



Prisoner swap is not start of “any new path”, Iran tells U.S. **3**



Hezbollah poses serious threat to U.S., Israeli schemes in Middle East **13**



Mohammadreza Fahimi, the world's most loyal fan **15**



Tehran Municipality to award movies promoting less waste **16**

Iraqis protest against U.S. meddling



See page 13

Preferential trade with Eurasia exceeds \$194m in a month

TEHRAN — Head of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) says the value of Iran's preferential trade with Eurasian countries has reached \$194.2 million since the trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) was implemented on October 27 up to the end of November.

In the mentioned period Iran exported \$28.2 million worth of commodities to

the EAEU nations while importing \$166 million of commodities through preferential trade, Mehdi Mirashrafi told IRIB on Saturday.

According to the official, the value of Iran's total (preferential and non-preferential) exports to Eurasia stood at \$137.9 million in the mentioned period, while the total imports reached \$193 million. **→4**

Mousavi: Iran ready to exchange all detainees, ball in U.S. court now

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman on Saturday voiced Tehran's readiness to exchange the entire Iranian detainees who are in the U.S. custody, noting the ball is now in Washington's court to decide wisely.

A couple of days ago, the United States released Massoud Soleimani, an Iranian scientist who was arrested last year by the U.S. for allegedly

violating American trade sanctions against Iran. Soleimani flew along with Foreign Minister Zarif from Zurich to Tehran. He was released in a prisoner exchange through mediation efforts by Switzerland.

Iran also freed an American graduate student who had been imprisoned in Tehran for more than three years on charges of being a spy. **→2**

UN General Assembly approves eight resolutions against Israel

United Nations General Assembly adopted eight resolutions on Friday that single out or condemn Israel.

The General Assembly renewed the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and renewed the mandate of the UN's "special committee to investigate Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories."

The mandate of the UNRWA was

extended until June 30, 2023, with 169 votes in favor and nine abstentions. The United States and Israel voted against.

UNRWA, which was established in 1949, provides education, health and relief services as well as housing and microfinance assistance to more than five million registered refugees in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, the besieged Gaza Strip as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. **→13**

Qatar's green light to resolve Persian Gulf crisis; Riyadh's greed for maximum concessions

By Morteza Helali

TEHRAN — Although Qatar has shown a green light over the past few days to resolve the Persian Gulf crisis, it seems that Saudi Arabia is seeking to achieve maximum concessions from Doha. Since June 2017, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt, following Saudi Arabia, have cut their diplomatic ties with Qatar and imposed widespread sanctions on the country.

The countries stated that they will restore ties with Doha and lift sanctions provided that Qatar curb its diplomatic ties with Tehran. The four countries emphasized the need to fulfill the condition, while Qatar officials strongly rejected the condition.

Since Qatar has rejected the conditions set by Saudi Arabia, Riyadh and its allies have imposed various sanctions against Doha. This issue led Yousef bin Sultan Yousef Laram, an official in the Qatari foreign ministry, to make comments about the crisis between Doha and the states imposing sanctions. The Qatari official said despite what

has happened, and the continued violation of fundamental human rights, Qatar still believes that dialogue without preconditions is the best way to solve the Persian Gulf crisis. Although Qatari officials have claimed that they are ready for negotiations, the four neighboring countries have so far not reacted to the green light by Doha. The move by sanctioning states suggests that they are reluctant to resolve the crisis.

However officials from the sanctioning countries have always verbally claimed their readiness to negotiate with Qatar. The officials of the four states have spoken out of political talks with Qatar to end the crisis, while they have so far rejected all requests by Doha to negotiate about their issues. Therefore, the sanctioning countries, above all Saudi Arabia, represent dichotomous positions in this regard.

Doha not only has not fulfilled the main condition of the sanctioning countries, but on the contrary, it has reinforced its ties with Tehran. Qatari officials have repeatedly stated that Iran

was the first country that assisted Qatar when it was blockaded from land, sea and air, a move that infuriated the four countries.

On December 5, during a session at the Mediterranean Dialogue Forum in Rome, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani said, "We have to acknowledge that Iran is our neighbor and we look at it differently than countries in the West or the United States. We will remain having relations of good neighborhood with them". The foreign minister added, "When the blockade took place, Iran opened its air space and the Qatari people are very thankful for this move".

Therefore, these explicit statements by the Qatari foreign minister indicate that, despite extensive sanctions, Doha is unwilling to end its relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is while, Saudi Arabia still insists on cutting ties between Doha and Tehran. Other sanctioning countries, including Bahrain, Egypt and the UAE, following Saudi officials, insist on their stance to apply more pressure on Doha. **→2**

Mahathir Mohamad says U.S. sanctions on Iran violate international law

By staff and agency

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said on Saturday that the United States' sanctions on Iran violate the United Nations charter and international law.

"Malaysia does not support the reimposition of the unilateral sanctions by the U.S. against Iran," he told the Doha Forum, according to Reuters.

Malaysia and other countries have lost "a big market" because of the sanctions on Iran, he said. "Such sanctions clearly violate the United Na-

tions charter and international law; sanctions can only be applied by the United Nations in accordance with the charter," he added.

U.S. President Donald Trump quit the 2015 nuclear deal in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions on Iran as part of the "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran. Also on November 3, the Malaysian prime minister said the U.S. sanctions against Iran are unlawful.

"There is no provision in the United Nations

that a country which is dissatisfied with another country can impose sanctions on that country and other countries trading with that nation," Free Malaysia Today quoted the prime minister as saying in a press conference on the sidelines of the 35th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits. "When you apply sanctions, it is against the law," he noted.

He said, "The sanctions don't apply to one country alone," he said, adding that Malaysia is now being sanctioned.



EDITORIAL

Mohammad Ghaderi
Tehran Times editor-in-chief
@ghaderi62

Why terrorist act by Saudi Air Force officer faced media boycott!

On December 5, a Saudi Air Force lieutenant, named Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani, opened fire at a U.S. naval base in Pensacola, Florida.

The gunman, who began training in the U.S. in August 2017, killed three people and wounded eight. Alshamrani was shot by a deputy sheriff.

Shortly after the shooting, Saudi Arabia's King Salman contacted Trump to express regret for what had happened and sympathize with families of the victims. The Saudi king insisted that the assailant did not represent the Saudi people.

Regarding the reaction by Saudi and U.S. officials, as well as the way media outlets are dealing with the issue, some points need to be mentioned about the incident:

a. Restricted and controlled media coverage

The Saudi and U.S. media outlets have covered the incident in a restricted and controlled manner. Interestingly, Qatari media such as Al Jazeera were not also very active in this regard. These approaches can be mainly based on two main reasons:

First, the shooting by the Saudi Air Force officer can revive and intensify U.S. cynicism and hatred of Saudi Arabia by recalling the 9/11 attacks. Therefore, U.S. media outlets' lack of enough attention to the issue is due to Washington's insistence to advance the maximum pressure project against Iran. Obviously, undermining Saudi Arabia's status could disrupt the project.

Second, it seems that the Qatari media are indifferent to the incident, as Doha and Riyadh are gradually changing their approaches toward each other, and Qatar is seeking to avoid tension with Saudi Arabia.

b. The way that the Saudi and U.S. officials reacted

The shooting by the Saudi Air Force officer shows that there are some radical persons among Saudi security forces, who could pose various risks. Accordingly, neither the U.S. nor Saudi Arabia have spoken about the motive behind the shooting.

However, based on numerous indications, it can be concluded that the officer was highly inspired by Wahhabism and was affiliated with terrorist groups, such as ISIS and al-Qaeda. **→3**



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Arbaeen hospitality gains UNESCO heritage status

TEHRAN — The generous hospitality of Iraqi people during the Arbaeen pilgrimage has been added to UNESCO's prestigious heritage list.

"Provision of services and hospitality during the Arba'in (Arbaeen) visitation" has won world heritage status, joining UNESCO's culture list as one of the most prominent social and cultural characteristics of the Arab nation to cherish the religious event, YJC reported on Saturday. **→10**



ARTICLE

Yuram Abdullah Weiler
Analyst and journalist

As the Islamophobia index increases: On being Muslim in America

"I think the real question is not whether America is afraid of Islam (and its adherents) but whether Muslims should be afraid of the US and Americans especially in this post-9/11 world."

—Attorney Diana Mae Cabili

Being Muslim in America carries the risk of being reviled, insulted, discriminated against, humiliated publicly or, worse yet, physically attacked. Despite having been a part of the American landscape since 1501, Muslims have faced discrimination, suspicion and hatred bordering on public hysteria, especially since the 9/11 attacks. With the ascendancy of Donald Trump and his virulent anti-Muslim diatribes, the prospect of a McCarthy-era-like interment of Muslims in the United States does not appear to be off the table given current policy trends.

Make no mistake about it; Islamophobia in the U.S. not only is on the rise, but also is condoned public policy. The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) with support from the Bridge Initiative of the Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University has developed the National Index of Islamophobia based on responses to various survey questions designed to uncover the deep-seated beliefs of respondents in five particular anti-Muslim stereotypes, which regrettably are often utilized by U.S. political leaders during campaigns to gain voter support.

These five anti-Muslim stereotypes are that most Muslims living in the United States: are more prone to violence than other people; discriminate against women; are hostile to the United States; are less civilized than other people; and are partially responsible for acts of violence carried out by other Muslims. These five stereotypes are linked to constituent support for policies, enacted by government officials, which discriminate specifically against Muslims, such as the surveillance of mosques, racial profiling and heightened security scrutiny of Muslims at airports.

Here in the quiet border community of Las Cruces, New Mexico, people seem to be generally tolerant and supportive of Muslims. **→13**

Larijani says Iran, Turkey are active in establishing regional security

POLITICAL **d e s k** TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Saturday that Iran and Turkey are active in helping establish long-lasting security in the region.

"Turkey and Iran are two important countries in the region. We have friendly relations," he told reporters after a meeting with Mustafa Sentop, the Turkish parliament speaker.

Larijani was in Turkey to attend the 12th plenary of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly which started on December 13 and will run until December 18 in Antalya.

Before departure to Turkey, Larijani told reporters that the meeting will help promote economic relations among the countries.

"The Asian Parliamentary Assembly is an opportunity to hold consultations on improving economic relations and cooperation," he said.

The Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) was born in 2006 at the Seventh Session of the Association of Asian Parliamentary for Peace (AAPP). In other words, the APA is continuation of an organization which was established in 1999. The APA comprises, in 2007, of 42 Member Parliaments and 16 observers, according to official website of the APA.

South Korea in talks with U.S. over Iran's call for resuming trade of medical items

SEOUL — South Korea is in talks with the United States over Iran's call for Seoul to resume exports of humanitarian goods to Tehran, after tougher U.S. sanctions virtually halted such trade, Yonhap News Agency reported.

Financial transactions between Seoul and Tehran for shipments of food and medical items became effectively impossible after Washington toughened sanctions against the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) in September, requiring third countries to provide information on trade with the Middle Eastern nation.

A local daily reported on Saturday that Tehran called in the South Korean ambassador to Iran to lodge a complaint, urging Seoul to resume humanitarian trade with the country.

"The Iranian side expressed its position that it hopes for the humanitarian trade to be resumed and is discussing the matter with us.

"We are in talks with Iran and the U.S. frequently so that the shipments of humanitarian goods like medical supplies can be resumed using the won-based transaction system," a Foreign Ministry official said.

Iran has denounced the tougher U.S. sanctions as "inhumane and cruel," calling for this kind of trade to be exempted from the sanctions.

Officials from the foreign, finance and industry ministries in Korea reportedly visited Washington last week and held talks with U.S. officials over the issue, according to sources familiar with the matter.

The U.S. decided in April this year to end sanctions waivers for imports of Iranian oil by South Korea and other countries. Since then, South Korean companies have faced difficulties in selling medicine, medical equipment and other humanitarian products to Iran through a bilateral transaction system using the Korean currency, the won.

The Iranian central bank has won-based accounts at Woori Bank and the Industrial Bank of Korea in Seoul for payments of not just oil imports but also products that are not subject to sanctions.

In June, Seoul officials visited Washington to ask for U.S. cooperation on the export of humanitarian goods to Iran.

Iran demands \$6 billion oil payment from South Korea: Chosun

Iran's Foreign Ministry called in the South Korean ambassador last month to demand payment of 7 trillion won (\$6 billion) for oil it sold to the Asian country, Chosun Ilbo reported, citing officials it didn't identify.

Iran expressed "strong regret" over Seoul's failure to complete the payment, which has been deposited at two South Korean banks without being transferred to Iran's central bank for years due to U.S. sanctions against the Middle Eastern country, the newspaper said. It added that other Iranian authorities including the central bank also complained.

South Korea sent a delegation to the Middle East late last month and explained that the country will cooperate with the U.S. to successfully complete transfer of the payment, it added. (Source: Bloomberg)

Qatar's green light to resolve the Persian Gulf crisis; Riyadh's greed for maximum concessions

1 → Despite all that has been said, Qatar continues to show green light to the sanctioning states in order to resolve the Persian Gulf crisis. In addition to declaring readiness by Qatari officials for negotiation, the Qatari foreign minister's remarks indicate that Doha emphasizes the necessity of a solution for the Persian Gulf crisis.

In this regard, at the Mediterranean forum, the Qatari foreign minister said that Doha has not backed the Muslim Brotherhood or political Islam, and that Qatar has never stopped supporting Egypt after the overthrow of the former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi. The foreign minister added that the Muslim Brotherhood are not officially present in Qatar.

The remarks by the Qatari foreign minister are in fact a message to the sanctioning countries, especially Saudi Arabia, which states that Doha has not crossed Riyadh's red lines, such as backing the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatari officials have also formally announced to Saudi Arabia that they will accept some conditions.

It seems that Saudi Arabia and its allies are not satisfied with Doha's green light to solve the Persian Gulf crisis and are seeking to obtain maximum concession from Qatar. Meanwhile, Qatar has repeatedly said that it would not accept certain conditions, such as closing Al Jazeera television or curbing ties with Iran.

It can be concluded that Saudi Arabia does not intend to put an end to the Persian Gulf crisis, despite facing some Qatar's flexible positions. Saudi officials believe that if they soften their position on Qatar, other regional countries will not to back down against Riyadh in long run.

Mousavi: Iran ready to exchange all detainees, ball in U.S. court now

1 → "After release of Massoud Soleimani, Zarif offered on his Twitter account a form of exchange, and now, we are ready to exchange our hostages in the U.S. as the ball is now in the Washington's court," Seyed Abbas Mousavi said in Tabriz.

On a plan by President Hassan Rouhani to visit Japan, he said, "Japan had previously submitted some offers to de-escalate tensions (between Iran and the U.S.). We hope to gain suitable results in the president's trip to Tokyo whose offer has been based on good will and hope."

"The U.S. has always used pressure as a policy, however, we must immune ourselves against such pressures," Mousavi added.

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

The Foreign Ministry spokesman also said Iran is not banned to test ballistic missiles and officials in Washington know this.

The UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal, calls upon Iran to not test missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

"The Resolution 2231 has not banned Iran from testing missiles and the Americans are fully aware of it," the ministry official asserted.

■ 'U.S. withdrawal from INF treaty will destabilize the globe'

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mousavi condemned the U.S. recent missile test, saying, "We express concern over the U.S. new missile test and announce that the U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces treaty (INF) will destabilize



the globe."

On to the outcome of election in Britain which the Conservatives won the majority, he said it is an internal affair and the Iranian Foreign Ministry has no intention to comment on it. "Other nations' internal affairs have nothing to do with us and we evade from such interferences."

Mousavi added, "We hope that Britain comes to a conclusion to fulfill its undertakings under the nuclear deal. We hope that the British government, regarding its current situation, along with the European Union, France, Germany, Russia and China adhere

to their commitments under the deal to pave the way to return to the JCPOA."

Under the JCPOA - the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

Touching upon tension between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Garabakh region, Mousavi said, "We, within the framework of international law and existing resolutions, have voiced our readiness to do our best to narrow down tension between the two countries."

Mousavi also lashed out at the U.S. for

Prisoner swap is not start of "any new path", Iran tells U.S.

POLITICAL **d e s k** TEHRAN – Keyvan Khosravi, the spokesman for Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said on Saturday that prisoner swap between Iran and the United States is not start of "any new path".

His comments came as Brian Hook, the U.S. special representative for Iran, said on Wednesday that recent prisoner exchange will lead to a broader discussion on consular affairs between the U.S. and Iran.

Khosravi said, "Prisoner swap was done without holding any negotiation and based on Iran's humanitarian approach. It is not start of any new path and is an end to difficult situation of innocent people who have been incarcerated by the United States' international banditry."

Iran and the U.S. exchanged prisoners on December 7. An Iranian scientist was released by the U.S. and Iran released an American detained for three years on spying

charges.

The prisoner exchange happened through mediation efforts by Switzerland.

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.

After he was released, Soleimani flew along with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif from Zurich to Tehran on December 7.

Xiyue Wang was also flown in a Swiss government airplane from Tehran to Zurich, where he was met by Hook, according to two senior United States officials.

After the prisoner exchange, Donald Trump wrote, "See, we can make a deal together!"

However, Iran has rejected any talks with the United States. Iran has said it will talk with the U.S. within the



5+1 format only if Washington returns to the 2015 nuclear deal and removes all sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

Islamabad continues efforts to mediate between Iran, Saudi Arabia: Pakistan Today

By staff and agency

Imran Khan, the Pakistani prime minister, was scheduled to visit Riyadh on a one-day trip on Saturday as part of continued efforts to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan Today reported on Friday.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, accompanied by head of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), visited Riyadh on Wednesday and is believed to have laid the ground for the premier's visit, the newspaper reported.

This would be Prime Minister Imran's fourth visit to Saudi Arabia since May.

Khan visited Tehran on October 13 to "facilitate" possible dialogue between Iran and Saudi Arabia which have been at loggerheads over a number of issues including the Saudi war on Yemen and Riyadh's support for U.S. President Donald Trump's anti-Iran moves.

Khan met with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani.

Qureshi has said that Iran and Saudi Arabia should bridge differences.

In an interview with Aaj News in October, Qureshi said that Pakistan will continue efforts in line with reducing tension in Iran-Saudi Arabia relations.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric has said that Antonio Guterres, the UN secretary-general, welcomes Khan's initiative to



de-escalate tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

On October 12, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said Tehran is ready for talks with Saudi Arabia with or without a mediator.

During a joint press conference with Khan in Tehran on October 13, Rouhani, without mentioning Saudi Arabia, suggested that Iran will give a positive response to "good intention".

Rouhani said Iran "welcomes efforts by the Pakistani prime minister to settle tensions in the region" and "restore peace and stability".

During a separate meeting with Khan, Ayatollah Khamenei said that ending the war on Yemen will have positive effects on the Middle East region.

The Leader said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran presented a four-point plan to end the war in Yemen a long time ago and if this war ends in the right way, it can have positive effects on the region."

Monarchist cell after running riots in central Iran dismantled

TEHRAN (FNA) — A four-strong monarchist cell intending to start a second wave of riots in Iran's central province of Isfahan were identified and apprehended by the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC).

Head of the public relations office of the IRGC in Isfahan Colonel Ali Qomian said a four-strong monarchist cell was busted on Friday in the wake of an operation conducted by the IRGC intelligence forces.

He said they were arrested when they were holding a meeting to discuss the second wave of riots in Iran.

While searching their house, monarchist flags, tools for daubing anti-Establishment slogans and Molotov cocktail glasses were discovered.

On Thursday, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani said enemies had plotted to increase the number of fatalities during the recent riots in several cities, adding that most of the people killed in Tehran province were not even involved in any protest gatherings.

"More than 85 percent of the victims of the recent incidents in towns of Tehran Province had not taken part in any gathering and were killed with non-organizational firearms and cold weapons in a very suspicious manner," said Shamkhani in a meeting with families of some of the



victims of the riots in the Western towns of the province.

He noted that there was certainly a plot hatched by the "adversaries" to cause as many fatalities as possible and pin the blame on Iran's security forces for the killings.

In mid-November, the Iranian government raised gasoline prices in order to moderate the national consumption rate.

The move prompted protests in a number of cities that went largely peaceful but turned violent when armed riotous individuals took advantage of the situation to vandalize public and state property, and attack civilians and security forces alike.

Shortly after the riots broke out, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei tasked the Supreme National Security Council with compiling a report detailing the reasons behind the riots and immediate attending of the families of the victims.

U.S. threatens Iran over attacks on military bases in Iraq

Press TV — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has threatened Iran with "decisive" action over a series of attacks on American military bases in Iraq.

In a statement released on Friday, Pompeo claimed that Iran was providing "lethal aid and support to third parties in Iraq and throughout the region."

"We must... use this opportunity to remind Iran's leaders that any attacks by them, or their proxies of any identity, that harm Americans, our allies or our interests will be answered with a decisive U.S. response," he said.

Prior to his statement, in a post on his Twitter account, Pompeo also said, "We strongly condemn the Iranian proxy attack that wounded five Iraqi soldiers near the Baghdad Airport this week. To Iran's leaders - the U.S. will respond decisively if #Iran or its proxies harm U.S. personnel or our



Iraqi partners.

This came one day after two Katyusha rockets targeted a compound near Baghdad International Airport, which houses U.S. troops. It was the 10th such assault since late October.

Another attack Monday on the same base wounded five members of Iraqi counter-

terrorism forces, two of them critically.

The Iraqi army says two Katyusha rockets landed near the "outside perimeter" of Baghdad International Airport.

Pompeo's remarks came in the wake of a report by The Wall Street Journal which said Saudi Arabia is quietly seeking to mend ties with Iran amid economic concerns and doubts about Washington's backing for Riyadh.

The fresh U.S. threat against Iran can be viewed as a signal of support for Saudi Arabia to prevent a thaw in the kingdom's relations with the Islamic Republic.

Possible friendly ties between Riyadh and Tehran will put America's interests in danger as it can no longer milk Saudi Arabia to protect it against an alleged threat from Iran.

"Riyadh's newfound interest in better relations with regional rivals comes as Saudi

officials question how much backing it has from the U.S. and other allies," the WSJ report said.

The U.S., backed by the UK, invaded Iraq in 2003 under the pretext that the former regime of Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. No such weapons, however, were ever found in the country.

The invasion plunged Iraq into chaos and led to the rise of terrorist groups.

The U.S. and a coalition of its allies further launched a military campaign against purported Daesh targets in Iraq in 2014, but their operations in many instances have led to civilian deaths.

Now, the U.S. is weighing deploying up to 7,000 additional troops to the Middle East in the face of what it calls a renewed Iranian threat.

U.S. is open to talks with Iran: Brian Hook

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Brian Hook, the U.S. special representative for Iran, says the United States is open to dialogue with Iran even as Washington reinforces sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Iran remains a threat to international peace and security, Hook claimed in a Bloomberg interview published on Saturday.

Tensions started to build up between the U.S. and Iran after U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew Washington from the 2015 deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in May 2018, and imposed sanctions against Tehran in a bid to put maximum pressure on the Islamic Republic.

The Trump administration has also made empty calls for talks, but the Islamic Republic maintains that as long as the sanctions are in place and the U.S. refuses to return to the JCPOA, negotiations will be meaningless.

Hook accused Iran of being behind the attack on Saudi oil facilities in September, saying the Saudi government at some point will present evidence of Iran's complicity to the United Nations Security Council.



Tehran has repeatedly rejected any involvement in the attack warning that if "any moves" takes place against Iran, they will face an immediate response.

Back in September, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said "even the Saudis

themselves don't believe the fiction of Iranian involvement" in the attack on the Aramco oil facilities.

Hook also pointed to the recent protests in Iran, saying the protests were "anti-regime" in nature even if they aren't evidence of pro-

U.S. sentiment.

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

Protesters turned violent in many cities and towns, but ended after a few days.

Top judicial, political and military figures in Iran have insisted that there is a difference between peaceful protesters and rioters.

During the interview, Hook also claimed the U.S. sanctions do not restrict imports of medical supplies into Iran and are not causing a humanitarian crisis there.

It came days after Iranian Health Minister Saeed Namaki said the United States lies when it says pharmaceuticals and medical equipment are not subject to its sanctions list on Iran.

Namaki has also 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.

1,795 kg narcotics seized in Kermanshah in eight months

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Kermanshah Province's anti-narcotics police have confiscated 1,795 kilograms of different illicit drugs over eight months, from March 21 to November 22, Mehr reported.

Iran's calendar year started on March 21, 2019.

Alireza Daliri, the anti-narcotics police chief of Kermanshah, said on Saturday that the confiscation of illicit drugs in the province has witnessed a 39% growth in comparison with the corresponding period of last year.

A total of 4,900 smugglers and culprits have been arrested in various operations in the province which indicates a 3% increase compared to the corresponding period last year, Daliri said.

He further said 105 kilograms of opium have been confiscated by police forces of Kermanshah in collaboration with Alborz and Lorestan provinces during the last two days.



In this regard, one smuggler has been arrested and a vehicle seized, he added.

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

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

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

Resolution 2231 imposes no ban on Iran's missile tests, Tehran says



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has argued that the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231 imposes no ban on Iran's missile tests.

During a presser in the northwestern city of Tabriz on Saturday, Mousavi criticized some Western countries' position on Iran's missile tests.

He said the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has nothing to do with missile tests.

The JCPOA was struck between Iran and six world powers, including the U.S., Russia, China, France, Britain and Germany, on July 14, 2015.

However, Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the deal on May 2018 and adopted what his administration called the policy of "maximum pressure" to force Tehran into writing another deal.

Only nuclear issues were discussed with the world powers during the negotiations that led to the JCPOA, Mousavi stated.

Noting that they unsuccessfully tried to raise the issue of missiles in the negotiations, he underlined that Resolution 2231 has not banned Iran from missile tests and they are well aware of it.

"We regard statements about Iran's missile tests as meddlesome and reject them," the spokesman added.

Resolution 2231, adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council in July 2015, endorsed the Iran nuclear agreement. While the resolution "calls upon" Iran not to test nuclear-capable missiles, it does not ban Iran to conduct missile tests.

Back in December 2018, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Resolution 2231 and the JCPOA do not restrict Iran's missile program.

Zarif reiterated Iran's long-held policy that Tehran does not seek to build nuclear weapons and that the country's missiles are not designed to carry nuclear warheads.

Iran maintains that its missile program is totally deterrent in nature and is part of the country's unstoppable defense program.

IRGC to stage large-scale naval drill in near future



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy said on Saturday that his force are preparing to hold a large-scale naval war game in the near future, adding that new military equipment will be unveiled and operated in the drill.

Rear Admiral Ali Reza Tangsiri did not give the date of the maneuver.

"The Guards' large-scale military exercise will be held in future in which the state-of-the-art military equipment and achievements will be unveiled," Tangsiri said in an interview with the Tasnim news agency in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas.

"The Iranian forces, including the Guards and Army as a united force, are at the highest possible level of readiness to defend the country," he underscored.

"The Leader of the Islamic Revolution, as the Armed Forces' commander-in-chief, has always laid emphasis on

readiness of the armed forces and their growing progress," he further said.

Touching upon the armed forces' full intelligence supremacy in the region, the commander also said, "The entire weapons and military equipment of naval forces of the Guards and Army are domestically-manufactured."

In May, the Army Navy and the IRGC Navy staged periodic naval drills with the neighboring states.

The Iranian and Omani naval forces held joint rescue and relief maneuvers in the waters near the coasts of Oman in a show of stronger ties between the two countries.

The drills were staged near the coast of Muscat within the framework of the Omani-Iranian Military Friendship Joint Committee.

Units from the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force of Oman as well as the Border Guard Brigade along with units from the Iranian Army's Navy and the IRGC Navy participated in the drills.

U.S. drops charges against two Iranian scientists after prisoner swap

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The United States has dropped charges against two Iranian researchers it had accused of attempting to export chemicals to Iran in violation of trade sanctions.

An Atlanta-based federal judge on Wednesday dismissed sanctions-violation cases against scientists Mahboobe Ghaedi and Maryam Jazayeri, Politico reported on Thursday.



Both women were co-defendants in the prosecution of Masoud Soleimani, a renowned Iranian stem-cell researcher who was arrested last year in the U.S.

The decision followed a prisoner exchange between Iran and the U.S. in which the United States freed Soleimani and Iran released a jailed U.S. student and both were allowed to return to their home countries last week.

Soleimani left Iran on sabbatical last year, but was arrested upon arrival in Chicago and transferred to prison in Atlanta, Georgia for unspecified reasons.

Following the prisoner swap, Soleimani flew along with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif from Zurich to Tehran December 7.

The prisoner exchange happened through mediation efforts by Switzerland.

On December 7, Iran freed an American graduate student who had been imprisoned in Tehran for more than three years on charges of being a spy.

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

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

In a tweet last week, Trump thanked Iran "on a very fair negotiation."

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

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

"Taken during the Obama Administration (despite \$150 Billion gift), returned during the Trump Administration," Trump wrote.

Trump has been very critical of Obama's Iran policy. Observers say he enjoyed killing the 2015 Iran nuclear deal because it was Obama's major foreign policy success.

Meanwhile, Iran has voiced readiness for a full prisoner swap with the United States, saying 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 on Monday.

Why terrorist act by Saudi Air Force officer faced media boycott?

1→ On the other hand, in a stereotypical way, the assailant may be charged with mental disorders. According to the New York Times, Alshamrani posted on his Twitter account, "I'm not against you for just being American, I don't hate you because your freedoms, I hate you because every day you supporting, funding and committing crimes not only against Muslims but also humanity."

Following the incident, some U.S. officials, including Senators Tim Scott and Matt Gaetz, condemned the shooting and called for a revision of foreign military training standards.

Tim Scott stated that the officer was either influenced by radical Islamic ideology or suffered from a mental disorder, so there is no reason that we provide military training for those who want to harm the U.S.

On the other hand, some evidence suggests that the close relationship between the Riyadh officials (especially Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman) and the White House has led to dissatisfaction of some extremist Wahhabis, as they are opposite to general approach of the Salafi movement.

In this regard, two important events over the past few months can be noted, which were not reflected in media properly. First, a report, which was recently released on the military's coup attempt against Mohammad bin Salman. Second, reporting news about the killing of King Salman's personal bodyguard. It was later revealed that the bodyguard intended to assassinate the king so he was killed in a made-up clash.

As a result, there are some reasons why the incident went somehow unnoticed by the media and the two countries' officials.

A. If the shooting is linked to the 9/11 incident, many Americans will be persuaded to vote against Trump in the 2020 election by reinforcing ties with Riyadh.

B. The continuous effort by the al-Saud family to repair their inhuman image (especially after the killing of Jamal Khashoggi) in public opinion would fail.

C. Saudi Arabia, as the main helper in the U.S. maximum pressure campaign against Iran, would be involved in a new issue. In this case, Riyadh could not fulfill its main task, which is undermining the stability and peace in the independent regional countries, including Lebanon and Iraq.

D. The domestic disputes in the house of Saud would be unveiled, and the crown prince's power would be undermined.

E. The White House would be forced to take an action against Saudi Arabia because of the pressure by the U.S. public opinion and Democratic politicians in particular.

General: Nation invincible under wise leadership

TEHRAN (FNA) — A top military aide to the Supreme Leader lauded Iran's defensive successes in foiling anti-Tehran plots, adding that enemies of Iran should know that they are facing an invincible nation which is led by a strong and wise Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Speaking in a local ceremony in Tehran late on Wednesday, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi praised the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force as an "honorable" force, which has a serious presence on the scene.

"The IRGC Ground Force... has promoted the grandeur of the Iranian nation in the face of mercenary forces of the U.S. and the Zionist regime," he said.

"Our enemies should be aware that our nation is an invincible nation and the leadership of the Islamic Republic is a strong and wise leader," the top general stated, lauding Ayatollah Khamenei.

"I can assure you that America will soon escape the West Asian region....," he added.

Last month, Ayatollah Khamenei praised the Iranian

people for their vigilance and rallies to support the Islamic Republic after the recent riots in Iran, stressing that they thwarted a dangerous plot against the country.

"I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the great Iranian nation for their magnificent movement during recent days. The people proved again that they are powerful and great, and defeated the big conspiracy of the enemy with their presence on the scene," Ayatollah Khamenei said, addressing a large number of Iranian Basij (volunteer) forces in Tehran on the occasion of the National Week of Basij.

"The grave, extensive and very dangerous conspiracy that Global Arrogance and Zionism spent so much on and worked for so that they could cause this destruction, villainy, and murder in Iran at a crucial time was quashed by the presence of the people," he added.

Police and security forces entered the scene and performed their duty, but what the nation did during this week was more important than any other measure, he added, noting that the movement started in Tabriz and Zanjan, spread to all

cities, villages, and a great movement took place in Tehran.

Ayatollah Khamenei underlined that the system of domination is against freedom, adding that "The biggest freedom is a nation's freedom and independence, which they are against. They enter via colonialism, then via neocolonialism, today using new methods, soft war, and if they can and find it necessary using military force without hesitation."

The nation's main enemies comprehend the meaning and message conveyed by the national drive, the Leader stated. "This past week truly witnessed the height of the Iranian nation's glory and magnificence. We are grateful towards God and are thankful towards the dear people, too," Ayatollah Khamenei noted.

The Leader said the hegemonic system and the U.S. have expended all in their power since the Islamic Revolution to confront Iran's Islamic establishment.

The establishment, however, has grown in power and strength every day and come to flaunt these qualities before the enemy's eyes, Ayatollah Khamenei added.

STOCK MARKET

| | |
|--------|----------|
| TEDPIX | 343291.8 |
| IFX | 4449.08 |

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

| | |
|-----|--------------|
| USD | 42,000 rials |
| EUR | 46,705 rials |
| GBP | 55,998 rials |
| AED | 11,437 rials |

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

| | |
|-------------|---------------|
| Brent | \$65.22/b |
| WTI | \$60.07/b |
| OPEC Basket | \$65.81/b |
| Gold | \$1,477.90/oz |
| Silver | \$817.02/oz |
| Platinum | \$932.60/oz |

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Worth of trades at IME hits \$785m in a week

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — During weekdays ended on December 12, approximately 633,059 tons of commodities worth over \$785 million were traded at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME).



According to the report from IME International Affairs and Public Relations Department, last week, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 241,817 tons of various products worth close to \$393 million were traded. On this trading floor, 222,030 tons of steel, 6,355 tons of copper, 8,300 tons of aluminum, 120 tons of molybdenum concentrates, 12 tons of precious metal concentrates, and 5,000 tons of iron ore as well as 15 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 386,590 tons of different commodities with the total value of \$394 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 99,603 tons of bitumen, 120,500 tons of VB feed stock, 90,430 tons of polymer products, 26,000 tons of lube cut oil, 46,394 tons of chemical products, 1,300 tons of slaps axes, 490 tons of insulation, 2,764 tons of base oil, as well as 680 tons of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, 4,652 tons of commodities were traded on the side market of IME.

German Central Bank slashes 2020 growth outlook

Germany's Central Bank on Friday slashed its 2020 growth forecast for Europe's largest economy in half, but said an export-powered rebound was on the cards in the following years.

The Bundesbank predicted 0.6 percent expansion next year, half the pace it had reckoned with in its last outlook in June.

That represents little change from the expected 0.5 percent reading for 2019, one third of last year's rate.



But in 2021-22 growth should pick back up to around 1.4 percent.

"Along with noticeably supportive fiscal policy, very expansive monetary policy and above all exports will be vital to the improved economic prospects," Bundesbank President Jens Weidmann said in a statement.

Export-dependent German manufacturers above all have in recent months suffered from slowing global growth and trade and increased uncertainty over U.S.-led trade conflicts and Brexit.

Meanwhile the powerhouse economy has enjoyed low unemployment and a strong services sector, although economists point to signs industrial weakness is beginning to spread to other areas.

Boris Johnson's resounding victory in British parliamentary elections on Thursday could reduce one element of uncertainty.

The Conservative leader many now have the necessary freedom of maneuver to see through Brexit and strike a trade deal with the European Union after Britain's departure.

A decisive outcome in the UK would mean an "element of uncertainty which is probably loosening and will give us a bit more clarity," European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde said ahead of the results on Thursday.

In her maiden press conference, she also pointed more generally to "initial signs of stabilization in the growth slowdown" that has sapped Europe in recent months.

And even as Lagarde was speaking, U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted that he was "getting very close to a big deal with China", powering American stock markets to new highs.

Bundesbank Chief Weidmann nevertheless warned on Friday that "there remain sources of economic danger from abroad that could prolong and worsen the industrial downturn."

(Source: saudigazette.com.sa)

Preferential trade with Eurasia exceeds \$194m in a month

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — "In the current situation [the U.S. sanctions], the Eurasian countries have a very good potential [for trade] that we need to utilize this capacity to boost our exports and also to import our needed commodities," Mirashrafi said.

He also noted that the two sides of the agreement are trying to avoid using dollar in their economic exchanges and use their national currencies or other common currencies like the euro instead.

After several years of negotiations, Iran and EAEU reached a free trade agreement earlier this year and the agreement officially came into force on October 27.

Based on this agreement, about 840 commodity items are subject to preferential tariffs, which means tariffs on some goods are reduced and for some commodities, tariffs are levied.

Iran is a very important market in the region and development of ties with this

Int. transportation exhibition to kick off in Tehran today

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The fourth edition of Iran's International Exhibition of Transportation, Logistics and Related Industries will kick off at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Grand Prayer Campus (Mosalla) on Sunday, IRIB reported.

As reported, Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami and his deputy will attend the inauguration ceremony of the exhibit.

Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) along with the country's airliners will showcase their latest achievements in the aviation industry during the three-day event, Reza Jafarzadeh, the spokesman of CAO, said on Saturday.

He said the motto of this year's exhibition is "Smart, Stable and Efficient Transportation" emphasizing the significance of applying information technology in transportation and logistics



sector in a way to elevate efficiency and promote economic booming in different sectors of transportation including aviation, railway, maritime and road transportation.

Experts, university professors, researchers and investors all will gather together in the event to find the ways for the most use of scientific and expert capabilities for promotion of state-run and private sectors of the country, Jafarzadeh further said.

Istanbul hosts Iran-Turkey business forum

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board (locally known as DEIK) hosted an Iran-Turkey business forum in which the two sides discussed issues pertaining to bilateral trade.

As reported by the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) on Saturday, the event was attended by officials from both sides including Gholamhossein Jamili, a member of the board of directors of ICCIMA, Iranian Ambassador to Turkey Mohammad Farazmand, Head of Iran-Turkey Joint Chamber of Commerce Mehrdad Saadat, and representatives of several Iranian and Turkish companies.

In the forum, the two sides discussed ways of expanding trade ties and removing the current obstacles in the way of the two countries economic relations.

Speaking in the event, Jamili who headed the Iranian delegation attending the forum, called for the two sides to form joint ventures in order to expand their presence in the global markets.



Gholamhossein Jamili, a board member of ICCIMA, speaking in the Iran-Turkey business forum in Istanbul

Hungary's Central Bank plans to extend corporate bond buying program, say sources

Hungary's Central Bank plans to extend the 300 billion forint (\$989 million) program to buy corporate bonds it launched in July, with a decision possibly as soon as Tuesday, two central bank sources said.

Central Europe's most dovish central bank launched the bond purchases to improve the way its policies are transmitted to the economy and provide an alternative to bank financing, the main choice for companies in Hungary.

The bank started the purchases in September and has bought corporate bonds worth

about 140 billion forints so far, according to the latest figures on its website.

It has bought bonds from 10 companies, including energy group MOL and construction company Cordia, but more than two dozen companies have signed up to be eligible for the program so far.

Two central bank sources speaking on condition of anonymity said the bank was planning to extend the program shortly, pending approval by the rate-setting Monetary Council, which meets next Tuesday to discuss interest rates.

One source said there was a "good chance" the program would continue and a decision was due in the "not too distant future," but it was unclear if the extension could be agreed as soon as next week.

Another source said that if the issue was put on the agenda of the panel, it could make the decision at Tuesday's meeting, where no change is expected in rate policy, according to economists polled by Reuters.

Last month, the bank said the 300 billion forints allotted to the scheme could be exhausted by the start of next year due to

strong demand, but did not say whether the program would be extended with additional financing.

"If the funding is exhausted by the end of January, no one would want to run the risk of having any (bond) issuance being postponed because there is no funding available," one of the sources said.

The central bank has said the program was neutral with regard to its rate policy stance as it mops up the excess liquidity created with the bond purchases.

(Source: reuters.com)

The specters circling Latin America's banks

Headwinds have pounded Latin America and dented economic activity this year, but the outlook for the region's banking sector for 2020 is stable, Moody's said.

A forecast uptick in economic growth next year, solid profitability levels, reserve cushions and contained asset risk underpin the rating agency's assessment.

The region has been impacted by domestic policy uncertainty, fallout from the U.S.-China trade spat and social protests.

On the economic front, South American powerhouse Brazil is gaining strength, shaking off the fallout from the likes of political scandals and the commodity crash. And embattled neighbor Argentina may start to slowly stabilize if new President Alberto Fernández's plans to grow his heavily indebted nation out of the mire bear fruit. Colombia and Mexico should also gain strength, according to a forecast from the UN's regional economic commission Eclac.

Moody's outlines six themes, or risks, that will shape global credit in 2020 — three of which are seen as particularly relevant to Latin America: recession risk, lower-for-longer interest rates and political risk.

Regarding the first, Moody's said a worsening external environment could weigh on the region's lenders. "Potential external shocks emerging from a slowing global economy could affect banks' operating conditions," it said.

In terms of interest rates

In terms of interest rates, the agency said easing monetary policy in most Latin American countries will compress banks' margins. Countries including Chile, Brazil and Peru, with low-inflation environments, cut their key rates this year to spur activity. Latin America's banks, particularly Argentina's and Peru's, remain strong money-making operations, with



profitability above the global median. However, bank ratings are below the global median.

Sources of political risk are both global and domestic. The needle on the Latin American risk gauge has risen sharply amid social tensions in Chile, Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador, and policy uncertainty in Argentina and Mexico that has dampened investor appetite. In terms of risk emanating from outside the region's border, Moody's said: "Hostile global political environment could cause bouts of capital outflows and commodity price volatility."

The other three themes — or risks facing banks globally — identified by Moody's are disruptive technologies, trade tensions and ESG.

The IMF, in its October World Economic Outlook, expects

global growth to reach 3% this year, down from an earlier forecast of 3.4% and its lowest level since the global financial crisis in 2008.

Output is forecast to accelerate to 3.4% in 2020, "reflecting primarily a projected improvement in economic performance in a number of emerging markets in Latin America, the Middle East, and emerging and developing Europe that are under macroeconomic strain."

Regional banking federation Felaban, in a quarterly report, outlined the domestic problems facing the region and called for rejigging, rather than scrapping, economic models.

The "deteriorating political and social environment will mark an adverse trend which can negatively affect economic activity, investment, employment, and prospects," Felaban said.

In terms of remedies, Felaban echoed comments made by players such as Eclac.

"In some cases, structural reforms are needed that seek better income distribution, social mobility, education and integration with the world," Felaban said. "Institutions, education and judicial apparatus that solve the conflicts under clear rules are a must for everyone."

It called for consensus-building to draw up long-term policies that bear fruit in sustainable manner.

In a statement accompanying Eclac's annual report, the organization's executive secretary, Alicia Bárcena, said the region "needs policies to stimulate growth and reduce inequality."

The "current conditions require that fiscal policy be centered on the reactivation of growth and on responding to growing social demands," Bárcena said.

(Source: bnamerica.com)



country is of high significance for the EAEU members.

Signing the free trade agreement between

Iran and this union has laid the ground for the expansion of trade ties between the two sides.

Zahedan-Chabahar railway to be completed by Mar. 2021

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The railroad which is to connect Zahedan, the capital city of Iran's southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan, to Chabahar, a strategic port city in the province, will be completed by the end of the next Iranian calendar year (March 2021), the governor general of Sistan-Baluchestan announced on Saturday.

Ahmad-Ali Mouhebati further said that Zahedan-Chabahar railway is currently under construction in eight parts, IRNA reported.

Connecting the ports to the railway network is an issue seriously emphasized and followed up by Iran over the recent years, as the country is strongly pursuing the objective of boosting exports and transit via its ports.

Chabahar Port in southeast Iran is the most prioritized one for railway connection



as the port's exemption from the new round of the U.S. sanctions on the country is an opportunity for development of export, transit, and also transshipment.

Lying on the coast of the Gulf of Oman in Iran's southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province, Chabahar is the country's only oceanic port and given its strategic location in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) development of the port is of high significance for Iran.

Small-scale petchem plants, huge potentials for a brighter future

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — Having the world's second largest gas reserves, Iran has a great potential for expansion of its petrochemical industry which is playing a great role in the country's economy.

Considering the country's abundant supply of feedstock for the petrochemical complexes, Iran offers such products to the world markets with considerably lower prices compared to other major petrochemical producers, making them very competitive and sought after.

In the past few years, especially since the re-imposition of the U.S. sanctions and especially when petrochemical industry was added to the list of sanctions, many expected the petrochemical industry in Iran to be hugely affected by the sanctions, however the industry is thriving and despite some challenges and obstacles, it is strongly moving forward.

Small and medium-sized complexes comprise a big share of Iran's petrochemical industry and considering the focus of sanctions of major complexes, private companies and small-scaled plants could play a significant role in boosting the country's exports in this area.

So, to have a look into this aspect of the country's petrochemical industry, Tehran Times conducted an interview with Mehdi Pourqazi, former member of the board at Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) and the deputy head of Iran National Plastic and Polymer Industrial Association (INPIA). What comes below is a summary of our discussion.

■ The new era

According to Pourqazi, in the past two years the shift in the economic transactions with the neighboring countries has resulted to a boost in the exports of petrochemical and plastic products from Iran to the neighboring countries like Iraq and Afghanistan.

considering the country's current economic situation and the impact of the unjust U.S. sanctions the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) has been following a new strategy



based on which the country's petrochemical industry is moving away from exporting only base products and is diversifying its output to products with more added value. In other words, the petrochemical industry is moving toward expanding its exports basket rather than selling just raw materials, he explained. "One of the main steps which could help diversify the exports, is to support small complexes to join the exporters club," Pourqazi added.

In the past two years the exports of petrochemical products have witnessed a significant rise and although most of this increase is still only due to the great potentials of the country for producing base products, but the industry is moving in the right direction toward more value added products like compounds and Masterbatch.

■ Challenges and obstacles

Speaking about increasing exports, the official noted that one major issue which must be considered when talking about the petrochemical industry is the huge capacity of the country's small and medium-sized plastic and polymer producers, which has unfortunately

been relatively neglected so far.

Aside from the big complexes, one major obstacle in the way of rising the country's petrochemical exports, is in fact the weak presence of the small complexes in the exports markets.

"Problems like lack of information and knowledge about the destination markets, banking problems, issues regarding the access to foreign currencies with official rates and commitments for returning the allocated currency into NIMA [the country's Forex Management Integrated System]," he said.

He went on saying: "For instance the government expects the exporters to re-inject their foreign currency incomes into NIMA within a specific timeline. However considering the limited gateways for banking transaction with other countries under the sanctions and lack of proper channels for transferring foreign currency into the country, the exporters mostly face problems for doing so and we expect the government to support their activities through easing some of the regulations in this regard."

Some of our producers have already limited

their exports since they haven't been able to re-inject the committed foreign currency into NIMA, Pourqazi added.

Here we should note that the Iranian government provides the country's exporters with foreign currency at a lower exchange rate compared to the free market and in return it expects the exporters to return the allocated amount within a specific deadline.

■ The future

According to Pourqazi, currently, more than 55 petrochemical plants are active in Iran. The annual production capacity of these units, under normal conditions is over 60 million tons.

"Using the full capacity of these petrochemical complexes, the value of annual exports from this sector could reach over \$16 billion," he said.

Last year, Iran exported 20 million tons of petrochemical products worth more than \$10.6 billion. Major export destinations for Iranian petrochemical products have been the neighboring countries, including Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Afghanistan and East Asian countries, such as China.

"If the country's Sixth National Development Plan is fully implemented, revenues from petrochemical products sales could rise even to \$50 billion."

According to the provisions of the national development plan regarding the petrochemical industry, Iran should become the region's leading power in the industry. This goal requires both foreign investment and improvement in the country's domestic bodies.

"The petrochemical industry needs over \$85 billion of investment to reach its goals for developing the industry by the year 1404 (starts in March 2025). Given the U.S. sanctions on the oil and gas industry, and the recent sanctions on the petrochemical industry, achieving the goals of the Sixth Petrochemical Development Plan won't be easy, however our petrochemical industry can still thrive if the government shifts its focus and put more importance upon the small and medium-sized complexes," he said.

NISOC presents list of 7,500 products required to be domestically manufactured

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) has released a list of 7500 equipment items needed in the country's oil industry, to be manufactured by domestic producers, Shana reported.

The list was unveiled at the opening ceremony of the 11th Khuzestan Specialized Exhibition of Domestic Manufacturing of Petroleum and the 17th Drilling Industry Equipment Exhibition in the southwestern province on Friday.

As reported the list was presented in the form of a CD to the Iranian companies active in the industry with the aim of informing them of the industry's equipment requirements so that they could work on manufacturing them.

On the sidelines of the mentioned exhibition, NISOC also unveiled some new oil and gas industry equipment items which were recently indigenized by Iranian companies.

Organized by NISOC in collaboration with National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC), the 11th Khuzestan Specialized Exhibition of Domestic Manufacturing of Petroleum and the

17th Drilling Industry Equipment Exhibition are hosting 260 domestic firms at Ahvaz International Exhibition Center in the southwestern province of Khuzestan.

Earlier this month, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Iranian Association of Manufacturers of Oil Industry Equipment said nearly 85 percent of the country's oil industry equipment are produced based on indigenized knowledge and technology.

According to Sirous Talari, Iran has a capacity to export over \$5 billion worth of oil industry equipment and knowledge every year and the government should invest on such a great potential.

Back in August, National Iranian Oil Company announced that many of the company's contracts with domestic manufacturers of oil industry equipment had reached over 70 percent of physical progress.

NIOC has been signing deals with capable domestic companies for manufacturing all kinds of oil industry equipment, including down hole tools and equipment, pumps, types of drill bits, all kinds of control and safety valves, and accessory equipment, as well as various pipe types, explosion-proof electro motors, turbines, com-



pressors, alloy steels, drilling measuring tools, and etc.

Following the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions and the problems caused by high volatility and rising exchange rates in the country's currency market, Iran's oil ministry was faced with some problems regarding the supply of necessary equipment in the oil industry, so it applied new strategies to focus more on domestic production.

OPEC+ becomes OPEC- with oil production cuts

By Kostis Geropoulos

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other major producers led by Russia, a group known as OPEC+, have reportedly agreed to make further small cuts in oil production to boost crude oil prices.

Meeting in Vienna on 5 December, the cartel and Russia decided to deepen recurring cuts over the last three years by an additional 500,000 barrels a day through the end of March 2020.

These would lead to total adjustments of 1.7 million barrels per day, OPEC said in a press release.

In addition, several participating countries, mainly Saudi Arabia, will continue their additional voluntary contributions, leading to adjustments of more than 2.1 million barrels, OPEC said, adding that this additional adjustment would be effective as of 1 January 2020 and is subject to full conformity by every country participating in the Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) reached on 10 December 2016, between OPEC and non-OPEC producing countries.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said Moscow's quota would be 300,000 barrels per day during the first three months of 2020. This measurement excludes gas condensate — a high-value light crude extracted as a by-product of gas production, Alexei Kokin, a senior oil and gas analyst at UralSib Financial Corp in Moscow, told New Europe by phone on 11 December.



■ Extra condensate volumes

"It was a surprise, to me at least it was a surprise, but it was a smart move in Russia's part because Russia also got OPEC+ to agree that extra condensate volumes would be excluded from the quota so Russia's extra cut would be very modest basically. I don't know how much but it won't be equal to the 70,000 barrels nominal cut. It would probably half that amount, even less," Kokin said, adding the cost of this decision to Russia is modest and the benefit could be pretty large if price stays where it is for the next quarter, maybe half a year.

What's probably surprising is that Russia got OPEC to agree to this condensate revision. Although it's only fair because OPEC does not include condensate in its quotas," the UralSib analyst explained. Russia has a lot of condensate. However, Kokin said, what it matters here is not the absolute amount but rather the change.

"Basically, if you look at OPEC it also has quite a bit of condensate, we are talking roughly 5.5 million barrels according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). That's quite a lot given that they are producing less than 30 million barrels of oil. So, we are talking close to 20 percent.

■ The Russia's amount

But OPEC does not vary this amount much because the condensate is a byproduct of gas and apparently it is OPEC's condensate amount it does not change very much but Russia's amount which is much more modest, we're talking about roughly less than one million per day, they happen to be increasing right now," Kokin said, noting that Russia's largest independent gas producer, Novatek, is increasing output at its Arctic Yamal liquefied natural gas (LNG) project.

"It's not so much to exclude condensate altogether, it has to exclude these extra vol-

umes so that Russia's condensate volumes could grow whereas its crude volumes could more or less stay the same or as they used to be. Once you remove this extra condensate from the calculation of what Russia has to cut from the October 2018 level, then you get a reduced obligation to cut," Kokin said.

"It's a pretty good outcome for Russia for now at least in the short term," Kokin said. The next OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial Meeting will be held on 6 March 2020. "What happens in the next meeting will also be crucial for the rest of the year," he said. He opined that in 2020, the second quarter in terms of demand-supply balance is going to be worse than the first quarter so tough decisions will have to be made probably. Asked if oil prices are going to increase, Kokin said, "We will see how it works out because everybody is hoping for the best, including obviously Russia and Saudi Arabia".

Riyadh and Moscow have led OPEC+ agreements to voluntary reduce supply since 2017 to counter increasing U.S. shale production, which has become the world's biggest producer and is not taking part in cuts.

Saudi Arabia and Russia are just hoping that the excess crude in demand won't be that significant and America will grow relatively slowly and maybe there will be delays in new projects, Kokin said, adding: "Maybe this Norwegian field won't grow very fast and maybe the Brazilian project won't come on stream, that sort of thing, so basically is a way and see approach."

(Source: neweurope.eu)

Africa's 'first fully solar-powered village' wants to be a model for a renewable future

By Emma Reynolds

Near Morocco's sunny Atlantic coast, the tiny community of Id Mjahdi is being touted as Africa's first completely solar-powered village.

Solar power has the potential to become one of Africa's top energy sources, according to the International Energy Agency, but more infrastructure needs to be installed -- of all solar power in use globally, less than 1% currently comes from the continent.

Morocco is leading efforts to fulfill that potential. It already meets 35 percent of its electricity needs from renewables and aims to increase its use of renewable energy to 52 percent by 2030, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

"Morocco is unquestionably a leader in sustainable energy," says Francesco La Camera, director-general of IRENA.

The country already has the world's largest solar farm, the Noor-Ouarzazate complex. Now, Id Mjahdi, on the outskirts of the city of Essaouira, is being pitched as a blueprint for how to power remote villages that would be expensive to connect to the national electricity grid.

While many other African villages use solar power to some extent, Id Mjahdi uses it for all its energy needs.

When Moroccan solar power company Cleanergy came up with the idea of testing a sustainable model for electrifying remote communities, it looked for a village "where they need everything," according to the company's founder, Mohamed Lasry.

■ Villagers relied on candles

Before the scheme began, villagers relied on candles for light, and they typically could afford only around an hour of candlelight for working or studying in the evenings. They would burn tree bark for heating and cooking, which was bad for their health, says Lasry. Id Mjahdi did not even have a nearby source of water, and girls in particular often missed school days to walk several miles to a well, says Lasry.

The first step in the \$188,000 project was to build a water tower for the community. The next stage was to install a power station with 32 solar photovoltaic panels, which generate 8.32 kilowatts of electricity for distribution via a mini-grid.

The power station is connected to around 20 homes in the village, serving more than 50 people. Each house was provided with a fridge, water heater, television, oven and an outlet to charge devices. The solar network has a battery that can supply up to five hours of electricity outside daylight hours.

The project was also assisted by Cluster Solaire, a Moroccan non-profit that supports green-tech companies, which enlisted financial help from the Moroccan Agency for Solar Energy and French businesses Intermarché and Petit Olivier.

In October, Cleanergy unveiled several solar-powered buildings -- a hammam (public baths), a workshop where women study and produce argan oil, and a preschool for children between the ages of three to six, which enables their mothers to work.

While the children play and draw, 30 women -- many of whom did not go to school as children -- learn reading and writing, train for scholarships, and use traditional techniques to create argan oil, crushing kernels from local argan trees. Cosmetics company Petit Olivier buys all the argan oil the women produce, giving them an income.

■ The presentation of project

"People that were not working at all and not having any sustainable revenue, the fact that they are working in their village and creating value is very important and very, very valuable," says Fatima El Khalifa, from Cluster Solaire, who is giving a presentation on the project at the COP25 climate summit in Madrid this week. "We created an association like a cooperative at the village and they own the whole production."

The association takes a small fee from the argan oil sales to maintain the solar network, and men and women in the village were trained by Cleanergy in how to manage it.

Lasry says the mini-grid is simple to replicate for villages of 100 to 1,000 people, and it is sustainable, because locals can maintain it themselves. "It is possible to duplicate anywhere in the world," he says. "It is not a complex system, it is easy to do, it is robust."

Cluster Solaire is now seeking funding to build more solar villages. El Khalifa says there are 800 villages without electricity in Morocco alone and the World Bank estimates that 840 million people lack access to electricity worldwide.

Around 650 million people will still lack access to electricity in 2030, nine out of 10 of them in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the World Bank. It says mini-grids could be the most cost-effective solution for remote areas with a high enough demand, and could provide electricity for 500 million people by 2030.

"Our plan is to show (Id Mjahdi) as an example," says Lasry.

"People change -- they have more time, they can have money, they can go to the market, they can buy what they need."

For deprived communities seeking economic stability that won't hurt the environment, this solar village shines bright.

(Source: edition.cnn.com)

Biggest Pakistan LNG import terminal plans 2021 start as demand surges

Pakistan's Energas plans to start the nation's largest liquefied natural gas import terminal in 2021 to help meet soaring demand once it gets the green light to build the project.

Energas, a consortium of large domestic users, aims to begin construction of the \$140 million to \$160 million facility next year, Chief Executive Officer Anser Ahmed Khan said in an interview. The project is being supported by Exxon Mobil Corp.

Energas and Exxon first proposed the terminal to Pakistan's previous government in 2017, at that time aiming to complete it by this year. The venture is one of two that submitted bids in October for regulators' permission to build terminals and tap demand that is expected to outgrow import capacity.

"There is a lot of demand in Pakistan and it will just grow," said Khan, who was vice president for LNG at EDF Energy Ltd. in London before taking up his current role in 2017. The "market is price sensitive so we need to play that card right."

The Energas proposal still faces several hurdles, including obtaining regulatory approval. It also hasn't signed off-take deals for much of its capacity and hasn't made a final investment decision. It has received bids for a floating storage and regasification unit that will be connected to Port Qasim terminal in Karachi, and will award the contract by March, Khan said Wednesday.

Taber Energy, the Mitsubishi Corp. unit that also applied to build an LNG terminal, couldn't be reached for comment.

The two ventures are vying to tap into what's expected to be one of the world's bright spots for LNG imports, with purchases set to quadruple by 2040 amid stagnating domestic production and robust demand, BloombergNEF forecast last week in a report.

(Source: jwenergy.com)

East Asia at the glance

Economic blueprint reassures Chinese public



GLOBALTIMES — The annual Central Economic Work Conference wrapped up on Thursday. Going through a statement released after the meeting, one would be deeply impressed with the central government's objective judgment on the economic situation and its determination to face various challenges. The measures put forward during the conference connote a strong spirit of seeking truth from facts. Next year must be a year of hard work and everything would be pushed forward in an orderly way.

For a big country like China, what it needs to avoid the most is the risk of large systemic fluctuations in the economy. The Central Economic Work Conference is believed to have reassured the Chinese people. The Chinese system has a strong planning ability, which injects stable development into the Chinese economy. This is a major advantage of China amid global uncertainties. Cold winds were blown into the world economy. But the Central Economic Work Conference has come up with a promising plan which embodies new development concepts. It put forward concrete measures to fight the "three tough battles," continue to improve the people's livelihood, propel industrial and consumption upgrades, and promote high-quality development. Deepening economic system reform has set a clearer requirement for a high-standard market system.

This is China. While ruling parties in many countries are busy bragging about themselves and different parties are engaging in fierce political struggles, China's ruling party has elaborately charted a course for the country's economic and social development and is doing its utmost to create conditions conducive to the rapid development of the country. The basic orientation of Chinese politics is different from that of some high-profile countries. While the latter focuses on partisan struggles, China emphasizes problem-solving and expanding consensus in society.

The Chinese public has high demands on the ruling party, hoping that it's faithful to its words and firm in its purposes. Empty slogans are unpopular in China. The ruling party knows this very well. Therefore, the work conference this time stressed the importance of putting an end to all forms of formalism and bureaucracy and stated that the implementation of new development concepts should be taken as an important yardstick to test leaders at all levels. The meeting has shown that the central government fully understands the call of society for economic development, prioritizes people's demands and has played a central role in uniting, inspiring and leading society to overcome various challenges. China is a powerful community that can constantly unleash its strength to meet difficulties. We have clear goals and capabilities.

There have been many discussions on whether China's economic growth would fall below 6 percent next year. If we can put the spirit of the Central Economic Work Conference into practice, the continuous improvement of quality and efficiency of the Chinese economy will gain momentum and little attention will be paid to the 6 percent growth benchmark. The Chinese economy will constantly rise to new heights and the Chinese people will benefit from it.

■ US efforts to block Huawei futile

Telefonica Germany, one of Germany's three major telecom carriers, decided on Wednesday to use Nokia and Huawei equipment to build 5G network, putting the US warning aside. The company said its cooperation with Huawei was pending approval from the German government. The German government has said that it would not exclude any company from 5G network roll-out, stressing that it will verify the security of all companies participating in Germany's 5G network construction.

Washington has done all it can to block Huawei equipment from entering European countries' 5G networks, even threatening to stop sharing intelligence with allies that reject the warning. The US has strong control over Europe in terms of security, but it fails to get those allies to cooperate on Huawei. Its credibility will suffer, something Washington clearly did not expect. The root cause is that the Americans are too overbearing and unreasonable this time, seriously violating the vital interests of European countries.

Washington seriously exaggerated the security risks of using Huawei equipment, and placed some groundless charges on Huawei. Europeans can tell that Washington's crackdown on Huawei is driven by concerns that the company's rise could pose a challenge to US technological hegemony, and that the US will not accept a Chinese company that is riding high in 5G technology, not that Huawei's equipment really poses an insurmountable security risk. More importantly, Huawei is absolutely ahead in 5G network technology. Now to build an efficient and cheap 5G network, it is impossible to bypass Huawei. America's geopolitical mind-set decides that in order to kill Huawei, it would rather slow down 5G. However, European countries have different interests in this respect from the US. They do not want to delay the construction of 5G networks. Giving up Huawei equipment means that their 5G networks are inefficient, slow and expensive.

The transatlantic relationship between the US and Europe, in which the US protects Europe in security and looks after Europe in economic terms, is shifting. The US has become more selfish. Europe's geopolitical perception of Huawei's rise is different from that of the US, and an extra Huawei option would undoubtedly do more good than harm to Europe. Washington's pressure on Europe not to use Huawei's equipment breaks the rules, dictating to the latter on matters that are entirely within European sovereignty. In particular, the US ambassador to Germany has hurt the feelings of the German public by bossing around, which have touched German sovereignty and national dignity. Some Europeans will naturally think that if this time they listen to the US, what should they do in the future?

As long as one European telecommunications

carrier uses Huawei equipment to build 5G network, its technological achievements will be clearly displayed there, with a wider demonstration effect. Because European and US telecommunication manufacturers have almost no chance to immediately catch up with Huawei in technology, this makes the US' blocking of Huawei face constant market pressure.

The campaign to kill Huawei has fully exposed US' moral flaws. If it goes ahead, it will suffer further political losses. America's 5G network will also lag behind other developed regions in the world in some important technical indicators. Allies will not be willing to accompany its paranoia and backwardness, such reluctance will be manifested in various ways.

■ Capitalism is losing appeal to Chinese

As China has stood on a higher level of development, it is having a different way of dealing with, and understanding Western countries. It's fair to say the Chinese people now have the most profound and objective understanding of capitalism. The US is representative of capitalism. Many Chinese used to adore the US. But with China and the US increasingly having interdependent interests, the Chinese people have begun to understand the US from a new perspective. We find that the US, though powerful, has many problems and made many mistakes. The US House of Representatives is moving to impeach the president.

If it were long ago, many Chinese would have regarded it a good example of checks and balances. But now, more people believe the US is messing with itself again. The two camps that support and oppose the impeachment fall along Democrat and Republican lines. US government shutdowns caused by ceaseless partisan squabbling in recent years have exposed the inefficiency of the American system.

Documents disclosed by US media recently reveal that the US government has been deceiving the public about the war in Afghanistan. Although it realized the war had become unwinnable, it kept saying the US was making progress, extending the war to 18 years at a cost of \$2 trillion and resulting in mass casualties, without bringing any benefits to the US. The US democratic system has failed to prevent the country from making such a blunder, but has made it quite difficult to fix. The recklessness, impulse and irrationality of US policies are particularly shown in the country's dealings with China. The US has failed to base their policies on facts and has misjudged China. Many of its practices are not in line with US long-term interests.

Let's have a look at other capitalist countries around the world. India, whose situation was similar to that of China decades ago, has fallen behind China in development. A majority of the developing countries in the world have adopted a political system of capitalism, but only a few have achieved rapid development and good governance. Most have a lackluster performance, and some have even slipped into turmoil.

All these at least tell the Chinese that capitalism is not a panacea. The economic and social achievements of Western countries cannot prove the institutional advantages of capitalism. And many problems appearing in developed countries have reflected the capitalist system's institutional flaws. The image of the capitalist system now is the most complex, and it's constantly declining. The Hong Kong unrest has taught the Chinese mainland society a "political lesson." In the originally prosperous Hong Kong society, huge systematic loopholes were lurking. As a result, the city is unable to withstand turmoil, and its rule of law has been ruined easily.

We are living in a highly ideological world. A political system is a basic structure developed by each country. But the competition between nations has highlighted the negation of each other's political systems as a means of struggle.

In the past few decades, China's high degree of opening-up has expanded into the ideological field. The country has been unswervingly following the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics while learning from the world. Through opening-up, we have had a close look at capitalism in all its forms and have observed various problems. Meantime, the US and other Western countries have been out of touch with reality, blindly believing in the "end of history" and demonizing China politically.

What matters to a country most is perhaps its ability to reform. No country's governance system is perfect. With the changes of the times, continuous reform is the guarantee of a country's progress. In terms of reform capacity, the Western capitalist countries, such as the US, are far from role models to the world.

■ China will lead new Asian order, 'Asian century'

Britain was scheduled to go to the polls on Thursday for the country's 2019 general election. Our era is undergoing tremendous changes - Britain, the once all-powerful empire, can only retreat to the sad situation of using Brexit to attract global attention today. A tediously long farce has been staged in Britain since the 2016 Brexit referendum, and many people have already become impatient and indifferent. Is the UK declining? Probably yes. But in the mid-19th century, the UK took the lead in completing the first industrial revolution and quickly became the leader of the world. Compared with today's global status of the US, the UK used to be more competitive back then.

However, compared to the bright period of the Victorian era, today's UK no longer leads the world in military strength, political system, economy or culture. The time when the sun never set on the British Empire has long passed. Brexit has

further dragged the UK into a downward spiral. Brexit shows the defect in the UK's political system. Politicians transfer too much power to the people only to protect the system and fawn on the people for the sake of political interests. This has made Brexit a complete farce and a dilemma. Back in the 19th century, Europe regarded the then backward Asia as the opposite of civilization. But in the 21st century, the UK's decline seems to reflect Asia's rise. As Asia rises, global wealth and power will accelerate to transfer to the continent.

The Financial Times published an article in March titled "The Asian century is set to begin," in which it said 21 of the world's 30 largest cities are in Asia, and Asian economies will be larger than the rest of the world in 2020. Indeed, people are now looking eastward because Asia shows a strong momentum in economic growth.

We must admit that the UK, in its heyday, left many precious legacies for later periods such as industrial technology, management model and the common law system.

Meanwhile, the once splendid empire has also left many troubles. For example, colonial Britain is responsible for many border issues in Asia, such as China-India border disputes and Pakistan-Afghanistan border disputes. These unsolved problems are still tormenting these Asian countries.

Solving these remaining problems is the key to Asia's rise in the future. China and other Asian countries should seize the historic opportunity, focus on their own development and try to let Asian countries have a larger say in the world. When Asian countries stop following the West, the real "Asian century" will begin. China is the most important and the fastest-rising country in Asia. As the world's second largest economy, China will play an important role in building a new Asian order and maintaining peace and stability in the future.

■ U.S. could determine unlikely 'China-Russia alliance'

Earlier this month, US magazine The National Interest published an article entitled "Donald Trump's Greatest National Security Threat: A China-Russia Alliance."

This statement doesn't come as a surprise since Polish-American political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski suggested two decades ago in his book The Grand Chessboard that the US should stay vigilant about the alliance of rival countries in Eurasia. The alliance that Brzezinski pointed out, more specifically, was the possible alliance between China and Russia. US political scientist Samuel Huntington also expressed his concern about the probable alliance among Islamic civilization, Orthodox civilization and Confucian civilization in his book The Clash of Civilizations.

Since Trump took office, he has been emphasizing superpower competition. In his first National Security Strategy, issued in 2017, China and Russia have already been listed as "revisionist powers" and "challengers" to the US. So, is it well-reasoned that the perceived China-Russia alliance is becoming the biggest national security threat to the US? Is the so-called alliance a real nightmare or a figment of imagination of the US?

There have been ups and downs in China-Russia relations over the past seven decades. For quite a long time, Western countries have been speculating about a possible establishment of an alliance between China and Russia. However, both Beijing and Moscow have already declared multiple times that their relations are a partnership rather than an alliance. There is no way back to the China-Soviet Union alliance in the Cold War era.

Based on history and the current international situation, China and Russia have pioneered a new type of relationship featuring non-alliance, non-confrontation and non-targeting at any third party. Although there is close cooperation between the two countries in many fields, such as politics, economy, security and culture, they are partners instead of allies, which the leaders of both countries have made clear.

Fu Ying, chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee of China's National People's Congress, wrote in US magazine Foreign Affairs in 2016 that "China has no interest in a formal alliance with Russia, nor in an anti-US or anti-Western bloc of any kind. Rather, Beijing hopes that the two neighbors can maintain their relations in a way that will provide a safe environment for the two countries to achieve their development goals and to support each other through mutually beneficial cooperation, offering a model for how major countries can manage their differences and cooperate

in ways that strengthen the international system."

Military alliance is an important form of international security cooperation. Yet its drawbacks have been exposed after the Cold War. The existing military alliances, especially those of the US, are mostly the remnants of the Cold War. There are very few new alliances formed among other countries after the period, which mirrors that military alliances are no longer compatible with the needs of the times. Forming an alliance will weaken the strategic autonomy of both China and Russia.

Security cooperation is one of the components in relations among countries. Close national security cooperation does not equal a military alliance. Nowadays, the security cooperation between China and Russia deals with the conventional and unconventional security threats, protecting the two countries, the regions they are in as well as the world. In fact, China also has close security cooperation with many other countries, such as Pakistan and Kazakhstan, but the country has also articulated those bilateral relations as featuring non-alliance and non-targeting at any third party.

Currently, the world is generally peaceful and stable. Yet conventional and unconventional security threats are entangled. No country can cope with them alone. Moreover, unconventional threats are spreading in a borderless way, which makes military alliance of no use. Thus, security cooperation is a viable solution. The reason why China follows the non-alignment policy, promotes partnership rather than alliance, is to embrace the new type of security cooperation rather than the traditional military alliance. Moscow also sees the partnership with Beijing as the best option for itself. The two have also learned a lesson from their previous alliance.

China, the US and Russia are regarded as the three most important forces in international arena. If there will be an alliance between China and Russia, it will definitely trigger a chain reaction in relations among the trio, which could possibly increase military tensions and do more harm than good.

On the whole, forming alliances is a strategy based on self-interest and mutual interest. But it is not a wise choice for both China and Russia in the foreseeable future. The US definitely does not want to see an alliance between its "challengers," which can be a huge threat to its hegemony. Even though the US is well aware that China and Russia will not form any alliance in the near future, it still tends to hype up such speculation due to its pursuit of absolute security.

With increasing global uncertainty and instability, the international order is facing more challenges. Intensifying collaboration between China and Russia is a response to US unilateralism, as it is gradually damaging the international system. In other words, whether an alliance between China and Russia alliance would be formed some day in the future, though it is unlikely now, could depend heavily on the US.

■ Does the US have shortage of philosophers?

The US can boast of a good many world renowned scientists, skilled diplomats, top sportsmen and numerous arts and culture icons. There is no shortage of military strategists or writers either. Yet this promised land seems to run low on philosophers.

This wealthiest country on the Earth has the creme de la creme from all walks of life, and top notch professionals command the best salaries. All types of professionals except philosophers have a market value in the US. They don't have much of a podium, and have a small fan base. Not to mention, their work is not up to American standards. With just a pinch of exaggeration, I'd say, the Americans are running a deficit in philosophy.

Is philosophy that important?

Of course, it is. Philosophy is the guiding principle of governance based on the premises of which citizens bond and countries deals with foreign relations. On state level, a philosophical governor will not be blinded by pure interests. On personal level, man with philosophical thinking has his own compass to navigate through the mist of ideologies and seemingly contradicting behaviors. The way the US has been conducting its foreign affairs lately indicates its lack of philosophical wisdom in foreign policy. We can compare how differently the US and China deal with conflicts. The philosophical foundation of China seeks common ground despite the differences; do unto others as you would have others do unto you; promises must be kept and action must be

resolute. What Washington seems to act upon are totally different - Take it or leave it; Fan the fire of colored revolution in order to impose US values; Retreat from international forums breaching the trust of its own people.

It seems quite obvious by comparing these two countries that the US way of thinking only serves to irritate its opponents and does no good in resolving conflicts.

History has shown that governments with little philosophical wisdom act on a whim. They are unpredictable and irresponsible. Their actions cannot be explained by logic and they tend to ignore the consequences.

Some will argue the Americans have their own set of philosophical thinking on democracy, freedom, market economy and so on. Yet as if designed by a wanton child, their policies are confusing and opaque, unhinged from the beneficial roots of philosophy. Even though there are traces of pragmatism in international relations, these short-lived policies only show how myopic the statesmen are.

On the contrary, developing countries such as China pay much attention to philosophical research, based on which we explore how to best amplify the advantage of our social system and how to counter the negative effect of our disadvantages. Any sensible statesman will recognize philosophical wisdom is in effect a form of productivity, a reflection of a country's soft power and an indispensable tool for policymakers. It has to be stated with much regret that although the US is a giant in the field of science, it is a dwarf in philosophical thinking. And it is unfortunate not only for its own people but beyond.

■ Macao proves 'one country, two systems' right

While it is challenged in Hong Kong, the "one country, two systems" principle prospers in China's other special administrative region (SAR), Macao, a city that enjoys political stability, rule of law, and has seen remarkable development and orderly integration into China's system. After 20 years of development following its return to China, Macao has been more confident with bright prospects. The Chinese central government has been seeking to develop the city as a bridge that links China and the West in terms of economy, trade and culture. China is also committed to the policy for the Macao people to govern Macao, with patriots playing the principal role. Thanks to that, the society in Macao has aligned its local perspectives and interests with those of the Chinese mainland, and is proactive to be part of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The city has thus become a unique and important source for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Macao's success stems from the "one country, two systems" principle. When Macao just returned to China, its security and economy were in a bad shape. That image has totally changed as the city is comprehensively supported by the central government in policies and is enjoying a high degree of autonomy, which is ensured by the Macao Basic Law, including independence in formulating its own policy to develop the local entertainment and recreation industry.

Given that Macao's development could be limited due to its land resources, the central government and authorities of Guangdong Province have launched a slew of measures to solve the problems the city faces. Under the "one country, two systems" principle, the central government also supports the Macao SAR government in promoting certain industries with its own characteristics to improve its international status, seeking to build the city into an international entertainment hub, a platform for commercial exchanges between China and Portugal, and a stage for China-West cultural interactions. Macao people's patriotic recognition of China is the foundation of sound governance in the city both before and after the city's return. The Macao Basic Law was formulated based on Hong Kong's experiences but with a more meticulous and rational design with regard to democracy. Besides, the implementation of Article 23 of the Basic Law and judicial reform, which excluded foreign judges in Macao from taking charge of national security-related cases, have helped avoid social unrest.

The social security and welfare system in Macao has been successful in solving problems of people's livelihood and protecting vulnerable groups. This lends stability to society and mitigates social contradictions. In contrast, the unrest in Hong Kong exposed contradictions and confrontations in the city, which has seen external interference and "color revolution"-style tumult. Hong Kong's economy, international status, and the influence left behind by British rulers have decided it won't be an easy task to bring sound governance to the city. Moreover, the society in Hong Kong has put too much attention to pursuing general election under "complete autonomy," and this has further split the society.

In Hong Kong, problems such as real estate hegemony and the wealth gap are still left unanswered while having led to increasingly radicalized social movements. Not to mention that outside forces have been meddling in the city and international financial speculators who want to take advantage of the unrest to do a "big short" in Hong Kong are waiting for an opportunity.

With the 20th anniversary of Macao's return to China just round the corner, the above analysis and comparison between the two SARs might help the central government plan further moves to better promote "one country, two systems" principle, which aims at national unity, economic modernization, system modernization, and integrated development of a community of shared future for mankind. What Macao achieved in the past 20 years has shown that "one country, two systems" principle is scientific and feasible. It can also be a useful benchmark for Hong Kong and the reunification of Taiwan with the motherland. ➔ 11

The crimes of the Zionist occupation regime continue

By Mohammadreza Farahzadi

TEHRAN — The Zionist regime continues its crimes against the people and the land of Palestine. In such circumstances, we see the silence of international institutions against the atrocities and crimes of Tel Aviv. However, in some media outlets around the world, there are analyzes that criticize the Zionist approach and treatment of the Palestinian people, some of which we will review:

Israel's Scheme To Defund the BDS Movement
IN THESE TIMES reported, AS END-OF-THE-YEAR FUND-RAISING REACHED A FEVER PITCH in December 2018, the account that the BDS National Committee (BNC) was using to receive donations became disabled. The BNC—the Palestinian group that leads the global movement to boycott, sanction and divest from Israel as leverage against human rights abuses—immediately suspected the Israeli government. The BNC's account was with Donorbox, a fundraising platform used by thousands of organizations. Donorbox explained in a statement that, while it had nothing against the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, a letter it received from Shurat HaDin—Israel Law Center accused the BNC of ties to terrorism, and Donorbox closed the BNC's account while “reviewing evidence.” Shurat HaDin has deep ties to the Israeli government.

An employee of Donorbox agreed to speak with In These Times on condition of anonymity, saying he feared for his personal safety because those involved have connections to Israeli intelligence and Palestinian political factions. “Shurat HaDin pressured one of our payment processors, which pressured us,” he wrote in an email. The BNC quickly found an alternative to Donorbox and lost less than 12 hours of fundraising time, but the shutdown sent a stark signal: The Israeli government and its allies are coming for the BDS movement's financial infrastructure. “[Shurat HaDin is] pursuing McCarthyite legal warfare,” said Omar Barghouti, co-founder of the BDS movement, in a statement at the time. “[It's] a desperate attempt to undermine our ability to challenge Israel's decades-old regime of apartheid and oppression.”

The tactic fits into a larger trend of cross-border attacks on civil society waged by repressive governments. China has reportedly spied on and intimidated activists in Europe working against policies targeting its Uighur Muslim minority, and Saudi Arabia has reportedly tried to hack into the phones of Amnesty International and dissidents living overseas.

In These Times has found that the account shutdown is the fruit of a much larger global campaign of litigation against the BDS movement. In filing lawsuits and legal threats, the Israeli government has cooperated with pro-Israel nonprofits around the world—backed, in some cases, by tax-subsidized donations from Americans, including Christian Zionists. Since 2013, in addition to at least two legal threats targeting the movement's financial infrastructure, Shurat HaDin filed at least five complaints or lawsuits against boycott advocates and threatened to file two more. Shurat HaDin's U.S. targets ranged from the Presbyterian Church to the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America to Airbnb. Both Shurat HaDin and the International Legal Forum (another Israeli group with ties to the Israeli government) appear to be escalating their activities in the United States, according to In These Times' investigation. In July, the Berkman Law Office, a New York firm, registered as a foreign agent for Shurat HaDin. In May, the Zionist Advocacy Center, a pro-Israel legal group run by New York lawyer David Abrams, registered as a foreign agent for the International Legal Forum. Documents filed as part of that registration show that Abrams will be assisting the group in “submitting reports of terrorist connections to financial services firms and prosecuting authorities.”

THE CALL FOR BOYCOTTS, DIVESTMENT, and sanctions originated with a coalition of Palestinian civil society groups—refugees, women's groups, unions and others—in 2005, modeled on the global movement against apartheid in South Africa. The movement has three demands: an end to Israel's occupation and separation wall, equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees and descendants of refugees expelled by Israeli forces during Israel's founding in 1948. Until those demands are met, BDS calls for boycotting and divesting from Israel and companies that violate Palestinian rights, as well as for international sanctions on Israel, such as ending military and free trade agreements.

The movement has successfully focused international attention on Israel's blockade of Gaza and its system of military occupation and settlement-building on Palestinian land. In the United States, the movement has enjoyed a recent surge in prominence—and an accompanying backlash. In 2018, Reps. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) and Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.) endorsed BDS, becoming the first two federal elected officials to support boycotting Israel. In July, Congress overwhelmingly passed a bill condemning BDS, with all but 16 Democrats voting in favor. However, the Democratic Party rallied behind Tlaib and Omar a month later when Israel banned the pair from visiting Israel and Palestine. The BDS movement threatens to become a growing public relations problem for Israel's carefully cultivated image as a liberal democracy, which is how BDS found itself in the crosshairs of the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs. The cabinet-level office is devoted to combatting threats identified by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government, ranging from Iran to the Palestinians to the BDS movement, and draws on the resources of Israel's national intelligence agency, the Mossad.

The Ministry finances and leads a campaign of online trolling, legal harassment and intelligence-gathering against BDS activists worldwide, according to investigative reports by Israeli newspaper Haaretz and the Qatari-funded English-language news agency Al Jazeera, among other outlets. BuzzFeed, for example, reported in September 2018 that the U.S. conservative mega-donor Sheldon Adelson had helped fund a “digital political astroturfing” app called Act.IL, created by ex-Israeli intelligence officers in partnership with the Israeli government, in which users are rewarded for completing pro-Israel “missions” online. Missions include arguable harassment of BDS proponents, such as petitioning an employer to fire a pro-Palestinian activist or posting the identities of George Washington University students who confidentially voted to support BDS.

“[The Ministry's] attacks on the BDS movement are part of a larger campaign to stifle the growing support for Palestinian rights, using dirty tactics including cyberbullying and false legal claims that intimidate and try to silence criticism of



Israeli policy,” says Rebecca Vilkomerson, who was executive director of the pro-BDS Palestine solidarity group Jewish Voice for Peace for ten years. “These disingenuous attacks—including anti-BDS legislation at the state and national level—lead directly to violations of our First Amendment right to free speech.”

In These Times has determined that, starting late in 2018, the Ministry teamed up with Shurat HaDin and the International Legal Forum to shut down pro-BDS financial accounts. Representatives of both Shurat HaDin and the International Legal Forum confirmed to In These Times that they collaborate with Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs, and according to Israeli government documents reviewed by In These Times, the International Legal Forum receives direct funding from the Ministry. But the full story of exactly why the BNC's Donorbox account was shut down didn't emerge until this past June. In a report sent to journalists, the Ministry revealed that an “undisclosed economic campaign” over the past two years had resulted in the closure of 30 financial accounts belonging to organizations as varied as the BNC and Al-Haq, a globally respected Palestinian human rights NGO.

In the Donorbox case, Shurat HaDin and the Ministry argued that the BNC was linked to terrorism by its connection to the Council of National and Islamic Forces in Palestine. The Council is made up of the leading Palestinian political factions, including militant groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which are on the U.S. State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations. This information wasn't secret and didn't require some sophisticated intelligence operation; the Council is listed as a member on BNC's website. Shurat HaDin alleged that BNC fundraising could be in violation of the U.S. law that prohibits “material support” to terrorism, a statute the ACLU says is overly broad and potentially criminalizes freedom of association and humanitarian support in areas where militant groups operate. The Center for Constitutional Rights dismissed Shurat HaDin's complaint to Donorbox as relying on “unsupported and false claims that funds raised by the BNC ‘may’ go to groups designated as terrorist organizations by the U.S. government.”

Meanwhile, the anonymous Donorbox employee tells In These Times, “Our company does not have the capability to investigate if U.S.-sanction[ed] groups are working with BDS. Thus, we are stuck between a rock and the hard place.”

The open collaboration between the Ministry and Israeli nonprofit groups to shut down the financial infrastructure of Palestinian rights groups is a new front in Israel's battle against the nonviolent BDS movement. But it isn't the first time Israel's government has used hardball tactics to combat BDS. ISRAEL'S MINISTRY OF STRATEGIC AFFAIRS was founded in 2006, but Israel didn't pay much attention to the nascent BDS movement until late 2009-10, according to Yossi Kuperwasser, who served as director general of the ministry from 2009-14.

That period was a turning point for efforts to hold Israel accountable for its policies toward Gaza, the coastal strip that has been battered by Israeli assaults and economically devastated by an Israeli land, air and sea blockade. In September 2009, the UN Human Rights Council released a report authored by Richard Goldstone, a respected Jewish South African judge, who accused both Israel and Palestinian militant groups of war crimes and possible crimes against humanity during Israel's 2008-09 assault on Gaza. Then, in May 2010, Israeli commandos raided a Turkish ship trying to break the sea blockade of Gaza, killing nine people. That episode sparked international condemnation of Israel's excessive use of force and of its policies toward Gaza, and Israel ultimately loosened the blockade. The Goldstone report and the attempt to break Israel's blockade were not BDS initiatives, but they did fuel BDS calls to hold Israel accountable for human rights abuses. Kuperwasser explains that if an eminent figure like Goldstone could accuse Israel of possible war crimes, it meant that the BDS movement's efforts to “delegitimize” Israel might convince liberals.

“This [idea of delegitimizing Israel] was ... a red light,” Kuperwasser tells In These Times. “The most important thing [was] to prevent the movement of this idea from the extreme progressive part [to] ... reasonable people.”

Since that period, Kuperwasser says, the Ministry of Strategic Affairs has stepped up its efforts to undermine activists calling for the boycott of Israel. Its budget has steadily grown. In 2015, the Ministry received about \$2.5 million; by 2017, that budget had more than quintupled to \$13.2 million. In late 2017, the Israeli government, as a whole, announced it would set aside \$72 million to attack BDS. Using that money, the Ministry of Strategic Affairs has embarked on a campaign of surveillance and propaganda targeting the BDS movement.

Because Israel controls all entry and exit points to the Palestinian territories, perhaps the Ministry's most potent tool is a 2017 law allowing Israel to bar supporters of BDS from entering Israel and Palestine. While the Ministry of the Interior has ultimate authority over whom it lets in, the Ministry of Strategic Affairs supplies the Interior with information about critics of Israel to guide those decisions. Members of U.S.-based organizations Jewish Voice for Peace, American Friends Service

Committee and Code Pink have been banned, in addition to Reps. Tlaib and Omar in August. The law is also being used to deport Omar Shakir, Human Rights Watch's Israel-Palestine director. Shurat HaDin kicked off the deportation with a 2017 petition to the Israeli government.

To carry out its attacks on BDS, the Ministry has drawn on the resources of the Mossad. In 2018, according to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, Strategic Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan met with Mossad head Yossi Cohen to discuss “the struggle against the boycott.”

But perhaps the Ministry's most prominent partner in this effort is Shurat HaDin. Founded in 2003, the nonprofit has made headlines for suing Iran and the Palestinian Authority to win settlements for Israeli and U.S. victims of militant attacks, with help from the Mossad. Yair Netanyahu, the son of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, worked as social media coordinator for Shurat HaDin for nearly a year.

Shurat HaDin has threatened the BDS movement and filed multiple lawsuits aimed at undermining it. Shurat HaDin asked the U.S. Internal Revenue Service in 2014 to revoke the tax-exempt status of the Presbyterian Church after the church divested from three corporations involved in the occupation of Palestine; filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board in 2016 after the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America endorsed BDS; and sued Airbnb on behalf of Israeli settlers for discrimination in 2018 after the home-sharing company decided to remove Jewish-only West Bank settlement listings from its platform. The Airbnb complaint in particular turned U.S. federal law on its head by arguing that delisting the settlements, despite discriminating against Palestinians, is a violation of the Fair Housing Act, a major civil rights-era law. (After heavy pressure from pro-Israel groups, Airbnb reversed its decision earlier this year and the lawsuit was settled.)

Shurat HaDin has not succeeded in U.S. federal courts with its attacks on the right to boycott, but that doesn't matter much. Shurat HaDin is backed by a network of donors, many of them U.S. foundations, whose annual tax-exempt donations underwrite a never-ending series of legal claims that tie up their targets in expensive litigation. Those donations include \$1.1 million from U.S. foundations and nonprofits over the past decade, according to an In These Times review. Among its most prominent donors are John Hagee Ministries, the evangelical ministry run by far-right Christian Zionist John Hagee, which has donated at least \$225,000 to Shurat HaDin; the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston, which has given \$475,000; and the Michael and Andrea Leven Family Foundation, run by Michael Leven, the former COO of Sheldon Adelson's casino empire Las Vegas Sands, which has sent \$25,000.

“They have a lot of resources, so they can throw a lot of spaghetti at the wall,” says Liz Jackson, a senior staff attorney for Palestine Legal, which defends Palestine advocates' free speech rights and has defended those whom Shurat HaDin has targeted. “[They] paint anyone who's an advocate for human rights as a terrorist. ... It's a win-win strategy because they have enough money that they can afford to lose. And even when they lose a case, they get media.”

Shurat HaDin tells In These Times that it directly collaborated with the Ministry of Strategic Affairs in at least two instances. “Sometimes, if they need a warning letter or other legal action to be taken, and they themselves as the Israeli government cannot do it, they ask us to write the letter or bring the legal action,” Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, founder and director of Shurat HaDin, tells In These Times. In addition to targeting the BNC's Donorbox account, Darshan-Leitner says Shurat HaDin teamed up with the Ministry to go after the bank account of Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East, a German NGO. The alleged crime? In 2019, its parent group, European Jews for a Just Peace, invited Rasmea Odeh, a Palestinian woman accused by Israel of taking part in a militant attack carried out by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, to speak at an event. Odeh denies participation and says her confession about the attack was tortured out of her by Israeli forces.

In response to the pressure, the Bank for Social Economy shut down the German group's bank account. The International Legal Forum, for its part, has formed a global network to go after critics of Israel in courts around the world, with official backing from Israel's Ministry of Strategic Affairs. The organization's head is Yifa Segal, who previously worked as a lawyer for Shurat HaDin. Segal confirmed to In These Times in an interview that the group has accepted Ministry funding.

In Israel, the International Legal Forum defended an anti-BDS law that lets Israelis sue boycott advocates. In Spain in 2015, it assisted action against cities that passed resolutions endorsing BDS—one city then withdrew its pro-BDS resolution, and another resolution was nullified by a Spanish judge. In the United States, it advocated against a 2016 State Department reminder that products made in illegal West Bank settlements should not be labeled as “made in Israel.” In October 2018, it sued the city of Durham, N.C., and its police chief for discrimination because a non-binding City Council resolution opposed

the Durham police doing military-style international trainings. The resolution passed at the request of Palestinian rights organizers who lobby against police training exchanges between U.S. police and Israeli forces.

In September 2017, the Ministry filed documents announcing it would pay the Israel Bar Association to partner with the International Legal Forum in organizing a conference on anti-BDS legal strategies. In 2018, the Ministry announced its intention to provide up to \$1 million in financial assistance to the International Legal Forum to foster an international network of attorneys to promote legal research on BDS. Now, the International Legal Forum has registered as a foreign agent in the United States, tapping the Zionist Advocacy Center to file legal claims about alleged terrorism. It remains unclear what, exactly, that means and which organizations will be targeted. David Abrams, Zionist Advocacy Center executive director, twice told In These Times he had “no comment” for this story. In the registration documents, Abrams states the International Legal Forum does not take foreign funding, despite what In These Times learned from Israeli government documents and was told by the International Legal Forum's president, Yifa Segal, herself.

There's concern among Palestinian rights advocates that Abrams and others are laying the groundwork to step up more financial and legal fights against BDS advocates, but leaders in the BDS movement say they are uncowed and view the response as a measure of their success. “The Israeli far-right regime's relentless and desperate measures of repression against the BDS movement are failing,” BDS movement co-founder Omar Barghouti tells In These Times. “The movement's supporters are increasing like never before, its impact is growing steadily and impressively, and its fundraisers are hitting new records. While Israel is now a model for authoritarian and fascist forces, from Italy to Hungary to Brazil to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the BDS movement for Palestinian rights has become an integral part of the global anti-fascist and progressive wave that strives for freedom, justice and equality for all.”

■ **It is time to stop lecturing Palestinians and to start listening**

ALJAZEERA reported that the US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, announced a reversal in decades of US policy towards Israel's illegal settlements in the West Bank, stating that: “the establishment of Israeli civilian settlements in the West Bank is not, per se, inconsistent with international law.” Within hours of Pompeo's statement, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini released a statement asserting that the EU position on the illegality of Israeli settlements in the 1967 territories remained “clear and unchanged” affirming that “all settlement activity is illegal under international law”. A spokesperson for the Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas, said that the decision “contradicts totally with international law” and Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat called it “a threat to global stability, security and peace”. Similarly, human rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch and BT'sealem, have condemned the move.

Many pundits are describing this as yet another “gift” to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from the Trump Administration. In 2017, Trump recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and announced that he will be moving the US embassy there. A year later, he announced that the US was cutting its contributions to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. In March this year, just before the first Israeli elections, Trump recognised Israel's 1981 annexation of the occupied Golan Heights.

The timing of his latest “gift” is also perfect for Netanyahu, as he is facing not only the possibility of a third parliamentary poll in less than a year but also serious corruption charges. While Washington's gifts undoubtedly serve to bolster him and his party - Likud -, it would be a mistake to think that this aggressive expansionism would die with him should he fail to make it into the next government. Benny Gantz, the leader of the opposition party Kahol Lavan, also welcomed the US move, tweeting that he applauded the US's “firm stance with Israel”. Lest we forget that before Israel's second parliamentary poll in September, when Netanyahu announced his plan to annex the Jordan Valley, Gantz rushed to claim that it had been plagiarised from him.

These days, the Trump administration and Netanyahu easily provide many liberals with a point of blame for the failure to secure peace in Palestine. Yet, it would be another mistake to place responsibility solely in the hands of President Trump. In a Twitter thread, Director for the US Campaigns for Palestinian Rights Youssef Munayyer, explained how the “Obama administration paved the way for this moment” by vetoing a UNSC resolution declaring settlements illegal in 2011 and consistently avoiding using legal language when talking about the issue. The rationale was that international law does not advance peace or diplomatic efforts. The then US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, explained their veto position by stating that the “resolution would not have advanced the goal of getting the parties closer to negotiations and agreement. On the contrary, it would have hardened the positions of one or both sides.” In other words, they considered international law as merely something to pick and choose from according to what suits their diplomatic needs. While it is clear that the diplomatic foundations for continued Israeli expansionism and colonialism were laid a long time ago, under the Trump administration we have seen it accelerate. This latest US declaration will give the green light for an increase in the violent takeover of Palestinian land and displacement of Palestinian people.

The US policy reversal appears to have come as a shock to the international community. But as Palestinians, we saw this coming long ago and we said as much. It is constantly demanded of us that when we speak of our reality we do not only speak of doom and gloom. It is demanded of us that we speak with positivity and hope. Over 70 years in, and in light of Trump's latest “gift” to Israel, it is high time for the international community to stop lecturing us on how to communicate our own story and start listening to us. It is time for the world to listen to the Palestinians who have been saying from day one that the State of Israel is an apartheid one, bent on keeping indigenous Palestinians permanently contained and oppressed. It is time to listen to the Palestinians who have been saying for decades that Israel has no intention of allowing the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. And it is time to listen to Palestinians when they say there is worse yet to come. → 11

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Water is ‘common’ on alien worlds, scientists say

Water is “common” on alien worlds, scientists have found in a study that could change our understanding of how planets form and where we might find alien life.

The discovery comes from the most extensive survey of the chemical compositions of planets ever conducted, and challenges our search for water in our own solar system and elsewhere.

Water is thought to be a key component of extraterrestrial life, and so finding it elsewhere in the universe is likely to be central to discovering whether aliens exist elsewhere in the universe.

The researchers used data from 19 exoplanets to get detailed measurements of the chemical and thermal properties of exoplanets. They looked at a wide variety of different worlds, from relatively small “mini-Neptunes” only 10 times bigger than our Earth to “super-Jupiters” that are as big as 600 of our own planet, and from places that are between 20C and 2000C.

They found that water was “common” across many of those exoplanets. But they also discovered that there was less of it on those planets than expected, and there was great variety between the different kinds of worlds.

“We are seeing the first signs of chemical patterns in extra-terrestrial worlds, and we’re seeing just how diverse they can be in



terms of their chemical compositions,” said project leader Dr. Nikku Madhusudhan from the Institute of Astronomy at Cambridge.

In our solar system, there is much more carbon relative to hydrogen in the atmospheres of the giant planets than there is in the Sun. That is thought to have come about at the formation of the planets, when large amounts of ice and other particles were pulled into the planet.

Researchers think that there will be a similar situation on other giant exoplanets. If that is true, there should also be large amounts of water.

Using data from a huge array of different telescopes, both in space and on the ground, the researchers found that water vapor was present in 14 of the 19 planets, and that there was also an abundance of sodium and potassium in six planets.

But they also found that there was less oxygen relative to other elements, and that they might have formed without gathering significant amounts of ice.

“It is incredible to see such low water abundances in the atmospheres of a broad range of planets orbiting a variety of stars,” said Dr. Madhusudhan.

The new data gives us a detailed understanding of exoplanets that we don’t even have of our nearest neighbors, scientists said.

“Measuring the abundances of these chemicals in exoplanetary atmospheres is something extraordinary, considering that we have not been able to do the same for giant planets in our solar system yet, including Jupiter, our nearest gas giant neighbor,” said Luis Welbanks, lead author of the study and PhD student at the Institute of Astronomy.

The discovery changes our understanding both of the prevalence of water on alien planets but also challenges our understanding of how those distant worlds might have formed.

“Given that water is a key ingredient to our notion of habitability on Earth, it is important to know how much water can be found in planetary systems beyond our own,” said project leader Dr. Madhusudhan. (Source: The Independent)

Africa’s ‘first fully solar-powered village’ wants to be a model for a renewable future

Near Morocco’s sunny Atlantic coast, the tiny community of Id Mjahdi is being touted as Africa’s first completely solar-powered village.

Solar power has the potential to become one of Africa’s top energy sources, according to the International Energy Agency, but more infrastructure needs to be installed -- of all solar power in use globally, less than 1% currently comes from the continent.

Morocco is leading efforts to fulfill that potential. It already meets 35 percent of its electricity needs from renewables and aims to increase its use of renewable energy to 52 percent by 2030, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

“Morocco is unquestionably a leader in sustainable energy,” says Francesco La Camera, director-general of IRENA.

The country already has the world’s largest solar farm, the Noor-Ouarzazate complex. Now, Id Mjahdi, on the outskirts of the city of Essaouira, is being pitched as a blueprint for how to power remote villages that would be expensive to connect to the national electricity grid.

While many other African villages use solar power to some extent, Id Mjahdi uses it for all its energy needs.

When Moroccan solar power company Cleanergy came up with the idea of testing a sustainable model for electrifying remote communities, it looked for a village “where they need everything,” according to the company’s founder, Mohamed Lasry.

Before the scheme began, villagers relied on candles for light, and they typically could afford only around an hour of candlelight for working or studying in the evenings. They

would burn tree bark for heating and cooking, which was bad for their health, says Lasry.

Id Mjahdi did not even have a nearby source of water, and girls in particular often missed school days to walk several miles to a well, says Lasry.

The first step in the \$188,000 project was to build a water tower for the community. The next stage was to install a power station with 32 solar photovoltaic panels, which generate 8.32 kilowatts of electricity for distribution via a mini-grid.

The power station is connected to around 20 homes in the village, serving more than 50 people. Each house was provided with a fridge, water heater, television, oven and an outlet to charge devices. The solar network has a battery that can supply up to five hours of electricity outside daylight hours.

The project was also assisted by Cluster Solaire, a Moroccan non-profit that supports green-tech companies, which enlisted financial help from the Moroccan Agency for Solar Energy and French businesses Internarché and Petit Olivier.

In October, Cleanergy unveiled several solar-powered buildings -- a hammam (public baths), a workshop where women study and produce argan oil, and a preschool for children between the ages of three to six, which enables their mothers to work.

While the children play and draw, 30 women -- many of whom did not go to school as children -- learn reading and writing, train for scholarships, and use traditional techniques to create argan oil, crushing kernels from local argan trees. Cosmetics company Petit Olivier buys all the argan oil the women produce, giving them an income.

“People that were not working at all and not having any sustainable revenue, the fact that they are working in their village and creating value is very important and very, very valuable,” says Fatima El Khalifa, from Cluster Solaire, who is giving a presentation on the project at the COP25 climate summit in Madrid this week. “We created an association like a cooperative at the village and they own the whole production.”

The association takes a small fee from the argan oil sales to maintain the solar network, and men and women in the village were trained by Cleanergy in how to manage it.

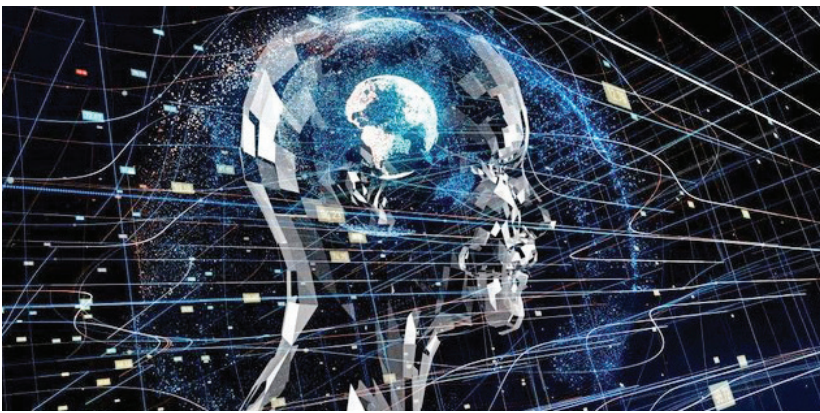
Lasry says the mini-grid is simple to replicate for villages of 100 to 1,000 people, and it is sustainable, because locals can maintain it themselves. “It is possible to duplicate anywhere in the world,” he says. “It is not a complex system, it is easy to do, it is robust.”

Cluster Solaire is now seeking funding to build more solar villages. El Khalifa says there are 800 villages without electricity in Morocco alone and the World Bank estimates that 840 million people lack access to electricity worldwide.

Around 650 million people will still lack access to electricity in 2030, nine out of 10 of them in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the World Bank. It says mini-grids could be the most cost-effective solution for remote areas with a high enough demand, and could provide electricity for 500 million people by 2030.

“Our plan is to show [Id Mjahdi] as an example,” says Lasry. “People change -- they have more time, they can have money, they can go to the market, they can buy what they need.” (Source: CNN)

Researchers criticize AI software that predicts emotions



A prominent group of researchers alarmed by the harmful social effects of artificial intelligence called Thursday for a ban on automated analysis of facial expressions in hiring and other major decisions.

The AI Now Institute at New York University said action against such software-driven “affect recognition” was its top priority because science doesn’t justify the technology’s use and there is still time to stop widespread adoption.

The group of professors and other researchers cited as a problematic example the company HireVue, which sells systems for remote video interviews for employers such as Hilton and Unilever. It offers AI to analyze facial movements, tone of voice and speech patterns, and doesn’t disclose scores to the job candidates.

The nonprofit Electronic Privacy Information Center has filed a complaint about HireVue to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, and AI Now has criticized the company before.

HireVue said it had not seen the AI Now report and did not answer questions on the criticism or the complaint.

“Many job candidates have benefited from HireVue’s technology to help remove the very significant human bias in the existing hiring process,” said spokeswoman Kim Paone.

AI Now, in its fourth annual report here on the effects of artificial intelligence tools, said job screening is one of many ways in which such software is used without accountability, and typically favored privileged groups.

“How people communicate anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise varies substantially across cultures, situations, and even across people within a single situation,” wrote a team at Northeastern University and Massachusetts General Hospital.

Companies including Microsoft Corp are marketing their ability to classify emotions using software, the study said. Microsoft did not respond to a request for comment Wednesday evening.

AI Now also criticized Amazon.com Inc, which offers analysis on expressions of emotion through its Rekognition software. Amazon told Reuters that its technology only makes a determination on the physical appearance of someone’s face and does not claim to show what a person is actually feeling.

In a conference call ahead of the report’s release, AI Now founders Kate Crawford and Meredith Whittaker said that damaging uses of AI are multiplying despite broad consensus on ethical principles because there are no consequences for violating them.

(Source: Reuters)

Underground fiber-optic cables help scientists record thunderquakes



By Brooks Hays

Loud thunderclaps can cause the ground to shake. The quakes are too subtle for humans to feel, but new research showed fiber optic cables can detect the thunderquakes.

A new study, published Wednesday in the Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres, suggests underground fiber-optic cables could be used to track thunderstorms.

“Severe weather has strong interactions with the ground, but we haven’t had the capability to study the coupling between the atmosphere and the solid Earth,” Tiejuan Zhu, lead study author and an assistant professor of geophysics at Pennsylvania State University, said in a news release. “With this new technology, we can utilize existing fiber-optics networks to clearly see how thunderstorm energy passed through campus.”

To track the tiny seismic events caused by thunder, scientists deployed a new technology called a distributed acoustic sensing array, or DAS array, which fires a laser down one of the glass fibers in fiber-optic cables. The laser registers tiny changes in pressure, recording measurements every six feet. A few miles of underground cables create a network featuring thousands of sensors.

“If there is any change in the external

energy on the ground above, even walking steps, you will have a very small change that’s going to stretch or compress the fiber,” Zhu said. “The laser is very sensitive and can detect these small changes.”

When the thunder-generated acoustic pressure wave hits the ground, it travels outward like a wave in a pond. The DAS records the location and movements of these pressure waves.

When scientists compared the measurements recorded by the newly deployed array, the thunderquake data matched the distribution of lightning recorded by the U.S. National Lightning Detection Network.

In addition, to help scientists track extreme weather, the new technology could be used to study Earth’s interior and model earthquake risks. Seismic events are relatively rare on the East Coast, but researchers could potentially use fiber optic cables to measure the movement of pressure waves through Earth’s mantle and crust.

“This research is an example of taking an existing technology and using it to serve another purpose,” said study co-author David Stensrud, head of the department of meteorology and atmospheric science at Penn State. “Having technologies that are multifunction maximizes the benefits to society.”

The comet that took 100 million years to pass Earth

It came out of the northern sky, a frozen breath of gas and dust from the genesis of some distant star, launched across the galaxy by the gravitational maelstroms that accompany the birth of worlds.

It wandered in the deep freeze of interstellar space for 100 million years or so, a locked vault of cosmo-chemical history. In the spring of 2019, this ice cube began falling into our solar system. Feeble heat from the sun, still distant, loosened carbon monoxide from its surface into a faint, glowing fog; the orphan ice cube became a new comet.

Six months later, Gennady Borisov, a Crimean astronomer, saw it drifting in front of the constellation Cancer and sounded the alarm.

On Sunday, the comet that now bears his name -- 2I Borisov -- made a wide turn around the sun and began heading back out of the solar system. As it departs, it will steadily brighten and grow in size as sunlight continues to shake off the dust from a long, cold sleep. On 28 December, the comet will pass 180 million miles from Earth, its closest approach to our planet.

This procession is being greeted with hungry eyes by a species only just knocking on the door of interstellar exploration and eager for news from out there.

Humanity’s most distant artefacts, the two Voyager spacecraft, recently punched through the magnetic bubble that closes off the solar system from the rest of the galaxy. Meanwhile, a band of scientists and engineers are developing an extravagantly ambitious plan, called Breakthrough Starshot, to launch a fleet of butterfly-sized probes all the way to Alpha Centauri, the nearest star system to our own.

But what’s out there is already in here. Nature, generous as ever, has been slinging “Scientific care packages” -- as Gregory Laughlin, a Yale astronomer, puts it -- towards us in the form of interstellar comets.

Two years ago, astronomers discovered an interstellar rock called Oumuamua cruising through the solar system. It caused a sensation, prompting talk of alien probes until further study concluded that it was actually a comet with no tail -- albeit a comet from reaches unknown. Now 2I Borisov has astronomers tingling again, ready to follow its outbound run with their telescopes.

“I think the sense of excitement stems in part from the timing of these discoveries,” Laughlin says. Oumuamua and Borisov, he adds, augur well for a new telescope the US National Science Foundation is building in Chile called the Large Synoptic Survey Telescope, which will sweep the entire sky every few days, producing in effect a movie of the universe.

That telescope will be superbly positioned to find more interloper comets, perhaps even in time to send probes to greet them with Deep Impact-style missions. “The situation is reminiscent of when the first exoplanets were detected,” Laughlin says.

That discovery occurred in 1995, shortly before the Spitzer Space Telescope, which was built without exoplanets in mind, was launched.

Astronomers have long suspected that if anything came calling from another star system, it would be comets. New stars and planetary systems are surrounded by vast clouds of icy leftover fragments, so the story goes. These snowballs are easily dislodged by passing stars and knocked about -- many inward towards their mother star and its planets, but others outward across the galaxy.

Until now, astronomers have lacked telescopes big and sensitive enough to detect them. Now, with telescopes like the Large Synoptic Survey Telescope and the Pan-STARRS in Hawaii, which discovered Oumuamua, they do.

Thus far, the two examples of interstellar comets that humans have observed could not be more different. Oumuamua was mistaken for an asteroid at first because it had no cemetery cloud of gas and dust around it at least that could be seen. But as it was travelling out of sight, small perturbations in its motion suggested that in fact the rock was actually a comet, being pushed around by jets of gas shooting from its surface.

Estimates of the object’s shape -- long and cigarlike -- spurred speculation that it could be an alien probe or even a solar sail. Recent analysis by Sergey Mashchenko, an astrophysicist at McMaster University in Ontario, has concluded that Oumuamua was less a rod than a thin slab rocking back and forth as sunlight and radiation wore it away.

“It was vanishing as it went away, like a bar of soap in the shower,” Laughlin says.

Borisov, in contrast, is thriving, sprouting a typically bushy, radiant tail. As a comet, it would be utterly ordinary if not for its origin. “Nothing about Borisov is weird,” Laughlin says. “With Oumuamua, everything was weird.”

Borisov looked like a comet from the start, enveloped in a cloud of gas, which is what enabled Gennady Borisov to recognise it so quickly. And everything the visitor has done since then has suggested that at least some comets out there are more or less like our neighbourhood comets

Borisov’s comet underwent an astronomical rite of passage of sorts in October, when the Hubble Space Telescope got a good look at it: a white knuckle at the head of a bluish fan of light.

Subsequent observations by telescopes on Earth have confirmed the presence of alien water and carbon monoxide as well as a growing list of chemicals from another part of the universe. As of 24 November, the comet’s tail had grown to 100,000 miles long. The comet’s nucleus is only a mile across.

Early in November, the Gemini observatory spotted the wanderer passing about 1 billion light years in front of a spiral galaxy “romantically known” as 2dFgrSTGN363Z174, says Travis Rector, an astronomer from the University of Alaska Anchorage who was involved in taking the photograph. As if to tease us humans with a reminder of places unknown and unvisited, the backdrop to the portrait is speckled with faint smudges of even more distant galaxies and stars.

When December began, 2I Borisov was drifting through the constellation Crater. Its brightness in astronomical terms was magnitude 16, far too faint for the naked eye or even binoculars, but accessible to a modest telescope and a CCD camera. (You can track it in real time at SkyLive.)

The comet is expected reach a peak brightness of about magnitude 15 around 20 December, plus or minus a week, according to Quanzhi Ye, an astronomer at the University of Maryland.

The comet came from the general direction of Cassiopeia and will exit the solar system through the southern constellation Telescopium, Ye says.

But this is only the beginning of comet-tracking season, he adds. Astronomers will be following Borisov at least until the end of next year. Anything could happen on this watch. As comets approach the sun, geysers of vaporized ice, gas and dust can spring forth. Subsurface gas can heat up and explode, ejecting huge plumes of dust, which would make the comet much brighter and more visible.

“Solar system comets often (but not always) display outbursts near perihelion,” Laughlin says. “But so far Borisov has been ‘boring’ in this regard.” (Source: The Independent)

Azerbaijani airline to launch Mashhad-Baku flights

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — An Azerbaijani airline is slated to launch flights from the capital city of Baku to the Iranian city of Mashhad on Monday.

The Baku-Mashhad-Baku route will be operated by one of the Azerbaijani airlines twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays, Mehr reported on Saturday. It is projected that daily flights to be launched between the two cities in the future.

It is forecast that more than 3,000 Azerbaijani Shia pilgrims will travel to Mashhad per month, the report added.



A woman prays during her visit to the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS) in Mashhad.

Mashhad, the capital of Khorasan Razavi province, attracts thousands of domestic pilgrims each day. The raison d'être is the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS), the eighth Shia Imam. The metropolis embraces dozens of five-star hotels, hotel apartments and hostels. It has the highest concentration of water parks in the country, and it is also home to a variety of cultural and historical sites, which are generally crowded.

Topeka will pay you up to \$15,000 just to move there

Ever thought about picking up and moving to Kansas? Now you might.

Topeka, the state capital, is offering potential new residents up to \$15,000 to move there.

A pilot program called "Choose Topeka" will match employer funds put up for people who move to Topeka and live and work there for a year, city and Shawnee County economic development groups announced Thursday. The program will pay up to \$10,000 to people who rent and \$15,000 to those who purchase or rehabilitate a home, according to the news release from the Greater Topeka Partnership.

"Choose Topeka was created with the intention of investing in employees to live and work in Topeka & Shawnee County, so that we may foster an 'intentional community,' one of community support builders," said Barbara Stapleton, vice president of Business Retention and Talent Initiatives for GO Topeka, an organization of the Greater Topeka Partnership. GO Topeka and the Joint Economic Development Organization are partnering on the effort.

The funds are available for 40 to 60 new residents in the program's initial run, the release said.

The performance-based incentives only kick in a year after the employee has relocated and "could be used for all types of moving related expenses," the release said.

"Moving costs alone to move a 1-2 bedroom apartment can range from \$4,000 to \$7,000 and for a 3-4 bedroom home, range from \$10,000 to \$16,000, depending on the distance and location," the release said.

(Source: CNN)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Group of monuments at Hampi

The austere, grandiose site of Hampi was the last capital of the last great Hindu Kingdom of Vijayanagar. Its fabulously rich princes built Dravidian temples and palaces which won the admiration of travelers between the 14th and 16th centuries.

Conquered by the Deccan Muslim confederacy in 1565, the city was pillaged over a period of six months before being abandoned.



The property encompasses an area of 4187, 24 hectares, located in the Tungabhadra basin in Central Karnataka, Bellary District, India.

Hampi's spectacular setting is dominated by river Tungabhadra, craggy hill ranges and open plains, with widespread physical remains. The sophistication of the varied urban, royal and sacred systems is evident from the more than 1600 surviving remains that include forts, riverside features, royal and sacred complexes, temples, shrines, pillared halls, Mandapas, memorial structures, gateways, defense check posts, stables, water structures, etc.

Among these, the Krishna temple complex, Narasimha, Ganesa, Hemakuta group of temples, Achyutaraya temple complex, Vitthala temple complex, Pattabhirama temple complex, Lotus Mahal complex, can be highlighted. Suburban townships (puras) surrounded the large Dravidian temple complexes containing subsidiary shrines, bazaars, residential areas and tanks applying the unique hydraulic technologies and skillfully and harmoniously integrating the town and defense architecture with surrounding landscape.

The remains unearthed in the site delineate both the extent of the economic prosperity and political status that once existed indicating a highly developed society.

(Source: UNESCO)

Iran seeking to win four joint UNESCO tags in 2020

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Iran is seeking to secure four world heritage status jointly with other countries in 2020.

Four cooperative dossiers are scheduled to be submitted to the UNESCO by Iran along with other countries to be evaluated for the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in the next year, Mostafa Pourali, a senior official with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, was quoted as saying by ISNA on Friday.

Iran is slated to register the "Art of miniature" jointly with Turkey, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan; the "Ceremony of Mehrgran" jointly with Tajikistan, "Pilgrimage to the St. Thaddeus Apostle Monastery" with Armenia; and "Crafting and playing the Oud" with Syria, the official explained.

In this regard, Iran has exchanged views with representatives of the countries during the 14th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was held from December 9 to 14 in Bogota, Republic of Colombia, deputy tourism minister Mohammad-Hassan Talebian said.

Yalda Night for 2021

Iran also seeks to register the ancient festivity of "Yalda" on the prestigious list in 2021.

Yalda (the birth of a new sun) and Noruz or Persian New Year (the birth of a new day) are amongst the most popular ancient Persian festivals, which are also celebrated by some countries in western and central Asia.

Also called, Yalda Night, the occasion is celebrated on the eve of winter solstice, which falls on the last day of Azar (the last month of autumn in the Iranian



Yalda Night is a time for family reunions, louder laughter, merriment and good cheer for Iranians from all walks of life.

calendar year). On that graceful night the winter chill is vanquished and the warmth of love embraces the entire family. It's a time for pleasant family reunions that entails laughter, merriment and good cheer.

According to the UNESCO website, Yalda ceremonies, in a best way, point to cultural diversity and human creativity, especially when one considers the wide range of the communities that celebrate it.

Arbaeen hospitality gains UNESCO heritage status



→ 1 UNESCO accepted the traditional hospitality on the world body's list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity during the annual meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible

Cultural Heritage, which was held in the Colombian capital of Bogota, sources reported.

Arbaeen pilgrimage, aka Arbaeen trek, is a characteristic spiritual exercise in which hundreds of thousands of Shia and Sunni Muslims, even Christians and Zoroastrians, etc. from various nationalities participate.

The long trek is destined to Karbala, where Imam Hussein (AS), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), is laid to rest. The event marks an end to the 40-day mourning period following martyrdom of the Imam and his loyal companions at the Battle of Karbala on Muharram 10 in the year 61 AH (680 CE).

According to the UN cultural body, the trend is a social practice performed across the central and southern regions of Iraq, from where processions of visitors and pilgrims converge towards the holy city of Karbala.

The tradition — a social practice with deep roots in the Iraqi and Arab tradition of hospitality — is an immense display of charity through volunteering and social mobilization and considered to be a defining element of Iraq's cultural identity.

Every year, around the 20th of the Islamic month of Safar, the Iraqi province of Karbala receives millions of visitors in one of the world's most populous religious pilgrimages.

Hailing from different regions in Iraq and abroad, visitors walk to the holy shrine of Imam Hussein (AS). A vast number of people contribute their time and resources to providing the pilgrims with free services along the route. Starting at least two weeks before the date of Arbaeen, associations set up temporary facilities or reopen more permanent ones along the pilgrimage routes, including prayer halls, guest houses and stands offering various services.

Many people also open their houses for free overnight accommodation. Bearers and practitioners include



cooks, families offering hospitality, the administration of the two holy shrines in Karbala, volunteer guides, volunteer medical teams, and benefactors contributing generous donations.

Recovered Achaemenid 'guard' to go on show at Milad Tower

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — A limestone relief of an Achaemenid Persian guard, which was brought back home from the U.S. last year, will go show in a month-long exhibit at Tehran's Milad Tower.

Tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan, municipality officials and several members of the Islamic City Council of Tehran have been invited for the opening ceremony that is scheduled for December 17, Mehr reported on Saturday.

The bas-relief was put on show at the National



Museum of Iran and a number of other museums after President Hassan Rouhani returned it home from the U.S. on September 27, 2018.

The eight-inch-square object was back home after 80 years. In 2017, it was confiscated from the Park Avenue Armory in New York, while offered for sale at an art fair. In June, a U.S. judge ruled that the exquisite relic should be returned to Iran.

The relief was part of a long line of soldiers depicted on a balustrade at the central building on the UNESCO-registered Persepolis in southern Iran.

Archeologists unearth lost town from little-known ancient East African empire

Archeologists have unearthed the remains of a town from an influential but little-known ancient civilization in East Africa that sheds light on the origins of Christianity in Ethiopia.

The buried settlement, which contains one of the oldest churches in sub-Saharan Africa, was inhabited for some 1,400 years before vanishing into the dusty highlands of northern Ethiopia around 650 CE.

Called Beta Samati, it was part of the Empire or Kingdom of Aksum, but prior to its discovery archeologists thought the area had been abandoned when the empire's ruling class set up its capital elsewhere.

The international team of archeologists conducted excavations at the site in 2011, 2012, 2015 and 2016.

The Kingdom of Aksum ruled over the region between 80 BC to 825 CE and was one of the ancient world's major powers -- conquering surrounding regions and trading with the Roman Empire, the researchers said. The kingdom converted to Christianity in the 4th century.

It was only in 2009 when archeologists spoke to local residents in the area near the discovery, who suggested the researchers investigate a hill near the modern village of Edaga Rabu. It turned out to be a 25-meter high mound formed

by waste and debris accumulated over generations of occupation.

"It was part of the local oral tradition. They knew it was an important place but they didn't know why," said Michael Harrower, associate professor of archeology at Johns Hopkins University and lead author of the research, which was published in the journal *Antiquity* on Wednesday.

Radiocarbon dating suggests people first started living in the town around 750 BC, and it remained occupied throughout Aksumite times, capturing key moments in Ethiopian history.

The buildings and artifacts uncovered, which include a basilica, gold ring, coins, inscriptions and pottery, have revealed the region remained important throughout Aksumite times and the town of Beta Samati was a key hub of trade and commerce, linking the capital Aksum with the Red Sea and beyond.

Today, the town lies near Ethiopia's border with Eritrea.

"The Empire of Aksum was one of the world's most influential ancient civilizations, but it remains one of the least widely known," Harrower said.

"Beta Samati spans Aksum's official conversion from polytheism to Christianity

and the rise of Islam in Arabia," he added.

The archeologists uncovered the remains of a large basilica dating back to the fourth century.

An inscription in Ge'ez or ancient Ethiopic found just outside the eastern basilica wall. It is thought to read: Christ [be] favorable to us.

Such buildings were key early places of Christian worship in Ethiopia, the study said, and the site at Beta Samati appears to be one of the first in the Aksumite kingdom, the researchers said -- built shortly after King Ezana converted the empire to Christianity during the mid-fourth century CE.

"That is what makes this discovery so important," said Aaron Butts, a professor of Semitic and Egyptian languages at Catholic University in Washington, DC, in an email.

"The archeological data combined with the radiocarbon dating suggest that the basilica stems from the fourth (or perhaps early fifth) century, making it certainly among the earliest known churches in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, given the reliability of the archeological data combined with the radio-carbon dating, it seems to be the earliest securely datable church in Sub-Saharan Africa," added Butts, who wasn't involved in the

excavation.

Relics uncovered at the site showed Roman, pagan and Christian influences, illustrating the "cultural diversity of this enigmatic civilization," the study said.

They included a gold Roman-style ring that featured an unusual icon -- a symbol of a bull and a soft-stone pendant recovered from outside the basilica with a cross and what appears to be an inscription in ancient Ethiopic that reads "venerable."

Harrower said the ring was the most impressive and exciting artifact they found.

"Usually we are searching for scholarly information and scientific information, not necessarily for gold. But I frequently get asked by all sorts of people 'did we find any gold?' and, yeah, we actually did find some gold," he told CNN.

"And it paints an important line of evidence. The ring looks very Roman in its composition and its style but the insignia of that bull's head is very African and is very unlike something you would find in the Mediterranean world and shows the kind of interaction and mixing of these different traditions."

He said he hopes the ring would go on display locally at some point so the local community can benefit from the discovery.

(Source: CNN)

The crimes of the Zionist occupation regime continue

7 ➔ ■ Pompeo Gives Away the Palestinian West Bank

Also UNZ reported that A story has been circulating suggesting that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will soon be resigning because he needs to focus on planning for his campaign to become a Senator from Kansas in 2020. This is good news for the United States, as Senator Lindsey Graham has had no one he is able to talk to about exporting democracy by blowing up the planet since Joe Lieberman retired and John McCain died. And the tale even has a bit of palace intrigue built into it, with an interesting back story as Pompeo is apparently considering his move because he fears that staying in harness with Donald Trump for too long might damage his reputation. There are also reports that he has been traveling to Kansas frequently on the State Department's dime to test the waters, a violation of the Hatch Act which prohibits most government officials from engaging in self-promotional political activities unrelated to their actual jobs.

If one is seeking evidence to suggest that Pompeo, a man who lies with a fluency that takes one's breath away, is delusional, it would certainly have to include his self-assessment that he has a reputation to protect. It is possible to cite many instances in which Pompeo has asserted something that is absolutely contrary to the truth, though one might also have to concede that he could often be saying what his factually challenged boss wants to hear. When Pompeo was Director of the CIA he even joked openly about how "We lied, we cheated, we stole."

Mike Pompeo's latest concession to the war criminals in charge of Israel, clearly intended to boost the electoral chances of Benjamin Netanyahu, is only the most recent dose of the Secretary of State's falsehood piled on fiction. It is generally assumed that the move to help Bibi by interfering in Israeli politics has been made in an effort to have Tel Aviv reciprocate by putting pressure on its many American fellow travelers in the media and congress to go easier on Trump in the impeachment saga. And Trump would also expect additional reciprocity when he runs again in 2020. Even though Netanyahu, who has been indicted over bribery and fraud, will not be able to shift many liberal Jewish votes, he will be able to get allies like mega billionaire Sheldon Adelson to pony up tens of millions of dollars to support the GOP campaign.

The Trump Administration's gifts to Israel are unprecedented, including moving the capital to Jerusalem and acknowledging the annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights. Pompeo, driven by his Christian Zionist beliefs, has been the point man on many of those moves, ably assisted by a U.S. Ambassador David Friedman, ex-bankruptcy lawyer, who has served as a consistent advocate and apologist for Israel with little or no concern for



actual American interests. One might also observe that if Pompeo is truly interested in running for the Senate a little help and cash from Israel and its many friends might be very welcome.

The Pompeo gift to Bibi was announced early last week. He said that the Trump Administration is now rejecting the 1978 State Department Hansell Memorandum legal opinion that the creation of civilian settlements in occupied territories is indeed "inconsistent with international law." In a sense, he was giving something away to Israel that neither he nor the Israelis legally possess. He said that he was "accepting realities on the ground" and elaborated on his view that the White House believes legal questions about settlements should be dealt with in Israeli courts, meaning that the hapless Palestinians would have no voice in developments that would deprive them of their homes.

Per Pompeo, "Calling the establishment of civilian settlements inconsistent with international law has not advanced the cause of peace. The hard truth is that there will never be a judicial resolution to the conflict, and arguments about who is right and who is wrong as a matter of international law will not bring peace."

Pompeo's latest statement, consistent with many of his earlier ones, is completely contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention framework of international law governing behavior by occupying military powers that was established after the Second World War. It ignores the fact that the status quo of expanding settlements has only taken place because of Washington's refusal to do anything about it. The State Department's new interpretation completely embraces arguments being made by hard-line politicians in Israel and opens the door to endorsement by the White House of a total de facto or even de jure annexation of the West Bank by the Jewish state.

Pompeo was talking about the nearly 700,000 illegal exclusively Jewish settlers

currently on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. Palestinians, in many areas under a brutal regime of martial law enforced by the Jewish state's army and police, have virtually no rights and are subject to increasing violent attacks by the settlers. Not surprisingly, Pompeo's statement was rejected by everyone but the Israelis and the usual crowd in the U.S. Congress and media, but even some leading Democratic candidates, including Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, found the decision troubling. The 28 member European Union declared that "All settlement activity is illegal under international law and it erodes the viability of the two-state solution and the prospects for a lasting peace. The E.U. calls on Israel to end all settlement activity, in line with its obligations as an occupying power."

And, of course, there are potential consequences when a government does something stupid. Shortly after Pompeo's announcement, the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem put out a security advisory warning Americans traveling in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza, stating, "Individuals and groups opposed to [the Pompeo] announcement may target U.S. government facilities, U.S. private interests, and U.S. citizens." It suggested that visitors ought "to maintain a high level of vigilance and take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness in light of the current environment."

There is inevitably considerable discussion in some circles regarding what the new situation on the West Bank actually means. To be sure, the number and size of settlements will increase, but some knowledgeable critics like Gilad Atzmon suggest that the move will backfire on the Israelis, who, by taking control of the land, will eventually have to accept some kind of one state solution, giving the Palestinians considerable rights in a not-completely-denominational state. He observes how "...Inadvertently, Trump has finally committed the U.S.A. to the One State Solution. It is hard to deny that the area

between the 'River and the Sea' is a single piece of land. It shares one electric grid, one pre-dial code (+972) and one sewage system. At present, the land is ruled over by a racist, tribal and discriminatory ideology through an apparatus that calls itself 'The Jewish State' and declares itself home for every Jew around the world; yet, is abusive, lethal and some would say genocidal toward the indigenous people of the land... Pompeo's declaration provides an explicit and necessary message to the Palestinians in general and in the West Bank in particular. The conflict is not progressing toward a peaceful resolution. Those amongst the Palestinians who advocated the 'Two States Solution' will have to hide now. Pompeo has affirmed that there is one Holy Land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. From now on the battle over this disputed land is whether it will be subject to the racist discriminatory ideology implied by the notion of 'The Jewish State' and its 'National Bill,' or if it will transform itself into a 'State of its Citizens' as is inherent in the notion of One Palestine."

Tom Suarez posits similarly at Mondo-weiss, observing that any form of annexation of the West Bank without giving Palestinians equal rights would basically make Israeli apartheid so visible and unacceptable to world opinion that the Jewish state would become a complete pariah internationally and would be forced to adopt some kind of one state formula.

Nevertheless, even if a one state solution with equal citizenship status for everyone would appear to be both desirable and compliant with modern notions of human rights, it is not necessarily inevitable. The chosen-by-God Israeli state is quite capable of ethnic cleansing or even genocide on a massive scale, as it did originally in 1947-8 when it was founded and also later after it occupied the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. The Jewish state's leaders have repeatedly asserted that there is no such thing as a Palestinian, that Jordan is actually Palestine. They have become skilled at making the lives of Palestinians so miserable by destroying their farms, other livelihood and even their homes while also controlling their infrastructure, killing them if they resist, that they emigrate. Christians in Palestine, the original followers of Jesus Christ, constituted close to 8 percent of the population in 1946 but now number less than 2 percent. Most have chosen to leave rather than submit to Israel.

There is no reason to doubt that the Israelis could continue their creeping annexation of the West Bank for ten more years or so while also deliberately driving the remaining Arabs out. I have little doubt that that is precisely what they will do and they will be empowered to do so by the United States, which will never develop either the integrity or the courage to push back against "America's closest ally and best friend in the entire world."

East Asia at the glance

6 ➔ ■ Economic growth needs deep vitality

Can the Chinese economy maintain growth rate of around 6 percent in 2020? There are many analyses and discussions as 2019 comes to an end, and there are more forecasts that China's GDP growth rate will fall below 6 percent next year. Some scholars with an official background made such predictions publicly, increasing people's anticipation that the economic situation next year may be more severe than this year. Based on various scholars' analysis, the Chinese economy's downward pressure has not been completely released, and the trend may last some time. China has the ability to maintain growth of 6 percent through strong stimulus, but that would yield negative effects. Is it worthwhile?

Scholars generally believe that China has made progress in adjusting the country's economic structure and that China's economic quality has improved. This is also what most Chinese people have experienced. But the problem is how much the economy will affect employment, social confidence and restrain people's consumption if it continues to decline. These uncertainties cause concerns. Stable growth should be the primary goal of China's economy for a period of time. But the measures to stabilize growth should be in line with the market economy and should yield minimum side effects.

Stabilizing growth should be a highly active effort by the Chinese government and society and should be a practical and realistic process. It should maximize China's release of its economic capacity, instead of an act only to stabilize social confidence. Much potential in the Chinese economy can be further tapped, but there are still many policy obstacles in our society. Some local governments haven't devoted enough energy to economic construction and lack a clear understanding of the political significance of economic work. It is hoped that the tremendous economic downward pressure will spur further reforms, further emancipate

our minds, and ensure that the economic growth is in full and deep operation.

China's major economic tasks have never been achieved only through economic means, but have also been accompanied by necessary political consensus and strong mobilization. Amid the trade war and economic downturn, developing the economy is currently the top political issue of the country. To develop the economy, activating the society in every regard is needed. The initiative for investment and consumption is of great importance. But initiative in another aspect cannot be ignored: the indispensable role of local governments in promoting economic growth. In the past, local governments were in a race for economic growth with each other, which had produced some problems. But in general, it has played a positive role. It is believed that by releasing and strengthening internal motivation, it's possible to open up additional space for growth. Its effects are worth looking forward to, and the strong stimulus can be avoided. This work orientation should by no means be neglected.

Chinese society should neither secure the growth of 6 percent through strong stimulus nor accept the inertia of a growth rate below 6 percent. We should take active and rational actions.

■ What's behind weaker US-Japan-SK ties

Starting with economic and trade cooperation, Japan has been showing the urge to integrate more intensely into Asia while keeping distance with the US. This can be seen in an uptick in ties between China and Japan as Beijing's relations with Washington become strained amid the US-launched trade war against China.

Meanwhile, South Korea and the US have seen widening differences in their policies toward North Korea. The US took Japan's side in the South Korea-Japan standoff, while continuously pressuring Seoul on extending the General Security of Military Information Agreement. In addition, Washington has

also pressured Seoul to pay a huge amount of additional money for their military alliance but refused to yield full wartime operational controls to Seoul. Hence, South Korea has seen rising anti-US sentiment in political, industrial and academic circles.

US differences with Japan and South Korea as well as the lingering Japan-South Korea disputes have affected trilateral ties, leading to Washington's weakened ability to mediate between its two Asian allies. As a result, the US is facing unprecedented challenges in using Japan and South Korea to strengthen its geopolitical strategy in Northeast Asia, Asia-Pacific region, and even the Indo-Pacific region. Why did the three countries' relations cool? Is it just a temporary phenomenon? In the face of changes in bilateral and trilateral relations among the three countries, how will China position itself?

There are severe divergences among the three countries in terms of multilateralism. US President Donald Trump is a fan of unilateralism and has been promoting his "America First" policy. Against the backdrop, Washington has pressured and bullied its trading partners and allies, which led to increasing geopolitical and trade pressure faced by Tokyo and Seoul. Both countries are dependent on export-oriented development. Thus, the pursuit of maximizing self-interest under the multilateral framework has become a watershed that divides US and its two Asian allies.

Moreover, Japan and South Korea have started to pay more attention to regional cooperation to safeguard regional security in recent years. For a long time, both countries have been relying on the US for security and embracing globalization for trade. But as the Trump administration's keenness to protect its allies has decreased and it has been pressuring allies to pay more for their military alliance, Japan and South Korea are not willing to be manipulated by US Cold War mind-set any more, especially as

the situation in Northeast Asia improves.

The two Northeast Asian countries now attach more importance to security cooperation inside the region and are exploring the possibility of establishing a security mechanism with China and even a trilateral one. Louder voices can be heard in Japan and South Korea asking their governments to be more independent from the US in terms of security. In addition, the win-win economic and trade bond makes Japan and South Korea attach more importance on regional cooperation. Given that peace and development are still an unchanged theme of the world, and people's desire for better welfare and livelihood is becoming stronger, the China-promoted win-win cooperation in Northeast Asia and Asia-Pacific region attracts Japan and South Korea to integrate further with regional cooperation, in which they can bring their advantages into full play and realize sustainable development.

China, as a neighbor of both South Korea and Japan, should play a more proactive role in driving Northeast Asia's development. China can promote the establishment of a Northeast Asian trade bloc by deepening China-Japan-South Korea multi-dimensional cooperation, build regional community of shared future through people-to-people bonds, and help create a sense of belonging by strengthening integration of the three Northeast Asian countries. To achieve these goals, the three countries' governments need to promote their cooperation at both national and local levels, make full use of their common culture to mitigate misunderstandings among themselves.

The changes in US-Japan-South Korea ties reflect the two Northeast Asian countries' intentions to maintain their own strategic interests and their preference for flexible diplomacy and pragmatic cooperation. Such a choice by the two countries is rational and realistic. It is in line with China-Japan-South Korea common aspiration and goal of realizing coexistence and prosperity.

Anti-war protesters were right about Afghanistan

OUTLINE — The 80 percent of Americans who supported the war in Afghanistan back in 2001 were wrong. And the tiny anti-war faction that opposed the conflict was correct in warning that an invasion and occupation would turn into a bloody quagmire. That was my thought as I read the long-suppressed war documents that the Washington Post published Monday after a three-year fight to make them public. Officials under Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump "failed to tell the truth about the war in Afghanistan throughout the 18-year campaign," the Post showed, "making rosy pronouncements they knew to be false and hiding unmistakable evidence the war had become unwinnable."

Observers will differ on whether U.S. officials could have been more effective or honest, or whether their failures were foreordained by perverse incentives and hard choices. A shorter war that struck Al Qaeda members but eschewed occupation can be imagined. a propaganda effort that hid truths about the war from a self-governing people, corroding American democracy. What might each of those 2,300 killed have done with another 60 years on earth? Could homelessness in America have been ended for a generation if \$1 trillion were invested in that effort? Which public and private tasks could've been accomplished domestically by the more than 775,000 humans who were deployed to Afghanistan during the conflict?



Despite everything, Afghanistan has not secured a stable democracy, assured women's rights, protected the lives of Afghan civilians, strengthened America's hand against regional rivals, defeated the Taliban, or established a central government or security force that can survive U.S. departure. Given how the war turned out, America would've been better off not going at all, especially given that anti-war options never precluded hunting Osama bin Laden, as U.S. special forces did later even as he hid in Pakistan outside a war zone. Americans ought to be upset at the officials responsible for this historic debacle and everyone complicit in hiding the truth about it from the citizenry. As John Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, told the Post, "the American people have constantly been lied to." All who lied deserve public censure.

But those responsible for the war in Afghanistan aren't just the U.S. officials who presided over the war effort or the Congress that approved it by overwhelming margins. Most Americans favored war in an unfamiliar country, knowing that the authorization to use force was expansive, that what victory entailed was never defined, that the U.S. government has lied to the public frequently during past conflicts, and that the Vietnam War lasted years longer than most anticipated when the fighting there began.

It is tempting to blame Washington elites, or the deep state, or the military-industrial complex for America's misbegotten Afghanistan policy. And I, among others, have been critical of all those forces. But as a 21-year-old who favored the Afghan war when it began, I was among the majority that believed the anti-war leftists of 2001 were wrong in their dire warnings of quagmire. So I am painfully aware that the American masses, almost the entire populist right, the center left, and Bush-era elites joined forces in supporting the war in Afghanistan, while a tiny faction of anti-capitalists, paleocons and libertarians opposed it. Some anti-war signs held aloft at small protests included unhelpful comparisons of George W. Bush to Adolf Hitler and mistaken assertions that racism motivated the intervention.

But the dismissive response to those anti-war protesters extended to more reasonable claims, some of which proved prescient. An illustrative example, published at The American Prospect on October 2, 2001, took aim at a sarcastic protest sign that declared, Rush In, Think Later.

The journalist Chris Mooney commented: This is precisely what the Bush administration has not done, though it's hard to say the same of certain peaceniks... I think about its holder, and try to imagine what was running through his or her mind. Protests themselves may take weeks to organize, but protest signs take just minutes to draw up. There must have been something instinctive and deep-seated behind that slogan, for its creator to be able to twist reality so starkly, rushing in to protest U.S. haste long after our government showed caution. Dare one suggest—without cramming stars and stripes down anyone's throat—that it is the blindly held creed of anti-Americanism?

But two years later, in a September 8, 2003, memo, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld admitted, "I have no visibility into who the bad guys are. We are woefully deficient in human intelligence."

While reeling from a catastrophic terrorist attack in 2001, America made a decision that turned out badly. These last 18 years should cause Americans to heed the warnings of anti-war protesters when next they raise the alarm about a war of choice. Almost inevitably, wars have a momentum of their own. They come with powerful propaganda efforts that hide the extent of what's going wrong from the public.

And all wars have the potential to be long, hard slogs. As Winston Churchill warned in 1930:

Never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy... The Statesman who yields to war fever must realise that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events. Antiquated War Offices, weak, incompetent or arrogant Commanders, untrustworthy allies, hostile neutrals, malignant Fortune, ugly surprises, awful miscalculations all take their seat at the Council Board on the morrow of a declaration of war. Always remember, however sure you are that you can easily win, that there would not be a war if the other man did not think he also had a chance.

According to the Post, "Last year, 3,804 Afghan civilians were killed in the war, according to the United Nations. That is the most in one year since the United Nations began tracking casualties a decade ago." As of last month more than 10,000 U.S. troops remained in the country."

There's still no telling when America will withdraw for good.

World must hit ‘peak meat’ by 2030 and restore vegetation on grazing land, scientists say

A vast restoration of natural vegetation on land currently used for meat production is the “best option” for removing CO2 from the Earth’s atmosphere, and must begin immediately, scientists have warned.

Levels of meat production must peak within the next 10 years and land must begin to be reforested if we are to avoid tipping “various Earth systems into unstable states”, researchers wrote in an open letter to the Lancet Planetary Health journal. All other methods of CO2 removal remain “untested at scale”, they said.

Cattle and sheep herds require enormous tracts of land, not only for pasture, but also for the grains grown to feed the intensively reared animals.



Furthermore, their digestive processes result in high methane emissions, which is a potent greenhouse gas.

As of 2017, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the atmosphere must not absorb more than 420 billion more tonnes of CO2, and approximately 720 billion tonnes of CO2 must be removed from the atmosphere, for us to have a chance of limiting global warming to 1.5C.

We are not on course to meet these demands, however. “If the livestock sector were to continue with business as usual, this sector alone would account for 49 per cent of the emissions budget for 1.5C by 2030,” the scientists said.

“Since the first Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change assessment report in 1990, the production of meat, milk, and eggs increased from 758 million tonnes to 1,247 million tonnes in 2017, and is projected to further increase.”

The researchers are now calling on “high-income and middle-income” countries to incorporate four measures to keep them in line with the aims of the Paris climate agreement:

- * declare a timeframe for peak livestock;
- * identify the largest livestock emissions sources and/or largest land occupiers, and set appropriate reduction targets for production;
- * implement policies to diversify food production by replacing livestock with sustainable foods that maximise public health benefits – mainly pulses (including beans, peas, and lentils), grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds;
- * and adopt a “natural climate-solutions approach” where possible, to repurpose land as a carbon sink by restoring native vegetation cover.

The scientists added: “We propose that, in creating Paris-compliant agriculture sectors, high-income and middle-income countries do not outsource their livestock production to other countries, and instead reduce demand for livestock products.”

Earlier this year, the UK government’s then-chief environment scientist, Sir Ian Boyd, warned that people must eat less red meat, travel less and buy fewer clothes, and he also called for the creation of a “net zero ministry”, which he said could work across government to vet the policies of all departments to ensure they are working to a common environmental framework.

This week, academics at the University of Göttingen released research that forecasts how calorific intake could change between 2010 and 2100, and estimates that global food demands could rise by 80 per cent by the end of the century.

(Source: The Independent)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Saving Venice

(July 17, 2002)

A team of British scientists has begun work in the Venice Lagoon in the latest international effort to protect the city from high tides and floods that struck again this week. This report from Brian Baron: Led by Professor David Paterson of St Andrew’s University, the British team have begun a three-year project to **map tidal flows** and **marine life**, using satellite technology and the latest **remote sensing techniques**. The work, **funded by** the European Union, is aimed at finding out exactly how the Lagoon functions before the construction of a **Thames-style barrier** of steel gates. They’ll be raised from the **sea bed** to shut off high tides. That two-billion-pound engineering project remains **intensely controversial** and years behind schedule. Professor Paterson thinks there’s **merit** in another plan for floating artificial marshes in the Lagoon to help break up the most destructive waves. Twice this week, St Mark’s Square has been **engulfed by high tides**. Some scientists fear that sea levels will rise by over eighteen inches this century which could prove **catastrophic**.

■ **Words to map tidal flows:** to study and make a record of the way the water moves up and down and through an area
■ **marine life:** animals and plants that live in the water
■ **remote sensing techniques:** ways of finding out information automatically
■ **funded by:** paid for by
■ **Thames-style barrier:** A gate, like the one on the River Thames in London, which goes up and down to stop too much water coming into the river
■ **sea bed:** the bottom of the sea
■ **intensely controversial:** if something is intensely controversial many people have very strong feelings that it is a bad idea
■ **merit:** if there is merit in something, then it is worth doing, it has value
■ **engulfed by high tides:** the high tide is the time of day when the water level is at its highest and this has caused a lot of water to flood the area
■ **catastrophic:** disastrous, causing a lot of damage and destruction

(Source: BBC)

New version of Surena humanoid robot unveiled

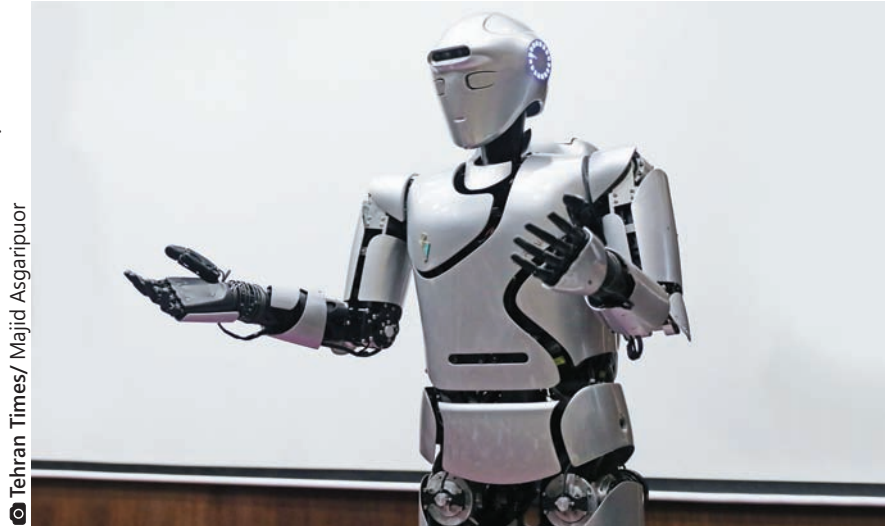
SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The fourth version of Surena, Iranian humanoid robot, was unveiled during a ceremony on Saturday, IRIB news agency reported.

The ceremony was held in the faculty of engineering of the University of Tehran, with vice president for scientific and technological affairs, Sorena Sattari, in attendance.

The robot has taken four years to be developed. It stands 170 cm tall, weighs 70 kg, and is able to walk at the speed of 0.7 km/hr.

It can move around the sides, backward and on rough surfaces while remaining upright on uneven ground and is able to lift objects, recognize faces, shake hands, and also kick a soccer ball.

Surena also has the ability to detect 100 voice commands in addition to listening, speaking and converting text into speech; visual ability and the ability to recognize



© Tehran Times/ Majid Asgaripour

Rare white lion cubs enter Iran for preservation



ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Iran is host to two white lion cubs recently sent from the African continent, said the official responsible for importing the rare species.

These three-month-old white lions have arrived in Iran to help breed rare animals and reduce the genetic diseases caused by inbreeding among lions, YJC quoted Pouria Navazani as saying on Thursday.

International legal and environmental steps have been taken to import these two white lions into Iran, including license from Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and different environmental and veterinary licenses, he explained.

Noting that the lions are called Hir and Dena (the female

one), he concluded that they are kept at the Alborz wildlife conservation and rehabilitation center.

The white lion is a rare color mutation of the lion, specifically the Southern African lion. White lions in the area of Timbavati were thought to have been indigenous to the Timbavati region of South Africa for centuries, although the earliest recorded sighting in this region was in 1938. Regarded as divine by locals, white lions first came to public attention in the 1970s, in Chris McBride’s book The White Lions of Timbavati.

There were 11 white lions in their natural habitat, currently, while it is hard to estimate the exact population of white lions in the world, based on the available evidence, there are less than 300 individuals worldwide.

Harvest mice found thriving 15 years after reintroduction efforts

As an idealistic PhD student, Wendy Fail’s ambition was to reintroduce harvest mice to Northumberland. She painstakingly bred 240 mice in captivity and in 2004 released the elusive mammals on to a coastal nature reserve with plenty of reedbeds for them to hide in.

When not a single harvest mouse – Britain’s smallest rodent – was recaptured in subsequent trap surveys, Fail concluded that her efforts to reintroduce them had been unsuccessful.

Now, 15 years later, fresh harvest mouse nests have been found for the first time at East Chevington nature reserve, showing that the descendants of Fail’s original harvest mice are in fact thriving.

A team of volunteers found two distinctive, orb-shaped nests in dense reedbeds close to where Fail had originally released them. Sophie Webster, of Northumberland Wildlife Trust, who led the search, said: “It was really exciting for everybody. It’s such a big area to search we doubted we would actually find them so it was a real treat.”

The nests were woven into grasses a metre (3ft) above ground and contained green leaves showing they were freshly made. Webster is planning a more extensive search of the wider reedbeds, with camera traps and live mammal trapping to see if they can calculate the population.

Fail, who now works in outdoor education, was contacted by one of her original team members with the news. “To say

I’m ecstatic with this positive result is an understatement,” said Fail. “I’m proud that my work, along with the support of volunteers and experts, has managed to secure the survival of one of Britain’s declining species.”

She also emailed her old PhD supervisor. “I told him, ‘This is the email I always wanted to send you’ and he replied, ‘Bloody hell, it worked!’ He was as surprised as I was.”

A priority species for conservation and protected by law, the harvest mouse is the weight of 10p piece and is Britain’s only mammal with a prehensile tail, which it uses for grip and balance as it lives in the stalk zone of tall plants.

Preyed upon by barn owls, cats and even pheasants, the mouse also suffers in cold, wet weather. Historically, it is more common in southern and eastern England than in the north. It is rarely found north of the Tyne, although recent surveys have discovered it on several sites in County Durham.

Fail’s original studies found harvest mice were vulnerable to being predated by wood mice when they were first released and so the 240 captive-bred harvest mice were first released into secure cages to acclimatise.

The mice were released incrementally into the wild over the course of eight weeks to avoid saturating the site or endangering all the mice at once.

Follow-up survey work using specially adapted traps, which capture small mam-



mals without hurting them, caught plenty of wood mice, shrews and even an angry weasel, but failed to find any trace of harvest mice, despite successfully catching them in trials.

Fail said she hoped her phased return methodology could be potentially used to help other reintroduction projects, now it had been shown to be successful.

She added: “I’m not saying we’ve changed the world but I hope that what we’ve done gives other people faith and hope that it is possible to conserve a much-loved species with a bit of hard work and

dedication.”

Mike Pratt, chief executive of Northumberland Wildlife Trust, said: “We’re really pleased and encouraged that in these days when we think we know everything about everything because we’ve got so much data, we can still find something that we didn’t know was there. We know wildlife is suffering terrible declines so this is refreshing to say the least.”

Last year, Northumberland also witnessed the return of the pine marten in the wild for the first time in 90 years.

(Source: The Guardian)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → €

Medical waste disposal become possible using plasma technology in Iran

Using plasma gasification, Iranian researchers managed to dispose medical wastes and disassemble all its hazardous gases by filters, IRNA reported on Sunday.

Considering numerous problems encountered in medical and urban waste management in the country, we decided to employ high technology to overcome them, Mahmood Quran-Nevis, an official with Vice Presidency for Science and Technology has said.

He went on to add that currently, autoclaves are used as waste disposal facilities in hospitals; the temperature of the autoclave is 130 degrees and most of the bacteria are not killed and subsequently they can contribute to various environmental problems.

Referring to the foreign countries reluctance to provide us with high technology machines, he noted that regarding the importance of medical waste disposal and disinfection, we managed to domestically produce the necessary equipment needed for healthcare waste treatment and disposal.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-crat”

■ **Meaning:** government

■ **For example:** The **bureaucrats** imposed rules and regulations on big business.

PHRASAL VERB

Hinge on/upon something

■ **Meaning:** if a result hinges on something, it depends on it completely

■ **For example:** His political future hinges on the outcome of this election.

IDIOM

A bundle of nerves

■ **Explanation:** if you describe someone as a bundle of nerves, you mean that they are very nervous, tense or worried

■ **For example:** My son is doing his driving test today. Needless to say he’s a bundle of nerves!

Hezbollah poses serious threat to U.S., Israeli schemes in Middle East: Nasrallah

Hezbollah poses a considerable threat to the scenarios developed by the United States and the Israeli regime to be implemented in the Middle East, says the secretary general of Lebanon's resistance movement, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

"The U.S. is doing its utmost to depict Hezbollah as a threat to Lebanon. Americans are actually vying for their own interests and those of Israel. The interests of the Lebanese nation are not a matter of concern to them at all. The U.S. is paying out millions of dollars as part of its attempts to sully the image of Hezbollah, yet such bids are all doomed to failure," Nasrallah said in a televised speech broadcast live from the Lebanese capital city of Beirut as he addressed his supporters on Friday evening.

He added that Washington is lying and disseminating fake news about the recent wave of anti-government protests in Lebanon, noting that U.S. statesmen are exercising such a practice as they are beset with their own problems and desperately trying to get to grips with them.

The leader of the Lebanese resistance



movement further noted that the U.S. is unable to sideline Hezbollah and push it away from Lebanon's political arena, describing Washington's approach vis-à-vis the Arab country's domestic issues as "silly and improper."

"Hezbollah represents a serious threat to Israel's hegemony and conspiracies. Israel is well aware of the fact that if Hezbollah had wanted to run the (Lebanese) government, it would have taken effective actions against its

building of a wall along its shared border with Lebanon and repeated violations of Lebanon's territorial waters," Nasrallah said.

The Hezbollah leader then called on the Lebanese nation and politicians not to put their trust in the hollow promises coming out of the White House, warning that Americans tend to 'milk' others to advance their own interests.

Nasrallah went on to say that the U.S. and the Israeli regime distort comments made by Iranian officials in order to provoke the Lebanese nation against the Islamic Republic.

"We contacted our Lebanese allies, and they assured us that the reports about Iran's threat to attack Israel from Lebanese territories are fabricated, and no Iranian official has ever made such remarks," the Hezbollah chief pointed out.

He underlined that Hezbollah is prepared to destroy Israel in case the Tel Aviv regime makes the folly of launching an act of military aggression against Iran, emphasizing that the Islamic Republic is fairly capable of defending itself and responding to U.S. and Israeli attacks.

Omar al-Bashir sentenced to two years for corruption

Sudan's former President Omar al-Bashir has been sentenced to two years in detention in a state-run reform center over financial irregularity and corruption charges in the first of several cases against the leader who was removed after nearly 30 years in power.

A court in the capital Khartoum on Saturday convicted al-Bashir, who was overthrown in April after months of nationwide demonstrations, on charges of illegal possession of foreign currency, illicit financial gains and corruption.

"The court convicted Omar Hassan al-Bashir," judge Al-Sadiq Abdelrahman said. "The court decided to send him to a community reform center for two years."

The judge said that "under the law, those who reached the age of 70 shall not serve jail terms."

Bashir, 75, will serve his sentence after the verdict has been reached in another

case in which he is accused of ordering the killing of demonstrators during the protests that led to his removal, the judge said.

Saturday's case against the 75-year-old centered around suitcases filled with multiple currencies worth more than \$130m which were found in his home.

While the former president admitted he had received \$25m from Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), he pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Dressed in traditional white robes and turban, al-Bashir watched silently from inside a metal defendant's cage while the judge read out the verdict on Saturday.

Before the verdict was read, supporters of al-Bashir briefly disrupted the proceedings and were pushed out of the courtroom by the security forces.

(Source: al Jazeera)

N. Korea claims another 'crucial test' at its rocket facility

North Korea has announced it successfully performed another "crucial test" at its long-range rocket launch site that would further strengthen its "reliable strategic nuclear deterrent".

The announcement on Saturday came as Pyongyang continued to pressure the Trump administration over an end-of-year deadline set by leader Kim Jong Un to salvage faltering nuclear negotiations.

North Korea's Academy of Defense Science did not specify what was tested on Friday.

Just days earlier, North Korea said it had conducted a "very important test" at the site, prompting speculation that it involved a new engine for either a space launch vehicle or an intercontinental ballistic missile.

North Korea has been demanding the United States make concessions to break the deadlock in their nuclear negotiations.

In the last few weeks, Pyongyang carried out at least 13 ballistic missile

launches that began in May.

Pyongyang has also promised an ominous "Christmas gift" if the U.S. does not come up with concessions by the end of the year.

Kim has also held three meetings with U.S. President Donald Trump since June 2018 but little progress has been made in efforts towards denuclearization since then.

On Friday, the South Korean news agency, Yonhap, quoted the Institute for National Security Strategy that Pyongyang could announce the end of the nuclear talks later this month. The institute is affiliated with South Korea's spy agency.

"For the time being, [the North] is expected to take low-intensity steps, such as resuming nuclear activities or repairing rocket launching sites, but if [the North] takes action, it would be done in a way to demonstrate its strategic position," the think-tank was quoted by Yonhap as saying. (Source: agencies)

Iraqis protest against U.S. meddling

Several thousand supporters of one of the most powerful groups in Iraq marched through Baghdad Saturday, trampling on giant U.S. flags after Washington slapped sanctions on their leader.

Last week Washington imposed sanctions on three Iraqis including Qais al-Khazali -- who heads Asaib Ahl al-Haq, part of the Hashed al-Shaabi security force tied to the Iraqi state -- and his brother, AFP reported.

The U.S. Treasury accused his group of "widespread forced disappearances, abductions, killings, and torture".

The measures block financial transactions with and travel to the U.S. for people who commit human rights abuses or corruption.

Khazali has laughed off the sanctions as an "honor".

His supporters blocked major roads in the capital Saturday, staging mock hangings using effigies of U.S. President Donald Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Mohammed bin Salman, crown prince of Saudi Arabia.

"We denounce the unjust decision" to punish Khazali, said Mahmoud al-Rubaye, a member of Asaib Ahl al-Haq's political wing.

Meanwhile, Influential Iraqi Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr last month condemns the U.S. for its interference in Iraq's internal affairs, threatening to take millions of demonstrators to streets if Washington keeps meddling in the Arab country.

In a statement on Monday, al-Sadr said that the Iraqi people want an early election free from the U.S. intervention, as the country does not need arrogant countries and the help of others, Iran News quotes.

"Once again it (America) proved that it interferes in the affairs of others," he said, noting that Iraq belongs to the people of Iraq who can decide their fate democratically and peacefully.

He added that Iraq does not want any interference from either the U.S. or any other country, especially if they are

going to bring corrupt officials and their authority "on the necks of the people".

"Iraqis will not allow Washington to turn their country into another Syria," said the leader of Sadrist Movement and Sairoon parliamentary alliance.

"Enough interference in our affairs! Iraq has a senior who can protect it and does not need the intervention of either you or anyone else," al-Sadr noted.

He also warned that if Washington repeats its interference in the Arab country, he would take millions of angry protesters to the Iraqi streets, which will mark the end of the U.S. existence.

Al-Sadr's statement came after the United States called on Iraqi officials to hold early polls as more people fall victim to ongoing anti-government protests that Baghdad says are being hijacked by foreign-backed elements.

(Source: agencies)

As the Islamophobia index increases: On being Muslim in America

➔1 Perhaps this is because Hispanic Americans are five times as likely to hold positive views of Islam and Muslims as negative views. Ironically, the only place where I have been even questioned aggressively about my Shi'a Islamic faith and connection to the Islamic Republic has been at the local mosque. But Las Cruces appears to be an exception to a general U.S. trend towards increasing Islamophobia. Over one quarter of Americans surveyed in a recent poll conducted by the ISPU endorsed negative stereotypes of Muslims and Islam. In fact, White Evangelicals are twice as likely to hold negative views of Muslims as positive ones.

As a Muslim living in the United States, I, too, have been discriminated against. Past employers have made it difficult for me to do salaah at the proper times, and have even suggested that I do the prayer in a filthy janitor's closet so as not to bother or distract other employees. I have been threatened with loss of employment for exhibiting support for the oppressed Palestinians, who have been the perpetual targets of Israeli violence. I have been reprimanded for speaking out against possible U.S. military action against Iran. I have been told that I should be shot for simply wearing a small flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran on my jacket. All this and more has taken place in the alleged bastion of human rights and religious freedom known as the United States of America.

However, I am not alone. Seventy five percent of my brothers and sisters in Islam believe there is a great deal of discrimination against Muslims in the United States. Nearly

the same number of Muslims is worried by the actions of the current U.S. president, and do not feel Islam is considered to be part of mainstream American society. About half feel that being Muslim in America has become more difficult and have themselves personally experienced an act of discrimination. Yet in spite of their Islamophobic environment, nearly nine out of ten Muslims in America claim to be proud to be Muslim and, astoundingly, proud to be American. I myself, while proud to be a Muslim, do not profess membership in the latter group, seventy percent of whom still hold fast to the American dream.

Unfortunately, Islamophobia seems to be a commonality uniting a number of disparate hate groups in the United States. The Southern Poverty Law Center, a forerunner in confronting racial, ethnic and religious hatred, has identified 33 Islamophobic groups operating openly on Facebook, all of which engage in anti-Muslim imagery and promote Islamophobic stereotypes to attract members. Some of these hate groups actually have avoided being screened out for hate speech and Islamophobic content by claiming to be educational forums. For example, the group "Infidels United for Truth" claims to be "for the education and sharing of information globally about the dangers of Radical Terrorism and how it is affecting all of the world."

Professor of computer science at Elon University Megan Squire has done preliminary research on Islamophobia and has found it to be a common thread among hate groups. Squire's findings indicate that those

groups holding anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant views do have significant common membership. Moreover, analysis of the data shows that "anti-Muslim ideologies in particular can serve as a bridge between mostly disconnected communities, such as between anti-government and white nationalist communities."

Yet the categorization of Islamophobia as merely "anti-Muslim" animosity overlooks the systemic racism inherent in the Orientalist world view that permeates and, in fact, predates the creation of the United States. Concerning this danger professor of law at the University of Detroit Mercy Khaled A. Beydoun warns, "To reduce Islamophobia to 'anti-Muslim animus' and nothing more overlooks its expansion and penetration into American culture, news, media, law, and political parlance." As clearly evidenced by the "Muslim ban," the Trump regime has endorsed Islamophobia as state policy, which legitimizes anti-Muslim stereotypes widely held by private U.S. citizens.

To see the systemic nature of Islamophobia in the United States, it is only necessary to note that Muslims are viewed as a "racial and socioeconomic monolith." In other words, Americans tend to view Muslims as a race, just like Blacks, Native Peoples, or Japanese, and given the endemic nature of racism in the U.S., we see that Islamophobia is another virulent strain of racism. The ISPU concurs, noting that "Islamophobia is just one branch on a bigger tree of bigotry."

Continuing with the ISPU's tree metaphor, we can understand that merely loping off the branch of Islamophobia does next to nothing

to cut down the tree of American racism that nourishes its growth. Fertilized by Facebook and other social media, the ugly branch of Islamophobia, after pruning, will not only sprout anew, but also more vigorously than before. The same holds for another branch sprouting from the same tree, Iranophobia.

As far as Facebook is concerned, it is no exaggeration to call it fertilizer for the tree of bigotry, as can be seen by the central role played by Zuckerberg's social media platform in the genocide of the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar. According to Marzuki Darusman, chairman of the U.N. Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, Facebook has "substantively contributed to the level of acrimony and dissension and conflict, if you will, within the public." U.N. Myanmar investigator Yanghee Lee, concurring, noted, "I'm afraid that Facebook has now turned into a beast, and not what it originally intended." Similarly, Equality Labs, a south Asian community technology organization, found that most hate speech violations on Facebook India are Islamophobic, and 93 percent remain posted.

Given that Islamophobia and Iranophobia are both flourishing branches on this mammoth tree of systemic American bigotry, it is self-evident that the tree itself must be felled and the stump of residual racism uprooted. Muslims should not be afraid of the United States and Americans, as Ms. Cabili has suggested in the epigram. Instead, we Muslims must carefully sharpen the Ax(is) of Resistance, uniting in our Islamic Revolution to cut down the tree of bigotry once and for all.

UN General Assembly approves eight resolutions against Israel

➔1 The agency has faced budgetary difficulties since last year, when the U.S. - its biggest donor - halted its aid of \$360m per year.

The Palestinian group Hamas, which administers the besieged Gaza Strip, hailed the UN vote as a defeat for the U.S. and a failure of its attempts to pressure UN member-states against UNRWA.

"We welcome the decision to renew the international mandate to UNRWA and we see it as another failure to hostile US policies to the Palestinian rights," Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters.

Praising the vote, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said it was "evidence that the entire world are standing with our people, its historical rights and its just cause," according to the official Wafa news agency.

"It is a triumph for international law and the rights of the Palestinian refugees, until their issue is finally resolved in accordance with United Nations resolutions," he said.

Among the other resolutions passed Friday was one condemning Israel for its control over the Syrian Golan Heights.

On November 21, India joined 164 countries to vote in favor of Palestinians' right to self-determination.

While India and other 165 nations voted in favor of the resolution titled "The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination" at the UN General Assembly's Third Committee, the United States, Israel, Nauru, Micronesia and the Marshall Islands voted against it.

Nine countries, including Australia, Guatemala and Rwanda, abstained.

The resolution was sponsored by North Korea, Egypt, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe and Palestine and voting took place on November 19, 2019.

Greater Kurdistan? Just kidding! Esper tells Syrian Kurds U.S. never promised them a state

The U.S. never promised Syria's Kurds that it would help them build an autonomous state, Defense Secretary Mark Esper has insisted, despite years of hints to the contrary. So much for the birth pangs of that New Middle East...

"Nowhere, at no point in time did we tell the Kurds, we will assist you in establishing an autonomous Kurdish state in Syria, nor would we fight against the longstanding ally Turkey on your behalf," Esper told reporters on Friday.

"We live up to our obligations, and our obligation, our agreement, our understanding with the Kurds was this: that we would work together to fight in Syria to defeat ISIL," he explained, referring to the ISIL terrorist group. But now that ISIS has been declared dead almost as many times as its late leader Baghdadi, is it game over for the U.S.-Kurdish partnership?

Esper's words no doubt came as a shock to anyone expecting a continuation of the Assad-Must-Go policies of the Obama administration, in which it was understood that the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces would be rewarded for doing their part to overthrow Syrian President Bashar Assad with their own semi-sovereign state à la Iraqi Kurdistan. U.S. media have long sung the praises of 'Rojava' as some sort of feminist utopia, but this "brave social experiment" is now imperiled by the Trump administration's stubborn refusal to continue waging a war it has all but lost in Syria.

The SDF provided an ideal anti-Assad proxy through which the U.S. could occupy resource-rich areas of Syria, an occupation which would otherwise be considered illegal under international law. But when the U.S. began pulling out of northeast Syria back in September, leaving the surprised Kurds at the mercy of Turkish forces that view them as terrorists, the Kurds were forced to beg the same Assad government they had decried as the devil incarnate while the U.S. was still propping them up for protection. They ultimately swallowed their pride and worked out an arrangement with Syrian and Russian forces along the Turkish border, but this was not the deal they thought they'd made with the U.S.

The Kurds had good reason to expect a state in return for doing the U.S.' bidding for so many years. Ever since then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice rapturously described the fallout from Washington's destabilization of the region as the "birth pangs of a new Middle East" in 2006, the game plan has been out in the open: "we have to be certain that we're pushing forward to the new Middle East, not going back to the old Middle East." Never mind that the residents of that old Middle East might prefer their homelands un-bombed, their borders in the same place, or their family members still alive -- when the Pentagon's redecorating crew shows up in your country, saying "no" isn't an option.

"Greater Kurdistan" encompasses oil-rich regions of Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran, forming a hypothetical (for now) state amid a thoroughly balkanized Middle East that dovetails perfectly with the foreign policy aims of the U.S., Israel and the Persian Gulf monarchies. Abandoning the Greater Kurdistan project lays the groundwork for the mending of relations between the U.S. and Turkey, which for obvious reasons doesn't fancy having chunks of its neighbors' territory broken off and given to a group it considers to be terrorists, and indeed, abandoning the effort to construct a "new Middle East" creates a happy ending for nearly everyone in the region, except Israel and the Persian Gulf monarchies. Until Trump spoiled everyone's fun with his insistence on pulling out of Syria, there was much support in the U.S. foreign policy community for busting the country up into ethnic enclaves -- always presented as a last resort, of course.

While the shower of rotten vegetables the Kurds gave the retreating American troops no doubt did little to endear them to Washington, the Trump administration's mind was clearly made up to abandon its predecessors' Greater Kurdistan project for the time being long before the pullout was announced. The U.S. still supports the SDF verbally, and they're still "helping" U.S. soldiers keep Syrian oil out of the hands of Damascus. There's even the hope that if they behave themselves they'll get that autonomous state after all. But Esper has made it clear that the expansive (and cannily vague) promises of previous administrations -- never, it must be noted, written out in the form of signed contracts -- dangling a homeland in front of the stateless people after "the birth pangs of a new Middle East" had settled down are a thing of the past.

(Source: RT)

Former Roland Garros champion Schiavone ‘wins’ cancer fight

Former French Open champion Francesca Schiavone said on Friday she had defeated cancer, defiantly telling fans: “I’m still breathing”.

The 39-year-old, who became the first Italian woman to win a Grand Slam title with victory at Roland Garros in 2010, revealed her diagnosis in a short video on her Instagram account.

“Hi everyone, upon 7-8 months of silence from social media and from the world, I wish to share with you what happened to me,” said Schiavone who appeared in the video with her dark hair closely cropped.

“A cancer had been diagnosed to me. I did chemotherapy, I fought a tough battle and now I am still breathing. I have won this fight. And now I am back in action.”

She did not elaborate on the type of cancer which had been diagnosed.

Schiavone retired from tennis after the 2018 US Open having won eight career titles and playing in three Fed Cup winning teams with Italy in 2006, 2009 and 2010.

Her greatest moment came when she defeated Australia’s Samantha Stosur in the 2010 Roland Garros final. She went on to claim her career best world ranking of four in January 2011.

Later that year, Schiavone came agonisingly close to defending her French Open title but was defeated by China’s Li Na in the Paris final.

“When I was 18 years old, I had two dreams,” Schiavone said on her retirement in New York in 2018.

“The first one was to win Roland Garros, and the second one was to become top 10 in the world. And I completed them, so I’m very, very happy, and lucky.”

Schiavone’s health battle drew instant praise.

“Your strength, your courage, your roar are always an inspiration,” tweeted Inter Milan, one of the Serie A football clubs based in her home city.

(Source: AFP)

Arsenal distances itself from midfielder Ozil’s comments on China, Uighurs

English soccer club Arsenal tried on Saturday to distance itself from the comments of its star midfielder Mesut Ozil after he posted messages on Twitter and Instagram critical of China’s policies toward its Muslim Uighur minority.

“The content he expressed is entirely Ozil’s personal opinion,” the official account of Arsenal Football Club said in a post on China’s Twitter-like Weibo platform. “As a football club, Arsenal always adheres to the principle of not being involved in politics.”

Ozil’s posts called Uighurs “warriors who resist persecution” and criticised both China’s crackdown and the silence of Muslims in response.

“(In China) Qurans are burned, mosques were closed down, Islamic theological schools, madrasas were banned, religious scholars were killed one by one. Despite all this, Muslims stay quiet,” Ozil, who is a Muslim, said in his posts.

The club’s Twitter account did not have a post addressing Ozil’s comments as of Saturday afternoon.

But replies to Arsenal’s Weibo post were angry, with one showing a shredded Ozil soccer jersey next to a pair of scissors and others demanding he be expelled from the club.

A search on Weibo for the hashtag translatable as “Ozil issues inappropriate statement”, which had been one of the top trending topics on the platform, returned no results on Saturday afternoon.

Weibo frequently censors discussion of sensitive topics, particularly amid a push by Beijing to clean up its internet.

The United Nations and human rights groups estimate that between 1 million and 2 million people, mostly ethnic Uighur Muslims, have been detained in harsh conditions in Xinjiang as part of what Beijing calls an anti-terrorism campaign.

China has repeatedly denied any mistreatment of Uighurs.

(Source: Reuters)

Rooney admits frustration as he waits for Derby debut

Wayne Rooney has admitted his frustration at being forced to wait until January to play for Championship side Derby.

The former Manchester United and England captain is unable to make his debut for the Rams until January, after signing an 18-month contract following his departure from Major League Soccer side DC United.

The visit of Barnsley to Pride Park on January 2 has been pencilled in for Rooney’s first appearance and he said he was ready.

“It’s obviously frustrating training throughout the week and not being able to play,” the 34-year-old player-coach said on Friday.

“Training the day before a game is the worst day as the players don’t do too much so it’s been one-on-one with the fitness coach today, which isn’t nice.

“It’s frustrating because I am ready to play. I’ve just really been topping up my fitness and ticking things over since (leaving America) and if the game was tomorrow I would be able to play.”

Derby will play four more matches before Rooney is eligible to feature. In that time, he will hope Phillip Cocu’s team can narrow the eight-point gap between themselves and the top six.

The Rams have failed to hit the heights of last season, when they reached the Championship play-off final, and are currently on a four-game winless run.

However, Rooney said that the play-offs remained the aim.

Despite not being able to play yet, Rooney said he had enjoyed his time at Derby under the guidance of Cocu.

(Source: Eurosport)

RB Leipzig boss confirms Haaland talks

RB Leipzig coach Julian Nagelsmann confirmed Friday holding talks with Salzburg’s teen striker Erling Haaland, who Bundesliga rivals Borussia Dortmund are also reportedly chasing.

“I tried to explain my idea of football to him in good English,” said Nagelsmann, whose side are second in the Bundesliga, a point behind leaders Borussia Moenchengladbach.

“I think it was a good conversation, but there is nothing new to announce.”

Leipzig and Salzburg are sister clubs, both backed by energy drinks giant Red Bull.

Earlier this week, several German media outlets reported that the prolific 19-year-old Norway forward met with Dortmund on Wednesday.

Haaland attracted attention when, aged 19 years and 58 days, he became one of the youngest players to score a Champions League hat-trick in a 6-2 victory over Genk in September.

The son of former Manchester City midfielder Alf-Inge Haaland then scored in his first five Champions League matches, claiming eight goals in the group stage.

(Source: Mirror)

3,000 police and security for rescheduled ‘Clasico’

Some 3,000 police officers and private security agents will be deployed for the rescheduled ‘Clasico’ between Barcelona and Real Madrid next week, local officials said Friday, amid renewed fears of unrest around the fixture.

Protestors from the Catalan separatist movement Democratic Tsunami have called for a “massive” protest outside Camp Nou, where Barca are due to play the match against Real in La Liga on December 18.

Spain’s most prestigious fixture was originally scheduled for October 26 but had to be postponed following a wave of pro-independence demonstrations in Barcelona which saw protesters hurl rocks at security forces and set up fiery barricades.

Police “will guarantee that the match goes ahead, fan access to the stadium and security both on and off the pitch,” the Catalan interior affairs chief, Miquel Buch, told a news conference.

Around 1,000 officers from Catalonia’s regional police force, the Mossos d’Esquadra, will be deployed along with 2,000 agents from other police forces and private security agencies, Mossos chief commissioner Eugeni Salent added.

The deployment is usual for matches deemed “high risk” but this time it was boosted by “hundreds” of extra agents both inside and outside the statement because of the call to



protest by Democratic Tsunami, he added.

The agents will guard the vicinity of Camp Nou beginning on Wednesday morning to ensure the teams, referees and fans can enter the stadium without problems.

They will also cordon off the area to ensure demonstrators can not get close to the stadium.

Democratic Tsunami has urged protes-

tors to gather at four points around Camp Nou from 4:00 pm (1500 GMT), four hours before kick-off.

■ **‘Complex scenario’ of pitch invasion**

The group denied Friday on Twitter it wanted to “block or suspend the match”.

“On the contrary, we want to invite the whole world to see it,” it added.

Thousands of people have registered their interest online in attending the protest action.

“One of the most complex scenarios would be an invasion of the pitch. It is an extreme situation which in principle we don’t contemplate as being probable but it is possible,” said Salient.

Democratic Tsunami has in the past blocked access to Barcelona’s airport and cut the main highway linking Spain to France for two days.

The planned rally at Camp Nou is the latest in a series of demonstrations that began two months ago when Spain’s top court jailed nine Catalan separatist leaders over their role in a failed 2017 bid for independence.

If a pitch invasion were to take place then Barcelona, who are responsible for security inside the stadium, could face hefty fines and be ordered to stage future matches behind closed doors.

Barca have long been associated with Catalan independence.

The club’s fans often wave the yellow and red striped Catalan independence flag and hold up banners at Camp Nou proclaiming in English that “Catalonia is not Spain”.

Real on the other hand are associated by many Catalans with the perceived centralizing force of the Spanish government in Madrid.

(Source: AFP)

How Brexit could affect Gareth Bale and Real Madrid



With Thursday’s landslide election victory for the Conservatives leaving prime minister Boris Johnson poised to take the United Kingdom out of the European Union on 31 January 2020, Real Madrid’s Gareth Bale is among many Brits living in Spain whose immigration and employment status will be affected.

The future of British immigrants living in other EU member states, and that of EU citizens residing in the UK, is one of the many thorny issues surrounding Brexit. In Bale’s case, the key problem seems to be the prospect of Madrid having to include the Welshman among their three permitted non-EU players. At present, Los Blancos only have two such players in their first-team squad, Éder Militao and Vinicius Júnior, a circumstance that allows Zinedine Zidane to also use Rodrygo Goes, officially registered with Castilla, in LaLiga. If Bale takes up the final EU place, Zidane will have to choose three from four in each matchday group.

However, it seems unlikely Bale will become a non-EU player overnight at the end of January. Earlier in 2019, the Spanish government approved a raft of measures covering Brits’ rights even in the event of a no-deal Brexit. According to the Royal Decree-Law 5/2019 of 1 March, indeed, he could hold on to his EU-player status, given that article 7.3 reads: “UK nationals who, on the date of the United Kingdom’s effective withdrawal, were pursuing on a

permanent basis in Spain a profession or professional activity for which EU citizenship is a requirement - as regards access to and pursuit thereof - may continue to pursue said profession under the same conditions, without needing to complete any further procedures, provided that they comply with any other requirements to which such pursuit is subject.”

The same document also guarantees that British citizens living in Spain before Brexit will be granted long-term residency if they have been in the country for at least five years - a condition that Bale, who signed for Real Madrid in September 2013, clearly fulfils. However, this measure is contingent on the UK government offering reciprocal treatment to Spanish citizens in Britain.

There are also a large number of non-European Union nationals who are considered as EU players because of treaties their countries have agreed with the bloc. In 2005, the European Court of Justice ruled that Igor Simutenkov, a Russian playing for Tenerife, could not be identified by Spain’s football authorities as a non-EU player because of Russia’s partnership agreement with the European Union. Other players to benefit from this include Real Valladolid’s on-loan Real Madrid goalkeeper Andriy Lunin, who is not counted as a non-EU footballer despite his home nation, Ukraine, not being a member state.

(Source: AS)

Guardiola denies Man City break clause



Pep Guardiola has denied reports that he has a break clause in his Manchester City contract that would allow him to leave the Premier League champions at the end of the season.

The Catalan signed a deal last year keeping him at the Etihad Stadium until 2021, but reports had suggested that it included an option allowing Guardiola to depart 12 months early.

Speculation about his future has surfaced with City trailing leaders Liverpool by 14 points.

“No,” It is not true,” Guardiola said at Friday’s pre-match press conference when asked about whether the break clause exists. “I spoke about that a few weeks ago, about my intentions for the club.”

Last month the City boss, whose side face Arsenal on Sunday, underlined his commitment to the club.

“I want to stay. I don’t have any reasons to move,” he said at the time. “I am incredibly satisfied to work with this club, with these players, and if the people think I am going to resign for these results... the people do not know me.

“I like to have this challenge, I love to be in this position. If the club wants (me) next season I want to be here 100 percent. I want to live in this city because I know lovely people here and I want to work and live with them and I want to be here.”

Guardiola’s curt denial aside, there is no doubt that City are negotiating their most difficult period in his three-and-a-half years in charge at the Etihad, to the extent that the manager and players cancelled their own Christmas party this week.

Having returned from a Champions League game in Zagreb in the early hours of Thursday, and facing a trip to Arsenal on Sunday, City personnel took a collective decision not to join the club staff’s Christmas festivities.

“We played Wednesday and we got back late to Manchester and, with regeneration, people were tired,” the City manager said on Friday.

“We had a game in two or three days. Myself and the payers preferred to be at home with the families.”

Guardiola insisted that teenage midfielder Phil Foden is still in his thoughts, saying he faced stiff competition from Kevin De Bruyne, David Silva and Bernardo Silva.

The local academy product has only started four games all season -- none in the Premier League -- and has just three league starts to his name in his career.

But Guardiola, not for the first time, said Foden had a bright future under his leadership.

“He has played 50 games and he’s 19 years old, in one of the top teams in Europe,” he said.

(Source: AFP)

LeBron comes alive after Lakers chide him for ‘passive’ play

Facing a Miami Heat team with an unblemished record at home, the Los Angeles Lakers’ road winning streak looked to be in jeopardy Friday night because of a disastrous first half from LeBron James.

“Well, we were down today because of me,” James said, referring to a Miami lead that swelled to as big as 14 as James turned it over seven times and missed seven of his 11 shots in the first half. “I was reckless.”

The Lakers were a different team and James was a different player after the break. L.A. was able to rally to win 113-110 to become the first visiting team to leave American Airlines Arena with a victory, extending its road win streak to 13, largely because of James, who pumped in 17 of his 28 points and dished out nine of his 12 assists in the second half.

And James was able to rally personally thanks to a little help from his friends, namely Lakers big men Anthony Davis and DeMarcus Cousins.

“My teammates got on my ass,” James told ESPN’s Israel Gutierrez during a walk-off interview on the game broadcast. “They told me you’re playing too passive, thinking about the game way too much instead of read and reacting and doing what you do. ... [Davis] got on me, Boogie Cousins got on me and they told me to just be me. So I was like, “Thank God we have two halves in a basketball game,” where I can flush the first one, and then come back and try to help us win.”



It didn’t start off smoothly after the pep talk. Jimmy Butler intercepted a James pass on the first possession of the second half, tossing it ahead to Kendrick Nunn to put the Heat back up by double digits.

“Jimmy was the one who got his hands on it again,” said James, whose all-time record against Butler evened up 17-17 with the Lakers’ win. “But I knew what was happening, and I just read it wrong. And I was able to make the right reads after that.”

L.A. completely turned the tables on Miami from there, climbing out of the 10-point hole and building an 11-point

lead of its own.

“Second half, he definitely picked it up everybody all around,” Lakers guard Danny Green said. “Turn the ball over less and got some good shots, got it going, got our rhythm going.”

It’s a rhythm the Lakers have mostly kept intact since an opening-night loss to the LA Clippers, now owning a 23-3 record, tied with the Milwaukee Bucks for the best in the league.

In a testament to their team makeup, it was Cousins in street clothes and Davis, eight years James’ junior, holding the Lakers’ star accountable.

And after he, along with Davis’ night of 33 points, 10 rebounds and 3 blocks, was so instrumental in the Lakers’ second-half comeback, it was James distributing the credit all throughout the roster.

“In the second half, I got back to myself. Playing my game and we all fed off of JaVale [McGee]. Especially in that third quarter, he was blocking everything at the rim,” James said. “AD got it going. Danny [Green] got it going, [Kentavious Caldwell-Pope, too], and I wanted to fill in and just try to help us close that gap, and we did that.”

And afterward there was appreciation shared for James’ open ears as much as there was for his closeout play.

(Source: ESPN)

Mohammadreza Fahimi, the world's most loyal fan

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Football is much more than just a game for Mohammadreza Fahimi; a football fan who has been hospitalized for 18 years.

In May 2001, Mohammadreza, 11-year-old, attended a match between Shamusahak and Persepolis at the Mottaqi Stadium in the city of Sari, north-east of Tehran, where the stadium collapsed because of lack of crowd control and about 100 people were taken to hospital and several people lost their lives.

He got out alive but was involved in a car accident on the way back to his home and suffered a spinal cord injury. Mohammadreza has been hospitalized since that time but has not abandoned his beloved sport.

His favorite teams are Tehran based Persepolis and Nassaji Mazandaran. To watch the matches of the second one is easier since they play in Vatan Stadium in Ghaemshahr but he cannot travel to Tehran's Azadi Stadium because of his physical condition. Distance is an obstacle for him.

In the match between Nassaji and Shahr Khodro on Friday, the photographers snapped photos of Mohammadreza laying down on a bed to watch the game.

Nassaji have disappointed their supporters in the current season but he remains loyal.

Mohammadreza is the world's most loyal fan.

He likes to watch the Iran league matches



across the country but travel costs are expensive since he should be taken by ambulance.

Mohammadreza stays in the intensive care unit (ICU) of Sari's Emam Khomeini

Hospital for many years and FOOTBALL is only pleasure in his most difficult days.

Italy beat Iran at FINA World Junior Water Polo



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Italy defeated Iran 16-4 at the FINA World Men's Junior Water Polo Championships 2019 on Saturday.

The Persians started the competition with a 15-7 win over Kuwait but lost to the U.S. 27-4 in the second match, while Italy had defeated the U.S. 18-11.

Iran will meet Montenegro on Monday.

Iran 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 is being held in Kuwait from Dec. 12 to 20.

FINA Junior Water Polo World Championships is an international water polo tournament held every two years for the players under the age of 20. It was launched by FINA in 1981 for men and in 1995 for women.

Persepolis, Esteghlal victorious over rivals: IPL



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis and Esteghlal football teams defeated their rivals at the Iran professional league (IPL) on Saturday.

Persepolis defeated Saipa in Shahr-e Qods Stadium 2-0, thanks to goals from Vahid Amiri and Ahmad Noorollahi.

Esteghlal also beat rock-bottom Shahin Bushehr 4-1 in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Arash Rezavand opened the scoring for the hosts in the 29th minute. Mehdi Ghaedi made it 2-0 in 52nd minute and Mohammad Daneshgar extended Es-

teghlal's lead six minutes later. Cheick Diabate scored Esteghlal's fourth goal in the 69th minute.

With two minutes remaining, Roozbeh Cheshmi scored an own goal to make it 4-1.

Sanat Naft edged past Machine Sazi 1-0.

Pars Jonoubi drew 1-1 with Naft Masjed Soleyman and Gol Gohar Sirjan and Zob Ahan played out a goalless draw.

Esteghlal moved up to top of the IPL table with 29 points.

Sepahan and Persepolis are second and third with 28 points and one game in hands.

Torabi's goal among 2014 AFC U23 Championship iconic goals

With the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 just a few weeks away, the-afc look back at some of the finest goals the competition has seen since it kicked off in Oman in early 2014.

Featuring some of Asia's finest modern-day talent, including the 2018 AFC Player of the Year Abdelkarim Hassan, Japan's Shoya Nakajima and Vietnam's Nguyen Quang Hai, our selection offers the perfect way to whet your appetite ahead of the fourth edition of the tournament early next year.

■ 1. Zakaria Al Sudani (2014)

Saudi Arabia vs Uzbekistan, Group Stage

The Green Falcons knew only victory against Uzbekistan would seal their place in the next round and Zakaria Al Sudani's stunning strike on the hour booked their place in the last eight en route to a final defeat against Iraq.

■ 2. Abdelkarim Hassan (2016)

Qatar vs China PR, Group Stage

Over the years, Abdelkarim Hassan has forged a reputation for scoring piledrivers from distance, and this rocket in a 3-1 win over China was one of four goals the left-back scored in the 2016 competition.

■ 3. Ahmed Al Sarori (2016)

Yemen vs Uzbekistan, Group Stage

A goal befitting of any occasion, Ahmed Al Sarori re-



ceived the ball in his own half and four touches later it was in the back of the Uzbek net after a beautifully weighted chip over Abdumavlon Abduljalilov for Yemen's only goal of the campaign.

■ 4. Mahdi Torabi (2016)

IR Iran vs China PR, Group Stage

From fully 30 yards out, Mahdi Torabi struck this free-kick with precision and power for the Iranians' third in a 3-2 victory over China that saw the young Team Melli progress to the last eight.

■ 5. Omar Maanasrah (2016)

Jordan vs Vietnam, Group Stage

In a tournament that witnessed numerous spectacular goals, Jordan's Omar Maanasrah added another as the full-back smashed this one in off the crossbar in a 3-1 opening-day win against Vietnam.

■ 6. Shoya Nakajima (2016)

Japan vs IR Iran, Quarter-Finals

One of the finest players to have ever graced the AFC U23 Championship, current FC Porto star Shoya Nakajima produced this sublime effort against Islamic Republic of Iran in the 2016 quarter-finals before Japan went on to lift the title.

■ 7. Azizjon Ganiev (2018)

Uzbekistan vs Korea Republic, Semi-Finals

It was a glorious campaign for the Central Asians in 2018 and Azizjon Ganiev's extra-time strike against Korea Republic was one of many moments to remember en route to the title. The celebration wasn't bad either.

■ 8. Nguyen Quang Hai (2018)

Vietnam vs Uzbekistan, Final

While Uzbekistan won the tournament, Nguyen Quang Hai captured the imagination and his 'Rainbow in the Snow' in the final – one of five superb goals by the midfielder – provided one of the most iconic moments the competition has ever seen.

(Source: the-afc)

FIBA Asia holds second Board meeting in Doha

FIBA Asia held its second Board meeting of the new cycle, 2019-2023, at the Ritz Carlton in Doha, Qatar on December 11 and 12.

The meeting covered important topics relevant to the region, including the development of youth and women's basketball, the successfully hosted events and the key priorities heading into the new year.

The meeting was attended by FIBA Asia President Sheikh Saud Al Thani, FIBA President Hamane Niang, FIBA Secretary General Andreas Zagklis, and FIBA Executive Director Asia, Hagop Khajirian.

The FIBA strategic objectives for 2019-2027, and the three main priorities for the period up to 2023, Empowering National

Federations, Women in Basketball and Enlarging the FIBA Family, were discussed at length during the two-day meeting. A detailed report of the 2019 activities was also presented by the Regional Office's three departments: Sport and Competitions, National Federations and Sports and Communications.

---Development of Youth and Women's basketball

A detailed report of the Regional Office's Ball'In Schools program intended to improve grassroots basketball in Asia was presented.

FIBA President, Hamane Niang said in regards to this: "If you want to develop basketball, you need to encourage children to play basketball. The youth are the future,

and our legacy is the youth".

The success of the FIBA Women's Asia Cup 2019 in Bengaluru was discussed, as well as the increased interest in women's basketball in the continent.

A proposal was made to launch a club competition for women in the near future and the importance of such events for the development of women's basketball was spoken of in depth. The Board asked the Regional Office to prepare a plan which will be discussed in the next meeting.

---FIBA Asia Cup 2021 Qualifiers and other Competitions

The Board were also updated regarding the readiness and preparation for the first-ever Qualifiers for the FIBA Asia Cup.

The Qualifiers are set to start in February 2020, taking place in three separate windows leading up to the Asia Cup in 2021.

The 2020 events including the FIBA U16 and U18 Men and Women Championships were discussed at length in addition to the continent's flagship club competition, the FIBA Asia Champions Cup 2020.

The Board emphasized the importance of having closer relationships with the National Federations and Sub-Zones and commented on the smooth cooperation with the Regional Office over the past four years.

Finally, the Board reviewed various National Federation matters and approved the budget for the region for 2020.

(Source: FIBA)

Iran rock climbers bag gold, silver medals in Asian Youth Champs

IRNA — Iranian female rock climbing team received three medals in the 2019 Asian Youth Sport Climbing Championship which is underway in Bangalore, India.

Iranian player Rahil Ramezani received a gold medal in bouldering category.

Earlier, Mahya Darabian ranked first in bouldering category and also received a silver medal lead category.

The International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) is an international non-governmental non-profit organization whose main objectives are the direction, regulation, promotion, development and furtherance of climbing competitions around the world.

Iran to help Pakistan develop traditional exercises

IRNA — Iran and the International Zorkhaneh Sports Federation will help Pakistan develop traditional exercises called (Zorkhaneh Sports), Pakistani coach Zakir Ali Khan said on Saturday.

Ali-Khan made the remarks on the sidelines of the fifth grade training of Zorkhaneh athletic sports and wrestling.



He told reporters that the athletic sports have a lot of fans in the Asian country and if Pakistani Sports Department could train good coaches, Pakistan can compete in Zorkhaneh sports by specialized team at international level.

«This field has good capacity in Pakistan, and if supported, we can become the main power of this field after Iran,» he said.

Zorkhaneh, which literally means 'strength house' in Persian, is a special place where men exercise traditional athletic sports.

Iran's Ghiasi to receive UWW Cadet World Championships medal upgrade

TASNIM — Silver medal of Iran's Mohammadreza Ghiasi in the United World Wrestling (UWW) Cadet World Championships will be upgraded to gold after his Russian rival Dmitrii Elkanov tested positive for banned substances.

In a letter to Iran wrestling federation sent by the United World Wrestling, Iran should return Ghiasi's silver to change it to the gold.

Ghiasi lost to Elkanov in the final match of the 80kg in the competition held in Zagreb, Croatia in July 2018.

UWW has suspended freestyle wrestler Elkanov following violations of the organization's anti-doping policy during the 2018 Cadet Wrestling World Championships in Zagreb, Croatia.

Iran win Day of Children Wrestling tournament

IRNA — Iranian wrestling team ranked first in the Day of Children International Tournament which was held in Iran.

The event was held with the attendance of 130 athletes from Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and also five Iranian teams in Greco-Roman and Free-style categories.

In free-style category, Iran with 245 points ranked first and Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan with 97 and 73 points, respectively stood on the second and third positions.

In Greco-Roman category, Iran with 235 points ranked first and Kyrgyzstan and Armenia with 137 and 101 points, respectively stood on the second and third positions.

FIFA receives four bids to host 2023 edition

The FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 bidding process, which has seen an unprecedented interest from Member Associations, has reached an important milestone, with four bids having been submitted by the deadline of December 13, 2019.

The bids received by FIFA were a joint submission by the Football Federation Australia and New Zealand Football, Brazilian Football Association, Colombian Football Association and Japan Football Association.

All of the bid books, along with their respective executive summaries, are available on FIFA.com.

FIFA will now implement an assessment process, including inspection visits to the Member Associations which are expected to take place across January and February 2020.

Once finalized, the evaluation report will be published on FIFA.com and all eligible bids will be presented to the FIFA Council, which is set to select the host(s) of the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 at its meeting in Addis Ababa in June 2020.

Following on from the astounding success of this year's FIFA Women's World Cup in France and the subsequent unanimous decision by the FIFA Council, the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 will be the first edition of the women's showcase to feature 32 teams.

(Source: FIFA.com)

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www.tehrantimes.com

Managing Director: Mohammad Shojaeian

Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895

editor@tehrantimes.com

» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000

» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450

» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807

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Zip Code: 1599814713

GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

O God, bring down gentle rain on us, and do not send dry clouds to us.

Imam Ali (AS)

22nd International Storytelling Festival opens Tuesday

A R T TEHRAN — The 22nd International Storytelling Festival will open in Tehran on Tuesday at the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) with narrators from Iran and several other countries.



A young narrator tells a story during the 20th edition of the International Storytelling Festival.

Eight Iranian storytellers along with narrators from Turkey, Lebanon, Japan and Spain will perform in the international section category, the director of the festival, Mohammad Zomorrodian, said during a press conference on Saturday.

“The festival is comprised of different sections with participants ranging from children to grandmothers and grandfathers,” he added.

“Like the previous edition, those individuals who could not take part in the festival recorded their stories and will be competing in the 90-second section of the festival,” he added.

“Writer Mostafa Rahmandust, children’s TV programmers Majid Qannad and Giti Khameneh, and actor Reza Kianian will be telling stories in the guest section during the event,” he added.

The artistic director of the festival, Soroush Sehat, also praised the IIDCYA for its efforts to promote reading among children.

The festival, which aims to promote storytelling traditions among the younger generation, will be running until December 21.

Bulgarian translation of book on Iranian arts introduced in Sofia

CULTURE TEHRAN — A Bulgarian translation of “Book on Iran, History of Art” has recently been introduced during a special ceremony at the 47th Sofia International Book Fair.



Iranian and Bulgarian officials introduce “Book on Iran, History of Art” at the 47th Sofia International Book Fair.

The ceremony was attended by the editor of the book, Ivo Panov, who is the director of the Iranian Studies Department at Sofia University; the director of the Directorate of Asia, Australia and Oceania of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, Angel Orbetsov; and the Iranian cultural attaché in Bulgaria, Hamidreza Azadi, Iran’s Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) announced on Saturday.

Diana Bratoeva is the translator of the book authored by Habibollah Ayatollahi.

The book is currently being taught by the Iranian Studies Department at Sofia University.

The 47th Sofia International Book Fair which opened on December 10 will come to an end today.

Tehran Municipality to award movies promoting less waste

A R T TEHRAN — Tehran Municipality has announced its plan to award movies that promote waste reduction.

“Those movies that promote less waste will be honored at the National Will Manifestation Awards this year during the Fajr Film Festival,” Tehran Waste Management Organization director Sadreddin Alipur said on Friday.

The awards are presented to those films that promote issues being pursued by some public organizations and institutes. Juries from the organizations select winners from the films screened at the Fajr Film Festival every year.

Over 20 movies will premiere during the 38th Fajr Film Festival, which will take place in Tehran from February 1 to 10.

“Population growth, urbanization, industrial activities and changing consumption patterns have triggered the production of millions tons of trash in the country,” Alipur said.

“To achieve better management of waste we need all people, one by one to be involved in this issue, and the problem needs to be highlighted in public opinion,” he added.

He noted that the Tehran Waste Management Organization will never succeed in its mission if the organization doesn’t have every individual’s contribution.

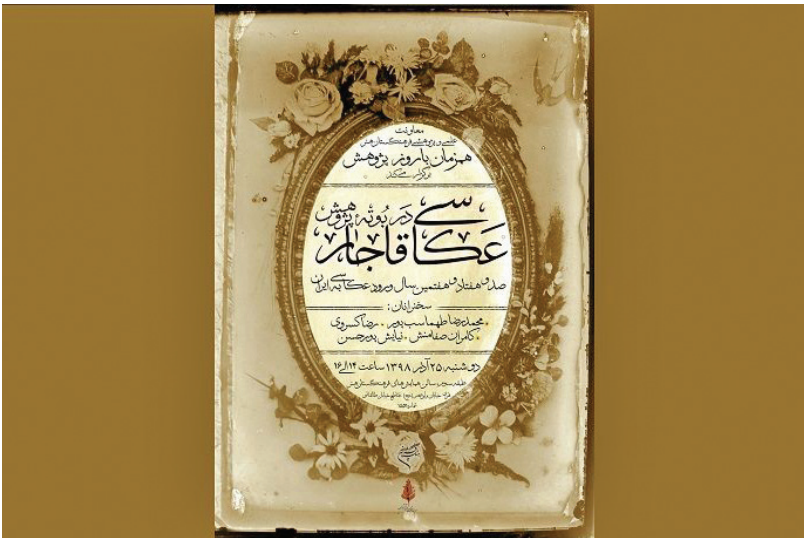
Based on a report published by the Tehran City Council in March, an average of 8000 to 9000 tons of household waste is generated in Tehran every day.

In addition, every citizen in Tehran every day produces an average of 800 to 900 grams of trash, two to three times higher than the global average, the report said.



A man walks past flags bearing logos for the Fajr Film Festival at Tehran’s Mellat Cineplex, February 2019. (FFF/Bahar Asgari)

Tehran center to review Qajar era photography



A poster for the Iranian Academy of Arts’ review session for the history of photography during the Qajar period.

A R T TEHRAN — The Iranian Academy of Arts will be playing host to a meeting on Monday, which plans to review the history of photography in the Qajar period (1789–1925).

The session has been organized to celebrate the 177th anniversary of the arrival of photography in Iran.

Photographer Mohammadreza Tahmasbpur, and scholars Reza Kasravi, Kamran Safabakhsh and Niayesh Purrhassan are scheduled to deliver speeches during the meeting.

The advent of photography occurred in Iran about three years after its invention in 1839 during the last years of Qajar king Mohammad Shah’s reign.

The first photo in Iran was taken in 1842 by Russian diplomat Nicolai Pavlov and was of Mohammad Shah and the royal family.

Afterwards, Nasser ad-Din Shah, Mohammad Shah’s successor, showed great interest in photography and sent several groups of talented students from Dar-ul-Fonun, the Iranian polytechnic institute established in 1851, to European academies to learn the art.

6th Silver Cypress Exhibition opens in Tehran



Art aficionados visit the 6th Silver Cypress Exhibition during the opening day on December 13, 2019. (Moj)

A R T TEHRAN — The 6th Silver Cypress Exhibition, which is organized biennially by the Iranian Graphic Designers Society, opened at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran on Friday.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, the director of the Iranian Graphic Designers Society, Mohsen Soleimani, said that there has been an increase in the number of works submitted to the biennial.

“We had no selection board for the sixth edition, however, the members of the policymaking council of the biennial

were invited to review the selected works and chose the final artworks for the public showing,” he added.

He also thanked the Beautification Organization of the Tehran Municipality and other supporters of the biennial.

Posters, book covers, designs of brochures and catalogs, digital graphic designs, and a collection of typographical designs by 300 artists are on view at the exhibition, which will run until December 20.

Top works in each category will be honored on the closing day.

Books by Italian children’s writer Gianni Rodari published in Persian

CULTURE TEHRAN — Four books by Italian children’s writer Gianni Rodari have recently been published in Persian in Tehran.

“Twice Upon a Time There Was a Baron Called Lamberto”, “Many Stories to Play”, “The Blue Arrow” and “Gelsomino in the Country of Liars” have been released by Hoopa Publications.

Hoopa, which is one of the major children’s books and board games publishers in Iran, has previously acquired the copyright to the books from Edizioni EL, the Italian publisher of Gianni Rodari’s books.

Translated by Mahbubeh Khodai and Homa Mirzai, “The Blue Arrow” is about a poor little boy, Francesco, who sells candy in a cinema. He sees a very beautiful train in a toy store but he knows he will never have the money to buy it. Even the toys,



This combination photo shows the front covers of the Persian versions of books by Italian children’s writer Gianni Rodari.

however, have a heart, and one night they climb on board the train, so they begin an adventurous journey to reach the children who really want them.

Khodai is also the translator of “Gelsomino in the Country of Liars”, which tells the story

of Gelsomino, who is born with an unusually loud voice that breaks things if he speaks above a whisper. Leaving his home he wanders into the strange Land of the Liars where it is mandated by law that no one shall ever speak the truth.

Italian police think stolen Klimt masterpiece found hidden behind ivy

ROME (Reuters) — A painting by the Austrian artist Gustav Klimt that was stolen in 1997 might have been discovered, hidden in a wall of the Italian gallery where it was taken from, officials said on Wednesday.

Workers discovered the painting, a portrait of a young woman completed in 1917, when they cleared ivy off the outside wall of the Ricci Oddi gallery in the northern city of Piacenza, and came across a small trap door.

Inside was a plastic rubbish bag that contained the artwork.

“This is incredible,” Jonathan Papamareng, head of culture in Piacenza town council, told Capital Radio.

Police took charge of the find and experts will now examine it to check its authenticity.

The painting vanished in February 1997. Police said at the time they believed thieves had used a fishing line to hook the masterpiece off the wall and haul it up through an open skylight to the gallery roof where the frame was discarded.

A skilled forgery of the painting, wrapped up and posted to a disgraced politician, was seized by authorities a month later, adding to the mystery.

Papamareng said it was hard to believe that the original had been hidden in the gallery wall ever since its disappearance, saying the building had been carefully

searched after the theft.

“The painting’s condition is excellent. It seems strange to believe it has been tucked away in a wall, close to the ground and vegetation for 22 years,” he added.

Papamareng said the Klimt was second on the list of most valuable art missing in Italy, just behind a painting by Caravaggio stolen from a church in Sicily in 1969.

The Klimt is considered particularly important because shortly before its disappearance an art student realized it was painted over another work previously believed lost – a portrait of a young lady that had not been seen since 1912 – making it the only “double” Klimt known to the art world.