entessar told Mehr News Agency on Friday.

"The three European countries aim to undermine Iran's deterrence and defense power and since they were not successful in forcing Iran into destroying its missile and defense pro-

gram, they want to fulfill this aim via the United Nations," he said.

"If the issue is referred to the UN Security Council, three permanent members of the council will vote against Iran, so Russian and China will have an important role in approval or rejection of an anti-Iranian resolution."

The remarks came as France, Germany and the United Kingdom penned a letter to the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, making allegations that Iran's ballistic missile activity is "inconsistent" with the call in a council resolution endorsing the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. "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," FM Zarif wrote in a tweet on Thursday in reaction to E3's letter.

European signatories of the deal have so far failed to fulfill their obligations under the nuclear deal and safeguard Iran's economy from damages of US unilateral sanctions after Washington withdrew from the deal in 2018. Meanwhile, Iran has announced that it is reducing commitments to the deal in a transparent and reversible manner to create a balance. Tehran says it has the right to do so according to Paragraphs 26 and 36 of the deal. E3 has called on Iran to return to full implementation of the deal and even threatened Tehran to use a mechanism in the deal which can return the UN sanctions against Iran. **→ 2**



Scientist Massoud Soleimani released from U.S. captivity

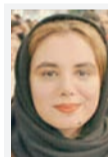
TEHRAN — The United States has released Massoud Soleimani, an Iranian scientist who was arrested last year by the U.S. for allegedly violating American trade sanctions against Iran.

Soleimani flew along with Foreign Minister Zarif from Zurich to Tehran on Saturday.

He was released in a prisoner exchange through mediation efforts by Switzerland.

On Saturday, Iran also freed an American graduate student who had been imprisoned in Tehran for more than three years on charges of being a spy.

Xiyue Wang was flown in a Swiss government airplane from Tehran to Zurich, where he was met by Brian H. Hook, the U.S. State Department's special representative for Iran, according to two senior United States officials. **→ 3**



PERSPECTIVE

Azadeh Abbaszadeh
Director of "Down Syndrome" cellular-molecular research center of Iran

Post-modern slavery: fetal chromosomal slavery

Just think about it. Several years ago, right here on Earth, people were sold at auctions and forcibly employed in fields and mines. Many were chained to prevent fleeing, and whipping was the most common punishment for their smallest mistakes. All of these were only because of the color of their skin, just because they were black.

Certainly, at this point, it is quite difficult for you to imagine such a situation and it even seems funny to you. However, I have to ask you to stop laughing since those slaves are here again and you might not believe me when I tell you that a novel and new slavery system has come to existence and started working right under our very noses.

During the slavery era, it was very difficult for people to perceive that the variation in the color of human skin fundamentally relates to genetic issues, and the amount of melanin in the skin is a very decisive factor. On those days, people who had more melanin pigment in their skin were regarded as black and abnormal people who belonged to lower strata of society.

The slavery system, today and in its latest advancement, has considered fetuses (future humans) that have an extra chromosome as abnormal and low-rank fetuses (future humans), regarded them worthless, and attempted to commit genocide!

Do you know anything about this genocide? Nowadays, many fetuses, who have an extra chromosome, are killed alive in the mothers' uteri lest a person with Down syndrome may not be born. This is while research has shown that fetuses having Down syndrome, like all other fetuses, are very likely to feel pain after the 20th week of their fetal lives.

Can you believe that in this modernity and technology era, in the UK, abortion is completely legal until birth? That is, a mother can kill her Down syndrome fetus until childbirth, just because her fetus has an extra chromosome and it is considered worthless. Hence, it does not matter when it is killed. In the UK, approximately 90% of Down syndrome fetuses are destroyed. **→ 12**

Iran says to unveil new generations of centrifuges

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) plans to unveil 50 new technological achievements in building new generations of centrifuges and producing heavy water in the early days of the next Iranian year, which starts on March 20, 2020.

The announcement was made by Ali Asqar Zare'an, the assistant head of the AEOI on Saturday.



“50 new achievements will be unveiled on April 9, including new centrifuge systems and power plant heavy water,” the Fars news agency quoted Zare'an as saying in a ceremony in Karaj, a city in west of Tehran.

April 9 is marked as National Nuclear Technology Day in Iran. He also said that the Arak heavy water reactor will start new activities next year.

Zare'an added that the enemies are angry that Iran has full control over the nuclear fuel cycle.

Foreign Ministry offers condolences over Saqqez incident

TEHRAN — (**Press TV**) - Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has expressed condolences over the demise of nearly a dozen people, including children, in a fire incident in the country's western Kordestan Province.

The incident took place on Thursday night when a liquid gas cylinder exploded at a wedding hall in the western city of Saqqez and claimed the lives of 11 people there, among them five children.

Some 50 others also sustained injuries in the deadly incident, with three of them being in a critical condition.

Mousavi voiced his sympathy in a tweet in Kurdish on Friday. “Our hearts go out to the grieved fathers, mothers, children and spouses who lost their loved ones in the tragic fire incident in Saqqez. We extend our condolences to the grieving families as well as the honorable people of Saqqez and Kordestan, and wish swift healing for the injured.”

Kordestan's Governorate General Office announced a day of national mourning in the western province following the deadly incident.

Iran missile program not in violation of JCPOA: prof. Entessar

1 → European countries consider the trigger mechanism as their winning card against Iran, Entessar said, adding, “If Iran officially withdraws from the JCPOA like what US did, Europe will lose the tool of ‘trigger mechanism’ ... of course, Westerners will try to adopt anti-Iranian resolution in the UNSC but this will become harder without this mechanism.”

“I believe the four steps that Iran has taken to reduce commitments to the JCPOA not has failed to influence the behavior of the E3, but also has turned them into claimants with aggressive behavior.”

He went on to say that “Bringing up the missile program and in particular, following the case in the UN Security Council would be the last blow to the body of the JCPOA that is now in a coma.”

“One of Iran's biggest mistakes after US withdrawal [from the JCPOA] was pinning hope on the Europe,” said the professor, adding that European countries can never distance themselves from the United States and play an independent role.

He confirmed that there are no legally-binding term in the JCPOA to limit Iran's missile program and on the other hand there is no legal framework in the international community to define or restrict missile programs of other countries, adding that Western countries “have stripped Iran missile program of any legal perspective, turning it into a totally political issue so as to achieve their aim.”

“Enemies of Iran seek to turn the country into a defenseless body that has no important role in the region,” he said, noting, “they consider Iran's missile program as the biggest obstacle in achieving their aim.”

Iranian diplomat says preparations underway for Rouhani's visit to Japan

By staff and agency

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said that preparations are underway for President Hassan Rouhani's visit to Japan.



In an interview with NHK published on Saturday, he said arrangements are underway to fix a date for the visit and expressed hope it would be decided soon.

He said Japan is an economic partner and provider of technology to Iran, which has always been one of Japan's major oil suppliers.

Araghchi added Iran wants to maintain the same positive relationship with Japan, and hinted at a possible resumption of oil exports.

If realized, it would be the first visit by an Iranian president since October 2000.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Iran in June as the first Japanese leader since 1978.

Deputy FM: All JCPOA parties see U.S. as root cause of tensions

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Iranian deputy foreign minister for political affairs said on Friday that Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany unanimously blame the U.S. for the standoff surrounding the 2015 nuclear deal.

Seyed Abbas Araqchi made the remarks at the end of the meeting of the remaining parties to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna.

“In the meeting, the entire member states laid emphasis on the U.S. as the root cause of tensions regarding the JCPOA,” he told reporters.

The meeting was chaired by Araqchi and Helga Schmid, secretary general of the European External Action Service (EEAS).

European parties to the JCPOA asked Iran to stop taking steps away from the accord but stopped short of triggering a mechanism that could renew United Nations sanctions, al Jazeera reported.

The three-hour meeting in Vienna, the first with all remaining parties since July, came as Iran is rolling back its commitments under the deal following Washington's withdrawal last year and imposition of “maximum pressure” sanctions.

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.”

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

Remaining parties firm to preserve nuclear deal: statement

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The remaining parties to the JCPOA who met in Vienna on Friday issued a statement saying they are determined to preserve the 2015 nuclear agreement.

“All participants emphasized the key importance of full and effective implementation by all sides as well as their determination to pursue all efforts to preserve the agreement,” read the statement published on the European Union official website.

Following is full text of the statement:

A meeting of the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was held in Vienna on 6 December 2019. Under the terms of the JCPOA, the Joint Commission is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the agreement.

The Joint Commission was chaired by the EEAS Secretary General Helga Schmid and was attended by the E3+2 (China, France, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom) and Iran at the level of Political Directors/Deputy Foreign Ministers.

This meeting takes place at a critical moment. Participants acknowledged Iran's compliance with its nuclear commitments for 14 months following the regrettable withdrawal of the United States from the agreement, and the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions that did not allow Iran to reap the full benefits arising from sanctions lifting. Participants recalled that the JCPOA is a multilateral achievement and key element of the global nuclear non-proliferation architecture. In this

respect, serious concerns were expressed about a series of developments, in particular the recent steps with regard to the implementation of Iran's nuclear commitments under the JCPOA.

All participants emphasized the key importance of full and effective implementation by all sides as well as their determination to pursue all efforts to preserve the agreement. In this spirit and in line with the joint statement made in September in New York during the E3/EU+2 and Iran ministerial meeting, E3+2 strongly encouraged Iran to take all the necessary steps towards full implementation of its nuclear commitments and to avoid further escalatory steps in this regard, while stressing the importance to preserve Iran's economic benefits derived from the JCPOA.

Participants underlined and supported the key role played by the IAEA, the body in charge of monitoring and verifying the implementation of Iran's nuclear commitments under the JCPOA and UN Security Council resolution 2231 (2015).

Participants reiterated their strong support and collective responsibility for the continuation of key nuclear non-proliferation projects that are an essential part of the JCPOA. They welcomed continued efforts by the Arak Working Group Co-Chairs, China and the United Kingdom, in taking the Arak Modernisation Project forward. They took note of recent developments concerning the Fordow facility and expressed strong support to the efforts of Russia to continue



implementation of the stable isotope project.

Participants welcomed the decision by the governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway to join INSTEX, including the perspective to open it in due course to economic operators from third countries. INSTEX aims at facilitating legitimate trade with Iran to support the needs of the Iranian population.

Participants expressed their appreciation for recent diplomatic efforts undertaken to deescalate tension. They underlined the need for all relevant parties to show enough flexibility to allow such efforts to fruition.

In this context, participants discussed the need for serious implementation challenges pertaining to the JCPOA to be addressed within the framework of the JCPOA.

Student Day is symbol of fight against arrogant powers: Raeisi

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Judiciary Chief Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said on Saturday that the National Student Day is symbol of fight against arrogant powers, colonialism and dictatorship.

“This symbol shows the important role of university and students in knowing the needs and fulfilling them,” he said during a speech at a ceremony held to mark that the National Student Day at Tehran University.

Student Day marks the anniversary of the murder of three students in the University of Tehran on December 7, 1953 (known as Azar 16 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.

The top judge went on to say that students should be concerned about political and social issues in the country.

He added that the students' demands from the officials should be considered as a kind of “wealth” and “blessing”.

“Students' demands should never be

considered problem.”

Elsewhere, Raeisi said that all officials are duty bound to practice justice. “Justice should be a common discourse at all levels of the system.”

He also said that corruption runs contrary to justice and is unacceptable in an Islamic society, noting the Judiciary is duty bound to fight corruption and fulfil its duty.

■ ‘Corruption-breeding structures should be eliminated’

The senior judge said structural reform needed to prevent corruption.

“Corruption-breeding structures should be eliminated,” he pointed out.

The Judiciary chief also said privatization in some cases is synonymous with pillage of public property.

■ ‘Last arrested student freed’

Raeisi also said the last students arrested in the recent unrest that followed increase in gasoline price has been freed.

Students also asked the Judiciary chief some questions, calling on him to seriously counter those who commit financial corruption.

Zarif: Nuclear-capable missile test by Israel is aimed at Iran

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has criticized the United States and Europe for their silence over a nuclear-capable missile test on Friday by Israel, saying the test was “aimed at Iran”.

“Israel today tested a nuke-missile, aimed at Iran,” Zarif tweeted on Friday.

The chief diplomat said this is while the three European states of France, Britain and Germany (E3), which are party to the 2015 nuclear deal, along with the U.S. have created an uproar over Iran's conventional missile program.

“E3 and the U.S. never complain about the only nuclear arsenal in West Asia—armed with missiles actually DESIGNED to be capable of carrying nukes—but has fits of apoplexy over our conventional and defensive ones,” Zarif pointed out.

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

In a tweet on November 30, Pompeo claimed

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 was done on November 6, Iran started injecting uranium gas into 1,044 centrifuges at the Fordow nuclear site. It was done at the presence of inspectors from the IAEA.

This happened again after the Europeans failed to take concrete steps to save the JCPOA.

Iran has said lifting ban on its oil export and financial transactions are the main conditions to reverse its decision.

■ Araqchi calls meeting with new IAEA chief good

In the meantime, Araqchi experienced his first meeting with Rafael Grossi, the newly-appointed director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), soon after the JCPOA meeting ended, saying, “As a beginning, it was a good meeting.”

“The agency's director general underscored that this body's cooperation with Iran must be preserved,” Araqchi further said.

The top Iranian negotiator said, “We conferred on some issues and solutions in the meeting.”

Russia: U.S. trying to demonize Iran missile program

PRESS TV— Russia's mission to the United Nations said that the U.S. continually tries to demonize Iran's missile activities despite lack of any damning evidence against the Islamic Republic's defensive activities, and while Washington itself is in default of several international non-proliferation agreements.

Dmitry Polyanskiy, Moscow's chargé d'affaires to the world body, addressed the remarks to the UN Secretary-General António Guterres in a letter dated November 26 that was made available on Friday.

He reminded that Iran was a signatory to many multilateral non-proliferation mechanisms, including the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The latter agreement came about in 2015 between the Islamic Republic and the P5+1 group of states -- the United States, the UK, France, Russia, and China plus Germany, lifting nuclear-related sanctions against Tehran, which, in turn, voluntarily changed some aspects of its nuclear energy program

Washington has, on numerous occasions, accused Tehran of developing nuclear-capable missiles, despite Tehran's outright rejection of nuclear weapons of all type, and its observance of the JCPOA, which prohibits it from pursuing such armaments.

The Russian official highlighted “the complete lack of evidence that Iran is developing or producing a nuclear weapon or means of its delivery or is deploying any infrastructure for the storage or servicing of nuclear weapons.” He further endorsed the Islamic Republic's continued commitment to the nuclear deal as verified by Tehran's “refraining from activities related to ballistic missiles that are designed to be capable of carrying nuclear weapons.”

Nor has the UN Security Council, which has endorsed the JCPOA in the form of Resolution 2231, has received any “viable information to the contrary,” Polyanskiy asserted.

However, he stated, the U.S. would keep trying to implicate Iran in nuclear arms-related activities by, among other means, citing the Missile Technology Control Regime

(MTCR). This is while the MTCR is an informal political understanding between 35 states on export control issues, and could not be deployed as a universal legally binding instrument or used in the context of Resolution 2231 to try and incriminate Iran's missile activities, the envoy added.

Washington was on the offensive against Iran, while itself left the JCPOA last year “in violation of Article 25 of the United Nations Charter,” and is preventing other states from implementing it, Polyanskiy added. After leaving the deal, the White House returned its sanctions against Tehran, and also started pushing other JCPOA members into abiding by the American bans.

The Russian envoy also reminded how America left the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with Moscow earlier this year, and was undermining efforts aimed at creating a Middle East region free of nuclear arms. He was referring to the U.S.'s using its veto power at the UN in favor of Israel, which is the sole nuclear armed power in the region and has refused to join the NPT.

Facebook closes Ayatollah Khamenei's Arabic page

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Facebook has closed the **d e s k** Arabic page of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, which had more than 100,000 followers.

According to Press TV, the page was closed after being recently put under restrictions for allegedly violating the social media giant's terms of service.

It comes as many observers have criticized Facebook for what they consider the U.S.-based company's political bias in dealing with online activity.

Last month, the U.S. State Department called on social media giants to take down the accounts of Ayatollah Khamenei and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif amid protests over petrol prices, which prompted the government to shut off the internet.

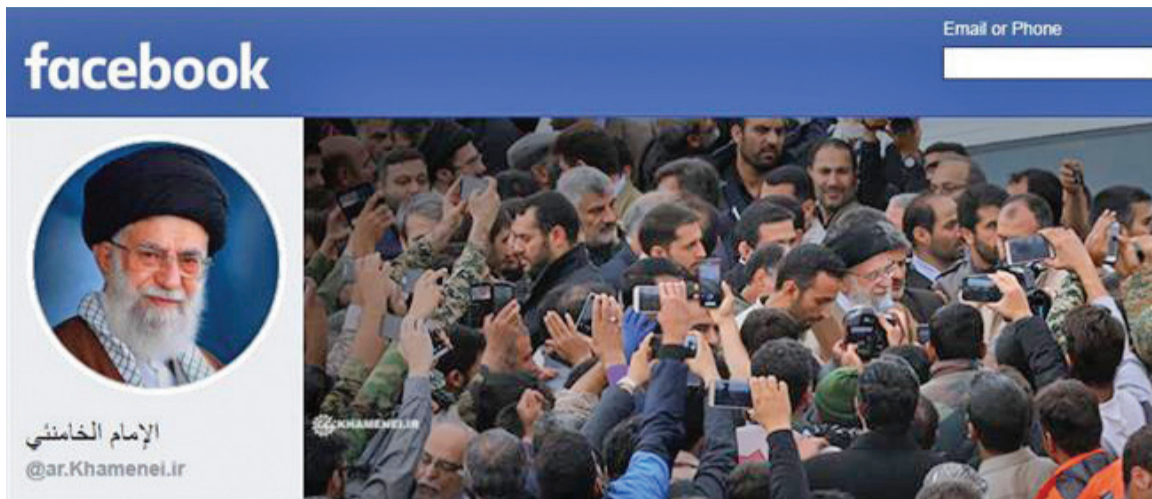
"One of the things that we are calling on are social media like Facebook and Instagram and Twitter to shut down the accounts of Supreme Leader Khamenei, Foreign Minister Zarif and President Rouhani until they restore the internet to their own people," U.S. Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook told Bloomberg.

In recent years, social media giants — including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram — have closed thousands of accounts allegedly tied to Iran and Russia under the pretext of fighting what they call "misinformation" campaigns.

In August 2018, Facebook announced it had targeted hundreds of accounts allegedly tied to Iran and Russia.

"We removed multiple pages, groups and accounts for coordinated inauthentic behavior on Facebook and Instagram. Some of this activity originated in Iran, and some originated in Russia," it said.

The targets were identified as "networks of accounts misleading people about what they were doing," Facebook's chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said back then.



Among the accounts was one belonging to the Quest 4 Truth (Q4T) Iranian media organization, which promotes Islamic values.

Facebook further wrote in bold text, "We've removed Pages, groups and accounts that can be linked to sources the U.S. government has previously identified as Russian military intelligence services. This is unrelated to the activities we found in Iran."

The Facebook investigation was prompted by a tip-off from cybersecurity firm FireEye.

FireEye has claimed the Iranian activity included "anti-Saudi, anti-Israeli, and pro-Palestinian themes" and advocacy of policies favorable to Iran such as the 2015 nuclear deal, to which the U.S. was a party

before pulling out in May 2018 in defiance of the international community.

"It really shows it's not just Russia that engages in this type of activity," said Lee Foster, an information operations analyst with FireEye.

Facebook said it had worked closely with law enforcement in both the U.S. and the UK on the investigation, and had briefed the U.S. Treasury Department and State Department as Washington has imposed sanctions on Tehran.

In a simultaneous move, Twitter Inc (TWTR.N) and Alphabet Inc (GOOGL.O) also acted on FireEye's claims and removed hundreds of accounts said to be tied to Iranian "actors," which are said to be promoting Iran's geopolitical agenda.

Scientist Massoud Soleimani released from U.S. captivity

1 → The White House confirmed the prisoner swap early on Saturday with a statement from President Trump, at a moment of high tensions between Tehran and Washington.

Zarif said he was happy that Soleimani and Xiyue are joining their families.

"Glad that Professor Massoud Soleimani and Mr. Xiyue Wang will be joining their families shortly. Many thanks to all engaged, particularly the Swiss government," Zarif tweeted on Saturday.

Masoud Soleimani, a 49-year-old stem cell scientist, left Iran on sabbatical last year, but was arrested upon arrival in Chicago and transferred to prison in Atlanta, Georgia for unspecified reasons.

On May 22, Iran's science minister said the United States has set a trap for Iranian scientists, enabling their entry into the country before arresting them.

Mansour Gholami said the U.S. has identified a number of Iranian professors, who have conducted research in certain areas, published relevant scientific articles and ordered and bought laboratory equipment.

"They issue visas for Iranian professors and arrest them upon their arrival in the U.S.," he said. "This is a type of game they play to lure Iranian professors there."

He also ruled out the possibility that those targeted in the scheme might

have been in violation of Washington's sanctions.

Soleimani's brother had said the only accusation facing him was that two of his students were arrested while departing the United States three years ago because they were carrying five vials of growth hormone.

This is while such material is readily available on the market and not subject to sanctions, he explained.

The two students were charged in a court and released after posting bail because they held U.S. citizenship.

Soleimani was "definitely" being held hostage by the U.S. administration, his brother said.

"How can a researcher and a physician, who does not have any criminal record and boasts numerous articles published in international circles, be placed in detention?" he asked.

Trump has imposed the harshest ever sanctions against Iran since he pulled the United States out of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Trump's administration has even threatened to penalize any country or company that does business with Iran.

Under the nuclear accord, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

Cutting-edge combat drone, destroyer delivered to Iran's Navy

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — A combat reconnaissance tactical drone and a modern destroyer were delivered to the Navy in a ceremony in southeastern Iran on Saturday.

The ceremony was held in the Navy's 3rd region of Nabovat in the port city of Konarak in Sistan-Baluchestan province on the coasts of the Oman Sea.



Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi and Rear Admiral Sayyari, who is currently deputy chief of the Army for coordination, attended the ceremony.

The Iranian Navy's new unveils were aimed at boosting the force's defense power.

The Simorgh unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) is a naval pattern of Shahed-129 drone which was previously operated by the air-space force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and is capable of staging combat operation against surface targets using smart precise-guided Sadid bombs.

Simorgh is a domestically-manufactured and multi-purpose drone with high range flight capability.

The drone can be utilized in surveillance and combat operations. Simorgh can fly operationally as far as 1,500 km up to 24,000 feet altitude for a period of continued 24 hours.

Somoq has been planned and manufactured by the Iranian experts and is considered as a new achievement for the defense industries.

The Navy's new home-made Bayandor destroyer, which has joined the Nabovat 3rd region, will remarkably bolster the fleet's combat might.

On the sidelines of the ceremony, Rear Admiral Khanzadi highlighted durable security across the country's waters, noting, "Other countries' forces that are currently in the region are after their own interests. Their presence and movement in the region's waters are deceptive and exhibitiv. They claim that the region is not safe, however, we see no insecurity in the region."

The Iranian Navy has in recent years along with the IRGC Navy have strengthened their capabilities. They are equipped with different home-made weapons.

Iran's Hajj organization chief in Saudi Arabia for talks

1 → and a subsequent attack by outraged Iranian protesters on the Saudi embassy in Tehran. Senior Iranian officials including Leader of the Islamic Revolution condemned the attack on the embassy. However, the Arab country used the attack as a pretext to expel Iranian diplomats and sever ties with the Islamic Republic.



Prior to the embassy attack, a deadly crush of Hajj pilgrims in September 2015 caused friction between Tehran and Riyadh. Tehran blamed mismanagement for the incident. More than 460 Iranians lost their lives in the crush.

During a visit to Saudi Arabia in December 2018, Rashidian held meetings with officials from the kingdom's Ministry of Hajj and Umrah about the 2019 Hajj season.

The two sides signed an agreement at the conclusion of the meetings aimed at making better arrangements for Iranian pilgrims and preventing the problems they faced in previous years.

Lavrov: U.S. sanctions on Iran absolutely illegal

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey **d e s k** Lavrov said on Friday that U.S. unilateral sanctions on Iran are absolutely illegal.

"Problems in Iran are very serious, to a large extent because of the U.S. sanctions that were imposed on that country absolutely illegally, because the Americans withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and are seeking to make others implement it," Lavrov said at a session of the Mediterranean Dialogue conference in Rome.

The Russian foreign minister noted that it is not the first time that the United States was using such a scheme, adding, "If the U.S. wants to stifle Iran economically and instigate people's discontent, we see such a scheme being used in Venezuela. It is a pattern."

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.

Iran has said it is adopted "maximum resistance" against maximum pressure.

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.

Analysts and think tanks say sanctions have hurt the Iranian economy but have failed to achieve what officials in Washington had expected.

Effects of U.S. sanctions on Iranian citizens' health security

1 → **2. Health security from the prospective of international law**

The concept of health security was first stated by the UN in 1994 and aimed to ensure the protection against diseases and unhealthy lifestyles. Subsequent to this initiative, many references have used this concept to represent the health issues that have a major influence on human security. Such security tackles the insecurities that are resulted from infectious and parasitic diseases in vulnerable areas or widespread consequences of countries' industrialization. In other words, health security refers to the people's freedom from all kinds of diseases and their access to health services. Currently, the UN is the main active organization in health security at the international level. The organization was founded in 1948 and pursues the above-mentioned goals.

Health is an international issue and there is a strong link between health and global peace and security. The World Health Organization (WHO), which was founded in 1984, at the same time the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed, is aimed at achieving health and developing health standards. In addition, the right to health security is emphasized in various international instruments and laws, such as the Statute of the WHO, Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Article 29 of Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). In Article 2 of the Charter of Rights is also stated that citizens have the right to a decent life and its necessities, including clean water, proper food, health promotion, environmental health, and access to medicine and medical services in accordance with current knowledge and national standards.

Regarding various international human rights instruments, it can be seen that today, the right to health security is a human right that obliges governments to respect, support and implement trans-national health security laws.

Therefore, governments should not directly or indirectly prevent people from their right to health. They should take appropriate legislative and executive measures to carry out all health security issues for the citizens within their geographical territory or outside it.

Another point is that the right to health is comprehensive and includes the right to health care and its determining factors as well. This issue is so important that the WHO considers the access to essential medicines as a necessary matter and has discussed about compulsory licenses in this field. Therefore, from the view of international law, sanctions should not lead lack of access to medicine and food to citizens.

On the other hand, the right to health is liable to stay in execution, and is considered as one of the most complex human rights in international law. International health law, which is developing on various international instruments, as well as national, regional and global organizations, has faced with new concepts. Health justice, primary health care, health promotion and health security are stated as the components of human security in international health law. The right to health security, as a significant human right, plays an important role in approaching a healthy society.

3. The effects of sanctions on health security

It is obvious that some international sanctions and also most U.S. sanctions have had various effects on health security of the Iranian people. The lack or restriction of access to medicine and standard medical services and supplies is one the sanctions' effects. The economic and financial sanctions imposed by the U.S. in the recent years have influenced the import of medical goods. In this regard, in 2018, the Executive Director of the Kidney Foundation of Iran, Ahmad Ghavidel, stated, "If we cannot buy medicine through the (banking) channel, we must buy low-quality medicines, those countries that have pharmaceutical agency in Iran are present in Iran, but banks have been sanctioned in a way that they cannot transfer money". Emphasizing that we are facing the U.S. in the current situation, he said, "These sanctions are different from those in previous periods, and we are not facing with all countries, and Americans are lying that medicine is not sanctioned and they must be held accountable".

4. The reaction of the Islamic Republic of Iran from a legal perspective

1. The ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on October 3, 2018 to temporarily settle the U.S.-Iranian disputes can be an example of the Iranian government's reaction to U.S. sanctions. According to the court's ruling, the sanctions may not hurt exportation to the territory of Iran of goods required for humanitarian needs such as medicines, medical devices and foodstuffs and agricultural commodities as well as goods and services required for the safety of civil aviation. In fact, Iran's government has been able to persuade the ICJ to order the U.S. that it does not have the right to impose sanctions on the three major fields of medicines, foodstuffs (agriculture) and airplane components.

2. The correspondence of the Minister of Health and Medical Education with the WHO about sanctions. Following the negotiations carried out at the meetings of the headquarters for providing medicine and medical equipment on October 30, 2018, Iran's Minister of Health and Medical Education Saeed Namaki sent a letter to WHO director-general stating the cruel and inhuman goals of the sanctions.

5. Legal recommendation to the government

Finally, in addition to the measures taken by the government to counter the effects of sanctions on health security, it is recommended that all deliberate actions and violations by the U.S. against the Iranian nation be filed for claiming damage. One of the measures that the executive body, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, can take in coordination with the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament) and the Judiciary is recording all the violations related to supply of medicines and medical devices, as well as banking operations. This move is essential for claiming damage from the United States. Since the ICJ has not yet entered the main lawsuit, the documentation is the most important step that can be taken at the present time. The management of public and private companies, hospitals and health centers can document all the damages to legal entities or individuals to record and claim damages.

Iran, Italy confer on bilateral, regional issues

TEHRAN (MNA) — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour, who is in Italy for MED 2019, met and held talks with his Italian counterpart Marina Sereni on expansion of bilateral ties and the latest regional developments.

Mohammad Kazem Sajjadpour, who is also the President of the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) at the Iranian Foreign Ministry, was one of the speakers for the 5th edition of Mediterranean Dialogues Conference (MED) — an annual high-level initiative promoted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was held from Dec. 5 to Dec. 7 in Rome.

During his stay in Rome, the Iranian diplomat met and held talks with Italian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Marina Sereni, on ways



to expand bilateral relations. The two sides also called for continuation of talks between Tehran and Rome given the current developments in the region.

During the meeting, the Italian diplomat once again reiterated her country's support for the Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the JCPOA.

Sajjadpour, for his part, outlined Iran's measures aimed at preserving the nuclear deal through full cooperation with the IAEA and its implementation of its commitments, adding "JCPOA is a two-sided agreement, and the other sides, especially the European signatories, are expected to live up to the commitments they agreed upon."

He further voiced Iran's readiness to continue consultations with Italy on regional issues.

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

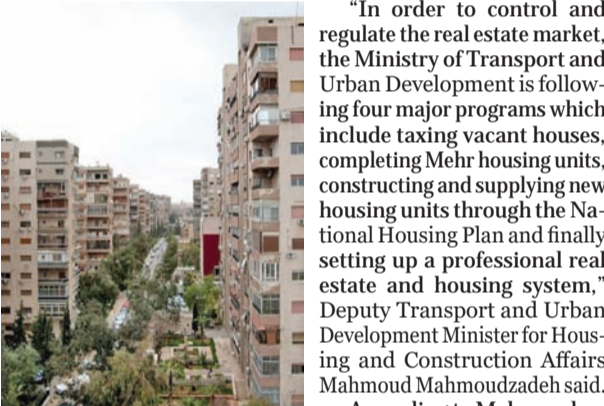
COMMODITIES

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

Govt. to launch national real estate system by March 2020

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The Iranian government is planning on launching a national real estate and housing system, aimed at controlling the country's housing and real estate market by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19, 2020), Tasnim news agency reported quoting an official with the Ministry of Transport and Urban Development.



“In order to control and regulate the real estate market, the Ministry of Transport and Urban Development is following four major programs which include taxing vacant houses, completing Mehr housing units, constructing and supplying new housing units through the National Housing Plan and finally setting up a professional real estate and housing system,” Deputy Transport and Urban Development Minister for Housing and Construction Affairs Mahmoud Mahmoudzadeh said.

According to Mahmoudzadeh, one of the main goals of establishing this system is to identify vacant and unused houses in order to receive tax from the owners.

“The system will be able to bring back 2.6 million vacant housing units into the real estate market, and consequently affect the rent prices significantly,” he said.

Commodities worth \$738m traded at IME in a week

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — During weekdays ended on December 5, approximately 638,838 tons of commodities worth over \$738 million were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME).

According to the report from IME International Affairs and Public Relations Department, last week, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 233,420 tons of various products worth close to \$338 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 213,958 tons of steel, 5,360 tons of copper, 6,680 tons of aluminum, 120 tons of molybdenum concentrates, 5,000 tons of iron ore and 12 tons of precious metal concentrates, 2,400 tons of coke, 5,000 tons of iron ore as well as 6 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 400,020 tons of different commodities with the total value of \$399 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 137,064 tons of bitumen, 113,000 tons of VB feed stock, 92,877 tons of polymer products, 4,500 tons of lube cut oil, 37,519 tons of chemical products, 650 tons of insulation, 3,128 tons of base oil, 70 tons of argon as well as 12,070 tons of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, 5,398 tons of commodities were traded on the side market of IME.

Global economy: stabilization, stability, opacity

Based on business surveys, the cyclical environment, globally, seems to have stabilized. A similar picture emerges for the eurozone and China, whereas in the U.S. it is mixed.

‘Stability’ characterizes the monetary policy outlook. After the announcements in September, the ECB can afford to wait before making a judgment of the effectiveness of its policy stance. For the Federal Reserve, it seems that the bar for envisaging a change in the federal funds rate is high, even more so when it’s about considering a rate hike.

Stabilization of economic data and a stable, very accommodative monetary stance provide reasons for being hopeful, but this supposes that uncertainty doesn’t increase again. In this respect, unfortunately, the situation remains very opaque. Shifting to a higher gear in terms of growth then becomes more complex.

Recent data releases confirm the signs registered one month ago of a tentative stabilization of the global cyclical environment. For the eurozone as a whole, the European Commission’s economic sentiment index, increased slightly in November and thus remains above its long-term average. This index covers industry, services, consumers, construction and retail trade.

The Commission’s business climate index remained stable. The purchasing managers’ index (PMI) for the manufacturing sector increased further in November and is now close to the level seen in August. The services index on the other hand, declined slightly, to 51.9.

(Source: fxstreet.com)

Oman trying to expand economic ties with Iran

1 → He also announced that an agreement is to be signed between Oman and Iran on marine transportation cooperation, adding, “We will make the most efforts to provide incentives for joint investment and also promote bilateral trade cooperation between the two countries.”

Stressing that a very proper condition is available for invigorating the bilateral trade, al Sunaidy said the two sides can also take the advantage of bartering to expand their trade ties.

■ A 5-fold trade turnover boost possible

Addressing the same meeting, Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani said while there are potential and capabilities for boosting the trade turnover between Iran and Oman to \$5 billion, the figure is currently \$1 billion.

The International NorthSouth Transit Corridor (INSTC) can help the two countries elevate their bilateral trade to this level, he further emphasized.

“It is the largest Omani trade delegation visiting Iran over the past years and we hope that the private sectors of the two countries will benefit from this visit to find strategies for



Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani (L) and Omani Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy in the 18th meeting of Iran-Oman Joint Economic Committee in Tehran on Saturday

facilitation of bilateral trade”, the minister noted.

There are some problems regarding money

transferring between the two sides’ traders which are hoped to be resolved through strat-

‘40 intl. expos planned to promote exports to neighbors’

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Managing director of Iran International Exhibitions Company said 40 international exhibitions have been planned to be held for promoting exports to the 15 neighboring countries, IRNA reported on Saturday.

“Last year, a total of 75 [international] exhibitions were held, while this year 107 exhibitions are scheduled to be held by yearend [current Iranian calendar year ends on March 19, 2020],” the portal of the Industry Ministry quoted Bahman Hosseinzadeh as saying.

Boosting domestic production is the Industry Ministry’s top priority, and in this regard supporting knowledge-based companies and startups and their strong presence in the international exhibitions has also been prioritized by Iran International Exhibition Company, according to Hosseinzadeh.

The official noted that his company also intends to hold national demand-oriented exhibitions to identify the country’s domestic needs in various areas.

“The demand-oriented exhibitions will be held along with international exhibitions



and the exhibitions’ themes will be relevant,” he explained.

He further mentioned the first international exhibition of Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) member states, which is planned to be held in Tehran in near future.

Earlier this week, Hosseinzadeh had announced the plans for holding EAEU’s first exclusive exhibition in Tehran.

“After producing domestic products, these products should be introduced to the target markets, and international exhibitions both inside the country and abroad will be a great help in this regard,” the official said on the sidelines of a ceremony on the occasion of the 23rd National Exports Day anniversary.

Iran calls for barter trade with S. Africa to overcome banking hurdles

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Deputy head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture said the best way for overcoming Iran and South Africa banking issues is barter trading.

Mohammadreza Karbasi, ICCIMA deputy head for International Affairs, put the two countries’ current trade turnover at nearly \$100 million, saying that it is far less than the two sides’ \$2-billion target.

The official mentioned the two countries’ good political relations and noted that the two sides’ trade and economic relations should match their political ties.

He further noted that South Africa’s foreign investment in 2018 reached \$135 billion, and expressed hope that given the country’s current position, South Africa would be a gateway for Iran to access various African countries.

“There are great capacities in the two countries for joint investment which have remained untapped so far, and Iran chamber of commerce once again formed the Iran-South



Africa Joint Economic Committee, at the request of the two sides’ businessmen,” he said.

He mentioned petrochemicals, bitumen, food, oil products, auto parts, electricity, construction, and technical serv-

Asian governments step up stimulus as economic growth stalls

Asian governments are starting to do their bit to revive economic growth as central banks gradually pull back on monetary policy easing.

Japan’s government announced a stimulus package Thursday worth some 26 trillion yen (\$239 billion), with about half coming from government spending. That came a day after Hong Kong announced additional steps to shore up businesses suffering from months of political unrest.

“We’re going to see more of this,” said Hak Bin Chua, a senior economist at Maybank Kim Eng Research Pte. in Singapore. The “space for monetary policy has narrowed, given how close interest rates are to the zero bound. There’s an increasing recognition that you can’t just depend on central banks; governments have to provide support through fiscal policy.”

That may be easier said than done. Unlike interest-rate decisions generally made by a small central bank committee, fiscal stimulus needs approval from governments and sometimes parliaments, and may run up against debt limits anchored in law. In addition, the impact of fiscal policy may appear only with a considerable lag — a disincentive for leaders who might be out of office by then.

Still, policy makers “are starting to accept that something more needs to be done,” said

Tuuli McCully, head of Asia Pacific economics at Scotiabank in Singapore. “I think the reality is kicking in that they need to loosen their purse strings.”

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe described the new stimulus as a three-pillared package to boost disaster relief, protect against downside risks and prepare for longer-term growth after the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. It should boost real growth by about 1.4 percentage point, according to a draft of the package obtained by Bloomberg.

■ Monetary policy is fast moving

Monetary policy is fast moving, technocratic, and — especially when rates are on the way down — enjoys broad political support. That’s what makes it so effective as a tool for demand management. It also explains why it’s now all but used up. Fiscal policy, in contrast, is slow moving, mired in ideological debates, and hemmed in by political constraints. Sometimes a blunt instrument is the only one there is.

The centerpiece of China’s “proactive” fiscal policy this year has been about 2 trillion yuan (\$284 billion) in tax cuts. While those reductions helped swell the deficit, they haven’t arrested the economy’s slowdown, and growth is projected to slip below 6% next year.

A key meeting to set economic policy

this month will detail the balance between monetary and fiscal settings for 2020. Meanwhile, officials are bringing forward from next year the use of some off-balance-sheet infrastructure spending financed by local government debt.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s administration has taken a series of steps to halt a slump in the economy, adding to the monetary stimulus from five interest-rate cuts this year.

Measures include a \$20 billion corporate tax cut, a \$1.4 billion fund to salvage stalled residential projects and a \$7 billion stimulus for exporters. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is open to doing more, but room is limited with the government expected to breach its deficit goal of 3.3% of GDP.

As economic growth slumps to a decade low, South Korea’s government proposed a record 513.5 trillion won (\$431 billion) budget for next year, a 9.3% increase from this year’s main budget. Finance Minister Hong Nam-ki called the budget “as expansionary as possible.” The Bank of Korea has already cut its benchmark rate to match a record low.

■ Support for the economy

Government spending has been a key source of support for the economy, offsetting a pullback in private investment. The proposal to raise 2020 spending came after

egies to be adopted by the central banks of the two countries, Rahmani further said.

Despite the U.S. reimposition of sanctions against the Islamic Republic, Oman is getting closer to Iran both politically and economically. There is also the same approach adopted by Iran, as Iranian companies now prefer to conduct trade with Oman rather than the United Arab Emirates (UAE), given that the UAE is highly complying with the sanctions.

Iran is somehow replacing some of its previous strategic trade partners such as UAE with Oman, considering the Sultanate as an economic-trade hub.

During the current year there have been many meetings and negotiations between trade and economic officials from the state-run and private sectors of the two sides with the aim of strengthening and expanding bilateral trade ties.

In a trip to Muscat in mid-July, Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani had met a number of Omani senior officials including Minister of Transport and Communications Ahmed Mohammed Salem Al-Futaisi and Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali bin Masoud al Sunaid.

President Rouhani to submit budget bill to Majlis today

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is going to submit the bill of the budget for the next Iranian calendar year (to start on March 20, 2020) to Majlis (Iranian parliament) on Sunday, Mehr news agency reported, quoting the head of Iran’s Plan and Budget Organization.

Speaking on the sidelines of a budget planning meeting on Saturday, Mohammad-Baqer Nobakht said the most important policy envisaged in planning the next year’s budget has been to increase the people’s purchasing power.

“Tomorrow, the president will submit the 4.8-quadrillion-rial (about \$114.28 billion) budget bill with 19 annexes to the parliament,” Nobakht said.

The next year’s budget bill is prepared based on the structural reform program which has been provided by the Planning and Budget Organization in four major axes and nine program and project packages, he added.

According to the official, the main characteristic of the next year’s budget bill which makes it different from previous years’ budget bills, is the impact of the U.S. sanctions on



the country’s economy and the consequent considerations which PBO had to take into account in preparing the bill.

“The next year’s budget bill has been modified in terms of resources, expenditures, policies and objectives, considering the resistance against the U.S. sanctions,” he said.

“In resources, we have tried to have the least dependence on oil resources in the history of the country’s economy,” he added.

Nobakht had earlier announced that the government will submit the budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year to the parliament on December 6 as it is scheduled.

Iran is going to allocate all revenues from oil sales to the development projects following structural reforms in its next budget bill.

es as some of the potent areas for cooperation with South Africa, noting that best mechanism for resolving banking problems between the two countries would be barter trade.

He said the creation of proper transit and transportation infrastructure is essential for achieving the export target between Iran and South Africa, adding “Distance is one of the main reasons that South Africa is not a competitive market for Iranian businesses; this problem must be resolved with economic solutions.”

Karbasi mentioned the issue of visa and launching a direct flight from Iran to the west and east of Africa as some of the plans pursued by the ICCIMA International Affairs Department.

Unofficial statistics suggest that in the first six months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-September 22), the value of Iran’s exports to South Africa reached \$43 million, while the figure stood at \$25 million in the first half of last year, thus increasing by \$16 million.

the government implemented a supplementary budget in the second half of this year.

The government now expects to run a rare budget deficit this fiscal year. Still, given the city’s structural problems and the sharpness of the downturn, economists and the International Monetary Fund say the response has been insufficient.

The government has taken a series of steps to boost an economy on pace

for its slowest growth in five years. Last week the cabinet passed a fresh round of stimulus that aims to spur more than 100 billion baht (\$3.3 billion) of spending.

That follows a \$10 billion package in August that included help for farmers and low earners, as well as initiatives to bolster consumer spending and investment. About one-third of the package will come from the government budget.

A slump in revenue is pushing the budget deficit closer to the legal limit of 3% of GDP. Rather than cut back on spending, the government has increased this year’s deficit target to as much as 2.2% of GDP and is ready to raise next year’s projection as well. Deputy Finance Minister Suhasil Nazara said. President Joko Widodo also is pushing structural and tax reforms to attract investment.

(Source: hellenicshippingnews.com)

177th OPEC meeting concluded with good outcomes: Zanganeh

ENERGY
desk

TEHRAN – Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of the 177th Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the OPEC+ meetings which were held during December 5-6, Mehr News Agency reported.

Speaking to the press after the OPEC+ meeting on Friday, Zanganeh said “we have reached good outcomes however most of the issues were approached in the short-run and there would be an extraordinary OPEC meeting in three or four months in order to follow up on the decisions.”

Asked why the OPEC meeting took over seven hours, Zanganeh blamed mathematics for the meeting taking too long.

■ The key outcomes

Following the gathering of OPEC+ nations on Friday, the 14-member organization released a statement in which five key decisions of the 177th OPEC meeting were announced.

As reported by Shana, OPEC+ production cuts will be increased by 503,000 barrels



per day (bpd) as of January 1, 2020 from 1.2 million bpd to 1.703 million bpd; secondary

sources designated as OPEC and non-OPEC production reference sources; gas conden-

sate was removed from crude oil production calculation of non-OPEC producers; Algeria's energy minister was selected as OPEC Conference President alphabetically, and eventually, Iran became the vice-chairman of the OPEC board of governors.

Iran, Venezuela and Libya remained exempted from any output cuts.

Hossein Kazempour Ardebili, the Iranian representative to the OPEC Board of Governors, was elected Vice Chairman of the OPEC Board of Governors in 2020. President of the board will be representative of Gabon.

OPEC Board of Governors is the executive pillar of OPEC, whose main functions are to manage the affairs of the Organization and to execute conference decisions, to review and decide on reports submitted by the Secretary-General, to provide reports and recommendations to the Conference on Organization Affairs, to arrange the organization's budget for each calendar year and submit it to the conference for approval, etc.

Qatar's LNG ambitions expand anew

Expansion of the Qatargas LNG liquefaction complex will get more ambitious again, the CEO of state-owned Qatar Petroleum (QP) Saad al-Kaabi confirmed in late November—the third time since a moratorium on upstream gas development at the supergiant North Field was lifted some two and a half years ago that the scope of new capacity has been revised upwards.

In July 2017, following successful exploration in the field's southern sector, proposals merely to debottleneck some of the existing 14 LNG trains at the Ras Laffan gas processing hub were replaced by the North Field expansion (NFE) project. This was then expanded in September 2018 to comprise four new 7.8mn-t/yr LNG trains, intended to lift total exports from 77mn t/yr to around 110mn t/yr by 2024.

Now, exploration has confirmed the onshore extension of the field into the country's north-east and a decision has been taken to use the fresh resources to feed two further LNG trains, raising output to 126mn t/yr by 2027, says Kaabi. Engineering work on the new trains has already begun—and is assumed to involve Japan's Chiyoda Corporation, as the front-end engineering and design (Feed) contractor on the NFE project and builder of the six existing mega-trains.

■ New liquefaction trains

Contracting on the estimated \$18b NFE scheme is well under way, albeit with modest delays. Bid submission for the main onshore engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) package covering the new liquefaction trains has been delayed from October to Q1 2020, making fulfilment of an

earlier promise to award all the major construction contracts by the end of March improbable.

Those invited to bid were Chiyoda with UK-based Technip FMC, Japan's JGC Corporation with Italy's Saipem and U.S. engineer McDermott (U.S.) with Taiwan's CTCL. Offshore work is further advanced, and on the same day the new find was unveiled, QP also announced that McDermott had completed the first two jackets for the project. The U.S. company won in May the Feed contract for the associated topsides and pipeline.

International oil companies (IOCs) have been salivating at the first opportunity for more than a decade to grab a slice of Qatar's gas bounty, rewarding QP with access to international upstream equity to improve their chances of a shareholding. In October, Kaabi confirmed that U.S. independent ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, Shell and Total were among those invited to bid for a stake, with Chevron and Italy's Eni also believed to be on the shortlist. A decision is due in the first quarter of next year. QP has frequently asserted its ability and willingness to proceed without a foreign partner. But this is unlikely to happen, with the majors' LNG marketing reach and expertise deemed invaluable, given the huge changes in the industry since QP last brought new supply on stream.

Renewed North Field expansion is designed to restore Qatar's long-held position as the leading LNG exporter, amid growing competition from Australia, Russia, the U.S. and a proliferation of aspirant new producers. With gas in vogue to replace dirtier fossil fuels, and LNG projects typically having a lead time of some five years, an ever-growing number of

schemes are in the early stages of implementation worldwide to meet the current thirst, leading to fears of another supply glut by the mid-2020s.

■ Ultra-low upstreams

Forecasts of future demand are widely divergent. QP consistently professes unconcern, pointing to the competitive advantage gained from Qatar's ultra-low upstream production costs and the huge profitability of the North Field's associated liquids output—the latter helping to deliver full costs payback on previous train that were measured in years rather than decades.

However, the firm is already looking to a future beyond long-term take-or-pay contracts with major Asian buyers, which have formed the bedrock of previous sales. Recent focus has turned to bolstering the Qatar's existing position in Europe, where countries are to varying degrees looking to reduce dependence on piped Russian gas.

In September 2019, QP signed an agreement with Belgian infrastructure firm Fluxys, reserving until 2044 the entire LNG unloading capacity at its Zeebrugge import terminal—around 6.6mn t/yr—and in early December, the German state of Lower Saxony said that “deep and concrete” talks were under way for the company to supply LNG to the floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) planned at Wilhelmshaven deep-water port.

The proposed terminal is targeting capacity of roughly 7.4mn t/yr and a start-up date of 2023.

(Source: petroleum-economist.com)

Saudi Arabia's path toward solar energy

November wasn't a good month for the planet. On November 26, the UN Environment Program warned that the world was failing to curb carbon emissions fast enough. Even if all current commitments under the Paris Agreement to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius were met, “temperatures can be expected to rise to 3.2 degrees Celsius this century.” We must, declared UNEP in its annual “Emissions Gap” report, “close the ‘commitment’ gap between what we say we will do and what we need to do.”

Governments, it added, “cannot afford to wait. Economies must shift to a decarbonization pathway now.”

The following day, a group of international scientists warned in the journal Nature that the world may already have passed beyond the point of no return, citing nine “tipping point” clues—ranging from increasingly frequent droughts in the Amazon rainforest to the loss of ice in the Arctic, Antarctic and Greenland—“potentially committing the world to long-term irreversible changes.”

UNEP, on the other hand, held out a lifeline—and it's one that fossil-fuel giant Saudi Arabia is in the throes of grasping.

Only a “vast expansion of renewable electricity generation” can hope to arrest the planet's descent into disaster, said UNEP, adding that this was an “easy win” because the necessary technology exists.

According to a new report from the Inter-

national Energy Agency, offshore wind farms alone could generate more electricity than the world needs—36,000 terawatt-hours a year compared with current global demand of 23,000TWh.

In 2018 the world added a record but still meager 108 gigawatts of solar power, and 50GW driven by wind—a small but significant start. In 2018 only 12.9% of global electricity was generated by wind or solar technology and, says UNEP, “renewables need to grow six times faster.”

■ Energy came from renewables

Nowhere is that more true than in the Middle East, where despite ample supplies of wind and sunshine, in 2018 only 0.3% of energy came from renewables, compared with 40.2% in the Asia-Pacific region, 30.7% in Europe and 21.2% in North America.

In 2018 Saudi Arabia generated precisely no electricity from wind power and only a wholly insignificant 0.2TWh of power from solar—a tiny fraction of the 383TWh consumed by the kingdom that year.

That, however, is about to change—and where fossil-fuel giant Saudi Arabia leads, others will surely follow.

In 2016 Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 development blueprint recognized that the “kingdom's impressive natural potential for solar and wind power generation remains largely untapped” and pledged to generate 9.5GW

of renewable energy by 2030. That modest ambition has already been improved upon as Saudi, increasingly focused on diversifying its economy away from reliance on fossil fuels, has set its green sights higher.

Now the target is 27.3GW of renewable energy capacity by 2024 and 58.7GW by 2030. Saudi is moving fast.

One of the first major projects is Saudi Arabia's inaugural and the Middle East's largest wind farm—a \$500 million, 415MW cluster of 99 turbines at Dumat al-Jandal in the northern region of al-Jouf, 900 kilometers northwest of Riyadh.

The contract to build it was won only in January by French Energy Company EDF Renewables and Abu Dhabi's Masdar. The wind farm could be supplying electricity to the national grid by the spring of 2022, in the process creating hundreds of jobs, and cutting use of fossil fuels by the equivalent of more than 800,000 barrels of oil a year.

On November 27, the same day Nature published its dire warning, a 300MW photovoltaic solar power plant at nearby Sakaka was connected to the Saudi grid for the first time. It will soon be supplying clean energy to 45,000 homes, saving 500 tons of carbon dioxide a year.

■ Developing solar-energy parks

Much more is in the pipeline, including plans to develop 30 solar-energy parks and five more

wind farms across the country by 2030.

The wind of change may also be blowing through the energy policies of other Persian Gulf states. Masdar, a world leader in wind farms, gaining invaluable experience developing major projects in countries including the UK, Seychelles and Serbia, has been slow to exploit the regional potential. That is now changing.

In addition to its role at Dumat al-Jandal, it has developed the 50MW Dofar wind farm in Oman, the first large-scale wind project in the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) region to go online. The first of the 13 turbines was connected to the grid in August and the rest will follow before the end of the year, supplying 16,000 homes.

As the scientists warning in Nature warned, the reaction time to achieve net zero emissions “is 30 years at best” and, while the rate at which damage accumulates “could still be under our control to some extent ... the stability and resilience of our planet is in peril. International action—not just words—must reflect this.”

Saudi Arabia, equipped with the motivation and the funds to carry out bold renewable-energy projects, has shown it can act fast. It is, after all, less than three years since the very first wind turbine was installed in the kingdom—tellingly, to supply 2.75MW of electricity to a facility in Turaif belonging to Saudi Aramco, the world's largest oil and gas company.

(Source: asiatictimes.com)

In energy wars, Turkey steals a march on against rivals

By Kerem Alkin

In 2010, we consumed 138.6 quadrillion calories of energy to maintain our daily lives, produce goods and services, and travel from place to place. This figure is expected to reach 226.8 quadrillion calories in 2050. The International Energy Agency's report published last September pointed to a 50% increase in the minimum energy requirement in 2050 scenarios. On a global scale, the energy needs of the industry are expected to increase by 30% between 2018 and 2050, while the energy requirement of the transportation sector is expected to increase by 40% in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries and by 80% in non-OECD countries.

While renewable energy facilities met 15% of the world's energy demand in 2018, they are expected to meet 28% of the demand in 2050. The same rates will decrease from 32% to 27% for oil and liquid fuels, while natural gas will maintain its share of 22%. The share of coal is expected to decline from 26% to 20%, while the share of nuclear energy is expected to drop to 4% from 5%. Therefore, the claim that fossil fuels will suffer a significant loss in 2050 in terms of meeting the world's energy needs is entirely an “urban legend.” In short, the “global energy competition war” between the Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific, particularly based around the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, will continue at the same pace.



President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his team's perseverance and determination transformed Turkey into Eurasia's most critical playwright in the Global Energy War and made it Europe's most indispensable actor in the field of energy supply security. The historical steps taken by our Ministry of Energy, starting with Hilmi Güler and Taner Yıldız, and especially Berat Albayrak, on domestic-national energy technologies and on the Turkish presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, in addition to Fatih Dönmez moving this process forward with great determination, have all carried Turkey as a strong, respected competitor with whom the other actors in the region should strive to cooperate with.

When Turkey and Libya reached a consensus to sign the “Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Restriction of Marine Jurisdiction” under the auspices of Erdogan and in agreement with the administration of Moammar Gadhafi, we did not forget how France suddenly bombed Libya on March 19, 2011, with warplanes and disabled Gadhafi.

■ Of historical importance

Today, the fact that Turkey and Libya, with the never-ending energy and perseverance of President Erdogan, signed the agreement after eight years is a strategic step of historical importance that put off the globalists and a group of politicians, civilian and military bureaucrats in the administrations of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Israel, Egypt and Greece.

The deal, along with eight main pipelines as part of TurkStream and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), whose Europe connection is finished, has made Turkey an indispensable actor of the global energy game for 2050. Let's enjoy this, but always work on strategies that will make our position stronger.

The biggest crisis that NATO has fallen into since the second half of the 1990s was the fact that the North Atlantic Alliance no longer had to fight a major threat against its existence.

While Russia seemed to be grappling with the severe problems brought about by the political, economic, administrative and military crises it faced after the collapse of the Soviet Union, causing it to lose all the elements that might make it a threat, China, on the other side of Asia, was far below the level that would be perceived as a threat due to a number of economic, political, or military-related issues.

For this reason, Western Europe, which had felt the warm breath of the Soviet threat at its neck, was mostly under the protective umbrella of the U.S. and was also happy with the power and presence of NATO until the mid-1990s. However, in line with the Single Europe Idea, the European Union—which entered into the process of creating a global European power with the Copenhagen and Maastricht Criteria, while expanding to 28 countries with the enlargement decisions in 2004, 2007 and 2013—revived the dream of creating a European Army by the end of the 1990s, and from 2010 onward, attempted to have it as an important agenda topic within the EU.

The preliminary idea of some EU politicians and opinion leaders was that they no longer needed a NATO dependent on the United States for Europe's security. Therefore, they began to neglect the military spending and investments they had to make under the NATO convention.

■ EU countries not fulfilling obligations

The U.S. side, on the other hand, had not brought up the issue of EU member states not doing their part, especially under former President Barack Obama, until Donald Trump came to the White House. Trump this week resolved his heavy criticism that EU countries were not fulfilling their obligations toward NATO with the EU countries finally agreeing to commit their budget during the last summit.

The undisputed loser of the NATO Summit is French President Emmanuel Macron. As a result of the decisive stance of President Erdogan, President Trump and NATO General Secretary Stoltenberg, Macron—who said that “NATO's brain death took place”—signed the declaration with the following statement: NATO is stronger than ever.

While Macron thought they could corner Turkey with the S-400 issue during his meeting with President Trump, Trump's statement that the “Obama administration has made mistakes” threw the French president a curve. The fact that the S-400 issue wasn't mentioned in the NATO summit's final declaration was an important indicator of Turkey's value.

It seems that the U.S. will not allow NATO to weaken. However, if there is a problem among the member states accepting Russia as a threat in order to make NATO's presence meaningful, this has put China on the radar of NATO as a country that needs to be carefully monitored.

NATO has created a new agenda for the all-out fight against terrorism and the close monitoring of China and the Asia-Pacific region. The last summit has once again bolstered the indispensability of Turkey for NATO. Let's focus more on our indispensable role between the Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific.

(Source: dailysabah.com)

Saudi delivers deeper cuts as OPEC+ oil producers back new pact

Saudi Arabia spearheaded a deal on Friday that will see the OPEC+ group of oil producers commit to some of the sector's deepest output cuts in a decade aiming to avert oversupply and support prices.

Saudi with OPEC peers and allies led by Russia backed a plan that could see cuts as much as 2.1 million barrels per day (bpd), Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said.

Brent oil rose 2 percent to more than \$64 a barrel after the announcement.

The figures include an extra 500,000 barrels per day in cuts to take the OPEC+ target 1.7 million bpd, or 1.7 percent of global demand, plus Saudi continuing to cut 400,000 bpd more than its quota.

“The Saudi goal was not necessarily to push oil prices significantly higher, but rather... to put a firm floor under them during the first quarter to temper any seasonal weakness,” said Amrita Sen, co-founder of Energy Aspects.

OPEC+, which includes more than 20 producers, pump over 40% of the world's oil. They are taking action ahead of expected output increases next year by countries not participating in the cuts led by top producer the United States.

Producers will meet again in early March to decide their next move, Prince Abdulaziz told reporters at the conclusion



of a meeting with OPEC+ producers, adding that there was “deep belief” their collaboration would continue.

“The jury is still out where will we be in March,” he later told Reuters in an interview, when asked what level of supply the market will need then.

Of the 500,000 bpd additional cuts, OPEC will shoulder 372,000 bpd and non-OPEC producers an extra 131,000 bpd, OPEC announced.

“It's the best outcome you could have expected. It puts a floor under prices at \$60 Brent but (we're) still likely in a \$60-65 Brent market until the global economy improves and then we could see \$65 to \$70 Brent in Q2,” said Gary Ross, founder

of Black Gold Investors.

****March meet

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

OPEC's meeting on Thursday in Vienna to deliberate on policy and issues such as compliance with existing targets lasted more than five hours. The extended talks forced the cancellation of a news conference and gala dinner for delegates aboard a boat on the Danube.

Compliance has been a sticking point since the coordinated cuts began in 2017, which is why Saudi Arabia has been cutting more than required. Iraq and Nigeria are among those over-producing.

In his interview with Reuters, Prince Abdulaziz stressed the need for producers such as Iraq and Nigeria to improve their compliance with promised cuts.

Even if their compliance did not improve, however, he said Riyadh would not raise output unilaterally. Instead it would wait for consultations with OPEC+ in March.

“I won't take unilateral measures. I would still consult and review... It will be the group versus those who have not performed.”

(Source: Reuters)

America's political situation is ambiguous

Good and bad polls for Trump!

By Saeed Sobhani

TEHRAN — The political climate in the United States of America is extremely vague! While US President Donald Trump and US Congressman Nancy Pelosi are engaged in a heated debate, some US citizens believe Trump should be impeached and expelled from the White House. Still others are Trump supporters. . Here's a look at the latest news, analysis and polls:

Poll: 46 percent of voters say Trump's Ukraine dealings constitute impeachable offense

As The Hill reported, Almost half of voters say President Trump's dealings with Ukraine constitute grounds for impeachment, according to a new Hill-HarrisX poll.

The nationwide survey found that 46 percent of registered voters said Trump's actions make him guilty "when judged by the constitutional standard of impeachment." Thirty-four percent said his dealings with Ukraine don't rise to the level of impeachment. Twenty percent said they were not sure.

Most of the divisions were along party lines.

Seventy-seven percent of Democratic voters said Trump was guilty of an impeachable offense, compared with just 15 percent of GOP voters who said the same. Four in 10 independents — 41 percent — said the president's actions were an impeachable offense. The survey comes a day after the House Intelligence Committee released a 300-page report making the case for Trump's impeachment. In late September, the House launched a probe into Trump's alleged efforts to leverage a White House visit and \$400 million in military aid to get Kyiv to launch politically motivated investigations that would benefit him politically in 2020.

Much of the information in the report had already been revealed publicly through congressional testimony, but some previously unreleased phone records offered new insights into the extent of communications between key players in the probe.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) released call records showing Rep. Devin Nunes (Calif.), the top Republican on the panel, had been in frequent contact with the White House, Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani and one of his associates, Lev Parnas. Schiff also released call records between Giuliani, Parnas and John Solomon, a conservative columnist formerly with The Hill. The White House criticized the Intelligence Committee report, likening it to "the ramblings of a basement blogger."

The Hill-HarrisX poll surveyed 1,001 registered voters between Nov. 30 and Dec. 1. The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

■ **Poll: 51 percent of Florida voters disapprove of Trump**

About half of voters in Florida disapprove of President Trump, posing a 2020 challenge for the president as he seeks to notch back-to-back electoral victories in the battleground state. The poll, conducted by the Saint Leo University Polling Institute and released Tuesday, found that 51.4 percent of Florida voters last month disapproved of the president's job performance, down from 55 percent in a similar April survey.

Trump garnered support from 45.6 percent of state voters, up from 40.4 percent in April. In 2016, Trump narrowly won Florida, beating former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton by less than 2 percentage points. Trump's approval rating increased among both Florida respondents and nationwide voters, according to the poll. In November, 43.4 percent of U.S. voters polled said they approved of the president's job performance, compared with 41.8 percent in April.

"Although the president's approval rating goes up and down slightly, opinions of his job performance are by now baked into the pumpkin pie," said Frank Orlando, director of the Saint Leo University Polling Institute, in a statement.

Support for the president splits sharply along party lines, with 85.5 percent of Republicans nationwide and 84 percent of Florida Republicans saying they support the president. Among independent voters, 39.6 percent nationwide approved Trump's job performance, compared with 40.5 percent in Florida. Respondents also rated Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R), with 68.2 percent of Florida voters saying they approved of his performance, up from 61.8 percent in April. Florida Sens. Rick Scott (R) and Marco Rubio (R) received approval ratings of 56.8 percent and 55.4 percent, respectively, in the new poll. The Saint Leo University Polling Institute conducted the nationwide survey among 1,000 respondents, with a margin of error of 3 percentage points. The survey of Florida voters consisted of 500 respondents and had 4.5 percentage point margin of error. The data was collected from Nov. 13 to Nov. 18.

■ **Here's why the impeachment polling isn't moving**

The impeachment inquiry into President Donald Trump has had little impact on public opinion. In late November, just like in October, 50% of Americans wanted to impeach and remove Trump from office in CNN/SSRS polling. Moreover, Trump's approval ratings remain in the low 40s, and impeachment really hasn't shaken up the Democratic race for president.

The lack of movement in the political environment may render a news junkie (perhaps you, the person reading this article) with a loss for words.

Here's the deal, though: Persuadable voters on impeachment aren't paying close attention to the impeachment proceedings, and impeachment is a low priority for voters overall. Most voters are locked into their impeachment positions. About 85% of voters in our October and November polls said they felt strongly that Trump should or shouldn't be impeached and removed. Only about 15% of voters didn't have a strong feeling about impeachment or had no opinion at all.

It's this 15% that you might think would be swayed by news coverage of the impeachment proceedings. There's just one problem with this line of thought: They mostly aren't paying attention.

Of those voters, a small 12% of them say they are paying very close attention to the impeachment proceedings. The majority (55%) say they aren't paying close attention. Compare this persuadable group to the about 85% of voters who feel strongly about impeachment. A majority (51%) among them say they are paying very close attention to the impeachment proceedings. Only 13% say they aren't paying close attention. In other words, many of those who feel strongly about impeachment are keeping an eye on proceedings that are unlikely to change their mind about impeachment. These



voters who feel strongly about impeachment have already decided how they feel about Trump. A near unanimous 98% of those who strongly favor impeaching and removing Trump disapprove of his overall job performance. A similar 96% who are strongly against impeachment and removing Trump approve of his job performance. There's just not a lot of room for Trump's job performance numbers to move among those who are locked into their impeachment opinion.

But there's another element at play here: Voters feel impeachment is not all that important in the grand scheme of things.

Our poll released last week asked voters to tell us how important eight different issues would be in determining their 2020 vote. Only 46% said the impeachment inquiry into Trump was extremely or very important to their vote. That was good enough for dead last. To put it in further perspective, the top two issues for voters were economy at 83% and health care at 80%.

This current polling reminds me a lot of the polling surrounding former special counsel Robert Mueller's Russian investigation. Despite it getting a lot of news coverage, voters said it was among the least important issues for them and their 2020 vote.

When you break it down to independents, the numbers are even more stark. A mere 42% of independents say the impeachment inquiry is extremely or very important to their 2020 vote, which is the lowest of any issue. In fact, climate change (48%) is the only other issue in which less than 60% said it is extremely or very important to their 2020 vote. Meanwhile, 84% of independents say the economy is.

The low ranking of the impeachment inquiry fits with what is being seen on the campaign trail, too. Very few voters are asking the candidates about it.

Unless something dramatically changes in the impeachment proceedings, don't expect voters to start caring more about impeachment. But even if something does happen, these poll numbers suggest that it may not have that large of an impact.

■ **Warren and Biden lose ground, Sanders moves ahead in California's shifting 2020 Democratic race**

The Democratic presidential contest in California remains extremely fluid — but not enough, at least so far, to provide an opening for Michael Bloomberg, who entered the race two weeks ago and was banking on winning big in the delegate-rich state, a new poll for the Los Angeles Times has found.

The survey by the UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies found that both Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts — the commanding front-runner in a September California poll — and former Vice President Joe Biden have lost ground among the state's likely Democratic primary voters over the last two months.

That erosion has benefited Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who narrowly tops the primary field, and Mayor Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Ind., who doubled his support since the September poll.

With less than two months before voting starts in Iowa's Democratic caucuses and three months before California's March 3 primary, "the race is really unusually fluid," said Mark DiCamillo, director of the Berkeley IGS poll of voters likely to go to the polls in the Democratic primary.

"Voters are struggling and not sticking with their candidates," he said. "They are moving around from candidate to candidate."

Bloomberg appears ill-equipped to break into the mix. The poll, which was taken Nov. 21-27, just as Bloomberg started advertising in California and elsewhere on Nov. 25, found that he began his campaign with one of the most negative images of any candidate in the field. About 40% of the likely Democratic primary voters surveyed viewed him negatively, and just 15% had a positive impression.

"That's a hole he's going to have to dig out of and reintroduce himself to voters," said DiCamillo. "It's going to be tough."

The upshot of the poll is that the field's most liberal candidates, Warren and Sanders, are in a statistical tie for first place. The leading candidates making a more moderate pitch, Biden and Buttigieg, are lagging and essentially tied for third place. Sanders is in the nominal lead, as the first-choice pick of 24%; Warren is the first pick of 22%. That is a big change from September, when she led the field with 29%. Biden is the first choice of 14%, down six points from September. Buttigieg is preferred by 12%, up six points from September. The poll was taken before California Sen. Kamala Harris dropped out of the race. It asked whom her supporters would name as their second choice if she quit and found that Warren and Biden would benefit the most. If Harris voters were reallocated based on those responses, the race would tighten at the top to Sanders, 25%; Warren, 24%; Biden, 17%; Buttigieg, 13%.

California will affect the prospects of all candidates because it has the largest number of delegates at next summer's Democratic nominating convention. It is especially important for Bloomberg, a multibillionaire and former New York City mayor. He is skipping the first nominating

contests and counting on a big splash March 3 in the so-called Super Tuesday primaries in 17 states and territories, including California.

The Berkeley IGS poll, which was three-quarters complete before Bloomberg's ads started running, found 8% were considering voting for Bloomberg. Whether his big spending on ads can change the negative image he brings to the race will be a test of the power of money in politics, but the record on such efforts — by rich presidential candidates such as Ross Perot, who ran as an independent in 1992, and Steve Forbes, a Republican candidate in 2000 — is not promising. California billionaire Tom Steyer also has made a heavy investment in his own 2020 presidential bid, and his campaign is still floundering: Just 1% of California voters in the Berkeley-IGS survey said Steyer was their first choice, and only 18% viewed him favorably.

Among the top-tier candidates, the opinion shifts among Californians are similar to trends found in other polls nationally and in key early-voting states. Warren is coming back down to earth after a steady run-up in polling this summer and fall; Sanders is regaining traction after an October heart attack unsettled his campaign; and Biden is facing increased competition from Buttigieg among voters who think Warren and Sanders are too far left.

Warren's image has suffered over the last few months, during which she has struggled to answer the question of how she would overhaul the healthcare system. Her favorability rating remains high, with 67% viewing her positively, but that is down 10 points since September. Still, the poll found that Warren had more room to increase support among California Democrats than any other candidate: 58% said they at least considered supporting her, compared with the 49% who were considering Sanders, 41% considering Buttigieg and 39% considering Biden. The poll also provided a window into the perceived strengths of the candidates — and why Biden has come in a weak third compared with his stronger standing in national polls.

Biden led the field when California voters were asked which candidate had the best chance of beating Trump and which was best qualified to serve as president: 29% said he was the most electable, and 28% said he was best qualified, compared with Sanders' second-place ranking on those points, with 22% and 24%, respectively. But Biden drops to single digits behind other candidates on other qualities: Just 6% said he was the candidate with the sharpest mental abilities, compared with the 24% who picked Warren, who leads the field on that attribute.

Sanders tops the field on three other attributes — being the candidate who would bring the right kind of change to Washington (28%), the one who comes closest to sharing voters' values (27%) and the candidate who best understands the problems of "people like you" (28%). The poll found that the four septuagenarian candidates — Sanders, 78; Biden and Bloomberg, 77; Warren, 70 — faced differing levels of concern about their age. About one-third said they were extremely or very concerned that Biden's and Sanders' age would hurt their ability to serve as president. Only 7% said that about Warren; 17% said so about Bloomberg.

The poll found increasingly stiff three-way competition in California for older voters, a part of the electorate that has been especially important to Biden's national standing. Both he and Warren lost ground among those 65 and older over the last few months, while Buttigieg gained among that group, a prized bloc because it tends to vote in large numbers.

Biden narrowly leads with 22% of the over-65 vote, down from 26% in September. Warren's share dropped to 18%, from 32% in September. Buttigieg supporters, meanwhile, increased to 17% of those seniors, from just 7% in September. Sanders' campaign, by contrast, hinges on his ability to turn out younger voters who are less inclined than their elders to vote: He barely registered among older voters but was the first choice of 46% of voters ages 18 to 29. That contributes to the advantage Sanders has among Latino voters, who tend to be younger as a group than other ethnicities. In California, 32% of Latino Democrats favor Sanders, a solid 13-point margin over the next closest candidate, Biden, who has 19%. California will be an important test of candidate strength because it has a much more diverse population than the first two states in the nominating process, Iowa and New Hampshire, which are predominantly white. The poll was conducted online in English and Spanish from Nov. 21 to 27 among 1,694 Californians considered likely to vote in the state's upcoming Democratic presidential primary. The estimated margin of error for the Democratic sample is 4 percentage points in either direction.

■ **Bernie Sanders Tops New California Poll—But You Wouldn't Have Known It By Reading This LA Times Headline**

As Common Dreams reported, A new poll released Thursday found that Sen. Bernie Sanders is leading the 2020 Democratic presidential field in California—but you wouldn't have known it by reading the Los Angeles Times' original headline on the survey, which mentioned Sen. Elizabeth Warren and former Vice President Joe Biden, but not the

senator from Vermont.

"Warren and Biden lose ground in California's shifting 2020 Democratic race," read the newspaper's initial headline which, in the face of backlash, was later changed to, "Warren and Biden lose ground, Sanders moves ahead in California's shifting 2020 Democratic race."

While the Times changed its headline, it did not alter the body of the story, which doesn't mention Sanders until the third paragraph. "The Democratic presidential contest in California remains extremely fluid—but not enough, at least so far, to provide an opening for Michael Bloomberg," reads the story's lede paragraph.

The poll, conducted for the Times by the U.C. Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies, found that Sanders is leading the California presidential primary race at 24% support and has gained 5% since September.

Warren polled in second place at 22% (down 7% since September), Biden in third at 14% (down 6% since September), and South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg in fourth at 12% (up 6% since September). The survey's margin of error is plus or minus 4%. "The person who gained ground is not allowed to be in the headline," Faiz Shakir, Sanders' campaign manager, tweeted in response to the Times original headline. Despite Sanders' jump since September, the Times framed the survey solely around Warren and Biden's fall.

"That erosion has benefited Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who narrowly tops the primary field," the Times reported. The new survey, the Times noted, also found that Sanders is leading 2020 Democratic field in California "on three other attributes—being the candidate who would bring the right kind of change to Washington (28%), the one who comes closest to sharing voters' values (27%) and the candidate who best understands the problems of 'people like you' (28%)."

The newspaper's treatment of Sanders on this poll was for many observers just the latest example of a trend by many mainstream outlets of ignoring, sidelining, or otherwise downplaying the Sanders presidential campaign—a phenomenon some refer to as the #BernieBlackout.

■ **Biden retains lead in national poll**

As The Hill reported, Former Vice President Joe Biden retained the lead in a national poll released Tuesday.

The Morning Consult poll shows Biden amassing the support of 29 percent of surveyed registered voters likely to vote in a Democratic primary or caucus. He maintains a 9 percentage-point lead over runner-up Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) nationally.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) slides into third place nationally with 15 percent support, followed by South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg at 9 percent.

But among the "Early Primary State Voters" surveyed, Biden's lead — 25 percent — shrinks to 5 percentage points over runner-up Sanders. Buttigieg jumps into third with 13 percent support in these states, followed by Warren with 12 percent. The former vice president's lead has dropped to its lowest point since he announced his candidacy in April. Biden's and Sanders's support each fell 1 percentage point since last week.

Warren has experienced a 6 percentage-point drop since her highest point from Sept. 29 to Oct. 20. Buttigieg, on the other hand, has risen in the polls 4 percentage points from his stagnant 5 percent status from mid-August to mid-October. Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has gained traction in the poll since his announcement to officially enter the race last week, jumping to 5 percent support and tying Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) for fifth place nationally.

Behind them, entrepreneur Andrew Yang has 4 percent, and Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii), Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and philanthropist Tom Steyer sit at 2 percent each.

Morning Consult interviewed 15,773 registered voters likely to vote in the Democratic primary or caucus. The poll was conducted between Nov. 25 and Dec. 1 and had a margin of error of 1 percentage point nationally and 4 points among early primary state voters in Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada.

■ **Bernie Sanders is the most popular candidate among college students**

American college students have chosen Bernie Sanders as their candidate of choice according to a new Axios/College-Reaction.com poll, outpacing President Donald Trump, who sits in second place, by 5.2 percent. Sanders captured 22.5 percent of the approval of those polled while incumbent Trump received 17.3 percent. Senator Elizabeth Warren came in third with 15.9 percent. Former Vice President Joe Biden, who led the poll with almost 19 percent in April, dropped to fourth place in the most recent poll with 12.3 percent. His ranking in this poll has hovered around 13 percent in each of these polls taken since April.

Entrepreneur Andrew Yang collected 9.3 percent to take fifth place while South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg came in sixth place with 8.2 percent. "Buttigieg was the only other candidate to gain more than one point in this poll since October," according to Axios. Other candidates in the 2020 presidential race came in at under 3 percent in the poll including Senator Kamala Harris who dropped out of the running on Tuesday.

Newsweek reached out to the campaigns of both Sanders and Trump but did not receive a response in time for publication. Senator Bernie Sanders has risen to the top of a poll of college students who have named him their top candidate for president. This marks the first time Sanders has taken the lead in the poll. In September, Warren was solidly in the lead with 19.5 percent. However, Warren's poll numbers have declined as of late.

Warren's numbers in this poll echo the November nationwide Quinnipiac poll that also found her in third place with 14 percent of voters throwing her their support. Her dropping poll numbers may coincide with her proposal for how to pay for her Medicare for All plan.

Warren's proposed Ultra-Millionaire Tax would serve to help finance her health plan. "By asking billionaires to pitch in six cents on each dollar of net worth above \$1 billion, we can raise an additional \$1 trillion in revenue and further close the gap between what middle-class families pay as a percentage of their wealth and what the top one-tenth of one percent pay," the Medicare for All plan reads. Sanders, however, has said his Medicare for All plan is more "progressive" than Warren's. ➡7

CIA behind recent unrest in Iran: Paul Craig Roberts

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Dr. Paul Craig Roberts, former US assistant secretary of the Treasury for Economic Policy under President Ronald Reagan in 1981, said the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) orchestrated the recent riots in Iran over fuel price hike.

"The riots were organized by the CIA just as in Ukraine, Hong Kong, Georgia, the 'Arab Spring.'" Why is this not obvious to Iran?" Craig Roberts, current chairman of the Institute for Political Economy, told Tasnim.

From early 1981 to January 1982, Roberts served as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Economic Policy. After his time in government, he turned to journalism, holding positions of editor and columnist for The Wall Street Journal, columnist for Business Week, the Scripps Howard News Service as well as contributing editor to Harper's Magazine. Roberts was a professor of business administration and professor of economics at George Mason University and was the inaugural William E. Simon Chair in Political Economy at Georgetown University, serving for 12 years.

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. 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: The real question is: Why did the Iranian government play into Washington's hands by raising fuel prices?

■ 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: Washington is expert at bringing "color revolutions," such as the Green Revolution in Iran. Most of them succeed. The real question is why do countries permit Washington-funded and organized NGOs to operate in their countries as Fifth Columns? Why are not the subversives arrested and the organizations broken up?



■ On 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: The riots were organized by the CIA just as in Ukraine, Hong Kong, Georgia, the "Arab Spring." Why is this not obvious to Iran?

■ 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: Washington is not interested in diplomacy in its dealings with any country, even far more powerful countries than Iran, such as Russia and China. Washington uses threats and force, not diplomacy. A person would think that Iran would know that by now.

U.S. Intel. Ops against Iran Limited, Not Very Successful: EX-CIA Officer

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A former military intelligence officer with the CIA described US-led intelligence operations against Iran as "limited" and "not very successful", saying that Washington is seeking to stir up trouble inside the country through its regional allies.

"The US intelligence operations in Iran are not very successful and are limited. They are only able to make the situation more difficult to contain. But yes, I do believe that evidence of Saudi and US involvement will be found and the government in Tehran should make that evidence public when it can be confirmed," Philip Giraldi told Tasnim in an interview.

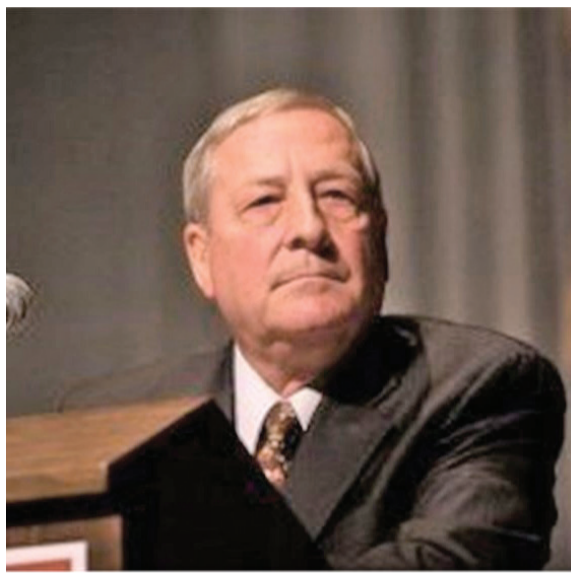
Philip Giraldi is a former counter-terrorism specialist and military intelligence officer of the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and a columnist and television commentator who is the Executive Director of the Council for the National Interest, a group that advocates for more even-handed policies by the US government in the Middle East.

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 has been the intention of the United States to bring about regime change in Iran since 1979. I believe that the rioting in Iran is largely spontaneous and the people blame the government for the rise in prices, but you also have to realize that the US, the Saudis and Israelis all have intelligence services that are actively stirring up trouble through their agents inside Iran and are also broadcasting false information to make the situation more confusing. Ironically, of course, the interventions by foreign countries only make most Iranians support the government more strongly because they are able to see with their own eyes and hear with their own ears that hostile governments in Riyadh, Tel Aviv and Washington truly are out to destroy Iran.

■ 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: The US intelligence operations in Iran are not very successful and are limited. They are only able to make the situation more difficult to contain. But yes, I do believe that evidence of Saudi and US involvement will be found and the government in Tehran should make that evidence public when it can be confirmed.

■ 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 the 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: Trump is not interested in diplomacy with Iran. He has been convinced by his neoconservative advisers that enough pressure on Iran will cause the government to fall, which is what the Deep State in Washington supported by Israel in particular and Saudi Arabia to an extent want to happen. There is no one at the top of any of those governments that wants to negotiate with Iran.

America's political situation is ambiguous

6 → "I think we have a better way, which is a 7.5 percent payroll tax," Sanders said to ABC News in November, "which is far more I think progressive, because it'll not impact employers of low wage workers but hit significantly employers of upper income people."

Nationwide, a November poll by Emerson Polling placed Sanders in a tie for first place with Biden with 27 percent approval apiece. Those results prompted Sanders to tweet, "We're going to win."

Poll: Trump Job Performance Hits 52 Percent Amid Impeachment

As Theepochtimes reported, A new poll showed that President Donald Trump's approval rating reached 52 percent amid the fight against impeachment. Rasmussen Reports, a pollster the president frequently cites, said 52 percent of likely U.S. voters approve of his job performance while 47 percent disapprove.

It added, "The latest figures include 38 percent who strongly approve of the job Trump is doing and 40 percent who strongly disapprove."

On Wednesday, after House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) announced the House would go forward on drafting articles of impeachment, Trump tweeted the Rasmussen poll results. Former President Barack Obama, during the same time in his presidency, had a 46 percent approval rating, Rasmussen noted.

As House Democrats have carried out an impeachment probe into Trump's dealings with Ukraine, the president has frequently said he has high approval rating among Republicans.

"In the history of the Republican Party, there has not been this support," Trump told reporters in London during a NATO press conference. "And as far as I'm concerned, I hear the Senate is angry about—the Republican senators are very angry about what's going on because they hurt our country. They're hurting our country—the other side—very badly," he added. Pelosi suggested that Democrats would move quickly on drafting articles of impeachment, and the House Judiciary Committee announced it will hold a hearing next week.

The hearing was set for Monday, Dec. 9, and is titled, "The Impeachment Inquiry into President Donald J. Trump: Presentations from the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and House Judiciary Committee," according to the committee. Other details about the hearing were not provided by the committee chaired by Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.).

"Our democracy is what is at stake. The president leaves us no choice but to act because he is trying to corrupt, once again, the election for his own benefit. The president has engaged in abuse of power, undermining our national security and jeopardizing the



integrity of our elections," Pelosi said earlier on Thursday. The speaker asserted Trump's July 25 call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky—where the president suggested his counterpart should look into allegations of corruption against former Vice President Joe Biden and son Hunter Biden—was an abuse of power that undermined national security. Trump and Zelensky have denied the allegations.

At Wednesday's hearing, three Democratic-selected law professors asserted that Trump committed an impeachable offense while the lone Republican-selected expert said Democrats are moving too quickly and have no evidence.

■ California voters strongly support impeaching Trump, poll shows

As House Democrats move forward in their effort to remove President Trump from office, a new poll finds California voters deeply split along party lines, with a majority supporting impeachment. More than 8 in 10 self-identified Democrats in the state support impeaching Trump and removing him from office while about 8 in 10 self-identified Republicans oppose doing so, according to the latest Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies poll conducted for the Los Angeles Times.

Independents who don't lean to either party split closely on impeachment, with 40% in favor and 36% opposed. That's a relatively small group, however, only about 1 in 8 California voters, since most self-identified independents lean toward one party or the other.

Nationally, voters are closely divided on impeachment, polls show. But in California, where Democrats heavily outnumber Republicans, the sharp divide

among partisans translates into a strong margin for impeaching Trump — 57% in favor, 30% opposed, with 13% saying they either don't know or feel it's too.

The partisan divide also means widespread approval of the two California Democrats who have steered the impeachment process in the House — Speaker Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco and the House Intelligence Committee chairman, Rep. Adam B. Schiff of Burbank. What it does not mean, however, is any significant change in how voters view Trump or his potential reelection — a lack of movement that's reflected in national polls. The president has been unpopular in California since he took office in 2017, and a large majority of voters in the state oppose him. That hasn't changed: California appears on track to reject Trump's reelection bid, likely by an historic margin. But the impeachment crisis has not worsened his standing. Nor does it appear to have changed minds on either side. Almost all partisans, on both sides, say they feel "strongly" about their positions.

"The net effect of two weeks of televised impeachment hearings appears only to have dug California voters in deeper to their earlier held partisan positions about the president. Few minds have been changed," said Mark DiCamillo, the poll director for the Berkeley institute. The roughly 1 in 8 voters who remain uncertain also overwhelmingly say they aren't paying close attention to the impeachment battle, following the typical pattern that the voters who most closely follow news tend to be the most partisan. Overall, 42% of the state's voters said they were following news of the impeachment process very closely,

another 40% said they were following somewhat closely, while 18% said they were not paying close attention.

The poll of 3,482 registered voters statewide was conducted Nov. 21-27 — after the conclusion of the two weeks of public hearings that the Intelligence Committee conducted in mid-November. The results for the full voter sample have an estimated margin of error of 2.5 percentage points in either direction.

On Wednesday, the House Judiciary Committee is scheduled to hold a public hearing and is expected to begin drawing up articles of impeachment later this month. The full House is expected to vote on impeachment before Christmas. If impeachment passes — as seems all but assured given the Democrats' majority in the chamber — the Senate probably would conduct a trial in January. Asked what the Senate should do, California voters divided the same way they did on a House impeachment — 55% said the senators should convict Trump and remove him from office, while 28% said they should not and 17% were undecided or said it was too soon to know.

Overall, 50% of voters favored both a House impeachment and a Senate conviction while 39% opposed both and 7% favored the House impeaching Trump, but were either opposed to the Senate convicting him or weren't sure about it.

The poll findings "really shows the solidification of party lines when it comes to Trump," said Berkeley political science professor Eric Schickler. "It's a sharp contrast with Watergate, where over time, you saw Republicans coming around to the idea that President Nixon should go." "There has been more news, more

surprises in this presidency than almost any, and yet his approval rating has remained the same," and how people feel about impeachment has largely matched whether or not they approve of Trump, he added. When Pelosi first announced on Sept. 24 that the House would begin an impeachment inquiry, many political analysts predicted the move would hurt Democrats' prospects, much as the impeachment of President Clinton hurt Republicans a generation ago. That hasn't happened. Instead, both in California and nationally, impeachment appears to have unified the Democrats' factions. By 50% to 32%, Democrats in the state said they want Democrats in Congress to focus on impeaching Trump. Republicans, overwhelmingly, said Democrats in Congress should focus on other national priorities. The two sides also divide on whether the impeachment process has been fair, with nearly 8 in 10 Democrats saying the process has been fair and impartial, while just over 8 in 10 Republicans say it has not been. Schiff, who ran the process in the Intelligence Committee and likely will continue to do so if the House votes to send the impeachment to the Senate for trial, has gained stature among Democrats, which could help him if he pursues statewide office, as he has long contemplated.

Four years ago, when Sen. Barbara Boxer announced her retirement and Schiff thought about getting into the race to replace her, a Los Angeles Times poll found only 19% of people statewide felt they knew enough about him to have an opinion.

Now, roughly three-quarters of California voters have a view of him, putting him in the same league statewide as Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Kamala Harris, who succeeded Boxer. Overall, 44% of the state's voters approve of Schiff's job performance, the poll found, while 31% disapprove, a more favorable ratio than either of the senators. The poll found voters slightly negative on Feinstein's job performance, 46% approval to 52% disapproval, and evenly divided on Harris, 50% to 49%.

As with the impeachment that has made him well known, views about Schiff are highly partisan: Democrats approve of his job performance 70% to 7%, while Republicans disapprove 80% to 7%.

Views of Pelosi are similarly partisan. Overall, the state's voters approve of her job performance 53% to 46%. Democrats approve 81% to 19% while Republicans overwhelmingly disapprove of her, 91% to 8%. Pelosi, like previous House speakers, has been a polarizing figure through much of her tenure. But Republican efforts to make her a centerpiece of their midterm election campaign fell flat in the 2018 as Democrats regained control of the House. The speaker's decision to put Schiff and

the Intelligence Committee in charge of the impeachment investigation has "paid off for the party, and for Schiff personally," Schickler said. "There's a long history of members of Congress raising their profiles by leading high-profile hearings. Schiff is providing another example of that."

■ Support for Elizabeth Warren drops to lowest since August

As Reuters reported, Support for U.S. Democratic presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren dropped nationally to its lowest level in four months, and nearly one in three potential Democratic primary voters say they do not know which candidate to pick with the first nominating contests less than two months away, according to a Reuters/Ipsos public opinion poll.

The poll, conducted on Wednesday and Thursday, found the level of indecision has jumped among Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents after an already wide slate of candidates underwent a considerable amount of recent turnover ahead of the November 2020 election. U.S. Senator Kamala Harris of California quit the race this week, and two new candidates, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and former Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, jumped in the race late last month.

The latest poll found that support declined for all of the top candidates, including Warren, when compared with a similar poll that ran on Nov. 20-22. Support dropped by 2 percentage points for former Vice President Joe Biden to 19%. It fell by 3 points for U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont to 14%, and it declined by 1 point to 6% for Mayor Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Indiana. Bloomberg, a billionaire media mogul, entered the race as the fifth-most popular candidate with 4% support. Support for Warren dropped by 2 points to 9% in the national poll, the worst showing for the U.S. senator from Massachusetts in the Reuters/Ipsos poll since August. To be sure, Warren is still among the most popular candidates in Iowa, which will be holding its nominating contest on Feb. 3, and she is also among the top candidates in other early primary states. But nationally, Warren has slipped as her rivals for the nomination criticized her proposal for extending government-paid healthcare to all Americans as too costly.

Meantime, 31% of Democrats and independents said they "don't know" which candidate to support. That is the highest level of indecision measured in Reuters/Ipsos poll dating back to mid-April. The Reuters/Ipsos poll was conducted online, in English, throughout the United States. It gathered responses from 719 adults who identify as Democrats, independents and politically unaffiliated. The poll has a credibility interval, a measure of precision, of 4 percentage points.

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Scientists find huge planet orbiting around a white dwarf star

Scientists have found the first ever evidence of a planet orbiting a dead white dwarf star. The giant, distant planet was discovered through the disc of gas that was created by its evaporating atmosphere.

The planet is much bigger than the dead sun that it orbits around. The world, which resembles Neptune, is about four times as big as the white dwarf, which is roughly the same size as Earth.

The giant planet orbits the star about once every 10 days, leaving a trail of gas comprised of hydrogen, oxygen and sulfur in its wake.

Until now, there has been no evidence of a planet that has survived a star's transition to a white dwarf, researchers say.

The discovery by astronomers from the University of Warwick's Department of Physics and the Millennium Nucleus for Planet Formation (NPF) at the University of Valparaíso is published in the journal Nature.

They say it is the first evidence of a giant planet orbiting a white dwarf star.

The star, WD J0914+1914, was identified in a survey of 10,000 white dwarfs observed by the Sloan Digital Sky Survey.

Researchers say the star is around 2,000 light years from Earth.

Astronomers at Warwick analyzed subtle variations in the light emitted from the system to identify the elements present around the star.

They detected very minute spikes of hydrogen in the data, but also of oxygen and sulfur, which they had never seen before.

Using the Very Large Telescope of the European Southern Observatory in Chile they found the shape of the gases are typical



indicators of a ring of gas.

Lead author Dr. Boris Gaensicke, from the University of Warwick, said: "At first, we thought that this was a binary star with an accretion disc formed from mass flowing between the two stars.

"However, our observations show that it is a single white dwarf with a disc around it roughly 10 times the size of our sun, made solely of hydrogen, oxygen and sulfur.

"Such a system has never been seen before, and it was immediately clear to me that this was a unique star."

Analysis of the data suggests the composition of the disc matches what scientists expect for the deeper layers of our own solar

system's ice giants, Uranus and Neptune.

Dr. Matthias Schreiber from the University of Valparaíso calculated that the 28,000C hot white dwarf is slowly evaporating this hidden icy giant by bombarding it with high energy photons.

It is pulling its lost mass into a gas disc around the star at a rate of more than 3,000 tons per second.

Dr. Gaensicke said: "This star has a planet that we can't see directly, but because the star is so hot it is evaporating the planet, and we detect the atmosphere it is losing.

"There could be many cooler white dwarfs that have planets but lacking the high-energy photons necessary to drive

evaporation, so we wouldn't be able to find them with the same method.

"This discovery is major progress because over the past two decades we had growing evidence that planetary systems survive into the white dwarf stage.

"We've seen a lot of asteroids, comets and other small planetary objects hitting white dwarfs, and explaining these events requires larger, planet-mass bodies further out."

He added that having evidence for an actual planet was an "important step".

Dr. Schreiber added: "In a sense, WD J0914+1914 is providing us with a glimpse into the very distant future of our own solar system."

The white dwarf was once a star similar to the sun but eventually ran out of fuel, and swelled up into a red giant, a few hundred times the size of the sun.

During that phase of its life, the star will have lost about half of its mass and what was left has shrunk, ending up size of the Earth.

It is essentially the burnt-out core of the former star.

Once the Earth's sun runs out of fuel in about 4.5 billion years it will shed its outer layers, destroying Mercury, Venus, and probably the Earth, eventually exposing the burnt-out core - the white dwarf.

In a companion paper led by Dr. Schreiber and Dr. Gaensicke, published in Astrophysical Journal Letters, they detail how this will radiate enough high energy photons to evaporate Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.

(Source: The Independent)

Iconic space observatory in Puerto Rico recovers after Hurricane Maria

By Paul Brinkmann

The world's most powerful radio space telescope, which was damaged by Hurricane Maria two years ago, is being repaired slowly under new management determined to maintain it as a hub of interstellar discovery.

The iconic Arecibo Observatory, famous for its appearance in movies such as 1995's GoldenEye and Species, and 1997's Contact, has brought two scientists Nobel Prizes and achieved worldwide acclaim for its research efforts.

For decades, Arecibo has had a key role in detecting dangerous near-Earth asteroids that could destroy civilization should they hit the planet, and NASA awarded the facility \$19 million for that program in August.

"We have a plan to revive Arecibo, and it includes building our science team, providing better access for visitors and seeking a new, more reliable power source for the region and for the observatory," said Ramon Lugo, director at the University of Central Florida's space institute in Orlando. The university is the new manager.

"People have argued that a combination of smaller telescopes could replace Arecibo, but the government would have to restore this site to its original condition if we left it, and we would lose the talent and the great facilities we already have here," Lugo said.

The site is owned by the National Science Foundation, which has had flat budgets for the past 10 years. The agency decided after the hurricane not to shutter Arecibo, but to pass facility management on to a group led by the University of Central Florida. The new leaders has received grants from the science organization and NASA for five years as it tries to develop new income from commercial enterprise and tourists.

Nestled in the hilly Puerto Rican interior, Arecibo is reachable only by helicopter or a long, twisty country road. About 120 people work at the observatory, 20 of whom are resident scientists. A small team of scientists and staff rode out Maria there.

The facility suffered about \$4 million to \$8 million in damage when Maria strafed the island in September 2017. Roofs and windows were wrecked on the observatory's buildings, but the dish and telescope remained mostly intact. A large antenna on the telescope broke off in the storm, and that has hampered work on scanning the atmosphere.

Trees and storm debris took weeks to clean up, and generators that were intended for sporadic use with the telescope were damaged by running 24 hours a day for four months.

When the university's staff walked the property for the first time, members found maintenance records on index cards and no running inventory in the warehouse, Lugo said.

"Scientists aren't trained to manage programs or facilities in general. We've brought in some new staff as needed," he said.



Lugo is the former director of NASA's Glenn Research Center in Cleveland. As a child in Puerto Rico, he visited the observatory. He visited again decades later representing NASA — before Maria hit.

"I kind of noticed that, while it was still a great place, it was suffering from a lack of enthusiasm," Lugo said. "At that point, I thought that if I ever had the chance to do something about it, I would."

The university's partners at Arecibo are Puerto Rico's Ana G. Mendez University System, which runs the visitor center, and Yang Enterprises, an engineering consulting firm based in an Orlando suburb.

The observatory came through Maria surprisingly intact, considering it is basically a six-story structure suspended by cables hanging from three skyscraper-like concrete towers.

Arecibo was consumed by rescue and cleanup efforts immediately after the storm. Just clearing the country roads around it took weeks. Crews removed debris from the observatory's dish, and the on-site maintenance staff made small repairs to buildings.

The two biggest remaining repairs require replacing a massive cable that helps suspend the telescope above the reflector dish and a realignment of some 39,000 panels that comprise the dish. Those two repairs could cost up to \$4 million, according to Arecibo engineers.

After Maria, the National Science Foundation awarded two grants of more than \$14 million to repair and upgrade the facility. But Arecibo's annual funding from the agency has been slashed. It used to provide the majority of Arecibo's \$12 million budget, but federal strategy in 2012 was to back away from funding older telescopes.

"It's a tough environment," Lugo said. "I don't think there's any maintenance issue that I would characterize as an immediate risk or as unsafe, but we still need to replace that cable, especially."

The observatory reopened for business four months after Maria. Besides asteroid detection, other research at Arecibo includes the study of interstellar gases and the Earth's ionosphere or upper atmosphere.

Lugo said he'd like to tap into Puerto Rico's tourism

economy, which has boomed with more cruise ship traffic, for revenue. But the staff at Arecibo has noted that visitors are almost entirely centered on the island's capital and main port, San Juan. The observatory is about 60 miles from the capital, and the last 15 miles are quite a journey.

Lugo also is talking to potential partners for a large solar farm in Puerto Rico's interior, which would could provide electricity should future hurricanes strike.

Completed in 1963, the observatory owns more than 100 acres. The facility itself covers 18 acres, with a curved reflector dish the area of about 20 football fields. It was built in Puerto Rico because scientists in the 1950s found a sinkhole valley that was shaped perfectly to support the massive dish.

One of the most complicated problems caused by Maria, and from years of declining budgets, is the need to align the dish's panels. Fixing the panels also is funded by Maria recovery grants.

The aluminum panels are rectangles, about 1 by 2 meters. Perforations allow rain to pass through, but the aluminum reflects radio waves from space to the telescope hanging above.

"Each panel needs to be aligned, down to the millimeter, and a few need to be replaced," said Luis Quintero, an engineer who heads up the electronics department at the observatory.

He said the panels are supposed to be aligned every 10 years, but the last scheduled maintenance didn't happen because of declining budgets and management decisions. Then Maria made the situation more pressing.

Winds toppled equipment around the dish, along with a few trees that fell and damaged the panels, knocking them out of alignment.

Quintero found he might need to use older technology to fix the dish properly, namely film cameras. Almost 20 years ago, engineers used a film camera to capture high-resolution images of each panel, along with cables and bolts that are used to align them, he said.

"We only have digital cameras now, so we're studying how it was done to come up with a plan," he said. "There may be laser scanning that can accomplish this also."

Lugo imagines a bold future for University of Central Florida's astronomy programs, with Arecibo as a centerpiece.

"We're writing a lot of proposals to pay for the scientists, and we're building a team," he said. "We've hired an early career scientist to start building instrumentation so we can start leading a research mission for NASA."

Eventually he imagines a return of samples from Mars, or a flyby to a distant planet or asteroid. Having Arecibo in the university's portfolio is a big advantage in building such a team, he said.

"We're not there yet. I'm not satisfied with where we're at with Arecibo, but it's a very challenging budget profile," Lugo said. "Like I tell our people there, the key is to have a strategy, work hard and evaluate the strategy. We're on our way."

Russian supply ship lifts off to International Space Station

An automatic Russian supply ship carrying tons of supplies successfully blasted off Friday heading for the International Space Station.

The Progress MS-13 cargo ship lifted off as scheduled at 2:34 p.m. (0934 GMT) atop a

Soyuz rocket from the Russian space complex in Baikonur, Kazakhstan.

It successfully entered a designated preliminary orbit and is set to dock with the space outpost on Monday.

The Progress is carrying about 3 tons (2.7 metric tons) of food, fuel and supplies to the space station, which currently has six astronauts aboard — NASA astronauts Andrew Morgan, Jessica Meir and

Christina Koch; Italian astronaut Luca Parmitano of the European Space Agency; and Russia's Alexander Skvortsov and Oleg Skripochka.

(Source: AP News)

Rocket Lab launches shooting star satellite from New Zealand

A satellite that spits out artificial shooting stars for light shows in the sky flew into space Friday from New Zealand. The launch came at 9:18 p.m. local time, or 3:18 a.m. EST.

The satellite, made by Japan-based Astro Live Experiences or ALE Co. Ltd, was packed on board an Electron rocket made by new space company Rocket Lab.

It was the 10th launch for Huntington Beach, Calif.-based Rocket Lab and its eighth commercial launch, prompting the mission name of "Running out of Fingers."

It was also the first time that Rocket Lab attempted to test navigation telemetry on its first-stage booster.

The company had decided not to recover the booster,

but to use the data in an effort to make the Electron rocket reusable in the future. Rocket Lab intends to catch its boosters, mid-air, using a helicopter with a grappling hook that would snag a parachute line.

Rocket Lab, founded by New Zealand engineer Peter Beck, launches from its own private launch pad on the Mahia Peninsula of New Zealand's North Island.

ALE hopes to have its shooting star satellite, ALE-2, ready by the opening ceremony of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics in June.

"With this launch, we are a step closer to realizing the man-made shooting star," said ALE's founder and CEO,

Lena Okajima. "Please look forward to the world's first demonstration we are aiming in 2020."

Also on board the Electron rocket were six nano-satellites built by Glasgow-based Alba Orbital.

Alba Orbital provides mission management for other customers. The small satellites represent five different countries and a range of technology demonstrations, including a payload built by university students in Hungary to measure human-made electromagnetic pollution and a test of new thermal-isolation material for use in space.

(Source: UPI)

Novel software helps scientists see what animals see

Researchers in Australia and Britain have developed a new software framework that allows humans to see the world as animals do.

To accurately model animal behavior, scientists need to understand how different species process their surroundings, but figuring out exactly how different animals see the world has proven difficult.

The new framework, described Tuesday in the journal Methods in Ecology and Evolution, processes digital images and strips away the colors and details that can't be seen by a specific animal species.

"The framework took four years to develop — many thousands of lines of code, combined with behavioral experiments to work out various parameters," behavioral ecologist Jolyon Troscianko, a research fellow at the University of Exeter, told UPI. "Digital images are used to capture the colors and patterns, then the framework makes use of known limitations and features of animal vision. For example the parts of the spectrum the animals are sensitive to, and the details each animal can see from a given distance."

Scientists have previously struggled to combine color and pattern information into a singular animal vision framework. But Troscianko and his research partners at the University of Queensland consolidated decades of animal vision research into a comprehensive analytical framework called the Quantitative Color Pattern Analysis framework, or QCPA for short.

"The QCPA is, just as researchers have been for decades, using information on the physiology and perceptual abilities of animal viewers," said lead researcher Cedric van den Berg, a doctoral student at the University of Queensland. "The former is often obtained using histological, or invasive, methods, while the latter can also be obtained using behavioral experiments."

The framework can process all kinds of digital photos, whether snapped with a smartphone or an expensive and powerful digital camera. The QCPA can also interpret all kinds of habitats, including underwater surroundings. After converting the digital photo into the colors animals process, as well as removing the details that animals can't see, the images are processed by several more algorithms.

"There are tools for reconstructing the sharp edges in images following acuity control, and 'agglomerative hierarchical clustering' algorithms which use animal-vision to break the scene down into a manageable number of distinct colors," Troscianko said.

The complex series of processing steps performed by the framework can even account for an animal's ultraviolet vision capabilities.

Van der Berg and Troscianko claim the framework will have a variety of applications.

"One example is identifying how an animal's camouflage works so that we can manage our land to protect certain species," Troscianko said. "For example, lapwings — which nest on the ground — are in dramatic decline, and human land use changes may have made their nests more vulnerable to predators. We will be using these tools to identify the types of visual background which offer lapwings the best protection from predators."

The framework could help biologists better understand a variety of animal behaviors, including mating systems, distance-dependent signaling and mimicry.

Because the framework operates as a digital plugin, it's accessible to anyone with a camera and computer — or a smartphone. Thanks to the QCPA, exploring animal vision no longer requires sophisticated image technology, making animal vision-related research more accessible.

"The framework can be used for essentially any scientific question that requires the description of visual information as perceived by an animal, design pet friendly objects or satisfy a high-school students' curiosity about the vision of the school's hamster," van der Berg said. "The applications are truly diverse and we have only just started to see what people are using these tools for."

(Source: UPI)

Dogs hear words the same way we do

Say "sit!" to your dog, and—if he's a good boy—he'll likely plant his rump on the floor. But would he respond correctly if the word were spoken by a stranger, or someone with a thick accent? A new study shows he will, suggesting dogs perceive spoken words in a sophisticated way long thought unique to humans.

"It's a very solid and interesting finding," says Tecumseh Fitch, an expert on vertebrate communication at the University of Vienna who was not involved in the research.



The way we pronounce words changes depending on our sex, age, and even social rank. Some as-yet-unknown neural mechanism enables us to filter out differences in accent and pronunciation, helping us understand spoken words regardless of the speaker. Animals like zebra finches, chinchillas, and macaques can be trained to do this, but until now only humans were shown to do this spontaneously.

In the new study, Holly Root-Gutteridge, a cognitive biologist at the University of Sussex in Brighton, UK, and her colleagues ran a test that others have used to show dogs can recognize other dogs from their barks. The researchers filmed 42 dogs of different breeds as they sat with their owners near an audio speaker that played six monosyllabic, noncommand words with similar sounds, such as "had," "hid," and "who'd." The words were spoken—not by the dog's owner—but by several strangers, men and women of different ages and with different accents.

The dogs pitched their ears forward or moved toward the speaker—both signs of engagement—whenever they heard a new word that had a slightly different vowel sound. That indicates, the researchers say, that they detected the difference. For instance, in the video above, the border collie Max turns quickly and listens intently when he hears a woman say "had" for the first time. But as other women with different accents repeat the word, he loses interest, indicating he knows they are all saying the same word. When a speaker says a new word, like "who'd," Max perks up again, but his attention flags when a new voice returns to saying "had." Together, these reactions suggest dogs recognize words irrespective of the speaker—and that they don't need any training to do it.

(Source: sciencemag.org)

Regional crafts, arts, souvenirs and rituals on show in Yazd

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Tens of tribespeople, crafters and folk artists from various Iranian provinces have come together in Yazd to showcase their traditional lifestyle, arts, cuisine, handicrafts and souvenirs.

A total of 150 stalls have been set up for the five-day sales exhibit, which opened to the public on Thursday.



A World Heritage, the historical city of Yazd is usually referred to as a delightful place to stay, or a “don’t miss” destination by almost all of its visitors. The oasis city is wedged between the northern Dasht-e Kavir and southern Dasht-e Lut on a flat plain ringed by mountains. Its historical structure enjoys a very harmonious public-religious architecture that dates from different eras.

Yazd is teemed with mudbrick houses that are equipped with innovative badgirs (wind catchers), atmospheric alleyways, and many Islamic and Iranian monuments that shape its eye-catching city landscape. The province has an interesting mix of people as well, some 10 percent of whom follow the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism.

Sri Lanka’s tourism still reeling since Easter attacks

Seven months after the Easter Sunday terror attacks, Sri Lanka, recognized as Lonely Planet’s number 1 travel destination in 2019, continues to suffer due to declining tourists.

Since the April 21 bomb blasts at three five-star hotels and churches in Colombo, tourism numbers have plunged steadily, resulting in hotels facing a severe hit and increasingly finding it difficult to stay afloat. The coordinated suicide bombings carried out by extremists resulted in over 250 people killed, including foreigners, while at least 500 were injured.

Before the terror attacks, tourism authorities estimated Sri Lanka would hit 2.5 million tourist arrivals this year, but the target now seems a distant dream, and the 2019 target is likely to fall way short of even last year’s 2.3 million visitors.

According to the Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), 1.6 million tourists arrived from January to November, compared to 2 million arrivals during the same period of last year.

Tourist arrivals in October recorded a decline of 22.5%, while the decline was 9.5% for November, a rather refreshing number in comparison to previous months. But despite the gap, industry experts were not too enthusiastic about the rising numbers.

President of the Cultural Triangle Hoteliers Association Saliya Dayananda said even with massive discounts offered, hotels are still suffering from low occupancy in the cultural triangle region located in the north central area which is popular among tourists as it is home to several UNESCO World Heritage sites, including the ancient capital of Anuradhapura, the ruins of Polonnaruwa and the rock citadel of Sigiriya.

(Source: Anadolu Agency)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Macquarie Island

Macquarie Island is an oceanic island in the Southern Ocean, lying 1,500 km south-east of Tasmania and approximately halfway between Australia and the Antarctic continent.

A World Heritage, the property includes Macquarie Island, Judge and Clerk Islets 11 kilometers to the north, the Bishop and Clerk Islets 37 kilometers to the south, rocks, reefs and the surrounding waters to a distance of 12 nautical miles.



The main island is approximately 34 kilometers long and 5.5 kilometers wide at its broadest point, covering an area of approximately 12,785 hectares. The property covers an area of 557,280 hectares.

Macquarie Island has outstanding universal value for two reasons. First, it provides a unique opportunity to study, in detail, geological features and processes of oceanic crust formation and plate boundary dynamics, as it is only place on earth where rocks from the earth’s mantle (6 kilometers below the ocean floor) are being actively exposed above sea level.

These unique exposures include excellent examples of pillow basalts and other extrusive rocks.

Second, its remote and windswept landscape of steep escarpments, lakes, and dramatic changes in vegetation provides an outstanding spectacle of wild, natural beauty complemented by vast congregations of wildlife including penguins and seals.

(Source: UNESCO)

UNWTO ready to help Iran develop comprehensive tourism plan

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is ready to extend cooperation with Iran in order to help the country develop a comprehensive tourism plan, UNWTO advisor Marcello Notarianni said on Saturday.

He expressed his satisfaction that growth of tourism is among priorities of the Islamic Republic, IRNA reported. Notarianni is an expert on sustainable tourism who has served as tourism consultant in about 30 countries.

“It’s very important that every travel-associated person [or business] could be involved in this area, so I am here to gather information and data to develop a comprehensive plan.”

He made the remarks in a Tehran meeting with deputy tourism minister Vali Teymouri and several other relevant experts and media personnel.

The UNWTO consultant noted that each department should play its own role and place in this comprehensive program.

He also reminded a list of [main] priorities in terms of education, laws and regulations (standards and sustainability), financial problems and attraction of funds for tourism industry development.

Marketing and advertising, visa related issues and facilities for foreign arrivals, destination management, experience management (XM), creating unique [customer] experiences, issues concerning rural tourism and local communities were among other priorities the expert mentioned.

Teymouri for his part reminded that Iran’s tourism sector has [untapped] capacity to replace oil revenues.

“Iran with more than 7,000 years of written history and climate diversity is one of the most sought-after tourism destinations in the world. And there are so many historical rituals, each having their own native culture, cousin, clothing and music, [a phenomenon] that is appealing to tourists,” Teymouri said.

“To stimulate drawing up the plan, we are ready to organize and coordinate with all tourism-related departments to meet with the World Tourism Organization’s advisor,” the Iranian official noted.

Tourism, according to UNWTO, has experienced continued expansion and diversification over the past six decades, and



Iran's deputy tourism minister Vali Teymouri (1st L) and UNWTO advisor Marcello Notarianni (2nd R) exchange views on developing the country's comprehensive tourism plan in a Tehran meeting, December 7, 2019.

it has become one of the fastest growing and most important economic sectors in the world, benefiting destinations and communities worldwide.

“International tourist arrivals worldwide have grown from 25 million in 1950 to nearly 1.3 billion today. Similarly, international tourism revenues earned by destinations around the world have grown from 2 billion U.S. dollars in 1950 to 1260 billion in 2015. The sector represents an estimated 10 percent of the world’s GDP and 1 in 10 jobs globally,” the organization says.

The UN body also certifies that the tourism’s role in job

creation is often undervalued, adding “This is despite the fact that tourism generates 1 percent of world jobs and is included in Sustainable Development Goal 8 for its potential to create decent work.”

It also mentions that new policies are needed in order to maximize tourism’s potential to create more and better jobs, especially for women and youth; to reflect and incorporate ongoing advances in technology; and eventually to address the current mismatch between tourism skills that are taught and those that tourism employers need.

22 medical tourism firms authorized in Iran

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Ministry of Health has so far granted licenses to 22 medical tourism companies with the aim of organizing authorized facilitators for the booming business.

“So far, 22 medical tourism companies have been licensed by the Ministry of Health, while 180 others are in the process of obtaining licenses,” IRNA quoted Saeid Hashemzadeh, the head of the ministry’s medical tourism department, as saying on Saturday.

One of the major drawbacks of health tourism [in Iran] was that those who are active in this field were often unidentified and they were needed to be organized so as to complete the health tourism services chain, the official noted.

The biggest problem was the lack of specialized medical tourism facilitation companies to advertise and promote the country’s medical capabilities abroad and offer classified services to foreign patients. This vacuum was preparing the ground for [unauthorized] dealers to do so overseas, Hashemzadeh explained.

“Services, provided by anonymous and unidentified brokers, have caused many problems, even some foreign



patients were referred to [medical] centers, which were not confirmed by the Ministry of Health.”

The official added that a problem, which is still in place in some cases and could destroy Iran’s medical credibility

worldwide, is the number of foreign patients who are willing to pursue their treatments in Iran may gradually decrease over time.

In July, Hashemzadeh had announced that Iranian hospitals admitted 70,000 foreign patients over the last [Iranian calendar] year (March 2018 – March 2019), adding some 90% of foreign patients in Iran are from Afghanistan, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain and other countries around the Persian Gulf.

The Islamic republic hosted a record high of nearly 600,000 medical travelers during the first four months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-July 21), nearly equal to the figure for the whole past year, according to an Iranian association for the health tourism promotion.

Many domestic experts say that medical tourism in Iran produces win-win outcomes as the country yields considerable benefits to international health-care seekers, offering affordable yet quality treatment services.

The country has set its goals to exceed its yearly medical travelers to around 2 million in [calendar year] 1404 (March 2025-March 2026).

Nusa Penida, a trip you cannot forget

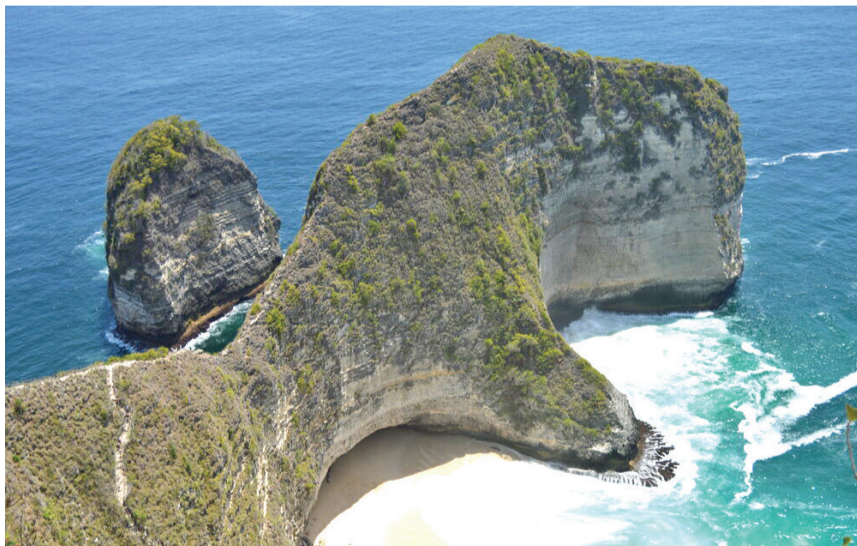


By Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

TEHRAN (MNA) — The photos taken in the breathtaking landscapes of this island are among those that you would always remember with a joyful smile at the corner of your lips.

Located on the southeast of Bali Island in Indonesia, Penida Island (or as locals call it Nusa [i.e. island] Penida) is turning into a major tourist attraction in the Southeast Asian country. Penida is the biggest of a trio island close to each other that each has its own amazing natural beauties.

They are fast boats designated for transferring tourists from mainland Bali to Nusa Penida. This trip takes some 40 minutes



before you can catch a view of the greenery of the island.

As soon as arriving at the port, you can hire a driver or a scooter, if the trip is not organized by tour agencies. The point is if you are not accustomed to left-hand traffic, driving in the narrow roads of the island can be a bit dangerous.

Road construction machinery can be found almost everywhere as authorities are ramping up efforts to further develop the island’s infrastructure and prepare it for hosting more tourists in the coming years.

There are a lot of things to do and see on the island and you can find out about them with a quick googling. For a person

who has just spent some seven hours on the island, I can assure that this is not enough for truly enjoying and knowing the place. There are plenty of amazing beaches to visit and I suppose a three-day stay could be enough to make unforgettable memories.

Here are the three beaches that we visited.

■ Kelingking Beach

It is definitely the most famous beach on the island and a must-see site. Getting a glimpse of the jaw-dropping T-Rex shaped cliff side will immerse you in its beauty and grandeur while at the same time taking you back to the time of creation. Those powerful in imagination can surely envision the time of dinosaurs in the place. There is a path

that leads you down from up on the cliff to the beach. It takes one hour to go down and it is better to wear appropriate shoes as the path is not smooth.

■ Broken Beach

This is one of the Instagram-famous sites for selfies and certainly a must-see. An eye-catching arch allowing ocean into a natural bowl impresses all who get the first glimpse. Visitors can take a panoramic walk all the way around Broken Beach to inspect different viewpoints and takes shots that cannot be taken anywhere else.

■ Visitor’s comments

Thanks to the internet, there are lots of information and comments about different tourist sites from both experts and from daily tourists. Here are two among thousands of comments about Nusa Penida that are worth reading:

“Nusa Penida is one of those places overlooked by some tourists. A lot of people short-change themselves by taking a “one-day” tour of the island then complain about only having 10 minutes in each spot crowded with tourists. This is what happens if you day-trip it however if you stay for a couple of nights, you can see these spots before the tourists arrive and enjoy your time there. Penida is a very large island and it takes a while to get around so it is well worth spending at least two nights on the island - 3 is more ideal.”

“We spent 4 days here and it wasn’t nearly enough. We definitely want to come back and spend at least a week exploring the beaches, dive sites and inland hills. Bali is enchanting, Nusa Penida is a pearl.”

New North Korean travel company to offer foreigners medical tourism packages

A new North Korean travel company targeting foreign medical tourists has been established, ruling party daily the Rodong Simnun reported Friday.

The Treatment Tourism Exchange Company will work with the top government health bodies to offer foreign tourists the ability to receive surgeries and cosmetic procedures at top state-run hospitals, it said. Tapping into additional segments of the tourist industry — which has not directly been targeted under UN and U.S. sanctions — is likely yet another way the country seeks to overcome trade restrictions and earn foreign currency.

The Friday article was published in the online version of the newspaper, but, notably, was absent from the print edition available to most North Koreans.

“It’s great to send tourists to view and enjoy the natural scenic attractions,” the article read, “but it would be better to also receive medical services in the tourism process.”

“This is why, following the growing worldwide trend, our country will meet this demand with the launch of the Treatment Tourist Exchange Company offering various hot springs resort facilities for domestic and international tourists.”

The company will also “provide treatment tourism attractions for foreign tourists through various centrally-managed hospitals.”

These include the Ryugyong General Ophthalmic Hospital, the Ryugyong Dental Hospital, and the Pyongyang Maternity Hospital Breast Tumour Institute.

“Tourists from abroad will be able to plentifully receive the services of [these] modern treatment facilities,” the article said, including “cataract surgery, dental implants, breast tumor treatment, and our people’s traditional medicine in Koryo medical treatment.”

(Source: NK NEWS)

By Saeed Shams

TEHRAN— The recent NATO summit in London has made it clear that the Atlantic Treaty is not far from destruction! Disagreements among NATO members have reached a climax during the Donald Trump presidency. No doubt in the near future we will see the escalation of internal crises in NATO and the verbal attacks of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization leaders against each other. A review of the latest analysis of the NATO summit in London well illustrates the widespread crisis that has arisen among its members:

■ Trump drama turns NATO gathering into a diplomatic soap opera

CNN reported that If allied leaders had hoped that US President Donald Trump's presence at a summit in the London area marking the 70th anniversary of the alliance this week would promote unity among old friends they probably left disappointed. Trump's visit was marked by showdowns between leaders, lengthy and freewheeling appearances by the President before the media, an abrupt news conference cancellation and an extraordinary row over a viral video. Trump has long challenged and pushed NATO members to spend more on defense and has even suggested the alliance is obsolete. Ahead of the summit he successfully cut the US contribution to NATO's budget.

At this year's gathering Trump seemed to play good cop-bad cop on NATO's role. Before his opening breakfast with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Tuesday he complained "NATO has not treated us fairly ... they pay far too little."

However, at times he seemed to defend the alliance. He was especially vocal about French President Emmanuel Macron's recent description of NATO as suffering from "brain death," due, in part, to a lack of US leadership under Trump. Alongside Stoltenberg Trump called Macron's comments "dangerous," "nasty" and "insulting." He also suggested France may exit NATO. And on Wednesday Trump said the alliance is "very important."

"NATO is very important. It was not good but it has gone to a very strong position. We had a really good day and a good day yesterday," Trump said.

But Macron was in no mood to back down from his comments about the state of NATO.

"I know that my statements created some reaction," he said alongside Trump on Tuesday. "I do stand by [them]."

There was another tense moment during their meeting when Trump was asked whether France had committed to taking back foreign fighters from Syria.

Trump said the matter hadn't come up yet but jokingly asked Macron, "Would you like some nice ISIS fighters? I could give them to you. You could take every one you want."

"Let's be serious," Macron responded, adding that the number one priority is to defeat ISIS. "It's not yet done. I'm sorry to say that."

Later that evening, though, the pair were spotted arriving together at a reception hosted at 10 Downing Street. Macron had evidently hitched a ride with Trump in his motorcade vehicle. The following day, Trump claimed Macron had "taken back" his critical comments on NATO. "Speaking to the President of France yesterday we had a good meeting and he's taken back his comments very much so on NATO," Trump said. It's unclear whether Macron agrees with Trump's assessment.

There were not one but two notable hot mic moments at the gathering.

Macron was recorded alongside other world leaders at a Tuesday evening reception at Buckingham Palace, appearing to joke about Trump's behavior earlier in the day.

The 25-second clip, first reported by Canadian Broadcasting Corp., begins with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson asking Macron why he was late.

"Is that why you were late?" Johnson asked. Macron nodded, as Trudeau replied, "He was late because he takes a ... 40-minute press conference at the top."

Trudeau admitted Wednesday that he and other leaders in the conversation were speaking about Trump's lengthy press availabilities during the summit.

At another point in the conversation captured on the recording, Trudeau said, "You just watched his team's jaws drop to the floor."

The Canadian prime minister said that in reference to Trump's announcement during their bilateral meeting that the upcoming G7 summit will be hosted at Camp David.

"Every different leader has teams who now and then (had) jaws drop at unscheduled surprises, like that video itself, for example," Trudeau said.

Johnson also weighed in on the recording Wednesday, saying it was "nonsense" to suggest the jokes made in the video indicated he didn't take Trump seriously.

"I don't know where that's come from," he added. Reacting to the video, Trump called Trudeau "two faced," and canceled a scheduled news conference at the end of Wednesday.

At an event following those comments, Trump was caught on a hot mic of his own, saying, "Oh, and then you know what they'll say. 'He didn't do a press conference. He didn't do a press conference.' That was funny when I said the guy's two-faced, you know that."

Even at a gathering to discuss geopolitical challenges politics seemed to be front of mind for Trump. The President attended a lucrative fundraiser with wealthy Americans residing in London in between meetings ahead of the NATO summit on Tuesday.

What was the sign of the London meeting?

Red situation in NATO



The White House billed the event, which was closed to the press, as "a roundtable with supporters" and a Republican source familiar with the event's plans tells CNN that the fundraiser was hosted by Trump Victory, a joint fundraising committee run by the Republican National Committee and Trump's campaign.

And throughout the summit Trump highlighted what he sees as potential political wins while magnifying what he sees as wrongdoing by Democratic foes.

Trump emphasized his foreign policy successes, including increased defense spending among NATO members and the death of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

At some points, he insisted that he wasn't thinking about impeachment but it was clearly on his mind. He dismissed Democrats' impeachment inquiry multiple times during the summit.

He also seemed to grapple with whether it would be better to sign a trade deal with China before or after the 2020 election.

"In some ways, I think it's better to wait until after the election. I just think that. In some ways, I like the idea of waiting until after the election," Trump said alongside Stoltenberg.

■ The Trump reality show: NATO edition

Politico reported that World leaders caught on tape discussing the American president! President Donald Trump calling the Canadian Prime Minister "two-faced"! A secret meeting with the controversial Turkish leader! The cancellation of a much-anticipated press conference over Twitter! An impeachment hearing back in Washington, D.C.!

It was an abrupt and surprising end to the two-day gathering of world leaders, with Trump declining to take a final victory lap on his talking point — echoed by other NATO leaders — that he was responsible for nudging countries to increase their domestic defense spending. That's a foreign policy win Trump can tout on the campaign trail in 2020. Instead, everyone at the NATO gathering was left chattering about a video released Wednesday morning that showed Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson animatedly talking over drinks about Trump at a Tuesday evening reception.

Trudeau said he was simply recounting White House aides' reaction to Trump's sudden announcement during their bilateral meeting that he planned to host the next Group of Seven gathering of world leaders at Camp David. On the video, Trudeau pantomimes his own jaw dropping, as he describes how people reacted to something Trump said.

"I think everyone's team, every different leader has teams who every now and then have their jaws drop at unscheduled surprises," Trudeau told reporters. "We recognize that as we talk to G-7 leaders there is an interest in where the next G-7 meeting is going to be, and I was pleased to share with them the story of how that came about."

Macron in a separate press conference declined to comment on what he called the "stolen video" of the leaders huddled together and gossiping. Trump wasn't about to let it go.

"Well, he's two-faced," the president said when asked about Trudeau and the video. Trump added that Trudeau, while a "nice guy," was probably upset by his request that Canada increase the amount of money it spends on defense as part of NATO's military alliance. The back-and-forth wasn't even the weirdest part of the day. It was soon eclipsed by a moment in which Trump was caught on a hot mic congratulating himself during a luncheon for calling Trudeau "two-faced."

"That was funny," the mic caught Trump saying after he mocked the media's harried reaction to the sudden cancellation of a press conference. Trump called off the press conference hours after the video surfaced, saying he'd already spoken to the press extensively for more than 120 minutes on Tuesday over three separate bilateral meetings, making further comments unnecessary. NATO-goers and White House reporters were equally surprised Wednesday when the Turkish government posted a photo online of Trump meetings with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a meeting that had not been listed on the official White House schedule.

The get-together drew attention as Trump has taken heat for agreeing to withdraw some American troops in Syria, which allowed Turkey to attack Kurdish forces that had been fighting side-by-side with U.S. troops in the battle against the Islamic State. Trump said he and Erdogan discussed Syria and the Kurds, and he proclaimed that an agreement to pause fighting in the region was holding, even though Turkey has not withdrawn its own forces. Several hundred U.S. troops have remained in the country to protect oil infrastructure.

"That border is a mess for a long time. We pulled our soldiers out and took over the oil. We have soldiers where the oil is. And that's the way I like it," Trump said, expressing his views on foreign policy in especially stark terms. Toward the end of the day, the pull of domestic politics too strong for Trump to avoid — especially as the House Judiciary Committee kicked off a public hearing to lay out the legal arguments for impeachment.

Trump continued to dismiss the proceedings as a "scam" and "hoax" and called House Intelligence Chairman Adam Schiff, the face of the impeachment inquiry, a "stone cold loser," just as he did on Tuesday. But Trump also expressed disappointment that the hearings were happening against the backdrop of the NATO meeting.

"To do it on a day like this where we're in England and some of the most powerful countries in the world having very important NATO meetings. And it just happened to be scheduled on this day. It's really honestly, it's a disgrace," he said.

Trump argued it was a poor move for the country for the Democrats to hold such a hearing. "You almost question whether or not they love our country and that's a very serious thing: Do they love our country?" he asked shortly before boarding his plane to fly home. And as he closed in on Washington, Trump took issue on Twitter with the headlines coming out of the meetings.

"The Fake News Media is doing everything possible to belittle my VERY successful trip to London for NATO. I got along great with the NATO leaders, even getting them to pay \$130 Billion a year more, & \$400 Billion a year more in 3 years. No increase for U.S., only deep respect!"

■ Trump Violates Diplomacy's Golden Rule

Also The Atlantic reported that At the NATO summit, the president publicly heaped abuse on America's closest friends.

Trump, in contrast, seems to relish going after the Europeans in full view of the rest of the world. The on-camera spat with Macron was the latest sign that Trump has brought America's most important security alliance to the point of crisis. And the president either doesn't know or doesn't care what he's done.

If the North Atlantic Treaty Organization had reached its 70th birthday under any of the previous 12 presidents, the celebration would have occurred in Washington rather than London. The "Washington treaty" was

signed in April 1949, at a dark moment in the early Cold War when a Soviet invasion of Western Europe was not a far-fetched possibility. The United States has always been the most powerful NATO member, and every American president until Trump has been the alliance's natural leader.

Instead, Trump has been NATO's loudest critic. He has cast America's military allies primarily as a drain on the U.S. Treasury, and he has aggressively criticized America's true friends in Europe—democratic leaders such as Macron and Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel—even as he treats Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Kim Jong Un, and other authoritarians around the world with unusual tact. He describes the European Union, whose membership overlaps significantly with NATO's, as a competitor rather than the close global partner it has been to every recent American president.

The not-so-closely guarded secret at NATO headquarters is allied officials are privately relieved that, rather than holding a full-fledged summit over two days, the leaders are holding just three and a half hours of formal discussions. That limited Trump's opportunities to blow up the proceedings, as he has done in other major meetings with European and Canadian leaders.

I previously served as U.S. ambassador to NATO under George W. Bush. I also served as a National Security Council staffer under George H. W. Bush, and was lucky enough to observe how a master diplomat like him could further American goals precisely by working skillfully with our allies. Holding a big alliance like NATO together takes patience, tact, a willingness to listen, deep knowledge of the issues, and the self-discipline to refrain from fiery public debate. In London, Trump proved once again that he is incapable of this type of presidential leadership. Senior European officials fear that, in a second term, Trump might seek to end U.S. participation in the alliance altogether. (For the record, I am an unpaid adviser to Vice President Joe Biden's campaign.)

Stung by Trump's overt criticism, U.S. allies have begun to reciprocate. Macron caused a real stir in NATO when he told The Economist last month the alliance was effectively "brain dead," given Trump's sole emphasis on how much NATO costs the United States and his lack of consultation with France on the withdrawal of U.S. Special Forces from Syria, where France also has soldiers.

Rather than try to mend fences, Trump announced new trade sanctions against France on the eve of the summit. Then, yesterday morning, he told the press that Macron's comments to The Economist were "insulting" to NATO. Trump's pious defense of the treaty organization sounded less than sincere, in light of his previous statements.

Trump's most egregious mistake, though, was his failure to support clearly and unequivocally the key provision of the NATO treaty, Article V, which calls on member states to come to one another's defense when attacked. He has had several opportunities to do so but has hedged each time. This is of major concern to allied leaders, who want NATO adversaries such as Vladimir Putin to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the U.S. and its allies will defend Estonia or Latvia should Russian forces cross their borders.

Article V has been invoked just once in NATO history, when the European allies and Canada vowed to come to our defense after the 9/11 attacks. On that tragic day—when I was a very new U.S. ambassador to the organization—my NATO colleagues from Canada and Europe called and pledged that

they would fight with us to avenge our nearly 3,000 dead. They kept their promises. Each ally went into Afghanistan with us. They and other partner nations have suffered more than 1,000 combat deaths there, with many more thousands wounded. Our NATO allies are still there with us today.

The London summit heralded one welcome change. Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced that NATO allies have all raised their defense budgets for a collective increase of more than \$130 billion. That is an impressive sum—and one for which Trump can rightly take some credit. Yet the fact is that every NATO ally started to spend more on defense following Putin's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The allies, including Germany, Trump's favorite scapegoat, deserve the lion's share of the accolades. Trump must also share credit with Barack Obama, under whose watch this great spending increase began.

In any case, Trump appears entirely indifferent to the clear, decisive advantage over Russia and China that the United States enjoys because of our European ties. We have 28 allies in NATO, as well as treaty allies in Japan, South Korea, and Australia in the western Pacific, who will defend us when our backs are against the wall. This is the great power differential we enjoy with Moscow and Beijing. The public, fortunately, understands just how important Europe remains to us. In a 2019 Chicago Council on Global Affairs poll, 73 percent of Americans said they support NATO. The great majority of Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress see the alliance as crucial for our future, as well.

Over the next decade, the U.S. will need to continue to contain Russia's power in Eastern Europe, cope with the terrorist threat in the Middle East and Europe itself, limit China's increasing presence in Europe, deal with a panoply of cyberthreats, and provide for the defense of our own country from conventional, nuclear, and asymmetric threats. We will be in an infinitely stronger position to manage all this with our allies beside us rather than alone. The president of the United States must lead accordingly.

■ Three charts that show why Trump thinks NATO is a bad deal

The NATO summit celebrates its 70th birthday in London this week but some of the main attendees aren't quite in the party mood. The biggest guest, President Donald Trump, has traveled to the U.K. capital to attend the meeting and join other heads of state in marking the alliance's seven decades in existence. Trump has repeatedly said the U.S. provides too much cash for NATO, spending big on maintaining missile defense systems across Europe and positioning 65,000 troops within the continent. On Tuesday, Trump issued another broadside, this time accusing Germany of not paying its fair share on defense.

A withdrawal of the U.S. from NATO would effectively destroy it with one stroke, and while nothing official has ever been said, several reports suggest Trump has considered ending U.S. involvement.

NATO itself estimates that as a percentage of GDP, the U.S. will far outstrip the spending of any other member country in 2019. In 2014, all NATO members agreed to increase their defense spending to 2% of gross domestic product by 2024. As of June 2019, NATO data estimated that only seven of its 29 members — including the U.S. — are estimated to spend 2% or more of their annual GDP on defense this year. On Monday, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg defended the spending of member nations.

"On spending, NATO allies are now really stepping up and delivering more than they have done for many, many years," he told CNBC's Hadley Gamble in London.

Stoltenberg said non-U.S. NATO allies, i.e. Europe plus Canada, are on target to add more than \$400 billion to their defense budgets by 2024.

"That's unprecedented and will make NATO stronger," he added.

Should that additional spending materialize, it will bring the combined spending of all the NATO allies to around par with the current U.S. outlay alone based on GDP.

NATO's earliest incarnation was a 1947 agreement between France and the U.K. to help each other in the event of any attack from Germany or the Soviet Union. This expanded into a military alliance that included the U.S.. In 1949, member countries put their signature to the North Atlantic Treaty for the first time. Its relevance and popularity has ebbed and flowed. In 1966, France, under President Charles de Gaulle, left NATO's military structure, doubting the organization's might against any invasion from the Soviet Union.

Full membership by France was restored only in 2009 and just 10 years later, current French leader Emmanuel Macron is again doubting the alliance. Macron has said NATO is experiencing "brain death" because of pressure to reform from Trump and unpredictable military action from Turkey. Macron has said the Turkish invasion of Syria is a threat to NATO's battle against the Islamic State. In an angry response, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Macron himself was suffering from "brain death" and he was showing disrespect and hubris by questioning Turkish action.

"You know how to show off, but you cannot even properly pay for NATO. You are a novice," Erdogan reportedly said.

NATO's Stoltenberg said Monday that while the members have often had different opinions, history shows that "we have always been able to agree around our core task to protect and defend each other."

Village on lockdown as polar bears ‘pushed south by climate change’ gather on its edge

A Russian village is on high alert over fears of a polar bear “invasion”, according to a conservationist group.

The region’s branch of World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) said more than 50 bears are roaming the shore on the lookout for food near Ryrkaypiy in northeast Russia.

“Polar bear patrol” officers are working to keep the animals outside the village and are standing guard near schools, WWF Russia said.

Inspections are reportedly being carried out on snowmobiles and all public events have been cancelled during the “bear invasion” in the Chukotka region.



The organization said special buses are also taking children back and forth from school.

WWF polar bear patrol reportedly counted 56 bears on a small area of shore near the village.

The animals usually live on Cape Schmidt, around 2km from Ryrkaypiy, according to the BBC.

Areas are losing sea ice due to climate change, forcing animals to go on land to find food in the Arctic, according to WWF Russia.

Mikhail Stishov, its Arctic biodiversity projects coordinator, said: “If there is enough ice, the bears would go further north to hunt the seals.

“Until the ice is thick enough, they will stay ashore and can visit the village due to curiosity and hunger.”

Tatyana Minenko, the head of bear patrol on Ryrkaypiy said “almost all” of the bears look “thin”.

Rod Downie, WWF’s chief polar adviser said: “Climate change is causing Arctic sea ice to thaw earlier in the year and freeze later, which means polar bears are spending longer onshore, where they stray into villages, attracted by the smell of food.”

He said: “These conflicts are becoming commonplace and the only long-term solution is to halt the climate crisis.”

Last week, Anatoly Kochnev from the Institute of Biological Problems of the North told Tass news agency he believed Ryrkaypiy should be evacuated because of the threat posed by polar bears.

Russian villagers have come face to face with the Arctic creatures before.

In February, a region declared a state of emergency after more than 50 polar bears reportedly stormed houses and offices.

Some animals even attacked residents on the Novaya Zemlya islands, according to an official.

(Source: The Independent)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Zimbabwean farmers

(June 24, 2002)

The majority of white farmers in Zimbabwe will have to stop working their land from 24th June, according to new laws passed last month, which give the government powers to take the land and re-distribute it. Many fear that the already serious food shortages in Zimbabwe will now get worse. This report from Martin Plaut.

Zimbabwe consumes around two hundred thousand tons of **grain** a month. But since the beginning of June almost all **domestic stocks** have been **exhausted**. Forty thousand tons are being imported commercially, and small quantities are coming through from aid donors, but that leaves a **gaping food deficit**. Nearly two thirds of Zimbabwe’s needs are not being supplied. For a country that was once the breadbasket of southern Africa this is nothing short of a disaster. Wheat for **milling** has been cut back to **eke out supplies**, leaving bakers producing only half the bread they normally provide.

Everywhere there is hunger, and it’s getting worse. Yet crops now in the fields cannot be legally **harvested**, in terms of the regulations that come into force today. By the end of the year six million people - half the population of Zimbabwe - will need food aid, according to the World Food Programme. Even government ministers admit that their policies have **exacerbated** the situation. Yet the government appears determined to **press ahead** with its confrontation with the white farming community, whatever the cost.

Words

grain: seeds from cereal crops, such as wheat, grown for food

domestic stocks: supplies of grain in Zimbabwe

exhausted: completely used up

gaping: enormous

food deficit: if a country has a food deficit, it is importing more than it is producing

milling: grinding to make flour

eke out supplies: make them last longer

harvested: gathered in, collected

exacerbated: made worse

press ahead with: to continue doing, in spite of possible problems

(Source: BBC)



UNHCR welcomes Iran’s efforts to extend education for refugees

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — United

d e s k Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) welcomes Iran’s efforts to extend education opportunities for nearly half a million Afghan children in the country, UNHCR spokesperson Babar Baloch has said.

He made the remarks at a press briefing at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

He further recognized that the country needs greater humanitarian support because of the economic challenges it faces today.

Iran is amongst the world’s leading refugee hosts for decades and currently is hosting one million registered refugees from Afghanistan, in addition to over two million Afghans who are living in Iran either without documentation or on national passports, according to UNHCR.



Shiraz to host intl. congress on health for peace

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The 2nd international

d e s k congress on health for peace will be held in the city of Shiraz, Fars province, on November 11-12, 2020.

The event aims to strengthen the efforts of health professionals to spread peace around the world, the congress’s chairman, Ali Bahador, said, Fars news agency reported on Friday.

The congress will focus on networking non-govern-

mental organizations for peace through health, the role of governments and national health systems in promoting peace, human values, and medical ethics in the Middle East, he explained.

International collaboration on peace through health, peace epidemiology, medical education and peace, medical journalism and peace, medical ethics, health diplomacy, psychological correlates of peace and war are among the topics to be discussed in the congress.

Post-modern slavery: fetal chromosomal slavery

1 → The new slavery system allows future parents to kill their Down syndrome fetus at the 20th week, 25th week, 30th week of pregnancy, or basically at any time before childbirth when the fetus has to suffer great pain to die. Why? Just because they own their fetus’s body and this is something personal. Indeed, it is none of our business. We cannot even ask a question about it since it makes us look like fuddy-duddy people who are real stick-in-the-muds.

Can you believe that people with Down syndrome have been eradicated in Iceland? Is the news of the genocide of people with Down syndrome in Iceland important to you? In Iceland, by implementing certain health policies, the live births of people with Down syndrome have been close to 0. In this country, with the abortion of every Down syndrome fetus, they put an end to a person’s life, whom, in authorities’ eyes, may bring about serious consequences and is not worth the extra burden it imposes on society.

In many countries all around the world, Down syndrome fetuses are sometimes considered as slaves with an extra chromosome who

live inside their mothers’ bodies and whose mothers possess them. Their lives are even sometimes in the hands of the government, owned by the government’s health departments, and/or owned by global research departments.

Why is there so much fear about the high number of people with Down syndrome in the world?

Yeah! Yeah! I know. We are the absolute rulers of this planet. We are human beings with 46 chromosomes that have 23 pairs of chromosomes and our superior population has given us the self-confidence to decide the fate of all other different creatures. Yeah! I know! I know that we have built a very advanced world so that if a child’s body is abused, all institutes and organizations active in the field of children’s rights will organize campaigns, write letters, and pursue the issue legally to support that child around the world. I have found the problem with fetuses having Down syndrome. Their problem is that they cannot talk about their pain, especially after the pain imposed on them after the 20th week. You know their

more serious problem is that they do not have accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to organize a campaign and take refuge in that haven.

The fetal slavery system created based on the number of chromosomes states that whenever two adults, under any circumstances, decide to go after an intimate relationship, they can do so. The worst scenario is that they will end up having a Down syndrome fetus, for killing whom they have 9 months to think. It is 2020 and it is so wrong to occupy your minds with some sets of cells called a fetus, the fetus with Down syndrome who is not worth this much speculation!

Nowadays, Down syndrome fetuses are not that different from black people who lived many years ago. Nobody cares about them. Many black people were killed and died and never had the opportunity to fall in love and get married, only and only because of the pigment of their skin. And today, Down syndrome fetuses die and do not even get the chance to fall in love and live, just because of the number of their chromosomes.

Welcome to the modern fetal slavery era.



Breathing London air same as smoking 150 cigarettes a year, experts warn

Living in the UK’s most polluted cities and towns increases the risk of an early death by the equivalent of smoking 150 cigarettes a year, a charity has warned.

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) said air pollution must be declared “a public health emergency”.

Its analysis shows that people living in the Newham, Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, and Islington areas of London are worst hit by air pollution – the equivalent to smoking more than 150 cigarettes a year on average.

Those in Waltham Forest, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Barking and Dagenham, Lambeth and Southwark in London are also badly affected, as are people in Slough, Dartford,

Portsmouth, Medway, Luton, Gravesham and Thurrock.

The BHF wants the next government to urgently introduce tougher World Health Organisation (WHO) air pollution limits.

It said current EU limits – which the UK comfortably meets – for fine particulate matter (PM2.5) are 25 micrograms per metre cubed as an annual average.

The WHO limits are tougher – at 10 micrograms per metre cubed as an annual average.

The BHF said PM2.5 can have a “seriously detrimental effect to heart health”, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke and making existing health problems worse.

It says that around 11,000 coronary heart disease and

stroke deaths each year in the UK are caused by particulate matter air pollution.

Jacob West, executive director of healthcare innovation at the BHF, said: “Air pollution is a major public health emergency and over many years it has not been treated with the seriousness it deserves.

“Unless we take radical measures now to curb air pollution, in the future we will look back on this period of inaction with shame.

“As these figures show, the effect of air pollution on our heart and circulatory system is profound, and we have no choice over the air we breathe in the places we live.

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Tehran air pollution incurs annual loss of \$2.8b

Air pollution brings heavy economic burden amounting to \$2.8 billion for the Iranian capital, Tehran, head of the national working group for air pollution mitigation affiliated to the Department of Environment (DOE) has announced.

The vehicle cycle consisting of manufacturing process to scrapping due to being clunker is the highest contributor to air pollution, as some 70 percent of the emission are generated by mobile sources, Vahid Hosseini lamented.

The economic consequences of air pollution haunting the metropolis of Tehran equal \$2.8 billion per year, as estimated in 2018, he highlighted.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-itis”

■ **Meaning:** a word ending that indicates inflammation, disease or excessive interest

■ **For example:** **Arthritis** can be related to diet.

PHRASAL VERB

Gussy somebody/something up

■ **Meaning:** to make someone look attractive by dressing them in their best clothes, or to make something look attractive by decorating it

■ **For example:** Shopkeepers gussied up their window displays.

IDIOM

Bring the house down

■ **Explanation:** if you bring the house down, you give a very successful performance.

■ **For example:** “If Charlie sings like that on Saturday, he’ll bring the house down.”

خسارت اقتصادی آلودگی هوا سالانه ۲٫۸ میلیارد دلار است

دبیر کارگروه ملی آلودگی هوای کشور گفت: خسارت اقتصادی آلودگی هوا برای تهران سالانه ۲٫۸ میلیارد دلار است.

وحید حسینی گفت: چرخه تولید، مصرف و اسقاط خودرو مهمترین زنجیره انتشار آلودگی هواست. ۷۰ درصد از ذرات معلق هوا از منابع متحرک هستند.

به گفته دبیر کارگروه ملی آلودگی هوای شهر تهران، خسارت اقتصادی آلودگی هوا برای تهران سالانه بالغ بر ۲٫۸ میلیارد دلار است که در سال ۲۰۱۸ برآورد شده است.

Iraqi MPs slam U.S. blacklisting as drone targets Muqtada Sadr

Iraqi lawmakers have slammed the US' blacklisting of a number of the country's anti-terrorism commanders amid reports of a drone strike that hit somewhere near the residence of an influential anti-American Iraqi leader.

Iraq's Baghdad al-Youm website reported that Iraqi lawmakers have denounced Washington's Friday move to impose sanctions targeting leaders of Iraq's Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Kata'ib Hezbollah groups which operate as part of the country's Popular Mobilization Units.

The Hikma bloc of the Iraqi parliament, lead by top Iraqi cleric Ammar al-Hakim, issued a statement decrying the measure as an instance of "blatant meddling in Iraq's affairs."

"We regard these measures as a clear violation of Iraq's sovereignty," the statement read.

Mohammad al-Rabiei, spokesperson for the al-Sadiqoun parliamentary bloc affiliated with Iraq's Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq movement, decried the measure as being illegitimate and useless.

"Die of you anger [against us], for we lead the resistance against occupation, Takfiri terrorism, separatism and ambitions," he said, adding that his groups stand "against the hegemonic plans of the US".

Also on Friday, Iraq's al-Sumeria television reported that Salih Mohammed al-Iraqi, a figure affiliated with Iraqi cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, said that a drone hit the al-Hannanah neighborhood in which the residence of Sadr in the city of Najaf is located.



The report did not further elaborate on the source of the attack or possible casualties. The strike comes as reports have alleged that US forces and Israeli-operated drones have targeted Iraqi forces, specifically Iraq's PMU forces, on numerous occasions.

The PMU is known to have played a major role countering the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group's influence in Iraq.

The strike comes a day after a report emerged claiming that the US was allowing Daesh to roam freely under its sights in Iraq's western al-Anbar Province, further casting doubt on the true reasons for US

military presence in Iraq.

"The way in which American aircraft act in regard to Daesh positions in al-Anbar's northern areas has raised many questions," Iraq's al-Maalomah news agency quoted an unnamed source in Iraq's PMU Operations Command in al-Anbar.

The source stressed that the American forces were aware of the terrorist movements and their negative effect on the security of the province.

"American planes fly over these regions for long durations without striking any Daesh cell positions," he said.

The source added that the American behavior was "surprising", specifically because the mission of US forces deployed in Anbar's Ayn al-Assad military base was to "strike Daesh sleeper cells".

The US first deployed forces to Iraq in 2003 under the banner of the so-called "war on terror". The deployment was followed by rampant violence and chaos, which set the stage for the emergence of Daesh in 2014.

Washington then mobilized scores of its allies in another mission to purportedly root out the terrorists.

The US-led coalition, however, was suspiciously slow in progress, while its airstrikes against purported terrorist positions led to heavy civilian casualties and damage to Iraqi infrastructure.

Numerous reports have also documented that Washington has provided Daesh terrorists with weapons and military support.

Observers have warned that the US is seeking to facilitate the reemergence of Daesh by manipulating Iraq's ongoing major anti-corruption and economic protests and by destabilizing the country.

Meanwhile, an armed drone targeted the home of Iraqi cleric Muqtada Sadr on Saturday, hours after his supporters deployed in Baghdad in response to an attack that left 17 protesters dead.

The developments marked a worrying turn for the anti-government protests rocking Iraq since October, the country's largest and deadliest grassroots movement in decades.

(Source: agencies)

Oman's Sultan Qaboos heads to Belgium for medical checkup

Sultan Qaboos of Oman will head to Belgium on Saturday for a medical checkup, a royal court statement has said.

Qaboos, 79, believed to be suffering from colon cancer, has rarely appeared in public since undergoing lengthy treatment in Germany in March 2015.

The statement said the checkup will take "a limited period of time", but did not specify the duration or give details on his condition.

The sultan's ill health and repeated hospital spells in Germany have focused attention on the fact that he has no designated successor.

Qaboos, who has ruled the Persian Gulf sultanate since 1970, is unmarried and has no children or brothers.

According to the constitution, the sultan must write a letter designating a successor from the ruling dynasty, to be opened in the event that his family cannot agree on his



replacement within three days of his death.

The sultanate's Basic Law says the royal family should choose a new sultan within three days of the position falling vacant.

Should it fail to reach an agreement, the nation's defence council, the head of the Supreme Court and the heads of the two chambers of the consultative council would then enforce Qaboos's choice and enthrone the person he designated in the envelope.

(Source: agencies)

Russia downed American drone in Libya

The U.S. military claims that Russian air defenses shot down an American drone over the Libyan capital last month, demanding Moscow return the aircraft's wreckage.

In a statement released on November 22, the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) said it had "lost" a remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) over Tripoli the previous day during what it called operations "to assess the ongoing security situation and monitor violent extremist activity."

It did not give a reason for the drone's loss, noting that the incident was under investigation.

On Saturday, General Stephen Townsend, head of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), said he believed the operators of the air defenses "didn't know it was a U.S. remotely piloted aircraft when they fired on it."

"But they certainly know who it belongs to now and they are refusing to return it.



They say they don't know where it is but I am not buying it," he told Reuters.

Townsend also pointed the finger at Russia over latest chaos in Tripoli, saying, "This highlights the malign influence of Russian mercenaries acting to influence the outcome of the civil war in Libya, and who are directly responsible for the recent and sharp increase in fighting, casualties and destruction around Tripoli."

(Source: Sputnik)

First round of resurrected U.S.-Taliban peace talks open in Qatar

The United States has resumed talks with the Taliban in Qatar, three months after President Donald Trump abruptly halted diplomatic efforts that could end the U.S.'s longest war.

U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad on Saturday held the first official talks since September with the Afghan group in Qatar's capital, Doha, a U.S. State Department spokesperson said.

The renewed talks were expected to pave the way for direct talks between the Taliban and the government in Kabul and, ultimately, a possible peace agreement after more than 18 years of war.

"The U.S. rejoined talks today in Doha. The focus of discussion will be reduction of violence that leads to intra-Afghan negotiations and a ceasefire," said the spokesperson.

The meetings in Doha, where the Taliban maintains a political office, follow several days of talks in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, where Khalilzad met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.

The Taliban has so far refused direct talks with Ghani, calling him a "U.S. puppet".

During a surprise Thanksgiving Day visit to a U.S. military base in Afghanistan last month, Trump said the Taliban "wants to make a deal".

Even during the stall in talks, Khalilzad has in recent



weeks made a whistle-stop tour of nations with a stake in Afghan peace, including Pakistan.

He recently arranged a captive swap in which the Taliban released an American and an Australian academic whom they had held hostage for three years.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military in its daily report said overnight on Saturday that U.S. air attacks killed 37 members of the armed group and operations by the Afghan National Security Forces killed 22 other rebels.

The Taliban, which now holds sway over nearly half of

Afghanistan, has continued to carry out near-daily attacks against military outposts throughout the country.

Trump has expressed frustration with the U.S.'s longest war, repeatedly saying he wants to bring the estimated 12,000 American soldiers home and calling on Afghanistan's own police and military to step up.

■ Afghan election standoff

Meanwhile, the Afghan government is embroiled in a fresh election standoff. Presidential polls on September 28 ended in accusations of misconduct and corruption, with no results yet announced.

Repeat leading contender and Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah has challenged the recounting of several hundred thousand ballots, accusing his opponent Ghani of trying to manipulate the tally.

Ghani leads the Afghan government with Abdullah in a power-sharing agreement brokered by the U.S. after the presidential election in 2014 was so deeply mired in corruption that a clear winner could not be determined.

To head off a conflict, Washington stepped in and forced the two leading candidates - Ghani and Abdullah - to share power in a so-called Unity Government that has been largely paralysed because of the relentless bickering between the two leaders.

(Source: al Jazeera)

More French protests see roads blocked, trains disrupted and scuffles in Paris

Truckers blocked roads in about 10 regions around France on Saturday to protest against a planned reduction in tax breaks on diesel for road transport, while train and metro services remained heavily disrupted by a strike against pension reform.

In Paris there were scuffles with police in the Denfert Rochereau area of the residential Left Bank as several hundred "yellow vest" protesters continued their weekly demonstrations, but numbers were relatively small compared with previous weeks as the transport strike made it hard to reach the capital.

The combined pressure of the yellow vest movement over the cost of living and union protests against pension reform are a major challenge to President Emmanuel Macron's efforts to balance the state budget

and introduce more environmentally friendly legislation in the second half of his mandate.

Truckers federation Otre (Organisation des Transporteurs Routiers Européens) said it opposed an increase in taxes on diesel for commercial vehicles as part of the government's draft 2020 budget.

"Our movement is a movement of rage against the continued fiscal punishment of road transport that we can no longer tolerate," Alexis Gibergues, Otre's president in the Ile-de-France region around Paris, said on LCI television.

Gibergues said truckers were not targeting city centers for now, but that could change if the government does not respond.

French TV showed images of trucks blocking motorways in several parts of the

country including the Ile-de-France. Passenger cars were allowed to pass slowly, but many foreign trucks were forced to stop.

Truckers' organizations complain that foreign truckers can buy cheaper fuel at home, which allows them to operate more efficiently in France.

In its draft 2020 budget, the government plans to gradually reduce tax breaks on fuel for trucks between July 1, 2020 and Jan. 1, 2022.

The measure is expected to raise about 140 million euros (\$154 million) in a full year, which the government wants to use to finance new transport infrastructure. The draft law is set to get a second reading in parliament in mid-December.

Last year, President Emmanuel Macron's



centrist government dropped plans to increase taxes on fuel for passenger cars after the yellow vest movement against the plan morphed into a nationwide and often violent anti-government protest.

(Source: Reuters)

Amnesty slams Saudi Arabia for 'outrageous' mistreatment of jailed rights activist

Amnesty International has condemned as "outrageous" the continued detention of prominent Saudi human rights lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair and his ill-treatment, as a crackdown led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman against Muslim preachers, members of the press and intellectuals widens in the conservative oil-rich kingdom.



The London-based organization said in a statement that it had received credible reports that authorities at Dhahban Central Prison near the Red Sea port city of Jeddah had in late November "arbitrarily" placed Abu al-Khair in solitary confinement under tightened security.

He has been on hunger strike since November 29 in a show of protest against his ill-treatment.

"The fact that Waleed Abu al-Khair is in prison to begin with, let alone serving a 15-year prison sentence, is outrageous," said Amnesty International's Middle East Research Director Lynn Malouf.

She added, "He was imprisoned under bogus terrorism-related charges simply for exercising his rights to freedom of expression and defending human rights. He is one amongst scores of Saudi women and men being punished for standing up for their fellow citizens' rights."

Amnesty International then called on Saudi authorities to protect Abu al-Khair from torture and allow him to contact his family and lawyer, and receive medical care.

"We continue to call for the immediate and unconditional release of Waleed Abu al-Khair and all other prisoners of conscience currently behind bars in Saudi prisons," the statement pointed out.

(Source: Press TV)

Morales arrives in Cuba for a 'temporary

Evo Morales has left Mexico and is now in Cuba, the Mexican Foreign Ministry said, noting that the ousted Bolivian leader told the authorities his trip was "temporary." Morales reportedly flew in to deal with some medical issues.

"With regard to the information circulating about Evo Morales, we specify that Mr Morales departed [Mexico] for Cuba this morning. As he informed us, it is a temporary trip," a spokesman for Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard tweeted late on Friday.

Although Morales himself has yet to comment on his travels, it's reported that the former Bolivian leader, forced into exile by a military coup last month, landed in Cuba for a medical check-up. "President Evo Morales is in Cuba for a medical appointment with the Cuban medical team that treated him in Bolivia," Reuters quoted Gabriela Montano, the former health minister in the Morales cabinet, as saying.

Even before the official announcement of Morales' departure, speculation swirled about his reported trip to "freedom island." Citing "sources," El Pais reported that Cuba was not Morales' final destination. They claimed the politician is looking forward to settling down in Argentina once the nation's newly elected President Alberto Fernandez is sworn into office next Tuesday.

(Source: RT)

Saudi trainee kills 3 in shooting at Florida Naval Base

A member of the Saudi Air Force armed with a handgun fatally shot three people and injured eight others on Friday morning during a bloody rampage in a classroom building at the prestigious Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Fla., where he was training to become a pilot.

The authorities, led by the F.B.I., were investigating to determine the gunman's motive and whether the shooting was an act of terrorism.

A United States military official identified the suspect, who was killed by a sheriff's deputy during the attack, as Second Lt. Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani. He was one of hundreds of military trainees at the base, which is considered the home of naval aviation.

Six other Saudi nationals were detained for questioning near the scene of the shooting, including three who were seen filming the entire incident, according to a person briefed on the initial stages of the investigation. A group that monitors online jihadist activity said that shortly before the shooting, a Twitter account with a name matching the gunman's posted a "will" calling the United States a "nation of evil" and criticizing its support for Israel.

(Source: NY times)

Berri says his bloc to vote for Khatib

➔ Struggling with a huge public debt and economic stagnation, Lebanon has sunk into major political trouble since protests erupted against its ruling elite a month ago, leading Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri to quit on October 29.

Efforts to form a new government, needed to enact urgent reforms, hit a setback at the weekend when former finance minister Mohammad Safadi withdrew his candidacy for the post of prime minister, sparking bitter recriminations.

(Source: Nahar net)

Qatar postpones launch of new 2022 World Cup venue

Qatar has postponed to next year the opening of Education City stadium, its second newly built venue for the 2022 football World Cup, FIFA said on Saturday.

The venue was due to be inaugurated when it hosted the semi-final of the Club World Cup between Liverpool and an as yet undetermined side on December 18.

But delays to the certification of the stadium by the authorities will mean that the fixture will instead be played at Khalifa International Stadium which was already due to host several Club World Cup fixtures.

Education City will now be opened in 2020 although the world football governing body did not give an exact date.

"Construction at Education City stadium is complete and the venue is now operational," FIFA said in a statement.

"However, the necessary certification process took longer than expected and therefore the stadium was unable to host the required test events prior to the semi-final and final of the FIFA Club World Cup at full capacity.

"The priority is to ensure an enjoyable experience for all fans so it was decided to open the stadium at a later date."

Three years ahead of the start of the 2022 tournament, Qatar has already launched the brand new 40,000-capacity Al-Janoub stadium and the refurbished Khalifa International ground.

Five new stadia remain under construction.

On Tuesday, Qatar will open the remaining line and stations on its new three-line metro system.

(Source: AFP)

Sonny Bill Williams heads fundraiser for families of Samoa epidemic

New Zealand sports star Sonny Bill Williams is heading a public fund-raising effort for families affected by the Samoan measles epidemic, as the death toll rose Saturday to 65.

The Samoan Ministry of Health said there were two further fatalities in the past 24 hours amid signs that the infection rate was slowing.

Williams -- a double rugby union World Cup winner with the All Blacks, and a former rugby league international and New Zealand boxing champion -- has teamed up with other prominent sportsmen to promote the "Alofa mo Samoa" Givealittle page.

"Our hearts are heavy and hurting at this time for our people in Samoa," says the givealittle page set up by the group of past and present All Blacks including Williams, Jerome Kaino, Ardie Savea, Michael Jones and former Wallaby Quade Cooper.

"Please join us in donating money that will go straight to the immediate families who have suffered loss of a loved one as a result of this terrible measles outbreak".

Williams separately tweeted that the group had started the fund with a NZ\$30,000 donation (US\$20,000).

There had been 4,460 confirmed measles cases in Samoa since the outbreak began in mid-October, and 57 of the 65 deaths were children under the age of five.

The Ministry of Health said 103 new measles cases were reported over the past 24 hours which was 37 fewer than the previous day and down from 165 the day before that.

The figures were released following a two-day lockdown while the government conducted an unprecedented mass vaccination drive.

The ministry said an estimated 89 percent of all eligible people in the Pacific island nation of 200,000 have now have been vaccinated against measles.

(Source: Eurosport)

UEFA chief calls reported world league plan 'far-fetched' and 'insane'

A proposal to create a two-division world soccer league for leading clubs is "far-fetched" and "insane", UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said in a statement on Friday.

The Financial Times and New York Times have reported that discussions led by Real Madrid president Florentino Perez have taken place over the possibility of setting up the league featuring the world's richest clubs split into two divisions.

The FT has reported that CVC Capital Partners and Gianni Infantino, president of soccer's world governing body FIFA, are among those approached by Perez about a new league.

"I have read about this insane plan. If reports are to be believed, it comes from a single club president (not the owner) and a lone football administrator," said Ceferin. "It would be hard to think of a more selfish and egotistical scheme.

"It would clearly ruin football around the world; for the players, for the fans and for everyone connected with the game - all for the benefit of a tiny number of people.

"Luckily, there is still too much common sense in the game for this kind of crazy notion to succeed. In fact, it is so far-fetched, I cannot actually believe anyone has dreamed it up."

Last month, Real chief Perez was chosen as the first president of the newly-formed World Football Club Association following a meeting hosted by FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

The other founders were AC Milan, Auckland City, Boca Juniors, River Plate, America of Mexico, Guangzhou Evergrande and Congo's TP Mazembe.

FIFA and Real Madrid could not immediately be reached for comment.

(Source: Reuters)

Sources: Cavs open to trade offers for Love

As NBA trade possibilities expand beginning Dec. 15, the Cleveland Cavaliers are expressing a willingness to listen to offers for All-Star forward Kevin Love, league sources told ESPN.

Cleveland is open to the idea of moving Love before the Feb. 7 trade deadline should the Cavaliers find a requisite package of young assets and/or future draft picks, league sources said.

Love is an intriguing target for franchises in both conferences, especially in a season in which so many teams believe a key addition could catapult them into championship contention.

Dec. 15 represents the date that players who signed free-agent contracts in the offseason are eligible to be moved -- a status that covers roughly 40 percent of the league.

Love, 31, has three years and \$90 million left on his contract.

The Cavaliers are pursuing a full rebuild, gathering young players and draft picks. The Cavaliers' plan has been to let coach John Beilein develop a younger roster. The team has a roster thick with expiring veteran contracts, including Tristan Thompson, Brandon Knight, Jordan Clarkson, John Henson and Matthew Dellavedova.

(Source: ESPN)

Political football: Riquelme and Maradona carry old feud into Boca election

Diego Maradona and Juan Roman Riquelme are back in the heart of the battle at their former club Boca Juniors, but this weekend they are playing political football.

Riquelme's decision to join the opposition ticket in the election of the club board has added fuel to a heated campaign and reopened a feud with Maradona who aimed a broadside at his former team-mate.

The vote on Sunday is also shaping as a rematch of the recent Argentine presidential election.

The 80,000 Boca members can vote at the club's famous Bonbonera stadium on Sunday in a ballot that could bring a second defeat for Mauricio Macri in less than two months.

Macri was president of Boca from 1995 to 2006 and used that as a springboard to national political success.

He became president of Argentina in 2015 at the head of his centre-right Cambiemos party. But his rule will end on December 10.

He was booted out of office in a national election on October 27, beaten by another Buenos Aires politician Alberto Fernandez, a centre-left candidate.

Boca has been run for the last eight years by Macri's long-time ally Daniel Anglici, backed by Cambiemos members on the board.

The Macri faction's candidate this time is Christian Gribaudo a former national deputy. His main challenger is a former Macri protegee Jorge Amor Ameal, club president from 2008-11.

Riquelme, 41, is running with Ameal as candidate for the position of second vice-president.



Riquelme made his Boca debut in 1996 and soon replaced Maradona, who had returned to the club to finish his career. Riquelme also had a fractious relationship with Macri and feuded with Anglici.

Unlike Maradona, who won little at the club, Riquelme is associated with Boca's greatest success.

The club's last major international trophies came in 2007, when Riquelme scored three goals in a 5-0 aggregate win over Gremio in the Libertadores Cup final.

That was the club's sixth victory in the competition, the last three with Riquelme in the team. He also led them to their last Intercontinental Cup victory in 2000.

Inter held by Roma after racism storm, leaving Juve to eye top spot



Inter Milan were held to a goalless draw by Roma at the San Siro on Friday, leaving the way open for Italian champions Juventus to reclaim top spot in Serie A this weekend.

The match in the San Siro had been overshadowed by a racism storm after Italian sports daily Corriere dello Sport's controversial "Black Friday" headline.

The front-page headline accompanied an article about the first Serie A meeting between former Manchester United teammates Romelu Lukaku and Chris Smalling.

On the pitch, defender Smalling and Gianluca Mancini stifled Inter's prolific strike duo Lukaku and Lautaro Martinez, who between them have scored 18 of their team's goals in 15 league games this season.

Conte's side proved toothless in attack against a well-organised Roma, failing to find the net for the first time this season, days before their Champions League clash against Barcelona.

"The great merit of Roma is having stopped Lautaro-Lukaku," said coach Paulo Fonseca.

"Inter's main chances came from our mistakes, but we always played the ball with courage and that's what I want for the team.

"We did well defensively. Smalling and Mancini had a good game like the whole team, it's certainly not easy against Inter."

Lukaku, Marcelo Brozovic and Matias Vecino all missed chances for the hosts as

Roma snatched a precious point to move fourth and into the Champions League places.

Inter were lacking in midfield with Stefano Sensi, Nicolo Barella and Roberto Gagliardini all out with Roma missing goalkeeper Pau Lopez while Edin Dzeko started on the bench after flu, but came on for the final 25 minutes.

Midfielder Nicolo Zaniolo took Dzeko's place up front with Roma dominating the first half hour, although Inter had the best chances with Antonio Mirante denying Lukaku after a blundering Jordan Veretout back-pass.

A similar error from the Roma goalkeeper nearly proved costly when Mirante passed the ball straight to Lukaku on the edge of the area just before the break but Marcelo Brozovic wastefully fired over the bar.

Inter held on to top spot but their advantage remains under threat from Juventus with third-placed Lazio eight points behind the leaders.

"We faced an excellent Roma but their goalkeeper was their best player on the pitch, they never had a shot on goal," said Conte.

"I congratulate my players, even if we were wasteful, we should have sealed the three points."

Roma are just one point ahead of Cagliari, with the Sardinians travelling to Sassuolo on Sunday.

(Source: Mirror)

Atletico title hopes suffer another blow after Villarreal draw



Atletico Madrid's title hopes look to be all-but over after a goalless draw away at Villarreal on Friday night raised further doubts about their progress under coach Diego Simeone.

After losing at home to Barcelona last weekend, another slip means Atletico are now five points behind Barca and Real Madrid in La Liga, despite having played two games more.

It means by the time Simeone's side head into the Christmas break, the gap could have stretched to double figures and that will be hard to close, especially given they play both Barcelona and Real Madrid away from home in the second half of the season.

Familiar failings in attack proved their undoing at la Ceramica, where Villarreal, who climb to 12th, were fully deserving of their point and could easily have snatched a victory too.

Atletico came into the game with 25 points from their first 15 league games, their lowest tally at that stage since Simeone took charge in 2011.

Their remarkable title triumph three years later, not to mention two Champions League finals, means Simeone is still held in high-esteem but after an expensive summer, questions are being asked about the club's direction of travel.

to win."

Attempts to cash in on Riquelme's popularity in the election have been blocked.

A photo showing his back, wearing the Boca number 10, was banned from the ballot paper. The club has warned that anyone wearing a Riquelme t-shirt on Sunday will not be allowed to vote.

Maradona, recently returned to Argentina to coach Gimnasia in nearby La Plata and the owner of a box at the Bombonera, reacted with hostility to Riquelme's candidacy.

Riquelme snubbed Maradona, Argentina's coach, by refusing to come out of retirement for the 2010 World Cup, making it clear the refusal was personal.

"We don't agree much," Riquelme said in late 2009. "My codes are not his and it's clear that we can't work together."

Maradona warned that electing Riquelme would mean Daniel Passarella coming in as Boca coach.

"We don't want a Passarella in Boca and if Riquelme wins, hold on," Maradona said.

Passarella, a former River star who was the manager who dropped Maradona from the Argentina team, had a disastrous stint running Boca from 2009 to 2013 which ended in relegation.

A third Argentine icon Gabriel Batistuta is a more peripheral figure in the election, as he is in Boca history.

'Batigol' played just 30 games for the club in 1990-91 and is acting as a consultant to a third candidate Jose Beraldi.

"It's an offer I've been waiting for," said Batistuta adding that "politics don't interest me."

(Source: AFP)

Legal fees drive \$5.5M rise in USSF 2020 deficit

U.S. Soccer's projected 2020 deficit is set to grow \$5.5 million due mostly to expenditures of \$9 million on legal fees devoted to various lawsuits.

The federation had already projected a loss for the upcoming year, but legal costs -- including those due to the equal pay lawsuit filed by the U.S. women's team -- are the primary reason for the increase.

Speaking at the USSF Board of Directors meeting, USSF CFO Pinky Raina presented reports on the federation's financial state. Entering the 2019 fiscal year, thanks in part to the financial success of the U.S.-hosted Copa America Centenario in 2016, the USSF had a cash surplus of about \$160 million.

At that point that the USSF made the decision to engage in deficit spending and invest those funds in a bid to grow the sport. The spending was projected to reduce the surplus to \$50 million by the end of the 2023 fiscal year. The reserve is now projected to be depleted even further.

Raina and USSF president Carlos Cordeiro both cited that an increase in litigation has added to the deficits. In addition to the equal pay lawsuit, the USSF is currently



involved in litigation involving a similar lawsuit filed by former U.S. women's international Hope Solo, an antitrust suit involving NASL and an antitrust lawsuit from sports promoter Relevant Sports, among others.

"When we were projecting back in [2017], we had deficits of about \$20 million each year," Cordeiro said in a subsequent roundtable with reporters. "So the concept of deficits

isn't new. We've always had planned deficits, but deficits to grow our investments in our programs.

"What's happened in the last few months and will accelerate into next year is that we have these unforeseen legal expenses that are now basically coming to bear. And they are the reason principally -- not exclusively -- for why our deficits are bigger than what we had planned in 2017 and 2018."

The budgeted operational deficit for the 2020 fiscal year, which ends in March, was \$14.8 million, but now, due in part to the \$9 million in legal fees, the projected operational deficit for that period is \$20.3 million.

Cordeiro said that the federation has insurance to defray some of the legal costs of the lawsuits, but that the insurance on one of the cases was "running out."

He declined to specify which of the cases was running out of insurance money, though it is believed to be the NASL antitrust case, which was filed in September 2017. It was confirmed that the \$9 million expense also represents those legal fees not covered by the insurance.

(Source: SoccerNet)

Marouf a candidate for IOC Athletes' Commission

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national volleyball team captain has been confirmed as an official candidate for membership in the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Athletes' Commission.

The election will take place during the Tokyo Olympic Games next summer, with all the athletes partaking having the right to vote.

Commenting on the announcement, Kirsty Coventry, the current Chair of the IOC AC, said: "It is great to see such a fantastic response from the athlete community with the interest we have received from athletes around the world in this election. I am impressed by the diverse representation of sports and countries, and this demonstrates how much athletes care, and want to share their voice and play a central role in the Olympic Movement. It is exciting to have such a high caliber of candidates, and I wish them all the very best of luck."

The athletes elected by their peers during the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 will replace the following members, whose term of office will expire at the end of these Games: IOC AC Chair Kirsty Coventry (Zimbabwe), Vice-Chair Danka Bartekova (Slovakia), Tony Estanguet (France) and James Tomkins (Australia). In addition, an appointed member of the Commission, Stefan Holm (Sweden),



will also end his term next year. Marouf's fluency in English lan-

guage and his fame are reasons for his appointment.

The 34-year-old setter is a member of Iran national volleyball team about 15 years.



Iran fall short against China at Asia-Pacific Goalball Champs

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran lost to China at the IBSA Goalball Asia-Pacific Championships on Saturday.

After three wins against Thailand, South Korea and Indonesia, Team Melli were defeated against China 9-5 at the Chiba Port Arena in Chiba, Japan.

Iran will face Australia and Japan on Sunday in Pool A.

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.

Iran win bronze at IWBF Asia Oceania Championships



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran's men's team defeated Japan 66-55 on Saturday to win bronze medal of the 2019 International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF) Asia Oceania Championships.

Iran's Omid Hadiazhar scored a match-high 33 Naohiro Murakami scored 15 points for Japan.

Australia won the gold medal with a 62-45 win over South Korea in the final.

Iran suffered three defeats against Australia (twice) and Japan and defeated China

(twice), Malaysia, South Korea and Japan. Team Melli had already qualified for the 2020 Paralympic Games as one of top four finishers.

Iran's women's team also defeated Afghanistan 48-35 in the fifth-place playoff on Friday.

Fourteen men's teams and an event-record eight women's teams competed at the competitions which took place at the Eastern National Sports Center in Thai city Pattaya from Nov. 29 to Dec. 7.

Mustafa Denizli steps down as Tractor head coach



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Mustafa Denizli stepped down as Tractor head coach less than six months in charge.

The 70-year-old coach, who has already worked in Iranian football teams Pas and Persepolis, left the team on Saturday by mutual consent.

Tractor, who want to win Iran Professional League (IPL) title for the first time ever, are eighth in the table in the current season.

Denizli has managed many Turkish notable soccer clubs, including "Istanbul Big Three" - namely Fenerbahce, Galatasaray and Besiktas but was forced to quit following poor results.

The team have not won in their past four league games.

His assistant Ahad Sheikhlari has been named as interim coach until January.

Social media reports suggest that the Tabriz-based football club has negotiated with ex-Iran coach Ali Daei.

Turkmenistan 2020: Five group stage matches to watch

New ground will be broken, and old rivalries resumed when the AFC Futsal Championship Turkmenistan 2020 begins in Ashgabat on February 26.

With four intriguing groups confirmed in Friday's official draw, the-AFC.com picks out some key clashes to pencil into your viewing schedule for the opening week of the competition.

Turkmenistan vs Oman

February 26, Main Indoor Arena

The tournament hosts kick-off their campaign against an Oman side making their first ever appearance at the Finals following a memorable play-off win over United Arab Emirates in qualifying, and the debutants will make their bow on a truly unique stage.

Ashgabat's Main Indoor Arena can fit 15,000, and Turkmenistan head coach Robert Grodovic has already called on local fans to power his side to opening night success.

Uzbekistan vs Indonesia

February 27, Martial Arts Arena

The AFC Futsal Championship's nearly men against a nation seen by many as a sleeping giant of the Asian game; Uzbekistan versus Indonesia looms as the pick

AFC FUTSAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2020			
GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D
TURKMENISTAN VIETNAM TAJIKISTAN OMAN	JAPAN LEBANON KYRGYZ REP. KUWAIT	UZBEKISTAN BAHRAIN CHINA PR INDONESIA	IR IRAN THAILAND KOREA REP. SAUDI ARABIA

of Day Two action.

Uzbekistan are still looking for a maiden Asian title after four unsuccessful appearances in the tournament decider since 2001, while Indonesia return to the Continental stage after a six-year absence buoyed by their best AFF Futsal Championship finish in nearly a decade.

Japan vs Lebanon

March 1, Martial Arts Arena

Three-time Asian champions Japan return to a Central Asian-hosted AFC Futsal Championship still eager to atone for a crushing turn of events at Uzbekistan 2016, which saw

them miss the FIFA Futsal World Cup after finishing seventh in the Continental finals.

Standing in the way of Group B success, among others, will be Lebanon, who breezed through qualifying in the initial phase of their bid to reach a first World Cup after quarter-final eliminations in six of their last seven trips to the AFC Finals.

Turkmenistan vs Vietnam

March 1, Main Indoor Arena

With a place in the last eight potentially on the line, this March 1 clash looms as a crucial collision between a Turkmenistan side desperate to impress on home soil and

a Vietnamese outfit equally eager to book a return to the FIFA Futsal World Cup after their landmark run to the knockout stage at Colombia 2016.

Both sides advanced when a single Ngo Ngoc Son goal earned Vietnam a hard-fought win in the meeting between the two sides at the 2017 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games; only time will tell what impact such a result would have at Turkmenistan 2020.

Iran vs Thailand

March 2, Martial Arts Arena

A match-up fit for the knockout stage comes early, as two of Asia's futsal heavyweights clash on the final day of group stage action in a repeat of the 2008 AFC Futsal Championship final.

Powerhouse Islamic Republic of Iran are the 12-time kings of Asian futsal, while Thailand are the FIFA Futsal World Cup regulars set to combine the powers of star pivot Suphawat Thueanklang with 21-year-old qualifying top scorer Muhammad Osmanmusa.

Only one side can top the group, and this blockbuster clash looks likely to decide precisely which.

(Source: the-afc)

Mardani takes silver at World Taekwondo Grand Prix Final

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Sajjad Mardani from Iran claimed a silver medal at the World Taekwondo Grand Prix Final in Moscow on Saturday.

The Iranian representative lost to his Korean opponent In Kyo-don 21-10 at over-80kg at the Russian capital's Dynamo Sports Palace.



He needed a gold medal to secure his place at the 2020 Olympic Games.

Arman Hadipour at under-58kg and Mirhashem Hosseini at under-68kg secured their berths by reaching the semifinals.

Taekwondo first became a full Olympic medal sport at Sydney 2000.

UAE eye Persepolis coach Gabriel Calderon

PLDC — After sacking Dutch coach Bert van Marwijk, the UAE are reportedly eying Persepolis coach Gabriel Calderon.

The 59-year-old Argentine, who has been appointed as Persepolis coach this season, has already worked in Oman and Bahrain national football teams.

A Saudi journalist has tweeted that the Emirati football officials are going to sign Calderon.

Bert van Marwijk took over the UAE national side in March but was sacked in the wake of a 4-2 defeat to Qatar in the Persian Gulf Cup on Tuesday.

Iran Loses to China at Men's Junior AHF Cup 2019

TASNIM — Iran lost to China at the Men's Junior Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) Cup 2019 on Friday.

The Iranian team, who had drawn 1-1 with Thailand in its opening match, suffered a 3-1 loss against China in Pool A.

Mehdi Shahrokhi scored the only goal of the match for Iran.

Iran will play Uzbekistan on Sunday.

The competition is being held in Muscat, Oman from December 5 to 14.

Iran have been drawn in Pool A along with China, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Uzbekistan.

Pool B consists of Oman, Singapore, Chinese Taipei and Hong Kong.

The competition is taking place at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, which is the most important stadium in the city of Muscat.

The top four teams from this tournament will qualify for the Men's Junior Asia Cup 2020 and join the teams of Bangladesh, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia and Pakistan who have already qualified.

The Men's Junior Asia Cup 2020 is a qualifier round for the Hockey Junior World Cup 2021.

Postecoglou leads Yokohama F. Marinos to J.League title

Yokohama F. Marinos' clinched the J.League title on Saturday to end a 15-year wait as head coach Ange Postecoglou created history by becoming the first Australian to win the Japanese title.

Ten-men Yokohama defeated eventual runners-up FC Tokyo 3-0 before a sell-out crowd of 64,000 at the Nissan Stadium to clinch their fourth J.League crown.

The win assures Yokohama - who finished on 70 points - a place in the 2020 AFC Champions League group stage.

Yokohama - on a 10-game unbeaten run and six-match winning streak - entered the final-day showdown three points clear of Tokyo, with Postecoglou's men needing to lose by four goals to be denied the title.

Goals from Theerathon Bunmathan (26th), Erik Lima (44th) and Keita Endo (77th) ensured Yokohama - reduced to 10 men following goalkeeper Park Iru-gyu's sending off in the 64th minute - sealed the title in style.

For Postecoglou, the title is the latest in an impressive resume which now sees him as the first Australian coach to lead a team to the J.League title, with Yokohama having finished 12th last season, Postecoglou's first year in charge.

Postecoglou's honor roll in his coaching career includes Australia's 2015 AFC Asian Cup win, two A-League championships with Brisbane Roar and two NSL titles with South Melbourne.

He guided Australia through 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifying, stepping down after the Socceroos sealed their Finals ticket.

Tokyo FC and third-placed Kashima Antlers sealed spots in the 2020 AFC Champions League play-offs.

Two-time AFC Champions League winners and 2019 runners-up Urawa Red Diamonds, meanwhile, finished 14th while Matsumoto Yamaga and Jubilo Iwata were relegated.

(Source: AFP)

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■ Managing Director: Mohammad Shojaeian
■ Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450
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No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.O. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713



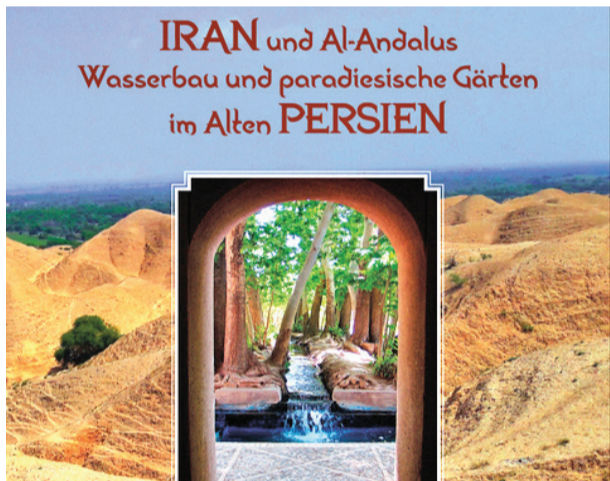
GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

O son of Adam, do not grieve for the livelihood
which is to come on the day it comes, for, if you
are alive tomorrow, God will send you your share.

Imam Ali (AS)

German writers discuss impacts of Persian art, knowledge on Andalusia

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — A number of German writers gathered during a meeting named “A Night with German Writers” at Iran’s Cultural Office in Berlin on Friday to discuss how Andalusia was influenced by Persian art and knowledge.



German author Isabel Blanco del Piñal's book “Iran and Al-Andalus: Water Constructions and Paradisiacal Gardens in Ancient Iran” was introduced during a meeting at Iran’s Cultural Office in Berlin on December 6, 2019.

German author Isabel Blanco del Piñal’s book “Iran and Al-Andalus: Water Constructions and Paradisiacal Gardens in Ancient Iran” was also introduced at the meeting, Iran’s Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) announced on Saturday.

Speaking at the ceremony, Blanco del Piñal talked about art in Persian gardens and knowledge of water in ancient Iran. She also explained the similarities between Persian gardens and gardens in Andalusia.

She also introduced ancient Persian qanats –subterranean aqueducts – and talked about Iranian knowledge of water extraction and refinery in ancient Iran.

Verlag Gisela Fischer RoseNoire Publications in Munich released the book in June 2019.

A short film about some Iranian ancient sites was also screened during the meeting.

In addition, Iran’s cultural attaché Hamid Mohammadi talked about the knowledge of water supply through qanats in desert cities, especially in Yazd.

Iranian troupe to perform “The Waltz Invention” in Tehran

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Sara Afshar’s troupe will perform Russian-born American writer Vladimir Nabokov’s play “The Waltz Invention” at Tehran’s Shahrzad Theater tonight.

Written in 1938, the play is about an inventor and poet Salvator Waltz, who invented a powerful, horrific weapon. He offers the weapon to his country in return for being put in charge of everything.

Now the minister of war and his absurd council of generals must decide if peace and prosperity are worth the possibility of being ruled by a mad dictator.

Hassan Majuni, Shabnam Farshadju, Amir-Hossein Taheri, Mohsen Nuri and Iraj Tadayyon are the members of the cast for the play.

NEWS IN BRIEF



“Book Means Life” at Tehran book fair

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — The organizers of the Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF) announced on Saturday that they have chosen “Book Means Life” as the motto for the 33rd edition of the event.

Turkey will be the guest of honor at the 33rd Tehran International Book Fair, which will be held from April 14 to 24, 2020.

Eugenio Barba, Romeo Castellucci to attend Fajr theater festival

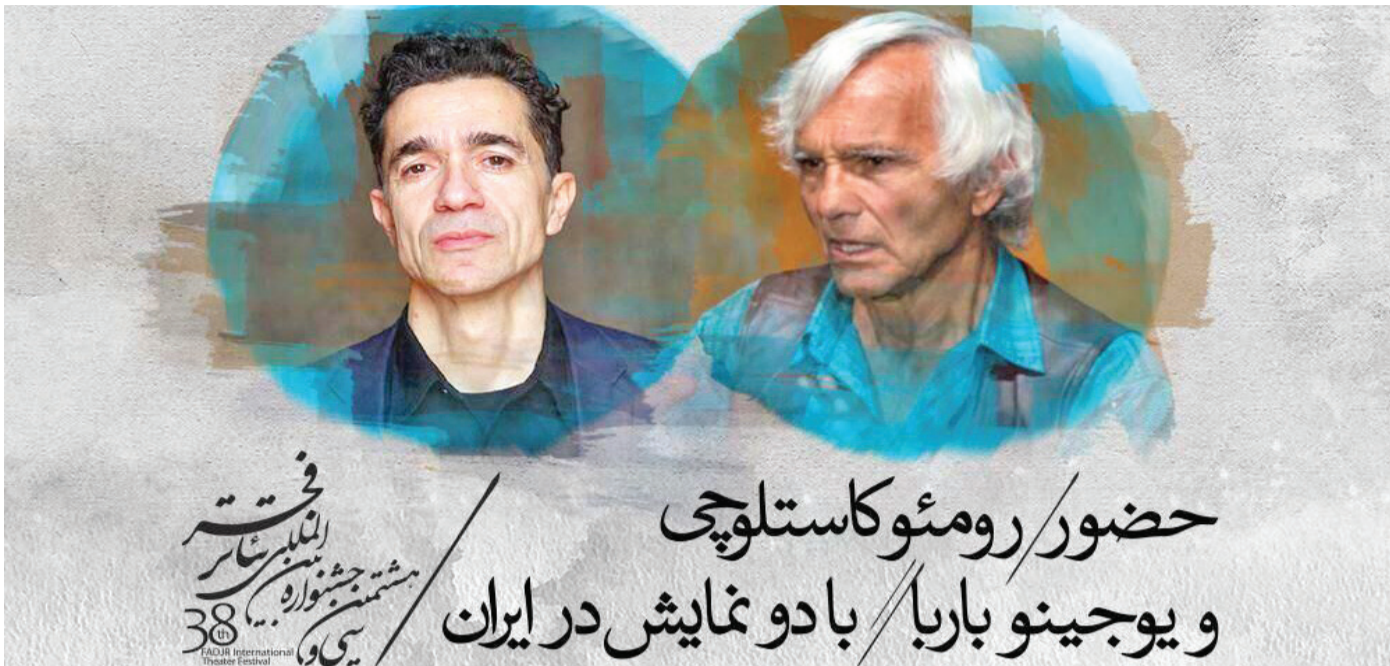
A R T **TEHRAN** — Italian theater directors Eugenio Barba and Romeo Castellucci will be attending the 38th Fajr International Theater Festival in Tehran, the organizers announced on Saturday.

Castellucci is scheduled to stage “Julius Caesar”, which is about celebrated Roman general and statesman Julius Caesar, while Barba will be staging “The Chronic Life” at the festival.

The story of “The Chronic Life” is set in Europe in 2031 after the Third Civil War. Groups and individuals converge, challenging each other over their diverging dreams, disappointments and hopes.

More details about the programs and the workshops, which will be organized by Barba and Castellucci, will be announced in the near future.

The festival will be running from January 30 to February 9 in Tehran.



This poster shows Italian theater directors Eugenio Barba (L) and Romeo Castellucci who will attend the 38th Fajr International Theater Festival in Tehran.

Iranian films line up for Manchester Kinofilm Festival



“The Feast of the Goat” by Saeid Zamanian.

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Manchester international short film and animation festival will screen 20 movies by Iranian filmmakers in various categories of its 16th edition, which will be held in 2020, the organizers have announced.

Six movies will go on screen in the Iranian Short 1 category. The films are “Hearing Aid” by Hamid Yusefi, “Showan” by Bijan Zarrin, “Cleaner” by Mohammad Meiqani, “I’m Not an Actress” by Ali Jalali, “Azadeh” by Mir Abbas Khosravinejad and “One Night” by Aida Alimadad.

The Iranian Short 2 category features “The Feast of the Goat” by Saeid Zamanian, “Umbrā” by Seid Jafarian, “Dissect” by Siavash Shahabi, “Don’t Forget Today” by Ahmad Monajemi, “Puzzle” by Meisam Hassanlu and “Flying Fishes”

by Mohammad Torivarian.

“Jebeer” by Rayhaneh Mirhashemi is competing in the Animation 3 section, while the Animation 1 will screen “Starvation” by Zahra Rostampur.

In the Micro Wonders category, “Watch Me” by Reza Mehranfar is the sole Iranian film and “Emesis” by Azin Hamidnia will be screened in the experimental film section.

“Oblivion” by Fatemeh Mohammadi has been selected to be screened in the Women in Film 2 section and “Serok” by Zhihar Farajzadeh has been picked for the documentary film category.

Saeid Shojaei’s “Tulsa” will go on screen in the International Prog 2 and the Crime/Noir section will screen “Block” by Mostafa Rabbani.

The Kinofilm Festival will take place in the northwestern English city Manchester from February 24 until March 1, 2020.

Actress Fatemeh Motamed-Arya presiding over Kerala festival jury

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian actress Fatemeh Motamed-Arya is presiding over the international jury of the 24th International Film Festival of Kerala, which is currently underway in the Indian city of Thiruvananthapuram.

Filmmakers Khairy Beshara from Egypt, Amir Karakulov from Kazakhstan and Nagraj Manjule and Rajiv Menon, both from India, are the other members of the jury.

Motamed-Arya, who has played in over 70 films, is famous for her roles in such acclaimed movies as “The Blue-Veiled” and “Gilaneh”.

She has been honored with a Crystal Simorgh for best actress four times at Iran’s Fajr Film Festival and also has won awards at over 80 international events.

Acclaimed Iranian dramas “Castle of Dreams” by Reza Mirkarimi, “Just 6.5” by Saeid Rustai and “The Warden” by Nima Javidi are competing in the World Cinema section of the Kerala festival.



Iranian actress Fatemeh Motamed-Arya in an undated photo.

“Irishman” draws 17 million U.S. viewers on Netflix, Nielsen estimates

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Martin Scorsese’s new gangster film “The Irishman” was watched by an estimated 17.1 million Americans in its first five days of release on Netflix, according to Nielsen data released on Friday.

The Nielsen estimates were the first indications of audience interest in the movie, which cost some \$160 million to make and is expected to be a major contender at the Oscars. Netflix has never won the coveted best picture Academy Award.

By comparison, last December’s Netflix thriller “Bird Box”, starring Sandra Bullock, scored nearly 26 million U.S. viewers in its first seven days of availability, according to Nielsen’s subscription video on demand content ratings.

Netflix said at the time that “Bird Box” was watched by 45 million members worldwide in its first seven days of release in December 2018.

Netflix does not routinely release viewing data and the streaming platform declined to comment on the Nielsen estimates for “The Irishman.”

The Nielsen estimates cover only U.S. viewers and is limited to those streaming Netflix on television, excluding viewers on mobile devices and computers.

“The Irishman” which stars Robert De Niro and Al Pacino, has already picked up multiple critics awards despite a limited release in U.S. movie theaters in November after an impasse in negotiations for a longer movie rollout between Netflix and major theater chains.

Netflix has not released any box office figures for the film’s 26-day run in independent movie theaters.

Scott Stuber, head of original films at Netflix, told Hollywood trade outlet Variety on Thursday that Netflix was working toward releasing more viewership data on its movie offerings but gave no timeline.

“The Irishman” and its lead actors and director are expected to be nominated for multiple Golden Globe awards when nominations are announced in Los Angeles on Monday. Oscar nominations will be announced on Jan. 13.

Tehran gallery hosts Iranian Sculpture Expo



A poster for the 3rd Iranian Sculpture Expo.

A R T **TEHRAN** — The 3rd edition of the Iranian Sculpture Expo opened at the Arte Design Gallery in Tehran after an 8-year hiatus.

The first expo was held at the Iranian Artists Forum in 2008 and the second edition was organized at Shirin Gallery in 2011.

“Unfortunately there was a problem in organizing the expo regularly,” the director of the expo, Mohsen Gholami, said at the opening ceremony on Friday.

“The expo aims to provide an opportunity to sell sculptures, however, the number of private collectors interested in sculptures is limited,” he added.

“We have tried to offer a special collection at the third expo so that we not only would draw the attention of collectors but also provide a chance

to increase the number of interested visitors,” he noted.

The director of the Association of Iranian Sculptors, Abbas Majidi, also said that Iranian artists have enjoyed a booming market over the past few years but sculptors have had the least share in this market.

“Joining this market is not an easy task,” he noted and added, “This expo aims to lessen the gap between the sculptors, collectors, gallery owners and people.”

A book of the expo was also unveiled during the opening ceremony and veteran sculptor Taha Behbahani was honored for his lifetime achievements.

Organized by the Association of Iranian Sculptors and the Arte Design Gallery, the expo will be running until December 27 at the gallery.

“Castle of Dreams” is about two young children whose mother has just died, and their father, Jalal, after long years of absence, returns to sort things out, but he does not want to take the children with him.

“Just 6.5” is about a police squad under the leadership of Samad who has been assigned to arrest Nasser Khakzad, a major drug trafficker in Tehran.

“The Warden” tells the story of an Iranian prison warden who is assigned to transfer prisoners to a new building during the 1960s.

“Hava, Maryam, Ayesha”, a co-production between Iran and Afghanistan by Afghan director Sahra Karimi is also competing in this section.

The film is about three pregnant Afghan women from different social backgrounds living in Kabul, each of whom is facing a big challenge in her life and must solve her problem by herself for the first time. The International Film Festival of Kerala will run until December 13.



Director Martin Scorsese arrives for the premiere of film “The Irishman” in Los Angeles, California, U.S. October 24, 2019. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)