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Iran expects to sell 1m bpd of oil at \$50 next year

TEHRAN — Head of Iran's Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) said the oil revenues in budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (starts on March 20, 2020) are estimated on the expectations of selling one million barrels per day (bpd) of oil at an average price of \$50, ISNA reported. "We have estimated the country's oil revenues to stand at 480 trillion rials (about \$11.4 billion) in the next year, and

this figure is estimated based upon one million barrels per day of oil sales at \$50 per barrel," Mohammad-Baqer Nobakht said in a press conference on Monday. Pointing out that some might say that the oil revenue estimations are too optimistic, Nobakht said "the average oil price in the current year has been up to \$60; we should be able to sell our oil and increase the national wealth." →4

Over 55m saplings to be planted in Iran within 4 months

TEHRAN — A campaign to plant 14 million saplings in a week kicked off in Iran on Thursday under the Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization (FRWMO)'s wider plan to lead the planting of 55 million saplings. The campaign, called "mass planting movement for greener Iran", was launched to plant some 14 million young trees over a period of seven days, which is part of a wider plan

to fight against environmental degradation. Some 42 million saplings are planned to be planted across the country by the next 4 months, Khosro Shahbazi, head of FRWMO said. He announced that a budget of €100 million was provided to plant 14 million saplings, €24.6 million of which is paid by FRWMO and part of which will be allocated from the National Development Fund. →12

More police forces injured in riots than civilians: government

TEHRAN — The number of police forces who were injured during the recent unrest is higher than that of the civilians, government spokesman Ali Rabiei said on Monday. "We cannot announce inflated statistics as America does," Rabiei told a regular press briefing in Tehran, ISNA reported. He was referring to a claim by U.S. special representative for Iran Brian Hook,

who said more than a thousand people may have been killed during the protests. "As the truth is trickling out of Iran, it appears the regime could have murdered over a thousand Iranian citizens since the protests began," Hook told reporters at a briefing at the State Department on Thursday. Rabiei, however, said the true death toll caused by the riots will be announced soon. →3

Iraqi commission summons, orders arrest of over 250 current, former officials over corruption

The Iraqi Commission of Integrity has summoned or issued arrest warrants against more than 250 former and acting officials on suspicion of corruption, as part of the government's reforms after a wave of protests over unemployment, corruption and lack of public services hit the country. The Investigation Department of the commission said in a statement on Monday that the independent body took the measures against 256 figures, including two current ministers and seven former ministers during the month of November. The statement added that two acting legislators and ten former ones, in addition to eleven ex-provincial governors, were among the suspects. It further noted that the Commission of Integrity has issued summons against 221 people, while

ordered the arrest of 35 others to be investigated on suspicions of corruption. The statement highlighted that whilst a total of 51 orders have been carried, 68 suspects have been referred to the judiciary for trial. Iraqi government spokesman Saad al-Hadithi told the official Iraqi News Agency on November 30 that a special central court, formed in coordination between executive and judiciary bodies, is going to issue summons orders against more top officials over corruption. Hadithi added that the court has ordered investigative bodies in the courts of appeal nationwide to summon, issue arrest warrants and seize the assets of anyone found guilty of corruption. On October 11, the Iraqi Supreme Anti-Corruption Council said in a statement that nine high-ranking officials had been referred to the

judiciary to be prosecuted on charges of corruption. The senior officials included former ministers and former provincial governors, according to the statement. Protests have rocked primarily the capital city of Baghdad and southern areas of Iraq for two months over the failing economy and demand for political and anti-corruption reforms. The rallies have, however, turned into violent confrontations in numerous occasions, with reports alleging that certain foreign-backed elements have been seeking to wreak havoc in the country. Since October 1, more than 300 people have been killed in the country, according to the Iraqi parliament's human rights commission. Iraq's parliament on December 1 formally accepted Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi's resignation. →13

Paris commuters face 300 miles of traffic jams as France enters its fifth day of strikes

French commuters experienced a chaotic journey getting to work on Monday as public sector workers entered a fifth consecutive day of nationwide strikes. The traffic lines totaled more than 500 kilometers (310 miles) getting into the French capital Monday morning, twice as long as the usual number; the Parisian metro had only 2 out of 16 lines fully working, and the national railway company also warned against severe disruptions in the suburbs of Paris. Nationwide, public sector workers have protested against government plans to update the pension system since Thursday. The strike has led to the closure of certain schools, can-

cellation of flights and a downturn in tourism and Christmas retail. Monday starts a make-it-or-break-it week for the French government, according to different French media. The French government is due to unveil the outcome of consultations carried over the last months on Monday and to announce the final details of its pension reform plan on Wednesday. President Emmanuel Macron vowed in 2017 to change France's pension system, which is one of the most expensive across the world, according to data from the OECD. Macron wants to implement a single, points-based system. This would replace the current 42 different pension plans that vary according

to profession and region, which means some workers are currently entitled to a full pension before the minimum retirement age of 62. The proposed system aims to make pensioners contribute the same amount and give them equal rights. However, the public sector is against the changes arguing these would mean a later retirement age or cuts to their pensions. France's Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said Friday that the government is not seeking a confrontation. "The application of a universal pension system guarantees to all citizens their retirement and to their children," he said on Twitter. →13

EDITORIAL
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Elections, participation and national security

Democratic establishments in the entire political structures worldwide have been founded based on the people's votes and views. It is for these reasons that people are considered the most main component in political, social, economic and cultural developments.

Normally, the most important component in analyzing the degree of a political establishment's admissibility and legitimacy can be drawn based on the percentage of the people's participation in elections to determine their own fate and set the path for future by voting for their own favored candidates.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, which was established based on the people's will following the victory of the Islamic Revolution and overthrow of the despotic Pahlavi regime in 1979, is not an exception. The entire affairs in the ruling system in Iran have been founded based to religious democracy.

According to the Principle 6 of the constitution, the country's affairs must be handled in accordance to the public votes (election or referendum), based on which the people's vote plays a pivotal role in how to manage the country.

In other words, according to an affirmation by the constitution, ballot boxes, as a national covenant is the only way towards materialization of proposed objectives which can meet the people's demands in all areas. This is the point that has clearly demonstrated its effectiveness over the last 40 years.

Based on the abovementioned issue, it can be understood that involving people in Iran in managing affairs is of high importance at least from two aspects:

- *The people's active role in envisioning their future and meeting their demands;
- *Admissibility of the political establishment and symbol of unity and national solidarity.

The importance of these two issues will be more obvious when we realize that the concept of national security in a democratic establishment is highly dependent on public participation. It is because these components that guarantee and reinvigorate the national security rely on the confidence principle as the most prominent pillar of the social wealth in any political establishment whose main sign is the percentage of public participation. →3

PERSPECTIVE
Javad Heirannia
 political analyst

Is Iran's missile program inconsistent with Resolution 2231?

France, Britain and Germany sent a letter to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on December 4 in which they claimed that some of the Iran's ballistic missile activities are inconsistent with the UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

In the letter circulated among the Security Council members, the three European countries, which are signatory to the JCPOA, urged Guterres to describe Iran's ballistic missiles as inconsistent with Resolution 2231 in the next report on the country's missile program.

Such claims are also made by certain Western think tanks. They argue that Iran intends to develop missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. Their argument is based on the shape and the nose cone of some missiles and also Iran's satellite launches which they claim is in tandem with launching long-range missiles.

What does Resolution 2231 state about Iran's missile program? Resolution 2231 calls on Iran to restrain the development of a specific type of missile. The request is not legally binding.

However, the Resolution 1929, which was adopted in July 2015, stated "the UN Security Council Decides that Iran shall not undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons".

The important question is that which organization is supposed to verify countries' missile programs? That is, based on which rule, the European countries have considered Iran's missile program in contravention with Resolution 2231 and believed that Iran has nuclear-capable missiles?

Peter Jenkins, former UK Ambassador to the IAEA and UN, recently responded to a letter from the E3 in an interview with the Mehr News Agency, saying, "No international treaty prohibits ownership or purchase of short-range, medium-range or Intercontinental missiles. The list of the countries that own missiles in the Arms Control Association website indicates that more than 30 states own one or more of mentioned missiles. →3



Outtakes from "The Lovers' Wind" open Cinéma Vérité

By Samaneh Aboutalebi

TEHRAN — The 13th Cinema Verité, Iran's major international festival for documentary cinema, opened on Monday with a screening of a short film made of outtakes from French director Albert Lamorisse's 1978 documentary "The Lovers' Wind" at Tehran's Charsu Cineplex. The 25-minute film has been made from the dailies of the documentary, which are being preserved at the National Film Archive of Iran, the organizers said during the opening ceremony attended by a number of Iranian documentarians and cineastes. →16

It is Iraqi people who should decide their own fate: ex-diplomat

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Hassan Danaeefar, the former Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, has said that it is the Iraqi people who should decide about the destiny of their own country.

In an interview with the Mehr news agency published on Monday, Danaeefar said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always wanted peace, welfare and progress for Iraq and also peaceful life for all Iraqi groups."

The former ambassador also noted that despite what the enemies claim, Iran enjoys "credibility" and not "influence" in Iraq.

A group of rioters stormed into the Islamic Republic's diplomatic mission in Najaf on November 27 and set it ablaze. They also replaced the Iranian flag with an Iraqi one. Reportedly, the consulate had already been evacuated of its staff.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Ali al-Hakim apologized to the Islamic Republic for the incident.

During a phone call on November 28, Hakim told Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif that his country was committed to protecting Iran's diplomatic missions and their staff in Iraq, according to Press TV.

Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad Iraj Masjedi said on November 28 that the attack was aimed at damaging relations between Iran and Iraq.

"Definitely, the objective behind setting fire on Iran's consulate in Najaf is damaging good and brotherly relations between the two neighboring countries of Iran and Iraq by certain foreign and internal elements in Iraq," the ambassador remarked.

Masjedi noted that good relationship between Iran and Iraq have made certain countries in the region angry.

He called on the Iranian people to practice self-restraint, noting that actions done by a limited number of rioters do not reflect the behavior of the Iraqi people.

Iranian Ambassador to London Hamid Baedinejad said in tweet on November 29 that British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has expressed concern over attack on Iran's consulate in the Iraqi city of Najaf.

Abe says Japan is in discussions about possible visit by Rouhani

By staff and agency

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said on Monday that Tokyo is in discussions about a possible Japan visit by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani later this month, an attempt to try to resolve Iran's nuclear impasse with the United States.

According to Financial Post, Abe also said Japan wants to make every possible effort to promote Middle East peace.

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

According to Kyodo, Washington has urged Tokyo to share the outcome of a summit between 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 the 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.

INSTEX may be implemented in future: Zarif

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Monday that the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) may be implemented in future.

Upon arrival in Istanbul, Turkey, he said that a decision by six new European countries to join INSTEX is a "positive action".

Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden issued a joint statement on November 29 announcing becoming shareholders of INSTEX.

INSTEX barter mechanism, introduced on January 31, is designed to circumvent U.S. sanctions against trade with Iran by avoiding use of the dollar.

INSTEX was introduced long after the U.S. imposed sanctions on Iran and threatened to punish any country or company that does business with Iran.

France, Germany and the United Kingdom issued a statement on November 30 welcoming the decision by the six countries.

"As founding shareholders of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), France, Germany and the United Kingdom warmly welcome the decision taken by the governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, to join INSTEX as shareholders," read their statement.

It added, "This step further strengthens INSTEX and demonstrates European efforts to facilitate legitimate trade between Europe and Iran and is a clear expression of our continuing commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)."

The statement also noted that full and effective implementation of the JCPOA is of utmost importance.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said on December 3 that China highly commends efforts to implement the INSTEX.

Iran not satisfied with Europeans' commitments to JCPOA

Zarif also said that Iran is not satisfied with Europeans' commitments to the JCPOA, adding Tehran announced its dissatisfaction at the meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission held in Vienna on Friday.

The necessity to implement obligations under the JCPOA by all signatories were discussed in the meeting, Zarif said.

Josep Borrell, the new EU foreign policy chief, said on Saturday that "collective responsibility" is needed to stop the JCPOA from breaking apart.

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

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

Iran warns to give "crushing response" to any Israeli attack

POLITICAL TEHRAN — The spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry said on Monday that Israel is not brave enough to launch an attack on Iran but warned of his country's "strong and crushing response" to any possible aggression.

In response to the Zionist regime of Israel's military claims and threats against Iran, Seyed Abbas Mousavi said, "Such threats are signs of the regime's incapability and weakness."

"Iran will give crushing response to any insane measure or any possible attack," Mousavi asserted.

Mousavi added, "We consider the Israelis' threats against Iran as a move to hide internal crisis and differences between their leaders. That is a regime whose nature has been founded on incursions and threats over the last 70 years."

He went on to say that Iran, with a reliance on culture of sacrifice and the people's resistance, will not hesitate even for a second to defend its territory and national security.

On Monday, Israeli war minister Naftali Bennett made open military threats against Iran.

A day earlier, Israeli foreign minister, Yisrael Katz, was quoted saying Israel



was considering military action against Iran for its nuclear program, which is under the strict monitoring of the UN's nuclear watchdog.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman say Iran, with a reliance on culture of sacrifice and the people's resistance, will not hesitate even for a second to defend its territory and national security.

"Is bombing Iran an option that Israel is considering?" Katz was asked by Italy's Corriere della Sera newspaper.

"Yes, it is an option. We will not allow Iran to produce or obtain nuclear weapons. If it were the last possible way to stop this, we would act militarily," Katz replied.

Katz also criticized European countries for not supporting the hard line the United States has adopted under President Donald Trump, withdrawing from the 2015 nuclear deal.

On Friday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif criticized the United States and Europe for their silence over a nuclear-capable missile test on Friday by Israel, saying the test was "aimed at Iran".

"Israel today tested a nuke-missile, aimed at Iran," Zarif tweeted.

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

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

Rouhani: Next year budget not dependent on negotiations

POLITICAL TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said on Monday that Iran's next year budget won't be dependent on negotiations with the United States whose officials have imposed "unilateral sanctions on our nation".

Iran's next fiscal year begins on March 21, 2020. "The next year's budget is not dependent on negotiation; instead it has been drawn up based on the continuation of sanctions (on the country)," the president pointed out.

Rouhani's remarks came in a ceremony marking Student Day at Farhangian University in Tehran.

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

organized by students to commemorate the day.

Rulers should be criticized otherwise deviation is possible

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rouhani said that criticism will awaken the authorities about existing inefficiencies, noting that a straight meaningful criticism will prevent a ruling system from deviation.

"We welcome constructive criticism. Authority should be criticized, otherwise its deviation is possible," the president said, adding, "The country needs a university student who criticizes the officials candidly, meaningfully and bravely."

"A university student, as a person who seeks reality, should criticize the authority. We must state the realities, but, we should not label (others)," Rouhani added.



Zarif says Iran backs 'Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process'

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Monday that Iran supports an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process with the participation of all political groups and factions.

"We support an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process with the participation of all political groups and factions including the Taliban with the Afghan government in the center," he said during a speech at the Ministerial Conference of Heart of Asia Countries in Istanbul, Turkey.

Following is full text of his speech: Please allow me to thank our co-chairs for organizing this timely meeting and the people and Government of Turkey for their warm hospitality.

We consider the 2018 parliamentary and 2019 Presidential elections as crucial steps envisaged in the Constitution of Afghanistan. We urge our Afghan friends to settle any differences taking into account the absolute imperative of keeping Afghanistan's unity as well as the constitutional arrangements intact.

There is no military solution in Afghanistan. The presence of foreign forces has never brought stability in our region and has historically provided a recruiting ground for



extremists. The announcement of a timetable for a responsible exit of foreign troops from Afghanistan would prepare the necessary ground for the Afghan government to promote peace and reconciliation process at the national level.

In that regard, we support an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process with the participation of all political groups and factions including the Taliban with the Afghan government in the center. Transparency and inclusiveness would be the keys to any successful prospect. We also encourage all relevant parties to participate in such an independent national

dialogue and resolve their differences through constructive engagement and negotiations.

We would also use every means at our disposal to facilitate a peace process that would preserve the achievements of the 2001 Bonn Conference, in particular, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as a solid foundation for any political solution.

Taking the views of neighboring countries and considering their legitimate concerns during the process would guarantee that the peace agreement has stronger supports regionally.

We believe the United Nations could become active to bring all domestic groups as well as international partners of the Afghan government under one umbrella to facilitate this process.

We should not forget the increasing threat of Daesh in Afghanistan which has led to more bloodshed and introduced dangerous sectarian tendencies. More dangerously, it has radicalized the local armed groups in a competition over followers and recruits. As no one gained from introducing and supporting Daesh and other extremists in Syria and Iraq, no one will gain from introducing them to Afghanistan and Central Asia. This horrific trend needs to be arrested before it reaches catastrophic proportions. We firmly believe that we need

to form a united front and strongly stand against Daesh.

Afghanistan is a very rich country in terms of natural resources and the numerous capacities it enjoys. Regrettably, its people are deprived from such potential wealth. With poverty and underdevelopment, we shall never expect a durable success in the fight against terrorism, drugs or organized crime.

Iran is building the third part of Khaf-Harar railway, connecting Afghanistan to our railway network and through our network to the region and Europe. This would help Afghan businesses and traders bring their goods to regional markets and beyond. We also have provided traders from Afghanistan easy access to international waters through the strategic port of Chabahar. The Chabahar-Zahedan railway would complete a major section of the North-South corridor which connects Afghanistan and Central-Asian countries to open seas through Chabahar.

Let's hope for a peaceful, stable and secure Afghanistan that would certainly be a trustworthy partner for the region and the world. Iran is ready to continue to help the people and government of Afghanistan in their quest for peace and cooperate with all with the same objective.

Kamalvandi says Iran able to produce stable isotopes without Russia

AEOI mulling over production of 11 different types of isotopes

POLITICAL TEHRAN — The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) is planning to be among rare global producers of 11 types of isotopes, the AEOI spokesman and deputy chief said on Sunday, noting that Iran is able to produce isotope even without the help of Russians.

"It is supposed that the Atomic Energy Organization, in project which will be completed in the next years, to be capable of producing 11 different types of isotopes," Behrouz Kamalvandi told a press conference.

"Do not forget that there are only 2 or 3 countries worldwide that enjoy such capability," the official said.

Isotopes are variants of a particular chemical element which differ in neutron number, and consequently in nucleon number. All isotopes of a given element have the same number of protons but different numbers of neutrons in each atom. Stable isotopes are non-radioactive forms of atoms. Although they do not emit radiation, their unique properties enable them to be used in a broad variety of applications, including water and soil management, environmental studies, nutrition assessment studies, and forensics.

As the U.S. has not renewed sanctions waiver for companies that have been cooperating with Iran in nuclear industry, naturally the Russians won't be able to cooperate with the country; however, the Russians have said that they are interested in continuing cooperation with Iran.

"Regarding our know-how, there is not any impossible objective (to be materialized) for the country's nuclear



industry," Kamalvandi said, adding, "So, we can produce stable isotopes even without Russians' assistance."

"Of course, in diplomatic view, if the Russians stay with us (in producing stable isotopes project) it will be definitely better," he added.

"We are building new facilities in the Fordow nuclear site. Construction of new building facilities will be completed with the next few months. The new facilities we can produce stable isotopes without utilizing centrifuge machines," Kamalvandi explained.

Touching upon a halt in cooperation with Russians in the project of production radio isotopes in Fordow, he said, "7 or 8 days ago, we negotiated with the Russians over the

issue. Technically, enrichment cannot be carried out in a site which is used to produce stable isotopes, therefore, when we decided to embark on enrichment, we could not produce stable isotopes simultaneously."

"In negotiations with the Russians, we offered several substitute plans in order to continue cooperation in technical levels," he added.

In retaliation for the abrogation of the nuclear deal (JCPOA) by the Trump administration and imposition of sanctions, Iran has started enriching uranium at the Fordow site.

Kamalvandi further touched upon texts related to producing stable isotopes in the JCPOA, saying, "In the JCPOA document it is written that the activity (production of stable isotopes) should be carried out in a proposed location. Of course it has not clarified which one of the two chains. When we assessed we realized that each of the two chains will create some problems. We are negotiating with the Russians over the issue."

The ground was broken for the second phase of the stable isotopes project in the Fordow facility on June 22.

Asqar Zare'an, the special assistant to the AEOI chief, expressed hope in early June that the facility would be finished and inaugurated in April 2020.

He added that the first phase of the project was finalized with the cooperation of Russia.

Iran is the 12th country that has mastered the technology to produce isotope which has various medical and agricultural applications, he explained.

Iran ready for full prisoner swap with the U.S., says Zarif

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Monday that Iran is ready for a full prisoner swap with the United States, noting that the “ball is in the U.S.’s court”.

“After getting our hostage back this week, fully ready for comprehensive prisoner exchange,” Zarif said via Twitter.

Iran and the United States exchanged prisoners on Saturday. An Iranian scientist was released by the U.S. and Iran released an American detained for three years on spying charges.

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 prisoner exchange happened through mediation efforts by Switzerland.

After he was released, Soleimani flew along with Zarif from Zurich to Tehran on Saturday.

Xiyue Wang was also 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 Xiyue were joining their families.

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

Hours before Zarif’s Monday tweet, Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabiei announced Iran’s readiness for more prisoner swaps with the United States.

“We are ready to cooperate to return all Iranians unlawfully imprisoned in the

U.S.,” Rabiei told reporters at a press conference in Tehran.

He said, however, that there will be no other talks with the U.S. beside this issue.

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

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

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

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.

Former British official urges intl. community to keep nuclear deal

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Tobias Ellwood, the former British defense minister, has urged the international community to make more efforts to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

He told IRNA in an interview published on Monday that the United States withdrawal from the deal caused harm to it.

He also described the U.S. policy of maximum pressure against Iran “unhelpful”.

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

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

On May 8, exactly one year after the U.S. abandoned the deal, Tehran announced that its “strategic patience”



is over and began to partially reduce its commitments to the agreement at bi-monthly intervals.

In the first stage, Iran announced that it will not limit its stockpile of the nuclear fuel to 300 kilograms allowed under the deal. On that date (May 8) Iran’s Supreme National

Security Council (SNSC) said if the remaining parties to the JCPOA, especially Europeans, devise a mechanism to protect Iran from the sanctions’ effect in the two-month deadline it will reverse its decision.

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

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

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

Josep Borrell, the new EU foreign policy chief, has attached great importance to preserving the JCPOA, saying “collective responsibility” is needed to stop the deal from breaking apart.

Raisi urges election officials to deal with infractions promptly



POLITICAL TEHRAN — Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi has urged election officials to act in accordance with the country’s law and deal with election infractions in the legal time.

“Dealing with infractions should be timely and proportional, and taking actions on these infractions after the elections is useless,” Raisi said on Monday, according to ISNA.

“Every infraction should be dealt with immediately,” he recounted.

Raisi also urged Judiciary officials to cooperate with executives and supervisors of the elections. Parliamentary elections will be held on February 21, 2020.

The candidates had until December 7, 2019 to register. Then the Guardian Council began vetting registered candidates and is scheduled to 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 complains and announce the final list on February 11.

The candidates will have 8 days to respond on the campaign trail, ending on February 19. The Iranian parliament has 290 members who are elected by the people for four-year terms.

Guardian Council spokesman Abbassali Kadkhodaei said last week 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.”

Iran, Pakistan confer on ways to bolster naval co-op



POLITICAL TEHRAN — In a meeting in Islamabad, Iran’s Navy chief and his Pakistani counterpart discussed new avenues to expand naval cooperation, Pakistani military sources reported on Monday.

The report was released by Rear Admiral Mohammad Arshid Javed, the spokesman for the Pakistani Navy.

It said Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi and Vice Admiral Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi, who is currently serving as the chief of the Naval Staff of Pakistan Navy, vowed to bolster cooperation between their forces.

“The Iranian and Pakistani Navy commanders reviewed mutual existing cooperation and exchanged views over other intended issues,” the report added.

In April, Khanzadi said Tehran and Islamabad would not allow the hegemony to impede broadening of relationship between the two neighbors.

“Given the existence of many ups and downs in global and regional policies, we do not allow the hegemonic countries to seize the opportunity from the two countries’ navies to grow and develop cooperation,” Khanzadi said in a meeting with his Pakistani counterpart on the sidelines of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy.

Khanzadi also said Iran has been welcoming Pakistan’s warships at its ports. He also said the two countries should be vigilant not to allow enemies to use terrorists to undermine relations.

A Pakistani Navy flotilla, comprising of 4 ships, docked at the Persian Gulf port city of Bandar Abbas on January 6-9 to strengthen naval ties between the two countries.

The ships were carrying message of solidarity, peace and prosperity for the people of Iran and the region, Pakistan said.

Police seize 426 kg of narcotics in Khorasan-e Razavi

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Khorasan-e Razavi Province’s anti-narcotic police have confiscated 426 kilograms of narcotics on one of the roads of Bajestan County, the province’s police chief said on Sunday.

Two smugglers were arrested and their cars seized during the operation, Second Brigadier General Mohammad Kazem Taqavi said, Mehr reported.

According to Taqavi, the seized narcotics shipment consisted of 388 kilograms of opium and 38 kilograms of hashish.

Khorasan-e Razavi’s anti-narcotics police have confiscated a total of 28,000 kilograms of different illicit drugs and dismantled 35 trafficking gangs between October 22, 2018 and October 22, 2019 in the province, he said.

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

The drugs originated from neighboring Afghanistan.

John F. Sopko, U.S. special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, said at the Wilson Center in Washington, DC, in November that the counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan “has just been a total failure”, the Business Insider said on December 5.

Opium cultivation covered 263,000 hectares in Afghanistan, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. That was down from 328,000 hectares in 2017 but still more than any other year since 1994.

Also on Sunday, the commander of Sistan-Baluchestan Province border guards said his forces have disbanded a large gang of drug traffickers, seizing a remarkable amount of narcotics.

“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,” Second Brigadier General Mohammad Molashahi said.

“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,” he added.

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.

Elections, participation and national security

1 → The people’s involvement is only one side of a coin in democratic establishments. The other side of the coin is the role of the ruling system and political structure. The system, in coordination with the people, is tasked to fulfill its role properly.

Accordingly, as the people’s role in this regard is vital, the role of ruling system is even more vital.

It should be mentioned that proper fulfillment of roles by a ruling system’s pillars in legislating, supervising and executing affairs are essential in order to meet the people’s demands in the best way possible. In turn, this will ease living conditions, meet the people’s social and economic demands, and prevent spread of corruption and will ultimately bring about social justice.

Is Iran’s missile program inconsistent with Resolution 2231?

1 → The 2004 UNSC Resolution imposes legal obligations on all countries regarding launcher vehicles for special weapons (such as missiles), but the obligations do not prohibit their production and ownership”.

In this regard, the Russian representative to the UN sent a letter to Guterres on November 26 stating that Iran is a full member of the UN, and the country is a member of many non-proliferation mechanisms, such as the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. He said none of them treaties, including Resolution 2231, ban Iran from developing missile and space programs.

The Russian representative further emphasized in his letter that there is no evidence that Iran is developing or producing nuclear weapons or even the means for their launch. The country also is not deploying an infrastructure for storing nuclear weapons. Therefore, the Russian Federation insists on its former assessment, stating that Iran has respected Paragraph 3 of Annex B of Resolution 2231, which calls on the country not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

It should be noted that there is no international organization to verify whether missiles are defensive or not. On the missile issue, there are only two universal treaties, the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCOG), which are a voluntary set of clarification and confidence-building.

Assessing U.S. stance from legal perspective

Following the letter from the E3, the U.S. once again commented on Iran’s missile program. Brian Hook, head of the Iran Action Group, said, “One of the deficiencies of the Iran nuclear deal is that it ended the prohibition on Iran’s ballistic missile testing.”

Mark Fitzpatrick, the executive director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), said on December 2, 2018, “Not to excuse Iran’s missile test, but it is not a ‘violation’ of UNSC 2231, which only ‘calls upon’ Iran not conduct such tests. It also calls all member states to refrain from actions that undermine implementation of JCPOA commitments. So if Iran is in violation so is the U.S.”

According to international law, a state has no right to refer to a treaty that it has rejected and not observed. Therefore, the U.S. has no legal right to claim that Iran has violated Resolution 2231 or failed to comply with its articles, while Washington itself violates the resolution.

Reasons behind Iran’s missile program

Iran’s missile program is defensive and deterrent. Tehran has said that it will negotiate about its missile program if there is no missile threat.

In this regard, in an interview with NBC News on July 15, Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said, “If you want to discuss ballistic missiles, then we need to discuss the amount of weapons sold to our region.”

Iranian foreign minister added, “These are American weaponry that is going into our region, making our region ready to explode. So if they want to talk about our missiles, they need first to stop selling all these weapons including missiles to our region.”

More police forces injured in riots than civilians: government

1 → “There is no evidence for what they claim,” he said. “We will announce the death toll honestly and by province and by cause.”

The spokesman also said the only reason the government has not announced the death toll is a request to hold off by the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) — a body responsible to safeguard the country’s security.

“The government, via coordination with the Judiciary and the Interior Ministry, will announce the death toll soon,” Rabiei said.

The remarks came a few weeks after protests erupted in some cities in Iran against increasing gasoline price.

In certain cases, the protests turned violent as some rioters clashed with police, using knives and guns.

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

The protests lasted just for a few days.

Based on “credible reports”, Amnesty International claimed recently that at least 208 people were killed during the unrest. The number has been widely used by news media outlets despite the fact that Iran has repeatedly rejected any international estimate as “invalid”.

Soon after the protests erupted, Ayatollah Khamenei supported the government’s decision, putting an end to doubts and possible moves to reverse the decision.

The Leader said he had previously announced that since he was not an expert on the issue, he would support any decision made by heads of the three branches of government and the experts.

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

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

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

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	335791.9
IFX	4351.07

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,435 rials
GBP	55,215 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$63.76/b
WTI	\$58.56/b
OPEC Basket	\$64.81/b
Gold	\$1,465.65/oz
Silver	\$816.67/oz
Platinum	\$894.55/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Stability to come back to forex market: CBI governor

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) said that the bank will bring stability back to the forex market, IRIB reported.

"We do not let any excitement affect this market and as we managed to control the forex rate during the past year we are trying to bring stability to this market again", Abdolnaser Hemmati said on Monday, while expressing hope that normal condition will be created in the market.

He mentioned gasoline rationing plan implemented since November 15 and also submitting the national budget bill to the parliament yesterday and the issues relating to different sectors of the bill as two major factors affecting the forex rates and said those who want to raise the rates uses such things to make shocks to the market.

The Iranian government has 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.

The increase in the gasoline price has risen prices in some other markets including gold and foreign currency markets.

Tehran hosting intl. exhibitions of paint, textile

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Two international exhibitions kicked off at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Monday and will run until Thursday, IRIB reported.

The 19th International Paint, Resin, Coatings, Composites and Plating Industries Fair (IPCC 2019) is hosting 240 Iranian and 55 foreign companies from 18 countries including Spain, France, Germany, U.S., Taiwan, India, China, South Korea, Russia, Italy, Sweden, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan.

And the 25th International Exhibition of Textile Machinery, Raw Materials, Home Textiles, Embroidery Machines and Textile Products (IRANTEX 2019) is a place for tens of companies from Iran and some other countries including Italy, Belgium, Germany, Russia, Turkey, India, Spain, Ukraine and Australia to present their capabilities in different investment and trade areas.

France to test digital currency in Q1 2020

France intends on testing its central bank digital currency (CBDC) in the first quarter of 2020. According to a report by Les Echos, the Banque de France aims at becoming the first in Europe to launch a CBDC. The bank will seek to use the digital currency to improve the efficiency of the country's financial system.

The governor of the Banque de France François Villeroy de Galhau revealed that the currency will be reserved for financial institutions.

Speaking at an event organized by the French Prudential Supervision and Resolution Authority, the governor stated, "We intend to start experimenting quickly and launch a call for projects (for private sector players) by the end of the first quarter of 2020."

The French government is acting in haste as it seeks to counter the efforts of private institutions such as Facebook's Libra and other governments as well, such as China.

The governor admitted to this, stating that the CBDC would give the French government the leverage it needs "for asserting our sovereignty against private initiatives of the Libra type."

The Banque de France also intends to stay ahead of other major economies which have expressed similar interests, key among them China. By becoming the first major economy in Europe to issue a CBDC, it would establish itself as a leader on the field. The governor noted that France intends to be the "first issuer at the international level and thus derive the benefits reserved for a reference CBDC."

The CBDC will be for institutional use for now. The Banque de France has put some thought into retail use, but this is just hypothetical for now. Retail CBDC would be a lot more complicated to issue and govern, the governor stressed.

The regulator would also have to put in place measures to prevent the abuse of such a currency, including thresholds on the amount of money that can be sent anonymously, he stated.

For the most part, the race to launch the first CBDC has been seen as just theoretical. However, the governor of the French central bank has revealed that there's indeed a race, and France intends to win it.

The deputy director of the People's Bank of China also previously confirmed that the Asian country also sees it as a race.

"In the future, the process of digital currency issuance will be the way of horse racing, the leader will win the entire market; who is more efficient, who can better serve the public, who it will survive in the future; if a front-runner takes the lead in taking action, the technology they use will be adopted by other parties."

(Source: coingeek.com)

Iran expects to sell 1m bpd of oil at \$50 next year

ECONOMY TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani submitted the administration's draft of the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1399 to the Majlis on Sunday. 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.

It has envisaged 2.61 quadrillion rials (about \$62.14 billion) of incomes, while 3.67 quadrillion rials (about \$87.38 billion)

of expenses. 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



Mohammad-Baqer Nobakht, the head of Iran's Planning and Budget Organization (PBO) 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."

FDI in Iran rises 20% in 7 months on year

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Iran has risen 20 percent during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-October 22) from the same period of time in the past year, Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejpasand announced on Monday.

The minister said the country has witnessed this rise in the FDI while there has been the tough condition of the sanctions, IRNA reported.

While the sanctions are targeting the country's economy, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs is seriously pursuing its plans to counter the sanction effects, Dejpasand highlighted.

As previously announced by the official, the foreign investment attracted into the country during the current year's summer period (June 22-September 22) increased by 20 percent compared to the last year's same period.

Dejpasand on Monday also elaborated on his ministry's programs to nullify the sanctions through measures such as strengthening trade and exports and providing required funds for infrastructure and production projects specially through allocation of banking facilities.

He further mentioned reforming the banking system as one of his major programs since taking his post as the minister.

Last week the official announced that over 170 trillion rials (about \$4.04 billion) worth of Iranian banks' excess properties have been put for sale as



part of a plan to reform the country's banking sector.

Speaking in a ceremony for unveiling a website designed for this purpose, Dejpasand said the plan is a step toward liberalizing the banks' resources to provide facilities for the country's productive sector and to create more jobs.

Mentioning the fact that the excess assets of the country's banks are much more than what has currently been offered for sale, the official noted that in this phase only 170 trillion rials of such properties will be offered for sale.

"The mentioned assets could also be auctioned in collaboration with the stock exchange," he said.

Some of the mentioned properties include 1,246 factory units and more than 277 livestock production units which investors can purchase or manage based on their expertise and experience.

According to the official, the proceeds from this plan will be injected into the banks again and the government won't be the beneficiary in any case.

TPO to hold seminar for introducing Indian market

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) plans to hold a seminar on December 18, to introduce potentials and capacities of the Indian market for Iranian traders and businessmen, the TPO portal announced.

The seminar, which is set to be held in collaboration with the Iran-India Joint Chamber of Commerce, aims to provide an opportunity for the Iranian businessmen and traders to get familiar with India's potential areas for cooperation, and collect information about the capacities and opportunities in the mentioned market.

In an exclusive interview with the Iran Labor News Agency (ILNA) published in August, Indian Ambassador to Iran Gaddam Dharmendra said that his country's ties with Tehran would not be influenced by other countries.

"Bilateral discussions between Indian prime minister and Iran's president have led to a diversification of trade exchanges", the ambassador noted.

With regard to how U.S. sanctions can affect the volume of trade between Iran and India, he said, "We do not adjust our relations with Iran based on the behavior of other countries. Iran is our neighbor and we have extensive relations with Iran. We saw a rise of more than 25% in bilateral trade as compared to last year."

The ambassador also said that sanctions are making officials on both sides to think of diversifying their trade ties beyond the energy sector. "Tehran-New Delhi relations were mostly in the



field of energy, and Iran exported oil to India and India exported items to Iran that were not in balance before."

"But now regarding new issues, we have to see what we can do about Iranian oil. India-Iran bilateral trade stands at more than \$ 17 billion (2018-19). This is an increase of 25%. At present, commodities like Basmati rice, Soybean meal, black tea and cane sugar are seeing an upward trend."

According to Dharmendra, the U.S. sanctions against Iran are a new challenge which nevertheless offers an opportunity for both countries.

Members of Iran-India chambers of commerce, manufacturers and traders must explore ways to further boost trade between the two countries, he suggested.

"Both Iran and India are large, developing economies with solid fundamentals. Both countries are benefiting from their respective demographic advantages. I see our economic partnership as being on a positive trajectory," the Indian ambassador stated.

Iran, Oman ink agreement to broaden maritime co-op

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran and Oman signed a maritime cooperation agreement on Sunday, aiming for boosting maritime transportation between the two countries, the portal of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) reported.

The agreement was signed in a ceremony attended by senior officials from both sides including Iranian Minister of Transport and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami and Oman's Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, and heads of the two countries' ports and maritime organizations.

As reported, the two ministers inked the agreement. Speaking in the signing ceremony, Iranian Transport Minister Mohammad Eslami said "signing of this agreement will facilitate trade and business interactions between the two countries, using the two sides' maritime capacities."

"This is the first time that Iran signs and exchanges a maritime transport document with the friend country

Oman," he added. Under the agreement, Iranian traders and businessmen interact constructively with their Omani counterparts, and regular shipping lines will be established between the two countries, while the two sides will also provide facilities for using each other's ports, the official explained.

Masoud al Sunaidy also expressed satisfaction with the signing of the agreement, saying: "Once the agreement's finalized copies are received, it will be implemented immediately."

He further expressed hope that signing of this agreement would encourage and stimulate an increase in the two countries' trade turnover.

Iran and Oman have already launched four direct shipping lines between the two countries ports.

Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy traveled to Iran on top of a trade delegation to attend the 18th meeting of Iran-Oman Joint Economic Committee in Tehran.



Iranian Minister of Transport and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami (R) and Oman's Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy signing maritime cooperation agreement documents in Tehran on Sunday

The good news about South Africa's economy

The economic outlook for 2020 is gloomy for us in South Africa. Our GDP is shrinking, our economy is stagnant and we're teetering on a rating downgrade. Our state-owned enterprises are failing, we have an above-average public sector wage bill and substantial budget deficit.

And while the official stats don't show an increase in emigration, we all know somebody skilled leaving the country; taking their money and ingenuity with them in search of greener pastures. Their departure is leaving the property market flooded and again, while the monthly FNB House Price Index for November shows a 3.8% growth in year-on-year property prices, this is the lowest it's been since 2011.

Anecdotally, we also know that those leaving are selling their homes at five-years-ago (or more) prices.

But in general, we South Africans are an optimistic bunch. As Adrian Gore, Group Chief Executive at Discovery, succinctly explained in an article backing South Africa earlier this year, our private optimism is contrasted with a persistent and pervasive public pessimism.

This optimism paradox – the gap between private hope and public despair – is an intriguing idiosyncrasy, he said, and



yet global research released by YouGov in September supports his view by showing that 64% of South Africans view themselves as optimists, 8% above the global average. It's interesting to note that according to a neuroscientist at University College London, optimism this bias affects about 80% of humans worldwide.

■ The cost of borrowing rises

So, while researchers at the University of Cape Town say there is circumstantial evidence from countries that were recently downgraded to junk status that this can hasten an economic crisis as their cost of borrowing rises, along with the likelihood of

further currency depreciation, other market commentators say a further downgrade for South Africa could coincide with a risk-on period in which emerging markets are flooded by money searching for yield.

Risk, I believe, is the key here; for anyone with the appetite and a medium- to long-term view on the future of this country and its economy, opportunity is rife.

Bargain-basement prices across some sectors of the volatile property market offer ample opportunity, whether to convert to Airbnb-type accommodation, shared office spaces, or simply fix up and re-sell. The lower- to mid-priced areas continue to attract

strong demand from prospective homeowners, according to FNB's Affordable Market Insights report.

Businesses of all types and sizes are also up for sale. Owners are either leaving or battling with sustainability but either way, they want out at almost any cost. This is leaving business brokers with plenty of well-priced stock on their books. It's a buyer's market and there are bargains aplenty for cash buyers.

The #I'mStaying movement on social media, launched just three months ago and already at over 900 000 followers on the official Facebook page, is an indication of the local mood.

People from all walks of life are staying put for a wide variety of reasons. They're optimistic, and a recent survey of over 2 000 Americans showed that 90% of optimists had put aside money for a major purchase compared to just 70% of pessimists.

So whether these stayers are future customers and consumers or have money to shop for deals in a buyer's market, good deals are available to be done.

It's tough out there, but if you have the appetite and vision for opportunity, the dark South African economic cloud does have a silver lining.

(Source: fn24.com)

Iran's gas industry to be fully indigenized within 5 years

ENERGY TEHRAN — Head of National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said his company is seriously pursuing a plan for indigenizing all the technology and equipment needed in the country's gas industry within the next five years, IRIB reported on Monday.

Speaking in the opening ceremony of the country's first Gas Tech Show, which is an event focusing on technology development for the gas industry's necessary equipment, Hassan Montazer Torbati said "In this process, we completely indigenize the technology and equipment required in the gas industry so that we won't need to import any technology or equipment in all the industry chain from refining to distribution."

"Reaching self-sufficiency and domestic production is a long term process that is not easily achieved, however in recent years we have pursued it seriously and we are achieving positive outcomes," he said. In the gas industry, we have achieved



a considerable degree of self-sufficiency, and since the industry was officially formed after the revolution, it now has the highest self-sufficiency rate, he added.

According to the official the oil ministry has been seriously supporting the country's knowledge-based companies and startups and has encouraged their contribution to the country's oil and gas industry.

Back in June, NIGC held a reverse pitch panel to address the industry's technological issues, and to benefit from the capabilities and capacities of the knowledge-based companies and academics active in the industry.

According to Torbati, after assessment and prioritization, practical ideas which offered appropriate and executive solutions to the targeted issues would be chosen to go through trials in the form of research projects and finally be implemented.

Despite the unjust U.S. sanctions, Iran has made considerable advances in science and technology in almost all areas during the past 30 years.

In recent years, the growth in Iran's scientific output is reported to be among the fastest in the world.

Oil prices stumble on weak China exports hangover

Oil prices fell on Monday after data showing China's overall exports of goods and services shrank for a fourth straight month, sending shivers through a market already concerned about damage being done to global demand by the Sino-U.S. trade war.

Brent futures LCOc1 were down 33 cents, or 0.5%, at \$64.06 per barrel by 0055 GMT, after gaining about 3% last week, boosted by news that OPEC and allies would deepen output cuts.

West Texas Intermediate oil futures CL1 were down 37 cents, or 0.6% to \$58.85 a barrel, having risen about 7% last week on prospects for lower production from 'OPEC+', the Organ-

ization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and associated producers including Russia.

Monday's sudden chill came after customs data released on Sunday showed exports from the world's second-biggest economy in November fell 1.1% from a year earlier - a sharp reversal from expectations for a 1% increase in a Reuters poll of analysts.

The weak start to the week came despite data showing China's crude imports jumped a record, revealing just how deep jitters are embedded in the market over the U.S.-China trade row that has stymied global growth and

oil demand.

The sagging export data is a "casualty again of the protracted trade war," said Stephen Innes chief Asia market strategist at AxiTrader.

Washington and Beijing have been trying to agree a trade deal that will end tit-for-tat tariffs, but talks have dragged on for months as they wrangle over key details.

Monday's price drops put an end to a strong run in previous sessions fueled by hopes for the OPEC+ production curbs deal.

On Friday, those producers agreed to deepen their output cuts from 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) to 1.7 million bpd, representing about

1.7% of global production.

Still, U.S. production has surged since the OPEC+ cuts were first introduced in 2017 in an attempt to drain a supply glut that had long weighed on prices. Output there has risen even as the drill count has fallen, reflecting more efficient well extraction.

Energy services firm Baker Hughes said in its closely watched weekly drilling report on Friday that the U.S. drill count fell in the week to Dec. 6 - a seventh week of decline.

Drilling companies cut five oil rigs, leaving a total of 661, the lowest since April 2017.

(Source: reuters.com)

Wind energy already serves 6% of the world's electricity demand

Renewable energy today employs twice as many people as the oil industry (oil and gas). The International Renewable Energy Agency estimates that photovoltaics, wind energy, concentrated solar power and other renewable energy employ more than eleven million people. The energy transition is a revolution.

The wind power sector expects to install more electric power in the next five years than the one installed by nuclear power in the last 40 years. And the solar photovoltaic, too.

Wind energy, which already serves 6% of the world's electricity demand, is the main protagonist of this revolution. He is the protagonist on land, where he already produces electricity in many regions of the planet at a cost that competes without aid and wins gas.

And protagonist in the seas, where not only is it a reality (23,000 megawatts installed offshore wind farm), but it is about to open the biggest window of energy opportunity of the century: the one that offers the most powerful and constant winds, the most away, those who only blow very far from the coast.

There the wind turbines cannot be cemented (given the depth of the water), but they can operate on floating platforms. And the floating wind farm is already here: the first installation was inaugurated in 2017; and, although its cost per megawatt is still high, the big economies - USA, China, India, EU - have already turned their gaze to that mine, because their costs are falling at a strong pace and the resource is formidable.

The floating wind turbines

According to the International Energy Agency, floating wind turbines can supply several times the demand for electricity from several key markets, "including Europe, U.S. and Japan."

According to the European employers of the photovoltaic solar sector, between 2019 and 2023, the world will add to the global photovoltaic park (which already has 600 gigawatts of power) between 800 and 1,300 gigawatts (GW) more: a growth of between +60% and +160%.

To give us an idea of the magnitude, after 60 years of history, nuclear today has 396 GW of generation power worldwide. Among the ten countries with the most photovoltaic power connected, there are four continents: U.S., Korea, Australia or Germany.

In 2018, photovoltaic installed more power than any other electricity generation technology: 100 GW (compared to 54 GW of wind or 6 net of nuclear). In spite of this, the contribution of the photovoltaic solar to the global mix today represents only 2.6% of the demand for electricity in the world, compared to 38% of coal, 23% of gas, 20% of hydraulics and biomass, 10% of nuclear ... the energy revolution is just emerging.

Between 2010 and 2017, the price of solar modules has fallen by 80%. The Spanish Photovoltaic Union estimates that between 2009 and 2019, costs have been reduced by 95%

(Source: ewind.es)

The most important thing to know about the Saudi Aramco IPO

Saudi Aramco's initial public offering (IPO) is set to begin trading Wednesday, and expect the financial media industrial complex to go into overdrive.

Aramco matters quite a bit, as the world's swing producer of oil. As long as the global economy is powered by dead dinosaurs, and it looks to be for the foreseeable future, that one company's health matters to quite literally billions of people.

But not the IPO, which will raise nearly \$26 billion and give Aramco a \$1.7 trillion valuation.

The IPO is targeted at Saudi nationals as well as a few strategic investors, as a gaggle of investment bankers failed to tempt international investors.

It is a bit of a strange offering. The good news, to Saudi investors, is that the Saudi government is giving one bonus share for every ten shares bought and held for six months.

The less good news is that if the oil price goes up, the Saudi government extracts more in royalties.

More pertinently, the Saudi government calls the shots on production. Aramco has a board and executive management, but it's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who's the effective CEO.

Still, Aramco is hardly the only company where shareholders have very little power. The share, for example, can be sold for Facebook.

Aswath Damodaran, a New York University professor, calculated Aramco

at a valuation of \$1.7 trillion might be a pretty good investment for Saudi nationals, but just for the dividends as the stock price won't have much room to appreciate.

These Saudi investors are getting an absolute monster of a company. Aramco earned \$111 billion in 2018, according to its prospectus - roughly double what Apple did - after producing 13.6 million barrels per day of oil equivalent.

Its reserves were five times larger than that of its largest rivals - ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell, Total and BP - combined. If there is any relevance to the IPO, it's whether it means that the oil giant will produce more or less.

For every \$1 increase in oil prices, Aramco's profits rise by \$1.5 billion, according to an estimate from Bernstein Research. By contrast, every 1% increase in production boosts the company's bottom line by \$1 billion.

But remember, those decisions will be made by the Saudi government, and not for the shareholders who will control about 1.5% of the company.

"This IPO is about national transformation, strengthening the Public Investment Fund, and delivering Vision 2030," said the Bernstein analysts.

The Public Investment Fund is Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, and Vision 2030 is bin Salman's plan to diversify the Saudi Arabia economy.

(Source: hellenicshippingnews.com)

The danger of deeper OPEC+ cuts

By Nick Cunningham

OPEC+ agreed to cut production by 500,000 bpd, sending oil prices higher on Friday. During mid-day trading, WTI was just shy of \$60 per barrel, and Brent moved closer to \$65.

In total, the 1.2 million-barrel-per-day (mb/d) cuts from OPEC will rise to 1.7 mb/d. Those details had been reported on Thursday. But when OPEC+ made it official on Friday, Saudi Arabia also assured the market that it would continue with its voluntary cuts beyond what is required.

With the Saudi cuts, the total contributions rise to 2.1 mb/d of reductions. The deal takes effect in January, and the group will meet again in March. Of the 500,000 bpd in extra cuts, OPEC will shoulder around 372,000 bpd and the non-OPEC group led by Russia will take on 131,000 bpd.

In a statement, OPEC noted the importance of "each individual country adhering to their voluntary production adjustments." It was a diplomatic way of calling out the countries that fell short on compliance for much of this year, such as Iraq and Nigeria.

What to make of all of this? OPEC+ clearly wanted to head off the supply surplus that most analysts saw coming in 2020. The deal defied predictions from most analysts, who saw a simple extension as all but inevitable. Getting everyone on board for additional cuts was a big lift.

The deal last through March

However, the deal only lasts through March. While it can obviously be extended, OPEC+ seems to think that the surplus might be temporary and solvable.

There are a few other factors that slightly undercut



the impact. Most important is that the group was already over-complying with the agreement, which is to say, they were already cutting deeper.

"Thanks to voluntary and involuntary production cuts, OPEC has been producing considerably less than stipulated in the agreement for months," Commerzbank said in a note. "In other words, the latest decisions change very little."

The investment bank went on to add that the danger is not over for OPEC. "We believe that Saturday's decisions do not go far enough. After all, the oversupply in the first quarter of 2020 is far higher than 500,000 barrels per day," Commerzbank said on Friday.

"What is more, it remains unclear how the sizeable oversupply that will likewise be seen in the second quarter can be contained without production cuts." As a result, the bank sees downside risks to oil prices.

Other analysts also pointed out the challenges with only a 3-month deal.

The key take-away

The "key take-away thus far is that a formalized agreement until only March 2020 doesn't do much to help the market price its perspectives beyond that point, or in other words it almost increases the relative level of uncertainty the market has to deal with and leaves lots of room for speculation," JBC Energy said in a note on Friday.

Goldman Sachs pointed out that the short duration might allow Saudi Arabia to "walk away" if other producers did not fully comply.

But it could also merely be a sign that OPEC+ feels that its task is not all that daunting. "We really do see some risks of oversupply in the first quarter due to lower seasonal demand for refined products and for crude oil," Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said.

The extent of the surplus - and the extent of OPEC's challenge in balancing the market - will very much depend on whether or not U.S. shale can continue to grow. Rystad Energy said in a report that it sees shale growth continuing, even if WTI remains stuck in the mid-\$50s. That remains to be seen, and the financial stress spreading in the industry will pose enormous challenges to drillers trying to maintain growth.

But the OPEC+ cuts could throw shale drillers a lifeline if it succeeds in boosting prices.

The danger for the cartel is that if the cuts work too well - if they raise prices too high - U.S. shale could bounce back, potentially increasing the pace of drilling and threatening another wave of supply. Then, OPEC+ might need to extend the cuts again.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Total opens Asia Pacific HQ in Singapore to drive regional growth in fossil fuels, renewable businesses

By Ovais Subhani

French energy giant Total S.A. reaffirmed its commitment to Singapore as a strategic hub by opening its regional headquarters in Frasers Tower in Cecil Street to manage its businesses across Asia Pacific.

"Today, we mark yet another milestone of Total's partnership with Singapore," said Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean on Monday at the inauguration ceremony of the office which will have 500 employees.

"This opening is a testament to Total's significant growth in Singapore and its commitment to our partnership."

Starting its operations in 1982 with oil trading and lubricant products sales, the international oil and gas company has steadily expanded its presence in the Republic retailing petrochemicals, marketing petroleum products and related services.

Total's lubricants blending plant at Singapore Lube Park in Tuas is its largest and most modern in the world.

"Total's new regional headquarters is a signal of our continued strong confidence in Singapore as an attractive business destination and talent hub for our diverse business including exploration and production, gas, renewable and power, refining & chemicals; marketing and services; trading and shipping; and Total Global Services," said Mr. Christian Cabrol, president and chief executive of Total Asia Pacific, and Country Chair Singapore.

Total's recent ventures

Mr. Teo recounted Total's recent ventures in the country that include the company's partnership with Singapore's Pavilion Energy to build up the liquefied natural gas (LNG) bunkering eco-system, and with the Adani Group to supply and market LNG in India.

Total is the second-largest private global LNG player, with a global market share of 10 percent.

Total sells LNG in markets worldwide, with stakes in liquefaction plants in the Middle East, Africa, the United States and Australia.

Singapore is one of their first movers in providing LNG as an alternative to High Sulphur Fuel Oil for bunkering fuel for ships, said Teo.

The switch to LNG would help shipping companies meet the International Maritime Organization's regulation to reduce the global sulphur limit for marine fuel from the current 3.5 percent to 0.5 percent from January 2020.

Mr. Teo said to date, Singapore has supplied LNG to 170 vessels using tanker trucks and its first LNG bunker vessel is slated to arrive in the third quarter of 2020.

The bunker vessel will enable catering of LNG as marine fuel to large vessels, he added.

Total has joined Singapore in efforts to deploy more renewable energy in the country's energy mix, said the minister.

The company equipped its Tuas lubricant plant to meet 35 percent of the site's energy needs through solar energy, and avoid up to 528 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions a year.

Singapore's ambitious target

Singapore recently announced an ambitious target to deploy 2 Gigawatt peak of solar energy by 2030, which is about 10 percent of Singapore's peak daily electricity demand today.

Said Mr. Teo: "We will also support energy companies that are moving into renewables, by streamlining our regulations and promoting innovation and research & development."

Singapore is also Total's hub for its renewable energy business in Asia.

Through Total Solar DG Southeast Asia, a wholly owned affiliate of Total Solar Distributed Generation, the Group is one of the major international providers of fully integrated solar solutions for commercial and industrial customers in Southeast Asia.

Earlier this year, Hutchinson SA, a subsidiary of Total, set up a "Digital Research Lab for Asia" which will have more than 10 data scientists and Internet Of Things (IOT) engineers working on deploying innovative rubber- and thermoplastics-based product solutions for the automotive and aerospace industries.

The opening of Total's regional HQ signifies Total's confidence in Singapore as a strategic hub for its operations in the region, said Mr. Teo.

"I hope that your significant presence in Singapore will open more doors to explore further avenues for growth in business, innovation and Research and Development to build an innovative and sustainable energy sector, and contribute new solutions to global climate action together."

(Source: straitstimes.com)

Saudi Aramco's shipping arm looks to charter tankers in LNG foray-sources

Saudi Aramco's shipping arm Bahri has issued an expression of interest (EOI) to charter up to 12 liquefied natural gas (LNG) tankers from 2025, its first foray into the superchilled fuel, industry sources said on Monday.

No further details were immediately available and Saudi Aramco declined to comment. EOIs are preliminary enquiries that may or may not turn into full-fledged orders.

According to Bahri's website, the national shipping carrier of Saudi Arabia has six business units dealing in oil, chemicals, logistics, dry bulk, ship management and data and owns 90 vessels, including 43 very large crude carriers (VLCCs) and 36 chemical/product tankers.

Bahri's EOI is likely part of Aramco's expansion into LNG trading as it boosts gas production and considers expanding its LNG investments, the sources said.

The Saudi state oil giant plans to become a major global gas player and has been developing its own gas resources as well as eyeing gas assets in the United States, Russia, Australia and Africa, the company's chief executive officer and the Saudi energy minister have said.

In May, it signed a 20-year agreement to buy LNG from a forthcoming export terminal in Port Arthur, Texas that U.S.-based Sempra Energy is developing. It also agreed to buy a 25% equity stake in the first phase of the multibillion-dollar project.

The company's trading arm, Aramco Trading Co, is also expected to hire an LNG trader to join its team in Singapore in January, industry sources said.

It is also looking to hire an LNG operations coordinator in Singapore to provide support for LNG contract negotiations, LNG ship chartering and shipping operations, according to Aramco's website.

The person will work closely with traders to provide operations support and jointly implement trading strategies, according to the job description.

(Source: Reuters.com)

Freedom in U.S. shallow, fake: American analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – A political expert based in the US city of Atlanta described freedom in the country as “shallow and fake” and said if Washington denies something requested by Israel, pressure groups like AIPAC and the ADL go to work “interfering” in US domestic affairs.

December, 04, 2019 - 17:14 World Comments

Freedom in US Shallow, Fake: American Analyst

“For the best example of how shallow and fake freedom is, look at when Israel wants something from the US,” Jim W. Dean, the managing editor of VeteransToday.com, told Tasnim in an interview.



“If the particular government ministry denies their request, then pressure groups like AIPAC and the ADL go to work ‘interfering’ in US domestic affairs via our compromised Congress that cannot stand up to a little country in the Mideast the size of metro Atlanta,” he added. Jim Dean is a regular geopolitical commentator on various media outlets around the world. He and Sr. Editor Gordon Duff have begun their own bridge building campaign with Iranian university youth via Skype conferences. Jim comes from an old military family going back to the American Revolution.

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 power of the State is inherently corrupt, primarily due to special interests that wield huge political power over government through their power of campaign donations. Both Democrats and Republicans line up shoulder to shoulder when it comes to their slogan of “pursuing our interests.” They love the vague term because they can interpret it any way needed to fit the situation. The most common application is to remove a government not subservient to US business interests that want to asset strip a foreign country. If Russia would prefer a US president less Russophobic, then that would be presented as an attack on the foundation of US democracy.

For the best example of how shallow and fake freedom is, look at when Israel wants something from the US. If the particular government ministry denies their request, then pressure groups like AIPAC and the ADL go to work “interfering” in US domestic affairs via our compromised Congress that cannot stand up to a little country in the Mideast the size of metro Atlanta.

■ 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: Academics are free to pursue anything they want unless it upsets a powerful business or political entity whose support is deemed valuable to local, state, and federal elected politicians, especially those who seek higher office with bigger campaign bills. This has gotten so bad that Israel operatives came out with a new plan. Instead of having to do the lobbying work to coerce Congress to block something they do not like, they conspired with Congressional people they controlled and came up with this plan to actually make it illegal to speak out politically against Israel, e.g. for Americans who support the BDS movement, by classifying it as a violation of our hate laws.

The Israel Lobby focused on getting these anti-BDS bills passed in State legislatures first to establish a political momentum to carry it up to the federal level. Any state politician voting against it knew they would be targeted with an Israeli Lobby funded opponent. So far, no one has brought a challenge to the US Supreme Court, where our Constitution’s First Amendment on freedom of speech will be ultimately judged to be real or subject to veto by Israel and its political terrorism operation inside the US.

■ 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 French are in much better shape than Americans, with the Israelis having subverted our own government, and with no effective enforcement from our security organizations, which is a sad story in itself. There have been no protests in America on the scale of the Yellow Vests since our Vietnam War, where many of our Veterans Today colleagues were involved.

Where the Yellow Vests have a chance to win is in joining with other citizen groups with a variety of interests, because they understand that only with bigger numbers can they really pressure the State to heed their demands. France is looking at major strikes, starting with a railroad strike on Thursday, which I do not support as the workers are demanding to keep their retirement age of 50, which is ridiculous, a form of worker elitism. Farmers are protesting, as they end up having to work until they no longer can. If these groups can pull together, they have a chance to bring Macron down, but huge multi-faction strikes also hurt the general public, where the strikers need their support.

‘Gaza Fights for freedom’: An antidote to Israel’s criminal propaganda

By Belen Fernandez

On 1 June 2018, 21-year-old Palestinian paramedic Razan al-Najjar was shot and killed by Israeli forces while tending to casualties during the Great March of Return - the unarmed protests that had begun two months earlier along the Gaza Strip’s border with Israel and that continue to this day. In predictable fashion, Israeli officials have cast the protesters - from children to elderly women to disabled persons - as diabolical minions sent by Hamas to lay waste to Israel via “kite and balloon terrorism” and other Scary Stuff.

As with every other manifestation of the Palestinian demand for dignity, Israel has used the Great March of Return as an opportunity to engage in mass slaughter: on a single day in May 2018, some 59 protesters were killed, including children. As with every other manifestation of the Palestinian demand for dignity, Israel has used the Great March of Return as an opportunity to engage in mass slaughter. In the case of al-Najjar and other medics targeted by Israeli snipers, the whole pesky business of war crimes is magically dispensed with Israel’s signature assault on logic, according to which Palestinian doctors are merely “human shields” for Hamas - and thus, somehow, fair game.

For an antidote to Israel’s criminal propaganda surrounding the Great March of Return, a good place to start is Gaza Fights for Freedom, a new film by the Empire Files’ Abby Martin. From film footage of al-Najjar and interviews with her family members and colleagues, it becomes evident that - forget the “human shield” business - her real crime was in fact being entirely human.

Al-Najjar’s mother recounts how her daughter was most affected by the death of a deaf protester named Abu Sabla: “When he was shot he fell into her arms, so she held him with her hands. His brain went entirely out of his head and into her hands.”

Obviously, humanity is not something that can be attributed to any component of the Israeli killing machine - as is particularly clear in footage recorded by Israeli soldiers themselves, who yelp and shriek with delight as they apparently shoot a Palestinian child through the border fence: “Wow what a video! Yes! That son of a bitch.”

While al-Najjar is certainly one of the heroines of Gaza Fights for Freedom, the film covers a ton of other ground. Martin exhaustively categorises Israel’s violations of international law, providing details of Palestinian victims too often written off as



“collateral damage” - or worse, “terrorists”. There’s the 29-year-old man, for example, whose legs were both amputated following an Israeli air strike in 2008 and who, a decade later, is finished off by Israeli snipers as he sits in his wheelchair at the protest.

There’s the man who is shot while smoking a cigarette, and the man who is shot while wrapped in a Palestinian flag. There’s the two-year-old child, the 71-year-old woman. The journalists, the doctors. The list goes on. A report released by an independent commission of the UN Human Rights Council quotes an international journalist covering the Great March of Return, who described the scene on 14 May 2018:

“Every few minutes... you would hear a shot ring out and you would see someone fall. And then another shot and another person fell. It went on for hours... It was surreal and endless. It became almost normal, it was happening so often. A shot, a person falling, people carrying the body away... I have covered wars in Syria, Yemen, Libya. I have never seen anything like this. The slow methodical shooting. It was just shocking.”

As Martin demonstrates in her film, reality rarely factors into media coverage of Israel-Palestine in the United States, fervent backer of the Israeli military and enabler of Israel’s vast repertoire of crimes. A compilation of clips from CNN, Fox News and other outlets illustrates just how maniacally the US media trumpets the Israeli line, transmitting an apocalyptic vision of the Great March of Return as a giant swarm of explosives-laden terrorists

rushing the Israeli border.

In one CNN clip, former Israeli Education Minister Naftali Bennett is given a platform to voice his opinion that “Hamas is conducting massive self-genocide”, while in another Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu swears that Hamas is interested in accruing as many “telegenically dead” Palestinian civilians as possible.

The “self-genocide” assessment is curious, to say the least, coming from the long-time political partner of Ayelet Shaked, the former Israeli justice minister who literally called for the genocide of Palestinians. As for Netanyahu’s musings, perhaps Israel could nip Hamas’ malevolent plot in the bud by simply refraining from regularly massacring Palestinians.

But where Martin’s film really shines is in providing the context for the Gaza protests and the Palestinian struggle in general - a context that Israel and its US buddy consistently strive to make disappear in favour of fabricated, simplistic narratives of Palestinian violence and Israeli victimhood and “self-defence”.

As Martin demonstrates in her film, reality rarely factors into media coverage of Israel-Palestine in the United States, fervent backer of the Israeli military and enabler of Israel’s vast repertoire of crime. She goes back to the beginning, and gives the big picture: from Israel’s violent self-invention on Palestinian land in 1948 - characterised by mass murder, ethnic cleansing, forcible expulsion, and destruction - through to the Israeli military occupation of Gaza, the so-called “withdrawal”, the siege and repeated reduction to rubble of swathes of

the diminutive territory, and so on.

In a place commonly referred to as an “open-air prison” - where the majority of the population consists of refugees barred from returning to their homes in what is now Israel - it’s not enormously difficult to see why people might feel compelled to protest.

Martin also showcases revealing soundbites from Israel’s founding fathers that assist with historical contextualisation, like this one from inaugural Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion: “We must expel the Arabs and take their places.”

Or this one from Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, who in the 1960s fantasised about purging the Gaza Strip of Palestinians: “Perhaps if we don’t give them enough water they won’t have a choice, because the orchards will yellow and wither.”

So much for making the desert bloom. As it turns out, Eshkol’s words were sinisterly prescient. As Martin narrates in the film, “even the UN reports the Gaza Strip will be completely uninhabitable due to lack of water alone by 2020.”

She continues: “97 percent of the fresh water in Gaza is toxic. The vast majority of Gaza’s water desalination plants, which produce fresh water, were destroyed or damaged by Israeli bombs and cannot operate. Fixing them requires importing materials banned by the blockade. Over 25 percent of all diseases in Gaza are directly caused by contaminated water.”

It bears mentioning that Martin herself was denied entry to Gaza by the Israeli government and thus relied on a team of journalists there to film and conduct interviews - perhaps a preferable arrangement in the end, in terms of having Palestinians tell their own stories. Some of the scenes are so beautifully shot - even ones of ubiquitous rubble, or of Israel firing gas canisters at the protests - that I actually had to pause the film at one point and contemplate whether I might be guilty of some form of morbid Orientalism and the fetishisation of destruction. Mercifully, Gaza Fights for Freedom avoids descending into Orientalist romanticisation of the Palestinian struggle. Martin documents a people seeking dignity and basic rights, and ends the film with an appeal for boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel - a state that has “so far enjoyed total protection from the US empire, shielded from accountability by the war machine”.

Because as Gaza fights for freedom, it’s not that we need to come to their rescue. We need to realise that Israel and its imperial backers are the enemy of humanity itself.

Alexander Mercouris: Weaponization of dollar to weaken U.S. economy

TEHRAN (FNA) – Alexander Mercouris, journalist and political commentator, says that Washington’s use of its currency to pursue its policies, including sanctions, makes countries move away from the US dollar in their international trades, ultimately undermining the US economy.

“Dollar is coming under the challenge because the United States no longer has that massive economic dominance that it used to have [...] China, world’s second biggest economy, trading with Russia, world’s sixth biggest economy, in local currencies is already a major blow to the position of the US dollar. Also, because the Chinese-Russian trade centers very much on oil and energy products, a large proportion of the world’s oil trade is no longer going to happen in dollars,” Mercouris said in an exclusive interview with FNA.

Alexander Mercouris is a London-based writer on international affairs with a special interest in law. He has extensively written on constitutionality and international law, being a frequent commentator on television and speaker at conferences. Also, he worked in Royal Courts of Justice in London as a lawyer. Below is the full text of the interview:

■ Why is the dollar used as the world currency?

A: Dollar is the world currency for three reasons: firstly the economic dominance of the United States since the World War II. In 1945, the United States accounted for around the half of the world GDP. So that already made its currency very powerful for world’s trade. Because half of the world trade was already taking place in the United States. Secondly, the United States in 1970s was able to persuade the Persian Gulf oil producers to accept payment for oil in dollars. Oil being the world’s most traded currency, which means all the countries have to have dollars in order to be able to buy oil. Finally, because of the historic position of the United States in dominating certain important financial institutions, including the World Bank and the IMF which designated the payments in dollars. The result was the United States’ economic dominance. All these three factors, however, are coming to an end.



■ How do you find the position of the US dollar in the world trade?

A: Dollar is coming under the challenge because the United States no longer has that massive economic dominance that it used to have. In terms of overall industrial production, it is already overtaken by China. The most people expect in the mid-2020s is that the Chinese economy will grow bigger than that of the United States, even in nominal currency terms. By purchasing power parity terms, it is already bigger. So, China, world’s second biggest economy, trading with Russia, world’s sixth biggest economy, in local currencies is already a major blow to the position of the US dollar. Also, because the Chinese-Russian trade centers very much on oil and energy products, a large proportion of the world’s oil trade is no longer going to happen in dollar.

■ Do you believe the current status of the US economy and currency will last long?

A: The United States no longer considers the reserve currency status of the dollar as a trust upon the United States to manage the world trade and finance system in an impartial way. Instead, it is weaponizing dollar in order to pursue its geo-political objectives. This is happening at the same time as the US’s economic dominance is declining. The United States’ economy now accounts for only 15% of the world’s GDP, a radical shrinking in its economic dominance. Using dollar in the way that it is done now is inevitably going to hasten the move away from the dollar by more and more countries which now buy gold. So, weaponization of the dollar will increasingly undermine its reserve currency status and will ultimately weaken the power of the United States.

NATO at 70: A Troubled future ahead

TEHRAN (FNA) – NATO’s 70th birthday summit was held in London. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance has struggled somewhat to keep its focus in light of a weakened and fractured opponent.

As the former Soviet Union broke apart, NATO has needed to rethink its purpose post-Cold War. With concerns of foreign interference - including the widespread use of “fake news” - to influence election outcomes, such a purpose has perhaps never been more exposed.

Last year’s meeting was marred by clashes between the US and its European allies. At the center of these clashes was President Trump’s insistence that defense spending by its allies needs to increase significantly and better pull its weight in Trump’s eyes. Otherwise, Trump threatened to reduce America’s contribution. This is a strange threat to make to your allies at a critical time. The US is at least formally signed up to standing up for NATO’s mission and goals. Cutting America’s support would undermine this. On the other hand, NATO has failed to refocus its driving purpose after helping win the Cold War.

Publication of an official House of Commons report that officially comments on such alleged interference by Russia in particular on both the EU referendum and 2017 general election has been delayed by British prime minister until after the current general election. It’s impossible to see why this was done unless such a report was fake, or would be hugely damaging to the political positions taken by Prime Minister Boris Johnson. This situation changes conventions.

There is hardly anything new in a PM - or others - blaming foreign interference as something to oppose in an election. What is new is its being allegedly courted. Previously, any such interference would have been seen in a bad light. But now anything that can help the PM keep power does appear to be off limits. One broad implication for NATO is there are question marks - at least in Trump’s US and Boris’ UK - about its commitments, in light of serious question regarding alleged Russian interference in

recent elections. This is a part of NATO finding its feet post-Cold War.

A second implication is that the original Cold War might be over, but there is a new phase resurfacing in the form of a disinformation and political fragmentation strategy some in the West claim to be in operation now. Gone is trying to undermine Western democracies through propaganda of a better tomorrow behind the Iron Curtain. Instead, it is an operation centered around spreading division and fear to undermine enemies instead of winning people over in a more positive way. That’s what they claim Russia has been doing, but in essence, you could very readily find out that Donald Trump and his far right allies in the West are running this very operation, if at all. NATO experts should be asked to give this question a moment of honest thinking: which one of these two is spreading division and fear to undermine the EU, Putin or Trump?

NATO’s divisions are very unlikely to be healed after the summit. Johnson’s presence (and likely comments) caused disagreement. NATO is clearly under strain, but yet no member is calling for its dissolution. The NATO summit coughed up few, if any, surprises as its members remain divided - and their alleged opponents make further progress. Trump and Johnson were more focused on keeping power than their promises or integrity. And this creates a problem not only for them and their countries’ support for NATO but much more. To sum up, the tale of NATO is intertwined with both conflicting realpolitik pursuits and fundamentally divided world views. With the end-of-history high spirit dying down in the West following the 2008 global financial crisis, NATO’s 70th anniversary offered a new candid look at the gradual unraveling of Western dominance. The big anniversary reminded people to do a round of stocktaking. Players within the military bloc of NATO may choose to appease the angry and the dumbfounded for as long as can be done, observers in the global community may as well know better about NATO and its troubled future.

The Campaign to lie America into world war II

THE AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE—A World War II era poster showing portraits of Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill with the title "Liberators of The World". The poster also shows the flags of the Allies, and the sinking of the Japanese battleship Haruna. (Photo by David J. & Janice L. Frent/Corbis via Getty Images)

Seventy-eight years ago, on December 6, 1941, the United States was at peace with world. The next morning, local time, the Empire of Japan bombed the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Four days later, Nazi Germany issued a declaration of war against the United States. The American people were now unalterably involved in a global conflict that would take the lives of over 400,000 of their native sons.

But before Japan opened this door to war, the United States had been the target of an elaborate, covert influence campaign meant to push public opinion, by hook or by crook, into supporting intervention on the side of the British. Conducted by the United Kingdom's MI6 intelligence service, it involved sometimes witting (and often unwitting) collaboration with the highest echelons of the U.S. government and media establishment.

In the early summer of 1940, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill dispatched intelligence agent William Stephenson to North America to establish the innocuous-sounding British Security Coordination (BSC). The Canadian-born Stephenson was a World War I flying ace and wealthy industrialist who had been a close Churchill confidant for several years. Adopting the codename "Intrepid" during his operations, spy-master Stephenson served as the main inspiration for James Bond (whose creator, Ian Fleming, worked with the BSC).

The BSC's base of operations was the 35th floor of Rockefeller Center in New York City, which it occupied rent-free. The influence campaign began in April 1941, employing hundreds of agents, including well-placed individuals in front groups, the government, and polling organizations. Intrepid had his work cut out for him.

Entering 1941, upwards of 80 percent of Americans opposed U.S. intervention in the war in Europe, a sentiment expressed through the America First Committee. Founded in September 1940 by a group of Yale students (including Gerald Ford, Sargent Shriver, and future Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart), at its peak the organization had 800,000 dues paying members and 450 local chapters spread across the country.

"The America First Committee was taking the position that we should not be involved in foreign wars, as we were in World War I," John V. Denson, a distinguished scholar at the Ludwig von Mises Institute and former circuit judge in Alabama, told The American Conservative. "There was a great deal of criticism of [Woodrow] Wilson taking us into World War I, so there was strong sentiment that we were tricked into that war and therefore that we needed to stay out of European wars. That was the America First position. We didn't want England or anyone else dragging us into another war."

This meant that a primary goal of the BSC was to disparage and harass those



Americans opposed to entering World War II. But it couldn't do this in the open. The Fight for Freedom Committee was (like the BSC) established in April 1941 and also headquartered at Rockefeller Center. There it announced that the United States ought to accept "the fact that we are at war, whether declared or undeclared."

In September 1941, when North Dakota Senator Gerald Nye, an anti-interventionist and scourge of the armaments industry, gave a speech in Boston, Fight for Freedom demonstrators booed and heckled him while handing out 25,000 pamphlets labeling him an "appeaser and Nazi-lover." Similarly, when New York Congressman Hamilton Fish III, an irritable thorn in Franklin Roosevelt's side, held a rally in Milwaukee, a Fight for Freedom member interrupted his speech to hand him a placard: "Der Fuhrer thanks you for your loyalty." Reporters, alerted ahead of time, made sure photos of the scene were reprinted nationwide. When Charles Lindbergh, the aviator and the America First Committee's most popular speaker, addressed a rally at Madison Square Garden in October 1941, Fight for Freedom attempted to sow confusion by printing duplicate tickets. Lindbergh still successfully spoke to over 20,000 supporters, not including an agent provocateur who tried to cause a stir by yelling, "Hang Roosevelt!" (In actuality, it would be Lindbergh's infamous September 11 remarks in Des Moines that would do more to damage the non-interventionist cause than any of the BSC-orchestrated hijinks.)

A 1945 study by BSC historians described their efforts: "Personalities were discredited, their unsavory pasts were dug up, their utterances were printed and reprinted.... Little by little, a sense of guilt crept through the cities and across the states. The campaign took hold."

To promote the influence campaign, Stephenson gave large sums of money every month to the heads of media outlets like the Overseas News Agency or the WRUL radio station, and in exchange they would publish or broadcast "fake news" overseas. The stories were often fictional accounts of the British war effort and were promptly republished by

American newspapers, which believed them to be credible. By the fall of 1941, the BSC was pushing out 20 to 25 phony stories a week. Stephenson's influence campaign was at its most effective when he used his political connections to shape the Roosevelt administration's policy. It was Stephenson who suggested that prominent lawyer William J. Donovan be made "Coordinator of Information" (whose office was also in Rockefeller Center). Describing this appointment, the late historian Ralph Raico wrote, "Through Stephenson, Churchill was virtually in control of William Donovan's organization, the embryonic U.S. intelligence service." Donovan, who the British described as "our man," later headed the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the CIA.

With the pieces in place, Stephenson directed British lyricist Eric Maschwitz to create two forgeries: one, a map showing a German war plan to occupy South America; the other, a Nazi plan to abolish the world's religions. These fake documents were provided by the BSC to Donovan, who gave them to the president. "I have in my possession a secret map made in Germany by Hitler's government—by the planners of the new world order," Franklin Roosevelt announced during an October 27 radio address at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. "It is a map of South America and a part of Central America, as Hitler proposes to reorganize it.... This map makes clear the Nazi design not only against South America but against the United States itself."

"Your government has in its possession another document made in Germany by Hitler's government," continued Roosevelt. "It is a plan to abolish all existing religions—Protestant, Catholic, Mohammedan, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish alike.... In the place of the Bible, the words of Mein Kampf will be imposed and enforced as Holy Writ. And in place of the cross of Christ will be put two symbols—the swastika and the naked sword."

Donovan, aware that Stephenson had given him falsified information in the past, almost certainly knew the documents were forgeries. But what about President Roosevelt?

Henry Hemming, author of *Agents of Influence: A British Campaign, a Canadian Spy, and the Secret Plot to Bring America into World War II*, explained in an interview with TAC: "When [Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs] Adolf Berle comes to see Roosevelt in September 1941, he brings with him a dossier. And in this dossier, he has evidence of three separate occasions in which the British have tried to fabricate proof of a Nazi plot somewhere in South America.... He says, 'This is a real problem. We have to do something about this.' And in his notes from that meeting, Berle says the president was curiously reserved and didn't seem to react in the way he expected him to. And Roosevelt eventually says, 'You should probably bring this up with Bill Donovan.'"

"[I]t's the South American map that's so interesting," Hemming said, "because Roosevelt knows that the British are concentrating on South America. This is where they're trying to create evidence of a Nazi plot. And here is a document which does precisely the same thing, just after he's been warned that the British are trying to do this. So knowing that, it would have been very strange for him not to think, 'Hm, this looks and smells like a British fake.'" Hemming concludes that it is "extremely likely" Roosevelt suspected the forgery, but proceeded with the speech anyway.

Denson believes Roosevelt's motivation for this deception was that American entry into World War II would gift the United States the international system he'd always desired: "I think he made up his mind as soon as the Senate didn't confirm the League of Nations [in 1919]. He decided he could do a better job than Wilson, and he could get a world government like the League of Nations started. I think he was always on that train." The "Declaration of United Nations," cowritten by Roosevelt and Churchill, was signed in January 1942. From manipulating American public perceptions against peace to actively propelling the United States towards war, the influence campaign by Intrepid was a rousing success for the British. And not incidentally, it helped build the modern world.

ICC holds hearing on Afghanistan war crimes, including U.S. torture

ANTIWAR — The current hearing will examine allegations that US troops and intelligence operatives tortured, raped and abused Afghan prisoners between 2003 and 2004.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) opened a three-day hearing in the The Hague, Netherlands on Wednesday at which prosecutors and Afghan torture victims are attempting to convince the court to overturn a previous decision to refuse to investigate war crimes committed by Taliban, Afghan government and US forces.

In April, the ICC Pre-Trial Chamber II announced it would not grant a request by ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda to open an investigation of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, including deliberate attacks on civilians and child soldier conscription by Taliban militants, torture and sexual violence by members of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and torture of prisoners held in US military and secret Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) prisons in Afghanistan, Poland, Romania and Lithuania. The decision was condemned by human rights advocates, many of whom accused the ICC of bowing to intense pressure from the Donald Trump administration after it barred Bensouda, a Gambian national, from entering the United States. The administration threatened further retaliation, including travel bans and economic sanctions, against the ICC.

President Donald Trump hailed the ICC's April decision as "a major international victory," while asserting that "the United States holds American citizens to the highest legal and ethical standards." Critics countered by noting the president's repeated pardoning of US war criminals, as well as America's overall general impunity from war crimes accountability, as proof of the need for more robust international war crimes investigations and prosecution.

However, the United States is not a member of the ICC, despite having signed the Rome Statute establishing the court. Jay Sekulow, a member of Trump's personal legal team, argued Wednesday at the ICC that this means court prosecutors had no legal basis upon which to build a case against US personnel. Sekulow also argued that under the "complementarity principle," the ICC's jurisdiction is limited to scenarios in which nations are unwilling or unable to prosecute war crimes.

"We have a very comprehensive system of military justice," Sekulow insisted, even in the face of Trump's recent war crimes pardons.

The current hearing will examine allegations that US troops and intelligence operatives tortured, raped and abused Afghan prisoners between 2003 and 2004. In December 2014 the US Senate released a 480-page summary of a previously classified 6,000-page report detailing how dozens of innocent individuals were wrongfully detained by the military and CIA due to mistaken identity and faulty intelligence, how these and other detainees were subjected to horrific and even deadly torture and abuse, and how the brutality and scope of the program were hidden from the Justice Department and even high-ranking members of the Bush administration, including President George W. Bush.

By 2006, at least 100 prisoners had died in US custody in Afghanistan and Iraq, most of them violently, according to government data. The most well-publicized detainee death happened at the notorious "Salt Pit," a CIA black site, or secret prison, in Afghanistan, where Gul Rahman died of hypothermia after being severely beaten, stripped naked and chained to a wall in near-freezing temperatures. Abuse of prisoners, who were often kidnapped from third countries in a practice known as extraordinary rendition, was rampant at black sites around the world, including Detention Center Green in Thailand, which current CIA Director Gina Haspel ran in late 2002. Black site prisoners were hung by chains from ceilings for days on end, stuffed into boxes, deprived of sleep, shackled naked in near-freezing temperatures and subjected to mock executions. Prior to Haspel's arrival, CIA torturers at Detention Center Green subjected cooperative prisoner Abu Zubaydah to the interrupted drowning torture known as waterboarding 83 times in a month. Haspel also played a key role in the destruction of videotaped CIA torture sessions.

Scores of friendly nations as well as some of the world's most notorious dictators, including Bashar al-Assad in Syria, the late Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and the mullahs of Iran, cooperated with the CIA's rendition program. The US also outsourced torture by sending abductees to these and other countries for interrogation knowing they would be abused, as well as by allowing agents from some of the world's worst human rights violators, including China, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia and Libya, to interrogate and even abuse detainees inside Guantánamo.

The sun never sets on the Canadian military

By Yves Engler

Most Canadians would be surprised to learn that the sun never sets on the military their taxes pay for. This country is not formally at war yet more than 2,100 Canadian troops are sprinkled across the globe. According to the Armed Forces, these soldiers are involved in 28 international missions. There are 850 Canadian troops in Iraq and its environs. Two hundred highly skilled special forces have provided training and combat support to Kurdish forces often accused of ethnic cleansing areas of Iraq they captured. A tactical helicopter detachment, intelligence officers and a combat hospital, as well as 200 Canadians at a base in Kuwait, support the special forces in Iraq.

Alongside the special forces mission, Canada commands the NATO mission in Iraq. Canadian Brigadier General Jennifer Carrigan commands nearly 600 NATO troops, including 250 Canadians. A comparable number of troops are stationed on Russia's borders. About 600 Canadians are part of a Canadian-led NATO mission in Latvia while 200 troops are part of a training effort in the Ukraine. Seventy-five Canadian Air Force personnel are currently in Romania. Some of the smaller operations are also highly political. Through Operation Proteus a dozen troops contribute to the Office of the United States Security Coordinator, which is supporting a security apparatus to protect the Palestinian Authority from popular disgust over its compliance in the face of ongoing Israeli settlement building.

Through Operation Foundation 15 troops are contributing to a US counter-terrorism effort in the Middle East, North Africa and Southwest Asia. As part of Operation Foundation General A. R. DAY, for instance, Directs the Combined Aerospace Operations Center at the US military's Al Udeid base in Qatar. The 2,100 number offered up by the military doesn't count the hundreds, maybe a thousand, naval personnel patrolling hotspots across the globe. Recently one or two Canadian naval vessels—with about

200 personnel each—has patrolled in East Asia. The ships are helping the US-led campaign to isolate North Korea and enforce UN sanctions. These Canadian vessels have also been involved in belligerent "freedom of navigation" exercises through international waters that Beijing claims in the South China Sea, Strait of Taiwan and East China Sea.

A Canadian vessel is also patrolling in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Sea. Recently Canadian vessels have also entered the Black Sea, which borders Russia. And Canadian vessels regularly deploy to the Caribbean. Nor does the 2,100 number count the colonels supported by sergeants and sometimes a second officer who are defense attachés based in 30 diplomatic posts around the world (with cross-accreditation to neighboring countries). Another 150 Canadian military personnel are stationed at the North American Aerospace Defense Command headquarters in Colorado and a smaller number at NORAD's hub near Tampa Bay, Florida. These bases assist US airstrikes in a number of places. Dozens of Canadian soldiers are also stationed at NATO headquarters in Brussels. They assist that organization in its international deployments. There may be other deployments not listed here. Dozens of Canadian soldiers are on exchange programs with the US and other militaries and some of them may be part of deployments abroad. Additionally, Canadian Special Forces can be deployed without public announcement, which has taken place on numerous occasions.

The scope of the military's international footprint is hard to square with the idea of a force defending Canada. That's why military types promote the importance of "forward defense." The government's 2017 "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy" claims Canada has to "actively address threats abroad for stability at home" and that "defending Canada and Canadian interests... requires active engagement abroad."

That logic, of course, can be used to justify participating in endless US-led military endeavors. That is the real reason the sun never sets on the Canadian military.

First Announcement



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The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 4,715 EURO or 225,567,716 RIAL, in favor of NISOC

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elevator, parking, **\$2000**
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spj, parking, **\$1000**
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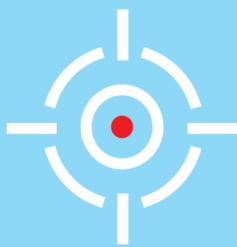
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SpaceX Dragon docks with International Space Station

By Allen Cone

The SpaceX Dragon cargo spacecraft containing 5,700 pounds of cargo arrived at the International Space Station on Sunday morning.

The spacecraft, which is SpaceX's 19th delivery to the ISS, was captured by the Canadarm2 robotic arm operated by astronauts Luca Parmitano and Andrew Morgan at 5:05 a.m. At 7:47 a.m., it was installed at the ISS, according to NASA.

Aboard were genetically enhanced "mighty mice," 36,000 worms and a new version of the CIMON rocket to interact with astronauts. The worms will reproduce 3 million mice in an incubator and be brought back to Earth in a frozen state, Space.com reported.

The mice will help scientists



understand how to limit muscle and bone loss in humans in space, CNN reported.

Also delivered were a high-tech toolbox to be mounted outside the station and a new hyperspectral Earth imaging system developed by the Japanese government for use in oil exploration among other things.

The spacecraft was launched aboard the Falcon 9 rocket Thursday from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida. The liftoff was delayed from Wednesday because of strong high-altitude winds.

The capsule is scheduled to leave the space station and re-enter Earth's atmosphere in January, splashing down in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Baja California with 3,600 pounds of return cargo.

Signs of life: New field guide aids astronomers' search

A Cornell University senior has come up with a way to discern life on exoplanets loitering in other cosmic neighborhoods: a spectral field guide.

Zifan Lin has developed high-resolution spectral models and scenarios for two exoplanets that may harbor life: Proxima b, in the habitable zone of our nearest neighbor Proxima Centauri; and Trappist-1e, one of three possible Earth-like exoplanet candidates in the Trappist-1 system.

The paper, co-authored with Lisa Kaltenegger, associate professor of astronomy and director of Cornell's Carl Sagan Institute, published in *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*.

"In order to investigate whether there are signs of life on other worlds, it is very important to understand signs of life that show in a planet's light fingerprint," Lin said. "Life on exoplanets can produce a characteristic combination of molecules in its atmosphere — and those become telltale signs in the spectra of such planets."

"In the near future we will be seeing the atmosphere of these worlds with new, sophisticated ground-based telescopes, which will allow us to explore the exoplanet's



climate and might spot its biota," he said.

In the search for habitable worlds, "M dwarf" stars catch astronomers' eyes, since the local universe teems with these suns, which make up 75% of the nearby cosmos, according to Lin.

Throughout the Milky Way, our home galaxy, astronomers

have discovered more than 4,000 exoplanets, some in their own suns' habitable zone — an area that provides conditions suitable for life.

To explore the atmosphere of these places, scientists need large next-generation telescopes, such as the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT), which is currently under construction in northern Chile's Atacama Desert and expected to be operational in 2025. Scientists can aim the mammoth eyepiece — with a flawless primary mirror about half the size of a football field — at Proxima b and Trappist-1e. The future telescope will have more than 250 times the light-gathering power of the Hubble Space Telescope.

Lin and Kaltenegger said the high-resolution spectrographs from the ELT can discern water, methane and oxygen for both Proxima b and Trappist-1e, if these planets are like our own pale blue dot.

"Zifan has generated a database of light fingerprints for these worlds, a guide to allow observers to learn how to find signs of life, if they are there," Kaltenegger said. "We are providing a template on how to find life on these worlds, if it exists." (Source: *Science Daily*)

The coldest reaction

The coldest chemical reaction in the known universe took place in what appears to be a chaotic mess of lasers. The appearance deceives: Deep within that painstakingly organized chaos, in temperatures millions of times colder than interstellar space, Kang-Kuen Ni achieved a feat of precision. Forcing two ultracold molecules to meet and react, she broke and formed the coldest bonds in the history of molecular couplings.

"Probably in the next couple of years, we are the only lab that can do this," said Ming-Guang Hu, a postdoctoral scholar in the Ni lab and first author on their paper published today in *Science*. Five years ago, Ni, the Morris Kahn Associate Professor of Chemistry and Chemical Biology and a pioneer of ultracold chemistry, set out to build a new apparatus that could achieve the lowest temperature chemical reactions of any currently available technology. But they couldn't be sure their intricate engineering would work.

Now, they not only performed the coldest reaction yet, they discovered their new apparatus can do something even they did not predict. In such intense cold — 500 nanokelvin or just a few millionths of a degree above absolute zero — their molecules slowed to such glacial speeds, Ni and her team could see something no one has been able to see before: the moment when two molecules meet to form two new molecules. In essence, they captured a chemical reaction in its most critical and elusive act.

Chemical reactions are responsible for literally everything: breathing, cooking, digesting, creating energy, pharmaceuticals, and household products like soap. So, understanding how they work at a fundamental level could help researchers design combinations the world has never seen. With an almost infinite number of new combinations possible, these new molecules could have endless applications from more efficient energy production to new materials like mold-proof walls and even better building blocks for quantum computers.

In her previous work, Ni used colder and colder temperatures to work this chemical magic: forging molecules from atoms that would otherwise never react. Cooled to such extremes, atoms and molecules slow to a quantum crawl, their lowest possible energy state. There, Ni can manipulate molecular interactions with utmost precision. But even she could only see the start of her reactions: two molecules go in, but then what? What happened in the middle and the end was a black hole only theories could try to explain.

Chemical reactions occur in just millionths of a billionth of a second,



better known in the scientific world as femtoseconds. Even today's most sophisticated technology can't capture something so short-lived, though some come close. In the last twenty years, scientists have used ultra-fast lasers like fast-action cameras, snapping rapid images of reactions as they occur. But they can't capture the whole picture. "Most of the time," Ni said, "you just see that the reactants disappear and the products appear in a time that you can measure. There was no direct measurement of what actually happened in these chemical reactions." Until now.

Ni's ultracold temperatures force reactions to a comparatively numbed speed. "Because [the molecules] are so cold," Ni said, "now we kind of have a bottleneck effect." When she and her team reacted two potassium rubidium molecules — chosen for their pliability — the ultracold temperatures forced the molecules to linger in the intermediate stage for microseconds. Microseconds — mere millionths of a second — may seem short, but that's millions of times longer than usual and long enough for Ni and her team to investigate the phase when bonds break and form, in essence, how one molecule turns into another.

With this intimate vision, Ni said she and her team can test theories that predict what happens in a reaction's black hole to confirm if they got it right. Then, her team can craft new theories, using actual data to more precisely predict what happens during other chemical reactions, even those that take place in the mysterious quantum realm.

Already, the team is exploring what else they can learn in their ultracold test bed. Next, for example, they could manipulate the reactants, exciting them before they react to see how their heightened energy impacts the outcome. Or, they could even influence the reaction as it occurs, nudging one molecule or the other. "With our controllability, this time window is long enough, we can probe," Hu said. "Now, with this apparatus, we can think about this. Without this technique, without this paper, we cannot even think about this." (Source: *Science Daily*)

Solar wind slows farther away from the Sun

Measurements taken by the Solar Wind Around Pluto (SWAP) instrument aboard NASA's New Horizons spacecraft are providing important new insights from some of the farthest reaches of space ever explored. In a paper recently published in the *Astrophysical Journal*, a team led by Southwest Research Institute shows how the solar wind — the supersonic stream of charged particles blown out by the Sun — evolves at increasing distances from the Sun.

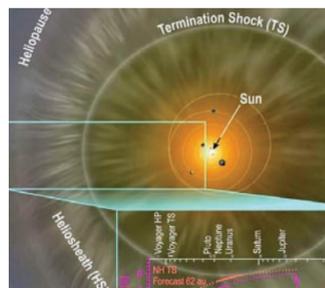
"Previously, only the Pioneer 10 and 11 and Voyager 1 and 2 missions have explored the outer solar system and outer heliosphere, but now New Horizons is doing that with more modern scientific instruments," said Dr. Heather Elliott, a staff scientist at SwRI, Deputy Principal Investigator of the SWAP instrument and lead author of the paper. "Our Sun's influence on the space environment extends well beyond the outer planets, and SWAP is showing us new aspects of how that environment changes with distance."

The solar wind fills a bubble-like region of space encompassing our solar system, called the heliosphere. From aboard New Horizons, SWAP collects detailed, daily measurements of the solar wind as well as other key components called "interstellar pickup ions" in the outer heliosphere. These interstellar pickup ions are created when neutral material from interstellar space enters the solar system and becomes ionized by light from the Sun or by charge exchange interactions with solar wind ions.

As the solar wind moves farther from the Sun, it encounters an increasing amount of material from interstellar space. When interstellar material is ionized, the solar wind picks up the material and, researchers theorized, slows and heats in response. SWAP has now detected and confirmed this predicted effect.

The SWAP team compared the New Horizons solar wind speed measurements from 21 to 42 astronomical units to the speeds at 1 AU from both the Advanced Composition Explorer (ACE) and Solar TErrestrial Relations Observatory (STEREO) spacecraft. (One AU is equal to the distance between the Sun and Earth.) By 21 AU, it appeared that SWAP could be detecting the slowing of the solar wind in response to picking up interstellar material. However, when New Horizons traveled beyond Pluto, between 33 and 42 AU, the solar wind measured 6-7% slower than at the 1 AU distance, confirming the effect.

In addition to confirming the slowing of the solar wind at great distances, the change in the solar wind temperature and density could also provide a means to estimate when New Horizons will



join the Voyager spacecraft on the other side of the termination shock, the boundary marking where the solar wind slows to less than the sound speed as it approaches the interstellar medium. Voyager 1 crossed the termination shock in 2004 at 94 AU, followed by Voyager 2 in 2007 at 84 AU. Based on current lower levels of solar activity and lower solar wind pressures, the termination shock is expected to have moved closer to the Sun since the Voyager crossings. Extrapolating current trends in the New Horizons measurements also indicates that the termination shock might now be closer than when it was intersected by Voyager. At the earliest, New Horizons will reach the termination shock in the mid-2020s. As the solar cycle activity increases, the increase in pressure will likely expand the heliosphere. This could push the termination shock to the 84-94 AU range found by the Voyager spacecraft before New Horizons has time to reach the termination shock.

New Horizons' journey through the outer heliosphere contrasts Voyager's in that the current solar cycle is mild compared to the very active solar cycle Voyager experienced in the outer heliosphere. In addition to measuring the solar wind, New Horizons' SWAP is extremely sensitive and simultaneously measures the low fluxes of interstellar pickup ions with unprecedented time resolution and extensive spatial coverage. New Horizons is also the only spacecraft in the solar wind beyond Mars (1.5 AU) and, consequently, the only spacecraft measuring interactions between the solar wind and the interstellar material in the outer heliosphere during the current mild solar cycle. New Horizons is on course to be the first spacecraft to measure both the solar wind and interstellar pickup ions at the termination shock.

"New Horizons has significantly advanced our knowledge of distant planetary objects, and it's only fitting that it is now also revealing new knowledge about our own Sun and its heliosphere," said New Horizons Principal Investigator Dr. Alan Stern of the SwRI. (Source: *Science Daily*)

December full Moon 2019: The 'Cold' Moon joins Venus and Saturn

The full Moon of December, called the Full Cold Moon, will arrive just after midnight EST on Dec. 12, and as it rises it will be joined in the sky by the planets Venus and Saturn, which will be close together after reaching a conjunction on Dec. 11.

The Moon becomes officially full on Dec. 12 at 12:13 a.m. EST (0513 GMT). Passing through the constellation Taurus, our planet's satellite will rise around 4:18 p.m. on Dec. 11 for observers on the U.S. East Coast. The Sun sets about 10 minutes later, and observers looking west will see Saturn and Venus in the sky together only a few degrees apart, and Jupiter will be visible as well, though it is difficult to see as it will be just a degree above the horizon by 5 p.m. local time.



The Moon itself will be framed by Auriga, the charioteer, to its left (north) and the Hyades star cluster to the south (on the right). The Hyades usually defines the "head" of Taurus, though its fainter stars will be washed out by the lunar glare.

The two planets Venus and Saturn will be in conjunction — sharing the same celestial longitude — on Dec. 10, and at 11:41 p.m. EST (0441 GMT on Dec. 11) will get as close as 1.8 degrees, or a bit more than three lunar diameters, according to In-the-sky.org. The actual conjunction won't be visible from New York City; the planets will set by 4:49 p.m. local time in New York, but they will still be a distinct pair. Both will be in Sagittarius.

Catching the actual conjunction will require moving west; Observers in Hawaii will see the conjunction at 6:41 p.m. local time, and the pair doesn't set until 8:02 p.m., well after the sun (which sets at 5:50 p.m.).

Jupiter will be approaching its superior conjunction, which occurs on Dec. 28. Superior conjunction is the point where the planet is on the opposite side of the Sun from Earth. That means it is sinking into the solar glare at sunset through December. On the night of the full Moon the planet sets at 5:15 p.m. local time in New York City, while the Sun sets at 4:29 p.m., so Jupiter will be hard to see, and most observers will only catch it for a few minutes even with clear weather and an unobstructed horizon.

Mars, by contrast, will be visible to observers who are up early (or have stayed up late). On Dec. 12 the Red Planet will rise at 4:20 a.m. in New York, while the sun doesn't rise until 7:10 a.m. local time. So, early commuters can look east and see Mars a good 20 degrees above the southeastern horizon by 6:30 a.m., as the sky gets lighter.

Full Moons are so bright that they tend to overwhelm fainter objects in the night sky, even from dark-sky locations. Indeed, the full Moon casts distinct shadows. Even so, the winter sky offers some of the brightest constellations of the year.

Besides Auriga and Taurus, by about 9 p.m. in your local time on the night of Dec. 11, one can see Orion, the hunter and its distinctive belt of three stars to the right and downward, toward the south of the Moon, and to the left Gemini's brightest stars, Castor and Pollux, will also be evident. The brightest star in the Northern Hemisphere sky, Sirius, will also be rising and visible almost the entire night.

In the Southern Hemisphere, the Large Magellanic Cloud, a dwarf galaxy that is the Milky Way's companion, is visible all night from locations such as Melbourne, Australia, because from that latitude it is circumpolar — it never sets. On the night of the full Moon (Dec. 12) the Large Magellanic Cloud reaches its highest point at about midnight. Even with the near-full Moon it is relatively easy to observe.

The constellations of Puppis, Vela and Carina, which collectively make up the Ship (also known as Argo Navis) will be high in the southeastern sky by 9 p.m. local time, and Canopus, the brightest star in the Southern Hemisphere, can be easily spotted.

The December full Moon is often called the Full Cold Moon, according to the *Old Farmer's Almanac*, as that's what the weather tends to be like in North America or Europe. While names for the full Moon in the United States and Canada are adapted from Native American terms, nations in the Americas had diverse names and traditions.

According to the Ontario Native Literacy Project, the Ojibwe (or Anishnabeg) peoples called it Mndoons Giizis, the Big Spirit Moon or Blue Moon. (This is not the same as the "blue Moon" that is a second full Moon in a single calendar month). The Cree called it the Thithikopiwapisim, or Hoar Frost Moon.

In the Pacific Northwest, the Haida called December's full Moon the Snow Moon, or Ta'aaw Kungaay, while the Tlingit called it Shanax Dis, meaning "unborn seals are getting hair," according to the Tlingit Moon and Tide Teaching Resource published by the University of Alaska at Fairbanks.

Among the Hopi, whose ceremonial life revolved around the lunar and solar cycles, the lunation just before the winter solstice was the Sparrow-Hawk Moon, as noted by Janet Sharp of Washburn University in her study of Hopi mathematical concepts and teaching that appeared in the February 2015 edition of the *Journal of Mathematical Culture*.

In the Southern Hemisphere, December is during the summer, and the M?ori of New Zealand described the lunar months in November to December as Hakihea, meaning "birds are now sitting in their nests," according to the *Encyclopedia of New Zealand*.

In China's traditional lunar calendar, the December lunation is the 11th month of the year. Called D'ngyue, meaning "winter month," it marks the winter solstice. (Source: *msn*)

Tourism ministry's budget seen to rise by 11.8%

TOURISM TEHRAN — The budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (to start March 20, 2020) has proposed 13 trillion rials (about \$310 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) for the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, an increase of 11.8 percent compared with the current year's budget.



President Hassan Rouhani submitted the bill worth 1.988 quadrillion rials (about \$473.5 billion) to the Majlis on Sunday, with the main focus of countering the U.S. sanctions on the country's economy, Mehr reported.

The bill has estimated the government's budget at 5.63 quadrillion rials (about \$134.04 billion), showing 8.2 percent rise year on year.

Iran expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots, including 22 ones that have been placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Some 6.7 million foreign nationals have visited the country since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year, Mojtaba Karimi, who presides over Foreign Ministry's visa and passport department, was quoted by IRNA as saying on December 4.

Iran welcomed some 7.8 million foreign nationals last year, achieving 52.5 percent increase year on year. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, Iraq was the main source of tourism for Iran in 2018, constituting 24% of all inbound visitors. Azerbaijan with (17%), Turkey (8%), Pakistan (4%) and Bahrain (2%) constituted other major sources while the remaining 46% came from the rest of the world.

Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, Iran is expecting to increase the number of tourism arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million by 2025.

Iranian crafts, souvenirs welcomed at Geneva charity fair

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Iranian handicrafts, souvenirs, and foodstuff were welcomed at the UN Bazaar 2019, an international charity fair which was held at the United Nations Office in Geneva on December 3.



Over 60 UN member-states and other international organizations in Geneva participated in the event and Iran's stalls were among the most visited, CHTN reported on Monday.

The event is organized by the United Nations Women's Guild (UNWG) that was founded in 1967 as a voluntary organization of women connected with the United Nations. The purpose of the Guild is to foster friendship, to encourage appreciation of each other's traditions and customs, and to financially support charity projects benefiting children of the world with emphasis on developing countries.

Handicrafts and souvenirs as well as foodstuff such as pistachios, saffron, jujube, gaz (a kind of candy), and barberry from Sistan-Baluchestan, Ardebil, Golestan, Isfahan, Qazvin, Yazd, Bushehr, and South Khoyan provinces were presented to the visitors during the event, the report said.

Iran seeks to foster 'art tourism' in partnership with handicrafts

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Iran aims to strengthen bonds existing between handicrafts and tourism in order to foster "art tourism", deputy tourism minister Pouya Mahmoudian has said.

"We are working hard to promote art tourism in Iran and now we have hotels in Iran that are fully decorated with handicrafts," she said on Sunday.

Mahmoudian made the remarks in meeting with Cvetan Cvetkovski, the officer-in-charge of the UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office, Marcello Notarianni, an advisor to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), CHTN reported.

Talking on the significance of handicrafts in the country, the deputy minister noted, "Iran globally ranks first in terms of having the topmost number of world cities [and villages] of handicrafts."

The World Crafts Council-Asia Pacific Region has so far designated eight cities and two villages for the honor.

Late in October, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization admitted Iranian cities of Bandar Abbas and Sanandaj as UNESCO Creative Cities.

"Some 295 fields of handicrafts are currently practiced across Iran with more than two million people engaging, majority of whom are women... Handicrafts also play an important role in the economy in our rural villages."

Cvetkovski for his part voiced hope that handicrafts to take an important part of tourism (in Iran).

"This meeting can give us a basic idea of tangible and intangible heritage and given that Iran is one of the countries with lots of handicraft (fields), we would like to work with you and your colleagues in more specialized arenas."

Cvetkovski also reminded that tourism and handicrafts are rapidly advancing in the global scene, adding "Iranian handicrafts are very important in this growing tourism chain."

Speaking at the meeting, Notarianni attached significance to artisans and craftspeople and their works as contributors



to Iran's [developing] comprehensive tourism plan.

Handicrafts are regarded as an economic factor in tourism, especially in the area of employment. In fact, preserving this area is very important point in comprehensive tourism plan, he said.

It is very important to consider and operationalize your point of view in developing the plan, Notarianni told Mahmoudian, the report said.

On Saturday, Notarianni, an expert on sustainable tourism who has served as tourism consultant in about 30 countries, officially announced the start of developing Iran's

comprehensive tourism plan, deputy tourism minister Vali Teymourli told the Tehran Times.

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

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

Russia's 7 most beautiful lighthouses

TOURISM TEHRAN — The first lighthouses in Russia were built under Peter the Great, known as the "father of the Russian Navy". There are now roughly about a hundred operating and abandoned lighthouses left in Russia. We have put together a list of the most beautiful specimens. Let's get started, or as the Russians say — Poekhali!

■ The Osinovsky Light in Leningrad Region

This 70-meter stone giant towers over the south-western shore of lake Ladoga. It is the ninth tallest lighthouse in the world. The Osinovsky lighthouse is active from April to November, marking the western border of the Petrokrepost (Shlisselburg) Inlet of Lake Ladoga for ships. The Neva River flows from Lake Ladoga.

The Osinovsky lighthouse took five years to construct, from 1905 to 1910. The lighthouse flashes red, green and white signals which are visible 40 kilometers away. These are the only three colors used by lighthouses. Other colors are unsuitable for navigation purposes. For example, blue flashes are rapidly dissipated by drops of moisture in the air, and create hazy signals that are only visible for a short distance, which is a recipe for marine disaster.

The Osinovsky lighthouse has played a special role in the history of St. Petersburg. A port was built there as part of the Road of Life during the Siege of Leningrad, and it received the first vital delivery of grain in September 1941. A year later, several hundred tons of cargo bound for the besieged city — everything from food to weapons and household appliances — passed through it.

Russia's oldest lighthouse keeper, Sergei Shulyatev, devoted over 20 years to taking care of the Osinovsky Light, and lit the tower's lamps every day. He worked at the lighthouse until he was 74. In 2010, Shulyatev was succeeded by Oleg Karepanov who had worked as a long-haul truck driver before becoming a lighthouse keeper.

Visitors are not allowed to enter the lighthouse. It belongs to Russia's Ministry of Defense and is protected by 24-hour security.

You can combine a trip to the lighthouse with a visit to the Road of Life Museum. The museum is beside Lake Ladoga, near Cape Osinovets. You can learn about the legendary ice road that saved many people's lives in Leningrad. Ships and planes, household items, photographs and documents from this period of history are exhibited at the museum.

Wrap up your trip to the lighthouse with a nice walk to the restaurant in the hotel at the Mir Mayakov retreat, which overlooks Lake Ladoga and the Osinovsky Light. Make sure you try their smoked fish. If you want to spend the night by the lake, there is a hostel, a hotel and cottages that you can rent at the Mir Mayakov retreat. A night at the hostel will cost 700 rubles. A standard double room costs two thousand rubles per night.

How to reach Osinovetsky: take the train from Ladozhsky Railway Station to "Ladozhskoye Ozero" (Ladoga Lake). The journey takes just over an hour. From there, you need to walk about a mile — you will be able to spot the lighthouse from a distance. The most convenient way to visit the lighthouse is to book a tour with "Nam Svetlo", who are based in St. Petersburg and specialize



A view of the Egersheld Lighthouse in Vladivostok in Russia's Far East.

in guided tours of lighthouses in the wider Leningrad region.

■ Egersheld Lighthouse, Vladivostok

Egersheld Lighthouse (also known as Tokarevsky Lighthouse) is one of the oldest lighthouses in Russia's Far East. It stands at the end of a narrow artificial spit in southern Vladivostok, the Tokarevskaya Koshka Dam. The lighthouse was built in 1876. The tower has since served as the main landmark to help skippers navigate the entrance to the seaside city's port.

The lighthouse is named in honor of the legendary navigator who explored Peter the Great Gulf — Captain Gustav Egersheld of the second rank. In 1860, the Griden, a corvette captained by Egersheld, who spent almost a year in Golden Horn Bay (trans. Zolotoy Rog), sailed into Vladivostok. The ship's crew and Egersheld himself made an invaluable contribution to the development of Vladivostok. They produced the first geological survey Golden Horn Bay ever recorded in history. Thanks to their research, the first handwritten map of the Golden Horn Bay and the Eastern Bosphorus was created.

Visitors are not allowed to enter the lighthouse. In summer, you can combine a trip to the Egersheld Lighthouse with a walk on the beach nearby. The beach has picturesque and panoramic views of Vladivostok, Russky Island and the cable-stayed Russky Bridge, which stretches across the Eastern Bosphorus strait. And in winter you can see the spotted seals on Tokarevskaya Koshka Dam, also known as larga seals. Please resist the temptation to go up and stroke them: it is not recommended to come any closer than 15 meters to them. Pup season is from February to March, so the seals may perceive you as a threat to their pups if you approach them, and may react aggressively.

How to reach the lighthouse: a number of tour agencies based in Vladivostok organise a trip to the lighthouse as part of their excursion program. You can get there on your own without a tour guide from Vladivostok on buses nos. 57, 59, 60, 62, 81 or shuttle bus no. 63 (your need to stop at "Mayak", the lighthouse). You need to walk about a mile from there.

■ Tarkhankut Lighthouse, Crimea
Tarkhankut Lighthouse stands on the Tarkhankut Cape of the Tarkhankut Peninsula — the westernmost point of Crimea. Tarkhankut was called "the Cape of Storms"

in the Middle Ages. The tower was built for ships that needed to navigate the changeable weather, frequent storms and the rocky terrain of the coastline, which make for dangerous sailing.

The lighthouse was built from white Inkerman limestone in 1816. It stands at 38 meters. Its twin tower, the Chersonesus Lighthouse, was built shortly after. At the time when it was built, the Tarhankut Lighthouse used an oil lamp with 15 wicks and 15 reflectors. The lamp used a type of rapeseed oil as its fuel source called colza, which is extracted from flowering plants commonly known as the mustards, the crucifers, or the cabbage family.

A lamp with powerful lenses was later installed inside the lighthouse. In 1970, The Tarkhankut Lighthouse was reinforced and repaired. It now has an electric beacon and radio beacon, fog signal, and a station with a medium-range radius radio navigation system. Light from the beacon can be seen from more than 30 kilometers out. Its foghorn can be heard from almost two kilometers away.

A cast-iron spiral staircase with 142 steps leads from the lower room to the top of the tower. The lighthouse is still in operation. Visitors are not allowed to enter the lighthouse. However, there are walking trails around the lighthouse and along the rocky coastline.

How to reach the lighthouse: the lighthouse is just over three kilometers away from the village of Olenivka, so you can cycle or take a taxi from there.

■ Storozhenskiy Light in Leningrad Region

Storozhenskiy Light, also known as Storozhno Light, is a red and white lighthouse in the village of Storozhno on the south-eastern side of Lake Ladoga — it is Russia's second tallest lighthouse and seventh in the world. To this day, this 71-meter giant still serves as a guiding star for ships, helping them traverse the treacherous Storozhensky reef.

The lighthouse was built in 1906. The lighthouse was initially built as a wooden structure, and was later replaced by a stone tower. There are 399 steps leading up to the top. The lighthouse overlooks Storozhensky Cape, which separates Svirskaia Bay from Volkhovskaya Bay, and views of Storozhno and Ladoga Lake.

There are Fresnel lenses at the top of the tower that enable the lighthouse to project a beam of white light that can be seen 35

kilometers away in clear weather. Its red light is visible 28 kilometers out.

The lighthouse keeper usually agrees to let visitors come inside the tower. His own red-brick house is next door to the lighthouse; there is a sign on the door that reads "Storozhensky Light". Please, do not forget: no photographs are allowed inside the lighthouse.

How to reach the lighthouse: by car to the village Storozhno (210 kilometers from St. Petersburg). You will be able to see the lighthouse from a distance. Part of road there is on a dirt track through the forest. You can get there on public transport, but it is a long and complicated journey. You can also take the train from Ladozhsky Railway Station in St. Petersburg bound for "Ladozhskoye Ozero" (Ladoga Lake), and get off at the station "Pasha" (the journey takes three and a half hours). Then you need to take a bus to the village of Zagubye, and after that you can cycle 18 kilometers or take a taxi to Storozhno.

■ Gamov Lighthouse in Primorsky Krai

Russia's southernmost lighthouse. The lighthouse is located in the village of Gamov on Cape Gamov of the Gamov Peninsula in south-western Primorsky Krai. The Cape's high coastline is abrupt and extremely steep — this is one of the most mesmerizing and enchanting places in Primorsky Krai.

The lighthouse was built at the turn of the nineteenth century. The tower is 50 meters tall. The lighthouse's main attraction is its old bell, which was used to warn ships of danger in thick fog and other harsh weather conditions.

The Cape and other regional namesakes were named after the then young midshipman Dmitry Gamov. He was a crew member of the Russian Navy's "Pallada" frigate and an explorer of the Primorsky region. He was the first aboard the vessel to spot the picturesque Cape on the east coast of Peter the Great Bay.

Today, the lighthouse's beacon can shine a beam of light visible 56 kilometers away.

The Gamov Lightkeepers are happy to welcome visitors inside. You just need to knock on the door and ask to go upstairs — they won't turn you away.

How to reach the lighthouse: take the bus from Vladivostok Bus Station to Andreevka village. The journey takes five hours. Then take a taxi or the ferry to the village of Vityaz. After that you can reach Cape Gamova on foot or by motorboat. There are also motorboats and ferries from Andreevka to the Cape. You can rent quad bikes and buggies.

■ The Abandoned Aniva Lighthouse on Sakhalin Island

This is one of Russia's most remote lighthouses in Russia, located just off the Sakhalin Island. The lighthouse was built in 1939 on the small rock of Sivuchya, which juts out of rugged Cape Aniva. Sailors know that this is a place where many different currents collide, where there is often foggy weather and dangerous offshore reefs, abruptly shallow waters, far shallower than the depths of the surrounding ocean.

The lighthouse is a 31-meter concrete tower with a side extension. It has nine floors. The project was designed by Japanese engineer Shinobu Miura, a graduate from the Kanagawa Prefecture.

(See the full text on the website)

ROUND THE GLOBE

Kasbah of Algiers

The Kasbah is a unique kind of medina, or Islamic city. It stands in one of the finest coastal sites on the Mediterranean, overlooking the islands where a Carthaginian trading-post was established in the 4th century BC.



The term Kasbah, that originally designated the highest point of the medina during the Zirid era, today applies to the ensemble of the old town of El Djazair, within the boundaries marked by the ramparts and built at the end of the 16th century, dating back to the Ottoman period.

In this living environment where nearly 50,000 people reside, very interesting traditional houses, palaces, hammams, mosques and various souks are still conserved, the urban form of which bears witness to an effect of stratification of several styles in a complex and original system that has adapted remarkably well to a very hilly and uneven site.

(Source: UNESCO)

Israel, Saudi missile programs should be considered when discussing Iran's missile program: Jenkins

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN (MNA) — Peter Jenkins, former UK Ambassador to the IAEA and UN, says that Israel has a significant missile program while Saudi Arabia has acquired a significant quantity of missiles from foreign suppliers and is reported to have embarked on an indigenous program.

A former associate fellow of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy also adds that "Both possess missiles of ranges in excess of 2000 km, unlike Iran."

He adds that "These facts should be seen as of crucial relevance to any discussion of Iran's missile program."

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ The British, German and French ambassadors, in a letter circulated on Wednesday, called on U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to inform the Security Council in his next report that Iran's missile program was "inconsistent" with a U.N. 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 European claim that aspects of Iran's missile program are inconsistent with UNSC Res 2231 is not new. We have heard it on more than one past occasion. It rests on paragraph 3 of Annex B of that resolution. In this paragraph, Iran is called upon not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons. I say "aspects of" because I assume — I do not know — that the Europeans recognize that only some of the missiles in Iran's inventory or under development would be capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Is such a claim watertight? No, it's a controversial claim because of the word "designed". That word enables Iranian representatives to assert that none of the missiles in Iran's inventory or under development has been designed to be a



nuclear delivery vehicle, and it places a burden of proof on the Europeans that they are likely to be unable to sustain.

Why have the Europeans chosen to resurface the claim at this point, by writing to the UN Secretary General? I assume there is a connection between this move and Iran's policy of progressive non-performance of the 2015 nuclear agreement known as the JCPOA. I assume that the Europeans are seeking to put diplomatic pressure on Iran as a counter to the diplomatic pressure that Iran has been putting on Europe by threatening the survival of the JCPOA.

If that is their tactic, will it be effective? Alas, it seems more likely that Iran will dismiss the European claim as unfounded and will continue to move progressively towards killing off the JCPOA. I say "alas" because, as I have told you in the past, I believe the policy of progressive non-performance to be both unwise and unfair: it amounts to punishing Europe to no constructive effect for injustices which the United States has committed and which Iran has prevented Europe from mitigating.

■ These two actions of Europe while Europe failed to fulfill its obligations to Iran and the reduction of its obliga-

tions by Iran was also a reaction to the passivity of European countries. What is your assessment?

A: I do not think there are objective grounds for ascribing passivity to European policy over the 22 months that have passed since President Trump first declared war on the JCPOA. The Europeans have tried repeatedly to persuade Trump that the JCPOA is a precious component of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. They have consistently opposed Trump's policy of subjecting Iran to "maximum pressure", which they see to be both unjust and incapable of contributing to global peace and security. They have set up the trading facilitation mechanism known as INSTEX. President Macron of France has sought to create a basis for the resumption of European purchases of Iranian oil, but has been denied cooperation by President Rouhani.

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

ognizing the country's missile capabilities and its aims include defensive, offensive or capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. What is your assessment?

A: You are right that UNSC Res 2231 does not impose on Iran a legally-binding obligation to refrain from developing a certain type of missile. You are also right that there is no international agreement that Iran is violating by developing and holding a range of missile types. This explains why Europe is reduced to claiming that Iran's missile program is "inconsistent" with 2231 and to making debatable assertions about the intention behind the characteristics of some of Iran's missiles.

■ 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 has 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: Again, you are right: Israel has a significant missile program while Saudi Arabia has acquired a significant quantity of missiles from foreign suppliers and is reported to have embarked on an indigenous program. Both possess missiles of ranges in excess of 2000 km, unlike Iran (although Iran has developed a "space launch vehicle" that could be modified to deliver payloads over a longer distance than 2000 km). These facts should be seen as of crucial relevance to any discussion of Iran's missile program. To my mind they lead to at least two conclusions: it is reasonable for Iran to seek to deter the use of missiles against Iran by acquiring a capability to retaliate, and only a regional approach to controlling missile proliferation has any chance of obtaining Iranian assent.

You mention that Israel possesses nuclear weapons. This too is a fact. It would not justify the Iranian acquisition of nuclear weapons since "two wrongs do not make a right". But it does justify Iran's possession of an effective anti-Israeli deterrent in the form of missiles.

Jennifer Loewenstein: Gantz has Palestinian blood on his hands

TEHRAN (FNA) — Jennifer Loewenstein, journalist and political activist, says Gantz's policy towards Palestinians is as brutal as Netanyahu's, making the outcome of the recent Israeli elections tragic; no matter who will come to form the cabinet.

In an exclusive interview with FNA, Loewenstein said, "The status quo will persist; Israeli expansionism will continue unabated... in the election campaigns, Gantz and Netanyahu had to out-do each other in their murderous rhetoric toward Gaza."

"The Palestinians can expect to see more of the same - packaged less brazenly perhaps, but in this respect even more hypocritical and depraved", she added. Jennifer Loewenstein is a journalist and political activist. Her works have appeared in academic journals such as The Journal of Palestine Studies. Also, she is a regular contributor to Media including Press TV and CounterPunch magazine.

Below is the full text of the interview:
■ What do Israel's latest elections mean for the Palestinians in the West bank, and the Gaza Strip?

A: The latest election means very little for the Palestinians and, chances are, they recognized this more quickly and clearly than anyone else. Gantz is no "moderate". He has Palestinian blood on his hands (see Operation Protective Edge if you have any doubts about this.) Like most other Israeli leaders, Gantz considers Jewish Israelis superior beings compared to Palestinians. He probably is not even conscious of such beliefs, so entrenched is the notion of Jewish supremacy in the land of Israel - and among political establishments in the US and Europe. The Palestinians can expect to see more of the same - packaged less brazenly perhaps, but in this respect even more hypocritical and depraved.

■ Do you think Palestinians have any chance to expect an improvement in their aggravating conditions as a result of Israeli election outcomes?

A: The status quo will persist; Israeli expansionism will continue unabated. There may be a few more meetings and 'negotiations'. There may even be more token 'concessions'

or meetings with Abbas. These will be distractions, however; tokens of 'good will' intended to hide the more serious policy measures. Beyond them, Israeli expansionist goals will continue as ruthlessly as ever, including in Jerusalem.

Some readers will remember how, early in the election campaigns, Gantz and Netanyahu had to out-do each other in their murderous rhetoric toward Gaza. What is tragic is that such rhetoric is based on actual policies and actions taken against Gaza, in particular; policies that are brutal and criminal - and that continue the systematic strangulation of the Gaza Strip and its nearly two million people.

■ How will the elections affect the destiny of the occupied Palestinian lands?

A: I believe the two state solution is dead. Israel has, in fact, been one state for many decades. What is known (perversely) as "Israel proper" is governed by quasi-democratic laws (for Jews only); the Occupied West Bank, is governed by a sadistic, expansionist Israeli military administration despite what exists on paper - Areas 'A', 'B', and 'C'. These divi-

sions are for popular consumption only. In fact, they are regions within the West Bank beholden to the same Israeli military and political authority that controls area 'C'.

Area 'A' is the biggest lie of all: it is a small sub-set of the West Bank ostensibly ruled by the Palestinian Authority. But the PA is ultimately answerable to Israel. Its security apparatus exists only insofar as it assures Israel that its Palestinian population does as it's told. Were the PA security forces not ultimately doing the IDF's bidding, they would be disbanded overnight. Gaza is a separate story; one that deserves far more detail and attention. Suffice to say, for now, that it is - in every sense of the word - a concentration camp. What is happening there beggars belief. If there is a way of annihilating people in life rather than in death, it is taking place in Gaza.

One day people will look back at what the US has overseen and Israel has carried out towards the Palestinians in Gaza with a horror and revulsion that will only further blight the terrible history of Israel's destruction of Palestine.

On the international day of commemoration and dignity of the victims of genocide: "Hate Speech in Bahrain: A warning prelude to genocide crimes"

MANAMA — On December 9 of each year, the world commemorates the "International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and the Prevention of this Crime," to prevent genocide and the conflicts that lead to it. The Bahrain Interfaith Center believes that this event is an opportunity to recall the importance of honoring the victims of all genocides, all over the world, and doing them justice, including the victims of genocides of cultural or religious forms.

Furthermore, the Bahrain Interfaith Center believes that some of the violations in Bahrain are similar, in form, to cultural genocides that are internationally considered as wrongful acts, referring to article 2 of the International Convention which states that genocide includes acts committed with the intent to "destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, or religious group", including "causing serious physical or spiritual harm to members of the group", as well as subjecting the group to "living conditions which may lead to its partial or total material destruction."

International organizations and the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (Bassioni Report - BICI) have documented severe abuses in Bahrain, affecting the religious identity of Shia citizens in the country. Also, the reports mention the systematic targeting of rituals and practices of



Shiites, amounting to "spiritual harm," as the state imposes religious education, contrary to the Shiite belief, in public schools, and prohibits the teaching and manifestation of Shia culture in government's institutions and official media. Moreover, the Shiite institutions, which manage the Shia's affairs in the country, are also being cracked down, and the government has demolished dozens of Shiite mosques, some of which are historical monuments. Additionally, the vast majority of victims of political killings and arrests since the events of 2011 are from the Shia community, of whom

nearly 200 have been killed, and NGOs have documented the arrest and imprisonment of more than 5,000 people since the events began.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, said that: "hate speech is one of the signals that are directly linked to the genocide," and according to this, the Bahrain Interfaith Center warns against the increase of the severity of the hate speech in Bahrain. Also, it asserts that the exclusion of Shiites from the official media, harassment of their lives, freedoms and rituals, and the organization of their affairs could be a serious trigger to genocide-like crimes."

Based on the fact that the Government of Bahrain has ratified and acceded to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of December 9, 1948, the Bahrain Interfaith Center urges the Government's official departments to cooperate and work with the community organizations to adopt effective strategies to eliminate hate speech, discrimination, racism, religious persecution, and identity-based targeting. Also, the Center believes that this is the only way for the government to praise its ratification of the Convention highly, and it would be an effective step that will reassure the victims and aid in doing them justice through genuine and complete reconciliation.

Modi's Hindutva Goals Collide With India's Destiny

By Iqbal Jassat

JOHANNESBURG — India today is in a frantic haste to solidify its position as a champion of Hindutva, which loosely translated means upholding rightwing religious bigotry at any cost.

It's on an upward trajectory following the rise of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under the leadership of a controversial hawk Narendra Modi.

In their haste to turn India around from a legacy of anticolonial freedom struggles, Modi and the BJP are pushing to rebrand India as an exclusive extremist Hindutva domain.

And despite these efforts being considered risky and unwise, Modi is evidently basking in the glory of adoration and solidarity by none other than the president of the United States of America, Donald Trump.



Also while previously lurking in the background but now in full glare of media spotlights as unflinching allies of the BJP's rightwing ideology, are Apartheid Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu and the Saudi monarchy's Mohamed bin Salman.

To them Modi is on the right trajectory. They share a common resentment of Islam which they deliberately frame in political language designed to mislead and depict Muslim opposition as "terrorism".

While Netanyahu is highly skilled in such devious political chicanery, Trump and MBS are fast catching on as indeed is Modi. Yet, knowing that the stakes are high and racing against time to accomplish supremacy of racial and religious divisive policies, Modi has promoted himself as the savior of the world's entire Hindu community.

His latest outrageous move is an attempt to limit the granting of nationality to non-Muslim refugees only. By excluding Muslims, the bill, known as Citizenship Amendment Bill, is viewed by analysts of India's secular constitution, as a ploy to render Muslims stateless in their own country. The situation in Assam bears testimony to this tragic violation of fundamental human rights.

Part of the BJP's attempt to rewrite India's history is to erase the idea of India welcoming refugees of all castes and creeds. Historical accounts which underpin the fact that despite centuries old traditions of absorbing migrants and embracing them as their own, are under threat by Modi's fanaticism. The Citizen Bill categorically excludes Muslims.

Critics of the bill warn that the move is a brazen BJP plot to marginalise India's Muslim population, which make up about 15 percent of 1.3 billion strong population.

Some commentators have argued that the BJP thrives on policies of polarization to advance its supremacist agenda. They point to a type of emotional blackmail to exploit religious sentiments on sensitive issues such as the Babri Masjid: you either for the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya or against it.

Likewise you are either for the icon of Hindutva, Narendra Modi or against him. After all, the Gujarat massacre of Muslims in 2002, raised his iconic stature as a warrior determined to ethnically cleanse India of "terrorists" - euphemism for Muslims.

The case of Kashmir is a glaring example of how the BJP has set out to target and colonise Muslim-majority territories. Having stripped Kashmir of autonomy, Modi instituted Israeli-style military crackdowns by laying siege of the valley.

Those who argue in defense of Modi's abrogation of Article 370, base their rationale on BJP propaganda which claim that it is an "internal affair". That this line has effectively prevented countries such as South Africa from adopting measures in solidarity with Kashmir, is an indication of Modi's reliance on the shield of "sovereignty" to ward off critics.

This however does not prevent investigative journalists and human rights activists from undertaking visits to Kashmir in order to probe the current and long term effects of the oppressive military lockdown.

The violence flowing from BJP's unilateral occupation and siege is a reminder of the atrocities committed against Palestinians by Modi's chum Netanyahu, who strangely is admired by Bollywood's leading stars.

A shameful set of tragic events triggered by the rise of Hindutva power has not only led to mindless violence against Kashmir's Muslim majority, the illegal restrictions including total shutdown of the internet, has contributed to their existing trauma and angst.

While Modi is racing to reshape India as an exclusive Hindutva domain, his pillars of external support are beginning to crumble: Trump facing impeachment and Netanyahu facing corruption charges.

These developments cannot be a good omen for him, even though Saudi Arabia has given Modi the go-ahead to do as he pleases in Kashmir. Ultimately his iconic status will face internal rebellion for placing India on a collision course with its own destiny.

Tigers, elephants and pangolins suffer as global wildlife trafficking soars

The two young women who arrived at Heathrow in February 2014 en route to Düsseldorf were carrying nondescript luggage. Customs officers were suspicious nevertheless and looked inside – to find 13 iguanas stuffed into socks inside the cases. Astonishingly, 12 of the highly endangered San Salvador rock iguanas had survived their transatlantic journey.

“There only about 600 of these animals left in the wild, in the Bahamas, and these animals were being taken to a private collector somewhere in Germany. Incredibly, we were able to return 12 of them, alive, to their homeland – on San Salvador island,” said Grant Miller, who was then working for the Border Force’s endangered species team.



The incident remains one of the strangest attempts at wildlife trafficking in recent years and reveals the extent to which individuals will try to break the law to obtain endangered animals for their collections, or to buy body parts to consume for their alleged medical properties, or as exotic food. Illegal wildlife trade is now the fourth most profitable form of trafficking in the world, after drugs, guns and humans.

And it is a trade that is increasing dramatically, ranging from the smuggling of the occasional, individual rare creature – like the endangered Chinese giant salamander that was recently found inside a cereal box brought into the UK – to the trafficking, for their meat and scales, of more than half a million pangolins from Africa to Asia over the past three years. In this latter case, two of the world’s eight species of pangolin are now rated as being critically endangered and there are serious concerns about numbers of the others.

In addition to pangolins, other endangered trafficked animals include elephants, rhinos, European eels and seahorses. Finding ways to halt the widespread loss of these creatures is now becoming a desperate problem, say conservationists, and will be the focus of a meeting. “Can surveillance technology and social science address rule-breaking and wildlife crime?”, to be held this week at the Zoological Society of London.

The conference organiser, Tom Letessier, said one of the most worrying forms of illegal wildlife trade was the killing, on a vast scale, of sharks – in particular grey reef sharks and thresher sharks in the Indian Ocean. “Their fins are cut off and the sharks are dumped back into the sea to drown. Their fins then end up as food for banquets for the rich in south-east Asia,” he added.

As a result, thresher sharks are now considered to be vulnerable to extinction, while grey reef sharks are rated as being “near threatened”. But what can be done?

One idea is to use technological fixes – such as drones which could be flown over ships to film crewmen in the act of disembarking sharks, said Letessier. “The development of increasingly accurate devices, such as synthetic aperture radar for satellites, would also allow authorities to monitor illegal fishing from space in real time,” he added.

“However, it is equally clear that we have to consider social factors when working out why people turn to illegal wildlife trade. Stocks of fish on which local villages depend could become depleted and fishermen have to turn to something else. Sometimes the only thing on offer is a creature that is legally protected.”

(Source: The Guardian)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

UN fights to save Bosnia mission

(July 01, 2002)

The United States has vetoed a resolution to extend United Nations peace-keeping operations in Bosnia Hercegovina for six months because it did not win agreement to exempt American peace-keepers from prosecution by the new International War Crimes Tribunal. This report from Matthew Price:

For Bosnia’s peace-keepers it is time to wait as the clock ticks on a deadline to **renew their mandate** to operate in the country. There are one-and-a-half thousand police officers and hundreds of **logistical staff** who, if no agreement can be found, will have to **start packing their bags** on Thursday. Officially there does not appear to be any panic among UN staff.

At the office of the High Representative for Bosnia, currently Lord Ashdown, a **spokesperson** said: the **reasonable person’s assumption** is that it is not going to happen. If it does, however, it would be a massive logistical exercise. The UN role is essentially a **policing** one. At the moment its staff are training a new Bosnian police force and at the end of the year the UN is due to hand over to European officers. But that was to be a controlled, planned exercise.

Any sudden **change in the timetable** would be, in the words of one spokesperson, a huge dislocation. There is also a **question-mark hanging over** the status of the NATO mission in Bosnia, SFOR. Around a quarter of SFOR troops are from the US. It’s unclear whether a new mandate would have to be negotiated, but as was **recently shown** in Afghanistan, that can be done.

Words

renew their mandate: extend the period of their authority to carry out peace keeping tasks

logistical staff: people involved in the organization of transport and supplies

start packing their bags: begin making preparations to leave

spokesperson: a person who speaks as the representative of a group or organization

reasonable person’s assumption: what a fair and sensible person supposes

policing: the system used to preserve law and order

exercise: an activity designed to achieve a particular purpose

change in the timetable: alterations to the times when particular activities would be carried out

a question-mark hanging over: there is uncertainty about

as was recently shown: to use as an example what happened

(Source: BBC)

Over 55m saplings to be planted in Iran within 4 months

1 → Under the plan, forests will grow by more than 24,000 hectares, Fars news agency quoted Shahbazi as saying on Thursday.

Over the recent years, the country has suffered from the negative impact of climate change especially in relation to droughts.

With climate change affecting almost all the world, planting trees is indispen-

sable; as over the past 150 years, carbon dioxide emissions have increased by 30 percent, which is very harmful to health, Shahbazi lamented.

Increased CO2 emissions are usually caused by increased deforestation, which then results in elevated ambient temperatures, he noted.

There are various ways to deforestation



namely, road construction, water transfer but our major plan is to minimize environmental damages, he concluded.

\$238m allocated to manage environmentally hazardous waste



ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — The Department of Environment (DOE) will receive a budget of 10 trillion rials (nearly \$238 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) to manage environmentally hazardous waste as proposed in the budget bill for the next calendar year (starting on March 20, 2020).

President Hassan Rouhani submitted the administration’s draft of the national budget bill for the next year to the Majlis on Sunday, which amounted to about 1.988 quadrillion rials (about \$473.5 billion), with a 14-percent rise from the current year’s approved budget.

Supplying basic goods, treatment and medical equipment; securing livelihood; supporting production and employment; promoting tourism; and preserving water resources and environment are the focal points of the bill.

Under the bill, products which turn into hazardous waste after consumption and lead to environmental degradation will be taxed, and the “revenue from hazardous products” will be provided to the DOE in order to manage and reduce the harmful effects of waste, ISNA reported.

A list of products containing hazardous materials and their side effects has been prepared; industrial coatings and paints, tires, light bulbs, batteries, computer and accessories, audio and video devices, cellphones, and all plastic products which are domestically-made will be tax-included.

In order to properly enforce the regulations, manufacturers and importers are required to file a declaration at the end of each tax period and pay the taxes, which is estimated at 10 trillion rials (about \$238 million).

22 Iranian universities on GreenMetric sustainability ranking



ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Twenty-two Iranian universities were ranked among the world’s green institutes announced by the University of Indonesia’s GreenMetric World University Ranking on Sustainability 2019, IRNA reported on Monday.

UI GreenMetric World University Ranking on Sustainability was launched in 2010 to promote sustainability in higher education institutions worldwide. It allows universities to share their experience and best practices on sustainability issues, as well as to measure their sustainability policy, facilitating a comparison between them.

The world’s green universities are ranked according to six deciding factors contributing to sustainability including setting and infrastructure, energy and climate change, waste and water management, transportation and education in more than 10,000

universities worldwide. University of Zanjan was ranked first among Iranian universities and 48th globally.

Wageningen University & Research of the Netherlands came in first, while University of Oxford and University of California Davis came in second and third respectively.

From Iran, universities of Zanjan, Kashan, Gilan, Isfahan, Al-Zahra, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Shahrood University of Technology, Razi University, University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, Azad University of Science and Research, University of Tehran, Arak University, Bu-Ali Sina University, Shiraz University, Khorasgan Branch of Azad University, Amir Kabir, Sharif, Yazd, Tabriz, Zanjan University of Medical Sciences, Technical and Vocational University, University of Applied Science and Technology were also on the list.



Iranian student wins UCMAS title for 4th consecutive year

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Iranian 12-year-old girl student Yosra Soleimani won the first prize for fourth year in a row at the 24th International UCMAS Abacus and Mental Arithmetic Competition 2019 which was held in Cambodia on December 7-8, ILNA reported.

UCMAS (Universal Concept of Mental Arithmetic System)

combines an ancient teaching tool – the Abacus – with modern instructional expertise to stimulate child development and whole brain development while promoting learning and math in particular, as fun and exciting.

The international competition is the biggest annual competition of UCMAS where students from 79 countries gather to compete with each other.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

Iran to hold first national online project Olympiad

The first round of online project Olympiad will be held in Iran in the next Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21), Fatemeh Mohajerani, an official with the Ministry of Education has said.

The project Olympiad will focus on special subjects and is very much like Khwarizmi International Award the only difference is that the Olympiad will be carried out online, IRNA news agency quoted Mohajerani as saying on Sunday.

The participants can submit their projects online via a website and a jury will evaluate them, she added.

اولین المپیاد مجازی برگزار می شود

فاطمه مهاجرانی رئیس مرکز ملی پرورش استعدادهای درخشان و دانش پژوهان جوان گفت: سال آینده اولین المپیاد مجازی با عنوان «المپیاد پروژه ای» برگزار می شود.

فاطمه مهاجرانی روز یکشنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا اظهار داشت: این المپیاد یک موضوع خاص را به عنوان یک مساله تعریف کرده و به آن می پردازد و در واقع شبیه جشنواره خوارزمی است با این تفاوت که نیازی به حضور افراد نیست بلکه به صورت مجازی برگزار می شود.

وی افزود: شرکت کنندگان و نخبگان از طریق یک پورتال، طرح ها و موضوعات خود را ارسال می کنند تا مورد داوری قرار گیرد.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“cerebro-, cerebr-”

■ **Meaning:** brain

■ **For example:** Passive smoking is considered a major cause of **cerebrovascular** disease, which causes strokes.

PHRASAL VERB

Think something through

■ **Meaning:** to think carefully about the possible results of something

■ **For example:** The policy has not been thought through properly.

IDIOM

Get over something

■ **Explanation:** to begin to feel better after a very upsetting experience

■ **For example:** She never got over the death of her son.

Lebanese Khatib withdraws name from premiership

Paris conference to call for rapid formation of new govt.

Lebanese businessman Samir al-Khatib, one of the leading candidates for the position of prime minister, has withdrawn his candidacy to lead the next government, paving the way for caretaker Prime Minister Sa'ad al-Hariri to re-emerge for the job.

Khatib on Sunday announced his withdrawal from efforts to form a new government that must tackle an acute economic crisis.

He is an executive vice president of Khatib & Alami engineering company.

The businessman reportedly met Lebanon's caretaker Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil on December 3 after holding talks with President Michel Aoun at the Baabda Palace to gain their support for the post.

Hariri submitted his resignation to President Aoun on October 29 under pressure from protesters who accuse the ruling elite of pushing Lebanon toward political turmoil at a time of economic woes.

Hariri said at the time that he had reached a "dead end" in trying to resolve the economic crisis.

Currently, Lebanese political parties are negotiating to find a way out of the cabinet crisis.

Under Lebanon's power-sharing system, the prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim. Hariri's cabinet would stay on in a caretaker capacity until a new prime minister is named.

A consensus on Khatib appeared to form



last week among the main parties, including Hariri, who told reporters on December 3 that he backed Khatib to head the next cabinet but added that "some details" still had to be hashed out.

However, the businessman failed to win enough backing from the Sunni Muslim establishment for the post.

In a meeting with Khatib on Sunday,

Lebanon's Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian told him that he throws his weight behind Hariri.

"I learnt ... that as a result of meetings and consultations and contacts with the sons of the (Sunni) Islamic sect, agreement was reached on nominating Sa'ad al-Hariri to form the coming government," Khatib said.

He then went to see Hariri at his res-

idence in Beirut where he announced his withdrawal from candidacy. Hariri has made no immediate statement.

It is scheduled that formal consultations to designate the new prime minister will be held at the presidential palace on Monday.

President Aoun must designate the candidate with the greatest level of support among Lebanon's 128 lawmakers.

He said on Thursday that carrying out essential reforms and fighting corruption in Lebanon will be among the new government's top priorities.

Paris conference

Meanwhile, France will host an international conference on Lebanon on Dec. 11, France's foreign ministry said, adding that the meeting aimed to push Beirut to quickly create a government that could restore the economic situation in the country.

"This meeting should enable the international community to call for the rapid formation of an effective and credible government, which takes the necessary decisions to restore the economic situation and meets the aspirations expressed by the Lebanese people," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Agnes von der Muhll told reporters in a daily online briefing.

(Source: agencies)

Putin, Zelenskyy to hold first summit on Ukraine conflict

Russian President Vladimir Putin for the first time held formal talks with his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelenskyy over the conflict in Ukraine's east on Monday in a much-anticipated summit in the French capital, Paris.

No comprehensive peace deal is expected from the afternoon meeting - mediated by French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel - but diplomats hope the exercise will help boost trust between the two men.

Thousands have been killed and one million fled their homes since pro-Russia militias in eastern Ukraine launched a bid for independence in 2014 - kicking off a conflict that deepened Russia's estrangement from the West.

The separatists seized control of the

Donetsk and Luhansk regions shortly after Russia's annexation of Crimea, a Ukrainian peninsula.

Diplomats have emphasised the issue of Crimea - a seizure that gave Putin a popularity boost domestically but led to international sanctions being imposed - is not on the table at the summit.

Kyiv has made clear its determination to never give up the peninsula, which the international community still regards as part of Ukraine.

The Kremlin has sent signals it is ready to work with Zelenskyy, who Putin has described as "likeable" and "sincere".

But the Russian president also will not want to return empty-handed and will be pushing for an easing of sanctions.

(Source: al Jazeera)

World's fastest supersonic cruise missiles to be purchased next year

The Philippines is on course to become the first foreign nation to acquire BrahMos, the world's fastest supersonic cruise missile, which was jointly developed by India and Russia, according to a report.

"As far as the Philippines Army is concerned, the consensus on the BrahMos system is a done deal," a source familiar with the talks told the Hindustan Times.

The source mentioned that New Delhi may offer a preferential loan to Manila for the purchase, and the cost will determine how many systems the Philippines will end up buying.

The Philippines Army confirmed its interest in purchasing the weapon to strengthen the nation's coastal defenses

in October. The land-based version of the BrahMos system was displayed at an arms expo in Manila last week. India has been in similar talks with other countries, including Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia.

BrahMos was developed jointly by India and Russia, and is described as the world's fastest supersonic cruise missile. Aside from a land-based version, it can be launched from a jet, a ship or a submarine. Its upgraded model is said to have a range of up to 500km.

New Delhi successfully test-fired the missile from a Su-30 aircraft last spring. The tests of the land-based and ship-based versions of BrahMos followed this fall.

(Source: RT)

N. Korea fires back at Trump, says has 'nothing more to lose'

Pyongyang has hit back at US President Donald Trump over his "inappropriate" comments following its test at a satellite launch center, saying North Korea will not give in to Washington's pressure since it already has "nothing to lose."

Senior North Korean official, Kim Yong-chol, made the remarks in response to Trump's tweet on Sunday, in which the U.S. president said North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was "too smart and has far too much to lose, everything actually, if he acts in a hostile way."

Trump also said, "He (Kim Jong-un) does not want to void his special relationship with the President of the United States or interfere with the US presidential election in November."

The tweet came after the North announced on Sunday that it had carried out a "successful test of great significance" at its Sohae Satellite Launching Station.

Kim further called the U.S. president an "impatient, old man," saying that the North's leader might change his view towards Trump if he continues making "inappropriate, dangerous" remarks.

"As (Trump) is such a heedless and erratic old man,



the time when we cannot but call him a 'dotard' again may come," Kim Yong-chol said.

"Trump has too many things that he does not know about (North Korea). We have nothing more to lose. Though the U.S. may take away anything more from us, it can never remove the strong sense of self-respect, might and resentment against the U.S. from us."

Kim Yong-chol made two visits to the US last

year and met with Trump. He also helped set up the North Korean leader's summits with the American president.

Trump has repeatedly described his relationship with the North Korean leader as "successful" since they met for the first time in 2018 in Singapore. The two met in another summit in Vietnam in an effort to make a denuclearization agreement, but the summit broke up without an agreement or even a joint statement.

The North has been under multiple rounds of harsh sanctions by the United Nations and the US over its nuclear and missile programs. In spite of those sanctions, it has taken several unilateral steps as signs of goodwill in the course of the diplomacy with the US.

Washington has, nevertheless, failed to offer any sanctions relief in return.

Back in October, the U.S. president once again urged Kim in a Twitter message to "get the deal done," and meet in a third summit with him. Kim, however, has ruled out any other "useless" summit with Trump, if he receives nothing in return.

(Source: agencies)

Reporter resigns, says Newsweek 'suppressed' Syria chemical attack story

A Newsweek reporter has resigned after the American magazine refuses to publish his article questioning Western-backed findings about the origin of a chemical attack in Syria.

Last April, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) published a report alleging that Syria had carried out a chemical attack against its southwestern city of Douma. The United States, Britain, and France later used the report as an excuse to launch a coordinated missile strike against sites and research facilities near the Syrian capital Damascus and the city of Homs in the Arab country's west.

The reporter Tareq Haddad submitted his resignation on Friday after his editor refused to publish his article mentioning an internal OPCW email that had revealed inconsistencies between actual findings on the ground by the organization's experts and the United Nations chemical watchdog's final report.

"Yesterday, I resigned from Newsweek after my attempts to publish newsworthy revelations about the leaked OPCW letter were refused for no valid reason," Haddad tweeted on Saturday.

The email sent by an OPCW member was revealed by whistleblower website WikiLeaks

in late November. In the communication, the inspector had accused the watchdog of doctoring the report, which had been compiled by its experts, who had visited Douma.

The author of the email had rejected as "highly misleading and not supported by facts" the OPCW claim that "sufficient evidence" was found to determine chlorine was "likely released" from cylinders the organization's experts had analyzed at two different locations in the Syrian city.

Haddad, meanwhile, said he was threatened with legal action after asking his editor why his story about the damning leak had been refused.

"I have collected evidence of how they suppressed the story in addition to evidence from another case where info inconvenient to U.S. govt. was removed [by the outlet], though it was factually correct," he said.

Fellow journalists, however, lauded Haddad for his courage.

"Newsweek, Newsweek UK, do you have any comment on this tweet from your former reporter Tareq Haddad?" Peter Hitchens of Britain's The Mail on Sunday paper tweeted. "Mr. Haddad, please contact me at The Mail on Sunday in London," Hitchens added.

(Source: Press TV)

Finland: Sanna Marin to become world's youngest PM at 34

Finland's left-wing Social Democrats, who lead a five-party coalition government, have picked 34-year-old Minister of Transport and Communications Sanna Marin to become the country's youngest-ever prime minister next week, taking over after the resignation of Antti Rinne.

Rinne resigned earlier this week after coalition member the Centre Party said it had lost confidence in him following his handling of a postal strike.

"We have a lot of work ahead to rebuild trust," Marin told reporters after winning a narrow vote among the party leadership.

Antti Lindtman, head of the party's parliamentary group, was runner-up. "We have a joint government program which glues the coalition together," Marin said.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is 39, Ukrainian Prime Minister Oleksii Honcharuk is 35, while North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un is reportedly 35. Marin will head Finland's women-led coalition, which includes Left Alliance's Li Anderson, 32; the Green League's Maria Ohisalo, 34; the Centre Party's Katri Kulmuni, 32 and Anna-Maja Henriksson, the 55-year-old leader of the Swedish People's party. Accord-

ing to the Guinness World Records, Malaysia's Mahathir bin Mohamad, now 94, is the oldest sitting prime minister.

The coalition, which took office just six months ago, has agreed to continue with its program after Rinne announced he was stepping down at the demand of the Centre Party.

The timing of the change in leadership is awkward for Finland, which holds the rotating presidency of the European Union until the end of the year, playing a central role in efforts to hammer out a new budget for the bloc.

(Source: agencies)

Iraqi commission summons, orders arrest of over 250 current, former officials over corruption

Missiles hit Iraqi military complex housing U.S. troops, six injured

Abdul-Mahdi had submitted his resignation to the legislature a day earlier, following weeks of protests demanding he step down.

The 77-year-old Iraqi politician had announced in a statement on November 29 that he would submit his resignation to parliament amid anti-government demonstrations.

"I will submit to parliament an official memorandum resigning from the current prime ministry so that parliament can review its choices," he said.

Abdul-Mahdi's remarks came on the same day that Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani urged lawmakers to reconsider their support for the government.

"We call upon the House of Representatives from which this current government emerged to reconsider its options in that regard," Ayatollah Sistani said in a statement read out by his representative Abdul Mahdi al-Karbalaei during a weekly sermon in the holy city of Karbala.

Missiles hit Iraqi military complex housing U.S. troops

Meanwhile, six Iraqi troops have been injured after several rockets hit a military complex that also houses U.S. forces near Baghdad airport, the Iraqi army says.

The Iraqi military said in a statement that Monday's rocket attack was planned to be a larger one as security forces found launchers that had not been fired properly.

Those wounded in the assault belonged to Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service, security sources told AFP, adding two of them were in critical condition.

The base also houses a small group of U.S. soldiers and American diplomats.

Attacks on Iraqi bases hosting U.S. troops and foreign diplomatic missions come as a wave of protests over unemployment, corruption and lack of public services continue in the country.

Over the past six weeks, at least nine attacks have hit U.S. targets. There have been no claims of responsibility and no U.S. troops have been harmed.

(Source: agencies)

Paris commuters face 300 miles of traffic jams as France enters its fifth day of strikes

France's pension problem

Changing France's pension system has been a controversial subject for more than two decades. In 1995, President Jacques Chirac ended up caving into union demands after his pension reform plans faced weeks of demonstrations. Since then, no president has tried to alter the pension arrangements. The current general strike is reportedly the biggest movement of its kind since 1995.

According to the French press, the Macron government could adjust plans to look at longer transition periods or apply the new laws to those that aren't currently close to the retirement age.

(Source: CNBC News)

Locals in east Afghanistan complain of diseases caused by U.S. 'mother of all bombs'

Over two and a half years after the United States dropped its most powerful non-nuclear bomb on an eastern Afghan province, locals are now complaining that America's "mother of all bombs" have brought them "many diseases" and affected crop yield in agricultural lands.

Back in April 2017, the U.S. military dropped the biggest bomb in its non-nuclear arsenal onto what it described as a Daesh hideout in Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province.

According to the Afghan government, the attack killed more than 90 Daesh militants. The U.S., however, did not release any figure.

Almost two and a half years on, local residents are reporting "many diseases" and health problems that they believed have been caused by the bomb.

Afghan news channel Tolonews has cited local residents saying the diseases have emerged in regions close to the targeted area.

One of the residents told the news outlet that many children and teenagers were suffering from skin problems.

"The 'mother of all bombs' was dropped here," said Pacha Shinwari, a local resident. "You can see that the stones can be broken easily, the plants are dry, the trees are dry, the nearby houses are all destroyed — 40 or 50 of them."

"The government evacuated the people (before the bomb was dropped), but when we came back, we saw that the houses were destroyed," said another resident.

The residents also explained that the agricultural yields "are not the same as in the past. The harvests are lesser than in the past."

Just days after the bombing, an Afghan parliamentary delegation visited the province to investigate the impact of the bomb; however, no further probes could be conducted in the area due to security issues, officials said.

But now, the Afghan Ministry of Public Health says it is set to dispatch researchers and medics to the bombing site as well as hospitals in Jalalabad, the provincial capital of Nangarhar to conduct further analysis on the bomb's impact.

Military affairs analyst Atiqullah Amarkhil said the bomb, officially known as the GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB), has three major health impacts, the first of them affecting the eyes.

(Source: Press TV)

French basketball player fined in China for not looking at flag

A French former NBA player has been reprimanded and fined \$1,400 by sports officials in China for not looking at the Chinese flag during the national anthem before a game.

Players with the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) are supposed to stare at the national symbol during the "March of the Volunteers", but television images showed Guerschon Yabusele, who plays for Nanjing Tongxi Monkey King, had his head down before Friday's game.

Yabusele was given a "serious warning" and a 10,000-yuan fine for not looking at the flag as required, the CBA said in a statement on Saturday.

Yabusele, who played forward for the Boston Celtics for two seasons before joining the CBA team this year, has not commented on the incident.

China's government has stepped up the promotion of patriotism under President Xi Jinping, with legislation approved in 2017 to punish anyone who disrespects the national anthem with up to three years in prison.

Opinions on Yabusele's punishment were divided on Chinese social media.

"He's happy to take money from China, but he doesn't respect it," one person wrote on the popular Weibo social media platform.

"This player must be expelled immediately and his club must be disqualified from the championship," another said.

But many found the sanction to be harsh.

"It's nonsense. First, he's not Chinese. Moreover, he stood up and didn't make any insulting gesture," one person wrote.

"He has his head down. So what? In what era does the CBA live? It's 50 years behind."

Yabusele is not the first foreign athlete to break patriotic rules in China.

Last year, Shandong Luneng's Brazilian midfielder Diego Tardelli was handed a one-game ban for rubbing his face during the anthem before a game.

(Source: Eurosport)

Guardiola admits Man City standards have slipped

Pep Guardiola says Manchester City may no longer be able to match the standards of the best teams after a painful defeat against Manchester United left them 14 points behind Premier League leaders Liverpool.

Guardiola's City have been the Premier League's outstanding side over the past two years, clocking up 100 points in 2017/18 and retaining the title last term during their treble-winning campaign.

Guardiola hopes City, who have now lost four of their 16 league games this season, will be able to learn from their setbacks.

"United have the quality to defend and the quality to attack on the counter-attack and you have to accept that," said the City boss.

"That is the level we face against Liverpool, United, Barcelona, Madrid, Juventus. They are the teams we have to face and the reality is maybe we are not able now to compete with them.

"We have to improve and accept it and move forward. Maybe we need to live that as a club to improve, to accept the reality now and improve."

Guardiola, however, is not ready to give up on his side's title defence and there is also plenty more to play for in the remainder of the campaign.

City have already qualified for the last 16 of the Champions League ahead of Wednesday's final group game against Dinamo Zagreb, are through to the League Cup quarter-finals and have a kind draw for the start of their FA Cup defence next month.

"The reality is we are 14 points behind for the mistakes we have done, for the quality of our opponents and especially, as well, the things we cannot control," said Guardiola. "That is the reality but we have to continue."

(Source: Mirror)

Burnley fan, 13, ejected for racially abusing Son

Burnley have announced a 13-year-old supporter was ejected from the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on Saturday for racially abusing Spurs attacker Son Heung-Min.

The club said the minor is under investigation by the Metropolitan Police and they will contact the teenager with a view to an enforced educational programme.

"Burnley Football Club is aware of an incident during the Tottenham Hotspurs vs. Burnley game on Saturday, Dec. 7," a Burnley statement read. "During the Premier League game, a 13-year-old Burnley supporter was ejected from the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium following an alleged racist gesture towards Spurs player Son Heung-Min."

"The minor, who was accompanied by a guardian, is now under investigation by the Metropolitan Police, with help from Lancashire Police and the two clubs."

"In the meantime, Burnley Football Club will be contacting the teenager and his family, with a view to an enforced educational programme, run in conjunction with Kick It Out and Burnley FC in the Community."

"Burnley Football Club would like to reiterate its zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination of any kind."

"We will continue to work with the authorities to help eradicate the growing problem of discrimination within football, and we urge all our supporters to report any such issues, in the strictest confidence, via our dedicated matchday 'Respect' text service, on 66777, or the Kick It Out App."

(Source: Daily Mail)

Messi out but Conte expects Inter to suffer

Barcelona star Lionel Messi will not make the trip to the San Siro for Tuesday's final Champions League group game, but Inter Milan coach Antonio Conte still expects a tough test as his side bids to reach the last 16.

Barcelona are already through to the knockout rounds after six-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi scored in a convincing 3-1 victory over Borussia Dortmund last time out.

The Argentine has been left out of the 20-man squad along with midfielder Sergi Roberto. Coach Ernesto Valverde's side will also be without injured the Ousmane Dembele, Jordi Alba, Nelson Semedo and Gerard Pique.

The Spaniards are assured of finishing top of Group F as they have 11 points from five games.

Inter are second, level on seven points with Borussia Dortmund who host Slavia Prague, but the Italians will qualify if the two clubs finish on the same number of points due to their superior head-to-head goal difference.

"We're talking about Barcelona, one of the strongest teams in the world with a very strong squad of 20 to 22 players," said Conte.

"Barcelona remain one of the four or five teams that every year sets out to win the competition."

(Source: Goal)

Russia banned from Olympics, World Cup over doping

The World Anti-Doping Agency on Monday banned Russia for four years from major global sporting events including the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, over manipulated doping data.

WADA's executive committee, meeting in Lausanne, handed Russia the four-year suspension after accusing Moscow of falsifying laboratory doping data handed over to investigators earlier this year.

Not only will Russia be ruled out of the next Olympic cycle, but Russian government officials will be barred from attending any major events, while the country will lose the right to host, or even bid, for tournaments.

"WADA's executive committee approved unanimously to assert a non-compliance on the Russian anti-doping agency for a period of four years," WADA spokesman James Fitzgerald said.

Under the sanctions, Russian sportsmen and women will still be allowed to compete at the Olympics next year and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics but only if they can demonstrate that they were not part of what WADA believes was a state-sponsored system of doping.

It will be up to FIFA to stipulate how a team of Russian players can take part in the qualifying matches for the 2022 World Cup.

Euro 2020, in which the Russian city of Saint Petersburg will host four matches, is not affected by the ban because it is not defined as a "major event" for anti-doping purposes.

"They are going to have prove they had nothing to do with the non-compliance, (that)



they were not involved in the doping schemes as described by the McLaren report, or they did not have their samples affected by the manipulation," Fitzgerald said.

The independent report by sports lawyer Richard McLaren, released in 2016, revealed the significant extent of state-sponsored doping in Russia, notably between 2011 and 2015.

It led to the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) being suspended for nearly three years previously over revelations of a vast state-supported doping programme.

Full disclosure of data from the Moscow laboratory was a key condition of Russia's controversial reinstatement by WADA in September 2018.

'A tragedy'

RUSADA chief Yuri Ganas told AFP Monday that his country had "no chance" of winning an appeal against the ban, dubbing it tragic for clean athletes.

"There is no chance of winning this case in court," Ganas said, with RUSADA's supervisory board set to meet on December 19 to take a decision on whether to appeal the ban.

"This is a tragedy," he added. "Clean athletes are seeing their rights limited."

The WADA decision was widely predicted, with the body's president, Craig Reedie, having made a presentation Saturday to the Olympic Summit, participants of which "strongly condemned those responsible for the manipulation of the data from the

Moscow laboratory".

"It was agreed that this was an attack on sport and that these actions should lead to the toughest sanctions against those responsible," the IOC said, asking that the Russian authorities deliver the "fully authenticated raw data".

Positive doping tests contained in data leaked by a whistleblower in 2017 were missing from the laboratory data supplied in January 2019, which prompted a new inquiry.

Former WADA president Dick Pound, who chaired the commission that in 2015 made damning accusations of mass doping in Russian athletics, said Moscow had this time gone "too far".

"The IOC is a little bit tired about what Russia has been doing and so I see the IOC probably focusing more on athletes who are newer," Pound told AFP.

Pound acknowledged the influential role of Russia -- which in recent years hosted the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics as well as the football World Cup in 2018 -- "on many levels" in the sporting world.

"On the field of play, it is a big, important country. With China and the United States, it's among the sporting giants, so that's influential," he said.

"It's (also) influential because Russia hosts and is willing to host many competitions for international federations, especially those who don't have much money of their own, so they have a considerable influence among the international federations."

(Source: AFP)

Reeling from doping ban, Moscow blames 'anti-Russian hysteria'

Russia reeled from a four-year ban from global sports on Monday, with athletes in shock and the government quick to blame "anti-Russian hysteria".

The head of Russia's anti-doping agency meanwhile said his country had "no chance" of winning an appeal of the ban, which he described as a tragedy for clean athletes.

The World Anti-Doping Agency on Monday banned Russia from international competitions including the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

It accused Russia of falsifying laboratory doping data handed over earlier this year to investigators probing claims of widespread doping.

Russia can appeal the ban to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, but the head of its RUSADA anti-doping agency, Yuri Ganas, said he doubted it would be successful.

"There is no chance of winning this case in court," Ganas told AFP. "This is a tragedy. Clean athletes are seeing their rights limited."

Under the sanctions, Russian sportsmen and women will still be allowed to compete at the Olympics next year but only if they can demonstrate that they were not part of what WADA believes was a state-sponsored system of doping.

Russian government officials will be barred from attending any major events, while the country will lose the right to host, or even bid, for tournaments.

'This is politics'

While admitting there have been instances of doping, Russian officials say the country is no worse than any other. Some have ac-



cused other countries of pursuing the ban to remove Russian athletes from competition.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said Monday that it was "impossible to deny" that doping had taken place but that those involved had already been punished.

"This is the continuation of this anti-Russian hysteria that has already become chronic," Medvedev told Russian news agencies.

Many in Russian sports agreed. "The decision that was taken today was political and not simply about sports," the head of Russia's Biathlon Union, Vladimir Drachev, told Russia-24 state television.

"I have no words... How can you mock athletes who have been preparing all their lives

for this?" said Aslanbek Khushtov, who won wrestling gold at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

"Unfortunately this is politics, I don't smell any sport here," he told state news agency TASS.

The scandal has tainted Russia's sporting reputation since the revelation of large-scale state-sponsored doping aimed at improving its medal performance at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

Russian track and field athletes were barred from competing at the 2016 Rio Olympics although Russians competing in other events were allowed to take part.

The ban was widened to include all events at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, though Russian competitors who could prove

they were above suspicion were able to compete as neutrals under the Olympic flag.

The heads of several Russian sports federations said Monday they were preparing to send athletes to the 2020 Olympics under a neutral flag.

'A proud Russian'

The country's athletes "must go to the Olympics whatever the situation," said the head of Russia's swimming federation, Vladimir Salnikov.

"Of course we'd prefer that our athletes participate under the Russian flag and hear their national anthem. But the circumstances may be different... (and) no one has the right to deprive innocent athletes of their dreams," he told state news agency RIA Novosti.

"If (participating under a neutral flag) is the only possibility, we must go and win. Our clean athletes, I am sure, will show that they are strong, even in these circumstances," said the head of the water polo, diving and synchronised swimming federation, Alexei Vlasenko.

Vyacheslav Fetisov, a Soviet-era ice hockey legend and now pro-government lawmaker, denounced what he called the "collective punishment" of Russia's athletes.

"I am a proud Russian. I was proud to represent my country," Fetisov, deputy chairman of the lower house State Duma's sports committee, told AFP.

"I will work tirelessly... to get today's athletes the opportunity I had to represent Russia -- and be up on that podium. It was one of the great privileges of my life."

(Source: Eurosport)

Russia anti-doping chief says 'no chance' of winning ban appeal

The head of Russia's anti-doping agency said Monday that his country had "no chance" of winning an appeal against a four-year international sporting ban he said was a tragedy for clean athletes.

"There is no chance of winning this case in court," RUSADA chief Yuri Ganas told AFP after the World Anti-Doping Agency imposed the ban that will rule Russia out of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

RUSADA's supervisory board is set to meet on December 19 to take a decision on whether to appeal the ban, he said.

"This is a tragedy," he said. "Clean athletes are seeing their rights limited."

Ganas said that some Russian athletes were contemplating leaving Russia so that they could train elsewhere.

He described the sentiments among athletes as "awful," stressing that four years for a sportsman is a long time in what can be a short career.

Earlier Monday WADA's executive committee, meeting in Lausanne, decided that Russia be handed a four-year suspension after accusing Moscow of falsifying laboratory data.

Russian athletes have already faced a series of bans over the last few years and were forced to participate in the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Games as neutral competitors.

The heads of several Russian sports federations said they were preparing to send



athletes to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics under a neutral flag.

The head of Russia's swimming federation, Vladimir Salnikov, said the country's athletes "must go to the Olympics whatever the situation."

"Of course we'd prefer that our athletes participate under the Russian flag and hear their national anthem. But the circumstances may be different... (and) no-one has the right to deprive innocent athletes of their dreams," he told state news agency RIA Novosti.

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(Source: AFP)

Russia cannot compete at 2022 World Cup under own flag - WADA

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said on Monday that the Russian national soccer team could not take part in the 2022 World Cup under the Russian flag due to doping sanctions that bar the country from major sporting events for four years.

WADA earlier on Monday banned Russia from the world's top sporting events for four years, a period that includes the next summer and winter Olympics and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, for tampering with doping-related laboratory data.

"If they qualify (for the World Cup), a team representing Russia cannot participate. But if there is a mechanism put in place, then they can apply to participate on a neutral basis, not as representatives of Russia," Jonathan Taylor, chair of WADA's compliance review committee, told a news conference.

Taylor said that FIFA, soccer's global governing body, had the option of putting in place such a mechanism and that it would allow clean Russian athletes to apply to compete as neutrals.

"It will be for FIFA to implement, but they will have to do so in conjunction with WADA," Taylor said. "But there will be no flag or anthem."

A spokesperson for FIFA told Reuters it had asked WADA and the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) to clarify how the four-year ban affected Russia's football teams.

The Russian Football Union told Rus-



sian news agencies earlier on Monday it had yet to hear FIFA's official position on the WADA decision. It said it hoped its national teams would not face any restrictions.

The sanctions against Russia, the host of last year's soccer World Cup, also bar it from hosting major sporting events for a four-year period or applying to host new events in that period.

But WADA has said the ban will not affect Russia's hosting of four Euro 2020 soccer championships matches, including a quarter-final, as well as the Champions League final in 2021 set to be held in St. Petersburg.

WADA has said these events "are not multi-sport major events or world championships but rather regional/continental single-sport events."

(Source: Reuters)

Shoja Khalilzadeh voted best goal of ACL 2019

S P O R T S TEHRAN — After nearly four million votes, the best goal of the 2019 AFC Champions League has been decided with Shoja Khalilzadeh's incredible scissor kick for Persepolis against Al Ahli named the winning effort following the public poll on the-AFC.com.

Ten fantastic goals were nominated that spanned the Continent from Uzbekistan to Urawa, but it was Persepolis' defender Khalilzadeh whose amazing acrobatics that captured the attention and favour of Asia's football fans.

The Iranian had previously won Goal of the Week for Matchday Three and Goal of the Group Stage, and so completes his hat-trick with the overall best goal of the 2019 AFC Champions League.

Johor Darul Ta'zim forward Safawi Rasid ran Khalilzadeh close but ultimately finished in second with Al Ittihad's Romarinho in third.

Khalilzadeh spoke exclusively to The-AFC.com after the poll concluded.

"It was easily the best goal of my career because I scored it for the best club in the world, Persepolis," he said.

"I would like to thank all the fans who voted for me to win. It means a lot to me for my goal to be voted best in the 2019 AFC Champions League and to be recognized by the AFC. Once again, I would like to thank the fans for all their support and love."

While the 30-year-old and his teammates were eliminated at the Group Stage in this year's competition, Iran 2018-19 league champions will have a chance to go again as they enter the draw on Tuesday for the 2020 edition.



Esteghlal suffer late draw against Paykan: IPL

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Esteghlal football team suffered a late 2-2 draw against Paykan in Iran Professional League (IPL) on Monday.

Mehdi Ghaedi gave Esteghlal the lead in the eighth minute but Faraz Emamali leveled the match in the 33rd minute. The referee showed Estghlal penalty spot after Paykan forward was brought down in the area just before the halftime.

Shahriar Moghanloo missed the penalty for Paykan. Paykan were the better team in the second half and created several chances but their strikers lacked the cutting edge. Just before the hour mark, Vouria Ghafouri opened

Paykan's goal with a powerful strike inside the area.

In the dying moments of the match, Hossein Pouramini equalized the match in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Earlier on the day, Shahr Khodro drew 1-1 with Sepahan in Mashhad.

Machine Sazi defeated Tractor 2-0 in Tabriz derby and Zob Ahan beat Nassaji 2-0 in Isfahan.

Foolad also moved to fourth place with a 1-0 win over Pars Jonoubi.

Esteghlal remain top of the table with 26 games.

Sepahan and Shahr Khodro are second and third with 25 and 24 points and one game in their hands.

Iran goalball one step closer to Paralympics berth



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran defeated Japan 3-1 at the IBSA Goalball Asia-Pacific Championships semifinals on Monday.

Mohammad Soranji and Khalil Shahriarnasab (two goals) were on target for Iran and Ryouga Yamaguchi scored Japan's solitary goal.

Team Melli will meet China in the final

match on Tuesday and will qualify for the 2020 Paralympic Games if defeats the Asian powerhouse team.

Iran have previously lost to China 9-5 on Saturday in the competition underway at the Chiba Port Arena in Chiba, Japan.

The tournaments have brought seven men teams and six women teams together.

Iran win two medals at Alans wrestling tournament



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iranian freestyle wrestlers claimed two medals at the Alans tournament.

Mohammadjavad Ebrahimi claimed a silver medal at the 92kg and Amirhossein Zare seized a bronze in the 120kg.

The team is headed by Ebrahim Mehrban and Oveis Mallah.

The tournament in Ossetia is now in its third year and has quickly become one of the toughest in the world. In just two years, there have been six world champions to compete in it and not win.

Iran sent six wrestlers to the competition which was held in Vladikavkaz, Russia from Dec. 5 to 8.

Excitement builds ahead of star-studded #ACL2020 draw

With Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal AFC Champions League triumph still fresh in the minds of fans throughout the Continent, the anticipation is now building towards the AFC Champions League 2020 Group Stage draw, which will take place at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia at 4:30pm (local time) on Tuesday.

Along with Al Hilal, as many as six former AFC Champions League champions, which include Al Sadd SC from Qatar, Korea Republic tri - Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors FC, Suwon Samsung Bluewings and Ulsan Hyundai FC - as well as China PR's Guangzhou Evergrande FC, will discover their opponents in what promises to be a historic 2020 AFC Champions League campaign.

Raising the stakes, the upcoming edition will present the ultimate winners, should they not qualify through their domestic league, with an added incentive of a guaranteed spot in the Preliminary/Play-off



stage of the 2021 season.

Adding to the anticipation and excitement, some of the most iconic names in AFC Champions League history are poised to grace the eagerly anticipated draw. Ibrahim Al Ghanim, who featured prominently for Qatar and Al Gharafa, China PR and Guangzhou Evergrande ace Gao Lin and ex-Japan and Urawa Red

Diamonds star Keisuke Tsuboi will lend their star credentials as draw ambassadors.

AFC General Secretary Dato' Windsor John said: "The AFC Champions League continues to be the ultimate club stage for our players and teams to shine. And its popularity was exemplified in 2019 with the rise of television viewership and new engagement records set across all

the AFC's digital platforms.

"The decision to enable the 2020 champions to defend their title in 2021, brings the AFC in line with the best practices in world football and reiterates the AFC's commitment to strengthen our competitions, as outlined in our Vision and Mission."

Among this year's debutants in the group stage are newly crowned Thai League 1 champions, Chiangrai United who narrowly missed out on the 2019 edition after losing to Japan's Sanfrecce Hiroshima in the final play-off round.

Surprise packages in the 2019 UAE Pro League, Sharjah, who clinched their first domestic title in nearly 25 years, are poised to make their maiden appearance alongside 2019 A-League Premiers, Perth Glory, who will be hoping to emulate Western Sydney Wanderers' fairy-tale run to the title in 2014 at their first attempt.

(Source: the-afc)

Iran win two gold medals at ITF West Asia 13&U Dev. C'ship

TASNIM — Iranian boys and girls tennis players earned two gold and two silver medals at the West Asia Cup 13& Under Developments Championships 2019.

Iranian girl Mandegar Farzami won the title after beating her compatriot Hana Soltani 6-2 6-0.

Iranian boy Kasra Rahmani defeated his countryman Amir Ali Ghavam 6-4 6-0 in the final match to win a gold.

The competition is being held in Dubai, the UAE from December 5 to 14 with participation of 13 countries.

Esteghlal GM Amir Hossein Fathi resigns

IRNA — Esteghlal General Manager Amir Hossein Fathi stepped down as his role following Andrea Stramaccioni's exit.

The Italian coach canceled his contract on Sunday and traveled to Rome early Monday.

Esteghlal has moved top of Iran Professional League after about four years under the discipline-based approach of the Italian coach but he left his post after the Iranian club failed to respect contractual obligations.

The local media have reported that around 100 Esteghlal supporters have gathered outside the Iran's Ministry of Sport and Youth, which owns the club, to protest the incident.

Fathi was appointed as Esteghlal GM in November 2018.

Sousa prepares for more challenges, Renard rues missed chances

Head coach Helio Sousa says there is still a lot of work for him and his technical staff ahead despite Bahrain winning the Persian Gulf Cup for the first time on Sunday.

Bahrain lifted the title after defeating Saudi Arabia 1-0 in the final at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium thanks to a 69th minute goal from Mohamed Al Romaihi.

Sousa, who brought all his assistants to the post-match press conference, praised his players but said Bahrain can't be satisfied just yet.

"This is a great achievement and it is due to the hard work of the players," said Sousa. "They had great belief and fought very hard in each match."



"We achieved two titles in 2019 (Bahrain won the WAFF Championship in August) and this is something good for Bahraini football," he added. "However we still have a lot of work ahead as we have the Asian Qualifiers next March and we must keep winning."

Sousa paid tribute to the big number of Bahraini fans who attended the match.

"I want to thank the fans who created a great atmosphere," he said. "They were the 12th player for us as they made the difference tonight compared to the previous match against Saudi Arabia in the group stage (which Bahrain lost 2-0)."

Saudi Arabia head coach Herve Renard praised the performance of Bahrain, who he said deserved to win the title.

"I want to congratulate Bahrain for their title victory," said Renard. "They dealt with us very well defensively and also showed great effort as a group."

"We had many scoring chances, especially in the first half where we also missed a penalty. We tried our best to come back but we failed."

"We were missing some key players through injuries and this affected us," he said. "We should now forget this match as the tournament is over for us and we must concentrate on the Asian Qualifiers."

(Source: AFP)

IPC Statement on decision by WADA Executive Committee

The IPC acknowledges decision by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Executive Committee.

Those responsible for the manipulation of data from the Moscow Laboratory before it was transferred to WADA appear to have done everything possible to undermine the principles of fair and clean sport, principles that the rest of the sporting world support and adhere to.

This sincere lack of respect towards the rest of the global sporting movement is not welcome and has zero place in the world of sport. It is only right that those responsible for this data manipulation are punished.

Unlike in 2016, when the IPC was the organisation with a decision to make, it is WADA on this occasion who are taking the lead. The IPC would like to thank WADA for the work they have done in exposing this attempt to cheat the system.

Following today's decision, the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) now has 21 days to either accept the proposed consequences or to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

In accordance with the WADA International Standard for Code Compliance by Signatories, any consequences will then come into effect only following a final decision by the CAS. The IPC cannot therefore implement outcome actions regarding this matter until after a final decision has been reached.

Once a final decision has been taken, it will be legally binding across all sports and bodies that are signatories of the World Anti-Doping Code, and must be recognised and enforced by all signatories. This includes the IPC.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

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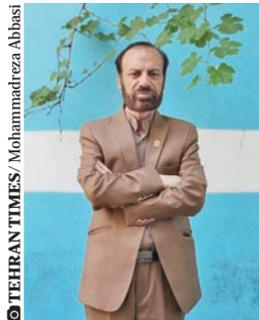


GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The bitterness of this world produces the sweetness of the next one, and the sweetness of the former leads to the bitterness of the latter.
Imam Ali (AS)

Islamic prayer reciter Qasem Musavi dies at 71

A R T TEHRAN — The veteran reciter of Islamic prayers, Seyyed Qasem Musavi-Qahar, who was most famous for reciting the special supplications for before dawns during the holy month of Ramadan, died on Sunday at a Tehran hospital after suffering from laryngeal cancer for several years. He was 71.



Reciter of Islamic prayers Seyyed Qasem Musavi-Qahar poses after an interview at the MNA office in Tehran on June 6, 2017.

He was Iran's second most popular prayer reciter after Seyyed Javad Zabih before the victory of the Islamic revolution. He recorded recitations of many Islamic prayers over the past 50 years at the Iranian radio and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting.

The office of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has announced that it will cover the entire cost of medical treatment for the eulogist, the Persian of FNA has reported.

Krakow Film Festival to screen "Sunless Shadows"

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian filmmaker Mehrdad Oskui's latest documentary "Sunless Shadows" will be screened at the 60th Krakow Film Festival. The film will be a highlight of the Polish event, which will take place from May 31 to June 2020, the organizers have announced.



A scene from "Sunless Shadows" by Mehrdad Oskui.

In "Sunless Shadows", Oskui builds a remarkable relationship with a group of adolescent girls that serve their sentence for the grave crime of murdering their father, their husband or another male family member in an Iranian juvenile detention center.

The director visited Krakow twice. In 2005, his film "The Other Side of Burka" won the Grand Prix of the festival, while he also participated in the festival as the chairman of the jury last year. "Sunless Shadows" opened the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) in the Netherlands and brought Oskui the best director award.

"My Father and Me" by the outstanding British filmmaker Nick Broomfield is another highlight of the Krakow festival.

Linda Ronstadt, Sally Field, and Sesame Street feted at Kennedy Center Honors

WASHINGTON (Reuters) — Singer Linda Ronstadt, actress Sally Field, and music group Earth, Wind & Fire received the United States' top awards for the arts on Sunday with a rocking, rousing performance at the annual Kennedy Center Honors show in Washington.

Children's television program "Sesame Street" and conductor Michael Tilson Thomas rounded out the group of five Kennedy Center honorees who were feted for successful, decades-long contributions to the small screen, large screen, and the stage.

With potential impeachment looming, President Donald Trump did not attend the event or hold the customary reception for the honorees at the White House.

The Republican president opted not to come to the annual show during his first year in office because of controversy over his policies and has not come since.

"The arts is about bringing people together," said the show's host, actor LL Cool J. "These are times when that's needed."

Outtakes from Lamorisse 1978 doc "The Lovers' Wind" open Cinéma Vérité

▶ Veteran Iranian writer and voice actor Manuchehr Anvar, who was the narrator of "The Lovers' Wind", was also among the guests.

In his brief speech, the director of the Cinéma Vérité festival, Mohammad Hamidi-Moqaddam, called the screening of "The Lovers' Wind" a big surprise and a gift for documentary lovers, and added, "The festival prepared the short film in collaboration with the National Film Archive of Iran."

"This year was a good year for Iranian documentary cinema as Iran's submission to the 2020 Oscars is a documentary film for the first time. In addition, our documentaries have also received several important awards at various international events, including three awards at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA)," he noted.

"The Lovers' Wind" is about the diverse landscapes of Iran. Lamorisse was killed in a helicopter crash while filming the documentary, during a helicopter-tour of Iran before finishing the film in 1970. His widow and son completed the film, based on his production notes, and released the film eight years later.

The film was nominated for a posthumous Academy Award for best documentary feature in 1978.

On the first day, the Cinéma Vérité festival screened "The King Maker" by Lauren Greenfield, "Thursday Fields" by Harry Zernike and "Breathless Animals" by Lei Lei, all from the U.S.

Six Iranian films have also been selected for showing in the international competition, which features 24 movies from 21 countries.

"Asho" by Jafar Najafi, "Cotton Walls" by Abbas Omrani Bidji, "Jamileh" by Mohammad-Baqer Shahin, "Steep Slope" by Loqman Khaledi, "Eclipse" by Mohsen Ostadali and



Manuchehr Anvaar, the narrator of "The Lovers' Wind", speaks during the opening ceremony of the 13th Cinéma Vérité at Tehran's Charsu Cineplex on December 9, 2019. (DEFC)

"No Place for Angels" by Sam Kalantari are the Iranian films competing in the various categories of the international section.

Moreover, several workshops and meetings by Iranian and European experts

are scheduled to be held during the festival.

Austrian composer Eric Spitzer-Marlyn, ARTE program manager Peter Gottschalk from Germany and Belgian director and producer Bram Crols are among the experts

holding workshops on different subjects.

The Documentary and Experimental Film Center is the organizer of the Cinéma Vérité festival, which will continue until December 16.

Carcassonne film festival picks Iran's "When the Moon Was Full"



Elnaz Shakerdoost (L) and Hutan Shakiba act in a scene from "When the Moon Was Full".

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian director Narges Abyar's acclaimed drama "When the Moon Was Full" will go on screen in the main section of the 2nd edition of the Carcassonne International Political Film Festival, which will open in the French city today.

The film tells the story of a woman from Tehran who marries a man from an Iranian province near the border of Pakistan. Soon after, she discovers that her new brother-in-law is a religious extremist trying to recruit her husband for his bloody cause.

Five other films, including "Radioactive" by Marjane Satrapi from the UK, "Official Secrets" by Gavin Hood from the U.S. and "Rafael" by Ben Sombogaart from the Netherlands, will

also be screened in this section of the festival, which will end on December 14.

"When the Moon Was Full" has been awarded in several Iranian and international festivals.

Earlier this week, the film received the audience award at the 23rd Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival in Estonia.

The true love story had its premiere in Tehran during February at the 37th Fajr Film Festival where it won the Crystal Simorgh for best film and Abyar was named best director.

In addition, the movie also won the award for best actor for Hutan Shakiba, while Elnaz Shakerdoost was crowned best actress for her role in the film.

Semnan next stop for exhibit featuring history of ties between UN, Iran



People visit an exhibition of photos and documents on 73 years of relations between Iran and the United Nations at Vahdat Hall in Mahabad, West Azarbaijan Province on June 10, 2019. (IRNA)

A R T TEHRAN — Semnan will be the next Iranian city, which is scheduled to host the exhibition of photos and documents featuring major events occurring over 73 years of relations between Iran and the United Nations.

The collection will on view at the Simorgh Gallery of the Kumesh Cultural Complex on December 22, and Maria Dotsenko, director of the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) in Tehran, is expected to attend the opening ceremony of the showcase, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Monday.

Over 50 photos and documents will

be displayed at the exhibit for five days. Several Iranian cities, including Tehran, Tabriz and Kermanshah, were the previous hosts of the exhibit.

The Tehran branch of the UN has selected the photos for the exhibition in collaboration with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency (IRNA).

Among the highlights are the photos of seven UN secretary-generals who have visited Iran, as well as a selection of projects implemented by the UN in Iran.

Also included are photos related to the negotiations over the Security Council Resolution 598, which was approved by Iran.

"Seven and a Half" crowned best at Sydney Persian Film Festival

A R T TEHRAN — "Seven and a Half", a co-production between Afghanistan and Iran, won the Golden Gazelle for best film at the 8th Persian Film Festival in the Australian city of Sydney, the organizers announced on Sunday.

The film by Tehran-based Afghan brothers Jamshid and Navid Mahmudi is about seven girls, who have never found love and are losing their control over their destinies through forced marriages.

In a video message screened at the closing ceremony, Navid Mahmudi said that he is happy the film has won the best feature film award.

"I am happy that what has been my major concern in this film has been of high significance for the juries as well," Navid said in his videos message.

"Of course, the issue of women is very important in the world and I think the women and girls should also enjoy their real rights in the world of today," he added.



A poster for "Seven and a Half" by Jamshid and Navid Mahmudi.

"Shouting through the Wind" co-directed by Ata Mehrad and Siavash Jamali was named best documentary at the festival.

The documentary portrays Meysam, an adolescent from Tehran's roughest neighborhood, who has a dream of changing his destiny through music, but his family disagrees.

"Tattoo" by Farhad Delaram won the best short film award. The film is about a young woman who wants to renew her driver's license but she is sent to the traffic police center because of her tattoos.

"Manicure" by Arman Fayyaz also received a special mention in the short film category.

"Manicure" is about a young man who tries to prevent the village from finding out a secret that will destroy his life and his wife's legacy after her suicide.

The jury also honored "African Violet" by Mona Zandi-Haghighi with a special mention. The film is about a woman who chooses to look after her former husband who is suffering from an illness.

Kosovo, Albania to boycott Nobel Literature award ceremony

PRISTINA, Kosovo (AP) — Kosovo and Albania say they will boycott the Nobel Literature Prize ceremony Tuesday to protest the award being given to Austrian writer Peter Handke who both countries link to the war in the former Yugoslavia.

Handke was an opponent of NATO's airstrikes against Serbia in the Kosovo War of the late 1990s and spoke in 2006 at the funeral of autocratic Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic.

Kosovo was part of Serbia until 1999 when NATO intervened to stop Milosevic. Kosovo's outgoing foreign minister,

Behgjet Pacolli has instructed the ambassador in Sweden "to boycott the ceremony," adding that "a writer who supported Milosevic and his genocide in Bosnia and Kosovo does not deserve the Nobel Prize."

In solidarity with Kosovo Albanians, Albania's ambassador to Sweden won't attend Tuesday's Nobel ceremony, the Foreign Ministry said Monday. The country is boycotting the ceremony because of Handke's support for "Slobodan Milosevic, the 'butcher of the Balkans,' who led so many mass atrocities during the bloody collapse

of the former Yugoslavia."

For Milazim Krasniqi, a resident of Hoce e Vogel, a small village 80 kilometres (50 miles) southwest of the capital Pristina, he can't believe "that Milosevic's friend and supporter gets the prize in the 21st century." There were more than 40 people killed in the village during the war.

More than 10,000 were killed or died in total in the 1998-99 war. A 78-day NATO air campaign ended Serb rule in Kosovo, and the United Nations governed the province until 2008 when Kosovo declared independence from

Serbia, which Belgrade hasn't recognized yet.

"It is intolerable, unacceptable to promote notorious writers with such a prize, writers who make reasoning of the crimes in the region," said Shkelzen Maliqi, a Pristina-based analyst.

That was, nevertheless, not the opinion of the ethnic Serb minority in Kosovo.

"Whatever he wrote about the Serbs, he wrote it good and frightfully," said Dimitrie Dimitric, an ethnic Serb in Hoce e Madhe, close to Hoce e Vogel. "Those who gave it to him are not senseless."