



**Competence of parliamentary candidates is assessed based on constitution** **2**



**Tehran voices hope to resolve Sheikh Zakzaky's problems** **3**



**A bright future ahead of Iran beach soccer: Paria Shahriari** **15**



**Mohammadi honored at Japanese environment painting contest** **16**

# Rouhani submits \$473b budget bill to Majlis



See page 4

**‘Budget of resistance’ to counter sanction effects**

## Prominent figures register for parliamentary polls

**TEHRAN** — Saturday marked the seventh and last day that parliamentary hopefuls were able to enroll for the upcoming elections.

Jamal Orf, who serves as the head of the Interior Ministry elections headquarters, said on Sunday that 16,145 people registered to run for the elections.

He said 88 percent of the registrants

are male and 12 percent female, adding that 248 current and 633 former members of the parliament also registered.

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

The elections will be held in over 200 constituencies across the country's 31 provinces. **→3**

## Kish to host Symposium of ECO Tourism Investment Opportunities

**TEHRAN** — Iran's southern Kish Island will host the Symposium of ECO Tourism Investment Opportunities on December 11-12.

The event will bring together investment companies in the fields of tourism and hospitality, as well as relative executives and officials from the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) member states. According to organizers, the symposium

is aimed to identify the factors affecting investment in the tourism sector, introduce capacities and opportunities for investment in Iran and other ECO member states, and explore ways to attract investment toward the growth of the tourism industry.

ECO is an inter-governmental regional organization encompassing countries from Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. **→10**

## Evidences prove Saudi involvement in delivering arms to terrorists in Syria

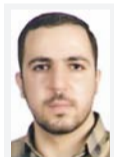
Another evidence has surfaced to reveal the involvement of the Saudi regime in buying and delivering weapons to the terrorist organizations in Syria.

In an article published by the UK's "The Independent" Newspaper, British writer and journalist Robert Fisk said that "hundreds of mortars along with their shipment documents and factory instructions were found in one of the hideouts of "Jabhat al-Nusra" terrorist organization in Aleppo. The shipment papers indicate that

these weapons were made in the Bosnian village of Novi Travnik.

"One of the shipment papers carried the dispatcher's name: Ifet Krnjic," Fisk said,

Fisk clarified that he travelled to Bosnia to meet this person and ask him how these weapons arrived to Syria. Krnjic acknowledged that his signature was on one of these documents and said that the Saudis had sent these weapons, specifically a Saudi minister and three Saudi army officers who had visited Krnjic at the factory. **→13**



## ARTICLE

**Ramin Hossein Abadian**  
Mehr News Agency  
journalist

## Finding a replacement for Adel Abdul Mahdi

**U**nder the Iraqi constitution, the president must ask the grand coalition in the parliament to nominate a new candidate, which usually takes some time. Although Iraqi political groups have always needed a lot of consultations to make the final decision, it seems even more difficult to agree on a candidate, especially as there is a pressure by the protesters.

Meanwhile, some figures are calling for the resignation of the heads of the three branches of the government and holding an early election.

Currently, the Iraqi president is extensively consulting with political groups and parliamentarians to make a final decision. Some conditions have been stated for the new prime minister that makes it even harder for the president to come to a decision.

The Iraqi politicians believe that in addition to an agreement on a new prime minister or his acceptance by people, the interpretation of the constitution is another problem for electing new prime minister.

According to Article 76 of the constitution, the president charges the candidate, who is nominated by the grand coalition, with forming a cabinet. If the nominee cannot establish a cabinet within the given time, he must resign or be removed, and the president should appoint another person to form a cabinet in 15 days. But, Iraq's constitution has not specified whether or not the nominee should be a person from the grand coalition.

On the other hand, from the Iraqi observers' point of view, by this mission, the Iraqi parliament has put Barham Salih in charge of making a decision. Now, the president should satisfy protesters and face the anger of those political groups that elected him to the post of president or take the political groups' side and await the protesters' rage.

The constitution has created a dilemma for the Iraqi president, so he has to decide to whether support protesters or the political groups.

Another issue is that there is no interpretation in the constitution to determine how many times the president can nominate a candidate. **→13**

## No trains and no compromise as France faces a winter of discontent

With hardline unions threatening indefinite strikes over pension reforms, there is apprehension at the political perils facing Emmanuel Macron. Emmanuel Macron will seek to placate angry strikers this week while honoring his election pledge to shake up France's pension system in a delicate balancing act that will define his political future.

Ministers are looking at possible concessions that could defuse the strikes and protests that have paralyzed the country since last week.

Transport chaos continued this weekend and unions have called for another day of industrial action on Tuesday, putting further pressure on the government.

After last-minute consultations, the prime minister Édouard Philippe will give full details of the controversial changes to the country's pension

schemes at midday on Wednesday.

As hardline union leaders vowed to continue striking indefinitely, there were warnings that the country was entering a dangerous period.

Caroline Janvier, who entered parliament as one of Macron's La République en Marche "citizen" MPs in the 2017 general election, denied the government was panicked but admitted it was "a moment of apprehension for everyone".

"Everyone in the country is still traumatised by the gilets jaunes (yellow vest protesters) and concerned the violence will start again," she said. "Nobody wants a repeat of that."

Jean Grosset, director of the social dialogue observatory at the Jean-Jaurès Foundation, a left-wing think-tank, feared that if the government refused to compromise there would be long-term consequences. "If there's a hardening of attitudes in France it could create a perilous situation,"

he said. "It's dangerous to have a social crisis because it results in people turning to more populist parties."

In the town of Joigny – 93 miles (150km) south-east of Paris in Yonne, the heart of the outer commuter belt around the French capital known as la France périphérique – the local railway station, like many in rural France, was deserted last Thursday. Notices announced that no trains would be stopping there.

In nearby villages, school buses continued their rounds, carrying only a handful of pupils to classes not cancelled by striking teachers, as thick fog descended over icy fields.

While schools and colleges are expected to be open again this week, nobody can predict when normal public transport services will be resumed. Rail workers have declared their strikes "renewable" on an open-ended daily basis. **→13**

## Pensacola shooting: FBI investigators search for attack motive

A Saudi airman accused of killing three people after opening fire in a Navy classroom appeared to have posted criticism of U.S. wars and quoted former al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden on social media hours before the shooting spree.

The SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors media, said the suspect posted a short manifesto on Twitter prior to the attack at the naval base in Pensacola, Florida, on Friday.

The attacker allegedly hosted a dinner party earlier in the week where he and three others watched videos of mass shootings, a United States official told The Associated Press.

The FBI on Saturday formally identified the attacker as Mohammed Alshamrani, 21, a second

lieutenant in the Royal Saudi Air Force and a student naval flight officer.

"I'm against evil and America as a whole has turned into a nation of evil. I hate you because every day you [are] supporting, funding and committing crimes not only against Muslims but also humanity," the group quoted the alleged gunman as saying.

U.S. defense chief Mark Esper said on Saturday he was not yet prepared to label the attack as "terrorism".

"No, I can't say it's terrorism at this time," Esper said, adding that he believed investigators needed to be allowed to do their work.

The suspect was on the base as part of a U.S. Navy training program designed to foster links

with foreign allies.

One of the three students who attended the dinner party hosted by the attacker recorded video footage from outside the classroom building while the shooting was taking place, an official said, adding that two other Saudi students watched from a car.

According to the official, 10 Saudi students were being held on the base while several others were unaccounted for.

The assault, which prompted a significant law enforcement response and base lockdown, ended when a sheriff's deputy killed the attacker. Eight people were wounded, including the deputy and a second deputy who was with him. **→13**



## Press conference on the fourth anniversary of Zaria massacre

A press conference was held on Sunday in the memory of those who were killed in the Zaria massacre in which the protestors were demanding the release of Sheikh Zakzaky, the leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN).

The press conference, attended by local and foreign media outlets, was hosted by the society for solidarity among children of the martyrs and altruists.



## ARTICLE

**Martin Love**  
Political analyst from  
North Carolina

## A search for counters to U.S. imperialism is necessary and hard

**F**ew often learn anything until it is too late, and even then they may not learn much that matters except in a context of a disaster that probably could have been avoided. The reference here is to the relatively comfortable and well off, say the mid to upper levels of a shrinking middle class in a society such as the U.S. has.

Walk around the campus of the university here in central North Carolina and there is a wealth of entertainments like sports teams and presentations and parties of all kinds aside from classes and study. Idyllic it can appear. Everyone seems to act, at least, just like their forebears on campus seemed to act say 50 years ago, at the height of the U.S. war on Vietnam. Except for one thing:

On campuses back then there existed student protests and occasional rage over the Vietnam War – not so much on campuses in the relatively conservative southern states, but for sure on campuses like Harvard and Columbia in the northeast of the U.S. where students are notably brighter and more often concerned about U.S. directions. Today? It is depressing. There has been very little protestive demand about anything but something fairly inane such as the removal of a 100-year-old life-sized bronze statue of a Confederate soldier during the Civil War of the mid 19th century.

Why were students demanding the removal of the statue? Because it implied a time when slavery was supported in the Southern states of the U.S. and some students lately did not want anything on campus that signified the past existence of "racism" and slavery 200 years ago. It apparently is "cool" to have SOME conscience about something appalling, at least about something that was long ago and is not really going to upset or diminish the criminality of current Washington warmongers. Students today are relatively boring compared to students half a century ago and part of the reason is that there is no forced "draft" in to the military as there was for decades up until the early 1970s, when it was suspended. **→11**

## Iran's new ambassador to Pakistan starts his diplomatic mission

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Ali Hosseini started his diplomatic mission as Iran's new ambassador to Pakistan on Sunday.



Upon arrival in Islamabad, Hosseini said that compared to political relations between Iran and Pakistan, the economic ties are not at a good level and should be expanded. He said boosting economic interaction between the two neighbors is on his agenda. Hosseini served as the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman and Tehran's ambassador to Italy.

## 'Sanctions can create opportunity for Iran-Georgia co-op'

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Sunday that the United States' unilateral sanctions on Iran can create an opportunity for expanding cooperation between Tehran and Tbilisi.

During a meeting with Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Khvtisiashvili, Araghchi said that Iran's relations with neighbors are not affected by foreign elements.

For his part, Khvtisiashvili said that Georgia seeks to strengthen relations with Iran.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also held a separate meeting with Khvtisiashvili.

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

## Competence of parliamentary candidates is assessed based on constitution: Guardian Council

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The spokesman for the Guardian Council wrote on his Twitter account late on Saturday that competency of the candidates for the parliamentary elections will be studied according to the constitution.

Abass Ali Kadhodaie, who also serves as the deputy secretary general of the council, wrote that time for registration of candidates ended on Saturday evening and "more than 16,000 candidates register for the 11th parliamentary election."

He said, "Monitoring and executive teams will review competency of the registered candidates and will announce the final list according to the constitution."

On December 1, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei advised potential parliamentary candidates not to run for the elections "if you don't have management capabilities."

Jamal Orf, the Interior Ministry director for election headquarters, announced on Sunday that 248 sitting MPs and 633 former MPs have registered to run for parliament.

The Leader criticized the way many people register for the elections, saying now that potential candidates can register for the parliamentary elections, a lot of people go ahead and register without hesitation.

Every responsibility or position requires certain commitments, Ayatollah Khamenei said.

"You have to see if you can make that commitment," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The Interior Ministry started registering candidates for the parliamentary elections on December 8. It ended on December 7. The election will be held on February 21, 2020.

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

The Guardian Council will release the names of candidates deemed eligible to run by December 18.

Disqualified candidates will have four days to object to the Guardian Council, after which the council will study complaints and announce the final list on February 11.

The candidates will have 8 days to spend on the campaign trail, ending on February 19, and then the elections will be held on February 21.

## U.S. cruel sanctions on Iran affecting rare disease patients: official

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — The head of Iran's Organ Transplant Management Center said the "cruel" sanctions imposed by the U.S. against the Islamic Republic have negatively affected patients with rare diseases.

Speaking at a meeting with high-ranking Spanish health officials in Madrid, Mehdi Shadnough presented a report on the situation of patients with rare diseases in Iran and described the U.S. sanctions and their impact on their quality of life and sufferings as "cruel and inhumane".

Patients with rare diseases around the world have common pains, and the U.S. government should answer the question as to why these patients' lives should be affected by the political and economic developments, he added.

"The U.S. restrictions have been inhumane and created problems for patients with rare diseases but the Iranian government remains committed to providing the necessary support for them...." Shadnough went on to say.

During the meeting, the two sides also exchanged views about a range of issues, including ways to reduce the problems of Iranian patients with rare diseases.

Back in April, Iranian First Vice-President Eshaq Jahangiri said the "inhumane" move by the US government to impose severe sanctions on the Islamic Republic has put the health of the Iranian people and regional nations at risk.

Addressing the 7th World Health Summit Regional Meeting 2019 on the southern island of Kish on April 29, Jahangiri deplored Washington's acts of sabotage against Iran's medicine sector and said the U.S. move to threaten international pharmaceutical companies not to cooperate with Iran has prevented the purchase and imports of needed medicines.

# Zarif says it is essential to cement Tehran-Muscat ties

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Sunday that it is essential for Tehran and Muscat to deepen economic ties.

During a meeting with Omani Trade Minister Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Zarif said that the two countries enjoy many capacities to strengthen relations in various areas.

First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri also met separately with Sunaidy. Jahangiri said political relationship between Tehran and Muscat is at its height.

Jahangiri said, "There is no limitation for Tehran to deepen cooperation with Muscat."

"Expansion of cooperation between Tehran and Muscat is beneficial to the world of Islam and the regional countries and no one is harmed by it," the vice president remarked.

He added that the friendly relations between Iran and Oman can serve as a role model for the regional countries.

Elsewhere, he called for expanding economic relations, noting that the volume of



economic transactions has reached 1.3 billion dollars which shows a growth.

Sunaidy, who was accompanied by 30 businessmen in his visit to Iran, also called for bolstering economic relations.

"The two countries' businessmen have held constructive meetings and it is the time to have a big leap in growth of economic interaction," he noted.

During a speech at the 18th meeting of

Iran-Oman Joint Economic Committee on Saturday, Sunaidy said Oman is trying to boost its trade and economic ties with Iran.

He also announced that an agreement was to be signed between Oman and Iran on marine transportation.

The Omani official added, "We will make the most efforts to provide incentives for joint investment and also promote trade between the two countries."

Oman's Foreign Minster Yusuf bin Alawi visited Tehran last week for a two-day trip.

Bin Alawi met with his Iranian counterpart Zarif, President Rouhani, Supreme National Security Council secretary Ali Shamkhani and Majlis speaker Ali Larijani.

The core of the talks focused on security in the Persian Gulf and how to settle the regional conflicts including the Yemen crisis.

Yemen acted as an intermediary between Iran and the United States during the Obama administration.

During Obama's presidency, the first informal nuclear talks between Tehran and Washington was held in Muscat.

## Officials are arranging for Rouhani to visit Tokyo around December 20: Japan Times

*By staff and agency*

In a report published by The Japan Times on Sunday, it is said that Japanese and Iranian officials are arranging for President Hassan Rouhani to visit Tokyo around December 20.

According to Kyodo, Washington has urged Tokyo to share the outcome of a summit between Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Rouhani.

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

In an interview with NHK published on Saturday, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that preparations are underway for Rouhani's visit to Japan.

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.

Araghchi and Abe met in Tokyo on December 3 during which Abe said that Japan still supports the 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the JCPOA.

Araghchi submitted a written message from Rouhani to Abe during the visit.

The Japanese prime minister welcomed continuation of political consultations between the two countries.

Araghchi also said that Iran will return to full implementation of the JCPOA if sanctions are lifted.

Abe visited Iran in June as the first Japanese leader since 1978. He was carrying a message from U.S. President Donald Trump to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for talks with Tehran. The Leader, while praising Japan's sincerity, said Trump is not worthy of exchanging messages with.



## New EU chief diplomat: We have collective responsibility to preserve nuclear deal

*By staff and agency*

Josep Borrell, the new EU foreign policy chief, has attached great importance to preserving the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the JCPOA, saying "collective responsibility" is needed to stop the deal from breaking apart.

"We have collective responsibility to preserve #IranDeal," he tweeted on Saturday.

He added, "Following the Joint Commission, as coordinator I support the call for full implementation & to reverse recent negative trend."

The Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was held in Vienna on Friday.

A statement was issued after the meeting saying the remaining parties to the deal are determined to preserve the 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.

U.S. President Donald Trump walked away from the multilateral pact in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever



sanctions on Iran.

After waiting for a full year, Iran started to gradually reduce its commitments to the nuclear deal in response to the U.S. and inaction by the remaining parties, especially Europeans, to shield Tehran from sanctions effect.

So far, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has taken four steps to cut back commitments in accordance to 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."

Iran has repeatedly said if the European parties to the nuclear deal protect its economy from the U.S. sanctions it will reverse its decisions.

## IAEA's Grossi reiterates he seeks to establish constructive relations with Iran

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Rafael Grossi, the new director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has reiterated his aim to establish "constructive relationship" with Iran.

"As DG Grossi has previously stated, he aims to establish constructive working relationship w/ Iran," the IAEA said in tweet on its website Saturday.

Grossi met with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Vienna on Friday. Araghchi was in Vienna to participate in the joint commission of the JCPOA.

In another tweet, the IAEA said, "IAEA Director General @rafaelgrossi met Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister @araghchi on Friday to discuss the Agency's safeguards activities in Iran, including verification and monitoring of the country's nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA, and other issues."

Grossi was appointed as the new director general of the IAEA in October, following the death of the previous chief Yukiya Amano in July. He officially took office as director general of the UN nuclear watchdog on Tuesday.

In an interview with NHK published on November 30, Grossi said that he wants to develop a constructive relationship with

the Iranians.

Iranian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the International Organizations in Vienna Kazem Qaribabadi said on December 2 that the IAEA should be "impartial" in its dealings with Iran.

"Maintaining constructive working relations between Iran and the Agency is of paramount importance, which we believe that it should be carried out in an impartial, professional and independent manner, void of any hidden political agenda," he said at the IAEA Second Special General Conference.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on October 31 that Iran is ready to expand cooperation with the IAEA based on "mutual trust" and adoption of a professional approach by the UN nuclear body.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to maintain and expand constructive interaction and cooperation with the Agency based on mutual respect and professional precision and neutrality of this institution," he said in a message, congratulating Grossi as the new director of the IAEA.

Mousavi expressed hope that Grossi would fulfil his international duties professionally by adopting an independent position.

## Reformist candidate vows to do her best for a strong Majlis

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The secretary-general of the women's rights protection society said on Saturday that she and other reformist candidates will do their best to form a strong and effective Majlis.

"We will do as much as we can to form a strong and effective parliament," Shahindokht Molaverdi told reporters. Molaverdi who served as presidential aide for civil rights in Hassan Rouhani's first term said reformists seek massive participation of people in the elections.

"We want the upcoming parliamentary election to be done with people's widespread presence," she remarked. The parliamentary elections will be held on Feb. 21, 2020. In response to a question about reformists' contest of

the elections, she said, "The reformists' registration is one issue and the filter in front of them is another issue. We have to wait to see whether the reformists can pass through such filter. We hope ultimately the reformists can have enough competent candidates to form their own lists for the upcoming election."

Mohammad Reza Aref, the leader of the pro-reform Hope faction in the sitting parliament, did not register for the election. However on Friday he called on the talented and motivated young people to register.

Last week, the Interior Ministry started registering candidates running for the upcoming parliamentary elections, set to be held on February 21, 2020.

Candidates had until December 7 to register.

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

The Guardian Council will review competency of parliamentary hopefuls for their qualifications and will release the names of candidates deemed eligible to run by December 18.

Disqualified candidates will have four days to object to the Guardian Council, after which the council will study complaints and announce the final list on February 11.

The candidates will have 8 days to spend on the campaign trail, ending on February 19, and then the elections will be held on February 21, 2020.

## Israeli FM threatens to target Tehran with 'hundreds of Tomahawk missiles'

**(Press TV)** — Hawkish Israeli foreign minister Israel Katz has threatened a military operation against Iran with the help of the United States, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Katz said Israeli bombing in Iran was "an option," making the most brazen threat in years in an interview with the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera Saturday on the sidelines of the Mediterranean Dialogues (MED) conference in Rome.

"If Iran crosses the 'red line', it will discover a uniform front between Saudi Arabia, UAE and the United States, which will

launch hundreds of Tomahawk missiles at Tehran," he said.

By the red line, Katz meant, "We will not allow Iran to acquire or stockpile nuclear weapons. If that is the last option - we will act militarily."

Iran has repeatedly enunciated its nuclear program as exclusively civilian, subject to the most intensive UN supervision ever.

Unlike Israel, Iran is a signatory to the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), whose aim is to prevent the spread of nuclear arms and weapons technology.

Israel is the only possessor of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, but maintains a policy of ambiguity, neither confirming nor denying its atomic bombs.

Nevertheless, Tel Aviv is estimated to have between 200 and 400 atomic warheads in its arsenal.

Tehran signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015 to forge closer cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which has always confirmed the country to be in full compliance.

President Donald Trump pulled the U.S. out of the international accord last year and

announced sanctions on Iran in an attempt to wreck the agreement.

Katz criticized European countries for not supporting the hard line Washington has adopted against Tehran.

"As long as the Iranians delude themselves into thinking they have Europe's backing, it will be more difficult for them to back down," he said.

In his Friday address to the MED 2019, the top Israeli diplomat claimed that it was "high time" for Western and Arab countries to "create a coalition that would threaten Iran and tell it to stop its nuclear program."

# Released professor Massoud Soleimani: ‘U.S. jailors told other inmates I was a terrorist’

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iranian scientist Massoud Soleimani, who returned home on Saturday after a prisoner swap between Tehran and Washington, says during his detention, the U.S. jail wardens told other prisoners that he was a terrorist with a mission to carry out bombings in the United States.

“U.S. authorities in the jail had told prisoners that I was a terrorist who wanted to carry out bombings in America,” Press TV quoted Soleimani as saying upon arrival at Tehran’s Mehrabad airport on Saturday night.

“They had made such false statements so that other prisoners would not come close to me and keep away from me,” he said.

“After a while, the inmates would tell me, ‘you do not look like a terrorist and a bomber, what these guys are saying’ and I would tell them I don’t know what they are saying,” the Iranian scientist added.

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.

The United States released him in a prisoner exchange, after which Soleimani flew along with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif from Zurich to Tehran on Saturday.

The prisoner exchange happened 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.

Xiye 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.

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

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

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

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 threat-

ened 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.

In a tweet on Saturday, Trump thanked Iran “on a very fair negotiation.”

“See, we can make a deal together!” he wrote.

The U.S. president also bashed his predecessor, Barack Obama, saying the released American student was taken during the Obama administration.

“Taken during the Obama Administration (despite \$150 Billion gift), returned during the Trump Administration,” Trump wrote. Trump has been very critical of Obama’s

Iran policy.

Observers say he enjoyed killing the JCPOA because it was Obama’s major foreign policy success.

In another tweet on Saturday, Trump claimed, “The United States will not rest until we bring every American wrongfully detained in Iran and around the world back home to their loved ones!”

Since assuming office, Trump’s anti-Iran rhetoric and actions have intensified tension between Tehran and Washington. His policies have also escalated regional tensions, especially in the Persian Gulf.

In reaction to Trump’s strategy of “maximum pressure”, which includes illegal sanctions, Iran has said it is adopting “maximum resistance”.

## Tehran voices hope to resolve Sheikh Zakzaky’s problems

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has voiced hope that diplomatic meetings between Iran and Nigeria would expedite the resolution of the problems faced by top Shiite cleric Sheikh Ibrahim al-Zakzaky.

Mousavi made the comments on Sunday in response to a question asked by reporters about the latest conditions of Sheikh Zakzaky, according to the Foreign Ministry website.

He was asked to comment on a recent meeting between the Iranian Vice President for Economic Affairs and the Nigerian president on the sidelines of a summit of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum in Equatorial Guinea.

“In the recent meeting between Dr. Nahavandian and the President of Nigeria, Mr. Buhari, various subjects have been mooted in the area of economic relations, the regional and international developments, as well as the issue of Sheikh Zakzaky,” he responded.

“Moreover, in the constant diplomatic meetings and contacts that we hold with Abuja, negotiations

about the Islamic Republic of Iran’s help in settling the problem is on the agenda, and we hope that the consultations and arrangements that are underway with the Nigerian government would expedite the resolution of the problem,” Mousavi added.

Sheikh Zakzaky, who is in his mid-sixties, lost his left eyesight when Nigerian government forces raided the northern town of Zaria more than three years ago. His wife also sustained serious wounds while more than 300 of his followers and three of his sons were killed in the violence.

The cleric has been kept in custody along his wife and a large number of his followers ever since.

Back in 2016, Nigeria’s federal high court ordered his unconditional release from jail following a trial but the government has so far refused to set him free.

Nigerian authorities on Thursday transferred Zakzaky and his wife to a dilapidated prison, where many detainees have so far died due to lack of medical attention.



A high court ordered the Department of State Services to transfer the two to the Correctional Center in Kaduna state, northwest of the country.

Members of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) say any attempt to take the couple anywhere other than a hospital will put them in further jeopardy.

## Prominent figures register for parliamentary polls

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

The Guardian Council will vet parliamentary hopefuls for their qualifications and will release the names of candidates deemed eligible to run by December 18.

Disqualified candidates will have four days to object to the Guardian Council, after which the council will study complaints and announce the final list on February 11.

The candidates will have 8 days to spend on the campaign trail, ending on February 19, and then the elections will be held on February 21, 2020.

During the 7-day registration time, prominent political figures signed up, including former mayor of Tehran Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who is regarded a perennial candidate in the presidential elections with three unsuccessful runs.

Ghalibaf was a candidate in the 2005 presidential election. He was also a candidate in the 2013 presidential election but lost to Hassan Rouhani, in second place with 6,077,292 of the votes. He announced his run for a third time in the 2017 election. However, he withdrew on 15 May 2017 in favor of Ebrahim Raisi’s candidacy.

Former presidential aide for civil rights Shahindokht Molaverdi also registered on Sunday, saying reformists seek massive participation of people in the elections.



“We will do as much as we can to form a strong and effective parliament,” Molaverdi said.

Among other figures registering are current vocal MP Ali Motahari; pro-reform MP Masoud Pezeshkian who currently serves as deputy parliament speaker; Mostafa Mirsalim from the conservative Islamic Coalition Party who contested the 2017 presidential election; former reformist law-

maker and secretary general of the Unity of the Nation Party Ali Shakouri Rad; and Majid Ansari, a former aide to President Rouhani and President Khatami.

According to Press TV, people close to former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad were also among those appearing at a registration office.

Meanwhile, current parliament speaker Ali Larijani announced earlier that he would not

contest the upcoming elections after serving for three terms as a representative of Qom.

Mohammad Reza Aref, chairman of the pro-reform Hope faction, also declined to register, saying, “I feel I can be of better help outside of Majlis.”

Aref was a candidate in the 2013 presidential election but withdrew his candidacy upon a request by Mohammad Khatami, who was president from 1997-2005.

On November 4, 2014, he announced he would run for parliament in the 2016 election from Tehran.

He was elected to the parliament with 1,608,926 votes which was the highest in the election.

All the 30 candidates in the Hope list, led by Aref, found a seat in parliament in Tehran. Guardian Council spokesman Abbasali Kadkhodaei said on Tuesday that the council is the only body responsible to supervise the elections.

“Sometimes questions arise over whether we are the only supervisor of the elections or not,” Kadkhodaei said, adding, “I emphasize that the Guardian Council is the only supervisor of the elections.” He said the Judiciary is tasked with investigating offenses and the Interior Ministry has an executive responsibility.

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

nian heavy water.

Before Donald Trump’s administration slapped sanctions on Iran’s nuclear industry, the AEOI exported heavy water to international markets.

The nuclear official said Iran broke the monopoly for export of heavy water and enriched uranium.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the nuclear official said about 400 tons yellow cake were imported in the post-JCPOA era and Iran exported 8.5 tons enriched uranium in return.

He added that centrifuge machines are not just for enrichment; rather, he said, they are used in health fields and other industries.

The official went on to say that Iran’s Blood Transfusion Organization needed centrifuge machines and wanted to buy it from Germany but they are now aware of the fact that the AEOI had such a capacity.

## Border guards disband large drug trafficking gang

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The commander of Sistan-Baluchestan Province border guards said on Sunday that his forces have disbanded a large gang of drug traffickers, seizing a remarkable amount of narcotics.

Second Brigadier General Mohammad Molashahi said, “The guards of the Mirjaveh border regiment, tipped off by the intelligence about a heavy consignment of narcotics loaded in several vehicles heading towards Iran to cross the border, embarked on reconnaissance operation in the region.”



He added, “The guards, within the framework of several operational and logistic teams, found out the exact location from which the gang had planned to cross the border.”

Two traffickers were arrested, two vehicles were seized and a sum of 500 kg narcotics was discovered in the operation, he explained.

The local border commander said that a large quantity of firearms and ammunition were also seized in the ambush.

Iran is in the forefront of the fight against drug trafficking. The drugs are mainly destined to lucrative markets in Europe and Persian Gulf Arab states.

Molashahi said Iran has so far lost 3,800 forces in the fight against drug smuggling.

According to reports, in 2018 alone, Iranian forces carried out 1,557 operations against drug traffickers, seizing approximately 807 tons of different types of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

The Iranian anti-narcotic police have always staged periodic operations against drug traffickers and dealers, but reports - which among others indicate an improved and systematic dissemination of information - reveal that the world’s most forefront and dedicated anti-narcotic force (as UN drug-campaign assessments put it) has embarked on a long-term countrywide plan to crack down on the drug trade since more than a decade ago.

Also, in April, Iranian Police Chief Brigadier General Hossein Ashtari described Iran as a pioneering state in campaign against drug trafficking. He said, “We have declared our information and needs to the international organizations and I should say that we have not pinned hope on their aid.”

“We do not have hope that the international organizations can seriously confront” the cultivation and production of narcotics in Afghanistan, General Ashtari said.

In mid-September the Iranian president’s chief of staff called on Europeans to increase assistance to Iran in fighting drugs to prevent traffic of drugs to their countries. Mahmoud Vaezi said the U.S. sanctions have left impacts on Tehran’s budget to fight against narcotics.

“The European states cannot sit still and issue statements to appreciate Iran and say that fighting drugs is Iran’s responsibility; they must certainly help Iran,” Vaezi said.

## Impeachment of three ministers are on parliament agenda: MP

**TEHRAN (MNA)** — The spokesman of the Iranian parliament’s presiding board announced on Sunday that impeachment of the ministers of oil, education and the interior is on the agenda of the parliament.

According to Asadollah Abbasi, the three ministers – namely Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh, Education Minister Mohsen Haji Mirzaie and Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli – attend the parliament sessions on Sunday or Monday to answer questions by Majlis representatives.

The oil minister attended the parliament on Sunday.



MP Mohammad Javad Abtahi said on Sunday that “the representatives have submitted a complaint to the Judiciary against the oil minister due to the losses the Iranian public properties and funds have incurred because of his measures and decisions.”

Abbasi also said the parliament will study the national budget bill in an open session on February 23, 2020, after studying it.

On Sunday, the president submitted the 4.8-quadrillion-rial (about \$114.28 billion) budget bill with 19 annexes to the parliament.

The next year’s budget bill is drawn up based on the structural reform program which has been provided by the Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) in four major axes and nine program and project packages.

According to the officials, the main characteristic of the next year’s budget bill which makes it different from previous years’ budget bills, is its aim to counter the impacts of the U.S. sanctions on the country’s economy and the consequent considerations.

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.



**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Ali Asghar Zare’an, the special assistant to the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOD), said on Sunday that Iran’s progress in nuclear technology is valued in the U.S. and Russian research centers.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran’s nuclear technology has found its place in scientific and research centers of the U.S. and Russia,” Zare’an told IRNA on the sidelines of a visit to the exhibition on nuclear industry achievements held in the Karaj Azad University.

He said that the AEOI has put export of nuclear products on its agenda.

Pointing to export of heavy water as an example, he said Iran sold about 30 tons of heavy water in one consignment to the U.S. and 40 tons to Russia.

Zare’an said that the Europeans also requested for Ira-

STOCK MARKET

|        |          |
|--------|----------|
| TEDPIX | 332567.2 |
| IFX    | 4282.81  |

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

|     |              |
|-----|--------------|
| USD | 42,000 rials |
| EUR | 46,447 rials |
| GBP | 55,148 rials |
| AED | 11,437 rials |

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

|             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| Brent       | \$64.39/b     |
| WTI         | \$59.20/b     |
| OPEC Basket | \$64.81/b     |
| Gold        | \$1,462.40/oz |
| Silver      | \$816.67/oz   |
| Platinum    | \$900.80/oz   |

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran, Ecuador discuss expansion of trade ties

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Ecuador’s Ambassador to Tehran Alejandro Ortega Almeida and Deputy Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Mohammadreza Karbasi met in Tehran on Sunday and discussed expansion of trade ties.

According to the ICCIMA portal, the two sides stressed the good political relations between the two countries and emphasized the need for boosting economic ties in line with the political relations.

Speaking in the meeting, Karbasi pointed to Iran’s direct exports to Brazil and some African countries as a model based on which Iran and Ecuador could expand their economic ties.

He also emphasized on providing information on trade with regional countries, in particular with Iraq and the United Arab Emirates, and called for the two sides to take necessary measures to improve their information and understanding of the economic and trade potentials of each other.

The Ecuadorian ambassador for his part pointed out the exports of stone from Iran to his country as a favorable field of cooperation and called on the Iranian side to provide the Ecuadorian Embassy in Tehran with a list of private sector companies active in this area.

Barter trade was yet another issue which was discussed by the two sides as a good way of developing the two countries’ trade relations.

Rouhani submits \$473b budget bill to Majlis

‘Budget of resistance’ to counter sanction effects

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani submitted the administration’s draft of the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1399, which starts on March 20, 2020, to the Majlis on Sunday, IRNA reported.

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

The bill has estimated the government’s budget at 5.63 quadrillion rials (about \$134.04 billion), 8.2 percent higher than the figure in the present year’s budget.

A 15-percent rise has been envisaged in the salary of the governmental employees.

The proposed budget has envisaged 2.61 quadrillion rials (about \$62.14 billion) of incomes, while 3.67 quadrillion rials (about \$87.38 billion) of expenses.

Revenues from exporting oil, gas and gas condensate are estimated at 454.9 trillion



rials (about \$10.83 billion), down 66 percent from 1.37 quadrillion rials (about \$32.61 billion) approved in the current year’s budget.

Tax incomes are predicted to be 1.95

quadrillion rials (about \$46.42 billion), rising 27 percent from 1.72 quadrillion rials (about \$40.95 billion) envisaged in the present year’s budget.

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

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 have been taken into account in preparing it.

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.

In resources, the government has tried to have the least dependence on oil resources in the history of the country’s economy.

During his speech after submitting the budget bill on Sunday, President Rouhani said, “Budget bill for [Iranian year of] 1399 is drafted considering resistance against the sanctions. It shows the world that we will manage our economy despite the sanctions.”

Tehran, Muscat explore avenues of economic co-op

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — An Iran-Oman business forum was held on Sunday, in which the two countries explored ways of further boosting economic relations, IRNA reported.

Hosted by Iran Chamber of Commerce Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), the forum was attended by senior officials including Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani, Oman’s Minister of Industry and Commerce Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, and ICCIMA Head Gholam-Hossein Shafeie.

In the forum representatives of the two countries’ businessmen discussed potential areas for expansion of trade and the Omani side called for cooperation with Iran’s knowledge-based companies in various areas.

Speaking in the event, Al Sunaidy put the two countries’ trade turnover at nearly \$1

billion, saying “in the past the two countries’ trade barley reached a few million dollars and we have witnessed a significant development in economic relations.”

He also welcomed Iran’s suggestion for barter trade, calling it a great solution for increasing the level of trade between the two countries.

Facilitation of banking transactions

During his visit to Iran, the Omani minister who headed a trade delegation, also held talks with the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) on Saturday and discussed ways of developing and facilitating banking relations between the two countries.

Speaking in the meeting, CBI Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati mentioned the positive relations between the two countries, saying “Fortunately, the barriers to economic and trade relations between the two countries

have now been removed and encouraging businessmen to expand their relations is on the agenda for both governments.”

Referring to his recent visit to Oman and talks with the foreign minister and governor of Oman’s central bank, Hemmati said: “Facilitating money transfer between the two sides is the key for expanding trade and economic relations.”

He further mentioned some of the areas for mutual cooperation, saying that in order to boost trade and tourism between the two countries, development of air and sea transport lines between the two sides is being seriously pursued.

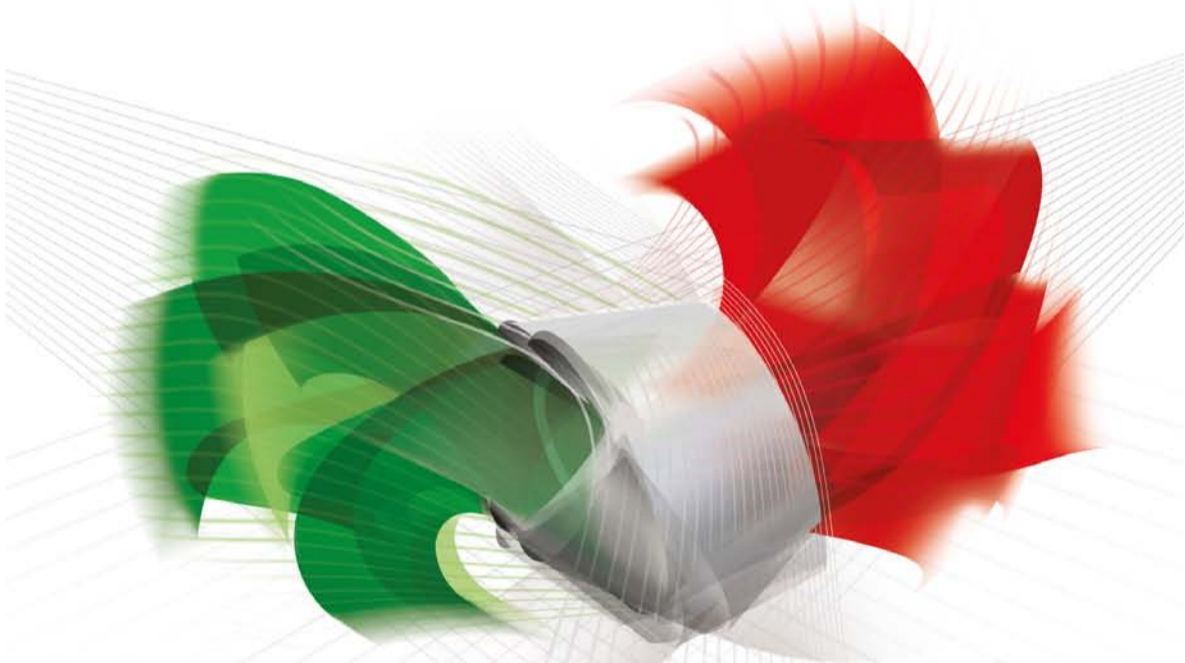
At the meeting, al Sunaidy expressed his country’s willingness for developing trade between the two countries, saying that the Omani government will make every effort to facilitate trade between the two countries

and the steps taken in this regard reflect this determination.

Despite the U.S. re-imposition 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 bi-lateral trade ties.



Italian Textile Machinery Industry: a success story with a look to the future

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سفارت ایتالیا - بخش توسعه بازرگانی



Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico



# Rationing ables Iran to export up to 30 MLD of gasoline

**E N E R G Y** **TEHRAN**—Spokesman of Iranian Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Products Exporters Union (OPEX) said the gasoline rationing scheme has made it possible for the country to export 25-30 million liters of gasoline every day, IRIB reported.

Stressing the fact that exports of oil products to the neighbors like Iraq continues despite the unrests, Hamid Hosseini noted that exporting the mentioned amounts of gasoline could bring the country up to \$4 billion of revenue.

He noted that currently two groups of oil products namely "special products" such as bitumen, paraffin and base oil, and "specific products" including gasoline, diesel and fuel oil are being exported to other countries, adding that after the implementation of the plan for offering oil products at the stock exchange, exports of such products to the neighboring countries have been welcomed by foreign buyers.

"Currently we produce 115 million liters of gasoline per day, of which 60 to



65 million liters is provided as subsidized fuel and another 20 million liters is sold in free market, so we will have about 30

million liters of surplus gasoline that can be exported," Hosseini said. He noted that exporting oil products does

not have the problem of exporting crude oil, adding that exports to neighboring countries are easier because they are done via land borders, and our buyers are usually the private sector, which are not affected by the U.S. sanctions.

Back in November, deputy finance and economic affairs minister said the fuel rationing plan would make the country able to export 3.65 billion liters of gasoline every year and earn about 14 trillion rials (about \$3.3 billion) from the exports.

"On average, 100 million liters of gasoline is produced in the country on a daily basis. If we could reduce fuel consumption by 10 million liters and sell it to other Persian Gulf neighbors, we would export about four billion rials (about \$952,000) a day....that would be 14 trillion rials a year," Mohammad-Ali Dehghan Dehnavi told ILNA.

In mid-November, The Iranian government started rationing of subsidized gasoline and increased fuel prices as part of a plan to reduce the energy subsidies to use the revenue for supporting underprivileged families.

## Acting banks to loan \$3b to develop oil industry's upstream sector

**E N E R G Y** **TEHRAN**—Iranian acting banks are authorized to offer up to \$3 billion of loans to the oil industry's upstream sector, according to the country's budget bill for the next calendar year (starts on March 19, 2020), IRNA reported.

Private sector investors, cooperatives and non-governmental entities can use these facilities for development projects in the oil and gas industry's upstream sector.

As reported, development projects of shared fields including increasing the fields'

recovery factor, revitalizing old fields and collecting flare gases, are the priority in this program.

Since the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions, the Iranian oil ministry has been encouraging domestic companies' presence in its oil and gas projects, both in exploration and in development sectors.

As there are many blocks waiting for exploration and development, the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) is seriously following up on the plans to lay the ground

for the private sector's contribution.

In late August, NIOC announced that it has introduced 10 major oil and gas exploration projects in the company's Exploration Directorate.

In early September, the country's Supreme Council of Economic Coordination thoroughly discussed the issue of implementing Iran's oil projects by domestic contractors in the council's 38th session and rules and regulations pertaining to the subject were approved by the council.



## Asia seen adequately prepared for deeper OPEC crude output cuts

Asia appears well prepared for OPEC's new crude production cut era as Chinese, South Korean and Japanese refiners' flexible feedstock procurement strategies would insulate them against any sharp reduction in Middle Eastern crude supply.

OPEC, Russia and nine other allies agreed Friday to deepen collective output cuts by 503,000 b/d to 1.7 million b/d from January through March. Saudi Arabia took it even further, declaring it would voluntarily slash another 400,000 b/d of production beyond its new quota.

However, the latest OPEC-led output cuts will likely leave more room for Asian refiners to diversify supply sources away from the Middle East, with the Americas expected to play a key role as a major alternative crude supplier, refinery and trade sources said.

South Korea, for one, has significantly reduced its dependence on OPEC and Middle Eastern supplies over the past decade and it emerged as the biggest customer of U.S. crude oil in Asia this year.

Asia's fourth biggest oil consumer imported 112.55 million barrels from the North American producer over January-October, almost threefold higher than 40.67 million barrels received a year earlier, latest data from state-run Korea National Oil Corp. showed.

Meanwhile, the country's biggest refiner SK Innovation is slightly worried about tightening supply of heavy sour Middle Eastern crude oil, but South America also provides plenty of options to buy similar grades, a company official told S&P Global Platts.

"Heavy grades have recently been in short supply ... but we could easily look for medium and heavy sour grades from Brazil, Canada and Guyana to make up for any shortfall caused by the OPEC+ cuts," the official said.

### ■ Plenty of sour crude

Plenty of sour crude could be sourced from Mexico as well, multiple South Korean refinery sources said, indicating that the country received more than 40 million barrels of Isthmus and Maya crude from the Central American producer this year.

China's state-run and independent refiners have also been relying on Latin American producers for their medium and heavy crude requirements in recent quarters, and any shortfall in OPEC supplies could be filled by fuel-oil rich grades from Brazil in particular, industry sources and analysts told Platts.

"Minor reductions can be supplemented by non-OPEC exporting countries, especially when IMO 2020 is implemented," said Kang Wu, head of Platts Analytics Asia. Brazil emerged as the second biggest crude supplier to the country's independent refining sector this year. Chinese independent refiners combined imported 19.69 million mt from the Latin American producer over January-November, up 34% from the same period a year earlier.

Brazil's Lula crude was also ranked the second most favored feedstock grade for the sector this year. The refiners purchased close to 14 million mt of the heavy sweet crude over January-November, the latest Platts survey showed.

In the event of tighter Middle Eastern crude supply, Japan could also turn to U.S. and Ecuador, with WTI, Mars Blend and Napo crude regularly flowing to Asia's third biggest oil consumer this year, a crude and condensate marketing source at a Japanese integrated trading firm based in Singapore said.

Japan imported 61,211 b/d from the U.S. over January-October, almost double the 33,806 b/d received during the same period a year earlier, data from the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy showed.

Japan also raised its imports from Ecuador to 40,561 b/d over January-October, up 33.7% from 30,346 b/d received a year earlier.

Asian refiners broadly expressed strong confidence that OPEC and its allies will likely keep any supply cuts to Asia minimal due to the region's status as the biggest and most important customer base for the producers. The group of producers are unlikely to reduce their crude exports to Asia by more than 200,000 b/d in the first quarter 2020, according to a Platts survey of traders at major Asian refiners including PetroChina, SK Innovation, S-Oil, PTT and Fuji Oil.

### ■ OPEC and other big producers

"Most of the new output cuts and export reduction would be geared towards European and U.S. end-users ... Asian consumers are VIP customers for most, if not all OPEC and other big producers," a crude feedstock trading manager at state-run Chinaoil based in Beijing said.

Demonstrating OPEC producers' strong dedication to keep steady and uninterrupted supply to Asian customers, Saudi Aramco managed to deliver full term contractual volumes to most of its customers in the Far East so far in Q4, despite the September 14 attacks on Saudi Arabia's major oil facilities, Platts reported previously.

China in fact saw its crude imports from Saudi Arabia surge 76% year on year and 17.4% month on month to a new high of 1.99 million b/d in October, according to the latest data from the General Administration of Customs.

South Korea also ended up receiving more Saudi crude following the attacks. Asia's fourth biggest oil consumer received 22.56 million barrels from the OPEC kingpin in October, 8.1% more than 20.88 million barrels imported in the previous month.

(Source: spglobal.com)

## Could Egypt cut into Qatar's gas market?

Qatar has been chosen to host the 2021 summit of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, highlighting its strong position in the global natural gas market but reports and estimates reveal Doha could face obstacles in meeting its energy objectives over the next decade.

While Qatar was celebrating its selection as Gas Exporting Countries Forum host, Egyptian state-affiliated media picked up on a report by the Qatari anti-regime organization Mubasher Qatar questioning Doha's ability to expand its liquid natural gas (LNG) production and exports as planned.

The report suggests that a potential glut in the gas market because of increased global production could pose problems for Qatar, which announced plans to increase annual LNG production 64% — from 77 million to 126 million tons per year — by 2027.

Statista, a German online portal for statistics, said the average consumption of liquefied or non-liquefied natural gas stood at 3.849 trillion cubic meters in 2018, just less than production, which reached 3.868 trillion cubic meters.

The most optimistic forecasts from McKinsey and Company, the largest management and economic consulting firm in the United States, stated the volume of demand for liquefied gas up to 2035 would increase cumulatively 3.6% yearly.

That means it would increase by 37.5% of current production and demand by 2028, rendering a 64% increase in Qatari production far above global market capacity.



Sayed el-Morsy, a retired deputy director of cost control at Apache Petroleum, said the expected production glut would be because of the "expansion of Australia, Russia, China and Iran along with some smaller markets in East Asia and the Middle East, such as Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Turkey and Israel, in the production of conventional natural gas and United States' expansion of shale gas production."

### ■ In the case of glut

He noted that "in the case of a glut of increased production versus consumption, there is an opportunity for producing countries that are able to offer more competitive price advantages, payment terms, agreements and transportation means such as pipelining, which is more rapid and more competitive price-wise, as there will be no major ship-

ping costs."

"Egypt is a strong candidate," Morsy added. In July, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi ratified an agreement linking Egypt to Cyprus via a pipeline to export Egyptian gas to Cyprus and from there to Europe.

Qatar could also face trouble pipelining its gas due to a years-long regional rift with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain.

In December 2016, Syrian President Bashar Assad told Italian media that Qatar and Iran were working on projects to export gas to Europe with pipelines passing through Syria and then into Turkey or the Mediterranean, Cyprus and Europe.

It seems the Qatari project will falter because it is impossible for its pipeline to go through Iraq and then Syria without entering

Saudi territory or Bahraini territorial waters — controlled by two of the quartet countries boycotting Qatar since July 2017.

The Iranian project is expected to remain on hold until European and U.S. sanctions against Tehran over its nuclear program are cancelled.

### ■ Increasing production of liquefied gas

The Arab boycott of Qatar likely exacerbated the erosion of Doha's resources and its declining economic growth rate — 33% from the end of 2016 until the end of 2018 — further depriving Qatar of the resources it needs to increase its production of liquefied gas.

Already it has struggled to keep pace. In July 2017, Qatar announced a plan to gradually increase LNG production from 77 million to 100 million tons per year by 2024. However, Qatar's production has not increased, despite resuming production from the North Field in 2017 after twelve years of inactivity.

Bloomberg News estimated the cost of increasing production to 100 million tons at \$27.6 billion, suggesting the plan to raise production to 126 million tons per year in 2027 could cost around twice that amount.

Any prospects for reconciliation in the Persian Gulf, likely predicated on Doha downgrading relations with Iran with which it shares the crucial North Field, would hamper Qatar's ambitions to expand gas production, Qatari Energy Minister Saad al-Kaabi said in a press conference November 25.

(Source: middle-east-online.com)

## Upstream oil and gas services market playing significant growth during 2016-2021

The report "Upstream Oil and Gas Services Market: Asia Pacific Industry Analysis and Opportunity Assessment, 2016–2021" offers a 5-year forecast of the Asia Pacific upstream oil and gas services market for the period of 2016–2021. The report studies the upstream oil & gas services market in eight major countries of Asia Pacific region, including, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Myanmar, China, India, Malaysia, and Vietnam. To provide a better understanding of the market, the report also includes the PEST analysis with regard to the upstream oil & gas services market in each designated country.

This Market Insights report examines the 'Asia Pacific upstream oil and gas services Market' for the period 2016–2021 in terms of value. The primary objective of the report is to offer updates on developments in the oil & gas services market and conduct qualitative as well as quantitative assessment of the market across various services and country/ regional market segments.

On the basis of service type, the Asia Pacific upstream oil and gas services market is segmented into: Inspection, repair & maintenance Sampling Decommissioning Remotely operated vehicle (ROV) drill support, Subsea umbilical, risers, and flowlines (SURF) support Well stimulation Well logging Seismic and geophysical services and Others (casing & tubing services, solid controls & waste management, etc.)

The report starts with upstream oil and gas services market overview and provides market definition, overview of services, along with detailed PEST analysis for each country in the upstream oil and gas services market.

### ■ On the basis of various factors

The sections that follow include Asia Pacific market analysis and forecast, by services and by region/country level analysis. All the above sections evaluate the market on the basis of various factors affecting the market, covering present scenario and future prospects. For market data analysis, the report considers 2015 as the base year, with market numbers estimated for 2016 and the forecast made for 2017–2021.

In the final section of the report, a competitive landscape has been included to provide a dashboard view of key companies operating in the Asia Pacific oil and gas services market. This section is primarily designed to provide clients with an objective and detailed comparative assessment of key providers specific to a market segment in the Asia Pacific oil and gas services market and the potential players. T

his section also includes market strategies and SWOT analysis of the main players operational in the Asia Pacific oil and gas services market.

To estimate the market size, various viewpoints on the basis of secondary research are considered in the report. Further, data inputs such as market split by services, and qualitative inputs from industry experts have been taken into consideration before concluding the market estimates.

### ■ The qualitative and quantitative aspects

Each country section discusses the qualitative and quantitative aspects of upstream oil & gas services market based on different services.

To give a brief idea about revenue opportunities from various services and region/ country, the report also provides absolute \$ opportunity and total incremental opportunity for each segment over the forecast period.

The market size estimation is carried out through multiple top-down and bottom-up approaches. Historical revenues of key players operating in Asia Pacific oil and gas services industry are closely examined to have a brief idea about market structure.

Crude oil production data — historical and forecast, is benchmarked to identify relative country shares in the market and the market data range, thus received has been cross-validated by primary resources.

Market forecast is based on various industry specific and macro-economic factors. The factors considered include average oil prices forecast, oil production forecast in each country and macroeconomic factors such as population, GDP and export data.

Supply side research, market share estimation, market structure and concentration are closely studied to derive base numbers of oil and gas services market in particular countries.

(Source: weeklyspy.com)

## Renewable energy ambition in NDCs must double by 2030

Countries are being urged to significantly raise renewable energy ambition and adopt targets to transform the global energy system in the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), according to a new report by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) that will be released at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP25) in Madrid.

The report will show that renewable energy ambition within NDCs would have to more than double by 2030 to put the world in line with the Paris Agreement goals, cost-effectively reaching 7.7 terawatts (TW) of globally installed capacity by then.

Today's renewable energy pledges under the NDCs are falling short of this, targeting only 3.2 TW.

Advancing Renewables in the Power Sector and Beyond will be released at IRENA's official side event on enhancing NDCs and raising ambition on 11 December 2019. It will state that with over 2.3 TW installed renewable capacity today, almost half of the additional renewable energy capacity foreseen by current NDCs has already been installed.

The analysis will also highlight that delivering on increased renewable energy ambition can be achieved in a cost-effective way and with considerable socio-economic benefits across the world.

"Increasing renewable energy targets is absolutely necessary," said IRENA's Director-General Francesco La Camera. "Much more is possible. There is a decisive opportunity for policy makers to step up climate action by raising ambition on renewables, which are the only immediate solution to meet rising energy demand whilst decarbonizing the economy and building resilience."

"IRENA's analysis shows that a pathway to a decarbonized economy is technologically possible and socially and economically beneficial," continued Mr. La Camera. "Renewables are good for growth, good for job creation and deliver significant welfare benefits. With renewables, we can also expand energy access and help eradicate energy poverty in line with the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. IRENA will promote knowledge exchange, strengthen partnerships and work with all stakeholders to catalyze action on the ground. We are engaging with countries and regions worldwide to facilitate renewable energy projects and raise their ambitions."

NDCs must become a driving force for an accelerated global energy transformation. The current pledges reflect neither the past decade's rapid growth nor the ongoing market trends for renewables. Through a higher renewable energy ambition, NDCs could serve to advance multiple climate and development objectives.

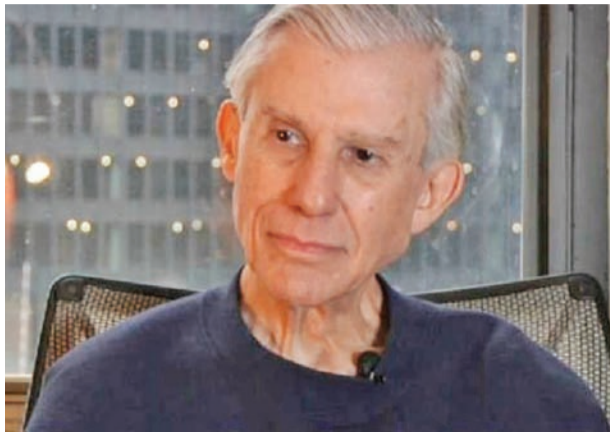
(Source: moderndiplomacy.eu)

## Speech, press, academic freedoms threatened in west: American expert

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — An American political expert described the US and other Western powers as “fantasy democracies” and said speech, press, and academic freedoms are threatened in these countries.

“In the US and elsewhere in the West, speech, press, and academic freedoms are threatened,” Chicago-based Stephen Lendman told Tasnim in an interview.

“The US and other Western countries are fantasy democracies,” he said, adding, “They disdain democratic values, the rule of law, human and civil rights they pretend to support.”



Stephen Lendman is a writer, syndicated columnist, activist, News TV personality, and radio show host. He currently writes for MoneyNewsNow.com and VeteransToday.com and hosts, since 2007, a progressive radio show at The Progressive Radio News Hour on The Progressive Radio Network.

The following is the full text of the interview:

■ Some Western powers which call themselves defenders of freedom of speech and interfere in the internal affairs of independent countries under this pretext have acted differently when it comes to their own countries. In the latest instance, the US voiced its support for violent protests in various sovereign states around the world ranging from Iran, Iraq, and Venezuela to China's Hong Kong. However, many critics slam the lack of free expression in the US, itself. What do you think?

A: The US and other Western countries are fantasy democracies. They disdain democratic values, the rule of law, human and civil rights they pretend to support. So-called coalitions of the willing cobbled together by the US are all about waging endless wars of aggression on nonbelligerent states threatening no one. Their aim is transforming these nations into US vassal states, their resources plundered, their people exploited. All of the above comprise what the scourge of “Western civilization” is all about. In the US and elsewhere in the West, speech, press, and academic freedoms are threatened. Whistleblower Chelsea Manning remains in prison for invoking her constitutional right to remain silent — refusing to testify against Julian Assange during a rigged grand jury hearing. Assange is imprisoned in London ahead of extraditing him to the US for the “crime” of journalism the way it should be, for truth-telling about vital issues, what establishment media in the US and West suppress. Freedom in the US and other Western countries are eroding toward disappearing altogether on the phony pretext of protecting national security. Elections, when held in these countries, are farcical. Dirty business, as usual, wins every time, especially in the US — a one-party state with two extremist right wings. Targeted nations like Iran, Syria, Venezuela, and others are attacked or assaulted with economic terrorism for not selling their souls to the US.

■ If an academic association in the US criticizes Washington's Israeli policy, it will lose its federal funding. That is the message the Department of Education recently sent with its threat to withdraw federal support for the Consortium for Middle East Studies, operated jointly by Duke University and the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, if it does not alter the content of its programming, according to a recent report published by the Guardian. How do assess academic freedom in the US?

A: The vast majority of so-called think tanks and academic associations in the US support its imperial, neoliberal agenda. Indeed they'd get no federal funding otherwise. More ominously, they'd be subjected to great pressure, even threats, to support policies free societies abhor.

■ The French government's crackdown on yellow vest demonstrators is another example that refutes the world power's claim to be a defender of freedom of speech. The protests began a year ago over high fuel prices but evolved into a broader social movement over income inequality and President Emmanuel Macron's leadership. How do you assess the crackdown and the free expression situation in the Western European country?

A: Yellow vest protests in France and others like them in Chile, Peru, Colombia and elsewhere are all about opposition to neoliberal harshness. The system exploits ordinary people so privileged ones can benefit. In the US, the greatest wealth disparity exists since the late 19th/early 20th-century robber baron age. Among developed countries, the US, UK, and Israel are the most unequal — their ruling regimes serving monied interests exclusively. The same goes for France, Germany, and other Western states. The country I grew up in during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s no longer exists. Growing police state tyranny and extreme inequality replaced it. Yellow vest protesters have been on the streets for over a year. Their activism is vitally needed throughout the West — especially in the US, but it's absent here because the population is the most over-entertained and uninformed in the world. If elections changed anything here they'd be banned. The only solution is sustained grassroots activism in the streets for peace, equity, and justice. In the 60s and 70s, it was instrumental in ending the Vietnam War. The same thing is more badly needed today.

# Crackdown on french yellow vests shows true face of west's liberalism: Russian analyst

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — A political commentator based in Moscow described the French government's crackdown on the yellow vest protests as “terrible” and said it demonstrated the true face of Western liberalism.

“The crackdown on the yellow vests was terrible, there were several people killed and hundreds maimed,” Dmitry Babich said in an interview with Tasnim.

“I was moved by the fact that French Muslims took part in this protest, which showed us the true face of Western ‘liberalism’,” he added.

Dmitry Babich, born in Moscow, has been an active journalist for over 25 years, focusing on Russian politics. Graduating from Moscow State University, Babich has had a successful career in Russian journalism. He has previously been a senior correspondent at the Komsomolskaya Pravda daily, RIA Novosti, and Russia Profile magazine. Between 1999 and 2003, Babich was a foreign editor at The Moscow News before returning to Russia Profile in 2009 as acting editor-in-chief. His core areas of focus include Russia's modern political history and international relations. Babich is currently working as a political analyst at Sputnik International and is a frequent guest on BBC, Al Jazeera, CNN, commenting on international affairs and history. The following is the full text of the interview:

■ Some Western powers which call themselves defenders of freedom of speech and interfere in the internal affairs of independent countries under this pretext have acted differently when it comes to their own countries. In the latest instance, the US voiced its support for violent protests in various sovereign states around the world ranging from Iran, Iraq, and Venezuela to China's Hong Kong. However, many critics slam the lack of free expression in the US, itself. What do you think?

A: You are right, and we are living through a very interesting moment in US history. The globalist circles, which control the media in the US, are now using the same methods inside their country, which they used against president Milosevic in Yugoslavia and president Yanukovich in Ukraine. They openly try to undermine the results of the 2016 election in the US. I am no sympathizer for Mr. Trump, but he was elected according to US law in 2016, with 90 percent of the US media actively campaigning against him, in favor of Hillary Clinton. And now the globalists controlling the House of Representatives in the US have concocted a very weak case against Mr. Trump, but they are pushing it really hard, declaring all dissenting voices “pro-Russian,” pro-Assad, etc. What was so bad about president Trump asking president Zelensky to investigate the corruption of Mr. Joe Biden in Ukraine? This corruption was for everyone to see — Mr. Biden, the vice-president of the US, acted like a viceroy in Ukraine, telling them which prosecutor-general Ukrainians need to remove.

The problem is that this opinion — that Biden deserved to be investigated — it is almost impossible to express in the US now. As for “police violence” in pre-Maidan Ukraine or Hong Kong — just imagine what the



US police would do to “peaceful protesters” who killed 38 policemen (as in Ukraine) or set several people on fire (as in Hong Kong). These “peaceful protesters” would end up with life imprisonment in the US — at best.

■ If an academic association in the US criticizes Washington's Israeli policy, it will lose its federal funding. That is the message the Department of Education recently sent with its threat to withdraw federal support for the Consortium for Middle East Studies, operated jointly by Duke University and the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, if it does not alter the content of its programming, according to a recent report published by the Guardian. How do assess academic freedom in the US?

A: There is no academic freedom in the US for ideological reasons. The crude anti-family, godless ideology, calling itself “liberalism”, is propagating aggressive feminism and the interests of pervers calling themselves “sexual minorities” — and you cannot object to it in the US. This ideology traces its origins to the leftist Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, founded in Germany in 1923, most of its professors moved to the US in the 1930s. This was a Marxist and Freudian institution, and in the 1960s its offsprings replaced the class struggle with gender struggle, pitting women against men and sexual minorities against “heterosexual white males.”

It has taken control of US academia back in the early 1990s. Now it is advocating against any form of traditionalist religion, including Islam, Christianity

and Judaism. It supports Israel, but not Judaism. It supports Israel as a part of globalist Western civilization, which this ideology now controls and which this ideology wants to use as a tool for achieving world domination.

Like any totalitarian ideology, the totalitarianism of modern “ultraliberals” encompasses all spheres of life, including sports, science, art and especially media. That is why Russia and Iran don't stand a chance of fair treatment in these spheres — there will always be sanctions from the modern West.

■ The French government's crackdown on yellow vest demonstrators is another example that refutes the world power's claim to be a defender of freedom of speech. The protests began a year ago over high fuel prices but evolved into a broader social movement over income inequality and President Emmanuel Macron's leadership. How do you assess the crackdown and the free expression situation in the Western European country?

A: The crackdown on the yellow vests was terrible, there were several people killed and hundreds maimed. I was moved by the fact that French Muslims took part in this protest, which showed us the true face of Western “liberalism”. All freedom loving people should support the yellow vests because globally controlled “human rights groups” did not do it and will never do — until the Western countries retrieve their Christian, monotheistic and freedom-loving tradition.

## U.S. is the biggest threat to global economy

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — It's a terrible shame that the so-called exceptional United States, a beacon of liberty, justice and fairness, continues to push the world economy against the wall with all those sanctions, tariffs and trade frictions, even if it threatens a recession in the US too.

Fighting back with facts, the World Bank (WB) is warning that as a consequence of the US trade wars with friends and foes, global business confidence has gone down the drain, slowdown in global trade has deepened, and investment in emerging and developing economies has dropped. Because of this worrisome and devastating trend, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Christine Lagarde is warning that the unnecessary trade war and escalating tariff threats will decelerate global growth even further.

This terrible business outlook is only bolstered by the fact that much of the US and global economic problems today can be traced back to Trump's political adventures and protectionist policies. The fall in stock markets is traced to his trade tussle with China. The recent investment loss in the manufacturing confidence in the US has come as a direct consequence of the threat to slap tariffs on European goods. The new reports and warnings issued by the World Bank and the IMF are also tied to the US role in destabilizing the global economy with its extended preoccupation with trade wars and tariffs, even against European allies.

To substantiate, Trump's threat to impose tariffs on European goods has cut investments in the US market and increased manufacturing costs. According to the Center for Automotive Research (CAR), a 5 percent to 25 percent tariff rate on all imports from Europe would mean a price increase of at least 5,400 dollars on an average new vehicle built in the US.

The Atlanta Federal Reserve (AFR) also says the recent selloff in stocks and sharp drop in interest rates reflect investor worry over a slowing global



**The pointless tussle, backed by no American ally in Europe and certainly no sound mind on the Capitol Hill, is far less about international law, trade balance and fair trade, and more about political power and American hegemony: The US hegemony of the world and the trade and technological dictatorships of American corporations.**

economy. In its latest forecast, the AFR names the US-China trade dispute and other protectionist measures that have raised costs for everybody and reduced economic activity.

The situation is so desperate that many Congressional Republicans are also unwilling to swallow Trump's trade-war miscalculations. Media reports suggest that, “White House Deputy Counsel Pat Philbin and Assistant Attorney General Steve Engel faced brutal push-back from the GOP, according to multiple senators, with some threatening that Trump could actually face a veto-proof majority to overturn the tariffs.”

This kind of opposition to Trump's

sanctions, tariffs and trade-war gambit should stun no one. It shows the Trump officials have been lying about their true intentions. The vast majority of their geopolitical intentions remains completely in the shadows and is never subjected to meaningful examination - which only increases the chances of global market uncertainties with catastrophic consequences.

Of course, these are only some of the overwhelming facts and developments that have managed to make it into the news and onto the record. After considering the trail of global economic consequences that follow the American flag wherever it goes, it is safe to say

the US is exceptional in many things; responsibility and fairness in global trade is not among them.

The threat of new sanctions on Iran and tariffs is also being consistently propped up by the concept of American exceptionalism. So, it's also safe to conclude that this makes the US the biggest threat to global economic growth and energy stability.

Behind the clouds, however, Washington's sanctions and trade-war goals are wishes, being fought for the worst possible reasons. The gambit is just a wish, a pie-in-the-sky ideal, without a definite and practical outcome. It comes from the egos of a decaying hegemonic power and a narcissistic president that don't live in a reality-based universe. History shows us that those who launch trade wars and economic terrorism are always defeated. History also tells us that Iran, China and others can protect themselves in any escalating conflict.

President Trump and his neon faction should stop blowing in the positive aspects of their sanctions and trade-war gambit as it is already overblown. The pointless tussle, backed by no American ally in Europe and certainly no sound mind on the Capitol Hill, is far less about international law, trade balance and fair trade, and more about political power and American hegemony: The US hegemony of the world and the trade and technological dictatorships of American corporations.

The futile efforts and tariff gambits by the Trumpsters, who advocate a doctrine of permanent war, as well as their technological dictatorships, who try to push their opponents under the bus by supporting the post-colonial status quo, will only go this far. Their dreams of sanctioning foes into submission, dominating the world in financial-economic terms, and ensuring that no nation, or a bloc of nations, would ever challenge their unholy agenda, will never come true. What they fail to see is the catastrophe that their fantasies have caused for the US and global economies.

# The Trump-NATO conflict continues

## NATO's fate in on the ambiguity

By Saeed Shams

**TEHRAN** — Conflicts between the United States and other NATO members are complicated. In recent days, many American and European media outlets have sought to gauge the future of Washington-NATO relations. Some analysts believe that NATO can no longer play the role of a solid security structure in the global equation. Others believe that NATO has virtually disappeared since the end of the Cold War. Here's an overview of some analysis of NATO's future and destiny:

### ■ NATO no Longer serves American interests

As National Interest reported, Quite simply, it makes no sense for U.S. taxpayers to subsidize the defense of nations capable of defending themselves. Shared interests will continue to justify military cooperation. However, the alliance as today constituted no longer serves American interests.

President Donald Trump returned early from the London NATO summit. Staged to satisfy British Prime Minister Boris Johnson—the official 70th-anniversary meeting was held in April—the latest gathering featured only one, mercifully short, session, to reduce the likelihood of a Trump eruption. Even so, before arriving he improbably chided French President Emmanuel Macron for being “nasty,” “insulting,” and “disrespectful” in suggesting that the alliance suffered from “brain death.” Then the session's minimal substance was overshadowed by the president's personal spat with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Of course, the assembled leaders filled their limited time together with happy talk. The greatest alliance ever is more necessary than ever as Europe faces the greatest security challenges ever. The Europeans are spending more and cutting Washington's burden. NATO is preparing plans both to defend its members from conventional attacks and confront new threats. The Europeans even are ready to tackle the huge new challenge posed by increasingly aggressive China. All in all, the alliance is prospering greatly. This is fantasy. A very pleasant one. But fantasy nonetheless.

NATO was formed in 1949 to shield European states from Soviet aggression as they recovered from World War II. The U.S. was only supposed to assist European governments in their defense efforts. For instance, Secretary of State Dean Acheson promised Congress that it would not need “to send substantial numbers of troops over there as a more or less permanent contribution.” Dwight D. Eisenhower, past wartime allied leader, first NATO commander, and future Cold War president opposed providing a permanent U.S. garrison which, he predicted, would “discourage the development of the necessary military strength Western European countries should provide themselves.”

Alas, these sentiments were ignored as the U.S.S.R. tightened its control over Central and Eastern Europe. The Europeans recovered economically but failed to increase their defense outlays accordingly. Washington maintained its dominant military presence while constantly urging its allies to do more. They routinely said yes but did little.

After the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union dissolved NATO's survival seemed uncertain. So officials suggested that the transatlantic organization shift to, in former Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's words, “new missions that will fit the new era.” For instance, Robert Hormats, another lengthy public official, proposed that NATO shift to promoting “student exchanges, to fighting the drug trade, to resisting terrorism, to countering threats to the environment.” David Abshire, onetime U.S. ambassador to NATO, suggested coordinating “the transfer of environmental-control technology to the East.”

Ultimately the alliance decided to expand its membership, even though the enemy had disappeared. Doing so violated multiple assurances given to Moscow. NATO also initiated “out-of-area” activities, which meant defending other than member states. This ironically turned the pact into an offensive instrument, first used to dismember Serbia in 1999. In essence, NATO had gone from a means to an end, with war the new means. Said Sen. Richard Lugar, then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the organization would “go out of area or out of business.” And, as public choice economists would predict, no one involved in the alliance wanted the latter.

The Soviet Union's collapse triggered European disarmament, which in turn intensified American demands for greater burden-sharing, which the Europeans continued to ignore. The process continued for years, demonstrating, perversely, that the less Europe did the more America would. Hence the bizarrely named “European Reassurance Initiative” after Russia's intervention in Ukraine: the Europeans were essentially promised that even if they did nothing Washington would remain at their side—though whining all the way. U.S. policymakers appeared to accept the need to



subsidize the Europeans in order to keep them dependent. Washington opposed any proposals for independent spending and action, preferring that Europe do more, but only under America's direction.

The alliance continued to add members. Most recently it accepted Montenegro, with North Macedonia awaiting treaty approval by the 29 current members. Next up, the Duchy of Grand Fenwick, featured in the novel *The Mouse that Roared*!

The latest out-of-area wars have been distant, unconventional conflicts: Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria, of which the latter triggered French President Emmanuel Macron's complaint about a lack of allied coordination. Some NATO fans call the organization a “global alliance,” presumably ready to act as global cop. In every case, of course, the heavy lifting inevitably falls on Washington.

Every recent president criticized Europeans for failing to make sufficient contributions for the common defense. Defense Secretary Robert Gates suggested that the alliance itself was at risk, since “there will be dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress, and in the American body politic writ large, to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources ... in their own defense.” President Trump expressed similar sentiments, though more crudely.

Alas, the burden-sharing debate is unproductive. The issue should be burden-shedding. Even when President Trump does the right thing, he does so badly. So it is with NATO. But the alliance's “brain death” reflects its inherent problems, not his dreadful management. Quite simply, it makes no sense for U.S. taxpayers to subsidize the defense of nations capable of defending themselves. Shared interests will continue to justify military cooperation. However, the alliance as today constituted no longer serves American interests.

First, America and Europe no longer face an existential threat, let alone a common one. Which makes united action by such a diverse membership so difficult. Russia is no Soviet Union. Vladimir Putin is no Joseph Stalin. The Russian Federation is an unpleasant actor but has reverted to a pre-1914 great power, insisting on border security and international respect. There is no prospect of a Russian attack on the U.S. and little more chance of one on Europe, Old or New. Although plausible, even a successful grab of the Baltic States would yield little benefit for much cost.

Russia's, Europe's, and America's interests often clash—they understandably have different perspectives on economic predominance in Ukraine and political predominance in Syria, for instance—but most such issues are of only limited importance. Even the disputes over Georgia and Ukraine are peripheral matters for Europe and America. However, the latter is existential (in the case of the latter) security concerns for Russia.

NATO expansion moved the transatlantic alliance a thousand miles eastward; Western-backed “color revolutions” placed unfriendly governments in neighboring states; Ukraine was heartland territory for the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union; and Crimea, transferred in 1954 to Ukraine as part of an internal Soviet political deal, contains the important Black Sea military base at Sebastopol. Moscow views its “near abroad” rather like Washington views Latin America. The U.S. officially does not believe in spheres of interest, but the Trump administration reacted badly to Russian involvement in Venezuela. The president said: “Russia has to get out.” Then-National Security adviser John Bolton announced: “We strongly caution actors external to the western hemisphere against deploying military assets to Venezuela, or elsewhere in the

hemisphere, with the intent of establishing or expanding military operations.”

Thus, Moscow's behavior, though unjustified, is essentially defensive toward the West. That conclusion is backed by Russian military deployments. Mike Kofman of Harvard University's Belfer Center argued: “Despite provocative air and naval activity concentrated in the [Baltic] area Russian forces base there are principally defensive, and aging to boot.” Despite increasing indications that the Putin government might be interested in reducing tensions over Ukraine, the allies have yet to offer the one concession that might cause Russia to moderate its behavior: the end of NATO expansion.

Second, most Europeans don't appear to fear for their security. Despite the public hysteria surrounding Moscow's often unsavory behavior, few Europeans worry about Russia. The Baltics and Poland express a different perspective, yet their military spending, around two percent of GDP, remains paltry if it

The continent faces other modest security issues, primarily emanating from the Middle East and North Africa, but few are susceptible to a military response and none require a larger European military. France and the United Kingdom have greater international interests related to their colonial past, but even their willingness to intervene is declining.

Earlier this year former U.S. ambassadors Douglas Lute and Nicholas Burns made the astonishing claim that NATO's problems “represent the most severe crisis in the security environment in Europe since the end of the Cold War and perhaps ever.” More than in September 1939? August 1914? During the Napoleonic Wars and French Revolution? German Chancellor Angela Merkel was only slightly less hysterical in declaring: “Maintaining NATO today is even more in our own interest than it was in the Cold War—or at least as important as it was in the Cold War.” In fact, Europe may be more secure than ever before.

Third, significant military spending increases—as opposed to incremental movement by some states toward NATO's two percent objective—are unlikely. Even Secretary of State Mike Pompeo admitted that when he asks Europeans to do more, “they say ‘It's tough. Our voters just really don't like to spend money on defense.’” This is an eminently sensible response, given the absence of a serious threat and Washington's oft-demonstrated determination to defend the continent, no matter what. As a share of GDP European military expenditures, last year ran 1.51 percent, the same in 2012.

### ■ Leaders learn the hard way that Trump will be Trump at NATO meeting

Also CNN reported that At the outset of NATO's 70th anniversary meeting, which was meant to promote the unity of the alliance, no one doubted President Donald Trump's ability to disrupt, and he didn't disappoint, taking his tactics to a new level.

Trump laid into two leaders who theoretically should be among the US's closest allies, dissing French President Emmanuel Macron by calling his comments about NATO experiencing “brain death” “very insulting” and confronting Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau by demanding he say how much Canada spends on defense and calling him “two-faced.”

It was in some ways a masterclass in disregard for the normal rules of diplomacy, which is traditionally conducted through skilled and subtle conversations behind closed doors. Trudeau admits to talking about Trump after President calls him &#39;two-faced&#39;

Of course, Trump's bombastic approach is no surprise to Americans, who in near

equal measure applaud or are appalled by their leader.

But in Europe, where object lessons in Trumpism are infrequent, this visit has underlined that there is no magic formula or silver bullet to get what you want out of Trump. Macron has tried it all, from bromance a few years ago to confrontation this week. Germany's Angela Merkel, who was never an over enthusiastic engager with Trump, now does passive like a possum does dead. The result is still the same: Trump does what Trump wants.

At times he has appeared out of his depth, or plain confused. He was the only leader during the handshake greeting ceremony not to understand the cues and try to walk the wrong way offstage.

Maybe that was an easy mistake -- we've all been there -- but he just didn't seem to keep up with the dialogue at times. Strikingly, when he challenged Macron to take ISIS fighters back to France he was told to get serious.

“Would you like some nice ISIS fighters? I could give them to you. You could take every one you want,” Trump asked.

“Let's be serious,” Macron said before pushing back. “The number one problem are not the foreign fighters. This is the ISIS fighters in the regiment and you have more and more of these fighters due to the situation today.”

Trump replied dismissively, “This is why he's a great politician. That was one of the greatest non-answers I've ever heard. And that's OK.”

The trouble was Macron had not only answered, but he'd also answered the President back. Either Trump didn't understand or he was bluffing to cover Macron's put-down. It wasn't Trump's only clash. On Wednesday he called his Canadian neighbor Trudeau “two-faced.”

There is an irony in this that may well be lost on the US President, who has clearly shown two distinct sides to his character this week.

On day one, the exuberantly confident world leader was ready to take any question, loquacious in the extreme with his generous answers.

Then on day two, he'd morphed into a taciturn politician, delivering tight, terse answers. To paraphrase another leader, Queen Victoria, whose empire was also on the verge of tipping toward decline, Trump was “not amused” by the second day of the meeting.

Any doubt his clipped conversations could have another meaning ended with the cancellation of his planned end-of-meeting news conference.

Maybe he had given too much of himself Tuesday: 52 minutes of reporter Q and As with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, followed by 41 minutes with Macron and then 35 minutes with Trudeau. More than two hours total.

Perhaps Trump was simply tired and wanted to go home, but that is not the impression he leaves behind. He seemed angry and unhappy, and the person he focused that displeasure on was the Canadian Prime Minister.

He was reacting to a few moments of viral video where Trudeau was caught on camera joking with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, France's President Macron and Holland's Prime Minister Mark Rutte, apparently at Trump's expense.

They were inside Buckingham Palace, had just met the Queen but were quite clearly in a rare moment of reverie discussing their experiences with Trump.

Trudeau was explaining the reaction of Trump's team to their President during their meeting, saying, “You just watched his team's jaws drop to the floor” as the President announced the next G7 summit will be held

at Camp David, rather than Trump's Florida Doral resort outside Miami.

Trump's character flip is what makes it hard for allies to do meaningful business with him; it's why this meeting was a leaders' meeting, not a summit, as NATO's annual gatherings are usually dubbed.

The title change obviated the need for a communique, and therefore compromise and a meeting of the minds. It was replaced by a joint declaration that was simply a rehash of NATO goals updated with some new numbers reflecting increased defense spending by NATO members.

A challenge from China could be just the thing to pull NATO together

A challenge from China could be just the thing to pull NATO together

It was these figures that Stoltenberg had hoped might please, even pacify, Trump. A \$130 billion increase in defense spending by the US's NATO allies since 2016, with nine nations now meeting NATO's threshold of a 2% of gross domestic product spend on defense, up from three in 2016.

Yet even with these figures, Trump could not contain himself: \$131 billion, he said several times, he just had to amp it up. Then he stepped over the line, claiming it was \$130 billion a year, which was not what NATO was saying.

It was not the only example of his warping facts to fit his agenda.

He said he has once been angry with NATO but as a result of the increased spending and “flexibility” he lavished praise on Stoltenberg.

And then he did what he does, bending the truth again, claiming NATO had become more flexible since he came to office, that It was branching out and becoming more international -- and implied that was a result of his efforts.

The fact is the whole point of NATO is that its members have each other's backs, and the only time all NATO members have ever been called by one member to come to its aid under NATO's Article 5 was to help the US after the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001.

So yet again Trump didn't disappoint. In his own unorthodox way he might even have exceeded expectations. He disrupted, then departed, cementing his reputation as mercurial, leaving his allies united only in their realization that this is as good as it gets with Trump, and NATO's long-term goals and vision are on hold for another year.

### ■ Europe Has Learned How to Deal With Trump — and Without Him

But New York Times reported that The NATO summit ended with members vowing to stick together for a future that nobody dares to define.

Germany's foreign minister, Heiko Maas, was well into his speech, opening a conference at the K?rber Foundation in Berlin on Nov. 26, when a news alert popped up on my phone: 13 French soldiers and officers had died when two helicopters carrying them collided during a combat operation in Mali. Suddenly, Mr. Maas's reassuring tone offered a striking contrast with the details about the casualties emerging on my screen. “German foreign policy is not disruptive,” he said. “NATO is strong and able to act, NATO is alive, from head to toe, even if there are different diagnoses.”

Germany's top diplomat was obviously taking aim at President Emmanuel Macron of France, whose diagnosis of “brain death” on the trans-Atlantic military alliance, in an interview with *The Economist* three weeks earlier, had rocked the Western foreign policy establishment. Germany was particularly stung: “This is total nonsense,” Norbert R?tgen, a conservative M.P. who heads the Foreign Affairs Committee at the Bundestag, shot back when I asked him about Mr. Macron's metaphor.

Yet the dichotomy between France's military experience in the sands of the Sahel, where it has been fighting a difficult war against jihadists for six years, and Berlin's refusal to disrupt what it sees as life insurance for its security perfectly illustrates the Atlantic alliance's predicament. The NATO summit near London this week, which was supposed to celebrate the organization's 70th birthday, ended awkwardly on Wednesday in a formal commitment of countries at odds with one another to stick together for a future that nobody dares to define. At the heart of the malaise lies the United States' gradual withdrawal from Western leadership, as well as the reluctance of many of its allies to accept it.

When the president of the United States announced via Twitter in October that he was withdrawing his troops from Syria, for Germany it was probably undiplomatic. For France it was not just that; it has become a very concrete problem, because France has troops in Syria along with the Americans, and the withdrawal affects them directly.

For historical reasons, France and Germany have different attitudes toward defense; Germany has delegated its security to NATO and its major contributor, the United States, which maintains 35,000 troops on German soil. France, having nuclear weapons, likes to think of itself as a geopolitical “power,” albeit “mid-size”; Germany has been “disem-

powered” in the post-World War II decades and lives happily with it.

This is why Mr. Macron's “‘brain-dead’ interview” as it came to be known in foreign policy circles in Berlin when he applied that description to NATO, could not go down well in Germany. It has not gone well either in most other European countries, notably those closer to Russia's borders, like Poland, the Baltic States, and the Northern states. But but those members were probably more worried about President Macron's unilateral and ill-explained offer of a new dialogue to Russia.

Telling Germany that NATO is dead is like pulling the rug under its feet; there is a sense of panic in Berlin that you don't feel in Paris, because France has learned to walk beside the rug.

“It is like a cappuccino,” says Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff of the German Marshall Fund, a trans-Atlantic think tank: “France has both the strong coffee and the foam, but Germany cannot live only with the foam.”

In the end, it is more about the United States than about NATO. Why is it more shocking for President Macron to talk about “brain-dead” NATO than for President Trump to say it is “obsolete”? Why are European partners more upset when the French president raises doubts about the validity of Article 5 of the NATO Charter (an attack on one of us is an attack on all of us) than when those doubts come from the American president himself? Because there is still, in most European capitals, the blind hope that Donald Trump is an aberration and that it will all reverse to the good old trans-Atlantic days after November 2020 if he is not re-elected. And President Macron, through his unwelcome provocations, ruins that hope.

The French, very early on, made the diagnosis that Mr. Trump is the extreme symptom of a deeper trend of American unilateralism and withdrawal from Western leadership. Mr. Macron insists that his warning that America “is turning its back on us” is designed as a useful wake-up call for Europeans to strengthen their capacity to defend themselves in a very dangerous world. Unfortunately, although they may agree privately with his analysis, most European leaders are irritated by Mr. Macron's methods. Too “Gallic” or “Gaulist,” as the clichés go. This French leader is not their style.

What is left of NATO politically, after this tense episode? President Macron is satisfied that at least his fellow European leaders can't hide their heads in the sand anymore, and he takes credit for it. “When the ice has hardened,” he told the press on Wednesday, “you need an ice-breaker. It makes a big bang, but it opens the way.” Now the difficult issues are on the table for all to see: Russia, Turkey, China, terrorism and setting up a new regime of arms control with more weapons and more actors around are only some of the challenges.

What is also missing after the London meeting is who will lead the necessary turnaround to meet those challenges. By all accounts, if Donald Trump wins a second term, it will not be the United States. After almost three years, European leaders seem to have learned how to deal with this president — and without him. More revealing than the “stolen video” showing the leaders of Canada, Britain, France and the Netherlands making fun of their American counterpart at Buckingham Palace on Tuesday evening was the cold, brutal exchange the day before between Emmanuel Macron and Donald Trump. When Mr. Trump asked with a grin whether Mr. Macron would like some “nice ISIS fighters,” — a proposal to the president of a country where ISIS fighters gunned down 130 people in one evening four years ago and which had just buried 13 soldiers — it was offensive. Mr. Macron answered with serious fact-checking about the resilience of the very ISIS that Mr. Trump claimed to have defeated. This time, nobody criticized him.

Just as important, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and Mr. Macron had dinner together in London, on the margins of the NATO meeting, to patch things up. Maybe they discussed a recent poll, carried out by the Pew Research Center for the K?rber Foundation, which showed that for 52 percent of Germans, their country should strive for greater independence from the United States in defense matters, even if it means more than doubling defense spending. By the same token, 22 percent of the Germans are in favor of continuing to rely on the American nuclear umbrella, while 40 percent think Germany should seek nuclear protection from France and the United Kingdom.

But what the German and French leaders most certainly discussed was their coming meeting, on Monday in Paris, with Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, and his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelensky. An important meeting for Europe — without the United States.

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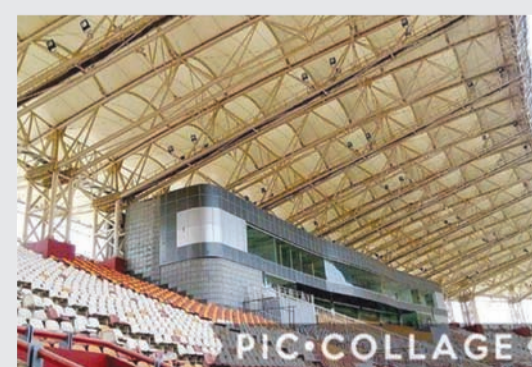
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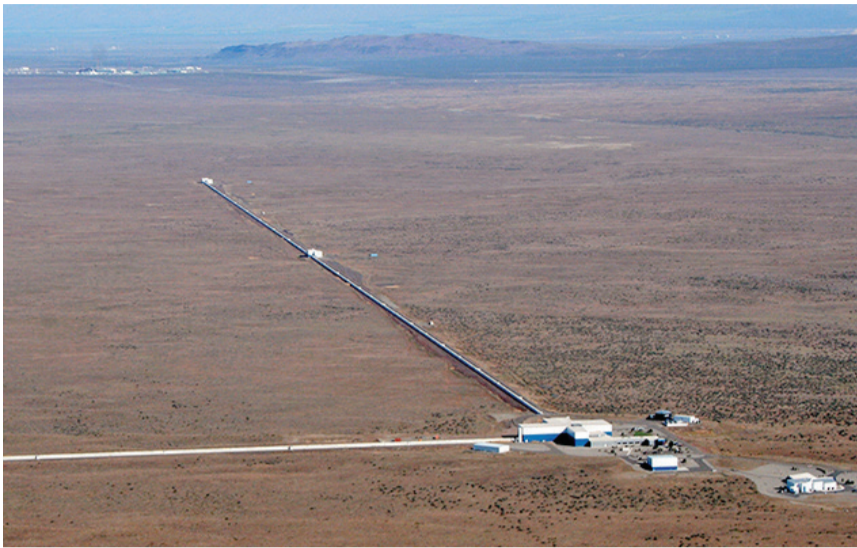
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# New technology improves gravitational wave detectors

Physicists have successfully developed a new instrument that significantly reduces quantum-level noise that has thus far limited experiments' ability to spot gravitational waves. Collisions between massive black holes and stars are thought to generate these ripples in space-time that were first detected in 2015. In all, about 11 detections have been fully confirmed so far.

The device marks a major improvement to the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory, or LIGO, increasing its detection range by 15%. Since the sky is a sphere, scientists expect to be able to detect about 50% more gravitational waves. They now predict that they will catch dozens of these rarely detected events during LIGO's ongoing experiment run through April 2020, which could transform their understanding of the phenomena. The collaboration published their findings today in the journal *Physical Review Letters*.

"This is really the turning point, because now we can really do statistics" with all these detections, said Lisa Barsotti, an MIT astrophysicist and one of the scientists leading the effort. "That's why it's becoming a new era in gravitational wave astronomy."



LIGO's detectors in Hanford, Washington and Livingston, Louisiana reveal an incoming gravitational wave using giant interferometers. These involve lasers bouncing off mirrors and traveling along two L-shaped arms 4 kilometers in length. A gravitational wave

strains the arms so that the pair of laser beams become out of phase.

But physicists' ability to detect such a tiny signal is limited by seemingly insurmountable quantum noise, due to random fluctuations that slightly modulate

the arrival time of photons, the smallest quantum bits of laser light. To remedy that, Barsotti and her colleagues use a quantum "squeezer," a crystal in the cavity of the arms of the interferometer that manipulates the interactions between the laser and the quantum vacuum and produces smaller fluctuations among the photons.

The achievement brought together expertise in quantum physics and astrophysics and enables more sensitive detections of black holes and extremely dense neutron stars as they smash into each other. Other colliding objects, like supernova explosions and more typical stars, create gravitational waves that are still too tiny to pick out with current technologies.

Similar quantum squeezing devices are also being tested by LIGO's European counterparts in Advanced Virgo, using detectors built in northern Italy. Barsotti predicts that quantum squeezed light will become the standard for all next-generation detectors, like the proposed Cosmic Explorer, which would have arms stretching 40 kilometers on the ground, further increasing its sensitivity.

(Source: *Inside Science*)

## Checkerboard of unharvested corn in snowy North Dakota seen in NASA image

NASA's Landsat 7 satellite revealed a unique checker board-like pattern across South Dakota this week.

The patchwork pattern of brown and white box-like shapes was created by a unique combination of weather and agricultural phenomena.

After NASA's satellite captured the image, Daryl Ritchison, director of the North Dakota Agricultural Weather Network, was one of the first to notice the pattern and surmise the cause.

"I'm 100 percent sure it is all corn," Ritchison wrote on Twitter.

Ritchison was right. Snow in November and December in North Dakota is common, but rarely is so much corn still in the ground in December. According to some reports, not since 2000 has so much corn been left unharvested so late in the season.



Data from the National Agricultural Statistics-North Dakota suggests just 36 percent of North Dakota's 3.5 million acres of corn have been harvested.

A wet spring delayed corn plantings, and a wet fall meant many corn crops were too full of moisture. Many farmers in the state have either been unable to harvest their corn, due to rain and snow, or have decided to wait until the spring.

If harvested corn is too wet, it must be dried. It's likely many farmers in North Dakota decided to let their corn dry on the stalk rather than in their barns.

Because the corn is planted in what's called row closure, with corn touching corn, the snow below is hidden from view, creating the checkerboard pattern captured by NASA's Earth-observing satellite.

(Source: *UPI*)

## How life on our planet made it through Snowball Earth

By Lucas Joel

Today, the world is warming. But from about 720 to 635 million years ago, temperatures swerved the other way as the planet became encased in ice during the two ice ages known as Snowball Earth.

It happened fast, and within just a few thousand years or so, ice stretched over both land and sea, from the poles to the tropics. Life lived in the oceans at the time, and the encroaching ice entombed that life, cutting it off from both the sun and the atmosphere.

"This is the one time when Earth's natural thermostat broke," said Noah Planavsky, a biogeochemist at Yale University. "The question on everyone's minds was: How did life actually make it through this?"

Glaciations can drive mass extinctions of life. Yet life, including perhaps our distant animal ancestors, somehow survived these deep freezes. In research published Monday in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Dr. Planavsky and his colleagues report the discovery of oases just beneath the ancient ice sheets that likely helped life persevere.

Snowball Earth came to an abrupt end over a half-billion years ago, but its marks still exist in remote corners of the planet. In 2015, to reach one of those corners, Max Lechte and his graduate adviser at the time, Malcolm Wallace, both sedimentologists at the University of Melbourne, drove 15 hours into the South Australian outback.

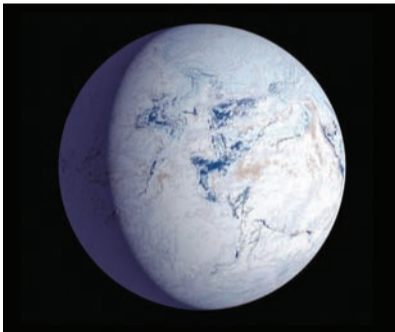
They trekked over hills made of red-colored rock, and it was so hot out — about 122 degrees Fahrenheit — that the soles of Dr. Wallace's boots melted.

"A bit of duct tape fixed that up," said Dr. Lechte, who led the new research.

These red-hot rocks formed in the oceans during the snowball glaciations, and their color caught Dr. Lechte's eye, so he took a few samples. Then, in 2015 and 2016, he traveled to Namibia and Death Valley in California and found more rocks — also red — that formed at the same time.

The rocks' color signaled to Dr. Lechte that they are rich in iron, which means they turned red for the same reason that old cars with iron exteriors turn red: They rusted.

Oxygen needs to be present for iron to rust. It also needs to be present for animals and many other organisms to survive. If the iron rocks below the ancient oceans rusted, then there was also oxygen in those oceans. And if there was oxygen, then oxygen-breathing life-forms had a lifeline they could cling to.



"This is the first direct evidence for oxygen-rich marine environments during Snowball Earth," said Dr. Lechte, now a postdoctoral researcher at McGill University in Canada.

But how that oxygen got into the oceans in the first place was a mystery. The atmosphere is a major source of oxygen for the oceans, and with the ice sheets of Snowball Earth acting as giant air-blocking shields, oxygen in seawater should've been nonexistent.

"This should've led to anoxic oceans, which could've killed off life-forms that need oxygen to survive," Dr. Lechte said. "It presents a bit of an unsolved problem."

In labs at Yale as well as Nanjing University in China, Dr. Lechte and his team crushed the iron-rich rocks, dissolved them in acid and measured the abundances of different iron isotopes. They found that the iron in rocks that formed far out in the open oceans rusted much less than the iron in rocks that formed closer to land, right where ice sheets dove from continents and into the oceans.

Today, beneath ice sheets in Antarctica, glacial meltwater streams flow into the Southern Ocean. That water melts from ice that can have air bubbles trapped inside it, and those bubbles can seed the meltwater streams with oxygen. On Snowball Earth, Dr. Planavsky explained, such oxygen-laden streams flowed into the oceans around the edges of continents and sustained life.

Paul Hoffman, a geologist at Harvard University who pioneered the Snowball Earth hypothesis, thinks this idea for how oxygen made it into the oceans is solid. "I'm attracted to the idea, and I think it's consistent with my own observations," he said.

But, Dr. Hoffman added, whether or not this oxygen pump was the main thing that helped many living things survive those ice ages is still an open question.

"We just don't know enough from a theoretical standpoint about how life would have responded to the challenge of a Snowball Earth," he said.

## Studying water quality with satellites and public data

Access to abundant, clean, water for drinking, recreation and the environment is one of the 21st century's most pressing issues. Directly monitoring threats to the quality of fresh water is critically important, but because current methods are costly and not standardized, comprehensive water quality datasets are rare. In the United States, one of the most data-rich countries in the world, fewer than 1% of all bodies of fresh water have ever been sampled for quality.

In a new paper, AquaSat: a dataset to enable remote sensing of water quality for inland waters, a team led by Colorado State University Assistant Professor Matt Ross matched large public datasets of water quality observations with satellite imagery to address the challenges of measuring water quality efficiently and cost-effectively.

According to Ross, a watershed scientist in the Department of Ecosystem Science and Sustainability, there are many threats to water quality, including nutrients from agricultural runoff that support algae blooms; sedimentation in reservoirs that cause distribution challenges; and dissolved carbon from decaying leaves that interrupts chemical reactions that keep water clean and safe for drinking.

For the most part, government entities monitor water quality in the U.S. by sending scientists into the field to measure variables like the amount of chlorophyll (from algae), concentrations of suspended sediment, dissolved organic carbon, and water clarity in person.

But, as Ross and his team explain, to fully understand and inventory changes in water quality, a far larger dataset is required; that in turn requires more and more people to do field sampling, which is very expensive and unlikely to completely address the problem.

Instead, the team suggests using remote sensing from satellite imagery could be a way to vastly expand our understanding of variation in water quality at continental scales, with little extra cost for sampling.

For many decades, scientists have known that water's color tells us something about what is in it. Bright tan water likely indicates a river full of sediment. Green swirls over Lake Erie show algae growing and producing chlorophyll. Dark brown waters draining tannin-rich forests and swamps turn blue waters into a tea-colored brown because of how light interacts with certain dissolved organic carbon compounds.

Imaging satellites orbiting the earth, including Landsat, detect these color variations as they take images of the Earth every 16 days.

"These satellites have fundamentally changed how we understand long-term changes in agriculture, forests, fires, and other land cover changes," explained Ross.



"However, there has been less use of the Landsat archive for understanding inland water quality changes."

One challenge of using Landsat images to evaluate water quality is the lack of a centralized dataset that pairs the satellite imagery with on-the-ground observations. These matchups -- for example, when satellites snap a picture on the same day someone takes an algae sample -- can be used to build algorithms that use imagery alone to predict water quality from space.

Fewer than 1,000 such matchups, mostly built for individual studies, currently exist, slowing researchers' ability to build, test, and apply large-scale models to predict water quality for every cloud-free image in the Landsat archive.

The CSU researchers built a novel dataset of more than 600,000 matchups between water quality field measurements and Landsat imagery, creating what Ross calls a "symphony of data."

The water quality data came from two public sources: the Water Quality Portal, a federal data clearinghouse from more than 400 different state, local, and federal agencies; and LAGOS-NE, an open-science dataset of lake water quality measurements for the Northeastern United States. Combined, these datasets provide more than 6 million water quality observations.

Using open-source software and Google Earth Engine, the authors merged the water quality data with the Landsat archive from 1984-2019. Both the raw datasets and the merged matchup dataset, which they call AquaSat, are now available along with the underlying code so future users can update, change, and improve it.

The authors expect that this dataset will unlock powerful new applications in remote sensing of water quality.

"We're hoping these tools will help build national-scale water quality estimates for large rivers and lakes," said Ross. "These data would dramatically improve our understanding of water quality change at the macro-scale and allow the remote sensing community to compare methods and collectively improve our approach."

(Source: *Science Daily*)

## Arecibo Observatory seeks upgrades to track asteroids, study space

Managers of the renowned Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico say they have plans for multimillion-dollar upgrades in instruments, software and facilities to keep it at the forefront of research in radio astronomy, asteroids and other planetary bodies.

The observatory is not running at full capacity because of age, years of tightening budgets and lingering damage from Hurricane Maria in 2017. Scientists who work there said the telescope still is a powerful tool, but it could provide more accurate radio signal data with restoration and upgrading.



A new more reliable power source and realignment of Arecibo's dish are the two most important fixes being planned. Having reliable power would mean less down time and more discoveries, while the dish realignment would provide more accurate data and images of space objects.

Both fixes are part of a \$14.3 million federal plan to revitalize the outpost in the island's rural interior.

A better power source and more accurate telescope would help astronomer Anne Virkki seek out asteroids that could collide with Earth some day.

She will be involved in watching the Didymos asteroid in 2022, when NASA's DART mission will try to hit the asteroid's small moon with a spacecraft and see how that changes its course.

But damage and neglect at Arecibo have had a real impact on the ability to provide accurate images, Virkki told UPI.

"Right now, we're running our asteroid observations at one-third of the power that we could do optimally, and the misalignment of the dish decreases the quality by another 50 percent," Virkki said.

"So, after all the improvements have been finished, including new generators and a dish realignment, our data will be up to six times better and we can successfully observe more asteroids," she said.

This year, Virkki said, Arecibo was able to take quality images of 30 asteroids, but that could be increased to 50 asteroids with better equipment. When it comes to simply observing the presence of asteroids, Arecibo can handle about 125 per year, and would be able to observe 20 or 30 more each year with better equipment.

Arecibo's powerful radar transmitter was closed for four months after Hurricane Maria, but the observatory demonstrated its scientific muscle immediately after it came back online. The facility provided the highest-resolution images to date of near-Earth asteroid Phaethon during a close approach to Earth.

Images showed a tumbling, rocky shaped rough sphere. NASA said Phaethon is the second largest near-Earth asteroid classified as potentially hazardous, meaning its orbit is close enough to strike the planet at some point.

Thanks to Arecibo, scientists now have more data on the asteroid, enabling better predictions about its future path.

Most of the search for extraterrestrial life occurs at places like the SETI Institute in California or Cornell University in upstate New York. Astronomers there use radio signal data from telescopes like Arecibo in a hunt for signals that could signify technology on other planets.

But those such as Anish Rosh, Arecibo's chief scientist for radio astronomy, prefer to work on-site to participate fully in settings of the instruments on the telescope when conducting research. He's preparing a paper now on the properties of interstellar gas ionized by stars, or plasma.

"Upgrades to the Arecibo telescope are critical to keep the national facility in the forefront of research in radio astronomy while maintaining its dominance in radar studies of near-Earth asteroids, planets and satellites," Rosh said.

Arecibo has several instruments that receive radio waves from space for different scientific disciplines. Rosh said a new planned instrument funded in the federal upgrade plan, a 40-beam cryogenic phased array feed, would provide unmatched sensitivity that would assist his research. It's expected to be in operation in the next couple of years.

The new instrument also would be used to get better information about star clusters that were previously difficult to study, and allow faster discovery of pulsars. NASA has found over 2,000 pulsars but continues to find more.

The original science goal of the observatory was to study the ionosphere, or the very outer edge of earth's atmosphere that is affected by solar wind, or plasma.

Today Michael Sulzer, senior observatory scientist at Arecibo, still studies the ionosphere. He is also looking forward to more reliable power generation and a more accurate telescope once it is realigned.

His calculations help to understand how the atmosphere distorts a signal from space, for example. He's also among the many scientists studying the impact of the sun's cycles on our atmosphere.

"We would like to get more power particularly, but we don't have enough generators," said Sulzer, who has worked at Arecibo since 1979.

On a recent autumn afternoon at Arecibo, Virkki was preparing to study a recently discovered asteroid, known as 2019 UM12. NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory said Arecibo would observe the space rock two days later.

The asteroid's closest approach to earth in mid-November was just a little more than the normal distance of the moon. With a diameter of over 100 feet, it's not a planet killer, but it could cause a lot of damage if it hit a populated area.

In comparison, the Chelyabinsk meteor that caused an airburst and shock wave over Russia in 2013 was about 66 feet across.

"We're looking for more refined information about the orbit, its size, how often it comes close to earth, etc.," Virkki said.

But the observation hinged entirely on whether the observatory's generators and machinery would perform.

"It takes a lot of power to generate the signal that we send toward the asteroid and to get a signal back," Virkki said.

(Source: *UPI*)

## French, British sightseers visiting Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — A group of ten French and British sightseers have commenced a ten-day tour across Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province.

The group who arrived in Sistan-Baluchestan two days ago have so far visited attractions in Zabol, Nimruz and Hamun, IRNA quoted Mojtaba Mirhosseini, a provincial tourism official as saying on Saturday.



A view of the UNESCO-registered Shahr-e-Soukhteh (Burnt City) in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province

They also set up an overnight camp in the [UNESCO-registered] Lut desert, he added.

Visits by foreign and domestic travelers will have a great impact on the province's economic growth and sustainable employment, he stressed.

"Today, the world's tourism geography has changed and sightseers are looking for new destinations to visit."

The vast province was long shunned by potential foreign and domestic travelers though it is home to several distinctive archaeological sites and natural attractions, including two UNESCO World Heritage sites, namely Shahr-e-Soukhteh (Burnt City) and Lut desert, parts of latter is situated in Kerman province.

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

## IKAC, knowledge-based firms sign over 60 MOUs

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — Imam Khomeini Airport City and a number of Iranian knowledge-based companies on Sunday inked over 60 memoranda of understanding (MOUs).



The agreements were signed on the sidelines of the event for introducing the technological needs for aircraft maintenance, IKAC News reported.

The event was attended by the IKAC managing director Ali Rostami, member of the board of directors Mehdi Ali Asgari and the Airport Operations Department deputy at IKAC Hassan Khoshkhoo.

Rostami noted that the Imam Khomeini Airport City Company has signed a contract

with Iranian knowledge-based companies to invest in the development of IKAC, services, airport facilities and equipment, information technology, navigation and flight control.



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### City of Cuzco

The City of Cuzco, at 3,400 m above sea level, is located in a fertile alluvial valley fed by several rivers in the heart of the Central Peruvian Andes of South America.

Under the rule of Inca Pachacutec (Tito Cusi Inca Yupanqui), in the 15th century, the city was redesigned and remodeled after a pre-Inca occupation process of over 3,000 years, and became the capital of the Tawantinsuyu Inca Empire, which covered much of the South American Andes between the 15th and 16th centuries CE.



The Imperial city of the Incas was developed as a complex urban center with distinct religious and administrative functions which were perfectly defined, distributed and organized.

The religious and government buildings were accompanied by the exclusive abodes for royal families, forming an unprecedented symbolic urban compound, which shows a stone construction technology with exceptional aesthetic and structural properties, such as the Temple of the Sun or Qoricancha, the Aqllahuasi, the Suntuwancha, the Kusicancha and a series of very finely finished buildings that shape the Inca compound as an indivisible unity of Inca urbanism.

The noble city was clearly isolated from the clearly delineated areas for agricultural, artisan and industrial production as well as from the surrounding neighborhoods. The pre-Hispanic patterns and buildings that shaped the Imperial city of the Incas are visible today.

With the Spanish conquest in the 16th century, the urban structure of the Inca imperial city of Cuzco was preserved and temples, monasteries and manor houses were built over the Inca city.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Iran enjoys all attractions for Spanish travelers: diplomat

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — Iran is a country that is highly important in terms of culture and it embraces all the necessary attractions for Spanish tourists who like to travel to the country, Spanish Charge d'Affaires to Tehran, Jose Luis Solano, has said.

These attractions range from handicrafts to diverse dishes which help gain a better understanding of a country's culture, Solano said in an interview published on Saturday.

"Every year we see an increase in the number of Spanish visitors to Iran, and this is a constant growth."

The diplomat also referred to Iranian arrivals in Spain, saying "Some 19,000 visas were issued to Iranians during the past year."

"So it can be said that we have a very good cooperation in tourism arena but it can always be improved and increased," he said.

"I believe that there are very good tourism relations between the two countries as we have many requests each year from Iranians for [obtaining] visas and traveling to Spain."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the official confirmed that the people who are applying for Spanish visas should meet all the necessary requirements.

Back in September, Madrid's ambassador to Tehran said that Iran is an amazing and wonderful country for tourists and [some] ninety percent of Spanish cultural tourists are willing to visit the country at least for once.

"Iran is home to the most genuinely hospitable people who greet foreign tourists with open arms," Eduardo Lopez Busquets said.

"Many Spanish tourists, around 10,000, travel to Iran annually, most of them are between the ages of 50 and 60 years. And most Spanish people who travel to Iran are cultural tourists. Once in Iran, they also become familiar with Iran's capacities in ecotourism."



An undated photo shows foreign travelers posing for a photo in Persepolis, southern Iran.

Currently, a loan exhibit from Spain's Archeological Museum of Alicante (MARQ) in on show at the National Museum of Iran. The large-scale exhibition features around 300 objects, some of which dating for millennia. The exhibit

is in return for a landmark Iranian exhibit titled "Iran, Cradle of Civilization" that the Spanish museum had hosted from March 14 to September 1, pulling in 101,108 visitors Spain and other nationalities.

## Kish to host Symposium of ECO Tourism Investment Opportunities

**1 →** Middle East and South Asia with more than 460 million inhabitants and over 8 million square kilometers connecting Russia to Persian Gulf and China to Europe. The overall objective of the Organization is to develop sustainable economic development of its member states and the region as a whole.

Over the past couple of decades, the coral Kish Island has become a beach resort where visitors can swim, shop and sample a laid-back and relatively liberated

local lifestyle. It is home to free-trade-zone status, with ever growing hotels, shopping centers, apartment blocks and retail complexes.

The Kish Free Zone Organization (KFZO) is in charge of handling the infrastructure affairs, development and economic growth, creating job opportunities, attracting local and foreign investors, regulating the good and labor market and ultimately utilizing the Island's tourist potentials.

## American travel-food vlogger takes social media by storm in Iran

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — Thailand-based American food and travel vlogger Mark Wiens has recently arrived in Tehran, tasting street foods and sending videos to hundreds of thousands of his followers on the social media.

On a Saturday Instagram post, Wiens wrote, "Thrilled to say, we made it. Can't wait to share the amazing food with you!"

"I'm an eater, traveler, author, blogger, video host, a coffee drinker, and some other random things, but mostly I just love to eat delicious food."

Born in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1986, Mark and his wife Ying are based in Thailand, traveling frequently while making food videos, and blogging.

### ■ Influencers can make a boom

In October, tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan announced that the ministry supports certain Instagram influencers to travel to the country.

"Instagram influencers' trips to Iran are backed by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts and, in the advertising arena, we do a lot of work to fight Iranophobia and introduce the true face of Iran," Mounesan said.



Food and travel vlogger Mark Wiens in an undated photo

"One of the areas [in travel & tourism advertising] is to bring famous figures to Iran, get the country known to them in terms of its rich culture, beautiful natural landscapes and historical monuments...this is part of programs to introduce the country that we will definitely continue."

Also in October, a group of Instagram

and Twitter influencers, who have some 16 million followers in total, from Turkey, Russia, Italy, Ukraine, India and China toured Iran for a couple weeks.

Last month, Trevor James, a Canadian-born food and travel vlogger visited several Iranian cities, saying "Although my trip may

only be for acquaintance with Iranian cuisine, it was also fascinating to see Iran's cultural and religious attractions."

Nicknamed as "The Food Ranger", James lamented "Though there are many varied Iranian dishes but restaurants in which to try these food are very limited."

Iranian cooking can be seen as a metaphor for the country itself: It's tart, sweet, fragrant and vastly complex. It's one of the world's oldest, yet largely obscure, culinary landscapes, with roots dating back to the Persian Empire. Experts say that food is not merely an organic product with biochemical compositions. However, for members of each community, food is defined as a cultural element.

With over one billion active monthly users, it seems reasonable that Instagram has enough power to set new trends on traveling to a country that boasts hospitable people and some of the world's oldest cultural monuments, rich natural and rural landscapes as well as 22 UNESCO World Heritage sites to name a few.

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

## Air New Zealand launches edible coffee cups to reduce waste

Air New Zealand has started rolling out vanilla-flavored edible cups, which can hold hot drinks without disintegrating, across its network.

The Kiwi flag carrier, recently named the best in the world by a new ranking, teamed up with New Zealand family business twice, which creates plant-based cups, for the innovative scheme.

Having already swapped non-sustainable for biodegradable cups, the airline wanted to go a step further towards making the 8 million cups of coffee it serves onboard annually as eco-friendly as possible.

"We have been working in partnership with innovative New Zealand company twice to explore the future of edible coffee cups, which are vanilla flavoured and leakproof," said Air New Zealand senior manager of customer experience Niki Chave.

"The cups have been a big hit with the customers who have used these and we have also been using the cups as dessert bowls."

If the pilot goes well, plans could be afoot to extend the

project into edible plates and dishes, which twice is currently working towards producing.

Twice co-founder Jamie Cashmore said: "It is terrific that Air New Zealand has partnered with us to showcase to its customers and the world that a little bit of Kiwi ingenuity and innovation could have a really positive impact on the environment while at the same time delivering really cool and tasty customer experience."

It's the latest in a series of pledges by airlines to become "greener".

Earlier this month, easyJet announced it was becoming the "first major airline to operate net-zero carbon flights".

Around £25m per year will be invested in "forestry, renewable and community-based projects", the equivalent of around 25p per passenger.

The carrier's chief executive, Johan Lundgren, said: "We acknowledge that offsetting is only an interim measure until other technologies become available to radically reduce the carbon emissions of flying, but we want to take action on carbon now."



"People have a choice in how they travel and people are now thinking about the potential carbon impact of different types of transport. But many people still want to fly and if people choose to fly we want to be one of the best choices they can make."

(Source: Independent)

## Scorpion on United Airlines flight stings passenger



A passenger was stung by a scorpion aboard a United Airlines flight in a bizarre incident that prompted an emergency response.

The unidentified woman, who was flying from San Francisco to Atlanta, said she was stung by the venomous creature while midair.

She felt a stinging sensation on her leg, prompting her to go to the restroom, TMZ

reports. The woman said a live scorpion then dropped out of her pant leg and crawled across the floor before being caught by flight attendants.

Paramedics tended to the victim, who was stung multiple times, upon the plane's landing. She reportedly did not suffer any major injuries and will be fine.

In a statement provided to KPIX, United said: "Upon landing in Atlanta,

the flight was met by medical personnel. The customer was transported to a local hospital. We have been in contact with our customer to ensure her well-being."

A United Airlines spokesperson did not immediately respond to Fox News' request for comment.

It not yet clear how the scorpion got inside the woman's pants or on the flight. (Source: MSN)

# No agreement among Permanent Members that Iran is not complying with resolution 2231: Finaud

By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN (MNA)** – Marc Finaud, a senior member of Geneva Centre for Security Policy, says that in the Middle East, several countries have wide-ranging missile capabilities that are the result of threat perceptions often fueled by the others' arms build-ups.

Former Senior Resident Fellow at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) adds "This is why the only effective way of dealing with that issue is a regional framework."

A senior member of Geneva Centre for Security Policy also says that "there is no agreement among the Permanent Members that Iran is not complying with resolution 2231."

Finaud adds that "The E3 letter raises an important issue but it is bound to fail if it only seeks to pressure Iran and does not offer an opportunity to discuss the matter on a regional basis."

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ The British, German and French ambassadors, in a letter circulated on Wednesday, called on UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to inform the Security Council in his next report that Iran's missile program was "inconsistent" with a UN resolution that had endorsed the nuclear deal reached between Iran and six world powers (UN Security Council Resolution 2231). The claim is that some of Iran's missiles do not comply with the resolution, while the resolution "calls on" Iran not to work on missiles "designed to carry nuclear warheads". What is your assessment of this letter? And is it possible to vote against Iran at the Security Council meeting?

A: The provisions related to Iran's ballistic missile program are part of the UN Security Council resolution endorsing the JCPOA but are not part of the JCPOA itself. The Security Council could theoretically



discuss and adopt a resolution on those missile provisions, but in fact, there is no agreement among the Permanent Members that Iran is not complying with resolution 2231. The E3 letter raises an important issue but it is bound to fail if it only seeks to pressure Iran and does not offer an opportunity to discuss the matter on a regional basis.

■ This was Europe's action while Europe had already threatened Iran to investigate the trigger mechanism. Why, besides threatening to investigate the trigger mechanism, have they also raised the Iranian missile issue?

A: This initiative seems intended to push Iran to accept a broader scope of negotiation beyond its nuclear program in the hope of achieving a new deal that could be accepted by the United States. But it is unlikely to succeed unless Iran can derive some benefits from such a broader agreement.

■ These two actions of Europe while

Europe failed to fulfill its obligations to Iran and the reduction of its obligations by Iran was also a reaction to the passivity of European countries. What is your assessment?

A: The problem obviously comes from the US withdrawal from the JCPOA in violation of the agreement itself and Security Council resolution 2231. Iran's decisions to reduce the implementation of its commitments are consistent with the spirit of the JCPOA, based on reciprocity, if not with its letter. But it also increases the risk of collapse of the whole agreement. The Europeans did try to reduce the impact of American sanctions on Iran, but their efforts are restricted by bureaucracy and their limited influence on European companies which are deterred to trade with Iran by US sanctions.

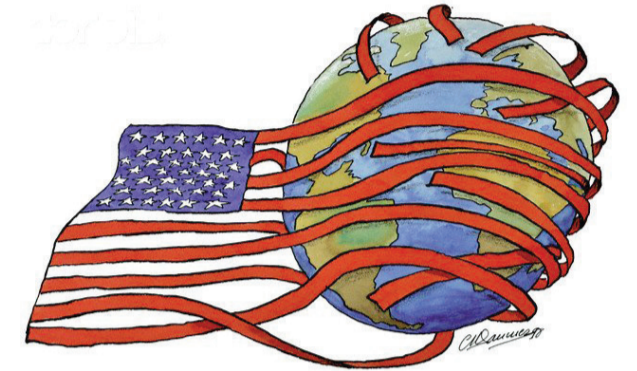
■ Resolution 2231 uses the term "calls on" which does not have a legal require-

ment. Accordingly, while on the basis of arguments put forward by Europe, Iran has models of missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads, but there are no legal entities for the legal review of countries' missile programs. This means that there is no international organization for recognizing the country's missile capabilities and its aims include defensive, offensive or capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. What is your assessment?

A: It is indeed regrettable that the international arms control framework on missiles is very weak: it only consists of the MTCR export control regime and The Hague Code of Conduct, a voluntary set of transparency- and confidence-building measures. In the case of the Middle East, means of delivery of weapons of mass destruction are part of the mandate of a WMD-free Zone, but discussions of this project have not made much progress so far.

■ Iran does not have a Continental missile and its missile range is eventually 2,000 kilometers. However, Israel has both a nuclear bomb and missiles that have far more missiles than Iranian missiles, and Saudi Arabia has a new, more advanced, missile program. Regarding this why Iran have no right to have a missile balance? If Iran is asked to limit its missile program, so should countries around Iran. What is your assessment?

A: Indeed, in the Middle East, several countries have wide-ranging missile capabilities that are the result of threat perceptions often fueled by the others' arms build-ups. This is why the only effective way of dealing with that issue is a regional framework. With other experts, my organization has made proposals for a series of measures (such as limits on range and payload and ban on transfers) that could be adopted by the key regional states as one of the first steps towards the establishment of a WMD-free zone.



if ever themselves enjoy.

America's probably fatal disease, long centered in and emanating from Washington, seems to be primarily greed and a broad lack of understanding, appreciation and magnanimity towards other cultures, like the Islamic world's, and other people in other nations. This altogether is surely reflected in rampant U.S. imperialism and the apparent desire to dominate and exploit others. And there are many thoughtful Americans who fervently want change but who lack the power to summon it except, possibly, through the vote and the election of better representation in Washington. But real democracy has been cancelled by an entrenched class of powerful people, Republicans or Democrats, whose hands are on the levers of power for their own benefit and maintenance. In sum, whether the U.S. government can change before it sets itself and the world on fire may be impossible. The real question is what can countries under sanction or attack by imperialism do not only to influence radical change in the West, but also to avoid further U.S. attacks whether by war or by sanctions. One obvious mandate is to try to erect effective defensive arrangements – alliances or military preparedness – that might obviate the progression of U.S. imperialism as it has existed particularly in this century.

One idea that may be useful in this regard for countries like Iran is to lower "defensiveness" (if not actual, latent and necessary defenses) and try to set examples of better ways to contend with and defuse foreign challenges and enmity. Ayatollah Khamenei recently hinted at this when he suggested or invoked the notion of "Islamic mercy" -- a powerful idea in its own right and expressed by Khamenei in the context of how to deal with the protesters and dissidents within Iran who expressed themselves during the recent disturbances over the gas price hikes. One must wonder to what extent it may be possible for Iran's leaders to extend the concept or practice of Islamic mercy and magnanimity towards the Islamic Republic's enemies, even if this should involve relatively straightforward measures such as unilaterally pardoning and releasing foreign prisoners, as has been done recently and from time to time, or by reducing the vocalization at least of (defensive) threats to countries like the U.S. or its allies, particularly the Zionists and the Saudis who are not respected most everywhere.

It may be worth further study to discern exactly what might be the most effective balance between the expression of Iran's defensive actualities and implied military counter measures against Iran's enemies, and an Iranian/Islamic posture of mercy and forgiveness that includes an expressed desire for building accord with hostiles like the Trump Administration. Iran under attack by sanctions, for example, has already proven, since the U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA and erected the sanctions, to be patient and counter responses have been measured and thoughtful.

Some responses by Iran to date have involved steps to ramp up very marginally the country's efforts to develop further its extant nuclear expertise. But what, for example, if Iran's leaders halted the expansions, which are implied if not real threats to Iran's enemies, and declared unequivocally and unilaterally that it was going to maintain its nuclear activities solely within the broader confines of the JCPOA even if the other JCPOA signatories still remain dilatory about honoring their own promises to Iran under the original terms of the deal. Would this not help at least to obviate actual military aggressions against Iran, because any military attack on Iran – which the Trumpists have tried to justify at the behest of the Zionists mostly, would be a disaster for Iran and in fact the entire world. Most all of humanity is entirely against more war in the Middle East and especially a war on Iran.

The question here is whether, with most of the world already cognizant of the unfairness and aggressive nature of America's and its allies' actions, whether even more mercy and magnanimity (which Khamenei has hinted at internally) might act as a way literally to further SHAME the U.S. in the world's opinion with the chance that this shaming may produce dividends by somehow forcing the U.S. eventually to reduce its bellicose posturing and begin to seek real accord and reduced tensions with Iran. In any event, Iran has correctly sought the elimination of sanctions and a U.S. recommitment to the JCPOA. What, exactly, can Iran do best to defuse and reduce U.S. imperialism pushed by literally craven "leaders" in Washington, which has to be the most tiresome and unproductive thing the alleged superpower pushes? Perhaps the search for answers is in vain, but maybe not.

The U.S. has spent (and wasted) an estimated seven trillion dollars in the so-called War(s) on Terror, a misnomer if ever there was one. It has been nothing but an expression of a destructive imperialism that has not benefitted humanity at all, and that includes no benefits whatsoever for most Americans, too, including college kids in North Carolina, at a time when humanity MUST begin to tackle together threats, environmental and otherwise, to the species as a whole.

## Taliban, U.S. to resume peace talks in next few days: Taliban official

**TEHRAN (MNA)** – Suhail Shaheen, the spokesman for the Taliban's political office in Doha said that the Taliban is ready for the return of Zalmay Khalilzad to Qatar to start Peace Talks.

In an interview with Mehr News correspondent, Shaheen said that the Taliban is ready for Khalilzad's return to Qatar to start Peace Talks, adding that they are not willing to negotiate with the Afghan government and accept ceasefire before signing a peace agreement which has been already prepared.

He noted that they have been informed on Khalilzad's visit to Qatar through the US Department of State.

In this regard, the members of the Taliban's political office in Doha expect the Peace Talks to resume within the next few days, he added.

US Department of State announced that US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad would visit Kabul in Afghanistan and then he will travel to Qatar to begin a new round of peace talks between Taliban and Americans over the ceasefire and ways to end the war in Afghanistan.

But Shaheen says the Taliban is not expected to cease fire and negotiate with the current Afghan government before signing a peace MoU.

The Americans have never asked the Taliban to cease fire immediately or start talks with the Afghan government simultaneously with the beginning of the negotiation, spokesman for the Taliban's political office in Doha said, adding that the peace agreement has been finalized and it will be discussed during the coming negotiation.

Referring to the schedule of US troop's withdrawal from Afghanistan and ceasefire's coincidence with their departure, Shaheen said that all of these issues have been discussed previously, and the solution is outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding.

He claimed that the Afghan election was illegitimate, saying that the Taliban do not recognize this election because Afghanistan is occupied by the US and the election will be expected as challenging.

In this regard, no one accepts this election, he added. Shaheen reiterated that the issue of elections and the future Afghanistan government will be among the issues that will be addressed after the agreement is signed.

Rejecting the possibility of Taliban's cooperation with the future Afghan government resulting from this election, he said that If the Taliban is to recognize the future Afghanistan government, then what is the insistence on



war, and there will be no need for resistance.

There is no justification for accepting the Afghan government, he added.

Shaheen emphasized that the Taliban will recognize every faction that wins the Afghan election as a side to the war, not as a government.

## Iran experiencing most challenging adversary in Persona of Trump: U.S. analyst

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** – An American political analyst confirmed reports that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was involved in the recent riots in Iran, saying that the Islamic Republic is experiencing "its most challenging adversary" in the persona of President Donald Trump.

"In my exopolitical opinion, Iran has now met its most challenging and deepest historical adversary in the persona and entity known as Donald John Trump," Alfred Lambremont Webre told Tasnim.

Webre was born at the US Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida, is a US and Canadian dual citizen. He is an author, International lawyer (a member of the District of Columbia Bar), futurist, peace activist, environmental activist, and a space activist who promotes the ban of space weapons. He was a co-architect of the Space Preservation Treaty and the Space Preservation Act that was introduced to the U.S. Congress by Congressman Dennis Kucinich and is endorsed by more than 240 NGO's worldwide. A graduate of Yale Law School who has taught at Yale University [Economics Department] and the University of Texas (Government Dept - Constitutional Law), Webre helped draft the Citizen Hearing in 2000 with Stephen Bassett and serves as a member of the Board of Advisors. Webre was a Judge on the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Tribunal that found UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, and US President George W. Bush, VP Richard B. Cheney, and SECDEF Donald H. Rumsfeld guilty of war crimes in Afghanistan, Iraq,



and Guantanamo, Cuba, and Israel guilty of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in Palestine 1948-2013.

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 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: Regarding Iran, the Zionist-occupied apparatus of the United States of America, its commander in chief Donald John Trump, and its covert corporate-military-industrial-think tank complex continue with structural preparations for Iran as a preferred war-target of the permanent war economy. A long-planned World War III around Iran would bring war-time profits, plus the long-term profits of rebuilding Iran, and co-opting its oil reserves into the Western Zionist petroleum reserves system. As we have shown from an exopolitical point of view, such a World War III is highly unlikely

and subject to exopolitical overcontrol.

■ Recently, 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: I agree with my esteemed colleague: CIA behind Recent Unrest in Iran: Paul Craig Roberts

■ 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: In my exopolitical opinion, Iran has now met its most challenging and deepest historical adversary in the persona and entity known as Donald John Trump. British Intelligence M15 reportedly was successful in thwarting a Nazi invasion of the British Isles in World War II because Winston Churchill and others were cognizant of Adolph Hitler's reported archetypal persona as set out in the Book of Revelation.

## Global warming causing birds to shrink, scientists say

Birds are getting smaller, according to an analysis of migratory birds that died after colliding into buildings in Chicago and were collected as specimens for the Field Museum of Natural History.

David Willard, a Field Museum ornithologist, has measured the Windy City's dead birds since 1978. Data from his calipers and scales reveal decades-long trends in bird bodies: Their legs, on average, are growing shorter. They have lost weight. Their wings are getting slightly longer.

These changes are present in nearly all of the species he measured, according to a study of 70,716 bird specimens from almost 40 years published in the journal Ecology Letters.

Morphing birds, Mr Willard and his colleagues say, reflect a changing climate.



“Warming temperatures seem to be having a pretty consistent and almost universal effect on a large number of different species, regardless of other aspects of their biology,” said study author Benjamin Winger, who studies the evolution and ecology of birds at the University of Michigan.

The basis for the study began after an acquaintance mentioned to Mr Willard birds often dashed into a glassy convention centre, McCormick Place, near the museum. (The convention centre, the biggest in North America, reduced its nighttime lights about 20 years ago; as a result, bird deaths there have dropped by about three-quarters, Mr Willard said. McCormick Place also recently installed a bird habitat over one of its underground parking garages.)

Climate change was not on his mind, Mr Willard said, when he started gathering the birds to add to the museum's collection. He measured their beaks, legs, mass and wings – standard ornithological dimensions – because he was curious about seasonal trends.

As the years passed, Mr Willard was joined by other museum staff and a volunteer organisation, Chicago Bird Collision Monitors, which also collects birds harmed by windows. The volunteers rehabilitate injured birds and only donate the departed ones to the museum.

By 2016, Mr Willard had recorded the measurements of more than 70,000 birds, representing 52 species, in his ledgers.

Simon Griffith, an ecologist at Macquarie University in Australia who was not a member of the research team, said it was “just amazing” that a single scientist measured such an extensive collection.

“It reduces the noise in the data-set,” which he said was more standardised in methodology and geology than previous studies that suggest climate change influences bird size.

Fifteen species of common birds, including swamp sparrows and dark-eyed juncos, made up the majority of the specimens. But elusive birds ended up in Mr Willard's ledgers of measurements, too, like a single yellow rail, a rarely seen marsh bird. Mr Willard said he identified Illinois' first Brewer's sparrow, a tiny bird that usually keeps to the western US.

From 1978 to 2016, birds on average lost 2.6 per cent of their mass and their legs shortened by 2.4 per cent. Their wings, meanwhile, lengthened by 1.3 per cent.

“The changes that are being documented are not something you could see with your eye,” Mr Willard said. But that they appear in such a large sample, and one involving diverse bird species, indicates the trends are real and widespread, he said.

Mr Winger said it was unclear whether small reductions harm the birds. “We don't really know what the biological significance is, of this difference,” he said.

But this observation was potentially concerning to Mr Griffith, who compared this with other broad-scale patterns in birds, like the recent study reporting the 29 per cent decline in North American bird populations since 1970.

(Source: The Independent)

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### Russian land sales bill

(June 26, 2002)

The Russian parliament has approved a bill to allow the sale of farm land for the first time since the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. Under communism, all agricultural land was owned by the state. Many fear that now Russia's rich will be the only ones to benefit from the new law. This report from Stephen Dalziel.

It's taken ten years since the collapse of the Soviet Union for the Russian parliament to agree on a **formula** for **selling off** land in Russia. But that delay hasn't been because of careful planning. It's been because of the kind of **in-fighting behind the scenes** which **dogged** the sale of other state assets, such as oil, gas and timber. In the first years of post-Communist Russia, a handful of people made themselves very wealthy at the state's expense.

The so-called “**oligarchs**” who then used this new-found economic strength to **wield** massive political **power** were the top of a small pyramid. Despite a much closer form of state control which is **exercised** by the current President, Vladimir Putin, than was the case under his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, there's no guarantee that there won't be simply a seizure of the best land by a **select few**.

■ **Words**  
**formula:** plan  
**selling off:** privatizing  
**in-fighting:** arguments between members of the same organization  
**behind the scenes:** in private  
**dogged:** if you are dogged by problems, they repeatedly affect you  
**‘oligarchs’:** members of a small group who control a whole state  
**wield...power:** if you wield power, you have it and are able to use it  
**exercised:** carried out  
**a select few:** a lucky elite minority

(Source: BBC)

# Biodiversity in 2020: the biggest threats and opportunities

What are the biggest emerging opportunities and threats the coming year holds for efforts to conserve biodiversity? Nearly two dozen scientists, conservation professionals and future scanners recently came together to answer that question as part of an annual “horizon scan” led by Cambridge University conservation biologist William Sutherland.

The group narrowed a list of 89 issues to 15 emerging or anticipated trends that have a strong potential to benefit or harm living things but are not yet on the radar for most conservationists. Here are their top picks, published in the journal Trends in Ecology & Evolution.

#### ■ Cellulose, for better and worse

Cellulose, one of the main components of wood, is proving to be remarkably useful when broken into nano-sized bits. As inventors find new uses for the versatile material, demand is growing a hefty 18% per year. The use of nanocellulose for packaging and construction can help remove carbon dioxide, a primary contributor to climate change, from the atmosphere, and reduce demand for environment-harming plastics. But it could also increase pressure to turn diverse forests into plantations bereft of biodiversity, and otherwise disrupt habitat.

#### ■ Forests as fuel

The European Union has adopted a directive classifying wood as a renewable energy source and has plans to dramatically increase renewables' share of the energy mix by 2030. Ironically, these moves are spurring actions that are seen as detrimental from both climate change and biodiversity perspectives: The import of wood into the EU from countries such as the US and Canada has increased in recent years and there are concerns for disruption of forest habitat in Europe as well. A lawsuit is challenging the classification but the problem could worsen if countries outside the EU follow suit.

#### ■ Better buds for bees?

Bees and other pollinators have been in big trouble lately as changing land use and perils such as pesticides and disease decimate their populations. Recent research in the US has shown that pollen of sunflowers and relatives, though not as nutritionally valuable as pollen from other plants, appears to reduce the severity of a gut infection that decreases reproductive success in bumblebees. If this research were to lead to mass plantings of sunflowers, it could adversely affect other wild bees that depend on more nutritious plants or on host-parasite interactions to thrive.



#### ■ Long-horned trouble

The Asian long-horned tick arrived in the US in 2017, bringing a most unwelcome guest: a bacterium that kills cattle. The tick tolerates a wide range of conditions and has potential to spread along the coasts of North America as well as into Central and South America, carrying its deadly companion along with it. This duo is likely to catalyse changes in land use as cattle growers adjust their operations. Because the tick has been known to infest mammals and birds, there is concern it may also harm wildlife as it spreads.

#### ■ Disappearing kelp

Large “forests” of kelp, a type of brown algae, grow along coastlines around the world, protecting shores from erosion and sheltering commercially important fish and other ocean life. Despite their reputation for enduring environmental stress, many of these kelp forests have been declining in recent years, possibly due to rising ocean temperatures, pollution, harvesting and non-native species. Further declines could disrupt ocean ecosystems and result in economically impactful losses of the billions of dollars worth of services they provide to humans.

#### ■ Antarctic ice: a dark horse

It's well known that a warming atmosphere is eating away at ice surrounding both of our planet's poles. What's less common knowledge, and only gradually being understood by scientists, is how the ozone hole over the Antarctic affects this. The hole in Earth's ozone layer has been shrinking due to reduced emissions of pollutants that cause it to enlarge. This alteration could contribute to

changes in wind and other weather patterns over the south pole. The changing weather in turn is likely to cause more Antarctic ice to melt, exacerbating global sea-level rise and further threatening coastal communities and habitat.

#### ■ Mini hydro meets river ecology

Small hydropower dams are becoming increasingly popular for powering local communities in Asia and elsewhere. Though they can have less land use impact than megadams, they still disrupt river flow and sediment movement and so can alter habitat in ways that affect animals and plants that inhabit rivers and streams. With more than 80,000 such dams in existence and a development push for more, there is a need for a better understanding of potential ecological impacts and what we can do to minimise harm to fish and other living things.

#### ■ Circular aquaculture

Ocean fish farming can produce large amounts of food but it takes a lot of water and can pollute the environment with nutrients and other chemicals. One approach being explored to reduce adverse impacts is the use of recirculating aquaculture systems, which reduce water demand by 97%–99%. Limiting factors for this approach are the cost, as well as concerns about the downsides such as feed sourcing and energy use. If these factors are addressed, farms could help boost ocean fish supply in a more sustainable manner than conventional approaches.

#### ■ Mosquito-murdering fungi

As conventional insecticides such as pyrethroids become less effective at killing

malaria-carrying mosquitoes due to the evolution of resistance, scientists are searching for innovative alternatives. One recently developed is a mosquito-infesting fungus that has been genetically engineered to produce a toxin found in spider venom. This biological control could benefit biodiversity by working synergistically with, and so reducing the use of, conventional insecticides. However, it could also cause problems by affecting other organisms besides malaria-carrying mosquitoes.

#### ■ Bag babies

Among the latest advances in assisted reproduction is the development of an artificial “biobag” womb that can be used to carry developing fetuses through to full term. Although still in its early stages, such a device could potentially be used to increase reproductive capacity of endangered mammals in instances where the availability of females to gestate the next generation is a limiting factor to recovery. Yet to be explored are possible behavioural and immune system implications and other unintended consequences of bypassing the mother's natural accommodations.

#### ■ Asian cures, biodiversity ills

Traditional Asian medicine is flying high these days with inclusion in the World Health Assembly's International Classification of Diseases in early 2019, a growing market push by the Chinese government, and booming sales in countries involved in China's Belt and Road initiative. Whether or not that's good for human health, implications for endangered species are a concern because some treatments require harvesting threatened species. Not only that but the Belt and Road development could enhance access to hard-to-reach sources of such species, further increasing opportunities to harvest high-demand plants and animals.

#### ■ Mystery blockchain

The distributed tracking technology known as blockchain is finding an increasingly broad array of applications, including managing energy and other natural resources. With no universal standards or oversight, however, it opens to door to disconcerting applications such as a Germany-based demonstration in which a forest was essentially empowered to sell its own timber. The lack of convention and regulation could create impacts on biodiversity outside of existing political and regulatory structures. At the same time, the technology could be used to improve governance of natural resources, protect indigenous land rights and more.

(Source: The Guardian)

## Oceans losing oxygen at unprecedented rate, experts warn

Oxygen in the oceans is being lost at an unprecedented rate, with “dead zones” proliferating and hundreds more areas showing oxygen dangerously depleted, as a result of the climate emergency and intensive farming, experts have warned.

Sharks, tuna, marlin and other large fish species were at particular risk, scientists said, with many vital ecosystems in danger of collapse. Dead zones – where oxygen is effectively absent – have quadrupled in extent in the last half-century, and there are also at least 700 areas where oxygen is at dangerously low levels, up from 45 when research was undertaken in the 1960s.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature presented the findings on Saturday at the UN climate conference in Madrid, where governments are halfway through tense negotiations aimed at tackling the climate crisis.

Grethel Aguilar, the acting director general of the IUCN, said the health of the oceans should be a key consideration for the talks. “As the warming ocean loses oxygen, the delicate balance of marine life is thrown into disarray,” she said. “The potentially dire effects on fisheries and vulnerable coastal communities mean that the decisions made at the conference are even more crucial.”

All fish need dissolved oxygen, but the biggest species are particularly vulnerable to depleted oxygen levels be-



cause they need much more to survive. Evidence shows that depleted levels are forcing them to move towards the surface and to shallow areas of sea, where they are more vulnerable to fishing.

Some ocean areas are naturally lower in oxygen than others, but these are even more susceptible to damage when their oxygen levels are depleted further, the report's authors said. Species that can more easily tolerate low oxygen levels, such as jellyfish, some squid and marine microbes, can flourish at the expense of fish, upsetting the balance of ecosystems. The natural oceanic cycles of phosphorus and nitrogen are also at risk.

The world's oceans are already being overfished, and assailed

### ENGLISH IN USE

#### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## 40,000 flood-stricken families received appliance packages

Iran Red Crescent Society (IRCS) volunteer organization provided some 40,000 packages consisting of household appliances to the families affected by flood, head of IRCS volunteer organization Mohammad Nasiri has stated.

Each family receives a package consisting of a refrigerator, oven, TV, blankets and carpets, he added, Mehr reported on Tuesday.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “by-, bye-”

■ **Meaning:** near or past

■ **For example:** I took a pleasant **byroad** which follows the coast.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Open out

■ **Meaning:** if a road, path, or passage opens out, it becomes wider

■ **For example:** Beyond the forest the path opened out into a track.

### IDIOM

#### Cross someone's path

■ **Explanation:** to meet somebody, usually unexpectedly or by chance

■ **For example:** Ms. Bridgewater was my English teacher but haven't crossed her path since I left school.

## اعطای لوازم خانگی به ۴۰ هزار خانوار سیلزده از سوی سازمان داوطلبان

رئیس سازمان داوطلبان هلال احمر از اعطای بسته های لوازم خانگی شامل ۵ قلم اصلی خانوارها به حدود ۴۰ هزار خانواده آسیب دیده در سیل اخیر خبر داد. محمد نصیری رئیس سازمان داوطلبان هلال احمر در گفتگو با خبرنگار درباره جزئیات این بستهها نیز توضیح داد: بستههای لوازم خانگی که قرار است میان خانوادههای سیل زده توزیع شود شامل ۵ قلم از جمله یک تخته فرش، گاز، تلویزیون، یخچال و پتو خواهد بود.

# Lebanon unrest in best interests of U.S., Israeli regime: Hezbollah

A senior official of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement says the United States and the Israeli regime are the main beneficiaries of the anti-government protests in his country, warning that Lebanon is on the brink of financial collapse.

“The (Lebanese) government must be formed in order to avoid such a collapse. There are parties that are working to harm Lebanon, especially the United States of America and State Secretary Mike Pompeo, who would not like to see Hezbollah as part of the Lebanese government or even in the country’s political arena,” Hezbollah Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Naim Qassem said in an exclusive interview with BBC Arabic radio station.

He added that “Hezbollah is part of this people (Lebanese nation),” calling on Washington to put an end to its interference in Lebanon’s domestic affairs.

Sheikh Qassem stressed that Hezbollah does not pay heed to the attitudes of the U.S. and Britain, as his movement only focuses on how the Lebanese view the resistance movement.

“For our people, Hezbollah means a resistance movement that liberated their land, and represents people who are working to serve the interests of the nation and



build the future of people. America, Britain and the occupying, aggressive and criminal Israeli regime have taken politically-motivated positions against Hezbollah and put the movement on terror lists. This does not mean that they are right,” the senior Hezbollah official pointed out.

Sheikh Qassem then described the U.S. and Britain as the root cause of terrorism worldwide, stating that they have no respect whatsoever for the interests of peoples.

He went on to say that the ongoing crisis in Lebanon best serves the interests of Washington and Tel Aviv, emphasizing that

they are behind any act of sedition in the country as Lebanese people do not want any internal strife at all.

Protests began on October 17, when the government proposed imposing a tax on Whatsapp calls, along with other austerity measures.

Amid the protests, Sa’ad al-Hariri resigned as prime minister on October 29.

Under the constitution, Hariri’s cabinet would stay on in a caretaker capacity until a new government is formed.

Hariri told reporters on Tuesday that he backed Lebanese businessman Samir al-Khatib to head the next cabinet, adding, however, that “some details” still had to be hashed out.

Protesters in Lebanon have stopped blocking roads and setting up barricades, and instead shifted to holding sit-ins at state-affiliated sites.

They say they will maintain pressure on the political establishment until their demands for the departure of the ruling elite and an end to chronic economic mismanagement and corruption are met.

Growth in Lebanon has plummeted in the wake of endless political deadlocks and an economic crisis in recent years.

(Source: Press TV)

## N. Korea conducts ‘very important test’

North Korea said Sunday it had carried out a “very important test” at its space launch center, as Pyongyang ramps up pressure on Washington over stalled nuclear talks.

The announcement of Saturday’s test at the Sohae satellite launch site came just hours after U.S. President Donald Trump said he’d be “surprised” by any hostile action from the North.

“A very important test took place at the Sohae Satellite Launching Ground on the afternoon of December 7, 2019,” a spokesman for North Korea’s Academy of the National Defense Science said.

The result of the latest test will have an “important effect” on changing the “strategic position” of North Korea, the spokesman said in a statement carried by the KCNA news agency.

The statement did not provide further details on the test. Satellite imagery taken on December 5 showed a large container box at the site that was “a decent indicator of an impending engine test,” Jeffrey Lewis of the U.S.-based Middlebury Institute of International Studies had said ahead of Pyongyang’s statement.

Sohae, on North Korea’s northwest coast, is ostensibly a facility designed for putting satellites into orbit.

But Pyongyang has carried out several rocket launches there that were condemned by the U.S. and others as disguised long-range ballistic missile tests.

Rocket engines are easily repurposed for use in missiles and the international community has called Pyongyang’s

space programme a fig leaf for weapons tests.

North Korea dismantled the test stand at Sohae amid a rapid rapprochement in 2018 but reassembled it this year, Lewis said, adding, “Still, we had not seen any activity at the test stand” until now.

“It is clear that this is one more sign that North Korea is conducting more missile-related activities as Kim Jong Un’s end-of-year deadline for sanctions relief approaches,” he said, referring to the North Korean leader.

The latest test comes as Pyongyang is ramping up pressure ahead of its December 31 deadline for the U.S. to propose a new offer to kickstart stalled nuclear talks.

Hours before North Korea announced its latest test, Trump had emphasized his “very good relationship” with Kim.

“Well, we’ll see about North Korea. I’d be surprised if North Korea acted hostilely,” he said on Saturday afternoon in Washington DC.

“(Kim) knows I have an election coming up. I don’t think he wants to interfere with that. But we’ll have to see.”

Following his first summit with Kim in June 2018, Trump said Kim had agreed to destroy “a major missile engine testing site” without naming the facility.

Kim then agreed to shutter the Sohae site during a summit last year with South Korean President Moon Jae-in in Pyongyang as part of trust-building measures.

Kim has held three meetings with Trump since June 2018 but little progress has been made in efforts towards denuclearization.



On Thursday, the North’s vice foreign minister warned of returning to a war of words with the U.S., threatening to resume referring to Trump as a “dotard” -- Pyongyang’s nickname for the U.S. leader at the height of tensions in 2017.

The comments came a day after it warned that if the U.S. used military force against the North it would take “prompt corresponding actions at any level”.

At the recent NATO summit, Trump boasted about Washington’s “most powerful military”, adding: “Hopefully, we don’t have to use it, but if we do, we’ll use it. If we have to, we’ll do it.”

(Source: AFP)

## Democrats huddle to draft impeachment charges against Trump

Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives met to prepare for what could be the final week of their months-old impeachment inquiry that has imperiled Donald Trump’s presidency.

After emerging from an all-day closed door meeting, House Judiciary Committee Democratic lawmakers said they were still in the process of drafting formal charges, known as articles of impeachment, that the

panel could recommend for a full House vote as early as Thursday.

Representative Jamie Raskin told reporters on Saturday evening the committee had spent the day digesting information they received from the House Intelligence Committee and constitutional law scholars who testified before Congress on Wednesday. “So now we are in the process of putting the law and the facts together to begin to think about the

next step,” he said. The lawmakers released a 55-page report on Saturday morning outlining what they see as the constitutional grounds on which articles of impeachment could be built.

In releasing the report, the panel’s Democratic chairman, Jerrold Nadler, said impeachment was the only way to hold the Republican president to account.

(Source: AP)

## Netanyahu demands U.S. recognition of Jordan Valley seizure

The embattled Prime Minister wants Washington to approve of Israel’s further expansion into the Jordan Valley, just days after he urged Donald Trump not to miss a rare chance to back Tel Aviv’s territorial appetites.

Benjamin Netanyahu, who fiercely fights for re-election, believes that “the time has come to extend Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley,” a swath of land spanning between the occupied West Bank and neighboring Kingdom of Jordan. On their part, Israel’s closest ally should give a final nod to the move.

“I want American recognition of our sovereignty in the Jordan Valley. This is important,” he bluntly told an event set up on Sunday by Israel’s Makor Rishon newspaper. As part of the proposed annexation, all Jewish settlements in the area would become part of Israel, he insisted.

Two days ago, Netanyahu claimed he talked the



issue with the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at their meeting in Lisbon. Interestingly, the State Department quickly disavowed his report, telling journalists that no such discussion had ever taken place.

“I can tell you that there was no annexation plan,

full or partial, for any part of the West Bank presented by Israel to the United States during the meeting,” Assistant Secretary for Near East David Schenker told an official briefing.

Netanyahu’s response to the comment was next to incomprehensible. “It was said that the issue was not raised [at the Pompeo meeting], the issue was raised,” he explained. The Americans, he believes, “didn’t say it was not raised, they said that a formal plan was not discussed.”

Also in the week, the Prime Minister bragged about talking the prospective move with the U.S. President Donald Trump. The two naturally discussed Iran, but their phone call also revolved around “historic opportunities that stand before us in the coming months – among them are [establishing] the Jordan Valley as the recognized eastern border of the State of Israel.”

(Source: RT)

## Finding a replacement for Adel Abdul Mahdi

➔ If the candidates nominated by the president fail for several times, then what will happen next? This is an issue that should be determined by Iraq’s Federal Supreme Court.

The Parliament’s legal committee member Bahar Mahmoud told Al-Araby Al-Jadeed that according to Article 81 of the constitution, in case the post of prime minister remains vacant, the president will serve in the position for 15 days. The premiership vacuum happens in cases of dismissal, resignation, permanent disability or an illness that prevent performing the prime ministerial duties. In the current situation, any action, which is not under the article, is illegal.

Ali al-Tamimi, an Iraqi legal expert, told Al-Araby Al-Jadeed that if the president cannot find a replacement for the prime minister by the end of 15-day period, Adel Abdul Mahdi will remain in power for another 30 days. After this period the president will be in charge of running the country for 30 days. If a new premiership candidate is not found, Iraq will face a constitutional vacuum. The constitution has no solution to the problem because such a situation has not been predicted.

The constitutional deadline is not observed in many cases, so it is expected that Abdul Mahdi remain in power for the next six months. This matter will

create constitutional problems, and the decisions made by the prime minister will not be legally valid.

But it has not yet been determined that who will be the next prime minister of Iraq, especially given that the life of the Iraqi caretaker government is not more than a month under the constitution, and consultations have not yet come to a conclusion.

Indeed, the process of electing a new prime minister will be very difficult. Earlier, a source close to the Iraqi president announced that he had not yet received a name for the prime minister.

Meanwhile, Iraq’s caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi urged polit-

ical groups to nominate a new person.

Abdul Mahdi said that the cabinet had only two choices, either to resign, which is what he did, or to vacate the prime ministerial position, and in that case the president would serve as prime minister for 15 days until a new prime minister was elected. “Finally,” he said, “We decided to resign after consultations with the Federal Court.”

Anyway, Salih has no more than 12 days to elect a new prime minister. But given the difficulties, it seems unlikely that the president can carry out this job within remaining time as electing a new prime minister is a time consuming process.

## Evidences prove Saudi regime’s involvement in delivering arms to terrorists in Syria

➔ The British journalist went on to say that he tried to show these documents and facts to the Saudis, but they denied everything as if the documents and the mortars were fake.

Fisk made it clear that the mortars found in the above mentioned “Jabhat al-Nusra” basement were more than the entire British army possessed.

These mortars were shipped from Bosnia to Saudi Arabia and then to Turkey and then crossed the Syrian border to the city in which they were found, 12 miles from the frontier, in Aleppo, Fisk said.

Earlier, media and intelligence reports confirmed that the United States, the Gulf monarchies and sheikdoms, headed by the Saudi regime, purchased and transported weapons from several countries in Eastern Europe to terrorists in Syria, while experts in the project of investigations into organized crime, corruption, and the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network revealed, in a report, the role of the Saudi regime in fueling the situation in the Middle East under U.S. sponsorship and order.

They indicated that the Saudi regime and several other countries bought \$ 2.1 billion worth of weapons from Central and Eastern European countries and transferred them to countries in the region, then these weapons reached the terrorists in Syria.

(Source: SANA)

## No trains and no compromise as France faces a winter of discontent

➔ Last Friday Philippe pointed out that the government had been consulting union and business leaders over pensions changes for almost two years in an attempt to clear the way for an agreement. Instead, like the freezing fog in the Yonne, the talks had left people cold and apprehensive.

Recent opinion polls clouded the issue further, suggesting 76% of French people support the pensions overhaul but 64% say have no confidence in Macron to deliver it, while more than 50% believe the strikes are justified.

On Friday, an Elysée spokesman told journalists the president was anxious to “dispel the fog” surrounding the pension issue, an aim not helped by contradictory statements from ministers.

Macron made shaking up France’s arcane pension system a pillar of his 2017 presidential campaign. Now half-way through his five-year mandate, he has already faced down protests against his labor reforms and the overhaul of the state railway SNCF last year, and more than 12 months of gilets jaunes protests; but pension reform is the hill on which his administration has chosen to go down in history – in ignomy or glory.

(Source: The Guardian)

## Pensacola shooting: FBI investigators search for attack motive

➔ Family members identified one of the victims as a 23-year-old graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy who alerted first responders to where the gunman was even after he had been shot several times.

“Joshua Kaleb Watson saved countless lives today with his own,” Adam Watson wrote on Facebook. “He died a hero and we are beyond proud but there is a hole in our hearts that can never be filled.”

The Navy, in an emailed statement, named the other victims as Mohammed Sameh Haitham, 19, and Cameron Scott Walters, 21, both sailors studying at the base.

President Donald Trump tweeted his condolences to the families of the victims and noted he received a phone call from Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. He said the king told him “this person in no way shape or form represents the feelings of the Saudi people”.

Trump also said he would review policies governing foreign military training in the U.S.

“This has been done for many decades,” Trump said. “I guess we’re going to have to look into the whole procedure. We’ll start that immediately.”

The U.S. has long had a robust training program for Saudis, providing assistance in the U.S. and in the kingdom. A couple of hundred students from countries outside the U.S. are enrolled in training at the Pensacola base.

The shooting was the second at a U.S. naval base in one week. A sailor whose submarine was docked at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, opened fire on three civilian employees on Wednesday, killing two before taking his own life.

(Source: al Jazeera)

## Myanmar leader Suu Kyi departs for genocide hearings

Myanmar leader and Nobel peace prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi departed on Sunday for the UN’s top court in The Hague to defend the country against charges of genocide of its Rohingya Muslim minority.

Demonstrations are planned throughout the coming week, with hearings set for Dec. 10 to 12.

Gambia, a tiny, mainly Muslim West African country, filed a lawsuit in November accusing Buddhist-majority Myanmar of genocide, the most serious international crime, against its Rohingya Muslim minority.

During three days of hearings, it will ask the 16-member panel of UN judges at the International Criminal Court of Justice to impose “provisional measures” to protect the Rohingya before the case can be heard in full.

More than 730,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar in 2017 after a brutal military-led crackdown the U.N. has said was executed with “genocidal intent” and included mass killings and rape.

Despite international condemnation over the campaign, Suu Kyi, whose government has defended the campaign as a legitimate response to attacks by Rohingya militants, remains overwhelmingly popular at home.

(Source: Reuters)

## Sudan’s first female football stars push for women’s rights

Within months of Sudan’s first women’s football league kicking off, the championship’s emerging stars are being hailed as icons for equal rights in a country transitioning to civilian rule.

Orjuan Essam, 19, and Rayan Rajab, 22, of Khartoum-based Tahadi women’s club, have scored several goals already in a tournament that would have seemed unlikely when autocrat Omar al-Bashir was in power.

“I was thrilled to see that authoritarian rule was finally turning into civilian and that women’s rights could now be achieved,” said Essam, her long hair flowing freely as she trained at a stadium in the capital.

Sudan was once a football pioneer, joining FIFA in 1948 and co-founding the Confederation of African Football with Egypt, Ethiopia and South Africa at a meeting in Khartoum in 1957.

But women’s football faced an uphill battle after the country adopted the Islamic sharia law in 1983, six years before then-brigadier Bashir seized power in an Islamist-backed coup.

Bashir’s 30 years of ironfisted rule ended in April after he was ousted by the army in a palace coup following months of protests, triggering hopes that more liberal, pro-women policies would emerge.

Women were at the forefront of anti-Bashir protests, expressing anger against centuries of patriarchal traditions and laws that severely restricted their role in Sudanese society.

Sudan is now ruled by a joint civilian-military sovereign council, which has been tasked with overseeing the transition to civilian rule as demanded by protesters.

Last month the new authorities scrapped a decades-old public order law, which primarily targeted women for “immoral acts”.

During the rule of Bashir, thousands of women were flogged or fined under the law.

Today, the launch of women’s club football is seen as a much-needed boost for women’s rights in Sudan.

(Source: AFP)

## ‘I put my booster on’: Son reveals secret to wonder-goal

Son Heung-min admitted he considered passing before the Tottenham winger “put his booster on” to score his astonishing goal of the season contender against Burnley.

Son’s stroke of genius was hailed as one of the best goals in Tottenham’s glittering history as he virtually ran the entire length of the pitch before firing home in Saturday’s Premier League clash in north London.

Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho dubbed the South Korea star “Son-aldo” in reference in a brilliant strike scored by Brazilian legend Ronaldo for Barcelona against Compostela in 1996.

But Son said he was actually looking to pass to Dele Alli before instead setting off on the counter-attacking gem that earned comparisons with Lionel Messi and George Weah.

“I saw Dele (Alli) running on the left side, and many Burnley players,” Son said.

“I tried to pass first of all to Dele, because he was open but then one of their players followed him so he wasn’t open any more.

“Then I was just thinking ‘should I go?’, and I put my booster on. I took the right timing to the booster on.

“Then in two or three seconds I was in front of the goal and I was really surprised. This kind of goal, especially at home, it makes me so proud and happy. It’s amazing.”

Harry Kane fired a brace with Lucas Moura and Moussa Sissoko both on target too, but it was Son’s stunning goal that hogged all the plaudits.

The humble 27-year-old, who has netted 10 times this season, conceded he feared wasting his remarkable run as he set himself to face Burnley keeper Nick Pope.

“I was tired actually, really, really tired after the running,” Son told Spurs TV.

(Source: Mirror)

## Guardiola’s darkest hour

After defeat to Manchester United on Saturday, Pep Guardiola’s Manchester City are now in crisis.

The reigning Premier League champions are now 14 points behind Liverpool in the standings and it’s not even Christmas yet.

“It’s normal not to win the Premier League every year,” Guardiola said after losing to Ole Gunnar Solskjaer’s side.

The defeat to their city neighbors was their fourth in the league this season - the same number of defeats they suffered in the whole of last season.

City have already dropped as many points (16) as they did in the whole of the previous campaign too.

While they’ve scored plenty of goals, it’s the defense that’s letting Guardiola down.

City have conceded 19 goals in 16 league games this season as injuries to the likes of Aymeric Laporte have left Guardiola short of options at the back.

The worst Guardiola team in history

With just 32 points from their opening 16 games, this is the worst start to a season any Guardiola team has made, including his Barcelona and Bayern Munich sides.

At Barcelona, his worst start came during the 2011/12 campaign when his team took 37 points from their opening 16 games.

In Germany, Guardiola’s Bayern Munich never picked up fewer than 40 points from their first 16 fixtures of a season.

(Source: Marca)

## Tevez: Rooney gave me Lamborghini at Man Utd

Carlos Tevez has said Wayne Rooney gave him a Lamborghini while at Manchester United after fellow teammates made fun of his car.

The former Argentina international joined United from West Ham in 2007, where he had been involved in a dramatic battle to avoid relegation from the Premier League.

Before then, he had played in Argentina and Brazil, but said he soon realised that the culture at United was on a different scale.

“At West Ham, we saved ourselves from relegation on the final day of the season with a victory over Manchester United at Old Trafford,” he told ESPN Argentina. “It wasn’t the same at Manchester United as at Boca.

“I missed at penalty at Boca and they killed me, this didn’t happen at United.

“Even the worst player came with a Ferrari. I was there with an Audi which the club had given me and they all laughed at me.

“Take the Lamborghini,” Rooney told me. I went to find it at his house and he let me keep it for 10 days.”

(Source: ESPN)

# What a four-year doping ban would mean for Russia



Doping Code, which includes the International Olympic Sports Federations.

Russian athletes and their coaches would only be allowed in these competitions if they demonstrate that they have nothing to do with the institutional doping system put in place in the country between 2011 and 2015.

In this case, they would again compete under the Olympic rather than the Russian flag.

No official or representative of the Russian government would be allowed at these events, including the president and the top officials of the Russian Olympic and Paralympic Committees.

## Messi hat-trick breaks La Liga record as Barca put five past Mallorca



Lionel Messi broke yet another record by hitting his 35th La Liga hat-trick on Saturday as Barcelona thrashed Real Mallorca 5-2 to keep pace with Real Madrid at the top of the table.

A trio of vintage Messi finishes contributed to five stunning Barca goals, the best of them arguably belonging to Luis Suarez, whose brilliant backheel capped a free-flowing move, involving seven different players.

“I knew I had a little gap, my last resort was to try a backheel,” said Suarez.

“I was surprised,” added Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde. “It was an extraordinary goal.”

But at the end of a week in which Messi claimed a record sixth Ballon d’Or, it was the Argentinian etching his name into the history books again after pulling clear of Cristiano Ronaldo’s 34 La Liga trebles to stand alone.

“Unbelievable,” said Valverde. “It was a celebration of the Ballon d’Or.”

The efforts of Messi and Suarez overshadowed Antoine Griezmann’s opener but that was impressive too, the Frenchman applying a sumptuous chip after being assisted by his own goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

An exhibition of creativity at Camp Nou allowed for the occasional lapse in defense and Mallorca’s Ante Budimir twice reduced the deficit to 2-1 and 4-2, even if a comeback never looked likely.

(Source: Eurosport)

### ■ The Events

For four years, Russia would not be permitted to host or submit a bid to host any of the events listed above.

On top of that Russia would not be able to become a candidate to host the 2032 Summer Olympics whether or not the bidding process falls within the four-year window.

Any competition that has already been awarded to Russia which is scheduled to take place during the four-year ban must be withdrawn and reassigned unless, according to WADA, “it is impossible to do so from a legal or practical point of view”.

Clarification will be required regarding

federations which are unwilling to review their plans, notably the 2022 World Men’s Volleyball Championships and the 2023 Summer Universiade which are both scheduled for the Russian city of Yekaterinburg.

Questions will also be asked about the Wrestling Worlds which are planned for Krasnoyarsk in 2022.

Some competitions, however, will not be affected, such as four Euro 2020 matches, including a quarter-final, and the 2021 Champions League final, all of which are taking place in St Petersburg.

WADA justified these exceptions last month by saying the competitions were “not multi-sport major events or world championships but rather regional/continental single-sport events”.

The same exemption would apply to events which make up one stage of a world circuit such as the Russian Formula One Grand Prix in Sochi.

### ■ The Administrators

No representative of the Russian government would be permitted to work for or sit on the committee of any signatory of the World Anti-Doping Code, which effectively means any international sports federation.

This ban does leave the door open to any Russian citizen who does not officially represent the Kremlin or the government.

Whether this will extend to President Vladimir Putin, who is the honorary president of the International Judo Federation, has not been specified.

(Source: AFP)

## Joshua tightlipped on future after reclaiming world titles



Anthony Joshua would not be drawn on his future plans after regaining his world heavyweight titles from Andy Ruiz on Saturday.

The British star won back his WBA, IBF and WBO belts with a one-sided unanimous defeat of Ruiz in Diriyah outside Saudi Arabia’s capital.

The victory reinstates Joshua as a major player in boxing’s most glamorous division, and instantly renews speculation about a possible unification superfight with WBC champion Deontay Wilder.

But Joshua, 30, said while he remained open to a fight with the unbeaten Wilder, he would not “chase” the fight.

“It’s difficult to unite them,” said Joshua, who had seen negotiations with Wilder’s camp fall flat several times before his defeat to Ruiz in June.

“We’ll see what happens. Chasing that fight wasn’t playing to my benefit, so I’m going to let the path takes it course.

“When the opportunity presents itself to become unified heavyweight champion I’ll take it.”

Ruiz meanwhile is eager for a third meeting with Joshua. Although Joshua indicated he would be happy to face the Mexican-American again, that fight is unlikely to happen anytime soon.

In the short term, Joshua faces mandatory title defenses against IBF challenger Kubrat Pulev and WBO contender Oleksandr Usyk.

Promoter Eddie Hearn also declined to elaborate on Joshua’s future plans.

“Tonight’s about celebrating victory,” Hearn said. “We’ll speak to the governing bodies and see who goes first.”

“We are going to celebrate. Anthony Joshua is an amazing ambassador for the sport. Tonight, in Saudi Arabia, he becomes the two-time heavyweight champion of the world and that is beautiful.

“They wrote him off. They said he was all hype. He had to come back from humiliation at Madison Square Garden. Tonight, he is the governor. The governor of the division.”

Joshua, meanwhile, said he had never doubted his ability to regain the titles despite his shocking defeat in New York, when Ruiz knocked him down four times in one of heavyweight boxing’s greatest upsets.

“I’ve said it was like sitting an exam,” Joshua said. “I failed the exam first time. This time though I studied, prepared and I just knew I was going to pass.”

Joshua also defended his cagey tactical style, saying he had consciously avoided being sucked into a slugfest against the hard-hitting Ruiz.

“There were times when I looked in Andy’s eyes and I wanted to put my fist through his head,” Joshua said.

“But this is boxing. It’s dangerous. I had a gameplan, I had a strategy and I wanted to follow it through.”

(Source: Reuters)

## Man arrested after racist incident mars Manchester derby

Police Sunday.

Superintendent Chris Hill of the City of Manchester Division said: “We will continue to work with Manchester City and Manchester United Football clubs on this incident and will investigate any other lines of enquiries.”

The English Football Association also confirmed Sunday that it would be investigating the incident, which has drawn widespread condemnation.

### ■ ‘Unacceptable’

United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer told BBC’s Match of the Day program: “I’ve seen it on the video, it was Jesse [Lingard] and Fred and the chap must be ashamed of himself,” he said.

“It’s unacceptable and I hope he will not be watching any football any more.”

Lingard also retweeted a social post containing the video, writing: “Not even this idiot can ruin tonight’s feeling. Shameful behavior,

it may be the derby but there is never ever a reason to be racist.”

### ■ ‘Big negative’

Football around the world has experienced an increasing number of racist incidents in recent years.

United forward Marcus Rashford, who scored his team’s opener from the penalty spot after he was bundled over by City’s Bernardo Silva, was part of the England squad when its black players were subjected to monkey chants and Nazi salutes during a Euro 2020 qualifier in Bulgaria in October.

“The fact it is still happening is not good enough,” he was quoted as saying by the BBC.

“We seem to be speaking about it an awful lot over last six to eight months. Even speaking about it now is not nice.

“The necessary departments need to do the right things to stop it in the game. It is a big negative in the sport and the country.”

A 41-year-old man has been arrested over an alleged incident of racist abuse by a Manchester City fan during the derby match against crosstown rival Manchester United Saturday.

A video circulating on social media appeared to show a fan making abusive gestures towards United players during their team’s 2-1 victory in the English Premier League match at City’s Etihad Stadium.

A statement released by City after the match said it was aware of a video and that the club would be working with Greater Manchester Police to identify any individuals responsible.

The reigning Premier League champion said it was also investigating objects thrown onto the pitch, notably at United’s Brazilian midfielder Fred.

“A 41-year-old man has been arrested on suspicion of a racially aggravated public order and remains in custody for questioning,” said a statement released by Greater Manchester

# A bright future ahead of Iran beach soccer: Paria Shahriari

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Paria Shahriari, head of Beach Soccer Committee at the Iran Football Federation, says that the sport has grown extremely fast across the world over the past years and they want to keep moving forward.

Shahriari, who has recently officiated as 2019 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup final match between Italy and Portugal, spoke to Tehran Times about the future plans for Iran national beach soccer team.

“I’ve been chosen as match commissioner by Asian Football Confederation (AFC) for the international matches in football, futsal and beach soccer over the past six years. I have been also selected as match commissioner by FIFA over the past year. I officiated as a match commissioner at the 2018 Summer Youth Olympics for the futsal competitions, Asian Women Futsal Championship, and FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup. The FIFA World Cup is the most prestigious event on the international beach soccer circuit and I did my best in the competition and finally was chosen as match commissioner of final match,” Shahriari said.

Iran won a bronze medal at the 2017 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Bahamas but failed to book their place at the next edition.

“We’ve always tried to keep going according to plan. The first step of developing is to have plan and the second step is to accomplish that but it needs budget. Beach soccer has grown fast over the past years across the world. We have to work harder than ever and I hope Team Melli can even play in the FIFA World Cup final because I believe that our team have the potential to do that. We missed the 2019 FIFA World Cup since our plan was not accomplished,” she added.



“Iran beach soccer have achieved two important accolades over the past two months. We won the bronze medal in the 2019 World Beach Games which was held with participation of 16 strong teams in Doha. Team Melli also claimed the title for the third time at the Beach Soccer Intercontinental Cup, where we defeated powerhouse teams Russia and Spain and deservedly won the

title,” Shahriari stated.

Iran coach Abbas Hashempour’s contract ran until the Beach Soccer Intercontinental Cup and Shahriari says they will make a decision on his future in the technical committee.

“Hashempour has worked as Marco Octavio assistant over the past years. The Brazilian coach built the current team and won

Beach Soccer Intercontinental Cup twice. The reality is it’s harder to stay at the top than it is to reach the top and Hashempour has a difficult task ahead because we need a golden generation for the future. We will discuss about the beach soccer coach at the federation’s technical and development committee and will make the best decision,” Shahriari concluded.

## Iran march into Asia-Pacific Goalball Champs semis



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran qualified for the IBSA Goalball Asia-Pacific Championships semifinals following Sunday’s wins over Australia and Japan on Sunday.

Team Melli beat Australia 11-1 and also earned a 10-6 victory over Japan at the Chiba Port Arena in Chiba.

The Persians will meet Japan once again on Monday to secure their places at the final. Iran have defeated Thailand, South

Korea, Indonesia, Australia and Japan so far and lost to China.

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.

## Brighton set to send Jahanbakhsh out on loan



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Alireza Jahanbakhsh is poised to leave Brighton & Hove Albion on loan in January after a nightmare 17 months since joining for £17 million from AZ Alkmaar.

The Athletic understands the club are lining up a temporary exit for the Iran winger in the new year, provided there are no setbacks with the timescale for Solly March’s return from minor groin surgery.

March is on course for a comeback early

in January or sooner. That will trigger a move for Jahanbakhsh, probably back to Holland, the Athletic reported.

Jahanbakhsh’s fortunes have nose-dived since his move to Brighton after an outstanding season for AZ Alkmaar. He scored 21 goals and provided 12 assists in 33 games for AZ in the Eredivisie in 2017-18.

Brighton finally landed the 26-year-old after initially attempting to sign him in 2015 when they were still in the Championship.

good, but he managed to put it in.

“The only thing that compares was when I was at Barcelona with Bobby Robson. Ronaldo Nazario, Compostela against Barcelona, 1996. Ronaldo got the ball near the halfway line and scored a similar goal, an amazing goal.”

Son has enjoyed a stellar year as 12 goals and six assists in 31 appearances in the Premier League helped Tottenham to a fourth-place finish in the 2018/19 Premier League season, and he was equally monumental in their UEFA Champions League campaign, where Spurs made their first-ever appearance in the final, losing 2-0 to Liverpool.

Son has been equally important to Korea Republic, skipping the Taeguk Warriors to a quarter-final finish in the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 last January, where they lost 1-0 to eventual champions Qatar, and is leading Korea Republic’s charge in the Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023.

(Source: AFP)

## Son celebrates AFC Asian International Player of the Year award with wonder goal

Korea Republic captain and Tottenham Hotspur star Son Heung-min celebrated receiving the 2019 AFC Asian International Player of the Year award with an amazing solo goal against Burnley in a Premier League tie on Saturday. Son, winning for a record third time, received the award from Korea Republic legend Park Ji-sung and Andy Roxburgh, the AFC’s Director of Technical Division at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

Son, who was also awarded the accolade in 2015 and 2017, then capped his evening by scoring a stunning 90-yard solo goal as Tottenham triumphed 5-0 against Burnley.

With Spurs already rampant after early goals from Harry Kane and Lucas Moura, Son stole the show before half-time when he ran from deep inside his own half past a host of Burnley defenders and capped the astonishing burst with an ice-cool finish for his 10th goal of the season and it will surely be considered for the FIFA Puskas Award

Always modest and unselfish, Son claimed he



had wanted to pass rather than go on his epic run.

“When I got the ball and tried to pass it to Dele (Alli) but I couldn’t find him so I just kept going. I am happy to score this goal.” Son told a television interview while Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho shouted «give him the man of the match» in the background.

Tottenham captain Kane benefitted from Son’s excellence as the first of his two goals

came from the Korean’s assist.

Mourinho hailed Son’s wonder-strike as the best goal he has seen since an equally stunning effort from Brazilian legend Ronaldo.

«Before this goal my son calls him Son-aldo and today he was Son-aldo!» Mourinho said. «This was an amazing goal. I know that he is going to reach the face of the keeper, his control is unstoppable. The keeper is

and reopened in May 2017 following a successful redevelopment to prepare it for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The stadium is fully operational at present and has hosted large crowds during the ongoing Gulf Cup. It is also just a short walk from the nearest Doha Metro station, making it easy for fans to get to and from the venue.

Construction at Education City Stadium is complete and the venue is now operational. 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.

In 2020, Education City Stadium – which is scheduled to host matches up to and including the quarter-finals of the FIFA World Cup – will become the third tournament-ready venue ahead of 2022.

Fans who successfully applied for tickets to Match 6 and the double-header of matches 7 and 8 will not be impacted – all their tickets will be automatically issued to Khalifa International Stadium, and their seats will be allocated within the same price category. The date and time of those matches will remain as previously indicated in the match schedule.

(Source: FIFA.com)

## Andrea Stramaccioni cancels contract with Esteghlal

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Italian coach Andrea Stramaccioni stepped down from his role as coach of Esteghlal football team on Sunday.

The decision was made after Esteghlal failed to pay his wage since Iran encounters a lot of problems for transferring money.

Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) has published an announcement on its website which confirms the Italian coaching staff’s departure.



“Andrea Stramaccioni together with his collaborators from the technical staff — Marco Caser, Sebastian Eduardo Leto and Omar Danesi — communicate to have all unilaterally terminated with just cause their Employment Contract with Esteghlal F.C. in front of F.I.F.A. with effect from 6 December 2019.

Stramaccioni and the aforesaid members of his technical staff would like to take this opportunity for thanking all the First Team’s players as well as the rest of the staff for the excellent performances and professional cooperation which have permitted the Team to reach the top of the ranking despite all the difficulties of these past months. Last but not least , the Coach would like to say a big big thank to the really amazing fans of Esteghlal F.C. for their unique and unbelievable support during all this period and wish them to reach with their beloved team all the successes which they deserve , with the heart broken he is forced to leave hoping to be together again one day in the future,” the announcement reads.

Under leadership of Stramaccioni, Esteghlal moved top of the Iran Professional League after four years.

Esteghlal assistant coach Javad Zarincheh will lead Esteghlal as interim coach.

## Iranian woman referee Dalir invited to ITTF Olympic Qualification

**TASNIM** — Iranian woman table tennis referee Nasibeh Dalir Heravi has been invited by International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) to officiate at the World Olympic Qualification event

The event will be held in Gondomar, Portugal between 22 – 26 January 2020.

The World Team Qualification Event will see nine national teams qualify directly for the Tokyo 2020 Teams competition, accounting for over half of the total 16 available spots.

Iran team consists of Nima and Noshad Alamian, Amir Hossein Hodaei, Amin Ahmadian and Hamid Reza Taherkhani will also participate at the competition.

## Grdovic: We’ll be ready for Turkmenistan 2020

Turkmenistan head coach Robert Grdovic was cautiously optimistic after his side discovered their group stage opponents for the AFC Futsal Championship Turkmenistan 2020 on Friday.

The tournament hosts will need to navigate a group featuring Vietnam, Tajikistan and tournament debutants Oman if they are to advance to the knockout stage on home court in Ashgabat after all four sides were drawn in Group A at Ashgabat’s Olympia Hotel.

Grdovic, a former Croatian international who has led Turkmenistan’s national team since March, isn’t expecting any easy matches in the Continental Finals, but believes his side will arrive ready to compete strongly.

“Oman is the first game and it will be a very important for us,” Grdovic told the-AFC.com.

“We also have Tajikistan; their national coach is my friend Dejan Dedovic. I saw them in Iran in qualification and they achieved good results, and then we have one of the very strong teams, Vietnam.

“I think it will be a very interesting championship. I’m very proud to be the head coach of the national team of Turkmenistan, and all the teams here have the possibilities to make good results, but we will prepare, and we will be ready.”

The hosts will begin their campaign without the major tournament history of some of their rivals, having failed to qualify for the past three editions of the AFC Futsal Championship and having never advanced from the group stage in any of their previous six appearances.

But Grdovic believes home ground advantage could be a crucial factor in his side’s bid for success.

Turkmenistan advanced to the futsal quarter-finals when they hosted the Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Ashgabat in 2017, with their eventual elimination coming only by way of a dramatic penalty shootout defeat against Afghanistan, and Grdovic believes playing in front of what are expected to be big crowds will give his charges a significant boost.

“What I see in Asia is that every team has qualities, but we are ready to achieve good results,” he said.

“Maybe Iran, for me, is the number one favourite (to win the competition), but in our home, with 15,000 fans supporting us, I think my guys will be boosted by 20 to 30 per cent.”

Turkmenistan captain Abdyllo Gurbannepesov pinpointed his side’s opening match against Oman as a crucial fixture in their bid for a place in the tournament’s last eight.

Oman will be the only side making their Finals debut when the competition begins in late February, and Gurbannepesov said he is aware of the importance of a winning start.

“All of the teams are very strong to have qualified for the final stage, so we will try our best, but we will try to get first place in the group,” said the 34-year-old.

(Source: the-afc)

## New champions to be crowned at Khalifa International Stadium

Khalifa International Stadium, the home of Qatar’s national team, will host three additional matches during the FIFA Club World Cup 2019 after the official opening of Education City Stadium was postponed until early 2020.

In addition to the double-header of games on December 17 – the fifth-place play-off and the semi-final involving CONMEBOL Libertadores winners Flamengo – Khalifa International Stadium will also host the second semi-final, involving UEFA Champions League winners Liverpool on December 18, along with the final and the third-place play-off on December 21.

Khalifa International Stadium has a capacity of 45,416

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GUIDE TO  
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Faith is a white spot in the heart, and the stronger  
that faith, the largest that spot is.

Imam Ali (AS)

## Austrian pianist Gottlieb Wallisch to perform in Tehran

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Austrian pianist Gottlieb Wallisch is scheduled to perform recitals at Tehran's Rudaki Hall on December 27 and 28, the Rudaki Foundation announced on Sunday.

Wallisch who is a professor at the Berlin University of the Arts also is slated to hold a master class before his performance on December 28.



Austrian pianist Gottlieb Wallisch in an undated photo.

Wallisch and his fellow violinist Wolfgang David were accompanied by an Armenian orchestra, which performed a benefit concert in 2007.

The concert conducted by Iranian maestro Loris Tjeknavorian was organized by the Mahak Charity Society, an institute located in Tehran that supports Iranian children suffering from cancer.

Wallisch has performed with a large number of leading orchestras, including the Wiener Philharmoniker, the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester, the Sinfonia Varsovia, the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, the Camerata Salzburg and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

He has performed during numerous international events and won several awards, including first prize and the Grand Prix Ivo Pogorelich at the Stravinsky Awards in the U.S.

## “Wallet” wins grand prize at Paris mobile film festival

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — “Wallet” by Iranian director Fatima Nofely won the international grand prize at the 15th edition of the Mobile Film Festival in Paris on Friday.

“Wallet” predicts the future when water becomes common currency in the world. The international grand prize is worth €20,000.

“Scream” by Gonzague Legout won the French grand prize, at the online competition dedicated to one-minute films.

Vinamra Pancharia from India was named best director for his film “Antihuman”.

“The Red Days” by Anatole Levain from France was presented with the audience award, while Florence Fauquet, also from France, was named best actress for her role in “Everything Is Fine” by Matthieu Boivineau.

“Rescue” co-directed by Masud Qanbarlu and Fardin Takramian and “The Father of Trees” by Teimur Qaderi, both from Iran, also was screened at the festival.

Organized in collaboration with Youtube, the Mobile Film Festival was held from November 14 to 30 on the theme of climate change.

## Italian festival to screen “Kiarostami and His Missing Cane”

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Mahmudreza Sani's documentary “Kiarostami and His Missing Cane” about the world-renowned filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami has been selected to be screened in the official competition of the 9th IntimaLente Film Festival, a public relations team of the film announced on Sunday.

The story of the film is a new narrative of Kiarostami's point of view on life, his vision and worldview that Sani tried to portray during four years of workshops held by Kiarostami in Spain and Colombia.

Dedicated to documentary films, the IntimaLente Film Festival will open in Caserta, Italy on February 5, 2020.

# Ghazaleh Mohammadi honored at Japanese environment painting contest

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Ghazaleh Mohammadi, a member of Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA), on Saturday received her prize previously won at the 10th Kao International Environment Painting Contest for Children in Tokyo.

Clad in local costume, Mohammadi who lives in the northwestern Iranian town of Maku, got the prize from Kao President Michitaka Sawada, the IIDCYA announced in a press release on Sunday.

Another IIDCYA member, Baran Karami, who has won a Kao Prize, could not attend the awards ceremony of the painting contest.

Tohid Sangvini, Janan Abedzadeh and Mohammad-Amin Asghari, all from Iran, were presented with Eco Friend Prizes at the competition. Parsa Ildarabadi from Iran was honored with a special jury prize.

Over 450 paintings by Iranian children were submitted to the contest, which was held on the theme of “Together, We Are Eco-Friendly”.

“The Park with Building”, a painting by 10-year-old Thai child Kritsakon Chaiwarin, won the Grand Prix.

Ana Sofia Vazquez Castillo from Mexico, Denis Avdic from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lily Zhang from Canada, Yutaro Kotani from Japan, and Li-Sin Lin and Shu-Yen Yeh, both from Taiwan, also received Kao Prizes.



Ghazaleh Mohammadi (L) and Kao President Michitaka Sawada (R) pose during the awards ceremony of the 10th Kao International Environment Painting Contest for Children in Tokyo, Japan, December 7, 2019. (IIDCYA)

## Tehran cultural center to review “Joker”



A scene from “Joker” by American director Todd Phillips.

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — Tehran's Ibn-e Sina Cultural Center will host a review session of American filmmaker Todd Phillips's acclaimed 2019 drama “Joker” today.

Iranian critic Kurosh Jahed will attend the review session, which will be organized after a screening at 6.30 pm.

Starring Joaquin Phoenix and based on DC Comics characters, “Joker” is about

Arthur Fleck, a failed stand-up comedian and a party clown, who lives with his mother in the fictional city of Gotham.

Arthur suffers from a medical disorder that causes him to laugh at inappropriate times, and depends on social services for medication. Caught in a cyclical existence between apathy and cruelty, Arthur makes one bad decision, which leads him to the world of darkness.

## “Tosca” with a touch of cinema enthralls Milan’s La Scala at opening night

**MILAN (Reuters)** — “Tosca”, Giacomo Puccini's opera about a diva prepared to do anything for love, was given a cinematic flavor as it opened La Scala's season for the first time, winning a 16-minute ovation and a stage strewn with flowers from the audience on Saturday.

Director Davide Livermore thrilled spectators with special effects. Sections of the stage moved up and down and rotated. Sets depicted the Sant'Andrea della Valle church, Palazzo Farnese and Castel Sant'Angelo, three architectural masterpieces in Rome. Riccardo Chailly conducted.

The audience included Italy's President Sergio Mattarella, who was welcomed with warm applause, as well as several government ministers and celebrities including the American singer Patti Smith.

“Puccini is one of my favorite composers. I love Tosca's



Opera cast members acknowledge the applause at the end of the season opening of La Scala theatre in Milan, Italy December 7, 2019. (Reuters/Alessandro Garofalo)

## Bulgarian Mutafova, one of world's oldest actresses, dies at 97

**SOFIA (Reuters)** — Bulgarian Stoyanka Mutafova, one of the world's oldest actresses performing regularly on stage, has died aged 97.

Dubbed the queen of Bulgarian comedy, Mutafova began performing in 1945, when she played a maidservant in Moliere's “Scapin the Schemer”.

She shot to fame in Bulgaria after appearing in several TV comedies and

entertainment programs, and embarked on a tour of theaters in North America and Europe at the age of 94.

She continued acting until a few months before her death, and received numerous awards during her long career.

“An extremely kind and good person has gone,” Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov said on Friday. “She will always be one of the symbols of

Bulgarian theater.”

Mutafova, believed locally to have become the oldest active stage performer after Russian actor Vladimir Zeldin died in 2016 at the age of 101, told Reuters she never regretted her decision to become an actress.

“If was 20 again, I still would become an actress,” Mutafova said in an interview two years ago.

## Tahitian Gauguin sold for 9.5 million euros

**PARIS (Reuters)** — A painting by French post-impressionist artist Paul Gauguin fetched 9.5 million euros (\$10.5 million) in a Paris auction on Tuesday.

“Te Bourao II”, which depicts a stream with birds and flowers in a rich palette of blues and greens, was painted in 1897 when Gauguin was living on the Polynesian island of Tahiti.

The artwork was the only Gauguin still in private

hands and one of a series of nine paintings produced by the artist while working on a much larger project later titled “Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?”

Born in Paris in 1848, Gauguin was influential in the symbolist movement as a painter, sculptor and ceramist, and gained wider fame after his death in 1903. He also influenced artists like Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse.

## Bel Canto to perform pieces by Giuseppe Verdi in Tehran



Nima Panahiha conducts the Bel Canto Symphony Orchestra during a concert at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on August 29, 2016. (Idealmusic/Golshan Qorbanian)

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The Bel Canto Symphony Orchestra will perform works by Italian opera composer Giuseppe Verdi in a concert at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on December 20.

The orchestra will perform a selection of best-loved Italian operas under the baton of conductor Nima Panahiha during the concert titled “Italian Opera”, Rudaki

Foundation announced in a press release on Sunday.

Amin Ghaffari, Kasma Faridi, Anahita Hosseinzadeh, Danial Jurabchi and Farshad Bayat are among the musicians who will cooperate in this concert.

The Iranian ensemble had given several performances of Italian operas in Tehran over the past few years.

strength,” said fashion designer Domenico Dolce.

The opera, based on the story by French playwright Victorien Sardou and set in 1800, had its debut in Rome in January 1900. It tells the story of the singer Floria Tosca, her lover Mario Cavaradossi and the cruel Baron Scarpia, a police chief Tosca kills while trying to escape his harassment.

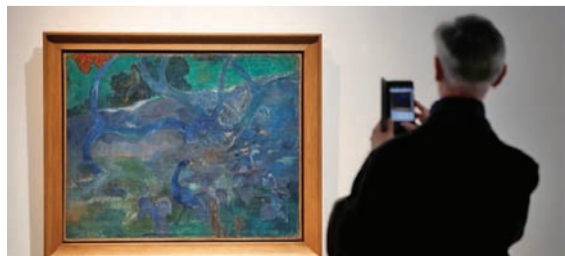
Russian soprano Anna Netrebko enchanted the audience with a passionate Tosca, a role once sung by the diva Maria Callas, while tenor Francesco Meli was a moving Cavaradossi. Baritone Luca Salsi played Baron Scarpia, a character he calls “as insidious as a rattlesnake”.

This year's season opening was the last for the theatre's outgoing artistic director Alexander Pereira, who will be replaced by Frenchman Dominique Meyer.

The opera will be performed at La Scala until Jan. 8.



Bulgarian actress Stoyanka Mutafova, 95, speaks during an interview with Reuters in Sofia, Bulgaria February 16, 2017. (Reuters/Stoyan Nenov)



A man takes a picture of Paul Gauguin's “Te Bourao II” (The Purao Tree) painting (1897) at Artcurial's auction house in Paris, France, October 3, 2019. (Reuters/Christian Hartmann)