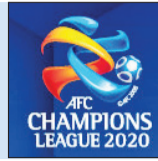




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## Iran exports \$27b of non-oil products in 8 months

**TEHRAN**— Iran exported \$27 billion of non-oil commodities during the eight-month period from March 21 to November 23, IRIB reported on Tuesday citing the data released by Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

The IRICA's data put the weight of the country's non-oil exports at 88 million tons during the mentioned time span, which indicates a 16-percent rise from

the figure of the same period of time in the previous year.

Iran imported 22 million tons of non-oil goods valued at \$28.3 billion during the eight-month period, with a 1.5-percent rise in weight while 4.8 percent fall in value compared to the same time span of the past year.

As reported, China, Iraq, United Arab Emirates (UAE), [→4](#)

## Foreign tour operators, travel marketers astonished by safe, modern Iran

**TEHRAN** – International tour operators and travel marketers, who have recently made a familiarization tour across Iran, are astonished by seeing a country that is far more safe and modern than that they previously thought.

A weeklong Famtrip organized by an Iranian tour operator brought 17 travelers from Spain, Portugal, Italy, Turkey, Peru and China.

"Iran is more modern, cleaner and even quieter than what the media picture," ISNA quoted one of the travelers as saying on Monday.

Julian, the representative a Spanish travel agency, reminded recent remonstrations in Iran to saying that protests are not unusual in the world as Spain, France and even Lebanon have experienced protests. [→10](#)

## Qatari emir turns down Saudi invitation to join PGCC summit in Riyadh

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani has turned down an invitation by Saudi Arabia to attend the annual meeting of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) in Riyadh.

The official Qatar News Agency (QNA) reported on Tuesday that Sheikh Tamim had named Prime Minister Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani to lead the Qatari delegation to the 40th GCC summit,

which is due to open in the Saudi capital later in the day.

The Qatari emir was invited to the meeting last week by Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

Sheikh Tamim's no-show at the Riyadh meeting dampens hopes of reconciliation between Qatar and a Saudi-led bloc, which are involved in a 30-month diplomatic dispute. [→13](#)



# 18 years of lying

**Top U.S. officials repeatedly misled public about Afghanistan War**

[See page 13](#)



## EDITORIAL

**Mohammad Ghaderi**  
Tehran Times editor-in-chief  
[@ghaderi62](#)

## UAE, a virus threatening Iraq

The United Arab Emirates is the name of a country that did not exist until 1971 and its geographical area was known as "the Trucial States".

On December 2, 1971, the UAE appeared as a country on the map of the world. Today, the UAE interventions in the Arab states' affairs and its role in creating instability is clear to everyone.

Regarding the destructive role of the UAE, the al-Monitor newspaper wrote that after the 2011 incidents, the role of the UAE, especially in quelling popular movements, became more obvious. The UAE, along with its allies, made every efforts to prevent the success of popular movements in the Arab countries.

Arab media outlets have recently released reports that reveal the UAE interference in the Iraqi domestic affairs. The Al Mayadeen news channel reported that three UAE plane loads of arms were sent to the Iraqi Kurdistan following the visit of the Kurdistan Regional Government's officials to Abu Dhabi.

Informed Iraqi sources told Al Mayadeen that Baghdad is not aware of the weapons that were sent to the KRG. It is not clear that whether the KRG or the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) will use these weapons.

The sources stated that sending arms to the KRG means that the UAE is interfering in the KRG-Iraq case. If the arms were sent for the KRG, so why did not Baghdad know anything about them? Was the move intended to begin a war?

The Arabi21 News Agency revealed the role of the UAE in the protests in Iraq, reporting that as the protests began, Abu Dhabi tried to carry out its planned military coup.

On the other hand, the Soat al-Iraq (Voice of Iraq) radio station announced the arrest of a UAE-affiliated group that sought to derail the popular protests in their own favor. The radio station emphasized that the group was directly affiliated with Tahnoun bin Zayed, the UAE national security adviser and crown prince's brother, who was trying to resolve the issue through the Western channels. [→3](#)

## U.S. Democrats to impeach Trump on abuse of power, obstruction of Congress probe

Democrats announced formal charges against President Donald Trump Tuesday that accuse him of abusing power and obstructing Congress, making him only the third U.S. president in history to face impeachment.

The full House of Representatives is expected to vote on the charges, or articles of impeachment, next week. The chamber, controlled by Democrats, is almost certain to vote to impeach the Republican president, setting the stage for a dramatic trial in the Republican-controlled Senate, likely to begin in January. House Judiciary Committee chairman, Jerrold Nadler, told reporters that Trump had endangered the U.S. Constitution, undermined the integrity of the 2020 election and jeopardized national security.

"No one, not even the president, is above the law," Nadler said.

Democrats have moved rapidly in their impeachment inquiry since launching an investigation on Sept. 24 into allegations that Trump

pressured Ukraine to investigate a Democratic political rival, former Vice President Joe Biden, in the 2020 elections.

Democrats accuse Trump of abusing power by withholding aid to Ukraine, a vulnerable U.S. ally facing Russian aggression, as well as dangling a possible White House meeting to get Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy to launch the investigation.

Republicans accuse Democrats of seeking to overturn the results of the 2016 election with a "witch hunt" against Trump, who denies he did anything wrong. Trump is unlikely to be convicted in the Senate, given it is controlled by his party, but his impeachment may yet have an impact on the campaign trail as Democrats seek to retake control of the White House.

If the House approves the articles, as expected, the Republican-controlled Senate would hold a trial to decide whether to remove the president from office. A conviction is considered unlikely.

## Greece says Libya-Turkish deal invalid, in bad faith

Greece has lodged objections to the United Nations over an accord between Libya and Turkey mapping out maritime boundaries as a violation of international law, a Greek government spokesman said Tuesday.

Greece expelled the Libyan ambassador in response to the deal last week, infuriated at a pact which skirts the Greek island of Crete and infringes, in Athens's view, its continental shelf.

"This agreement was compiled in bad

faith," government spokesman Stelios Petsas told reporters.

"It violates the (U.N.) Law of the Sea. The sea zones of Turkey and Libya do not meet, and nor is there a sea border between the two states," Petsas said.

A row over eastern Mediterranean gas reserves offshore has become increasingly shrill with countries in the region jostling to stake their claims.

Turkey has had a long-running disagreement with ethnically split Cyprus over re-

serves around that island.

Greece and Turkey are at loggerheads over mineral rights in the Aegean Sea, and Greece has accused the internationally-recognized Libyan government of deceiving Athens by negotiating the deal with Ankara signed last month.

It carves out a slanting sea corridor of maritime boundaries at the closest points between Libya and Turkey, potentially clearing the way for oil and gas search there.

(Source: Reuters)



## Para shooters train for World Shooting

**TEHRAN** – Iranian shooters are training for the 2019 World Shooting Para Sport World Cup in Al Ain, Dubai.

The competition will be held in Al Ain from Feb. 16 to 24.

The competition will serve as qualifying for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

The World Cup will be held at the Al Ain Equestrian, Shooting & Golf Club.

Iran will participate at the competition with five para shooters.



## ARTICLE

**Hana Saada**  
Journalist from Algeria

## Algeria's landmark televised trial: Court convicts, imprisons 2 ex-PMs, ministers, tycoons for corruption

For the second time since Algeria's pro-democracy mass protests, following the first trial with long prison terms handed to former spy chiefs, leftist political party SG, and the brother of the ousted President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, over charges of plotting against the state and undermining the army, senior political officials and oligarchs, including two former Algerian prime ministers, went on live trial on groundbreaking corruption charges in the most high-profile act of transparency and accountability.

The exceptional trial came few days before the historical presidential election for the replacement of the long-serving president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, forced to step down, this April, following mass protests. It resulted from the sweeping investigations into graft allegations launched after the resignation of former president Bouteflika.

The televised trial took place at the Sidi M'Hamed court in Algiers. It involved Algerian power players, including former premier; Ahmed Ouyahia, considered as one of the veteran statesmen of the North African country, and a "crisis manager". He has served as prime minister for four terms since mid-1990s, before tendering his resignation in March amid protests against Mr. Bouteflika and the whole old guard, as well as his predecessor Abdelmalek Sellal, who held the post of prime minister under Bouteflika for five years (2011-2016). He is well-known for his populist rhetoric.

The defendants, facing charges ranging from "corruption to abuse of power, granting undue privileges in the vehicle assembly industry, embezzlement, squandering of money and the misappropriation of public funds", denied any wrongdoing.

The inquiry involved a car assembly corruption scandal with huge bribes, inflated invoices and dodgy loans. The Algerian automotive sector got its start in 2014, based on partnerships inked between foreign groups and large Algerian corporations, owned by oligarchs linked to the old guard, with the aim to boost the trade balance in response to lower energy revenue due to the oil prices' drop.

(See full text at [tehrantimes.com](#))

## Iran, Caspian Sea littoral states to stage naval drill in near future

**POLITICAL d e s k** TEHRAN — The Iranian Navy commander has announced that his forces and navies from the Caspian Sea littoral states will stage a joint drill in the near future to enhance their cooperation to counter possible threats.

In an interview with Azad University News Agency (ANA) published on Tuesday, Rear Admiral Mohammad Hossein Khanzadi said, “the Caspian Sea littoral states’ joint naval drill is aimed at countering any insecurity, terrorist attacks as well as bolstering the participant countries’ rescue and relief and reconnaissance capabilities and capacities.”



He said, “Within a framework agreed by the Sea’s littoral states in the summer, the exact date of the upcoming joint drill will be announced after completion of necessary planning.”

The rear admiral reiterated Iran’s position that the Caspian is the sea of peace and friendship.

“From Iran’s point of view, the Caspian Sea is the Sea of peace and friendship, so the upcoming drill is meant preparing to counter any insecurity hot-spot and any terrorist operation. The second objective of the joint maneuver is to operationalize

the entire capabilities of the littoral states’ navies regarding rescue and relief and reconnaissance operations.”

He further touched upon the Navy’s construction activities in Makran coasts, saying, “Permanent deployment of Navy forces across Makran coasts will help development of the region.”

“The Navy will inaugurate a large hospital in Bandar Abbas and another one in Konarak in Makran coasts by the yearend. The Navy is to build another hospital in the port city of Jask,” the Navy commander explained.

In mid-October, Iran and four other Caspian Sea littoral states signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in Saint Petersburg to broaden cooperation among their navies.

Rear Admiral Khanzadi and his counterparts signed the deal which mainly focuses on security, training, technical as well as rescue and relief cooperation.

The Iranian Navy commander held separate meetings with Russian, Azeri and Kazakh counterparts on the sidelines of meeting of the Caspian Sea littoral states’ navy commanders.

## ‘Reforming culture of consumerism helps economy’

**POLITICAL d e s k** TEHRAN — Secretary of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution Seyed Saeed Reza Ameli said on Tuesday that reforming culture of consumerism helps develop economy.



In a press conference, he said that reforming culture of consumerism will bring a “miracle” in helping the economy.

His remarks came nearly three weeks after the government raised gasoline price. According to the Iranian Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Products Exporters Union, the price increase has led the petrol consumption to decrease by 25-30 million liters per day.

Elsewhere, Ameli said that Iran seeks to develop a national internet network in order to protect the country’s data.

## Foreign Ministry asks Iranian nationals to postpone visit to France

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Iran’s foreign ministry in a statement on Tuesday called on the Iranian nationals to delay their trips to France due to countrywide strikes and violence in the European state.

“Given the continued popular protests in the French Republic during the past year and the general strikes in the past two days and the violence shown during the protests in different cities of the country, specially Paris, we seriously recommend the Iranian passengers and tourists to postpone to another time their trip to the Republic of France to protect their security and health,” the statement said.

French unions are staging a second round of mass street demonstrations as the country entered its sixth day of a nationwide strike and transport standstill over proposed plans to change the pensions system.

The government’s standoff with unions continued as the prime minister, Édouard Philippe, said he would stand firm and announce details of the pension changes on Wednesday, with speculation over possible concessions on the start date in order to diffuse growing tensions on the streets.

## UAE, a virus threatening Iraq

**1 →** UAE’s expansionist policies seem to have no end in sight, and after years of suspicious support, the name of the UAE has been highlighted again in Iraq. The UAE is taking step to meet its political demands in Iraq, and is seeking sedition to advance its own hostile plans. The planeloads of arms show the UAE’s intervention in security issues, raising the question of whether ISIS is linked to the UAE. What is the secret of the Iraqi antiquities stolen from a museum in Abu Dhabi?

A few days ago, the Iraqi media announced the arrest of a UAE-affiliated group, including some Lebanese individuals, who intended to influence the demonstrations in the country.

At the same time, Asa-ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) Secretary General Qais Khazali told the Iraqi media that the Zionist regime and the UAE are the main actors of this great conspiracy against Iraq. The secretary general provided the Iraqi authorities with more details about the conspiracy.

From analysts’ perspective, Iraq, like other Arab countries, has not been safe from the UAE interference. The UEA is trying to plunge Iraq into drugs, and supports terrorist groups to create instability in the country.

# Mousavi: EU adopting instrumental approach toward human rights

**POLITICAL d e s k** TEHRAN — The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Tuesday that the European Union is making a political and instrumental use of human rights, noting such an approach is intended to isolate sovereign states.

Seyed Abbas Mousavi’s remarks came on Tuesday in reaction to a statement declared by, the newly-appointed High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

In his statement, which was published on Monday, Borrell claimed that Iran used widespread and disproportionate force against nonviolent protestors.

“Observing the people’s rights is a principle and national security necessity for the Islamic Republic of Iran as a democratic establishment,” Mousavi stressed.

“Iran rejects any instrumental and political use of human rights against independent countries,” he said while voicing his deep sorrow over Borrell’s statement.

“His statement has roots in his incorrect information,” Mousavi said, adding, “Iran’s performance in the last 40 years testifies that the country is resolved to upgrade human rights situation and preserve the people’s rights. Popular protests and holding gatherings are among inevitable recognized rights of the people in Iran.”

“Misuse of these rights to attack people and loot public properties is not tolerable as such misuses are not bearable in Europe as well. The French police’s crackdown on



the protestors in Paris is an obvious example which has thus far left a number of casualties, injured and arrests.”

The Foreign Ministry official called on Borrell to care about the violation of the entire Iranian population by the harshest ever sanctions imposed by the United States, a major ally of Europe.

“We call on the European Union to pay serious attention to violation of human rights in their allied counties, fulfill their commitments to the JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) and prevent violation of the

rights of over 80 million Iranians resulting from the U.S. inhuman unilateral sanctions,” Mousavi underscored.

On November 15, the government increased the gasoline price. However, the legitimate public protests against the price increase were directed at sowing chaos through targeted attacks on public and private properties, forcing law enforcement forces to step in to stop saboteurs.

Last week, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution urged relevant state bodies to honor Islamic mercy in regard to those who com-

mitted violent acts and caused insecurity in the protests that followed a rise in gas price.

The call by the Leader came in response to a request by Secretary of Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani on how to deal with those who were killed or wounded in the protests as well as those who acted viciously.

The Leader said those were killed without being involved in fueling riots should be considered martyrs and their families should receive stipends.

On others (those who instigated riots or committed violent acts under the influence of anti-Islamic Revolution propaganda), the Leader said each group must be treated in a way that is closer to the Islamic mercy.

Shamkhani had prepared a report according to a verdict by the Leader soon after eruption of protests to realize the root causes and reasons behind the unrest and providing support for the families of the victims.

The Supreme National Security Council’s report had suggested that, within the existing legal framework, those ordinary citizens who were killed during the protests innocently without any destructive role, should be recognized as martyrs and their family should also be subject to services by the Martyrs Foundation.

In the meantime, the report had suggested that those who were killed in the protests in any way should be entitled to receive Diyeh (blood money based on the Islamic law) and their family members should also be appeased.

## Rouhani may visit Japan on December 19: Reuters

*By staff and agency*

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani may visit Japan on Dec. 19 for talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Reuters reported on Tuesday.

Abe said on Monday that Tokyo is in discussions about a possible Japan visit by 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.

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.

Araqchi 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.

## EU chief urges united stance to preserve nuclear deal

**POLITICAL d e s k** TEHRAN — Josep Borrell, the new EU foreign policy chief, said on Monday that the signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the JCPOA, should adopt a united stance to preserve the deal.

“[The JCPOA Joint Commission] meeting on Friday showed that all sides support this agreement and seek to preserve it. This united stance is very important to us,” IRNA quoted him as saying at a press conference after a meeting with the EU foreign ministers in Paris.

Borrell 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.”

Helga Schmid, secretary general of the European External Action Service (EEAS), said in a tweet after the meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission that there is a “strong call for full implementation” of the multilateral agreement.

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).

Iran’s move are in line with paragraph 36 of the JCPOA.

(Paragraph 36 provided a mechanism to resolve disputes and allows one side, under certain circumstances, to stop complying with the deal if the other side is out of compliance.)

## Deputy FM: Europeans will not activate JCPOA trigger mechanism for now

**TEHRAN (Press TV)** — Iran’s deputy foreign minister for political affairs says despite their recent threat to activate the trigger mechanism envisaged in the nuclear accord with Iran, the European signatories to the deal will not do so for the time being.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the Iranian parliament’s Monday session, Abbas Araqchi said, “During the recent meeting with the 4+1 group, the trigger mechanism was never brought up and all remarks to this effect have no other goal, but to create a negative atmosphere against our country.”

Representatives from Iran and the five remaining signatories to the landmark nuclear deal -- Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China -- as well as the European Union attended the Friday meeting to discuss ways to save the accord.

It was the first meeting by the remaining parties to the JCPOA since July. In May 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled his country out of the international deal,



in defiance of global criticism, and later re-imposed the sanctions that had been lifted against Tehran as part of the agreement.

In response to the move, Tehran has so far rowed back

on its nuclear commitments four times in compliance with Articles 26 and 36 of the nuclear deal, but stressed that its retaliatory measures will be reversible as soon as Europe finds practical ways to shield the mutual trade from the sanctions.

However, European members since last month have begun raising the possibility of triggering the JCPOA’s “dispute resolution mechanism,” which is also known as the trigger mechanism, and whose activation can lead to the return of the UN sanctions on Iran.

Asked about a possible decision on the fifth step to be taken by Iran to reduce its JCPOA commitments, Araqchi said, “We are currently one month away from the point where we may take the fifth step. There are various ideas about how such a measure should be taken.”

“Of course, in the recent meeting with the 4+1 group we told them that if Iran makes sure it stands to no benefit from the JCPOA, our country will take new measures to reduce its commitments,”

# Trusting scientists is best way to counter sanctions: deputy parliament speaker

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The vice speaker of the Iranian Parliament said on Tuesday that one of the best ways to overcome consequences of the U.S. sanctions is to rely on the country's talents.

Addressing an open session of Majlis, Masoud Pezeshkian said, "This is very important to pay due attention to scientists and science-based companies."

"If we are to resist against U.S. and its sanctions, we have to believe in our talents. If we do trust them and if provide required support for them, neither the U.S. nor Europe nor any other power will be able to pin down us," noted Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon who served as health minister at the Khatami administration.

Touching upon knowledge-based companies' problems, he said, "We have had a unique point of view and political commitment to two key issues of (peaceful) nuclear technology and (deterrent) missile program and have managed to have a say powerfully. Our policy enabled us to go forward."

The senior pro-reform lawmaker went on to say that "senior officials should realize"



that scientists including the talented youth can help advance the country.

He added, "If they have any plan to settle problems (of the knowledge-based companies and institutions) they should submit it to the

Majlis which is fully prepared to cooperate with them."

Pezeshkian added, "The only way to save the country is resorting to science."

In mid-October, Vice-President for Scien-

tific and Technological Affairs Sorena Sattari announced that knowledge-based companies were increasing at a swift pace despite the sanctions imposed on the country.

"As the knowledge-based firms are developing, increasing their production capacity is on our agenda, and the government will support them," Sattari said during a visit to the knowledge-based companies in Alborz Industrial City of Gazvin.

The vice president visited different sections of Gelatin Halal Pharmaceutical Technology Company, which used state-of-the-art technologies as the only food and drug gelatin company to produce powdered and granular from fresh bones of cows.

Gelatin is one of the most important and strategic products used in various industries, including the pharmaceutical industry, the food industry (dairy, beverages, chocolate and confectionery), military and paper with no substitute.

Gelatin Halal Company is also registered as a knowledge-based company, and the unit with a capacity of 1500 tons per year, currently operates at its one-third capacity.

## Nation broke enemy's will in the worst situation, says Larijani

Parliament speaker says some only dishearten people

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian nation succeeded to break the enemy's will in the hardest time, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said in reference to the recent unrest across Iran.

"Some only spread negativity and dishearten people, but the nation broke the enemy's will in the worst situation," Larijani said on Monday, Tasnim reported.

"The Iranian nation would succeed against this international injustice when they become united and do not destroy each other and the country's important bodies," he added.

He further said negativity is a deadly poison for the country and hard-working men are those who work in difficult conditions.

Following a hike in the price of gasoline last month, a number of Iranian cities saw sporadic protests that turned violent in some cases. A number of banks and government buildings were set ablaze.

Meanwhile, anti-Iranian media outlets as well as some Western officials, including U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, voiced their support for the rioters.

However, the Iranian people staged rallies in various cities across the country to condemn the riots and support



the Islamic Republic system.

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.

Government spokesman Ali Rabiei said on Monday the number of police forces who were injured during the recent unrest is higher than that of the civilians.

"We cannot announce inflated statistics as America does," Rabiei told a regular press briefing in Tehran.

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.

"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.

## Health minister: U.S. lying about pharmaceutical sanctions



**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Health Minister Saeed Namaki said on Tuesday the United States lies when it says pharmaceuticals and medical equipment are not subject to its sanctions on Iran.

Namaki also said there is no serious shortage of pharmaceuticals in Iran, according to Tasnim

"Iran has not faced any severe shortage of medicines although the enemies have waged an economic war against the country," he said.

The medicine shortage at the present time has dropped to one-third of what it used to be last year, he added.

Last week, Namaki said the U.S. is exerting pressure on all pharmaceutical companies to stop the sale of medicine to Iran.

"They have put pressure on all our financial transactions regarding medicinal drugs and are exerting pressure on all pharmaceutical companies to stop the sale of medicines to us," he said.

Officials in Washington repeatedly

claimed they would not stop the sale of medicines and food to Iran, but they have lied, and the flow of vital medicines has been stopped, the minister explained.

President Donald Trump withdrew Washington from the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, in May 2018 and restored the previous sanctions against Iran and ordered new ones. Trump has described his government's sanctions against Iran as "economic war".

Iran says sanctions on its central bank will prevent it from providing medicine to its citizens.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said last month that the United States' sanctions and economic war on Iran have targeted the ordinary people's health and livelihood.

"There was a time when such warfare was used to simply limit the activities of some countries. However, new warfare of the United States and what Trump has called the 'economic war' have targeted the ordinary people's livelihood and health," the chief diplomat lamented.

## Prisoner swap took place without direct talks with Washington: Zarif aide



**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — An aide to Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said Iran and the U.S. swapped prisoners without holding direct talks.

The Iranian government thought about many aspects of the swap, especially the humanitarian aspect, Mohsen Baharvand told IRNA on Tuesday.

"Previously, there were some talks about the Iranian and American prisoners who were swapped," Baharvand said. "Zarif had talked about it on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in an interview. Some others such as former U.S. ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson talked with Zarif, but we didn't hold direct talks with the U.S. government, meaning that we didn't sit down for talks with them."

The remarks came a few days after Iran and the United States exchanged prisoners. 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 Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif from Zurich to Tehran on Saturday.

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.

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.

## The Guardian Council is soft when vetting candidates, general says

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Former Chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has criticized the Guardian Council for treating parliamentary hopefuls with leniency when vetting them for elections.

"Unfortunately, the Guardian Council does not examine the candidates' line of thought," Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari said on Tuesday.



"The candidates' line of thought should match that of the establishment," he said. "This is the case in all countries."

Jafari argued that a person's viewpoints should match that of the establishment even in the countries which claim to be very democratic.

"However, the gentlemen who come to power here do not hesitate to say their viewpoints differ from those of the Leader," the former IRGC chief said.

"Well, if your viewpoints are different, then why did you come?" he asked rhetorically.

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

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 spend on the campaign trail, ending on February 19.

## Army equips transport helicopters with modern rockets, cannons

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Yousef Qorbani, the commander of the Iranian Army Airborne, announced on Monday that his forces have mounted modern cannons and rocket-launchers on the transport helicopters.

Qorbani's remarks came on the sidelines of a ceremony commemorating Major General Ahmad Keshvari, who was martyred in Iraq's war against Iran during the Saddam regime in the 1980s).

The date of Keshvari's martyrdom, 7 December, is remembered as "Havanirooz (Army Aviation) Day" in the Iranian military calendar.

"Previously, helicopter 214, which is a transport helicopter, could not defend itself and that was a weak point for the said helicopter. Today, the Airborne Unit's helicopters have been equipped with 20mm Cannons and rocket-launchers," Second Brigadier General Qorbani said in the ceremony.

"The missiles that were previously mounted on our choppers enjoyed finally 3,500 meters of effective range but in the last 2 years the Airborne with cooperation of the country's defense industries and universities have managed to produce long range missiles and have mounted them on the choppers," he explained.

The commander went on to say that the Airborne unit has attained self-sufficiency in producing its spare parts. "We are producing nearly 240,000 different parts inside the country."

He said, The Airborne Unit turned sanctions into an opportunity.

In recent years, Iran has made great strides in the defense sector and become self-sufficient in producing essential military hardware and defense systems.

Iran has made it clear that its military might is merely defensive and that it poses no threat to other countries.

## Defense chief: No force capable of countering Iranian nation

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — No force is capable of countering the Iranian nation, Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Tuesday.

"Without doubt, such nation with such transcendent culture is victorious and glorious," Brigadier General Hatami said, ISNA reported.

He also pointed out that Iran has been able to withstand the bullies and tyrants for forty years, saying such achievement is a result of firm belief in martyrdom.

The remarks by the defense chief comes 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.

Hatami said on November 23 that people strongly support decisions by the officials.

"We are in an economic war which is an important war. We will gain victory in this war and make the enemy disappointed that we surrender," he added.



**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Rafael Grossi, the new director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has promised to act fairly and independently towards Tehran.

Grossi said on Monday that he would not allow discrimination in any case and would like to rely on cooperation with Iran, Press TV reported.

"We will not allow discrimination and bias against Iran," he said. "I will be very determined and very fair. I will not be undecided as to the implementation of liabilities."

Grossi added that he would rely on the information provided by the agency's inspectors, who monitor Iran's commitment to its obligations under the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

He explained that he has no intention to introduce a new methodology, saying the agency would continue its work as before.

## IAEA chief vows to act fairly towards Tehran

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

Since assuming the post, Grossi has repeatedly voiced his determination to cooperate with Iran.

"I'm the new kid on the block in this relationship. They've been there, now they get a new DG, so we have to sit down together, start talking and take it from there," he said last week.

"Let me start my conversation with Iran. I don't think it would be appropriate, and it would be unfair, to pronounce myself about their attitudes before I sit down with them."

He has also said he will be "firm but fair" on inspections generally, including in Iran, without spelling out what that means. He told Reuters he is satisfied with the work the IAEA's inspections team has been doing. Grossi was appointed as the new director-general of the IAEA in October, following the death of the previous chief Yukiya Amano in July.

Under a nuclear agreement Iran signed with the 5+1 nations in July 2015, Tehran agreed to put limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions. The IAEA was tasked to monitor Iran's compliance with the agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

But in May 2018 U.S. President Donald Trump pulled his country out of the JCPOA and reinstituted sanctions on Iran.

Iran and the remaining parties launched talks to save the JCPOA after the U.S. withdrawal, but the three EU parties to the deal (France, Britain, and Germany) have failed to ensure Iran's economic interests.

Iran started to partially reduce commitments under the nuclear deal exactly a year after the U.S. abandoned the deal and imposed the harshest ever sanctions on the country under the "maximum pressure" policy. At the time Iran announced that its "strategic patience" is over.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	340,605
IFX	4391.97

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,489 rials
GBP	55,237 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$63.94/b
WTI	\$58.73/b
OPEC Basket	\$65.24/b
Gold	\$1,469.15/oz
Silver	\$816.74/oz
Platinum	\$912.20/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

TEDPIX surpasses record high of 340,000 points

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), gained 4,813 points to stand at 340,605 on Tuesday, Mehr news agency reported.

Heading for its fourth day of rises since the start of the current Iranian week (Saturday), the index surpassed the record high of 340,000 points on Tuesday.

As reported, the indices of Tamin Petroleum & Petrochemical Investment Company (TAPPICO), Ghadir Investment Company, Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (PGPIC), Parsian Oil and Gas Development Company (POGDC), Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI), Pars Petrochemical Company, and Tehran Oil Refining Company mostly contributed to TEDPIX advancing.

Seminar for introducing Indonesian market slated for late Dec.

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) plans to hold a seminar on December 31, to introduce potentials and capacities of the Indonesian market for Iranian traders and businessmen, the TPO portal announced.

Attended by officials, including Indonesian embassy's commercial attaché and Iran's former commercial attaché in Indonesia, the seminar aims to provide an opportunity for the Iranian businessmen and traders to get familiar with Indonesia's potential areas for cooperation, and collect information about the capacities and opportunities in the mentioned market.

Indonesia is one of the important counties with which Iran is taking measures to boost trade ties because both nations are Muslim countries and both countries are full members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), The Non-Aligned Movement, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and Developing 8 Countries.

Japan's economy grew much faster in third quarter than first estimated

The economy expanded in the July-September quarter at a much faster pace than initially reported, driven by stronger capital investment and private consumption ahead of the October 1 consumption tax increase.



Gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an annualized pace of 1.8 percent in the three months through September from the previous quarter, faster than an initial reading of 0.2 percent, according to revised Cabinet Office data released Monday.

The result was stronger than all the projections of economists surveyed by Bloomberg. The median forecast was for a 0.6 percent expansion.

While the updated figures show domestic demand is continuing to power growth in Japan despite a global slowdown, front-loading of spending before the tax hike could amplify a contraction expected in the October-December quarter as the economy contends with the fallout of the higher tax and typhoon damage.

Revised third-quarter growth came in faster than the initial government estimate after companies capital spending proved twice as strong as initially thought. Continued robustness in business investment is a positive sign that concern over the global slowdown has yet to buckle corporate sentiment.

"Capital spending was the key driver for the upward revision," said Norio Miyagawa, senior economist at Mizuho Securities Co. A shortage of workers is forcing companies to invest in labor-saving equipment, while the October tax hike may also have pushed some companies to bring investment forward, he said.

The figures come after the government last week announced ¥13.2 trillion in fiscal measures to support growth and the recovery from typhoon damage. While domestic demand has kept the economy expanding this year despite falling exports, gross domestic product is expected to contract 2.6 percent in the last three months of this year as consumers stay home following the consumption tax hike.

(Source: japantimes.co.jp)

Iran exports \$27b of non-oil products in 8 months

**1 →** Turkey and Afghanistan were the five major export destinations of Iranian non-oil products while China, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, India and Germany were the five leading exporters of goods to Iran during the mentioned time.

As previously announced by IRICA, the value of Iran's non-oil exports stood at \$44.3 billion in the previous Iranian year, while \$42.6 billion worth of commodities were shipped into the country.

Iran shares border with fifteen countries, namely the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, Oman, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kuwait, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.

Based on the data published by Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO), the value of trade with the neighboring countries



stood at over \$36.5 billion in the past Iranian calendar year, which is about 41 percent of the country's total non-oil trade in the mentioned

time span.

Increasing non-oil exports to the neighboring countries is one of the major

ISIPO to revive 1400 idle production units by March 2020

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran d e s k Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) plans to revive 1400 idle production units by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19, 2020), IRNA reported on Monday, quoting a deputy with ISIPO.

"Following a program for boosting domestic production, ISIPO managed to revive 529 idle production units in the first six months of the current calendar year and the number is planned to reach 1400 by yearend," ISIPO Deputy Head Ali Asqar Mosaheb told IRNA on the sidelines of a SME and startups event in Alborz Province.

Noting that one of the approaches through which ISIPO is planning to help inactive units get back in the production cycle is to see their knowledge and technology needs.

"The country's technology units and scientific and research centers have come to believe that they can help the industry and that the industry can use their potentials and capacities," he said.

According to the official the Industry Ministry plans to revive 2000 idle units by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020) of which 1400 units are Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME).

Elaborating on ISIPO's programs for reviving idle SMEs, the official said "Last year, a successful plan for reviving production units was implemented, in



which, despite targeting 1,000 units for reactivation, ISIPO was able to bring 1,726 small industrial units back into production."

Back in August, Deputy Industry Minister Saied Zarandi had announced that the ministry allocated 15 trillion rials (about \$357 million) for reviving 2000 idle production units across the country.

Earlier that month, ISIPO head had also announced that the organization was following major programs in order to revive idle units and to help them to get back into business.

Speaking in a press conference Mohsen Salehinia mentioned some of his organization's plans for supporting SMEs, noting that the industry ministry was also fully supporting ISIPO's efforts in this regard.

"Although the SMEs have the potential to provide nearly 900,000 job opportunities across the country, currently 22 percent of the SMEs are idle and there are only 710,000 people working in active units," Salehinia said.

Exports of Iranian SMEs at \$1.5b in Mar.-Nov.

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian d e s k small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) exported \$1.5 billion worth of commodities in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 23), IRNA reported, quoting an official with Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO).

"The exports were conducted by 590 SMEs based in the country's industrial parks," ISIPO's Market Development and International Affairs Manager Ahmad Javanmard said on the sidelines of a local event on SMEs and startups in Alborz Province.

Once SMEs are empowered, their exports would witness a considerable growth of at least twofold, the official emphasized.

To this end, various measures have been taken by ISIPO, including identifying specialized, export intermediaries for helping small units further develop their exports, and forming an export consortium

to support SMEs.

Back in August, head of ISIPO announced that over 33,000 SMEs are currently active in Iran of which 1,100 are exporting their products and services to foreign destinations.

According to Mohsen Salehinia, currently 43,650 SMEs are based in over 800 industrial parks across the country, of which nearly 78 percent or 33,800 are active.

One of the major programs that ISIPO is following regarding the SMEs is reviving idle units and helping them to get back into business to increase the country's domestic production and to boost exports to the neighboring countries.

Holding training courses, supporting SMEs participation in international exhibitions, supporting SMEs research and study projects, and supporting knowledge-based SMEs are some other programs which ISIPO is following to help SMEs expand their activities, according to Salehinia.

Free Zones High Council inks technological co-op MOU with PTP

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian d e s k Free Zones High Council Secretariat and Pardis Technology Park (PTP) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Tuesday with the aim of developing, and enhancing innovation and technology in the country's free and special economic zones.

The MOU was signed by Akbar Eftekhari, Iranian Free Zones High Council Secretariat's deputy for economic affairs and Head of PTP Mehdi Safarinia, IRNA reported, citing the free zones news agency (Freena).

Development of the country's innovation and technology ecosystem, especially in the industrial parks and free and special economic zones, facilitating and expanding the export of knowledge and technology-based goods and services in the country, developing investment in the production of knowledge- and technology-based commodities and services in free and special economic zones through the joint venture with Pardis Science and Technology Park, were reported to be among the major goals of signing the mentioned MOU.

The signing ceremony was also attended by the Secretary of Iranian Free Zones High Council Morteza Bank.

Back in August, Bank announced that domestic investment in the country's free economic, industrial zones increased nearly 40 percent in the past Iranian calendar year of 1397 (ended on March 20).

According to the official, domestic investment in the country's free zones during the past Iranian calendar year stood at 67.9 trillion rials.

Establishment of free trade zones in Iran

plans that Iranian government is pursuing in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21).

Deputy Industry Minister Hossein Modares Khiahani has said that his ministry is planning to increase the value of Iran's non-oil exports to its 15 neighbors up to \$50 billion.

"Our goal is to be able to meet five percent of our neighboring countries' needs, which would amount to more than \$50 billion a year considering the total imports of all the 15 countries which is at least \$1 trillion annually," he said in August.

The official expressed hope that the mentioned goal would be realized before the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (which starts in March 2021), saying that the Institute for Trade Studies and Research and also Trade Promotion Organization are currently developing detailed plans to achieve this goal.



Akbar Eftekhari, deputy secretary of Iranian Free Zones High Council (L), and Head of Pardis Science and Technology Park Mehdi Safarinia sign a cooperation memorandum on Tuesday in Tehran.

dates back to Iranian calendar year 1368 (March 1989- March 1990) following the fall in the country's oil income in the preceding year which prompted the government to promote the non-oil exports.

The first two free trade zones of Iran were established in the south of country. The first one was Kish Free Trade Zone established in 1368 on Kish Island in the Persian Gulf and the second one was Qeshm Free Trade Zone established the year after on Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz.

Some five other free trade zones have been also established in the country since then, including Chabahar in southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province, Arvand in southwestern Khuzestan Province, Anzali in northern Gilan Province, Aras in East-Azarbaijan Province and Maku in West-Azarbaijan Province, both in the northwest of the country.

Tehran, Tashkent explore expansion of trade ties

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — During a d e s k meeting between Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Head Hamid Zadboum and Uzbekistan's deputy minister of investment and foreign trade, the two sides discussed the ways for strengthening their bilateral trade, TPO portal reported on Tuesday.

Zadboum has traveled to Tashkent accompanying an Iranian trade delegation including the head of Chabahar Free Trade Zone Organization and head of Mazandaran Province's Chamber of Commerce for preliminary measures to be taken prior to the 13th meeting of Iran-Uzbekistan Joint Economic Committee, which will be held in the Uzbek capital city from December 11 to 13.

During the meeting, TPO head referred to the significance of investment making by the two countries' traders and industrialists in the other country in line with the agreements between the two sides' senior officials.

Back in August, Uzbekistan's Prime

Minister Abdulla Nigmatovich Aripov had said that his country welcomes Iranian investors and private sector's contribution to its economy.

Making the remarks in a meeting with Iran's First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri and Iranian Transport Minister Mohammad Eslami, the Uzbek prime minister also said that the level of trade between the two countries has increased in recent months compared to the same period last year, however it is still not at the level it should be.

Jahangiri, for his part underlined the great economic capacities of Iran and Uzbekistan, saying that the two countries should take necessary measures to remove barriers to the trade development between the two countries so that the two sides could reach a comprehensive agreement on trade cooperation as soon as possible.

"The two countries' economies can complement each other and Iran is ready to expand its relations with Uzbekistan in all areas," the official added.

Can the eurozone economy be revived without budget deficits?

The eurozone is in a bind. Despite successive doses of monetary stimulus by the European Central Bank, inflation remains stubbornly below target. Conventional monetary policy, and even quantitative easing, evidently have limited potency when interest rates are at or near zero.

Monetary skeptics worry that lowering rates further will damage Europe's banks. Additional asset purchases beyond the monthly level of €20b (£16.8b) already agreed, they warn, will impair the liquidity of financial markets. By pushing up asset prices, the ECB could expose the financial system to stability risks when those lofty prices return to earth.

The obvious event precipitating this return would be a recession. And when this downturn materializes, the ECB will have limited room for offsetting action, again because interest rates are already low.

The solution to this conundrum suggested by the ECB president, Christine Lagarde, is



greater reliance on fiscal policy. By purchasing government bonds bearing negative interest rates, investors are literally begging European governments to borrow.

So long as growth rates remain stuck at low levels because of anemic private spending, a bit of additional public spending is just what the doctor ordered. If the economy nonetheless sinks into recession, fiscal stimulus can be ramped up still further.

The problem is that national policymakers in a number of eurozone countries, starting with Germany, are dead set against fiscal expansion.

Believing that they are being asked to encumber their children with debt in order to provide the stimulus that countries such as Italy are unable to deliver, they happily invoke the EU's fiscal rules to justify not running budget deficits.

Dual interest rates

This impasse has prompted suggestions that the ECB should pursue fiscal policy by stealth. For example, it could adopt a policy of dual interest rates. It could pay positive rates when taking deposits from commercial banks, cushioning the banks' profitability. It could then lend to those same banks at sharply negative rates, giving them money on such concessional terms that they would find lending it irresistible.

The ECB has experimented with these policies on a small scale under its so-called TLTRO-II program.

But by expanding a policy under which it paid more on its liabilities than it charged on its assets, the ECB would incur losses and erode its capital. To be sure, central banks can operate with negative capital, financing themselves by printing money. But the longer they do so, the more observers, anticipating ongoing money creation, will come to doubt the credibility of monetary policy. The ECB's shareholders, meaning European governments, may then feel compelled to recapitalize it – at a significant cost to themselves.

Critics in Germany and elsewhere will therefore challenge the legality of such policies, citing the strict separation between monetary and fiscal policy in the European treaties. One response is: who cares? Treaty provisions can be creatively reinterpreted when exigent circumstances require. This has happened more than once in the euro's two decades.

(Source: theguardian.com)

# 'Iranian electricity industry expanding presence in region'

**ENERGY** **TERHAN** — Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said the country's power industry is expanding its activities in the region's markets, the portal of the Energy Ministry (Paven) reported.

"The markets in the region are becoming more open to the diverse capabilities of Iranian electricity industry's big family, especially in the private sector," Ardakanian said in the opening ceremony of the 34th Power System Conference (PSC 2019) in Tehran on Monday.

Mentioning some of the activities of the country's electricity industry in the neighboring countries, the minister said: We have prepared and endorsed a three-year plan with the Iraqi electricity industry partners for reconstruction of the country's electricity industry as soon as possible.

"In this regard, the two countries' electricity networks were synchronized in early November," he added.

He further referred to the development of cooperation programs with other neighbors including Afghanistan, Armenia and



Azerbaijan, saying, "At the regional level we are making progress using our existing capacities and improving the quality of our

industry at home."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ardakanian noted that Iran's power industry is more

than 95 percent self-sufficient and almost all the technology and equipment needed for maintaining the country's electricity networks are made inside the country.

He also stressed the stability of the country's power network, saying the country's electricity sector has witnessed new records in production, exports and consumption management during the current calendar year (started on March 20).

Back in June, Ardakanian had pointed to development of economic relations with the neighboring countries as a priority for Iran in the sanctions era.

The International Power System Conference (PSC) is an annual event held on December 9 to 11, 2019 by Iran's Power Generation, Distribution and Transmission Company (known as Tavanir), in association with over 250 Iranian companies, institutes, and universities.

Many experts in power industry and academics of universities reveal their latest achievements in PSC to find the comments and feedbacks of final consumers.

## NIORDC, IKCO ink MOU to add dual-fuel cars to public transport fleet

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) and Iran's state-owned Iran Khodro Company (IKCO) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to add new dual-fuel vehicles to the country's public transportation fleet.

As reported by IRIB on Tuesday, based on the MOU, 1.46 million dual-fuel vehicles will be added to the public transportation fleet, reducing the country's daily gasoline consumption by 10 million liters.

Implementation of the mentioned MOU is going to save the government 200 trillion rials (about \$4.7 billion).

Iran has recently started a program for rationing of subsidized gasoline and increased fuel prices to reduce the energy subsidies and to use the revenue for supporting underprivileged families.

According to the spokesman of Iranian Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Products Exporters Union (OPEX), the gasoline rationing scheme has made it possible for the country to export

25-30 million liters of gasoline every day.

Currently Iran is exporting two groups of oil products namely "special products" such as bitumen, paraffin and base oil, and "specific products" including gasoline, diesel and fuel oil to other countries.

Iran produces 115 million liters of gasoline per day, of which 60 to 65 million liters are provided as subsidized fuel and another 20 million liters are sold in the free market, the rest which is about 30 million liters is exported.



## Oil prices recoil as specter of trade war, weaker demand haunts market

Oil prices slipped on Tuesday for a second straight session as the cons of a slowing global demand outlook outweighed the pros of OPEC's agreement with associated producers at the end of last week to deepen crude output cuts in early 2020.

Brent futures were down 14 cents, or 0.2%, at \$64.11 per barrel by 0450 GMT. West Texas Intermediate oil futures were 13 cents, or 0.2%, lower to \$58.89 a barrel. The benchmarks fell 0.2% and 0.3% respectively on Monday.

The "euphoria (on output cuts) was short-lived, with an unexpected fall in exports from China highlighting the impact of the trade conflict," said ANZ Bank in a note on Tuesday.

Data released on Sunday showed exports from China in November fell 1.1% from a year earlier, confounding expectations for a 1% rise in a Reuters poll.

That weakness came amid fresh fronts in the trade war between Washington and Beijing that has stymied global economic growth coming up fast: Washington's next round of tariffs against some \$156 billion Chinese goods are scheduled to take effect on Dec. 15.

U.S. President Donald Trump does not want to implement the next round of tariffs, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said on Monday — but he wants "movement" from China to avoid them.

"With the swathe of new tariffs due to kick in on 15 December, the market is watching negotiations closely," said ANZ.



Analysts said that, though overshadowed for now, the move by 'OPEC+' - the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and associated producers like Russia - to deepen output cuts from 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) to 1.7 million bpd would remain a mid-term support factor. But rising non-OPEC production threatens to counteract efforts to limit global crude supplies.

"Despite the voluntary restraint from OPEC, world oil markets remain well supplied ... with non-OPEC output expected to rise by well over 2 million bpd next year, with big increases in the U.S., Brazil, and Norway," said Henning Gloystein, director of global energy and natural resources at Eurasia Group in a note.

U.S. crude oil output recently hit a record of 13 million bpd and is expected to rise further in 2020.

"Going forward, oil prices are likely to be more data-driven, and move in tandem with demand forecasts," said Margaret Yang, market analyst at CMC Markets.

(Source: reuters.com)

## Coal and renewables don't compete, says Canyon Coal chairman

Coal and renewable energy sources are not in competition with each other. Instead, they are complementary and should be treated as such, said Canyon Coal executive chairman Vuslat Bayoglu.

Bayoglu says the ongoing debate about coal and renewables has resulted in people mistakenly thinking that coal could be replaced.

Some banks were withdrawing support for investments in coal mining and coal-fired power stations.

South Africa has about 118 years of resources left.

"We don't know what will happen in 118 years, so South Africa should benefit from existing resources," says Bayoglu.

He attributes some of the misconception to the lobbying activities of developed countries that have already industrialized as a result of coal and were beginning to explore alternatives.

Bayoglu, whose growth-oriented, mid-tier mining company in South Africa continues to invest in new mining projects and is creating new partnerships with emerging mining players to look for strategic acquisitions, urged mining stakeholders to be conscious of the energy needs of the South African economy.

Coal mines are among the biggest job creators in South Africa. More than 86 000 people are employed by coal mines in the country.

"We need coal to power the South Afri-

can economy and create jobs. If we don't invest in coal, who will supply South Africa with the required energy and create jobs?"

Coal provides the bulk of South Africa's energy requirements.

His comments came amid growing public concerns about Eskom's governance challenges that have created doubts about its ability to sustainably supply energy at competitive prices.

Echoing the views expressed by fellow investors, government and the new leadership of Eskom, Bayoglu says Eskom was very important to the South African economy and should not be allowed to fail.

Bayoglu goes further to suggest a solution to Eskom's coal inefficient procurement strategy which he believes has an impact on electricity prices.

He says Eskom should procure coal based on a transparent market-based index price. The price must not be based on the bargaining power of the seller.

The "same amount and quality of coal should carry the same price regardless of who is the seller. If we do that, Eskom will get rid of the inefficiencies in its procurement system," says Bayoglu whose company has no contracts with Eskom at this stage.

Bayoglu also highlights the dominance of major coal suppliers and cautioned against potential over-concentration that might contribute negatively to the South African economy.

(Source: miningreview.com)

## China eyes new energy exchange to expand global oil and gas trade

By Ken Silverstein

China is the world's biggest oil importer. To broaden its market access, and perhaps help drive down prices, it is launching a new exchange called the Greater Bay Area International Energy Transaction Center. The exchange will connect myriad buyers and sellers, large and small, of everything from crude oil, liquefied natural gas, ethane, electricity, carbon credits, chemical products and energy derivatives. Leveraging cloud-based blockchain technologies China is also setting up hubs in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America to gather and analyze energy market data for its participants.

"If you are looking at China, small businesses do not know how to approach it — to attract finance and technology," says Gong Jialong, chairman of the Greater Bay Area International Energy Transaction Center, in a roundtable discussion with reporters in Beijing last month in which this reporter took part. "We are providing a transparent exchange channel. This exchange serves that purpose. Small businesses do not know where to look. But if you are an exchange member, you have access to all the Chinese counterparts. Ninety-percent of small businesses cannot connect with each other but this exchange is for that purpose."

China's burgeoning economy is demanding oil and natural gas and the chemical offshoots from

both. As such, Chinese companies are looking to make investments in all of these areas and especially with U.S. producers. A platform such as this is essentially a match-making service — something that introduces all the players. By being transparent, it creates more efficiencies and better prices. And in Asia, that is much-needed; natural gas is cheap in the United States but by the time it is frozen and shipped to China, its price can triple.

### ■ Little oil and gas production

Why build this exchange in China, which has little oil and gas production? Because it has the necessary refineries that can break apart the various chemicals and derivatives, all of which are used in manufacturing and production and which are part of nearly every consumer product made.

To boot: Chairman Jialong says the exchange is a disruptive technology, giving developing nations cheaper prices and increased access to those resources. Russia, for example, is a major producer that is looking to supply new markets. Canada, meanwhile, has lost U.S. market share and it is now it is seeking to sell in Asia. The Greater Bay Area is 50,000 square kilometers with 70 million people, and a region that includes Hong Kong.

"We believe this exchange could rise to be major center for the future," says Eric Fang, president of The National Center for Sustainable



Development, a U.S.-based nonprofit organization, who led the roundtable discussion. "Once we stop the trade war, you will see a lot of energy supply going to China."

The exchange could increase transparency and reduce prices. But a few concerns pop up. For starters, China's reach will extend to parts of the world that may not be aligned with that of the United States, like Venezuela — hardly a concern to China, given its current spat with this country over Hong Kong and Taiwan. Meantime, China's privately-funded platform could "crowd out" other existing exchanges where China is creating hubs. With potential investors like BP and Exxon Mobil, it will have deep pockets.

In Africa, for example, Alpha Ports is creating a similar exchange, which also introduces potential business partners to each other across several economic sectors. Oil and gas are a major component of its exchange.

### ■ Would complement each other

Still, Kingsley Ekwair, who is the chief executive of Alpha Ports, told this writer that he feels that the two businesses would complement each other and that he would be interested in partnering with China: "I do see anyone able to elbow us out of the market regarding investment. We have a strong network."

To that end, Angola sells crude oil to China. But Angola needs chemical products that are derived from oil. After China buys Angola's crude, it then refines it and sells Angola the spin-offs. It's a "complementary" arrangement, says Jialong, chairman of the Greater Bay Area exchange. China can produce 1 billion tons, with half of that being exported. Africa has few oil refineries of its own.

"We don't compete on the production side," adds Fang, president of The National Center for Sustainable Development. The "exchange opens up a whole new set of dynamics. It will bring prices all the way down."

The Greater Bay Area International Energy Transaction Center is an innovative idea that will give China more leverage in international energy markets. It's just one more way that it is trying to reach economic parity with the West. But China emphasizes that its exchange is open to all players and that its primary purpose is to drive global development, creating a ripple effect and a win-win proposition.

(Source: forbes.com)

## Canada's oil crisis isn't as bad as it seems

By Irina Slav

Any investor or prospective investor googling "Alberta" -- Canada's key oil-producing province -- will likely give up before clicking any further, at this point. The results will be a string of bleaker-than-bleak forecasts for Canada's oil heartland. Job losses, office vacancies, and oil companies leaving the oil patch all indicate that Canada's most prolific oil province has fallen on particularly hard times.

But let's dial down the headline drama and look at Alberta from a sober perspective. It's struggling, but the doomsday scenarios have potentially taken things too far.

There is no question that Alberta has suffered blow after blow — and not just from international oil market trends, but from Canadian governments, too. The Trans-Mountain pipeline saga only deserves to be referred to as a saga because plans to expand the pipeline's capacity started a feud between Alberta and its neighbor British Columbia — a very big feud.

This feud brought the two provinces to court after a series of mutual threats that culminated in a piece of legislation by the new Alberta parliament that would have allowed the government of the province to stop the flow of any oil to British Columbia. That law was blocked temporarily by a court, but its very existence is evidence enough how far the hostility between the two provinces went.

The latest chapter in the saga is optimistic, however. Construction on the expanded pipeline began earlier this month despite the fact that the federal court of appeals has opened the door for challenges to the project -- again. Hearings on these are scheduled for late December.

### ■ The project has a future

The future of Trans Mountain is still uncertain, but at the very least the project still has a future. If it does, then so does the Alberta oil industry and the provincial economy. In fact, one might argue that news headlines about Alberta's situation are often excessively bleak.

This picture includes, for instance, a credit rating downgrade for the Alberta economy by Moody's, on the grounds of oil industry troubles. "Alberta's oil and gas sector is carbon intensive and Alberta's greenhouse gas emissions are the highest among provinces."

Alberta is also susceptible to natural disasters including wildfires and floods which could lead to significant mitigation costs by the province," Moody's said, adding, however, that the overall uncertainty in oil also contributed to its decision. The credit ratings agency also said it would revise its outlook for Alberta as soon as the global oil outlook improves, suggesting that emissions and the disasters are only relative threats.

Speaking of emissions, the situation may not be as doomsday-dark as anti-oil activists make it sound.

Edmonton Journal's David Staples recently wrote a column stating something that many might find outrageous. "Alberta will soon have the cleanest oil industry in the world," he said, before going on to explore the investments that local oil miners have been putting into reducing the carbon intensity of their operations and shrinking their overall carbon footprint.



Indeed, government data shows that while overall emissions in Alberta rose by 23 percent between 2005 and 2017, the carbon intensity, or emissions per barrel of oil, fell by 28 percent between 2000 and 2017. Alberta is simply producing more oil than 20 years ago, so its emissions are naturally higher. Yet, the "dirty oil sands" adage is being challenged by the same industry that was responsible for its emergence in the first place.

The struggle with emissions is ongoing, and while it is one more burden for the Alberta oil industry, right up there with the now notorious pipeline shortage, it will hardly break the industry—not when this industry accounts for the biggest chunk of Canada's exports, at 22 percent, with vehicles a distant second at 13.4 percent, according to 2018 figures.

Yet, for all its importance to the Canadian economy, Alberta is struggling, and everyone acknowledges this.

### ■ Fiscal stabilization fund

Earlier this month, all province Premiers agreed that the federal fiscal stabilization system needed to be reformed in order to respond to Alberta's troubles. The very fact the province needs fiscal stabilization funds when historically it has overwhelmingly been a provider of such funds is a clear indication that things are difficult in the oil heartland.

Difficult does not necessarily mean hopeless, however.

In a string of budget updates, Alberta's oil majors gave observers mixed signals. While some planned spending cuts to reflect the difficulties that they are dealing with amid the pipeline shortage, costly railway transportation for their oil, and growing opposition to the whole oil industry, others announced they would increase their budgets for 2020.

That's hardly the move of a doomed industry.

The long-term outlook is not all that apocalyptic, either. In fact, none other than the federal energy watchdog, the Canada Energy Regulator, forecast the production of crude oil in the country will expand by 50 percent by 2040, to some 7 million bpd.

In recognition of pipeline realities, the regulator wrote that "Canadian oil pricing and production trends will rely heavily on the availability of export pipeline and rail capacity. If approved pipeline projects (Trans Mountain, Keystone XL, Line 3) proceed as announced, along with continued volumes of crude by rail, there will be sufficient takeaway capacity to accommodate production growth over the next 20 years."

Of course, these pipelines may not proceed as announced, and this will affect growth trends in oil. But will it kill the industry? Hardly.

As Shell's chief executive summarized the future of the global oil industry: until there is demand, there will be supply. It's hard to argue with the foundations of economics, after all.

(Source: oilprice.com)

New documents against the Afghan War

U.S. officials must be tried

By Saeed Shams

**TEHRAN**— The release of new documents on the Afghan war has led to a new crisis in US foreign policy. The documents clearly show how Washington has deceived public opinion about the war in Afghanistan. Undoubtedly, both Democratic and Republican officials, especially George W. Bush, Obama, and Trump, must respond to the Afghan people and the world’s public opinion in this regard.

■ 5 Infuriating Takeaways From The ‘Afghan-istan Papers’

After an extensive investigation and a three-year long Freedom of Information Act legal battle, TheWashington Post released a trove of documents entitled the Afghanistan Papers Monday, and there’s a staggering amount of infuriating information contained therein.

The trove comes from a project entitled “Lessons Learned” commissioned by the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR.) As part of the project, SIGAR staff interviewed over 600 people with firsthand knowledge of the war, including generals, diplomats, aid workers, and Afghan officials.

There’s over two thousand pages of previously unpublished documents and notes from interviews here showing that the U.S. government deliberately misled Americans about the progress of the war in Afghanistan and proffered misleading and dishonest claims that senior officials knew were untrue. The title “Afghanistan Papers” is an unflattering nod by The Washington Post to the Pentagon Papers, which exposed the lies by the government in the Vietnam War.

1) The government suppressed its own “Lessons Learned” Probably the biggest unintentional irony here is the Pentagon’s title for the project: “Lessons Learned.” “The \$11 million project was meant to diagnose policy failures in Afghanistan so the United States would not repeat the mistakes the next time it invaded a country or tried to rebuild a shattered one,” reports The Washington Post.

Instead, the witnesses’ first-hand accounts and unvarnished truths were suppressed for years. SIGAR instead published documents “written in dense bureaucratic prose and focused on an alphabet soup of government initiatives” leaving “out the harshest and most frank criticisms from the interviews.” The only reason these accounts are seeing the light of day is because the Post was able to withstand years of legal battle—which continues—as the U.S. District Court has yet to rule that the public has a right to know which public officials misled the American people on the war. The paper decided to publish in the meantime.

2) Staggering Amount of Money Wasted Perhaps the most outrageous takeaway is the untold sums wasted in the war:

One unidentified contractor told government interviewers he was expected to dole out \$3 million daily for projects in a single Afghan district roughly the size of a U.S. county. He once asked a visiting congressman whether the lawmaker could responsibly spend that kind of money back home: “He said hell no. ‘Well, sir, that’s what you just obligated us to spend and I’m doing it for communities that live in mud huts with no windows.’?”

Three million dollars. A day. In one Afghan district.The United States allocated more than \$133 billion to build Afghanistan—more than was spent, in inflation adjusted dollars, on the Marshall Plan, which encompassed all of Western Europe after World War II. After World War II, the Marshall Plan helped reconstitute well-developed first-world countries. The best estimates say over a trillion has been spent so far on the war in total. What do we have to show for it?

An unnamed executive from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is quoted in the article saying that he guessed 90 percent of what was spent was wasted: “We lost objectivity. We were given money, told to spend it and we did, without reason.”

3) Who are the ‘Bad Guys’? Officials repeatedly acknowledge in “Lessons Learned” that with so many competing agendas in Washington that it was like having no real war strategy at all.Fundamental disagreements went unresolved. Some U.S. officials wanted to use the war to turn Afghanistan into a democracy. Others wanted to transform Afghan culture and elevate women’s rights. Still others wanted to reshape the regional balance of power .

“With the AfPak strategy there was a present under the Christmas tree for everyone,” an unidentified U.S. official told government interviewers in 2015. “By the time you were finished you had so many priorities and aspirations it was like no strategy at all.”

This made it easy for warlords and kleptocrats to exploit the huge U.S. cash infusion for their own purposes. U.S. officials publicly denounced the historic levels of corruption, but privately tolerated it.Christopher Kolenda, an Army colonel who deployed to Afghanistan several times and advised three U.S. generals in charge of the war, said that the Afghan government led by President Hamid Karzai had “self-organized into a kleptocracy” by 2006 — and that U.S. officials failed to recognize the lethal threat it posed to their strategy.

“Our biggest single project, sadly and inadvertently, of course, may have been the development of mass corruption,” said former U.S. ambassador Ryan Crocker, the top U.S. diplomat in Kabul in 2002 and from 2011 to 2012. Crocker sat for two interviews that yielded 95 transcribed pages. He added, “Once it gets to the level I saw, when I was out there, it’s somewhere between unbelievably hard and outright impossible to fix it.”

The single most salient challenge for U.S. military commanders, however, was the struggle to articulate who they were fighting, or why. From the article:

Was al-Qaeda the enemy, or the Taliban? Was Pakistan a friend or an adversary? What about the Islamic State and the bewildering array of foreign jihadists, let alone the warlords on the CIA’s payroll? According to the documents, the U.S. government never settled on an answer.As a result, in the field, U.S. troops often couldn’t tell friend from foe.

“They thought I was going to come to them with a map to show them where the good guys and bad guys live,” an unnamed former adviser to an Army Special Forces team told government interviewers in 2017. “It took several



conversations for them to understand that I did not have that information in my hands. At first, they just kept asking: ‘But who are the bad guys, where are they?’?”

The view wasn’t any clearer from the Pentagon. “I have no visibility into who the bad guys are,” Rumsfeld complained in a Sept. 8, 2003 memo.No one seems to have seriously questioned whether the U.S. should have invaded Afghanistan while possessing a foreign policy that only has room for “bad guys” and “good guys.”

4) It was all fake news, lies and spin In response to a 2017 FOIA lawsuit filed by the National Security Archive, the Pentagon began reviewing and releasing hundreds of pages of previously classified memos about the Afghan war dictated by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld between 2001 and 2006—often called his “snowflakes.” The Archive shared the snowflakes with The Post, and together with the SIGAR interviews, they comprise a damning account of the ways officials kept Americans in the dark about what was transpiring in Afghanistan.While Rumsfeld privately foresaw many of the problems that would continue to haunt the U.S. military over a decade later, he publicly scoffed at the idea that the war had turned into a “quagmire.”

In one note he wrote to several generals and senior aides: “I may be impatient. In fact I know I’m a bit impatient. We are never going to get the U.S. military out of Afghanistan unless we take care to see that there is something going on that will provide the stability that will be necessary for us to leave. Help!”

That memo was dated April 17, 2002, just six months after the war started.That wasn’t the face he showed publicly however.In fact, the documents show Rumsfeld’s blessing on numerous tactics U.S. military officials used, borrowed from Vietnam, to manipulate public opinion. These high-pressure tactics to spin the narrative so that any news, no matter how dire, would read as good news, continued unabated under Obama.A person identified only as a senior National Security Council official said there was constant pressure from the Obama White House and Pentagon to produce figures to show the troop surge of 2009 to 2011 was working, despite hard evidence to the contrary.

“It was impossible to create good metrics. We tried using troop numbers trained, violence levels, control of territory and none of it painted an accurate picture,” the senior NSC official told government interviewers in 2016. “The metrics were always manipulated for the duration of the war.”

Even when casualty counts and other figures looked bad, the senior NSC official said, the White House and Pentagon would spin them to the point of absurdity. Suicide bombings in Kabul were portrayed as a sign of the Taliban’s desperation, that the insurgents were too weak to engage in direct combat. Meanwhile, a rise in U.S. troop deaths was cited as proof that American forces were taking the fight to the enemy.

“From the ambassadors down to the low level, [they all say] we are doing a great job,” Michael Flynn, a retired three-star Army general, told government interviewers in 2015. “Really? So if we are doing such a great job, why does it feel like we are losing?”

Bob Crowley, a retired Army colonel who served as a counterinsurgency adviser in Afghanistan in 2013 and 2014, told government interviewers that at military headquarters in Kabul, “bad news was often stifled” because “the truth was rarely welcome.”

“There was more freedom to share bad news if it was small—we’re running over kids with our MRAPs [armored vehicles] —because those things could be changed with policy directives,” he said. “But when we tried to air larger strategic concerns about the willingness, capacity or corruption of the Afghan government, it was clear it wasn’t welcome.”

Military officials would create color-coded charts proclaiming their positive achievements, devoting an “inordinate amount of resources” to the endeavor, said John Garofano, a Naval War College strategist who advised Marines in Helmand province in 2011.

“They had a really expensive machine that would print the really large pieces of paper like in a print shop,” he said. “There would be a caveat that these are not actually scientific figures, or this is not a scientific process behind this.”

But it didn’t matter that the process wasn’t scientific, because no one bothered to question the numbers behind the charts anyway.

5) Eighteen Years In, two parties responsible, no one accountable

It’s that after 18 years encompassing three presidential administrations from both parties, no one has been held accountable for the vast U.S. taxpayer dollars—not to mention, blood, sweat, and tears—wasted on a vast

exercise for a purpose that even the principle players seem unable to identify.These papers show a clear attempt to mislead and deceive the American people about the extent of the administrative and bureaucratic waste and incompetence that was occurring. What these interviews reveal is mind-blowing; that no one has been unaccountable is criminal.

■ The Real Collusion: How To Recruit for Forever War

I guess you can say I was raised on the old 1980s-era “Be, All that you can be” U.S. Army recruiting commercials. Cheesy, sure, but they were brilliant. I remember one that embodied the whole series. A racially diverse squad was helicoptered to a lovely green hilltop and proceeded to — almost instantaneously — set up a satellite communications dish. The message couldn’t have been clearer: join an army that looks like you, do exciting stuff, and, best of all, learn a trade. Win, win! Still, the subtext, the context, mattered. That was a peacetime army. Early Reagan administration alarmism aside, no one really expected an all-out shooting war with the Soviets. Vietnam was comfortably in the rearview — never to be repeated (it was thought) — and, in the worst case scenario, a new army recruit might partake in a couple days-long invasion-con-tourism adventure in Grenada, Panama, or some other tropical dot on the map. Ah, the good old days...

Anyway, I was hooked before I’d even begun intermediate school. Heroic black-and-white movies, GI Joe cartoons, my grandparents’ World War II stories, and, of course, those ‘80s army recruiting commercials combined to ensure I’d be a soldier someday. And so I was. Even then, when I came of (military) age, in July 2001, a prospective army career still mainly entailed training, exotic travel, and, at worst, “peace-keeping” duty somewhere in the Balkans. Meet German women and take cool photos during a (quite safe) bid in Kosovo? Count me in, thought my then seventeen year-old self. Then the towers came down. I watched in wonder during mandatory freshman boxing class at West Point. Though I still couldn’t grow facial hair, I sensed that my life had just unalterably changed.

For me, as they say, the rest was history. More importantly, the future path of the US military was to be unique. It eventually faced a historically unusual quandary: how to recruit young soldiers to wage forever war? See, early on in the “war on terror,” memories of 9/11 and the resultant patriotic passions, were fresh enough to make the recruiter’s job fairly easy. Then Iraq fell apart (’04), Afghanistan followed (’06-’08), deployments spread to Africa (’08), Obama foolishly “regime-changed” Libya (’11), ISIS exploded into Syria and (again) Iraq (’13-’14), and, well, things fell apart. The year 2019 snuck up on us — on me, at least — didn’t it? And, so today, after eighteen full years of regional war, without a single victory to speak of, and none in sight, I can’t help but thank my lucky stars that...I’m not an army recruiting sergeant!

Worst job in the world, I’m pretty sure. The jaded, exhausted, surprisingly young, combat veterans charged with recruiting duty, face a daunting task unrivaled in the nation’s history: filling the ranks of a volunteer military engaged in full-tilt forever war. Think on it: the US Army has never before asked its recruiters to convince young men and women to sign up for a war that began before they’d been born. But that’s where we are at, folks.

Recruiters, raised in the “can-do” military culture, have tried just about everything, and, mostly managed (often by the skin-of-their-teeth) to make their quotas. Yet it wasn’t easy. The military, especially the overburdened army, pulled out just about every trick-in-its-hat to meet its goals. In the heat of the by then failing Iraq War (’05-’07), that meant giving waivers to high school-drop-outs, obese kids, and felons. When that didn’t work, the army proceeded to enforce the “fine print” in enlistment contracts, and “Stop-Loss” soldiers — essentially forcing troops to serve beyond their contracts, often in another combat deployment.

Those were the bad old days, admittedly. Since then, recruiters have filled the ranks by more classic means: exploiting the insecurities and economic desperation of (mostly) young American men. As a result, the US military has become, more and more, unrepresentative of the national demography — a civil-military gap that concerns scholars but is hardly noticed by the populace. So it is that America’s servicemen and women are, per capita, more southern/mountain-western, more rural, and more likely to have a family legacy in the military. They’re also decidedly not from wealthy families. Today, the average, representative, recruit is from rural Georgia and followed his father into the military life. Serving one’s country has rapidly fallen to a veritable military caste. Which should be troubling.

All of which is little more than a long introduction to

my rather flippant, if still illustrative point: I’m pretty sure military recruiters are colluding with the university-industrial-complex in order to fill the ranks. Think on it, a college degree has become basically obligatory to earn a living wage, and the cost of that education has ballooned past normative inflation rates, rendering the coveted degree literally beyond the reach of most working-class Americans. Unless, of course, loving parents or desperate students take out exorbitant college loans — which most do. Is it purely coincidental, then, that one of the key motivational tools for recruiters today is the offer to pay off student debt for potential soldiers?

Look, I’m not a conspiracy-theory-guy by nature. I’m more of an Occam’s razor sort of fellow. Which is why I’m regularly attacked in the comments section of my weekly columns for not recognizing the “truth” that 9/11 was an “inside job.” Nonetheless, living in our increasingly absurd times has, I’m afraid, made conspiratorial thinking a bit more amenable. As such, I’ve come to realize that, sometimes, positing ludicrous conspiracy theories can emphasize broader, vital points.

So, my theory is based on no empirical evidence, mind you, but (in my defense) bolstered by the, perhaps coincidental, facts on the proverbial ground: tuition costs are exploding and a desperate military is exploiting that fact to fill the ranks for what good-old General Petraeus calls “generational war.” In my own (smallest and cheapest) borough of New York City, Staten Island, young nurses and teachers share apartments out of necessity. Societally indispensable work, in many parts of this country, does not equate to a living wage; to say nothing of the burden of college debt most carry these days. And, for young males in particular, the impossibility of financial stability is a direct threat to their own sense of dignity, of manhood. For such folks, military socialism — stable wages, free healthcare, and a generous pension plan — is undoubtedly tempting.

Okay, maybe the near perfect shared interests between the college-loan bankers and the embattled military recruiters are sheer coincidence. But what if it’s not? There’s nuance in any conspiracy worth its salt. The general commanding the Army Recruiting Command doesn’t necessarily have to physically meet with the bankers for a systemic conspiracy to exist. That’s what the obtuse Democrats on Capitol Hill don’t seem to get. Compared with the unspoken (except by Tulsi) crime of collusion that is the Congress-courts-media-corporate forever war complex, Hunter Biden, Ukraine, and even Trump, hardly matter.

The real collusion, I’d submit, is between the Yacht-owning bankers profiting from the college debt-machine, and the desperate recruiters tasked to fill the military ranks. Their collaboration meets a need, after all: forgiving \$200k in student debt might just do the trick to convince kids born after the 9/11 attacks to go fight in a country their parents can’t pronounce and that they themselves can’t point out on a map. I’m pretty sure economists call that synergy — in fact, they ought to teach such mutually beneficial collusion in business school. And so a vindicated Orwell smiles from the grave...

■ Everyone Knew We Were Losing in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has long been the overshadowed war, eclipsed in public attention by the invasion of Iraq and a dozen other stories. Even so, the American occupation of Afghanistan grinds on, with an end seeming remote and any kind of positive resolution even more so.It’s bitterly appropriate, then, that on Monday—with more hearings in the impeachment of Donald Trump and the release of a long-awaited Justice Department inspector-general report into the Russia investigation sucking up attention—The Washington Post’s Craig Whitlock delivered a devastating suite of articles about Afghanistan.Sign up for The Atlantic’s daily newsletter.Each weekday evening, get an overview of the day’s biggest news, along with fascinating ideas, images, and voices.

Based on a tranche of thousands of documents obtained by the Post in litigation, as well as some previously released memos, the report shows that for nearly two decades, America’s leaders—Democrat and Republican; civilian and military; elected, appointed, and career civil servant—have lied to us about how the war in Afghanistan is going. Yet while this story risks being overshadowed by the fresher stories coming out of Washington, there’s a straight line between the years-long dissembling about Afghanistan and the chaos of the Trump administration today.

The obvious analogy to the Post scoop is the Pentagon Papers, the batch of documents about the Vietnam War leaked to the press and published—over the fierce objections of the Nixon administration, and with the permission of the Supreme Court—in 1971. The documents were a watershed. As R. W. Apple Jr. wrote in The New York Times 25 years later, “They demonstrated, among other things, that the Johnson Administration had systematically lied, not only to the public but also to Congress, about a subject of transcendent national interest and significance.” They helped turn the tide of public opinion decisively against the war, and their lesson—that the government would lie so brazenly and extensively—set the table for Richard Nixon’s downfall and post-Watergate governmental reforms.

The Post, courting the comparison with the Pentagon Papers, is billing its stories as “a secret history of the war.” The shocking thing about the Post stories, however, is how unshocking they are. That isn’t to say they aren’t appalling. In exhausting detail, Whitlock shows how Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, their Cabinet officials, and military commanders told Americans that the U.S. had a clear strategy and was effectively executing it—even though, in private, they said that the U.S. had no idea what it was doing, and no idea how to do it.

Polls have long shown majorities or pluralities of Americans saying that they don’t think the war in Afghanistan is worth fighting and that it is failing. Fewer than half now believe fighting the war was the right decision in the first place—a finding that comes as a jolt to anyone who remembers the national mood after September 11, 2001. Most think that the war doesn’t have a clear objective. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these views are often even stronger among veterans—the people who have been sent to fight the war and have seen how little progress the American effort is making, and at what cost. →11

# Do Saudi Arabs really love Americans?

By Ronald Enzweiler

**ANTIWAR** — Soon after the shooting of American citizens at the Pensacola Naval Air Station last Friday (December 6) by a Saudi national who was in the US for flight training, President Trump, speaking from the White House, read a statement from Saudi Arabia's King Salman. President Trump let us know "the Saudi people are greatly angered by the barbaric actions of the shooter." He then reassured us, "this person [the perpetrator] in no way shape or form represents the feelings of the Saudi people who love the American people."

As an American who has lived and worked in Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Middle East on a full-time basis for over ten years, I was astonished by this obviously untruthful and deceiving statement that President Trump was parroting on behalf of Saudi Arabia. Let me forget, 15 of the 19 hijackers who committed the 9/11 terror attacks — and their leader Osama bin Laden — were Saudi nationals. Moreover, anti-American Saudi nationals killed twenty US soldiers and injured 500 more in a car bombing attack on Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in June 1996. I guess the Saudi nationals who perpetrated these attacks (among others I could cite) also were "in no way, shape or form [representative] of the feelings of the Saudi people" and thus these attacks also should be excused.

Even when I worked for the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s twenty years before Al Qaeda; Americans were tolerated in the Kingdom only if we kept a low profile and adhered to the Saudis' strict social norms — since they loathed ours. The "Saudi people" whom the King refers to are predominately devout Sunni Muslims who practice a medieval form of Islam called Wahhabism (which they taught to the Afghan Taliban). These Salafists ("true believers") uneasily coexist with a minority pro-Iranian Shiite sect in the Eastern Province where Aramco operates. The claim these two staunchly anti-Western Islamic sects "love Americans" and condone our way of life is laughable.

Given this reality, I was astonished that no mainstream media reporters who knows the Middle East (surely some do) didn't immediately called out the deception

that King Salman and President Trump were perpetrating on the American public. I surmise a lot of "damage control" is going on. Indeed, this shooting reveals the obvious risks — given the ominous parallel to 9/11 — of having Saudi national pilots (and those of other Muslim nations) being trained on American soil on how to fly the high-performance military aircraft that US arms merchants eagerly sell these nations. These contracts include provisions for pilots from the acquiring countries to be trained at US military bases in America. It's easy to imagine a radicalized foreign-national pilot in a single-seat jet fighter crashing his plane into a nearby city rather than landing it back on his flight-training base.

This possible scenario shows the danger to Americans back home of keeping the Middle East arms race going unchecked for the financial benefit of our burgeoning military-industrial complex. Apparently, Congress (which authorizes foreign arms sales by US firms on a case-by-case basis) is more interested in sustaining the profits of arms merchants (who are big contributors to individual members' reelection campaigns) than they are in ensuring the safety of the American homeland.

This pilot-training risk falls into the category of an "inconvenient truth" related to the international arms business. More ominously, the Pensacola attack reveals the inevitable "blowback" inherent in our country's current pro-Israel Middle East foreign and military policy. Like the foreign-pilot training risk, the blowback issue is never mentioned nor debated by policymakers in Washington. Indeed, it is taboo to do so.

As background on the blowback issue, I traveled through the international airport in Dubai — the crossroads of the Middle East — over 20 times on my R&R trips home from the civilian advisor jobs I held in Afghanistan over seven years (2008-14). I always browsed the airport bookstore looking for something to read on the 13-hour flight to Dulles; or to take back to Kabul or Kandahar. Throughout this period, the #1 bestseller on the non-fiction rack was always The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. This controversial work was published in book form in US in August 2007, after The



London Review of Books had published it in manuscript form in June 2006.

The main thesis of this book is that America's interventionist foreign policy in the Middle East (including starting the Iraq war; maintaining a threatening posture toward Iran; and Congress' unconditional support of Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians) is driven by a very powerful pro-Israel lobby in Washington. Given this lobby's influence (which includes interfering in U.S. Congressional elections on behalf of Israel's interests), Mearsheimer and Walt argue in their dispassionate analysis that current US policies in the Middle East do not serve the best interests of the American people. In the months following the publication of their book, it was viciously discredited by the pro-Israel/pro-war US foreign policy establishment and corporate media. Consequently, in the 12 years since his taboo-bashing book was published, it has had no effect on US foreign policy; nor did it lead to a just resolution of the long-festering Israel-Palestine conflict — as some open-minded reviewers had hoped. Thus, this timely and important work is not relevant to the current discourse on Middle East foreign-policy in our country. The only matters under discussion are (1) when to attack Iran and (2) how to further destabilize Iraq, Syria and Lebanon — both in support of Israel.

But as I observed traveling through the Dubai airport, these scholars' fact-based expository book on the "special relationship"

between Israel and the US has remained a bestseller in the Middle East. Unlike in America, this topic is discussed and is a motivating issue throughout Islamic world. I was often asked by the college educated/English speaking Muslims with whom I associated and mentored, "Why is America spending hundreds of billions to promote democracy and human rights in the Middle East; yet you country allows the Israelis to treat the Palestinians so unjustly?" Most knew the real answer to this question and were just jiving me. I would tell the others, "I'll lend you a book to read."

Thus, I was not surprised to learn on Sunday two days after the Pensacola shooting — first exclusively reported by foreign media sources — that the Saudi pilot trainee (who would have been similarly educated and fluent in English like my Iraqi and Afghan associates) had posted on his twitter account (now suspended) a manifesto in which he confesses:

"I'm against evil, and America as a whole has turned into a nation of evil. I'm not against you for just being American, I don't hate you because your freedoms, I hate you because every day you [are] supporting, funding and committing crimes not only against Muslims but also humanity." He wrote he condemned US support for Israel and included a quote from Al-Qaeda's deceased leader, the Saudi Osama bin Laden. (For more quotes from the shooter's manifesto — which are now banned from the internet — see Scott Horton's Antiwar.com

article, "Pensacola: Blowback Terrorism.")

Regarding the shooter's Osama bin Laden reference, The Guardian on December 3, 2007 reported Osama had declared two days earlier that: "The events of Manhattan were a response to the American-Israeli coalition's murder of our people in Palestine and Lebanon." Going back to the 1980s, "Palestine has featured in practically every statement and interview by Bin Laden."

Congressman Matt Gaetz (R), whose Florida district includes Pensacola Naval Air Station, is one of the few public officials who has called this attack on Americans on US spoil what it is: "an act of terrorism." It's noteworthy that Rep. Gaetz is one of the few members of Congress who is highly critical of our country's foreign interventions and endless wars in the Middle East. Thus, he has already broken with the Washington establishment.

In contrast, more than 48 hours after the attack and notwithstanding foreign media's revelation of the shooter's manifesto, the Pentagon and FBI still have yet not called the attack terrorism. They refer to the shooter's tweets and manifesto as being "some concerning statements and online materials [we have] discovered." In a Saturday morning interview on national television when the Trump administration's spokesperson was asked about the Pensacola attack, she uttered the usual evasive non-answer babble: "we're looking into it, we can't get ahead of the investigation, we'll get to the bottom of it." (Since when has President Trump not gotten ahead of an investigation?) She also proclaimed, "President Trump always puts Americans' safety first" — and he "won't let this happen again!"

But if the administration doesn't yet know yet the shooter's motivation or his possible terror-network affiliations, how can the president assure the American people that such attacks won't happen again? I'm suspicious. There are currently 852 Saudi nationals in the US in various military training programs along with an unreported number of nationals from other Muslim countries among the over 5,000 foreign military personnel receiving training. This flight training is conducted as part of foreign arms-sales contracts with American firms. That's a lot of canceled contracts and loss of future business if the reality is: the only

way to assure that Americans are safe is to close down the military's foreign-pilot training program.

**Spoiler Alert:** Don't expect an official account in the MSM confirming the Saudi shooter's anti-Israel inspired animus toward America and seeing the full text of his manifesto. The Washington establishment has closed ranks to mitigate this attack's negative effect on foreign arms sales and its pro-Israel Middle East foreign policy. In Washington's counterfactual narrative, the American public is supposed to believe the Saudis are good guys who "love Americans" and tacitly support Israel (despite being Salafi fundamentalists). The truth is the Saudis are America's arms merchants' best customer. And since the US military got (mostly) kicked out of Iraq in 2011, Pentagon needs to use bases in Saudi Arabia to attack Iran and continue its interventions in other neighboring Islamic countries.

When the truth becomes known, this Pensacola attack — just like 9/11 — will fall into the category of "blowback."

As Mearsheimer and Walt tried to warn the American public in their courageous book published twelve years ago, there is a "cause and effect" to Washington's decidedly pro-Israel foreign policy in the Middle East. In a recent article (A Manifesto for Restraints) that Mr. Walt published before the Pensacola attack, he presciently advocates for a less militaristic, noninterventionist foreign policy devoid of "special relationships" with allies who perceive they "deserve US support no matter what they do."

Maybe this time our elected officials will heed Mr. Walt's sage advice, and our country will avoid getting bogged down in a third protected, multi-trillion-dollar, unwinnable war in the Middle East. Ronald Enzweiler is a Harvard MBA and MIT graduate who served in the US Air Force and has lived, worked and traveled extensively in the Middle East, including working as an USAID contractor and US Foreign Service (limited) Officer in the Iraq and Afghan wars from 2007 through 2014. He is retired and lives in California and Mexico. He's written a book critiquing US foreign and military policy titled, When Will We Ever Learn?

## 15th Conference of Development of Human Resources;

# Organizations Should Be One Step Ahead of Opportunities

The 15th Conference of Development of Human Resources was held today in the presence of senior officials and experts in relevant field, the Public Relations Department of Industrial Management Institute (IMI) reported.

The Deputy minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Chief Executive of Industries Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) Mohammad Bagher Aali was the first speaker in this Conference who pointed to the significance of principles of sustainable development in the results and processes and added, "sustainability and its consistence is one of the salient specifications of this Conference."

He pointed to the resistance economy and added, "bedrock of development in Iran is the resistance economy and its important element is the expert and competent manpower. So, we order the Industrial Management Institute (IMI) to design and compile business courses in sanctions conditions."

He pointed to the movement of domestic manufacturing as the most important pillar of the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade and added, "IDRO is determined to provide \$10 billion worth of

fund needed for manufacturing parts in industrial sector of the country through the cooperation and collaboration of manufacturers and entrepreneurs."

He pointed to the expert and the most experienced manpower as the most important factor for realizing this objective.

He also pointed to the remarks of Leader of the Islamic Revolution among economic entrepreneurs and second statement of the Islamic Revolution and added, "paying due attention to the talented youth and young individuals should be considered as the most important elements in progress and development of the country, so that Industrial Management Institute (IMI) should plan for training youth and young people."

He emphasized on the sublime statements of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution on continuation of economic war and added, "the pivotal aboriginal issue, with regards to the human resources, should be taken in subsequent conferences and for this purpose, Industrial Management Institute (IMI) in cooperation with IDRO should design a behavioral model of human resources based on the resistance economy and 4th Industrial Revolution."

Barat Ghobadian Deputy Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade for Training, Research and Innovation Affairs was the next speaker who pointed to the necessity of management based on scientific indicators and added, "Islamic Republic of Iran's position is satisfactory and appropriate in the field of training human resources in technical and engineering fields as well as applied sciences."

He praised and lauded the activity done by Industrial Management Institute (IMI) in the field of training human resources and added, "the value of this work will be more shined if this model is provided and designed for the government."

In this regard, the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade has concentrated on the issue of human resources in the country and has planned for employing 500 elites of the universities in the field of industry.

Abolfazl Kiani Bakhtiari the Managing Director of Industrial Management Institute (IMI) and head of 15th Conference of Development of Human Resources was the next speaker who added, "today, we are witnessing the basic and fundamental developments

in the management of human resources of organizations and concepts such as management of human capitals, management of talent or strategic partner in the human resources have substituted with the traditional concepts such as management of manpower, management of staff, etc."

He pointed to today's challenges of the organizations in the field of human resources and studying the modern-day problems and expounded on ranking generations of human resources and added, "formation of the first generation is related to the human resources based on world and administrative affairs, the second generation based on cooperation with the business of organization, third generation based on data for decision makers and fourth generation based on platform and biological networks."

With dividing organization into traditional, modern and post-modern organizations, he pointed to the specification of each of them and added, "in postmodern organizations, all beneficiaries are taken into consideration, so that organizational culture is based on value and empowerment and giving power is exerted to the human resources."

He described postmodern organizations as hybrid organizations and added, "postmodern organizations are similar to the wing of social, cultural and environmental mission."

Kiani Bakhtiari added, "hybrid organizations have created with this approach. Therefore, entrepreneurs of hybrid organizations are after creating organizations and acceptable markets for paying due attention to the specific social, cultural and environmental issues."

CEO of Industrial Management Institute (IMI) said that intellectual principles of organizations have direct relationship with the hybrid culture such as creation of value for the healthy life, social and environmental justice, sustainability of environment and products with high quality and added, "specifications of managers and policymakers of hybrid organizations is this that these people are identified as cultural architects and methods of healthy and sustainable life."

Kiani Bakhtiari pointed to the key distinguished factors of hybrid organizations from traditional organizations and added, "in this type of organizations, originality is with the society and environment while the business case is at

the secondary rank. In other words, it can be said that this type of organization is interested in gaining profitability in line with solving environmental concerns and problems."

In these organizations, activity of industry is based on creating markets for successful competition or joint Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and/or formation of joint ecosystems in line with meeting demands of society and environment.

Removal of concerns of humanity is the main objective of these types of organizations and in this line, IMI will spare no effort from interaction, cooperation and formation of ecosystem.

In the end, he said, "the managers that could not remember their previous are subject to repeat it and those managers that fail to see future will be subject to future determination."

Nasrin Jazani the Scientific Secretary of the Conference said, "the necessity of paying due attention of organizations to environment has prompted the managers of human resources to consider an approach for synchronization of social, economic and environmental responsibilities."



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# ESA to fund world’s first space debris removal mission

The European Space Agency has agreed to fund a mission to remove a piece of space debris — the first of its kind — as part of the agency's new Space Safety program.

The mission, announced Monday, will be executed by a consortium of aerospace companies, led by the Swiss startup ClearSpace, which was founded by a group of space debris researchers working at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne research institute, EPFL.

ESA expects the mission to launch in 2025. "This is the right time for such a mission," Luc Piguet, founder and CEO of ClearSpace, said in a news update from ESA. "The space debris issue is more pressing than ever before. Today we have nearly 2,000 live satellites in space and more than 3,000 failed ones."

Currently, scientists with the U.S. military and space agencies around the globe use tracking data and probability models to help active government-owned and private satellites avoid pieces of junk. But the problem of space debris is getting worse.

The growth of the private space industry and the shrinking of satellite technology has made it cheaper and easier to launch a satellite than ever before. Every year, hundreds of new satellites are sent into space.

Many experts predict low Earth orbit will eventually become so crowded that more interventionist methods will be necessary



— in other words, debris removal.

To demonstrate the feasibility of space debris removal, engineers with the ClearSpace-1 mission will launch a four-armed robotic junk collector to retrieve Vespa, a small satellite launched by ESA in 2013. Vespa, though defunct, remains in orbit around Earth at a distance of 497 miles.

At a meeting held in Seville, Spain, at the end of November, ESA leaders agreed

that the growing problem of space junk required action.

"Imagine how dangerous sailing the high seas would be if all the ships ever lost in history were still drifting on top of the water," said ESA Director General Jan Wörner. "That is the current situation in orbit, and it cannot be allowed to continue. ESA's Member States have given their strong support to this new mission, which also points the way forward to essential

new commercial services in the future."

Space agencies, aerospace companies and a variety of research institutions continue to work to improve guidelines for space launches in order to minimize the impacts of new satellites and spacecraft on low Earth orbit congestion.

But even if all launches were called off today, low Earth orbit will continue to get increasingly dangerous for active satellites. When pieces of debris collide and break apart, the shrapnel scatters and increases the odds of future collisions — a cascading effect.

Data collected by the U.S. government shows congestion in low Earth orbit gets worse every day.

"We're at a tipping point right now," John Crassidis, a professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering at the University of Buffalo, told UPI earlier this year.

Some space junk experts suggest low Earth orbit, LEO, could become overwhelmed by space debris within 50 years.

Once the ClearSpace-1 mission probe grabs Vespa, it will fall back into Earth's atmosphere and burn up. Such a technique for debris removal isn't economically sustainable. Experts hope future cleanup probes will be able to grab a piece of junk, deposit into the atmosphere and continue on to collect more debris.

(Source: UPI)

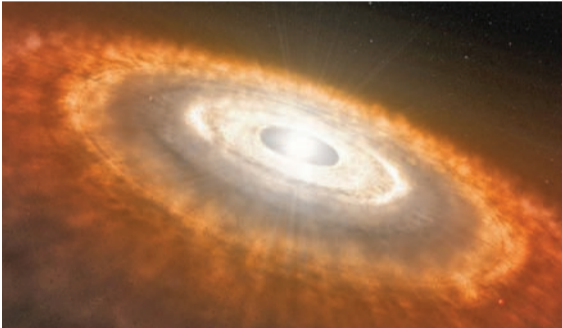
## Electric charges on dust grains may help explain how planets are born

Growing up is hard to do, especially for baby planets. Now, scientists may have uncovered the solution to one puzzle about protoplanetary growing pains.

An obstacle to planetary formation, known as the bouncing barrier, hinders the clumping of dust particles that eventually form planets. But electric charge can provide extra stickiness that those cosmic motes need for clumps to keep growing, scientists report December 9 in Nature Physics. Testing that explanation required vigorously shaking thousands of small glass beads and catapulting them more than 100 meters skyward in an attempt to mimic planets' birthplaces, protoplanetary disks.

In the pancakes of dust and gas known as protoplanetary disks, the seeds of planets collide and stick, forming larger and larger clumps. But, according to experiments and simulations, once particles are a millimeter or so in size, their growth stalls as they bounce off one another, rather than sticking. It's a quandary that has stymied attempts to simulate how planets form.

Somehow, the dust particles overcome the bouncing barrier,



resulting in a cosmos peppered with a wide variety of worlds (SN: 1/8/19). "We see exoplanets, so there must be a way to get bigger particles," says experimental astrophysicist Tobias Steinpilz of the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany.

So Steinpilz and colleagues set out to form analogs of planetary seeds. Instead of protoplanetary dust grains, the

researchers used glass beads, each a bit less than half a millimeter in diameter. Collisions between those beads would mimic colliding dust particles in the protoplanetary disk. But there was one catch: Earth's gravity. "That overpowers everything we want to see," Steinpilz says.

So the researchers launched their experiment with a catapult inside the 120-meter-tall Bremen Drop Tower in Germany, letting the apparatus containing the beads, a camera and other measurement equipment, fly upward and back down. During its approximately nine-second flight, the device was effectively weightless.

Prior to the launch, the researchers shook the beads, mimicking the collisions that particles in a protoplanetary disk would experience over time. That movement caused the beads to build up electric charges, some negative and some positive. When the beads went weightless, they formed clumps — some consisting of over a thousand beads — thanks to electric forces between the charged beads, the researchers determined.

(Source: sciencenews.org)

## App helps Inuit hunters navigate thinning sea ice in Canadian Arctic



A new mobile phone app has been devised to help Inuit hunters in the Canadian north avoid an increasingly dangerous effect of climate change: unpredictable sea ice.

Developed under the guidance of the Arctic Eider Society, the app aims to draw on the catalogue of traditional knowledge that has helped Inuit thrive in an unforgiving region.

Named after the Inuktitut word for "sea ice", Siku is intended to provide an all-in-one system of critical information for hunters out in the land.

"We're copying what our parents used to do, but in modern ways," Lucassie Arragutainaq, manager of the Sanikiluaq hunters and trappers association in Nunavut, told the Canadian Press.

The app was devised to address the growing number of accidents in which hunters unexpectedly plunge through ice. Knowledge accrued over thousands of years has traditionally helped hunters read and test ice, but many have seen troubling changes to ice behavior in recent years.

A growing body of evidence has found that Canada's Arctic is warming at a rate much faster than the rest of the world.

By drawing on satellite data and user-submitted tagging, Siku's developers hope to provide better and more up-to-date information to hunters.

In one example, the society's executive director, Joel Heath, told how a hunter saw a narrow crack in sea ice. After he tagged it, satellite stats later showed that the crack soon morphed into a cleavage so large that hunters on the ocean side of the ice would have been trapped.

"It shows how [a hunter] taking a few photos and tagging can mobilize Indigenous knowledge," said Heath.

The app also has features that let hunters indicate where wildlife has been spotted — seals, narwhal, rabbits and polar bear — to direct others to bountiful hunting grounds.

Siku also includes a function to upload stories — a nod to the importance of storytelling as a repository of knowledge and information among communities.

The app was unveiled last week at the ArcticNet conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia. It was previously a winner of Google's 2017 Impact Challenge, bringing in \$750,000 in development funding.

(Source: msn)

## NASA says core stage of next Moon rocket now ready



NASA has completed the giant rocket that will take US astronauts back to the Moon, the space agency's head announced Monday, pledging the mission would take place in 2024 despite being beset by delays.

Towering 212 feet (65 meters), the equivalent of a 20-story building, the Space Launch System (SLS) is the tallest rocket ever built at a towering 212 feet (65 meters), the equivalent of a 20-story building.

It is also the most powerful, designed to reach a record-breaking speed of Mach 23 before separating from its upper stage, the Orion crew capsule.

But its development has been hit by delays and cost overruns - its first flight was set to take place in November 2018, and its price tag has risen from \$6.2 billion to \$8 billion, or 29 percent, according to a June audit report.

Standing before the orange behemoth at the Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans, NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine called it a "very important day" for the space agency "when we get to announce core stage complete for in

fact the SLS rocket.

"We are making significant progress towards achieving that Artemis 3 mission and getting our first woman, and next man to the south pole of the Moon in 2024."

The Artemis 1 mission will likely take off by June 2020, according to the audit report. The first test will be uncrewed.

NASA plans to land on the Moon's south pole in order to exploit its water ice, discovered in 2009, both for life support purposes and to split into hydrogen and oxygen for use as rocket propellant.

The agency views its return to the Moon as a proving ground for an onward mission to Mars in the 2030s.

It's not just the cost of the rocket that has spiralled: NASA will have spent roughly \$34 billion on the SLS, Orion, and Exploration Ground Systems Program programs through 2019, a sum projected to increase to over \$50 billion by 2024.

The future of the mission rests on continued political support, both from the White House and Congress, which is ultimately responsible for budget allocations.

(Source: msn)

## Storms, erosion a costly problem at NASA's Kennedy Space Center

Kennedy Space Center in Florida has spent \$100 million fixing storm damage and rebuilding sand dunes to protect launch pads in the past 10 years, and that number is expected to grow dramatically in the coming years.

New studies indicate sea level rise is accelerating and will impact low-lying areas, including the space center, sooner than previously thought.

The space center's strategy to date has been to rebuild sand dunes every time they are washed away by a storm so that buffer is maintained between launch pads and the sea. The shoreline restoration area is about 3.2 miles along an outer road that circles the space center.



A study by non-profit Climate Central recently found that historic launch pads 39A and 39B, from which the Apollo moon missions lifted off, are among the most vulnerable. Each is about a quarter-mile from the Atlantic Ocean.

Both launch sites are undergoing multimillion-dollar upgrades, by SpaceX for commercial launches and eventual goals to reach Mars and by NASA for its planned Artemis moon missions.

"We are very certain that rising sea level is a trend that is increasing and will get worse," said Maya Buchanan, an environmental scientist with Climate Central, an independent organization of scientists and journalists.

"The sand and limestone geology in Florida is not helping the space center's situation. It's more at risk because of erosion, and water can seep into the soils there," Buchanan said.

NASA has invested billions at the space center since it was built in 1962 for the Apollo missions. The space agency has noted that the shoreline is about 200 feet closer to the big concrete launch platforms due to storms and rising seas. A railroad that was used during the Apollo era has been abandoned because of erosion.

A \$11.4 million contract was awarded over the summer to Idaho-based North Wind Construction Services to continue building up the dunes near launch pads 39A and 39B. The company plans to begin work Monday, which includes removing and relocating a weather station that is in the path of new dune work.

Most space launch facilities around the globe are built near oceans to allow debris, recovered parts or wreckage from failed launches to fall into the sea rather than striking land. Exceptions include White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico and Russia's Baikonur Cosmodrome in southern Kazakhstan, which are both in sparsely populated areas.

"Kennedy is basically a sandbar, and it's susceptible to a lot of tropical activity," said Greg Harland, a NASA public affairs officer. "But NASA has some vulnerability to natural disasters in all sites, whether it be flooding, wildfires, tornadoes or earthquakes. We've been here for 60 years. Our job is to protect what we have."

The space center's only strategy for coping with rising seas is to haul in more sand and build up sand dunes when they wash away — as it has during events like Hurricanes Sandy and Matthew in 2016. Hurricanes Irma in 2017 and Dorian in 2019 also caused some erosion.

Launch sites at neighboring Cape Canaveral Air Force Station are higher, but also susceptible to erosion. SpaceX uses one of those sites to land rocket boosters, and others there are being renovated by new space companies Blue Origin and Firefly Aerospace.

But some observers, like Climate Control's Buchanan, question the long-term strategy of investing heavily on low-lying sandbars to secure America's future in space exploration.

"It's a question of how much to spend building up dunes again and again, and how long will they do that," Buchanan said. "The most protective thing we could do is put limits on carbon emissions. People say that's expensive, but any level of rising seas makes storm damage worse, which is expensive, and building sea walls and sand dunes is also expensive."

NASA doesn't budget for storm damage or shoreline restoration, Harland said, because it considers such damage an act of God for which it can't plan. The money comes from allocations set aside in federal disaster declarations.

Dunes are not a long-term solution, agreed Maia McGuire, a Florida Sea Grant biologist with the University of Florida Extension Service.

"Building up dunes is a Band-Aid approach, and at some point the wound is going to get too big for the Band-Aid," McGuire said. "Retreating from the coast is an option. It's not everybody's favorite option, but more and more are advocating for this every day."

Meanwhile, Florida's space development agency, Space Florida, continues a hot streak of economic development on the Cape. It has attracted many new companies like Blue Origin and Firefly, along with space-related manufacturers like OneWeb Satellites and Ruag Space that have built out new facilities near the space center.

"Space launch activity was put at the Cape originally because this was where the least amount of development was in Florida back in the '50s. There is no such place left anymore," said Dale Ketcham, the agency's vice president of government and external relations.

"We remain focused on assuring human activity in space is a part of the solution to this threat" of rising seas and erosion, Ketcham said.

(Source: UPI)

## Russian cargo ship docks at International Space Station

The International Space Station is running out of docking ports. Russia's Progress 74 cargo ship, which linked up with ISS early Monday morning, is one of five craft attached to the space station.

The cargo ship automatically attached itself to the Pirs docking compartment on the Russian segment at 5:35 a.m. ET.

"The Progress 74 spacecraft is carrying almost three tons of food, fuel and supplies for the Expedition 61 crew aboard the station," according to NASA. "Progress will arrive after making 49 orbits of Earth in three days since its launch Friday."

The Russian cargo ship joined the space station as the two craft sailed over the Yellow Sea, east of Shanghai, at an

altitude of 260 miles.

Russian cosmonauts Alexander Skvortskov and Oleg Skripochka oversaw — but did not need to intervene in — the automatic docking.

The space station's crew has lots of unpacking to do, as another vessel, SpaceX's Dragon cargo ship, arrived on Sunday morning, bringing with it 2.5 tons of supplies and science gear.

Both dockings were broadcast live on NASA TV.

A third cargo vessel, the U.S. Cygnus spacecraft built by Northrop Grumman, remains attached to the space station, having arrived in early November. Two Soyuz crew capsules,

waiting to ferry astronauts home, are also docked at the space station.

NASA considers the space station an important bridge to the Artemis program, the effort to return astronauts to the surface of the Moon.

"As the only place for conducting long-duration research on how living in microgravity affects living organisms as well as testing technologies to allow humans to work at the Moon, the space station serves as a unique asset in the effort establish a sustainable presence at the Moon and prepare for missions to Mars," NASA wrote in an update.

(Source: UPI)

Iran issues travel advisory for France due to unrest

**TOURISM** TEHRAN — Iran’s Foreign Ministry on Tuesday issued a warning for Iranian citizens to postpone traveling to France amid ongoing protests and civil unrest in the European country.

The Ministry has advised Iranian citizens to exercise increased caution due to “violent protests in various cities of that country” and postpone their travels to France in order to preserve their safety and health, ISNA reported.



Demonstrators gathered as part of a national strike protesting changes to the French pension system last week in Paris. (Credit...Kiran Ridley/Getty Images)

Regarding to constant public protests during the past year and concerning general strikes over the past two days and the violent protests in various cities of that country, particularly Paris, Iranian travelers and tourists are strongly advised to postpone their trips to France, the statement said.

French unions are staging a second round of mass street demonstrations as the country entered its sixth day of a nationwide strike and transport standstill over proposed plans to change the pensions system, the Guardian reported on Tuesday.

More hotel guests steal mattresses than you might think, survey reveals

Plenty of people end up taking home small things from hotels, especially those little, complimentary soaps. But what about the bigger stuff, like hairdryers, bathrobes, or mattresses?

Well, those go missing more than you might think. Yes, even the mattresses.

A study by Wellness Heaven revealed that about 4.2 percent of the 1,157 four and five-star hotels (634 four-star hoteliers and 523 five-star hoteliers) surveyed have reported their mattresses mysteriously going missing. Obviously, these mattresses aren’t just getting up and walking out in the middle of the night. Metro reported it seems hotel guests have managed to sneak them out in the middle of the night.

Making your home bed feel like a hotel bed is certainly a goal for a lot of people out there, but hopefully most would stop short of actually taking home the bed itself.

It’s unclear how many hotels deal with this particular situation, but some hotel chains have opted for simply charging the guest for the missing item (depending on what it is), or even pressing charges for theft. In the most extreme cases, some hotels ban guests who have been caught stealing. But mattresses aren’t the only big ticket items that have gone missing, according to Wellness Heaven. According to the survey, in one case a grand piano was taken from a hotel in Italy. “Once I walked through the lobby, I noticed that something was missing, and soon after I learned that three unknown men in overalls had taken away the grand piano, and it never reappeared, of course,” the hotel owner told Wellness Heaven. ught stealing. (Source: MSN)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Morne Trois Pitons National Park

A rugged mountain range featuring steep volcanoes and deep canyons forms the natural spine of Dominica, a volcanic island of the Lesser Antilles.

A World Heritage, Morne Trois Pitons National Park (MTPNP) protects a scenically striking part in the central and southern highlands with an extension of 6,857 hectares, roughly 9 percent of the country’s land area.



The centerpiece is Morne Trois Pitons, one of five live volcanic centers within the park. Above 1,300 m.a.s.l., this spectacular dome complex is the highest peak within the property. The park’s landscape is dominated by the extreme relief covered by various types of tropical forest against the dramatic backdrop of diverse volcanic topography and features.

The scenic beauty is further complemented by numerous natural lakes and pools, including Boeri Lake and Freshwater Lake, the country’s largest lakes. Countless rivers and creeks originate in MTPNP, often forming magnificent waterfalls on their way towards the ocean.

Within MTPNP there are massive volcanic piles surrounded by precipitous glaci slopes and soufrieres, in particular the Grand Soufriere or Valley of Desolation. In this large amphitheater-like area surrounded by mountains, the volcanic activity is displayed in the form of streams of various colors interspersed with fumaroles and hot springs, bubbling mud ponds and the aptly named Boiling Lake.

The latter is a massive hot spring with a water temperature of about 95°C. Surrounded by steep cliffs, the lake is one of the largest of its kind in the world. It constantly bubbles and churns, with steam emitting an almost surreal sound. Water level and coloration vary greatly.

(Source: UNESCO)

Foreign tour operators, travel marketers astonished by safe, modern Iran

→ 1 “We all continue life and the tourists are still coming.”

Joao, who presides over a Portuguese travel agency, said to ISNA, “I am in Iran, and my clients are surprised that I have traveled to such a country. They constantly ask me about the safety in here. I have sent some videos from the [Iranian] streets and people to show that everything is safe but they hardly believed that.”

Saeid Fekri, organizer of the Famtrip, noted that 30 people were initially invited to take part in the event, but some of them preferred to exercise caution and postponed their trips, so that 17 people took part in the Famtrip ultimately. “From the hotels to the restaurants, Iran was beyond the group’s expectations. They did not think Iran to only have a modern city or a single modern hotel.”

Almost everything was incredible for them. Even about news of the unrest that they had heard, they asked where this was happening in such a way that everything is so calm now, Fekri explained.

“This seemed even strange to their clients how managers of travel agencies could go to Iran under so-called circumstance.”

Deputy tourism minister Vali Teymouri said in October, “We need a good image of Iran to be displayed by the world media, thus, we would pursue any method perceived to be easy or less costly in compliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran’s regulations.”

“We do our best to create a good image of Iran in the minds of the world people,” he noted.

The 2019 Travel Risk Map, which shows the risk level around the world, puts Iran among countries with “insignificant risk”, a category where the UK, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, and Finland are placed in.

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.

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

President Rouhani invited to Hyrcanian Forest World Heritage celebration



The magic of falling autumn leaves is a delight to the eye in the prehistoric Hyrcanian Forest, Golestan province, northern Iran, December 1, 2019.

**TOURISM** TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani has been invited to attend a ceremony to celebrate registration of Hyrcanian Forest as a UNESCO World Heritage.

Such a national celebration was previously slated to be held on Monday in Babolsar, Mazandaran province. However, it is postponed to a date when President Rouhani will pay a visit to the northern province in the near future, IRNA reported.

The celebration has been canceled today due to [an unexpected] change in plans of tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan who was scheduled to join the event, deputy provincial tourism chief said.

“The next date for the Hyrcanian Forest celebration has not been determined yet, however, we have been informed that the festivity will be attended by the tourism minister during

the President’s visit [to the province],” Mehdi Izadi added.

Hyrcanian Forest (also known as Caspian Forest) was named a UNESCO World Heritage earlier in July during the 43rd session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

Spanning from the south of Azerbaijan to about 850 km eastward to the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran and Golestan, the Hyrcanian forests are witnesses of the ancient forests of the world estimated to be survived for a long period spanning 35 and 50 million years.

According to UNESCO, the forest contains the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation. It also contains superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.

Atlas of food being developed in Ardebil province

**HERITAGE** TEHRAN — A comprehensive atlas of traditional foods, which are prepared across Iran’s Ardebil province, is being developed, CHTN reported.

“Indigenous dishes of Ardebil province have been identified in collaboration with food industry experts and now we are preparing a comprehensive atlas of culinary tourism,” deputy provincial tourism chief Soghra Farshi said.

“Since the culinary tourism involves high-quality and attractive foods, several sessions have been held to reintroduce indigenous foods into the menus of restaurants.”

“Food tourism is one of the top fields of the travel sector in the world and we are working to further introduce [potential] tourists to the province by developing this atlas,” she added.



Including the full range of experiences, cooking classes, producer visits, enjoying street food, or diving into a one-of-a-kind restaurants, food Tourism, according to experts starts to catch on with mainstream tourism with the help and exposure from social media and television shows.

According to the World Food Travel Association food is now a main motivation for travelers choosing their destinations as many of whom are spending more time and money on unique food and beverage experiences.

“We have seen a global increase in the number of food tour companies, food and beverage focused events and food and beverage experience-focused marketing efforts.”

sprawling on a high, windswept plateau, Ardebil is well-known for having lush natural beauties, hospitable people and its silk and carpet trade tradition.

Cuneiform tablets and ‘envelopes’ tell of Mesopotamian sophistication

A team of Italian and Iraqi archaeologists has unearthed hundreds of cuneiform tablets in central Iraq. They also uncovered some clay coverings and seals with the tablets. The collection of cuneiform texts is one of the most important finds of its kind in many years and is opening up a window into the complex and sophisticated culture of ancient Mesopotamia.

The treasure trove of tablets and other fascinating and revealing items was found by a team from the Italian Universities of Pisa and Siena who worked with specialists from the Iraqi University of Al-Qadisiyah. They had been digging at the Tell as-Sadoum site which is in south-central Iraq. According to Unipi News, “The 50-hectare site, east of Najaf, on a branch of the Euphrates River has been identified as Marad”.

This was an important city that was established in the 3rd millennium BC and was once part of the Akkadian Empire. It was located on a hill and it was inhabited until the Neo-Babylonian period in the 1st millennium BC. Excavations have revealed a large temple, some residential districts and a large manufacturing center. 3000-year-old clay cuneiform tablets

The team found the clay tablets in the manufacturing district, along with a large number of ceramic and pottery fragments. Archaeology News Network reports that “the archaeologists found a hundred or so fragments with cuneiform script”. They are believed to date to the 2nd millennium BC. This means that they belong to the period of the Paleo-Babylonian Empire (the time of Hammurabi) reports LBV. Eight of the tablets have been found intact or only have relatively minor damage and all are inscribed with cuneiform, one of the earliest systems of writing.

The texts are related to a diverse range of activities that were happening in the ancient city. A number of the clay texts appear to be letters and other official

documents. Some are on the subject of business and a sales contract and a purchase agreement have been found. There are others of a bureaucratic nature and some are even concerned with legal disputes.

Archaeology News Network quotes Prof. Anacleto D’Agostino of the University of Pisa, who took part in the dig, as saying, “the tablets bear witness to the wealth and the lively economic and administrative life of the ancient city in Mesopotamia”. A few of the tablets also list the names of some kings and other cities. These could potentially provide insights into the political history of the Mesopotamian city.

■ Clay ‘envelopes’

The archaeologists also found with the texts many fragments of clay containers or covers. These have been likened to envelopes in which the cuneiform tablets were kept. Three of these ‘envelopes’ have been found nearly intact. Many of these, which are made of thin strips of clay, have the subject of the tablets they contained written on them. They also often bear the imprint of seals, known as ‘cretulae’ with names and images, which were designed to authenticate the contents of the texts, inside the clay covering.

Some ‘ninetynine’ cretulae, or rather blocks of clay with seal or string impressions which were used to secure the containers’ were also found according to the Archaeology News Network. Some of the seals were decorated with semi-precious stones. These were the personal marks of prominent people in the city, who were probably members of its administrative and commercial elite.

■ Artistic seals

The cretulae are beautifully engraved with ‘various themes and are often executed with great care and expertise by skillful craftsmen’ reports the Archaeology News Network. There are some with scenes of mon-



The tablets are inscribed with cuneiform and are in great condition. (Universita di Pisa)

archs or possibly heroes fighting wild animals. There are also some Mesopotamian deities, mythological creatures and depictions of animals. These seals with their artistic designs demonstrate the sophistication of the culture in Marad.

The site at Tell as-Sadoum is believed to hold many more archaeological treasures. Unipi News reports D’Agostino, as stating that the expectation is “to continue the project through 2020 with a new mission in the field”. The tablets will be studied further so that all their contents can be fully understood, and they will hopefully, reveal more about life in Ancient Mesopotamia.

(Source: Ancient Origins)

# New documents against the Afghan War

6 → The Pentagon Papers helped enshrine in the public lexicon the idea of a “credibility gap”: the difference between what government officials were telling Americans about how the Vietnam War was going and how they knew the war was actually going. At the time, the presence of that gap seemed untenable.

Today, however, the credibility gap regarding Afghanistan isn’t a bizarre and unstable temporary situation but the status quo. Everyone knows the U.S. is losing in Afghanistan. Almost everyone in the government has been lying about it for years. Yet the collective response to this contradiction is a resigned shrug.

And while Afghanistan doesn’t make headlines much these days, there’s a straight line between this story and the impeachment hearing. In 1971, Americans could still be shocked by the fact that their leaders could be duplicitous. The Afghanistan debacle has conditioned us to expect this. That helped pave the way for the presidency of Donald Trump, who as a candidate offered a mix of outright lies, goofy fibs, and bullshit, and has faithfully continued to do the same since being elected.

## Will Trump Close the Deal to End Afghanistan's Long War?

President Donald Trump had barely been in Afghanistan for a few hours on Nov. 28 when he made three bold declarations. In coming days, Trump said, the Taliban would stop their attacks and stalled peace talks would resume. But, he also told Afghan officials, the U.S. would keep a small number of troops there indefinitely. “They didn’t want to do a cease-fire, but now they do want to do a cease-fire,” Trump said of the Taliban, during a press conference at Bagram Airfield, north of Kabul, roughly 13 hours after flying from Maryland under the cover of darkness for a surprise Thanksgiving visit to the troops. “It will probably work out that way.”

Unfortunately, that’s not how the Taliban see it. The combination of notions Trump floated is a deal breaker for the militants who have been waging war against the Afghan government and foreign troops for nearly two decades. For starters, the Taliban aren’t laying down their weapons before brokering a full withdrawal of U.S. troops. Leaving any American forces in the country is also likely to stymie talks. “The cease-fire will start only after the signing of the peace agreement,” Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen tells TIME.

Any compromise must come from Trump, Shaheen adds, since it was he who canceled a planned peace summit at Camp David, via Twitter on Sept. 7. “In our view, the ball is in the U.S. court,” Shaheen says. “They called off the talks. It is up to them to come to the table if they want peaceful solution of the issue.”

So it’s hard to say who Trump was trying to reach with these new messages. In their delivery, he muddled his 2019 State of the Union pledge to end U.S. involvement in “endless wars.” And aides have surely told him that even though he did give the Taliban half of what they want—a public declaration from the U.S. President that he is serious about resuming talks—negotiations are unlikely to move forward under the conditions he set out. That leaves any hope of a peace deal where it was when Trump came to office: nowhere. As talks drag on, the delays can be measured in lives: in the first nine months of 2019, there were more than 8,200 civilian casualties, according to the U.N.

This mess now falls to U.S. peace envoy Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad to clean up. Khalilzad, who was in Kabul on Dec. 4, must try to talk the Taliban into reducing attacks on U.S. and Afghan forces without calling it a cease-fire, while convincing Trump and the Afghan government that he’s achieved a cease-fire in all but name.

His job will be complicated by Trump’s alleged assurances to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. Current and former Afghan officials briefed on the leaders’ conversations during Trump’s visit said Trump promised the Afghan government a greater say in future discussions, an idea the Taliban have long rejected. They also said Trump told the Afghan government he’d maintain some U.S. troop presence in the country, echoing comments he made earlier this year. “We’re going to keep a presence there. We’re reducing that presence very substantially, and we’re going to always have a presence,” Trump told Fox News Radio in August. Get The Brief. Sign up to receive the top stories you need to know right now.

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Both points constitute a major reversal of the earlier draft deal between the U.S. and the Taliban, which took nearly a year to negotiate. It included a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops as well as special operations and intelligence operatives, Taliban spokesman Shaheen told TIME in October. On that condition, the Taliban would agree to stop targeting U.S. forces as they withdrew, though it would continue to fight Afghan forces while the militants and a delegation of Afghan leaders separately hammered out a way forward in later talks to be held in Oslo. Trump abruptly walked away from that deal in a blistering September tweetstorm, just after canceling the secret summit at Camp David. The plan had been to try to broker an agreement between the militants and Afghan President Ghani, who’d accepted the invitation, in the style of the 1978 Camp David accords. Trump blamed the talks’ collapse on a Taliban bombing in Kabul that killed 12 people, including an American soldier, but Shaheen said it was the Taliban that balked at traveling to Washington without having a deal and cease-fire already in place.

One thing to emerge in the post-Thanksgiving haze is that Trump’s position toward the Taliban seems to have hardened, perhaps because of criticism from retired generals and lawmakers like Senator Lindsey Graham. “I don’t know why in the world we would restart talks with the Taliban unless they renounce violence,” Graham tells TIME.

The Taliban delegation in Doha has always insisted there is no cease-fire without a deal, and no deal without a full withdrawal. But they too are also facing a weary and impatient fighting force that was disappointed by the derailing of talks in September. U.S. negotiators are seeking a “reduction in violence” against both U.S. and Afghan forces, a senior administration official told TIME on Thursday, conceding that push



goes beyond what the Taliban agreed to before talks fell apart. “The reduction in violence discussion has definitely widened and it does involve the Afghans as well,” she said, speaking anonymously to discuss the sensitive negotiations.

She also confirmed Afghan officials’ assertions that Trump wants the Afghan government to be more involved in the peace process, but would not comment directly on whether Trump had pledged to keep U.S. troops in Afghanistan. “We are constantly evaluating our troop force levels,” she said. “President Trump has been clear (that) he would like to bring it down... but he’s also not going to do something that is going to threaten the American people or the American homeland.” When asked if the Taliban would accept keeping a small number of U.S. forces in the country, she replied: “We think the Taliban also would like a peace agreement.”

So would most people in Afghanistan. “One of the real frustrations in the last year is that the talks have been going on, but for many in the countryside, it feels like the fighting has escalated,” says Kate Clark, co-director of the Kabul-based Afghanistan Analysts Network. “From the Taliban or the Afghan government and U.S. side ... from airstrikes and night raids. And there’s no accountability for any of it.”

## Documents Reveal U.S. Officials Misled Public on War in Afghanistan

As New York Times reported, The documents, obtained by The Washington Post, paint a stark picture of missteps and failures in the American effort to pacify and rebuild the country.

Prominent American officials concealed pessimistic assessments about the long-running military campaign in Afghanistan, according to thousands of pages of documents published by The Washington Post on Monday. Taken together, the documents paint a stark picture of missteps and failures.

The United States military achieved a quick but short-term victory over the Taliban and Al Qaeda in early 2002, and the Pentagon’s focus then shifted toward Iraq. The Afghan conflict became a secondary effort, a hazy spectacle of nation building, with intermittent troop increases to conduct high-intensity counterinsurgency offensives — but, over all, with a small number of troops carrying out an unclear mission.

Even as the Taliban returned in greater numbers and troops on the ground voiced concerns about the American strategy’s growing shortcomings, senior American officials almost always said that progress was being made.

“We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan — we didn’t know what we were doing,” said Douglas Lute, a retired three-star Army general who helped the White House oversee the war in Afghanistan in both the Bush and Obama administrations.

“What are we trying to do here?” he told government interviewers in 2015. “We didn’t have the foggiest notion of what we were undertaking.”

The 2,000 pages of interviews were obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request and years of legal back-and-forth with the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, according to The Post. Formed in 2008, the office has served as a government watchdog for the war in Afghanistan, releasing reports quarterly on the conflict’s progress, many of which publicly depicted the shortcomings of the effort. In one interview obtained by The Post, a person identified only as a senior National Security Council official said that the Obama White House, along with the Pentagon, pushed for data that showed President Barack Obama’s announced surge in 2009 was succeeding.

“It was impossible to create good metrics. We tried using troop numbers trained, violence levels, control of territory, and none of it painted an accurate picture,” the official told interviewers in 2016, according to The Post. “The metrics were always manipulated for the duration of the war.”

In 2010 this pressure trickled down to troops on the ground, as they answered to commanders eager to show progress to senior leaders, including Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, then the commander of all American troops in Afghanistan. But the facts were that the fledgling Afghan military performed poorly in the field and that the American “clear, hold, build” counterinsurgency strategy had little hope of succeeding.

“Afghans knew we were there temporarily, and that affected what we could do,” Marc Chretien, who served as the senior State Department adviser to the Marines in Helmand Province, said in one interview. “An elder in Helmand once told me as much, saying: ‘Your Marines live in tents. That’s how I know you won’t be here long.’”

The tension between rosy public statements and

the reality on the ground has been one of the enduring elements of the war. Now, 18 years in, the American-led mission in Afghanistan has all but cut off outside access to United States troops on the ground in an attempt to execute their mission in near-secrecy.

Jeffrey Eggers, a former Navy SEAL who served as a strategic adviser to General McChrystal, the commander of United States forces in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2010, pointed out a failed plan in 2010 to seize control of Marja, a Taliban stronghold in Helmand Province, after a long battle there. General McChrystal and a number of senior Pentagon civilians had repeatedly told reporters before the battle that they had “a government in a box” ready to install in Marja to provide public services to civilians. But the plan to pacify the stronghold failed and came to symbolize larger problems with the counterinsurgency strategy, The Post reported.

“One of McChrystal’s hardest lessons was his government-in-a-box program which typified the American wartime machinery, and he thought you could simply wave a magic wand and POOF!” Mr. Eggers told investigators.

When discussing the state of the war in 2009, Barnett Rubin, who served as the senior adviser to the American special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan from 2009 to 2013, described the American strategy in much starker terms. “But we were doing” counterinsurgency “as colonial power,” he said in a 2017 interview. “Afghans knew this influx of funds wouldn’t last, and they wanted to make the best of the windfall without endangering themselves. It was a fantasy that we could do that.”

The Washington Post said the new document trove has a precedent in the Pentagon Papers, but also drew distinctions with that 7,000-page study of the Vietnam War, which was based on internal government documents kept secret until published in 1971 by The New York Times and The Post. In contrast, The Post describes the new documents as drawn from interviews conducted between 2014 and 2018 that were used by the inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction to write a series of unclassified “Lessons Learned” reports that have been publicly released. “About 30 of the interview records are transcribed, word-for-word accounts,” The Post said. “The rest are typed summaries of conversations: pages of notes and quotes from people with different vantage points in the conflict, from provincial outposts to the highest circles of power.”

Since 2001, more than 2,200 American troops have been killed in Afghanistan, along with hundreds from allied countries that have contributed forces to the war. Since 2014, after the Pentagon officially and euphemistically ended “combat operations,” putting the Afghan military in the lead, more than 50,000 Afghan security forces have died. And the military effort has cost the United States more than \$1 trillion.

Of the \$133 billion that the United States has spent on reconstruction programs in Afghanistan, about \$83 billion went toward training the Afghan Army and police forces, according to the inspector general. “If you look at the overall amount of money spent in Afghanistan, you see a tiny percentage of it went to help the people of the country,” Robert Finn, the United States ambassador to Afghanistan in 2002 and 2003, told investigators. “It almost all went to the military and even most of that money went for local militia and police training.”

“When you are in power, you are expected to take care of your own,” Mr. Finn told investigators. “They come to him because the sister-in-law needs an operation, or want a new car, or want electricity in their house.”

Lt. Col. Thomas Campbell, a Pentagon spokesman, issued a statement late Monday saying that “there has been no intent” by the Defense Department “to mislead Congress or the public.” He said that “most of the individuals interviewed spoke with the benefit of hindsight.”

The Washington Post published its report just as talks between the United States and the Taliban have restarted for another round of peace negotiations in Doha, Qatar. In September, President Trump abruptly called off months of the talks after a suicide blast in Kabul that killed an American soldier and 11 others.

During a recent trip to Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan over the Thanksgiving holiday, Mr. Trump said the United States would stay in Afghanistan “until such time as we have a deal, or we have total victory, and they want to make a deal very badly.” Mr. Trump also reaffirmed that he wanted to reduce the American military presence in the country to 8,600 troops, down from about 12,000 to 13,000. In one 2003 memo cited by The Post from Donald H. Rumsfeld, the defense secretary at the time, he declared, “I have no visibility into who the bad guys are.”

## Ukrainian Professor: We become isolated due to false hope for west’s help

TEHRAN (FNA) — Valentin Yakushik, Ukrainian professor, says adopting a pro-Western-only policy, Kiev failed to play the role of the bridge between the West and East.

In an exclusive interview with FNA, professor Yakushik said, “Ukraine played a bad game with Russia, and did not understand it was not the way to act with a great political power; you should not disturb a big player, then the results on you will be much worse than on whom you offend.”

Valentin Yakushik received his Ph.D in Law. He is a Professor of Political Science at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Ukraine. His research interests include interdisciplinary studies in the fields of general theory of the state in transition, comparative political and legal systems, national reconciliation and peace-building.

Below is the full text of the interview:

■ How do you view Ukraine’s periodic policy shifting of leaning towards the West or Russia?

A: After the 2013 and 2014 revolution, majority of Ukrainians had the idea that the West will come and help Ukraine, and they would just by miracle receive European salaries and work conditions; but it turned out that they could go to only Poland and other Eastern European countries where there are at least two million people working hard labors. So, there was a picture that Europe is heaven, and it was spread among people as not very patriotic people were ruling the country at that time, even though they used nationalistic ideological clichés. Now it is the time to change the ideological approach and technics by getting closer to people and understanding their needs. All our budget is spent to repay our debts; it is necessary to find ways to improve the economy, which is impossible to do by isolating Ukraine from its neighbors. Isolation is an old-fashioned approach; we need creative approaches. Mr. Zelensky in his pre-presidential activities as an actor showed a lot of creativities, boosting the chance to adopt a creative approach. Instead of seeking help only from Europeans and other aliens, he can have real friends from its neighbors; real friends who can cooperate with him and advise him on regional affairs. Again, only pro-western approach is a limited one.

■ In your opinion, what position should Ukraine take on the international scene? How far is it from its desired international position?

A: Some of the prominent American consultants and thinkers like Henry Kissinger have said Ukraine should have a position in the world to bridge the West to the East, between NATO and Russia, and not to join any of these alliances. The West thinks Ukraine should be a part of the West, but the West and Ukraine will understand neutrality and balanced position are the best possible solution.

Sometimes in the history of each nation is the favorable conditions when you can use this situation for your own development. It was in Taiwan and Japan after the World War II when they could make the best possible economy in their quite balanced political systems, because they were seen as possible competitors of powerful communist China. But the last king in Pahlavi dynasty in Iran did not make a balanced power system, and leaned toward the US and finally collapsed. Ukraine can learn from these technics to have an efficient civil servant, instruments and vision of its real position in the world. But I acknowledge a lot of these possibilities were lost due to corruption. The 2013 and 2014 revolution was anti-Russia and anti-China, and it tightened the ties with China. Ukraine therefore closed the ways to be included in China’s Belt and Road Initiative to be a bridge between China and Europe. Ukraine played a bad game with Russia, and did not understand it was not the way to act with a great political power; you should not disturb a big player, then the results on you will be much worse than on whom you offend.

Ukrainian authorities were unable to use Russian-Chinese way proposed in 2013, nor the US-Western way. We saw the West did not help us, and we became isolated. Now we should develop ways to connect not only to the West, but also to Russia and China, and Muslim countries including Iran.

## Congress Is Trump’s Co-Conspirator Against Liberty

By Ron Paul

Imagine that President Trump spent his phone call with the Ukrainian president threatening to withhold military aid unless the Ukrainian government agreed to use the money to purchase weapons from a US manufacturer. Does anyone seriously think that foreign service professionals and deep state operatives would be so shocked and offended by Trump’s request that they would launch efforts to impeach him? Would Congress view this as “high crimes and misdemeanors” or applaud Trump for carrying out one of modern presidents’ supposedly most important jobs — acting as salesmen for the American military-industrial complex?

This hypothetical shows that impeachment is not about President Trump’s abuse of power. Instead, it is an attempt to make sure President Trump, and all future presidents, confine their abuses of power to items that advance the agenda of the political establishment.

President Trump’s most consequential abuses of power have been met with the full approval of the majority in Congress, the mainstream media, and the deep state. For example, when President Trump launched military action in Syria without obtaining a congressional declaration of war there were no calls for his impeachment. Instead, most members of Congress were perfectly happy to let stand unchallenged President Trump’s claim that the 2001 authorization for use of military force — a limited grant of authority to act against those responsible for the September 11, 2001 attacks — gave him the authority to launch military action against a government that had nothing to do with the September 11th attacks. The only times Congress rebukes President Trump’s foreign policy is when he speaks favorably about pursuing peaceful relations with Russia or ending US involvement in no-win military conflicts.

This hypocrisy extends beyond foreign policy. Many Democrats who claim that President Trump is both a fascist and mentally unhinged are eager to ensure President Trump can continue to conduct warrantless surveillance on every American by reauthorizing Section 215 of the PATRIOT Act. Trump-opposing progressives in Congress are also eager to give President Trump new authority to violate the Second Amendment. Even those progressives who say they believe Trump is a deranged fascist did not object when he endorsed “red flag” laws that give the government power to, as President Trump put it, “take the guns first, go through due process second.” →13

## Orca grandmothers babysit young whales, study finds

Doting killer whale grandmothers help their grand calves survive, particularly in times of food scarcity, scientists reported in a paper that sheds new light on the evolutionary role of menopause.

Orca females stop reproducing in their thirties or forties but can continue to live for decades more, a phenomenon known only to exist in humans and four other mammal species, all of which are whales.

It has been suggested that the trait evolved because it allowed post reproductive females to help their wider kin – referred to as the “grandmother effect” in people, but the theory had not been tested in whales until now.

“This is the first non-human example of the grandmother effect in a menopausal species,” senior author Daniel Franks from the University of York said.



“It has also been shown in elephants, but they are able to reproduce until the end of their lives. We currently know of only five species that go through menopause: the others are short-finned pilot whales, narwhals and beluga.”

Writing in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Franks and colleagues examined more than 40 years of census data on two killer whale groups off the coasts of the US state of Washington as well as Canada’s British Columbia.

The individuals were identified by their unique fin shapes, saddle patches and the presence of nicks and scratches, and sexed by the distinct pigmentation around their genitals as well as adult fin size.

Their relations to one another were inferred through observations of social organisation, and mothers identified by their repeated association with their young calves.

The team, which also included scientists from the University of Exeter, the US Center for Whale Research and Canada’s Pacific Biological Station, focused on 378 individuals known to have a maternal grandmother.

They found that those whose grandmother died within the last two years had a mortality rate 4.5 times higher than those with a living grandmother, in the two years following her death.

The effect was significantly amplified in years of fish scarcity, which the researchers judged through data on annual catches of Chinook salmon, and diminished in years of plenty.

“We have previously shown that post-reproductive grandmothers lead the group around foraging grounds, and that they are important in doing that in times of need, when the salmon are scarce,” Franks explained.

“They are also known to directly share food with younger relatives. We also suspect babysitting,” he added.

While the researchers identified a grandmother effect was at play, these benefits alone do not explain why orca females lose reproductive capacity at midlife: elephant grandmothers help their grandchildren too while continuing to breed until they die.

The team wrote that continued reproductive capacity might come at a cost for whales and for humans, such as intergenerational conflict between mothers and their daughters in competition for males.

“In killer whales, when mothers and daughters cobreed, the calves of mothers from [the] older generation have significantly higher mortality,” the paper said.

The researchers would like to hone in more precisely on how members of the close-knit family-based species help and harm each other, using drones to examine these behaviours.

(Source: The Guardian)

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### Contour space mission

(July 03, 2002)  
NASA has launched its Contour spacecraft, one of a series of missions designed to investigate comets. Scientists hope Contour will visit at least two comets, providing the first detailed look at the differences between these primitive building blocks of the Solar System. This report from Ania Lichtarowicz.

Contour is NASA’s second mission dedicated to studying **comets**. The spacecraft Stardust is already on its way to bring a **sample** of a comet back to Earth; and next year NASA hope to launch their Deep Impact Mission, which they say may help answer questions about how life may have begun on Earth. Some scientists believe that comets hold the most **primitive** materials in the solar system and that they played a role in shaping some of the planets, as well as possibly **seeding life** on Earth.

Instruments on board include the Neutral Gas and Ion Mass Spectrometer which will **analyze the chemical composition** of the comet **nucleus** - the icy core in the head of the comet. Contour will travel closer to the nucleus than any spacecraft ever has before - at only a hundred meters away it’ll be exposed to **high speed debris**, but NASA scientists hope that a five-layer dust shield made of heavy metallic fabric will protect the craft.

Its main camera, the Contour Remote Imager-Spectrograph, will provide **high-resolution images** showing rocks and other features on the nucleus as small as 4 metres across. However scientists will have to wait a while before they get any **comet data** back - Contour is due to rendezvous with comets Encke in 2003 and Schwassmann-Wachmann-3 in 2006.

■ **Words**  
**comets:** a comet is an object that travels around the sun leaving a bright trail  
**sample:** a small quantity of a substance that shows you what it’s like  
**primitive:** extremely old, and not developed  
**seeding life:** causing life to start  
**analyze the chemical composition:** examine what chemicals are included  
**nucleus:** the central part of the comet  
**high speed debris:** pieces of things that have been destroyed travelling very fast  
**high-resolution images:** very good quality pictures  
**comet data:** scientific information about the comet

(Source: BBC)

# Adverse environmental effects may occur as Caspian Sea is shrinking: expert

**ENVIRONMENT d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Caspian Sea water level is shrinking and, if the trend continues, adverse environmental consequences may occur in the coastal areas of the country, Iran’s Meteorological Organization (IMO) director has warned.

Sahar Taj Bakhsh made the remarks during the 24th meeting of the Coordinating Committee on Hydrometeorology and Pollution Monitoring of the Caspian Sea (CASPCOM) held on Tuesday in Tehran.

The CASPCOM was established in 1994 by the national hydro meteorological agencies (NMHSs) of the Caspian littoral states (Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan) with the support of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

CASPCOM was established with a view to coordinating, standardizing, cooperating in and improving in the fields of hydro-meteorology and pollution monitoring of the Caspian Sea.

Over the past 5 years, littoral states managed to set up a legal framework for international cooperation in the field of hydrometeorology and pollution monitoring and achieve good results in this regard, she said.

Another important step that we hope to achieve is the adoption of internal rules of the committee, which will pave the way for the committee to pace up the process and involve the Caspian states in the integrated monitoring and forecasting program, she highlighted.

The exchange of meteorological information between the member states has been ongoing for several years and has provided a great deal of joint activities and research between countries, most of which can be assessed as climate change impacts on the



Caspian Sea, she noted.

Climate change is already having a significant impact on the temperature, precipitation and water level of the sea, and examining the trends of these changes and how it affects the environment and coastline are important issues that can be pursued by researchers in these countries, she added.

A declining trend is affecting the Caspian Sea water level, and if it continues, adverse environmental effects may be brought up in the coastal areas of the states, she warned, Mehr reported.

Accelerating the preparation, approval and implementation of the monitoring and forecasting programs can be considered

as an important step in identifying the contributing factors to this phenomenon and providing appropriate solutions for national and regional decision makers, she highlighted.

The Caspian Sea is recognized as an important waterway for trade between littoral states and a major part of meteorological organizations is dedicated to providing services to the maritime transport fleet, she noted, adding, one of the main objectives of the Committee is to improve the quality and quantity of services provided to these vessels.

Oil exploration and extraction activities in various parts of the Caspian Sea have long

been in progress, while increased over the recent years, she said, noting, the extensive presence of oil companies in the Caspian Sea and the establishment of extraction and exploration platforms in different parts of the sea increase the industry’s need for specialized meteorological services, from monitoring and forecasting sea conditions to conducting studies.

This will require investment in the development of meteorological infrastructure, and oil companies, as a sponsor of the CASPCOM committee’s programs, can play an important role in achieving the key objectives, she emphasized.

Considering the high sensitivity of the Caspian Sea to the pollution and low self-purification capacity of the Sea, cooperation with the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea, also called Tehran Convention, has been on the Committee’s agenda and a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed in this regard, she explained.

Partnerships between the two regional entities will include the provision of meteorological data in environmental assessments as well as joint research on pollutant transfer and its impact, she also added.

She further expressed hope that by achievement of the Committee’s goals, important steps will be taken in the field of environmental cooperation and improvement of the precious ecosystem.

The Caspian Sea is the largest enclosed inland body of water on Earth by area. It is bounded by Kazakhstan to the northeast, Russia to the northwest, Azerbaijan to the west, Iran to the south, and Turkmenistan to the southeast. The sea has a surface area of 371,000 square kilometers and a volume of 78,200 cubic kilometers.

## Department of environment’s budget nearly doubled

**ENVIRONMENT d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The national budget bill for the next calendar year (starting on March 20, 2020) has proposed 6.38 trillion rials (around \$151 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) for the Department of Environment, a nearly twofold increase compared to the current year’s budget of 3.73 trillion rials (nearly \$88 million), ISNA reported on Tuesday.

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.



The DOE’s budget will be spent on air pollution management, sustainable conservation and exploitation of aquatic ecosystems, conservation, restoration and refinement of onshore biodiversity, conservation of protected areas, protection of rangers, and promotion of public participation in environmental protection.

■ **\$67m proposed for FRWMO**

The Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization (FRWMO) will be also provided with a budget of 2.83 trillion rials (around \$67 million), compared with the current year’s budget of 18 trillion rials (\$45 million).

The fund will be used for watershed management and conservation programs, restoration, development and utilization of the country’s forests, rangelands and natural resources, in addition to promotion and empowerment of local communities.

## International Animal Rights Day: why animal rights should be protected?

By Payam Mohebbi  
Head of Tehran Pet Hospital

**TEHRAN** — Observance of International Animal Rights Day draws public attention to recognize animal rights, stop cruelty against them and give them the opportunity to live the life that God has granted them.

International Animal Rights Day is celebrated annually on December 10, which coincides with the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

On December 10, 1948 the UN General Assembly adopted and declared the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to prevent the repetition of World War II and concentration camps. But some years ago activists demanded

expansion of the Declaration, stating that animals also have rights not to suffer pain and die because of human activity.

Unfortunately, despite the emphasis on religious studies and Iranian culture, animal rights in our society are not respected as they should, or rather, it is whether strictly considered or totally violated, there is nothing in between.

Regarding a common understanding of animal rights, some people claim that we cannot deal with human rights let alone animal rights, however, respecting the rights of animals does not come at a cost or bring them any difficulties, it is solely about decent behavior that human must have toward any of God’s creatures.

Human should not only respect each other but recognize animal rights; it may be thought

that countries with greater economic and social prosperity are more concerned about animal rights, but this is a misconception and there might be mistreatment of animal species even in those countries.

The point is, however, our duty as human beings is to think of other species in addition to human beings, and at least provide the suitable living conditions for other species and take steps toward their preservation.

On the other hand, human beings with their intellect and perception can understand that the removal of any creature from the ecosystem will disrupt a small part of their life cycle and can ultimately be a threat to the survival of human.

Humans have long thought that with their

power and knowledge, they can prevail over the whole nature, but after years it has been proven that even with all the power we have, we are nothing more than nature, and only a small point on the planet.

Talking about animal rights is not the way to protect it, but the fact is that we have to take the needs of other species into consideration in order to preserve human life.

Respecting the rights of animals means that animals should have a normal life that God gave them and human must not interfere or violate their rights of living.

Remember that only human beings who respect the rights of animals, respect human rights as well; so let’s work hard to respect animal rights.

### ENGLISH IN USE

#### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## Philanthropists support 28,000 orphans, deprived children

Iranian benefactors have made cash and kind contributions from the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan (starting on May 6) to help 28,000 children who are either orphaned or whose parents are financially struggling, deputy director of Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation has announced.

There are currently 600,000 philanthropists who support orphaned children as well as children living in families in financial distress, IRNA quoted Alireza Asgarian as saying on Wednesday.

The foundation also intends to build housing units for families who cannot afford to rent houses, he added.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “para-”

- **Meaning:** on the side of, beside
- **For example:** **Paranoia** is an instinct or thought process which is believed to be heavily influenced by anxiety.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Perk something/someone up

- **Meaning:** to make something or someone more active, cheerful or interesting
- **For example:** She seemed kind of tired, but she perked up when Helen came over.

### IDIOM

#### Cut to the quick

- **Explanation:** If you cut someone to the quick, you hurt their feelings or offend them deeply
- **For example:** Alan was cut to the quick when Joe expressed doubt about his sincerity.

## مردم ۲۸ هزار کودک بی سرپرست را تحت حمایت قرار دادند

معاون توسعه مشارکتهای مردمی کمیته امداد امام خمینی (ره) گفت:

خیرین و نیکوکاران کشور از ابتدای ماه مبارک رمضان تاکنون ۲۸ هزار کودک بی سرپرست را تحت حمایت های مالی و غیرمالی خود قرار دادند.

علیرضا عسگریان روز چهارشنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار اجتماعی ایرنا افزود، ۶۰۰ هزار حامی در سطح کشور در یاری رسانی به ایتام و فرزندان محسنین با کمیته امداد همکاری دارند.

عسگریان اظهار داشت: ساخت مسکن برای خانواده های تحت پوشش کمیته امداد از دیگر برنامه های اجرایی و دارای اولویت کاری این نهاد در سال جاری است.

# Normandy Four agree to ‘stabilize’ eastern Ukraine in Paris communique

The leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine have agreed to implement “ceasefire support measures” for eastern Ukraine and “stabilize” the region by the end of the year.

The four leaders held a joint media conference in Paris after the so-called Normandy Format negotiations on the transition to peace in eastern Ukraine.

Prior to the news conference, the leaders said in a joint communique that they agreed to “immediate measures to stabilize the situation in the conflict area in east Ukraine.” Previous attempts by the ‘Normandy Four’ group to simmer down the conflict have achieved mixed results at best.

Among these new additions are the release of prisoners on each side by the end of the year, the creation of three new disengagement areas and the creation of new crossing points, allowing civilians to cross the control line separating Donetsk and Lugansk from the rest of Ukraine.

“We need to make sure there are no more hour-long queues, so the thousands of ordinary people who live in this area can easily pass,” Russian President Vladimir Putin told reporters. “Let’s not forget about



ordinary people who reside here. All of our arrangements need to improve their lives, and not sometime in the future, but now.”

The group also agreed to implement the ‘Steinmeier Formula’ in Ukrainian

legislation. Named after Germany’s former foreign minister, the formula calls for elections to be held in Donetsk and Lugansk, with a view to granting autonomous status to these regions. Kiev, Moscow, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation

in Europe (OSCE) agreed to the formula in principle in October.

Heading into the talks, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy maintained that such elections would only be possible under Ukrainian law, and once foreign military forces withdraw from Donetsk and Lugansk. The leaders’ communique did not touch on Zelenskyy’s conditions, but the Ukrainian leader said he is “confident” that the issues can be ironed out at future meetings.

Though Ukrainians have by and large supported Zelenskyy’s outreach to Putin, nationalists there see the Steinmeier Formula as capitulation to Moscow. As such, Zelenskyy faces the unenviable task of respecting these regions’ desire for autonomy and closer relations with Russia, while also pleasing the Ukrainian nationalists.

“For our part, we are ready to follow all the agreements,” Zelenskyy said, “but this is a two-way street.” Given that these autonomous regions would share a border with Russia, Zelenskyy told reporters that himself and Putin have “completely different views” on the transfer of control of this border.

(Source: RT)

## U.S., Saudi rank bottom of climate class: report

The United States and Saudi Arabia are among major polluters showing “hardly any signs” of reducing their greenhouse gas production, a global assessment of countries’ emissions trajectories said Tuesday at United Nations climate talks.

The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) measures the emissions, renewable energy share and climate policies of 57 countries and the European Union.

It found the US ranks last, followed by Saudi Arabia and Australia, although several countries did report falls in emissions last year, largely due to an industry-wide fade out of coal.

While climate performance varied greatly - even within the EU, with Sweden leading the way - the report found

that none of the countries surveyed were currently on a path compatible with the Paris climate goals.

The 2015 accord saw nations agree to work towards limiting global temperature rises to “well below” two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

US President Donald Trump says he plans to withdraw from the global plan to reduce emissions.

China, the world’s largest single emitter, was found to have taken “medium action” due to its high investment in renewables. However the index warned that Beijing could slump to the bottom rungs if it follows through on its plan to continue building coal-fired power plants.

(Source: AFP)

## World Court launches genocide hearings against Myanmar

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has launched genocide hearings against Myanmar, as the first major legal attempt to bring the country to justice over horrific atrocities committed against Rohingya Muslims.

The three-day hearings in the United Nations’ top court kicked off at The Hague on Tuesday following a November lawsuit filed by the West African country of Gambia.

Acting on behalf of the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Gambia called on the ICJ to take emergency measures to halt Myanmar’s “ongoing genocidal actions” against the Rohingya.

“All that The Gambia asks is that you tell Myanmar to stop these senseless killings, to stop these acts of barbarity that continue to shock our collective conscience, to stop this genocide of its own people,” Gambian

Justice Minister Abubacarr Tambadou told judges on Tuesday.

Demonstrations have been planned outside the court and across the Dutch city against and in support of Myanmar’s de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who attended the tribunal.

Rohingya Muslims, recognized by the UN as the world’s most persecuted minority group, are denied Myanmarese citizenship as the country’s leadership brands them as “illegal” immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh, which, for its part, says they are from Myanmar.

A military crackdown that began in 2016 saw thousands of the Muslims being killed, injured, arbitrarily arrested, or raped by Myanmarese soldiers and Buddhist mobs.

(Source: AP)

## Assad says Europe main player in creating chaos in Syria

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has blasted Europe’s key role in creating chaos in Syria, saying the current refugee crisis in European countries is a consequence of their support for terrorism in the Arab country.

“Why do you have refugees in Europe? It’s a simple question: because of terrorism that’s being supported by Europe,” the Syrian president said.

“Europe was the main player in creating chaos in Syria. So, what goes around comes around,” he noted in an interview with Italian TV channel Rai News 24.

The interview was originally given to the Italian TV channel on November 26, 2019, and was expected to go on air on December 2; however, the channel refused to broadcast it, according to Syria’s official news agency SANA, which published the full text of the interview on December 9.

“They sent armaments; they created this chaos. That’s why a lot of people find it difficult to stay in Syria; millions of people couldn’t live here so they had to get out of Syria,” he added.

The Syrian president also warned about other repercussions of external support for terrorism in the Arab state.

“Definitely, whenever you have chaos, it’s going to be bad for everyone, it’s going to have side-effects and repercussions, especially when there is external interference,” he explained.

Many refugees take perilous sea journeys to reach European shores, from where they attempt to make their way into wealthier European Union states, particularly Germany, in search of better living conditions.

At least 15,000 people have lost their lives in Medi-



terranean crossings since 2014, according to the UN’s International Organization for Migration.

(Source: SANA)

## Yemeni army forces shoot down another Saudi-led reconnaissance drone

Yemeni army forces, supported by allied fighters from the Popular Committees, have intercepted and targeted an unmanned aerial vehicle belonging to the Saudi-led military coalition while flying in the skies over Saudi Arabia’s southwestern border region of Najran.

An unnamed source in the Yemeni air defense forces told the media bureau of the Houthi Ansarullah movement that Yemeni forces and their allies shot down the drone as it was on a reconnaissance

mission over al-Kasarah area of the region, situated 844 kilometers (524 miles) south of the capital Riyadh, on Tuesday afternoon.

On Saturday evening, Yemeni soldiers and allied fighters from Popular Committees shot down a Saudi-led drone as it was flying in the skies east of Jabal al-Alam mountainous area in Saudi Arabia’s southern border region of Jizan.

Ansarollah said at the time that the unmanned aerial vehicle was targeted with a proper missile as it was conducting “hostile

acts” in the area.

Yemeni air defense forces and fighters from Popular Committees had shot down a Saudi-led drone as it was on a reconnaissance mission over Jahfan district of Jizan, situated 966 kilometers south of the capital Riyadh, two days earlier.

The spokesman for Yemeni Armed Forces, Brigadier General Yahya Saree, wrote in posts published on his Twitter page on December 4 that Yemeni forces and their allies had shot down a drone over

Jizan, and another over Asir region.

He added that Yemeni army forces and Popular Committees fighters targeted the unmanned aerial vehicles with proper missiles as they were carrying out “reconnaissance and hostile acts.”

Yemeni army forces and fighters from Popular Committees shot down a spy drone of the Saudi-led military coalition in the skies over Hayran district in Yemen’s northwestern province of Hajjah on December 1.

(Source: Press TV)

## Jerusalem chief rabbi visits Bahrain amid Israel-Arab normalization bids

A senior Israeli rabbi has visited Bahrain under the pretext of attending a religious event and met with the kingdom’s monarch, as Tel Aviv and its Arab allies speed up attempts to normalize ties following years of clandestine contacts.

Shlomo Amar, chief rabbi of Jerusalem al-Quds, on Monday concluded the rare visit to Bahrain, where he attended a conference of religious leaders at the invitation of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah, Israeli media reported.

During his visit, which was organized by the Israeli foreign ministry, Amar met with the king and religious figures from several other Arab countries, including Ku-

wait, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon.

“Middle East nations want peace with Israel, the leadership should promote that without fear,” Amar said during his stay, expressing hope that in the future, such visits would not require special preparation.

He was referring to the Al Khalifah regime’s fear of public backlash in the kingdom — where anti-Israel and pro-Palestine sentiments run high — against attempts to normalize ties with Israel.

Israel has full diplomatic ties with only two Arab states, Egypt and Jordan, but recent reports suggest Tel Aviv has been working behind the scenes to establish formal

contacts with other Arab countries as well.

Earlier in October, the Britain-based and Arabic-language Bahrain al-Youm news agency, citing an unnamed diplomatic source, reported that Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah had held a secret meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Hungary in April.

In July, Israeli and Bahraini foreign ministers Israel Katz and Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifah met for a brief chat on Iran in Washington and the two posed for a rare photograph.

(Source: Press TV)

## Top U.S. officials repeatedly misled public about Afghanistan War

Confidential documents obtained by The Washington Post reveal that top U.S. officials misled the American public about the war in Afghanistan in order to conceal doubts about the likelihood that the U.S. could be successful in the nearly 20-year effort since its earliest days, the paper reported in a major investigation.

The Post said it obtained the more than 2,000 pages of documents through a Freedom of Information Act request made three years ago that sought to win access to the documents, which it said were part of a lengthy government report titled “Lessons Learned” that examined “the root failures” of the war effort through interviews with more than 600 people, including a number of foreigners connected to NATO and 20 Afghan officials. The first interviews for the report were conducted in 2014, according to the Post, which said seven parts of the report have been published since 2016.

The paper said the interviews “bring into sharp relief the core failings of the war that persist to this day” as “U.S. officials acknowledged that their warfighting strategies were fatally flawed and that Washington wasted enormous sums of money trying to remake Afghanistan into a modern nation.”

“Several of those interviewed described explicit and sustained efforts by the U.S. government to deliberately mislead the public,” the Post reported. “They said it was common at military headquarters in Kabul — and at the White House — to distort statistics to make it appear the United States was winning the war when that was not the case.”

Lt. Col. Thomas Campbell, a Defense Department spokesperson, pushed back on the Post’s reports of deception, telling CNN in a statement that “there has been no intent by DoD to mislead Congress or the public.”

Defense Department “officials have consistently briefed the progress and challenges associated with our efforts in Afghanistan, and (the department) provides regular reports to Congress that highlight these challenges,” Campbell continued. “The information contained in the interviews was provided to (the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction) for the express purpose of inclusion in SIGAR’s public reports.”

Campbell also asserted that “most of the individuals interviewed spoke with the benefit of hindsight” and defended President Donald Trump’s South Asia Strategy in reassessing the United States’ approach in the region.

“Hindsight has also enabled the Department to evaluate previous approaches and revise our strategy, as we did in 2017 with the launch of the President’s South Asia Strategy. DoD has been very clear that this war will not end on the battlefield,” he said, adding that “in accordance with the President’s South Asia Strategy, our military mission in Afghanistan is in support of diplomatic efforts to achieve a peace settlement.”

The Post, which said its investigation includes information from previously unreported memos written between 2001 and 2006 by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, noted that the newly disclosed Defense documents “broadly resembles the Pentagon Papers, the Defense Department’s top-secret history of the Vietnam War” because of the candor in the accounts included in both collections of documents. Most of those interviewed assumed that their remarks would not become public, the paper said.

In one such case, the Post said Douglas Lute, “a three-star Army general who served as the White House’s Afghan war czar” under former Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, told interviewers “we were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan -- we didn’t know what we were doing.”

(Source: CNN)

## Qatari emir turns down Saudi invitation to join PGCC summit in Riyadh

➔ In June 2017, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates imposed a land, naval and air blockade on import-dependent Qatar, accusing Doha of supporting terrorism; an allegation strongly denied by Doha.

The Saudi-led bloc presented Qatar with a list of demands and gave it an ultimatum to comply with them or face consequences. Doha, however, refused to meet the demands and stressed that it would not abandon its independent foreign policy.

Last year’s GCC summit was held in Riyadh, where Qatar was represented by its Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad Al Muraikhi.

Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani reportedly made an unannounced visit to Riyadh in September.

Speaking at the Mediterranean Dialogues (MED) conference in Rome last week, the top Qatari diplomat said he hoped for “progress” in the efforts to settle the Persian Gulf rift.

“We have moved from a stalemate to some progress where... some talks took place between us and specifically Saudi,” he said. “We hope that these talks will lead to our progress where we can see an end for the crisis.”

(Source: agencies)

## Sudan’s Bashir questioned over 1989 coup that brought him to power

Sudan’s ousted long-time leader Omar al-Bashir was summoned for questioning Tuesday over his role in the 1989 coup that brought him to power.

Bashir, who ruled Sudan until the military removed him in April following months of street protests, was charged in May with incitement and involvement in the killing of protesters.

He is also already on trial on charges of possessing illicit foreign currency and corruption. A verdict is expected Saturday in that trial.

“We believe that this is a political trial par excellence because 30 years have passed and many variables have occurred,” Mohamed al-Hassan al-Amin, a member of Bashir’s defence, told reporters of his summons Tuesday.

“We do not know what happened in the investigation room. We have an agreement with President al-Bashir not to speak with this committee and to boycott it,” Amin added, referring to the investigative committee.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Congress Is Trump’s Co-Conspirator Against Liberty

➔ Perhaps the most sickening example of Trump’s congressional opponents’ hypocrisy is how many of those fretting about the safety of the Ukrainegate “whistleblower” are silent about, or supportive of, the Trump administration’s complicity in the inhumane treatment of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. They are

also silent about the US government throwing Chelsea Manning back into jail because she refuses to help the US prosecution of Mr. Assange.

All modern presidents have exceeded constitutional limitations on their power and thus could have, and maybe should have, been impeached. The reason they were not impeached

is that a majority of Congress members support allowing presidents to wage war abroad and destroy liberty at home without being “hamstrung” by Congress. The only real dispute among the political class is which party should wield the levers of power.

Restoring constitutional limits on govern-

ment power and thus protecting liberty depend on spreading ideas and building a movement. Our lost freedom will only be restored when presidents and members of Congress fear being “impeached” at the ballot box for committing high crimes and misdemeanors against peace, prosperity, and liberty.

## Tsunami Democratic plan Camp Nou protest hours before El Clasico

Tsunami Democratic have called for a rally to be held outside the Camp Nou on December 18, just hours before Real Madrid take on Barcelona in the season's first Clasico.

A statement was released on Tuesday that explained over 18,000 people have registered to take part in the protest, which will get underway at 16:00, just four hours before kick off.

Four focal points have been chosen around the stadium, depending on the geographical origin of the protesters.

Additionally, they have ensured that those registered to participate have received "the relevant slogans" and are ready for "a day that will be followed by 650 million people worldwide".

The group have justified the plans as "Catalonia is going through an exceptional situation and it's necessary to act exceptionally".

"At the moment," they explained, "an important part of the Catalan population suffer exclusion for reasons of ideology.

"They cannot exercise fundamental rights without repression.

"Dozens of people are or have been in prison simply for exercising and promoting these rights."

(Source: Marca)

## Amazon acquire Champions League broadcast rights in Germany

Amazon confirmed Tuesday that they have acquired the rights to broadcast a selection of Champions League games in Germany from the 2021-22 season, as the company continues its offensive into the football TV rights market.

The company has secured a package which includes the top picks of the Tuesday night games in Europe's biggest club competition, German media magazine DWDL.de revealed.

In a statement on Tuesday, Amazon confirmed that they had secured the rights for their streaming platform Prime Video.

"We are excited to bring UEFA Champions League to our customers in Germany," said Alex Green, executive director of Prime Video Sport Europa.

The announcement comes just days after Amazon UK debated their live coverage of the English Premier League.

The coverage was the first time Premier League games had been broadcast exclusively online in the UK, and was met with mixed reactions from viewers.

German football fans are more accustomed to watching football online, however.

Broadcasting rights for both the Champions League and the Bundesliga are currently shared between traditional broadcaster Sky Sports and London-based streaming service DAZN.

Germany is the biggest market outside the USA for Amazon, who entered the sports streaming market in 2017 and have since broadcast major events in both football and tennis.

(Source: Reuters)

## NBA rejects Rockets protest after blown dunk call

The NBA has rejected the Houston Rockets' request for a replay following the blown call of a James Harden dunk in the team's 135-133 overtime defeat to the San Antonio Spurs last week.

The Rockets had lodged a protest after the officiating crew in the game mistakenly ruled out Harden's fourth quarter dunk.

Although officials later acknowledged the mistake, the error turned out to be pivotal, ultimately leading to double overtime where the Spurs would snatch victory.

The Rockets had requested the league allow them to replay the final seven minutes and 50 seconds of the fourth quarter, just before the officiating error.

In a ruling on the Rockets protest however, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver acknowledged the referees misapplied the rules by failing to grant a coach's challenge for the incident.

However in a statement issued Monday, Silver said that the Rockets had "sufficient time to overcome the error during the remainder of the fourth quarter and two subsequent overtime periods."

"Thus the extraordinary remedy of granting a game protest was not warranted," the statement read.

The league added that the three referees from the game had been disciplined for misapplying the coach's challenge rules. Details of the sanctions against the referees were not immediately available.

(Source: Eurosport)

## 'It's like having 80 cigarettes a day' – Sydney smoke hampers play

The "toxic" conditions at the Sydney Cricket Ground, caused by bushfires, left players feeling like they have "smoked 80 cigarettes", says Australia spinner Steve O'Keefe.

Players said it was "hard to breathe" and visibility was reduced during New South Wales' Sheffield Shield match with Queensland on Tuesday.

Smoke from the continuing fire crisis in Australia has caused chaos in Sydney, bringing dangerous air quality.

"It's not healthy," said O'Keefe.

The Australia international added: "I don't have kids, but if I did they'd be locked up inside, and if I was at home I wouldn't be training or playing.

"For someone like me who smokes 40 a day, it's now like smoking 80 cigarettes a day."

Sydney has endured air quality surpassing "hazardous" levels for weeks, as about 100 blazes continue to rage throughout New South Wales (NSW).

Last week, players at golf's Australian Open complained of stinging eyes as smoke affected the opening round.

The haze on Tuesday has been described as the thickest to cover the city during the crisis.

NSW Health urged young children and the elderly to stay indoors with windows shut and postpone outdoor activities, however play continued on the fourth day at the SCG with O'Keefe taking 3-28 as NSW beat Queensland by nine wickets.

Air Quality Index ratings were monitored throughout the day but readings were never high enough to stop play.

Queensland captain and Australia batsman Usman Khawaja, who made 54, said it was "hard to breathe" but was "not unplayable".

(Source: BBC)

# Russia reacts with anger after doping ban from Olympics, World Cup

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, prompting an angry response from President Vladimir Putin.

WADA's executive committee, meeting in Lausanne, handed Russia the "robust" four-year suspension after accusing Moscow of falsifying data from a doping testing laboratory that was handed over to investigators earlier this year.

The toughest ever sanctions imposed on Russian state authorities will see government officials barred from attending any major events, while the country will lose the right to host or bid for tournaments.

"For too long, Russian doping has detracted from clean sport," WADA president Craig Reedie said.

"Russia was afforded every opportunity to get its house in order and rejoin the global anti-doping community for the good of its athletes and of the integrity of sport, but it chose instead to continue in its stance of deception and denial."

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 as neutrals and if they can demonstrate that they were not part of what WADA believes was a state-sponsored system of doping.

Russia will still be allowed to compete in qualifiers for the 2022 football World Cup, but



WADA director general Olivier Niggli added that should they progress to the finals in Qatar, "the team there will not be representing the Russian federation".

Russia's participation in Euro 2020 -- and Saint Petersburg's hosting of four matches -- is not affected by the ban because it is not defined as a "major event" for anti-doping purposes.

Speaking in Paris, Putin slammed the decision as a "politically motivated" ruling that "contradicted" the Olympic Charter.

"There is nothing to reproach the Russian Olympic Committee for and if there is no reproach towards this committee, the country should take part in competitions under its own flag," Putin said.

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev also said the ban was politically motivated. "This is the continuation of this anti-Russian hysteria that has already become chronic," Medvedev told domestic news agencies.

### ■ 'A tragedy'

The significant extent of state-sponsored doping in Russia, notably between 2011 and 2015, was revealed in the independent report by sports lawyer Richard McLaren, released in 2016.

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.

RUSADA's supervisory board is set to meet on December 19 to take a decision on whether to appeal against the ban at the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Yury Ganus, the head of RUSADA, told AFP Monday that his country had "no chance" of winning an appeal.

"There is no chance of winning this case in court," Ganus said.

"This is a tragedy," he added. "Clean athletes are seeing their rights limited."

Documents released Monday show WADA's Compliance Review Committee (CRC) believes "deletions and alterations" to Russia's doping data "materially prejudiced the ability to pursue cases against 145 of the 298 athletes" whose doping controls between 2011 and 2015 WADA thought to be suspicious.

About one third of the 145 athletes are still active, WADA chief of investigators Gunter Younger said Monday.

The WADA decision was widely predicted, with 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".

(Source: AFP)

## United Nations calls for truce around 2020 Tokyo Olympics



The General Assembly unanimously approved a resolution Monday urging all nations to observe a truce during the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, saying sports can play a role in promoting peace and tolerance and in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism.

Diplomats burst into applause as the assembly president announced the adoption of the resolution by the 193-member world body.

The resolution recalls the ancient Greek tradition of "ekecheiria," which called for a cessation of hostilities to encourage a peaceful environment and ensure safe passage and participation of athletes in the ancient Olympics.

The General Assembly revived the tradition in 1993 and has adopted resolutions before all Olympics since then, calling for a cessation of hostilities for seven days before and after the games. But member states involved in conflicts have often ignored the call for a truce.

Yoshiro Mori, head of the Tokyo organizing committee for the 2020 games, introduced the resolution calling on U.N. members states to observe the truce around next year's Summer Olympics, being held July 24-Aug. 9, and the Paralympics, following on Aug. 25-Sept. 6.

The resolution also urges nations to help "use sport as a tool to promote peace, dialogue and reconciliation in areas of conflict during

and beyond" the games.

Thomas Bach, president of the International Olympic Committee, told the General Assembly that as the U.N. approaches its 75th anniversary next year, an Olympic year, there is no better time to celebrate the shared values of both organizations to promote peace among all countries and people of the world.

But he warned that "in sport, we can see an increasing erosion of the respect for the global rule of law."

Bach said the IOC's political neutrality "is undermined whenever organizations or individuals attempt to use the Olympic Games as a stage for their own agendas -- as legitimate as they might be. The Olympics "are a sports celebration of our shared humanity ... and must never be a platform to advance political or any other potentially divisive ends," he said.

Looking ahead, Bach announced that "we will achieve gender balance at the Olympic Games for the first time in Tokyo, with the highest-ever number of female athletes in history at about 49%."

He said Tokyo 2020 also aims "for carbon-neutral games," saying medals will be made from recycled electronics and renewable energy and zero-emission vehicles will be used.

The resolution notes that the Tokyo event will be the second of three Olympics in Asia.

(Source: ESPN)

## Demand for Tokyo 2020 tickets unprecedented, says IPC chief



There have been more than three million requests for Tokyo 2020 Paralympics tickets via the first lottery phase, three times the demand seen a year out from the London 2012 event which went on to post record sales, Paralympics chief Andrew Parsons has said.

London is seen as the benchmark for the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) in terms of interest in the Games with a record total of 2.7 million tickets sold.

"We have some very good numbers on ticket sales," IPC President Parsons told Reuters on Tuesday.

"We had 3.1 million ticket requests. It is an unprecedented number, three times more than in London (one year from the start of Games) and London was the most successful Paralympic Games so far.

"(This) shows the appetite that Japanese society has for the Olympic Games next year."

About 600,000 tickets were allocated during the first lottery. In Tokyo 2020's bid for the Games, organizers said there would only be 2.3 million tickets for the Paralympics but organizers are hopeful more tickets will be made available.

"It is a positive surprise and it is paying off all the efforts, not only of the IPC but also Tokyo 2020, the levels of government, the media and Japanese society,"

said Parsons.

"If you think of the last wheelchair rugby tournament a few weeks ago and the enthusiasm of the spectators there, this is a country where people have fallen in love with Paralympic sport."

Paralympic sports have grown in popularity in Japan, frequently appearing on television and often given equal billing to the Olympics in the buildup to Tokyo 2020.

In October, the World Wheelchair Rugby Challenge drew big crowds and with Japan the current world champions in the sport, it is likely to be one of the most popular events next year.

While the Olympic marathons have been moved to the northern city of Sapporo to avoid the worst of Tokyo's summer heat Parsons said it was likely that all Paralympic events would remain in Tokyo as scheduled. [L8N28E2C1]

"There was an overwhelming response from the athletes saying because the Paralympic marathon is the last event of the whole of Tokyo 2020, that it is the moment to be closer to the Tokyo spectators," said Parsons.

"To be competing in front of hundreds of thousands of spectators... (is) a way to say thank you to them for the support." The 2020 Paralympics run from Aug. 25 to Sep. 6

(Source: Reuters)

## Arsenal relieved as worst winless run since 1977 ends at West Ham

Arsenal caretaker manager Freddie Ljungberg believes a weight has been lifted off his players' shoulders after a three-goal blitz in nine second-half minutes beat West Ham 3-1 on Monday to end the Gunners' worst winless run in 42 years.

Another miserable night for the Swede seemed in store when the visitors trailed at half-time to Angelo Ogbonna's deflected header.

However, Arsenal suddenly sparked into life after Gabriel Martinelli scored his first Premier League goal as Nicolas Pepe finally started to deliver on his club record £72 million fee by curling home a brilliant second, before crossing for Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang to secure all three points.

"It means so much for the players. They have been living under enormous pressure and you see it in their performances," said Ljungberg.

"You can see the players have been a bit low and you see in the dressing room the relief and how happy they are."

A first win in 10 games in all competitions lifts Arsenal up to ninth and cuts the gap on fourth-placed Chelsea to seven points in the battle for Champions League qualification next season.

Ljungberg reacted to taking just one point from his opening

two games in temporary charge against lowly Norwich and Brighton by making five changes with Martinelli and Pepe among those coming into the side.

Pepe's inability to make an impact has been one of the major reasons for Arsenal's struggles, but the Ivorian looked a new player after curling home his first Premier League goal from open play 24 minutes from time.

"Nicolas is an amazing football player, but it is not easy to come from the French league into the Premier League and adjust straight away," added Ljungberg.

### ■ West Ham 'dominated for 60 minutes'

Not much had improved in Ljungberg's first two games since replacing the sacked Unai Emery and it was the same tame and lifeless Arsenal for the first hour against a West Ham side that have won just once in their last 11 games.

"I think we dominated the game for 60 minutes and after that in 10 minutes we lose the game," said West Ham manager Manuel Pellegrini, who is under increasing pressure as his side sit just one point above the relegation zone.

Another home defeat means the Hammers have taken just one point from their last five games at the London Stadium

and the home side were booed off at full-time.

"You understand the boos because the last five games we played here we didn't win," added Pellegrini. "You cannot concede three goals in every game."

In a first half of precious little good football it was fitting the opener arrived in scrappy fashion as Ogbonna's attempted header came off his shoulder and deflected off Martinelli to wrong-foot Bernd Leno in the Arsenal goal.

But one moment changed the course of the game when Sead Kolasinac burst down the left and crossed low for Martinelli to slot home his eighth goal of the season after impressing in the League Cup and Europa League.

Suddenly the confidence which Emery and Ljungberg be-moaned had drained away from their players in recent times was restored, none more so than in Pepe, who cut inside onto his favoured left foot and curled into the top corner.

Pepe then turned provider for Aubameyang to slide in for his 13th goal of the campaign.

"At half-time, Freddie told us to play with a higher tempo," said Aubameyang.

(Source: Mirror)

# Persepolis, Sepahan learn fate at ACL2020

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iranian football teams Persepolis and Sepahan have learned their rivals at the 2020 AFC Champions League following the conclusion of the draw at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on Tuesday.

Persepolis are drawn in Group C along with Qatari giants, Al Duhail SC, Al Taawoun FC from Saudi Arabia and Sharjah FC of the UAE.

Sepahan have been also drawn in Group D with Al Sadd SC of Qatar, Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr and Play-off 1 winner (UAE/UZB/IRQ).

Group A consists of Al Wahda FSCC of the UAE, Iraq's Al Shorta, Play-off winner (QAT/IRN/JOR/KUW) and Play-off winner (KSA/UZB/TJK).

Esteghlal will host the winner of Jordan's Al-Faisaly and Al Kuwait of Kuwait in Tehran's Azadi Stadium in play-off and will face Al-Rayyan of Qatar if come out as winners.

Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal, who defeated Urawa Red Diamonds of Japan to lift the 2019 title after runners-up finishes in 2014 and 2017, will have Shabab Al Ahli Dubai (UAE), Pakhtakor (UZB) and the winner of a play-off for company in Group B.

Shahr Khodro of Iran will first meet winners of Cheney and Bahrain's Bahrain

GROUP A				GROUP B				GROUP C				GROUP D			
A1	AL WAHDA (UAE)	B1	AL HILAL (KSA)	C1	AL DUHAIL (QAT)	D1	SEPAHAN FC (IRN)								
A2	AL SHORTA (IRQ)	B2	SHABAB AL AHLI DUBAI (UAE)	C2	AL TAAWOUN (KSA)	D2	AL SADD (QAT)								
A3	PO WINNER (QAT/IRN/JOR/KUW)	B3	PAKHTAKOR (UZB)	C3	SHARJAH FC (UAE)	D3	AL NASSR (KSA)								
A4	PO WINNER (KSA/UZB/TJK)	B4	PO WINNER (QAT/IRN/IND/BHR)	C4	PERSEPOLIS (IRN)	D4	PO WINNER (UAE/UZB/IRQ)								
GROUP E				GROUP F				GROUP G				GROUP H			
E1	BEIJING FC (CHN)	F1	ULSAN HYUNDAI (KOR)	G1	JAPAN SECOND CLUB	H1	SYDNEY FC (AUS)								
E2	CHIANGRAI UNITED (THA)	F2	SHANGHAI SHENHUA (CHN)	G2	SUVON SAMSUNG BLUEWINGS (KOR)	H2	YOKOHAMA F MARINOS (JPN)								
E3	PO WINNER (JPN/AUS/SGP/IDN)	F3	PERTH GLORY (AUS)	G3	GUANGZHOU EVERGRANDE (CHN)	H3	JEONBUK HYUNDAI MOTORS (KOR)								
E4	PO WINNER (KOR/MAS/HKG)	F4	PO WINNER (JPN/THA/PHI/MYA)	G4	JOHOR DARUL TA'ZIM (MAS)	H4	PO WINNER (CHN/THA/VIE)								

Al-Riffa and if emerge victorious will play Al-Sailiya of Qatar in play-off.

A total of 56 teams will be vying for the 2020 AFC Champions League, with the group stage divided into the East and West Zones.

The 2020 season kicks off with the preliminary stage on January 14 with the two-leg final scheduled for November 22 and 28.

Raising the stakes, the upcoming edi-

tion will present the champions, 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.



## Persepolis move closer to IPL top

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Persepolis defeated Gol Gohar Sirjan 2-1 here and moved closer to top of Iran Professional league (IPL) table.

In the match held at the Azadi Stadium, Mehdi Torabi gave hosts a lead with a long-range strike in the 52nd minute.

Abdollah Hosseini made it 2-0, scoring an own goal in the 80th minute.

Alireza Ebrahimi pulled a goal back for the visiting team with two minutes remaining.

Gol Gohar forward Behnam Barzai was shown second yellow card in the dying moments of the match.

Furthermore, Naft Masjed Soleyman earned a 2-1 win over Saipa thanks to second-half's goals from Emad Mirjavan and Farzad Hatami.

Reza Jafari scored for Saipa in the 38th minute.

Shahin Bushehr and Sanat Naft drew 1-1 in Bushehr.

Esteghlal are top of the table with 26 points. Sepahan and Persepolis are second and third with 25 points with one game in their hands.

## Iran goalball heartbroken after China qualify for 2020 Paralympics



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran's men's team were left heartbroken after losing to China 10-0 at the IBSA Goalball Asia-Pacific Championships final on Tuesday.

Iran had also lost to China 9-5 in the competition's preliminary round. The Persian would qualify for the 2020 Paralympic

Games if they won the championships.

Earlier on the day, Japan defeated South Korea 11-5 in the bronze medal match.

In the women's division, Japan defeated China 2-1 in the final match but the Chinese team booked a berth in the 2020 Paralympic Games since Japan have already secured their berth in the competition as hosts

## Iran in World Junior Water Polo C'ships tough group



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran will have a difficult task at the FINA World Men's Junior Water Polo Championships 2019.

The Iranian team have been drawn in Group C along with Montenegro, Kuwait, the U.S., and Italy.

Group A consists of Serbia, Japan,

South Africa, Croatia and China.

Russia, Canada, Canada, Spain, Hungary and Egypt in Group B.

Brazil, Uzbekistan, Greece, Australia and New Zealand are in Group D.

The FINA World Men's Junior Water Polo Championships 2019 will be held in Kuwait from Dec. 12 to 20.

## Global challenge awaits Al Hilal and Al Sadd

Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal SFC and Qatar's Al Sadd SC are primed for world class action in the FIFA Club World Cup Qatar 2019 which kicks off on Wednesday.

The 16th edition of the global showpiece will pit the champions from the six Continental Confederations, as well as the host nation's league champions, with the final on December 21 at the Khalifa International Stadium.

Hosts Al Sadd will have to negotiate the first round against New Caledonia's Hienghene Sport, who won the 2019 OFC Champions League, while Al Hilal will lock horns with 2019 CAF Champions League winners Esperance ST of Tunisia in the second round.

### Al Sadd SC

The Qatari champions will be making their second appearance in the FIFA Club World Cup, having finished third in 2011 after their triumphant AFC Champions League season.

Al Sadd enter the competition on the back of having won a record-extending 14th Qatar Stars League title, where they lost only one match and scored 100 goals.

On the Continental front, Al Sadd reached the 2019 AFC Champions League knock-out stage after topping their group before defeating fellow Qatari side Al Duhail in the Round of 16 and then showed remarkable resilience to beat Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr in the quarter-finals.

However, Al Sadd's run came to an end



when they lost 6-5 on aggregate to eventual champions Al Hilal in the semi-finals.

Should Al Sadd win against Hienghene tomorrow, up next for them will be CONCACAF Champions League winners Monterrey three days later and another triumph will set up a clash with UEFA Champions League holders Liverpool on December 18.

### Players to watch

Head coach Xavi will have a host of home-grown stars at his disposal including the talented Akram Afif, the 2019 AFC Player of the Year, Hassan Al Haydos as well as Algerian marksman Baghdad Bounedjah - who was the 2018-19 Qatar Stars League top goalscorer with 39 goals.



### Wednesday

Al Sadd vs Hienghene Sport  
Jassim bin Hamad Stadium

### Al Hilal SFC

Razvan Lucescu's Al Hilal are newcomers in the FIFA Club World Club. Their entry into the elite club competition was down to their successful AFC Champions League 2019 outing where they defeated Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds 3-0 aggregate in the final.

Al Hilal's AFC Champions League win made them the first side from the West Zone to claim the coveted crown since Al Sadd in 2011.

Al Hilal are Saudi Arabia's most successful team with 15 Saudi Pro League titles

under their belt and are only the third side from the country to make an appearance in the global showpiece and the first since Al Ittihad in 2005.

Despite finishing second behind champions Al Nassr in the domestic league in the 2018-19 season, Al Hilal's underlined their quality with their performance in the 2019 AFC Champions League.

If Lucescu's side beat Esperance on Saturday, awaiting the Riyadh-based club in the semi-finals three days later will be CONMEBOL representatives Flamengo of Brazil - the Copa Libertadores champions.

### Players to watch

Topping the bill for Lucescu's title winners are striker Bafetimbi Gomis, who emerged from the 2019 AFC Champions League with two awards - Top Scorer and MVP, former Juventus forward Sebastian Giovinco and Saudi Arabia international Salem Al Dawsari.

### Saturday

Al Hilal SFC vs Esperance ST  
Jassim bin Hamad Stadium  
Did You Know

The FIFA Club World Cup Qatar 2019 will see a new name engraved on the trophy with nine teams having won the title previously. Who among Al Hilal, Al Sadd, CR Flamengo, Esperance Sportive De Tunis, Hienghene Sport, Liverpool and Monterrey will be first time champions?

(Sources: FIFA, AFP, Al Sadd SC, Al Hilal SFC)

## Andrea Stramaccioni opens door to return to Esteghlal

Andrea Stramaccioni says he "had no choice" but to leave Iranian football team Esteghlal but has left the door open to return to the team.

"There's great bitterness at the way in which this journey has come to an end. It was a fascinating job, an adventure, different to anything I have experienced in my career before," the Italian coach said.

"We were forced to annul the contract. In the last few months the club, despite many failed promises, didn't fulfill their obligations from a legal point of view," he added.

"I regret this because the team is at the top of the table, where it hadn't been for six years. Playing in stadiums with 100,000 people and playing in the Asian Champions League was beautiful.

"For me, it was a great honor to coach a team with such great fans and I am proud of my affection for them," the Italian stated.

Despite the bad blood between him and the board, which has since stepped down, the ex-Udinese coach suggested he could return on one condition.

"I would come back to Iran tomorrow if the problems were solved."



(Source: Sky Sports)

## Gabriel Calderon threatens to leave Persepolis

**PLDC** — Gabriel Calderon has threatened to leave Persepolis football team if he doesn't receive his payment on time.

Esteghlal coach Andrea Stramaccioni canceled his contract with Esteghlal on Sunday after the Iranian club failed to respect contractual obligations.

On Monday, Persepolis coach also threatened Persepolis officials to leave the club if they failed to pay his salary on time.

"I will focus on my team until December 26. I will concentrate on our performance 200 percent," the Argentine said.

"Stramaccioni did a great job in Esteghlal but was forced to leave the club. I don't know about the details of the problem. I also have this problem in Persepolis but I will not leave the club until December 26. The club's officials have enough time to solve my problem," Calderon said.

## Vietnam end 60-year wait for men's gold, Myanmar deny Cambodia

Vietnam clinched their first SEA Games men's football gold medal since unification after beating Indonesia 3-0 in the 2019 final, while Myanmar edged Cambodia on penalties in the bronze play-off at the Rizal Memorial Stadium on Tuesday.

Vietnam took a first half lead through Doan Van Hau before second half efforts by Do Hung Dung and Van Hau again sealed a historic win for the Golden Dragons, with the gold being their first since South Vietnam won in 1959.



Meanwhile, in the bronze play-off between Myanmar and Cambodia, the pulsating tie ended 2-2 after 90 minutes, with Cambodia captain Keo Sokpheng's spot-kick hitting the upright as Myanmar won the shoot-out 5-4.

### Gold Medal Match: Vietnam 3-0 Indonesia

The final was a repeat of the Group B match earlier in the tournament, which Vietnam won 2-1.

Vietnam, runners-up seven times since the 1959 triumph, started the stronger of the two and translated their dominance into the lead in the 40th minute with Van Hau rising high to head home a free-kick.

Two-time gold medalists Indonesia battled hard for the equalizer but were dealt another blow in the 59th minute, as Vietnam captain Hung Dung beat custodian Nadeo Winata.

Trailing by two goals, the writing was on the wall for Indonesia, and the gold was sealed in the 73rd minute with Van Hau slotting a rebound past Winata as the celebrations began on the streets of Vietnam.

### Bronze Play-off: Myanmar 2-2 Cambodia (Myanmar win 5-4 on penalties)

Cambodia enjoyed a dream start in their bid to win a medal for the first time, with Sieng Chanthea scoring with just 18 seconds showing on the clock as he finished a team move with a right-footed effort.

Myanmar, however, drew level in the ninth minute as Aung Kaung Mann scored with a header past Cambodia goalkeeper Keo Soksela.

Myanmar took the lead in the 35th minute with Myat Kaung Khant scoring from a free-kick he had earned after being brought down at the edge of the penalty box.

Cambodia, however, were far from disheartened and took the match to Myanmar in the second half and after some near misses, equalised in the 71st minute through captain Keo.

Neither side was able to find the winner in the remaining minutes and Cambodia suffered a heartbreaking finish with Keo's miss from the penalty spot.

(Source: the-afc)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY  
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» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807  
» Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603  
» www.eshtarak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.  
Tel: 88911433  
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com  
» Printed at: Jame Jam Barta Borna - 44197737

Tehrantimes79 Tehrantimesdaily

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran  
P.O. Box: 14155-4843  
Zip Code: 1599814713

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

If someone has a good opinion of you, believe it.  
Imam Ali (AS)

## 10 Days with Iranian Photographers wraps up

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The 8th edition of the 10 Days with Iranian Photographers, an exhibition that presents some of the latest projects by young photographers from around the country, came to an end during a ceremony at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran on Monday.



Art enthusiasts visit the exhibit 10 Days with Iranian Photographers at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran.

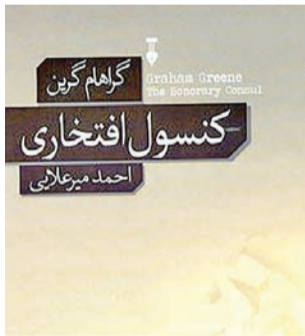
Speaking at the ceremony, IAF director Majid Rajabi-Memar said that such events can bring young and veteran photographers together.

“Although we are all suffering from the country’s political issues, I hope this young blood can change the atmosphere of the National Iranian Photographer’s Society,” Seifollah Samadian, the director of the society, which is the main organizer of the event, said in his brief speech.

Forty photographers under 35, whose projects composed of nearly 600 photos were on display at the exhibition, were also honored at the ceremony.

## “The Honorary Consul” comes to Iranian bookstores

**C U L T U R E d e s k** **TEHRAN** — English novelist Graham Greene’s book “The Honorary Consul” has recently been published in Persian by Now Publications in Tehran.



the front cover of the Persian version of “The Honorary Consul” by English novelist Graham Greene.

Richard Gere and Michael Caine.

Translated by Ahmad Miralai, the 1973 book is about Charley Fortnum, a British consul in Argentina, who is kidnapped by Paraguayan revolutionaries who have mistaken him for the American ambassador, Dr. Eduardo Plarr, a local physician with his own divided loyalties, serves as the negotiator between the rebels and the authorities.

The book was adapted for a 1983 film of the same name directed by British filmmaker John Mackenzie, starring

## Michelle Obama promotes girls education in Vietnam school

**LONG AN, Vietnam (AP)** — Former U.S. first lady Michelle Obama spoke to students at a school in southern Vietnam while promoting education for girls to help reach their full potential.

Obama, accompanied by actresses Julia Roberts and Lana Condor and “Today Show” co-host Jenna Bush Hager, met on Monday with girls at a high school in Long An province by the Mekong delta, where they listened to the students talk about their schoolwork and challenges.

“We are gonna shine a light on you and the work that’s going on here ... so that there are people around the world, who understand that when you educate a girl, you’ll give them power and a voice and an opportunity to improve their lives and the lives of their families and the lives of their communities,” Obama said.

The visitors also joined the students in a life-skills training session where the girls practiced perseverance, critical thinking and negotiating and leadership skills that could ensure the girls are able to advocate for themselves in and out of their classrooms.

Michelle Obama started to work on promoting girls education while her husband was president. She continues the charitable work through the Obama Foundation, with Girls Opportunity Alliance as one of its initiatives.

# Leader’s rare handwritten scripts on view at NLAI

**C U L T U R E d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A collection of rare handwritten scripts by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei went on display in an exhibition which opened at the National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) on Monday.

The collection contains a handwritten script of the Leader written beneath one of the copies of the *Ganjineh* (treasure) magazine published by the library.

Besides the handwritten scripts, there are also photos of the Leader attending the 1979 demonstrations in Mashhad.

The very first editions of the Persian translation of “Sulh al-Hasan” (“The Peace Treaty of Imam Hassan”) by Leader published in 1969 is also on display.

The book is written by the Iraqi Shia scholar Sheikh Radi Al-Yasin (1935-1993) in Arabic.

The book reviews the outstanding works of Imam Hasan (AS), the second Imam of the Shia Muslims, the issues that he faced during his Imamate, and the events and political attitudes that led to peacemaking, as well as the unfair accusations made against him.

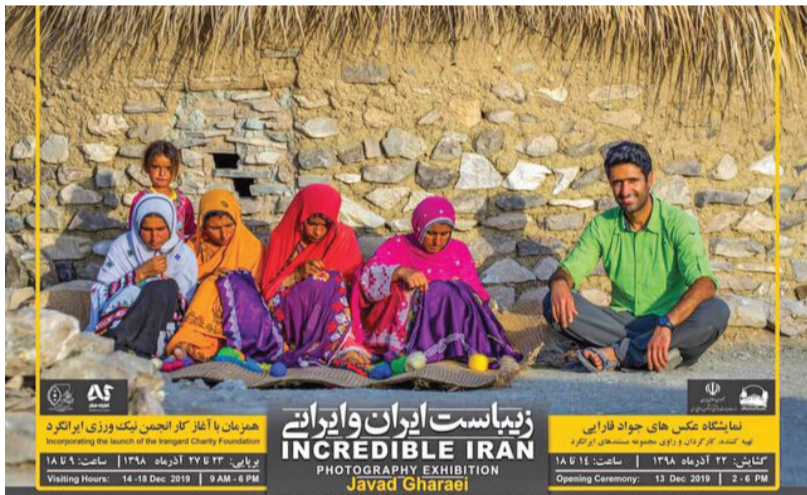
The new edition of the Persian version carrying new footnotes and additional materials from Ayatollah Khamenei was republished by the Islamic Revolution Publications in summer.

This exhibition is organized by the library focusing on the local history of Khorasan Razavi Province.



NLAI director Ashraf Borujerdi and a number of officials visit the rare handwritten scripts by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on view in the library on December 9, 2019.

## Tehran cultural center to host “Incredible Iran”



A poster for “Incredible Iran” photo exhibition.

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — An exhibition of photos by Javad Qarai, the director of the popular documentary series “Irangard”, will open Friday at the Niavaran Cultural-Historical Complex in Tehran.

Entitled “Incredible Iran”, the exhibition will feature a collection of photos taken by Qarai of different Iranian landscapes and people during his travels around the country to produce his documentary series.

“Irangard” was produced in three seasons from 2010 to 2018 and was aired on several TV channels.

The series, highlighting Iran’s natural and cultural attractions, has received several awards in different festivals including best documentary award at the Jame Jam Television Festival in March.

Qarai is a graduate of tourism management and has been traveling for over 20 years.

## “Exam” to compete in Sundance Film Festival 2020



A scene from “Exam” by Iranian director Sonia Haddad.

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Sonia Haddad’s film “Exam” will be competing in the Sundance Film Festival 2020, a public relations team of the film announced in a press release on Tuesday.

The largest independent film festival in the United States will be taking place from January 23 to February 2. “Exam” is about a teenage girl who

agrees to deliver a pack of cocaine on the day of an important exam at school.

The short film received the Grand Jury Award - Live-Action Short at the American Film Institute - AFI FEST in November.

The award was presented to the film for “its bold directorial style, anchored by a stunning lead performance,” the jury had said in their statement.

## Iran’s House of Music cancels annual celebration

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The organizers of Iran’s House of Music Celebration said on Tuesday that the winners will be announced at a later time without a celebration in order to sympathize with the families of innocent who lost their lives during the recent unrest across Iran.

The celebration is annually held to honor Iran’s top musical products.

“After the recent unrest in the country and in order to sympathize with the families of those who lost their lives, the celebration has been canceled,” Iran’s House of Music

said in a statement published on Tuesday.

“Several veteran musicians were due to be honored at the ceremony, while the best album of the year was scheduled to be announced,” the statement said.

“Several ensembles were also due to give performances and new talents were scheduled to be introduced at the ceremony set for late December in Vahdat Hall,” it added.

“However, the winners and the best album will be announced in one of the sessions of the house,” it noted.

Protests erupted in Iran on November 15 after the government announced an increase in the price of gasoline.

## Puppeteer who performed Sesame Street’s Big Bird, Oscar, dies at 85

**NEW YORK (Reuters)** — Carroll Spinney, the puppeteer who brought boyish vulnerability to Big Bird, the towering yellow-plumed character, during 50 years on the groundbreaking children’s television show “Sesame Street” and even made garbage-loving Oscar the Grouch loveable, died on Sunday at the age of 85, the Sesame Workshop said.

Spinney, who suffered from the movement disorder dystonia, had provided only Big Bird’s voice since 2015 while another puppeteer was in the costume.

“We at Sesame Workshop mourn his passing and feel an immense gratitude for all he has given to Sesame Street and to children around the world,” the show’s co-founder Joan Ganz Cooney said in a statement on Sunday.

Big Bird, Oscar and Spinney were part of “Sesame Street” when it made its debut Nov. 10, 1969, with the goal of entertaining and educating young children, especially those in low-income families.

Spinney announced his retirement at age 84 in October 2018 after completing episodes that were to be aired in 2019 to mark the show’s 50th year.

With Spinney inside, Big Bird danced with the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall, sang at Carnegie Hall, passed out Emmys,

appeared on the cover of Time magazine and toured China with Bob Hope. He performed with everyone from Johnny Cash to Michael Jackson.

Spinney’s career inside the Big Bird costume was portrayed in the 2015 documentary “I Am Big Bird”. The film covered some of his darker moments, including suicidal thoughts after his first wife left him and took their kids, and the jealousy he felt when the character Elmo became more popular than Big Bird.

The beloved Big Bird was a fluffy pear-shaped mass of yellow-dyed turkey feathers set atop spindly legs and standing more than 8 feet (2.4 meters) tall. At first he was a dim-witted goof but Spinney developed him into a character whom children could relate to - an excitable naïf with the sensibilities of a 6-year-old who was learning letters and numbers just like the young viewers who adored him.

Big Bird was often flustered but persevered with the help of his neighbors on Sesame Street, where puppet creatures and humans lived side by side.

“Through Big Bird I’ve learned things that have changed my life, lessons that have stayed with me even when I’m not in the puppet,” Spinney said in his book, “The Wisdom of Big

Bird (and Dark Genius of Oscar the Grouch). “I’m certain that being a bird has made me a better person.”

In a statement announcing his retirement, Spinney said: “Even as I step down from my roles, I feel I will always be Big Bird. And even Oscar, once in a while.”

Spinney said Big Bird’s voice was actually his own, just a little higher, but bringing him to life was physically demanding. He had to keep his right hand straight up in Big Bird’s head while his left arm was in the costume’s left wing. He operated the right wing by pulling on a cord and used an interior video monitor to see what was going on in front of him.

Spinney was close to Jim Henson, the man behind “Sesame Street” and the Muppets puppet troupe, and he wore the full Big Bird costume when he sang the Muppet anthem “Bein’ Green” at Henson’s funeral in 1990.

Big Bird and death also were part of one of most memorable moments on “Sesame Street.” Actor Will Lee, who played storekeeper Mr. Hooper, died in 1982, and it turned into a lesson for children as the show’s cast gathered around Big Bird to explain the loss of the friend who had made him bird-seed milkshakes. “When we finished there were tears on all

the actors’ faces,” Spinney said in an interview on the “Sesame Street” website. “When I came out of the suit, I had to have a towel because I had been crying.”

Spinney also gave life to Big Bird’s antithesis, Oscar the Grouch, the furry green creature who offered his curmudgeonly views on the goings-on on Sesame Street. Oscar lived in a garbage can and sang about his love of trash - “anything dirty or dingy or dusty, anything ragged or rotten or rusty.”

Spinney said the gravelly voice he gave Oscar was an imitation of the tough-talking New York cab driver who took Spinney to the studio the day he was to debut the character.

Spinney grew up in Acton, Massachusetts, and developed his interest in puppets as a child. He said he never had a desire to be seen by the audience.

He pursued puppetry in his spare time while in the Air Force by starting a kids’ show for a Las Vegas television station. Once back in Boston, he was part of the “Bozo the Clown Show” before Henson brought him to Sesame Street.

Spinney credited his 1979 marriage to Debra Gilroy, who worked for the company that produced “Sesame Street,” for turning his life around.