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'Boosting domestic production a must, even after sanctions'

TEHRAN — Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani said developing the country's domestic production must be seriously pursued whether the country is under sanctions or not, Shata reported.

Speaking in a gathering with CEOs and board members of the country's large industrial and mining organizations and corporations on Monday, Rahmani said "Our enemies expected the country's industry sector to shut

down under the pressure of the unjust sanctions, however their plots did not work out and we are still standing strong."

He mentioned some of the country's improvements in the industry, mining and trade sector, saying license issuance for establishing industrial units across the country increased by 16.7 percent in the first eight months of the current calendar year (March 21- November 23). →4

Regional security meeting to kick off in Tehran today

TEHRAN—Iran and six more key countries are set to hold the second session of Regional Security Dialogue in Tehran today.

According to the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretariat, senior security officials from Iran, Russia, China, India, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are attending the session. The core of the talks will be how to restore

endurable security in Afghanistan.

The one-day session, which is initiated and hosted by the SNSC, will be attended by the national security advisors and officials from the mentioned countries.

This year's meeting will concentrate on the issue of Afghanistan as well as comprehensive campaign against different forms of terrorism in the country. →2

New leaks: Trump's Palestine deal seeks shared al-Quds, Saudi role

A Lebanese TV network has published what it reported to be a draft of U.S. President Donald Trump's controversial deal on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which envisages the establishment of a "new Palestine," with occupied Jerusalem al-Quds remaining under mostly Israeli control and Saudi Arabia replacing Jordan as the custodian of the al-Aqsa Mosque.

According to Al-Mayadeen's report,

Trump's so-called peace plan — which he calls the "deal of the century" — would see a trilateral agreement signed between Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Gaza-based Hamas resistance movement.

■ New Palestine

Under the deal, a "new Palestinian state" would be established in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. →13

EDITORIAL
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How Guterres suppressed the Western media warfare against Iran

On the morning of September 14, 2019, the Saudi Aramco oil facilities in Buqayq and Khurais in eastern Saudi Arabia were attacked by the Yemeni army and Popular Resistance Committees, which cut the country's oil production by %50.

From the earliest moments of the event, Saudi Arabia and the U.S., which were in great shock, held Iran responsible for the attacks without any evidence.

However, the Yemeni army spokesman took the responsibility for the attacks and stated that they were launched in response to the Saudi invasion into Yemen. The spokesman also rejected statements by U.S. and Saudi officials about Iranian or Iraqi intervention in the event.

Saudi Arabia and the U.S. were pursuing several considerable goals by accusing the Islamic Republic of Iran of involving in the attacks, including:

1. Derailing the public opinion from the main reason triggering the event, which was the continuing aggression of the Saudi-UAE coalition into Yemen and the daily killing of Yemeni women and children.
2. Refusing to accept that the Yemeni army has dealt such heavy blow, since they did not believe that Yemen would be able to carry out such an operation.
3. Engaging Iran in the event to prove Tehran's active role in the Yemen war.
4. Making excuses to justify further legal, political and military reactions and measures against Iran in order to complete the maximum pressure campaign.

These accusations, however, failed to convince local and international public opinion due to the lack of substantiated evidence.

On the one hand, the inability to convince the public opinion as well as international organizations raises the question about the U.S. technical capabilities to identify from which side the attacks originated. Although, an international fact-finding committee was established by the UN, there was no sign of Iran's involvement in the attacks. →13

French police fire tear gas at pension reform protesters

Protests and industrial action cripple transport, schools

French police in Nantes have fired tear gas at protesters taking part in continuing demonstrations against President Emmanuel Macron's proposed pension reforms.

Unions have refused to back down in their opposition to the reforms, which were unveiled by Prime Minister Édouard Philippe last week. The crippling protests and workers' strikes have brought transport chaos to French cities since they kicked off on December 5.

Footage from Nantes, shared on social media, shows tear gas and water cannons being deployed against protesters, while some protesters managed to kick the gas canisters back towards riot cops.

Meanwhile, nationwide strikes and protests were disrupting schools and travel in cities across

France on Tuesday, with mass demonstrations organized by unions in their ongoing battle with the government over pension reform.

The 13th day of strikes shuttered eight metro lines in Paris and reduced others to a limited service. Only one in four high-speed trains are running.

French rail workers, in particular, have been striking over proposed changes that include scrapping industry-agreed retirement plans in favor of a universal pensions system.

Prime Minister Édouard Philippe unveiled reforms last week, including a change in the pivotal retirement age from 62 to 64, though people can still decide to retire at 62.

The leader of one of France's largest unions,

the CFDT, said that the adjustment in age crossed a "red line" and called for the strike to continue.

The protests were sparked by the revelation that France's High Commissioner for Pensions Jean-Paul Delevoye had failed to declare 13 paid and volunteer roles on his conflict of interest declaration when he entered government two months ago.

His resignation on Monday amid a scandal over his external income has failed to calm the outrage.

■ Why workers are striking

Many of the country's largest unions want Emmanuel Macron's government to revoke some of the proposed changes. (Source: RT)

Malaysia to host major summit of Muslim leaders

Malaysia will this week host a summit of Muslim leaders billed as a forum to look at the Islamic world's problems, but it will be closely watched for Middle East power plays and their stance on China's Uighur minority.

Leaders from Iran, Turkey, and Qatar will be among hundreds of delegates attending the three-day event set to discuss myriad challenges faced by Muslims.

The summit has been pushed by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who has long championed greater solidarity among the world's Islamic communities -- and wants to boost his country's standing on the international stage.

A key question is whether China's treatment

of its mostly Muslim Uighur minority, many of whom have been sent to "re-education" camps, will be raised after Islamic leaders faced criticism for largely remaining silent on the issue.

In a statement ahead of the forum, Mahathir's office said the Muslim community was suffering due to "the incarceration of millions (who) are placed in detention camps, civil wars resulting in total destruction of cities... the rise of Islamophobia".

With no high-level Saudi delegation coming but the President of arch-rival Iran and the emir of Qatar -- under a Riyadh-led blockade -- in attendance, there has been speculation the forum could be used to counter the kingdom's influence.

Also present is Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose ties with Riyadh have worsened in recent times.

Saudi Arabia's King Salman was invited but is not coming, Malaysian officials say.

■ Challenge to the Saudis?

Analysts Giorgio Cafiero and Khalid Al-Jaber, in a commentary for the Middle East Institute think-tank, said some Muslim-majority countries were uncomfortable with Saudi Arabia due to de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's rise.

The Kuala Lumpur summit could "serve as an alternative to the Jeddah-headquartered Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which is under Saudi Arabia's de facto leadership", they said. →13

ARTICLE
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journalist

Costs by inexperienced crown prince for Saudi Arabia

As the influence of Crown Prince Mohamad bin Salman on Saudi Arabia's decision-making bodies has been increasing, the country has taken an aggressive foreign policy approach.

The most important reason for changes in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is the crown prince's ambitions and inexperience in governing as well as ignoring the realities of the country's political environment.

The illegal invasion of Yemen, widespread intervention in the domestic affairs of Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Libya as well as cutting ties with Qatar are among obvious effects of the aggressive approach adopted by Saudi Arabia.

The unprecedented strain in Riyadh's ties with Iran and extensive effort to apply direct or indirect pressure on the Islamic Republic are the measures that can be considered as the crown prince's foreign policy achievement.

After nearly six years of following such an approach, not only no new achievement has emerged, but also the country has faced the burdensome economic, security and political costs.

Being caught in the Yemeni quagmire coupled with failure in implementing its policies in Syria and Iraq, which were being pursued through financial and intelligence support for the Takfiri terrorist groups are the effects of the aggressive approach. The inept foreign policy has resulted in more debacles, such as the scandal of arresting Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri while in Saudi Arabia and Qatar's successful resistance in face of widespread pressure by Riyadh.

In recent months, Saudi Arabia have made many efforts to reduce the problems caused its aggressive foreign policy approach. In this regard, Riyadh has taken some actions. For example, it has taken steps to resolve disputes with Qatar and attempting to get closer to the Yemeni Houthis in order to reach a peace agreement.

Although, Saudi Arabia has been trying to review its previous aggressive approaches, there are numerous evidences that the country is seeking to interfere in the regional states' domestic affairs and dictate its political will through soft and less costly methods. →13



Iranian top researchers, technologists honored

TEHRAN — Twenty-three top researchers and technologists were honored at the 20th Exhibition of Research and Technological Achievements which opened in Tehran on Tuesday, ISNA news agency reported.

Science Minister Mansour Gholami and Vice President for Science and Technology Sourena Sattari attended the opening ceremony.

The event is underway at Tehran International Exhibition Center till December 20. →12

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No deal can survive if there is no balance between gives and takes: Araqchi says of JCPOA

Iran wants to save nuclear deal: Araghchi

By staff and agency

Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said that Iran wants to save the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

"The message is that we want to save the deal. The purpose is not to kill the deal. Otherwise, we could have withdrawn from the deal right after the U.S. withdrew on May 8, 2018, and nobody would have blamed us because that was in reaction to what the U.S. has done," he told CGTN in an interview published on Tuesday.

"But we decided to give diplomacy a chance to save the deal. And now... we are exercising our right in paragraph 36 of the deal. So, we are still in the deal and are trying to take remedy measures in order to save the deal," he added.

He said, "No deal can survive if there is not a balance between gives and takes. And we have no balance in the deal right now. Iran is fully committed to its obligations up to May this year. But we received nothing. So, what Iran is doing is still trying to restore the balance in the deal, which hasn't happen yet."

Araghchi asserts that Iran wouldn't bow to pressure. Negotiating under maximum pressure is tantamount to surrender, Araghchi believes.

So, for the Iranian government, at this moment, negotiation with the United States would be out of the political equation.

Looking at the long run, Araghchi believes that Iran would not shape its own policy based on what's happening in the United States.

"We are not counting on who is the U.S. president and who is not. We have a very basic principle and strategy. And we are following it very carefully. We don't think the change of president in the United States would change anything in the relation with Iran, unless somebody come who can fulfill the commitments they have already made and unless they will back to the JCPOA. So, we can, again, talk with them in the JCPOA format. That is the only possibility," he said.

Elsewhere, he said, "China is a major international player. We believe that, like Russia, China also can play a very constructive role in problems that exist in the Middle East and other regions."

"We have a very good experience of working with China for coming to a conclusion on Iran's nuclear program. China was a part of JCPOA and still an important participant to the JCPOA. We appreciate China's position to protect the deal and save the deal. So, China already played its role in the JCPOA, which was a very important question in the Middle East," he said.

Army holds first theoretical research conference

POLITICAL TEHRAN — The first version of the Army's theoretical research gathering was held in Tehran, the Army announced on Tuesday, saying several senior military officials attended the meeting.

The meeting was held in the Kowthar center of the self-sufficiency jihad and research department of the Army.

In a statement in February, Ayatollah Khamenei entrusted the young generation with 7 missions for the second long stride of the Islamic Revolution in the fields of science and research, spirituality and ethics, economy, justice and fighting corruption, independence and freedom, national honor, foreign relations and setting boundaries with enemy and lifestyle.

Several research plans, books and quarterlies were unveiled in line with explaining views of the Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief Ayatollah Khamenei and his second stride statement.

Also, earlier this year, in a meeting with a group of top Army commanders in Tehran, Ayatollah said the growing unity among the Iranian armed forces has enraged the enemy.

Iranian patients breathe hard due to U.S. sanctions on medical imports

TEHRAN (FNA)- The U.S. sanctions and restrictions on the imports of drugs and medical equipment to Iran have shortened the breath of special patients who are diagnosed with cancer, hemophilia, epilepsy and thalassemia.

Despite the American officials' claims of not imposing sanctions on imports of drugs to Iran, it's reported that medications are hard to obtain in the country due to banking embargos that hamper money transactions which causes some Western companies to refuse to sell the necessary drugs and medical equipment to Tehran.

"The U.S. has targeted the Iranian patients and they have planned to pressure those who are consumers of these drugs. Therefore, the vitamins and ordinary drugs are easily accessed in the market but the U.S. is making its utmost attempts to prevent Iran from purchasing the vital medicine and those which are necessary for cancer patients," Head of the Iranian Society of Blood and Cancer of Children Hassan Abolqassemi told FNA on Tuesday.

He added that the crime committed by the U.S. against the Iranian patients is worse than its crime in Hiroshima.

Meantime, Head of Iran Thalassaemia Association Yunes Arab said that 90 thalassaemia patients lost their life last year due to the lack of drugs and the U.S. sanctions, adding that 60 other young patients also died in the current year.

"They would have been breathing a normal life if it hadn't been for the U.S. sanctions on drugs," he told FNA.

The U.S. embargos have also left impacts on the hemophilia patients.

"Basically, what the U.S. is doing is a type of war crime; although the Americans declared that drugs and medical equipment are not sanctioned, what we witness is harsh sanctions in the field of drugs and medical equipment," former head of Iran's Hemophilia Association Ahmad Qavidel told FNA.

Also, Sara Nouri, the Managing-Director of Iran's MPS (Mucopolysaccharidosis) Patients Society, told FNA that the Association provides necessary medicine to the MPS patients but it has faced problems after the U.S. sanctions.

"The most important medicine needed for the patients is a type of enzyme and they should receive them weekly," Nouri said, adding that 300 MPS patients have been identified in Iran so far but the number is expected to increase to 1,000.

"For instance, if a patient should receive 50 drugs in a period of time, he/she receives 5 to 10 drugs now due to the problems created by sanctions, and this will inflict serious harm to the patients' health," she warned.

Countries seek to have close ties with Iran: Rouhani

President says U.S. sanctions on Iran will not be permanent

POLITICAL TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday that despite pressure by America countries around the world are seeking to establish close relationship with Iran.

"The policy of a view on East and closer ties with important Asian countries has always been objective of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Visits to Kuala Lumpur and Tokyo at the invitation of the two countries' senior officials are in line with this policy of Iran," Rouhani said before departure to Kuala Lumpur.

He added that the United States' oppressive sanctions on Iran will not be permanent.

On his visit to Malaysia to attend the Kuala Lumpur (KL) Summit, Rouhani said multilateral relations in the world of Islam will be studied.

Rouhani said that important Islamic countries, including Iran, Turkey, Malaysia, Pakistan, Qatar and Indonesia, are attending the summit.

He said that he will hold talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on the sidelines of the summit.

Rouhani also said that his visit to Japan is in line with facilitating expansion of relations.

After concluding his visit to Malaysia, Rouhani will fly to Japan for talks with



Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Rouhani said regional security will be discussed in the meeting with Prime Minister Abe.

Rouhani's visit to Japan will be the first visit by an Iranian president since October 2000.

Deputy Foreign Minister for Political

Affairs Abbas Araghchi said on Monday that visits to Tehran and Tokyo by the officials from Iran and Japan show the strength of relations between the two countries.

During a conference at Tehran University, he said, "Rouhani's visit to Japan will be one-day and in continuation of

"The policy of a view on East and closer ties with important Asian countries has always been objective of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Spread of terrorism is biggest challenge to Afghanistan: Shamkhani

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said on Tuesday that spread of terrorism is the biggest challenge to Afghanistan.

"Spread of terrorism and efforts by certain regional and extra-regional countries to weaken security in Afghanistan are the most serious challenges that threaten peace and stability in Afghanistan," he said during a meeting with

Chinese Minister of State Security Chen Wenqing in Tehran.

Chen has visited Tehran as Iran is holding the Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan with participation of China, Russia, India, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.

Shamkhani expressed hope that constructive steps would be taken in line with strengthening security and stability in Afghanistan.

Elsewhere, he said that Iran and China are

determined to expand strategic cooperation.

"The Iranian and Chinese security institutions can play a special role in implementing political, economic and defense agreements between the two countries," the top security official remarked.

For his part, Chen said that China attaches great importance to relations with Tehran.

Shamkhani also held a separate meeting with Mahmatali Vatanzoda, the secretary of

the two countries' national interests. We should not expect something special to happen. Diplomatic visits are constant and are not in a way that a special result achieve by just one move. Hundreds of meetings should be held to reach a result."

In an interview with NHK published on December 7, Araghchi said that Japan is an economic partner and provider of technology to Iran, which has always been one of Japan's major oil suppliers.

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

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

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

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

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

Royal Navy head says UK does not support maximum pressure on Iran

By staff and agency

Admiral Tony Radakin, the head of the British Royal Navy, has said that the United Kingdom does not support the United States' policy of maximum pressure on Iran.

The UK had "been very clear" it did not support the Trump administration's policy of maximum pressure on Iran, he told BBC in an interview published on Tuesday.

He said that the UK wanted to "de-escalate" tensions with Iran following the release of the Stena Impero.

On July 19, the 30,000-ton UK-flagged Stena Impero tanker was seized by Iranian naval forces, after it ignored distress call as it collided with a fishing boat on its route. The tanker was released in September.

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

Iranian officials and analysts say the maximum pressure policy has failed.

Addressing a ceremony marking International Day for the People with Disability on December 3, President Hassan Rouhani highlighted the key role of the people's "maximum

resistance" against the U.S. maximum pressure.

Rouhani said in October that the Iranian nation has successfully passed the difficult test of countering the "maximum pressure" policy of the ill-wishers.

First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri also said in October that Iran has succeeded to defeat the U.S. policy of maximum pressure.

"We have defeated the United States' policy of maximum pressure and they are aware that this plan does not work against Iran," he said.

Abbas Araqchi, a top nuclear negotiator and deputy foreign minister, has said Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran has produced "maximum resistance".

In an interview with NPR published on September 22, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that Iran will not succumb to economic pressure by Washington.

"Abandon the illusion that Iran can be defeated by pressure," he said.

"We are resisting an unprovoked aggression by the United States. I can assure you that the United States will not be able to bring us to our knees through pressure," he noted.

Zarif also told CGTN in an interview aired on Septem-



ber 22 that Washington's policy of sanction and pressure against Iran has not worked.

"The United States is running out of options. It is desperate. The policy of maximum pressure has not worked," he said. Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has called policy of "maximum pressure" on Tehran bankrupt.

"We have been pressuring them. Maximum pressure... we're seeing the unfolding of really a bankruptcy of approach," Kerry told CBS News.

Private sector playing pivotal role in countering economic war: Jahangiri

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Es'haq Jahangiri, the first vice-president, said on Tuesday that the private sector has been assisting the government in confronting the U.S. economic war against Iran.

Touching upon measures adopted by the country's private sector, Jahangiri said, "The country's private sector has taken giant strides in facing the U.S. economic war against Iran."

He added, "Despite unfair judgments, the private sector has been carrying out the country's exports and imports, has been generating job opportunities for the young people and has also been preventing closure of our industrial units."

He also rejected as futile a claim by Washington that sanctions will decrease Iran's oil exports to zero, saying, "A number of the Iranian managers and young experts stood up firmly against the U.S. policies via new plans and did not allow the enemy to materialize its plots and objectives."

"The volume of our trade transactions has exceeded \$100 billion regardless of the U.S. pressures on Iran's economy which proves that the country's economy is still standing on Iranians' feet," the vice president underscored.



Also, in July, Jahangiri stressed that his country's economy had remained stable more than one year after the U.S. imposed the toughest embargos against Tehran.

"The U.S. imagines that it can zero down our oil sales by exerting pressure on the countries which purchase Iran's oil to push Iran's economy towards a collapse, but fortunately the situation of Iran's economy enjoys an acceptable stability one year after the U.S. oil sanctions," Jahangiri said in a meeting with Head of the International Liaison Department of the Communist Party of China Song Tao in Tehran.

He described China as the main economic partner of Iran and oil customer and said, "All high-ranking Iranian officials have put the strategy to develop ties with China on their agenda as a serious mechanism."

MP sees no way for talks unless U.S. returns to JCPOA

POLITICAL TEHRAN — There is no possibility for resumption of talks between Tehran and Washington unless the U.S. returns to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), MP Seyed Hossein Naqavi-Hosseini said on Tuesday.

"Iran's strategy towards the U.S. has been completely obvious and has been announced several times," he said when asked about President Hassan Rouhani's looming trip to Japan and some views in this regard that Japan may act as intermediary between Tehran and Washington.

In an interview with Azad University news agency (ANA), he said, "With regard to the U.S. oppressive sanctions and disloyalty to obligations, there is no negotiations or meeting in any form with them on Iran's foreign policy agenda."

Naqavi-Hosseini, rapporteur for the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, added, "Iran has on many occasions announced that the required negotiations and agreement with the U.S. have already been concluded and now they must fulfil their undertakings."

Rouhani is set to visit Japan on Dec.

19 for talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Abe said last week that Tokyo backs the JCPOA and is trying to help keep the pact alive.

According to Financial Post, Abe also said Japan wants to make every possible effort to reduce tension in the Middle East.

Washington has urged Tokyo to share the outcome of summit between Abe and Rouhani, Kyodo reported.

It will be the first visit by an Iranian president since October 2000.

In May 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump announced his country's withdrawal from the JCPOA and returned the previous sanctions lifted under the JCPOA and imposed new ones.

The pact was struck in July 2015 between Iran and the five permanent UN Security Council members, Germany and the European Union.

Iran has repeatedly said it will keeping reducing its obligations to the agreement in stages and may even quit the agreement unless the remaining signatories come up with solutions to protect its economy from U.S. sanctions.

Regional security meeting to kick off in Tehran on Wednesday

1 → The national security officials will also hold bilateral talks. The first session of the Regional Security Dialogue was held last year in October.

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan which neighbor Afghanistan have attended this year's meeting.

In August, senior Afghan analyst Entezar Khadem hailed Tehran's role in the peace process in Afghanistan, saying Iran

enjoyed the capability to help stabilize its eastern neighbor.

"Iran, as a neighbor of Afghanistan, has a bold role in peace and it can undertake several vital steps for having a sustainable peace," Khadem said at the time, touching upon comments by Afghan officials who believed that U.S. efforts for establishing peace in Afghanistan would be futile without contribution from neighboring countries like Iran and India.

Khadem added that Iran could cooperate with Afghanistan and assist Kabul in fighting terrorism.

"On the other hand, Iran, because of its dominance and status, can convince the leaders of Taliban to join the campaign for establishing peace and stability in Afghanistan," he highlighted.

The expert added that Tehran could help Taliban reach the conclusion that Afghanistan was no longer a place for terrorism.

Foreign diplomats meet Iran's human rights chief

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Mohammad Javad Larijani, secretary of the High Council for Human Rights in Iran, hosted a meeting with a number of foreign ambassadors in Tehran on Tuesday.

There was no word about the content of the talks.

However, speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the meeting, Larijani said the number of individuals who were arrested in the last month's protests is "a few hundreds, not a few thousands."

"Two incidents happened after the announcement of the gasoline price increase," he said, according to IRIB news. "The first incident was the people's protest which we should attend to, but the second incident was systematic measures by guided groups which resorted to violence, destruction and killing under the guise of protests."

He also said 85 percent of victims of the killings were security forces as well as those who were trying to protect their homes and families.

The other 15 percent were from terrorist



groups, Larijani added.

In remarks last week, government spokesman Ali Rabiei said number of police forces who were injured during

the November unrest is higher than that of the civilians.

"We cannot announce inflated statistics as America does," Rabiei told a press

briefing in Tehran.

He was referring to a claim by U.S. special representative for Iran Brian Hook, who had said more than a thousand people may have been killed during the protests.

In certain cases, the protests against rise in gasoline price turned violent as some rioters clashed with police, using knives and guns.

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

The protests lasted just for a few days. Earlier this month, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged relevant state bodies to practice Islamic mercy when dealing with those who committed acts of violence or caused insecurity in the protests.

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

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

'Failure to join FATF won't be good for economy'



POLITICAL TEHRAN — Mehdi Motaharnia, a political analyst, has claimed that if Iran refuses to join the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an international consensus would be formed against Iran.

"Currently, North Korea has been blacklisted and Iran will be the second country if it is also blacklisted. If so, the first consequence will be an international consensus against Iran in the area of economic activities," he told ISNA in an interview published on Tuesday.

He noted that refusing to join the FATF will be "very dangerous" for Iran and will affect the future of investment negatively.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Monday that the Expediency Council takes the final decision on the FATF, expressing hope the deci-

sion would be in line with the country's "expediency". Majid Ansari, a member of the Expediency Council, told IRNA on Monday that the council is still studying the CFT and the Palermo bill.

He declined to comment about whether the two bills would be finally rejected or approved by the council.

The overall atmosphere in the Expediency Council is against approving the FATF. The opposition to ratifying the FATF rose after the abrogation of the 2015 nuclear deal by the United States and the return of sanctions.

Gholamreza Mesbahi-Moghadam, a member of the Expediency Council, has said, "In a situation in which the country is under the most severe sanctions, joining such conventions is synonymous with self-inflicted sanctions. In the situation in which the United States seeks to limit the country's financial relations, it is not beneficial to join institutions like FATF."

The parliament ratified the FATF in October 2018, however, the oversight Guardian Council rejected the bill.

Whenever there is a dispute between the parliament and the Guardian Council on a bill it is referred to the Expediency Council for final arbitration.

The Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) said on October 18 that it has given Iran a final deadline of February 2020 to tighten its laws against money laundering in compliance with the global watchdog's financial standards.

"If before February 2020, Iran does not enact the Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions in line

with the FATF Standards, then the FATF will fully lift the suspension of counter-measures and call on its members and urge all jurisdictions to apply effective counter-measures, in line with recommendation 19," the FATF said in a statement, Reuters reported.

One of the actions Iran is required to take to appease the FATF is to ratify the CFT, the convention combatting the financing of terrorism.

Mesbahi-Moghadam, who served as parliament representative for two four-year terms, also told ISNA in an interview last month that the council has set aside studies to approve bills related to the FATF.

"Palermo and CFT will help the United States to identify the ways we circumvent the sanctions. We will not tighten sanctions by our own hands," he remarked.

However, the government is pushing for the approval of the FATF.

Talking in a cabinet meeting on October 23, President Hassan Rouhani called on the Expediency Council to approve the FATF related bills.

"It is our pride that we fight terrorists and counter corruption, therefore we should not allow allegations of money laundering against our banking system," Rouhani stated.

He added, "This hurts our country." Mahmoud Vaezi, the presidential chief of staff, said on October 30 that Iran should use the opportunity to join the FATF in order to avoid self-inflicted sanctions.

He said those who oppose joining the FATF should accept responsibility for their actions.

Judiciary: Amnesty International's death toll stats is invalid

Esmaili says Judiciary is investigating cases of unrest victims

POLITICAL TEHRAN — The spokesman for Iran's Judiciary says the Judiciary is investigating cases of the victims of the November protests in certain cities in the country.

The Judiciary has started investigation into any suspicious death during the protests, Gholam Hossein Esmaili said at a press conference on Tuesday, Mehr reported.

According to Esmaili, the death toll of the unrest, as announced by Amnesty International, is invalid.

He said the international body's statistics is based on lies, adding that Amnesty International is an anti-human rights body which supported rioters.

Esmaili said Iran's enemies are spreading false information about the death toll to damage the reputation of the Islamic Republic.

"Even individuals who were alive were reported dead [by foreign media]," he added.

He added the Judiciary is planning to review the cases of all the individuals who were arrested during the protests to



ensure fair trial.

The spokesman also said most of the detainees have been released. Following a hike in the price of gasoline

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

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

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

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

Esmaili said on November 19 that the innocent individuals who were arrested would be released soon.

The judicial, security and law enforcement units are expected to immediately determine whether the detainees have committed crimes and to release those who are innocent and have not committed arson or property damage, he said.

"This was put on the agenda from the very beginning," Esmaili said. "With this measure, the concern of some families will be alleviated."

He also said foreign elements were proven to be involved in the protests.

Defense chief: Iran needs to gain power for survival

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iran's geopolitical and geographic position necessitates gaining power for survival in the region, Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Tuesday.

"We must increase our power in all fields, particularly in defense," Hatami said at a meeting of defense industry researchers in Tehran.

He said Iran has gained such a high level of defense power that it surprises the enemies in their decision-making.



"By employing new models in science and technology, we have detected the shortcomings in the defense sphere," he said, adding that Iran has reached a point that will not be overwhelmed by the enemies.

Pointing to Iran's progress in the defense sphere, General Hatami said the technologies developed by the Defense Ministry are helping other domestic organizations, industries, knowledge-based companies and the private sector.

In remarks earlier this month, Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri said the Islamic Republic has gained full self-sufficiency in the field of defense.

He also highlighted the effectual strategy to take advantage of knowledge-based companies for manufacturing defense equipment.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great headways in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment.

Iran maintains that its military capabilities pose no threat to regional countries, stressing that the Islamic Republic's defense doctrine is entirely based on deterrence.

Iran, Russia, Turkey to hold parliamentary talks in Ankara: Russian MP

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iran, Russia and Turkey are set to hold parliamentary consultations in Ankara early next year, a Russian lawmaker said on Tuesday.

"We have an agreement with Turkey and Iran to hold regular trilateral joint meetings of foreign affairs committees," said Konstantin Kosachev, head of the Russian upper house's Foreign Affairs Committee.



"The first such meeting took place in the end of the spring session in Moscow. The second meeting is scheduled to take place early next year in Turkey's Ankara. We, for our part, have already agreed to the dates, but we are still waiting for the confirmation by our Iranian partners," Kosachev said at a press conference, Urdu Point reported.

He said Tehran has confirmed that it will host the third meeting in the second half of 2020.

"And then it will be Russia's turn again. So, we are having a mechanism of regular biannual joint meetings of foreign affairs committees of the three parliaments," Kosachev added.

The three countries have, in part, worked together to help resolve the conflict in Syria. They serve as guarantors of the Syrian ceasefire.

The Astana peace talks were launched on Jan. 23-24, 2017 with the aim of putting an end to the Syrian conflict.

Kazakhstan has hosted multiple rounds of talks on Syria since January 2017, backed by the three power brokers, most of which involved delegations from the Syrian government and opposition.

The 14th round of talks kicked off in Noursultan (formerly called Astana) earlier this month, with a focus on technical issues, in the northern part of Syria, the area of Idlib, and the banks of the Euphrates.

Health minister: Iran holds reserve of strategic medicines

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Iran's Health Minister said the country has amassed a reserve of strategic medicines enough to meet domestic demand for seven months.

Speaking at a conference in the western city of Hamedan on Tuesday, Saeed Namaki said all Iranian pharmaceutical factories and operating rooms have a reserve of strategic medicines enough to meet demands until July 2020.

The minister also noted that medicine shortage in Iran has dropped to one-third what it used to be last year.

The Health Ministry has managed to supply the necessary medical equipment and medicines despite the cruel sanctions imposed by the U.S., Namaki added.

In comments in October, he said Iran was exporting pharmaceuticals to countries in Europe, Africa and Central Asia.

In September, secretary of Biotechnology Development Headquarters at the Iranian Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology said Iranian biopharmaceuticals were being exported to major customers like Russia, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Turkey, adding that plans were underway to transfer Iranian biopharmaceuticals technology to Argentina.

Paris serious in salvaging Iran nuclear deal: envoy

POLITICAL TEHRAN — French ambassador to Tehran Philippe Thiebaud has underlined Paris's interest in preserving the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), reaffirming the seriousness and interest of his country and the European Union in maintaining the important agreement.

Thiebaud made the remarks in a meeting with Behrouz Kamalvandi, the spokesman of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization (IAEO) on Monday.

During the meeting, the French envoy discussed the latest status of the agreement and expectation of the JCPOA parties to maintain the agreement given Iran's scaling down of its commitments under the deal, Iran Press reported.

The two sides also exchanged views on bilateral cooperation in various fields of nuclear science and technology, including fusion and radiopharmaceuticals, and the

deepening of relations in the field of nuclear industry.

Washington withdrew from the internationally-endorsed nuclear deal with Iran on May 8, 2018, reimposed the toughest-ever sanctions against the country and started a plan to zero down Tehran's oil sales.

Under the nuclear agreement, Tehran undertook to put limits on its nuclear program in exchange for the termination of economic and financial sanctions.

Following the U.S. withdrawal, Iran remained fully committed to the JCPOA for a year, but announced on the anniversary of Washington's bellicose move that its "strategic patience" is over and would gradually reduce its commitments to the deal at 60-day intervals, which were designed as deadlines for Europe to protect Tehran's interests under the deal.

Tehran has repeatedly said its measures will be revered as soon as Europe finds practical ways to shield the Iranian economy from unilateral U.S. sanctions.



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	346870.73
IFX	4528.11

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,820 rials
GBP	55,850 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$65.58/b
WTI	\$60.40/b
OPEC Basket	\$66.76/b
Gold	\$1,480.30/oz
Silver	\$817.12/oz
Platinum	\$934.00/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Singapore eyes new drivers of financial progress

A key Singapore advisory panel has proposed a 10-year strategy aimed at ensuring annual economic growth of 2-3%, mainly centered on trade partnerships, deepening the workforce's tech skills and digitalizing the economy.

It also recommended a review of Singapore's tax system so that it remains pro-growth and competitive, while also "broad-based, progressive and fair" to adjust to an ageing society but it did not go into details over how that should be shaped.

"Over the next decade, our collective efforts should enable us to grow by 2-3% per year on average, exceeding the performance of most advanced economies," the Committee on the Future Economy (CFE) said in its report.

In 2016, Singapore's economy grew 1.8%, its lowest pace of growth since 2009, when the global financial crisis sent international trade plummeting.

Singapore has a history of conducting broad reviews of its economic strategy going back to the 1960s and 1970s, and most recently in 2010, with the government following most proposals.

The CFE, formed of some government officials, prominent CEOs and specialists in various fields, consulted 9,000 stakeholders, including trade associations, public agencies, unions, companies and students, before putting forward its proposals.

Government accepted strategies

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in a letter attached to the report that the government accepted the proposed strategies and would pursue all of them. Ministers will provide a response during the 2017 budget speech, due on Feb 20.



Asked about possible specific changes to the tax system, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat said at a press briefing that will be addressed through a separate process, including consultations.

Economists said the government might be looking at increasing the sales tax or the income tax for the high earners, while potentially lowering the flat 17% corporate tax.

"Every country in the world right now wants to cut their corporate tax rate, the U.S. included," said Michael Wan, an economist for Credit Suisse.

"I think the government does view that with some concern. It could impact Singapore's competitiveness, re-shape global supply chains... the government would definitely want to save some fiscal space to respond to those kind of shocks if need be."

The report identifies the rise of the Asian middle-class and increased urbanization as opportunities for its finance, logistics and hub services, as well for a more advanced manufacturing sector.

In terms of external policies, the government was advised to resist protectionism and strengthen trade cooperation by reducing tariffs and other barriers.

The ASEAN Economic Community and the Beijing-favored Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership are key avenues to pursue such policies. Another option is partnering global financial institutions on regional development projects.

Strategic importance for the economy

Domestically, the report identified cybersecurity skills as of strategic importance for the economy and national defense. It said these could be developed in the workforce during national service training, which is mandatory for male citizens upon leaving school.

A simplified regulatory framework for venture capital funds and encouraging more private equity firms to be based in Singapore, could help spur the growth of local companies, while the government should provide more targeted assistance, the report said.

There were no proposals to further tighten foreign manpower regulations, after such measures were introduced following the 2011 elections, when popular discontent with immigration came to the spotlight.

The committee urged the government to support the development of digital capabilities such as applied data analytics by establishing joint laboratories with industry players.

CFE also recommended that the government should keep investing in new international connections such as the planned Kuala Lumpur-Singapore high-speed rail, Changi airport's Terminal 5 and the high-tech seaport in Tuas.

(Source: wellstonjournal.com)

'Boosting domestic production a must, even after sanctions'

According to the official, production of various vehicles including trucks and agricultural machinery also witnessed an increase in the mentioned period, while other sectors including textiles, yarns, home appliances, foodstuff, and leather stuff also experienced a rise in production.

"In this year's first eight months, production in food industry increased by 15 percent while production of crude steel increased by 6.5 percent, steel products by 6.6 percent, copper cathode by 13 percent, glass jar by 10.2 percent, and cement by

7.2 percent," he said.

He further noted that the ministry is implementing 34 executive programs under seven major axes, for promoting domestic production across the country in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21).

According to Rahmani, the ministry's programs mainly focus on developing and supporting domestic production, mining and mining industry development, technology, business environment improvement, new strategies in trade logistics and



financing, as well as expanding exports to the neighboring countries.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the minister stressed his ministry's determination for reducing imports of domestically-made products in order to support the country's

producers and said industry ministry is determined to pursue its plans on boosting domestic production based on the country's Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (ends in March 2021) until it is able to save the country over \$10 billion every year.

Jask Port becomes free trade zone

TEHRAN — Iran's Jask Port in southern Hormozgan province has become a free trade zone, IRNA reported on Tuesday, quoting the Transport and Urban Development Minister as saying.

Speaking in a conference on development of Iran's maritime services and infrastructure in Tehran, Mohammad Eslami said the program for turning the country's ports into free trade zones with the aim of facilitating investment and attracting foreign investors is on the government's agenda.

Referring to some ports in the country that enjoy the benefits of being free trade zones, Eslami noted: "The process of turning some of the country's ports into special economic zones is also on the agenda."

The official stressed the need for increasing international communication in order to attract investors in the global markets.

"We should be able to improve our non-oil economy, especially in the ports," he added.

According to the official, the Iranian government is seriously pursuing the development of maritime trade exchanges through joint commissions with regional



countries.

Situated on the Gulf of Oman, Jask is a port town which serves as the capital of Jask County in the southern province of Hormozgan.

Back in October, Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said the country is planning to build petrochemical complexes as well as refineries in the Port.

According to Zanganeh, the ministry has issued permits for construction of two refineries with daily refining capacities of 300,000 and 150,000 barrels per day (bpd), the projects which are going to be carried out by the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order (EIKO) and one of the subsidiaries of Bakhtar Petrochemical Company (Petro-refinery), respectively.

PMO inks deals worth \$1.3b with private sector since March

TEHRAN — The head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) said his organization has signed nine investment deals worth 55 trillion rials (about \$1.31 billion) with domestic investors since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20), IRIB reported.

Speaking in a ceremony on the occasion of the National Transportation Day on Tuesday, Mohammad Rastad said despite all the U.S. efforts for hurting Iran's economy and its maritime transport industry, non-oil imports through the country's ports has witnessed a 15.8-percent rise while exports grew by 2.2 percent.

According to the official, since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year, 23.5 million tons of goods have been imported into the country's ports and 38.6 million tons of commodities have also been exported.

Delivering his speech in the same event, Deputy Head of PMO, Mohammad-Ali Hassanzadeh said over the past year, more than 158 trillion rials (about \$3.76

billion) have been invested in various maritime and port sectors in the form of 330 investment deals.

"Investment in this sectors has increased by 53 percent compared to previous year," he added.

Investment deals signed on Monday

On the sidelines of the ceremony, PMO also signed two investment deals worth 900 billion rials (about \$21.4 million) with the country's private sector.

The investment agreement between Amirabad Port and Ard Nemone Joybar Flour Company was one of the contracts reached on the sidelines of the event which was held at Homa Hotel in Tehran.

The second agreement was inked between PMO and the Office of Advanced Space and Transportation Technologies of the Vice Presidency of Science and Technology for construction and indigenization of marine vessel technology.

The agreement was signed by Mohammad Rastad and Manouchehr Manteqi, the president of the Office of Advanced Space Technologies and Advanced Transportation.

Majlis Budget committee approves next year's budget bill

TEHRAN — The Iranian parliament (Majlis)'s Planning and Budget Committee on Monday approved the 1.988 quadrillion rials (about \$473.5 billion) national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year, starting March 20, Shana reported, quoting a member of the committee as saying.

According to Shahbaz Hassanpour, the committee will start assessing the details of the bill since the budget outlines are ratified.

On December 8, President Hassan Rouhani submitted the administration's draft of the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1399 to the Majlis.

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

proved budget.

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

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

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

Revenues from exporting oil, gas and condensate are estimated at 454.9 trillion rials (about \$10.83 billion), down 66 percent from 1.37 quadrillion rials (about \$32.61 billion) approved in the current year's budget.

Tax incomes are predicted to be 1.95 quadrillion rials (about \$46.42 billion), rising 27 percent from 1.72 quadrillion rials

(about \$40.95 billion) envisaged in the present year's budget.

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

The main characteristic of the next year's budget bill which makes it different from previous years' budget bills, is the impact of the U.S. sanctions on the country's economy and the consequent considerations which have been taken into account in preparing it.

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

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

The global economy is growing at its slowest rate since 2009

Trade tensions, which have been inflamed by the Trump administration in Washington, are seen as one of the key constraints to growth. China's gross domestic product growth slowed to 6% in the third quarter, its weakest performance in more than three decades.

Worldwide economic growth is at its slowest pace since 2009 when the global financial crisis was in full swing. This represents another headwind in South Africa's dismal growth story, which has already been hobbled by a litany of domestic errors and woes.

The planet may be heating up because of human-induced climate change, but the global economy is cooling down in the face of trade wars, Brexit, geopolitical tensions and the policy uncertainty that is an offshoot of these trends.

Let's start with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) most recent World Economic

Forecast, released in October.

"Global growth is forecast at 3.0% for 2019, its lowest level since 2008-09 and a 0.3% percentage point downgrade from the April 2019 World Economic Outlook. Growth is projected to pick up to 3.4% in 2020 (a 0.2 percentage point downward revision compared with April), 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," it said.

"Yet, with uncertainty about prospects for several of these countries, a projected slowdown in China and the United States, and prominent downside risks, a much more subdued pace of global activity could well materialize. To forestall such an outcome, policies should decisively

aim at defusing trade tensions, reinvigorating multilateral cooperation, and providing timely support to economic activity where needed."

Other growth forecasts have also been subdued. In June, the World Bank projected 2019 global growth of just 2.6% and 2.7% for 2020.

Emerging and developing economies need to strike a careful balance between borrowing to promote growth and avoiding risks associated with excessive borrowing," it noted. So, South Africa is not alone in this regard, but that is small solace as rising debt levels are adding to the general risk outlook for emerging economies.

"Investment growth among emerging and developing economies is expected to remain subdued and below historical averages, held back by sluggish global growth, limited fiscal space, and structural constraints. A sustained

pickup in investment growth is necessary to meet key development goals," the World Bank said.

"Global trade is stagnating and is dragging down economic activity in almost all major economies.

"Policy uncertainty is undermining investment and future jobs and incomes. Risks of even weaker growth remain high, including from an escalation of trade conflicts, geopolitical tensions, the possibility of a sharper-than-expected slowdown in China and climate change," the OECD said in its economic outlook.

One of the most depressing things about this state of affairs is that it raises the scale of the challenge confronted by South African policymakers, who have an economy on their hands that may well be stuck in the rut of recession, with little prospect for decent growth in 2020. (Source: dailymaverick.co.za)

Chinese corporate debt is the 'biggest threat' to the global economy, says Moody's chief economist

By Weizhen Tan

Chinese corporate debt is the "biggest threat" to the global economy, warned a Moody's Analytics economist, who described such risks as a "very significant fault line."

That followed similar comments by Fitch Ratings last week, which said that private companies in China have defaulted on their debts at a record pace this year.

While corporate debt is a "fault line in the financial system and the broader economy," Moody's Chief Economist Mark Zandi flagged indebted Chinese companies as the larger risk.

"I would point to Chinese corporate debt as the biggest threat," he said, adding that it's growing very rapidly in China. Zandi explained that many companies are struggling to deal with a slowdown in growth stemming from the trade war and other factors.

"In the United States, it's similar kind of picture — not to the same degree — but we have seen very significant increase in so-called leveraged lending, as in lending to highly indebted companies, and they are vulnerable if the



economy were to slow," Zandi said.

Debt has been a problem in the world's second-largest economy, which has been trying to reduce its reliance on it by tightening regulations to speed up deleveraging — or the process of reducing debt.

However, the trade war is putting a dent in its efforts to pare its massive debt levels as China seeks ways to boost

its slowing economy, which has been hit by U.S. tariffs on Chinese exports.

The country has this year more or less paused its deleveraging efforts and put in place more stimulus.

Fitch Ratings said last week that a record high of 4.9% of China's private issuers defaulted on onshore bond payments — or yuan-denominated bonds — in the first 11 months of 2019, a jump from 0.6% in 2014.

In an October report, the ratings agency put it down to a tightening of credit as a result of the government's deleveraging efforts.

Local governments have also shown a "greater tolerance" towards defaults, it said.

"Around 80% of the onshore defaults by both issuer count and principal amount were from the private sector, being more vulnerable than state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to external funding market volatilities — and therefore face greater liquidity and/or refinancing risk under tight credit conditions," the report said. (Source: cnbc.com)

KEPCO inks 3 research-based deals with domestic firms

E N E R G Y TEHRAN — Khazar Exploration and Production Company (KEPCO), a subsidiary of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) which handles exploration operation in the Caspian Sea region in northern Iran, signed three research-based deals with domestic companies, Shana reported.

As reported, signing these deals, KEPCO aims to conduct comprehensive studies in the Caspian Sea region and expand its database for oil and gas discovery operations.

The signed deals include a contract with Dana Systems Co. for identification of geological hazards and possible hydrocarbon zones using geophysical methods and geological and reservoir data in the Caspian Sea; another one with Pars Geology Research Center for exploring the mechanisms of formation of mudflats and their effects on the creation of hydrocarbon reservoirs using remote sensing technology in South Caspian Basin; and finally one deal was signed with Tavana Energy Company



for modeling of sedimentary basin and determination of the delta yield range and reservoir rock expansion in the Southern Caspian region.

Earlier this month, KEPCO Managing Director Ali Osouli said that his company also has on the agenda to cooperate with knowledge-based companies specialized in deep water explorations and also with the neighboring countries for executing exploration projects in the region.

Founded in January 1998, KEPCO is a subsidiary of NIOC which is mainly focused on oil and gas exploration and development operations in the South Caspian Basin in Iran's territory.

The company is in charge of all the contracts signed by local and international companies regarding the exploration and development of hydrocarbon reserves in the area including the pertinent environmental matters.

The Caspian Sea is divided into three regions in terms of oil and gas reserves: Northern, Middle, and Southern Caspian. The Southern Caspian, which is in Iran's territory, is the deepest with oceanic depths of over 1,000 meters (3,300 ft).

NITC overhauls 10 oil tankers since March

E N E R G Y TEHRAN — National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC) has overhauled 10 oil tankers since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21), the company's managing director told Mehr news agency.

Nasrollah Sardashti also announced that two tankers have been already dry-docked for overhaul and as scheduled seven or eight more oil tankers will be overhauled by the yearend.

In this way, NITC will finish the overhaul operation of 20 oil tankers in the current Iranian calendar year, while the company had previously announced that the plan for this year is overhauling 12 tankers.

"We have not sent any tanker outside the country for overhaul in the present year", Sardashti further emphasized.

In late July, the company successfully finished the overhaul operation of supertanker "DORE" after a month.

According to Sardashti, Iranian technicians managed to repair the oil supertanker "DORE" inside the country

for the first time in the history of Iran's shipping industry.

"Engines, generators, and electrical appliances all have been repaired and stained and will not require major repairs for the next five years," Sardashti said.

In late June, the 320,000-ton oil supertanker DORE was successfully dry-docked in Bandar Abbas at Iran ISOICO to go through overhaul for the first time inside the country.

DORE belongs to the national Iranian oil tanker fleet and is a "giant oil tanker" with a length of 333 meters.

It was the first time that repair and maintenance services of a super oil vessel is assigned to a domestic repair yard.

According to NITC Technical Advisor Ali Mansourzadeh, before this Iranian technicians had successfully completed the overhauling and maintenance operations of a variety of smaller vessels in a 6-month period, including MARIA 3 tanker with a capacity of 13,600 cubic meters, POLARIS with a capacity of 45,000 tons, and ARK and ARGO each with a capacity of 100,000 tons.

However, due to some technological limitations, the



repair operations of supertankers like DORE was carried out in foreign countries.

Oil steadies on U.S.-China trade hopes, supply cuts

Oil steadied above \$65 a barrel on Tuesday, supported by hopes that the U.S.-China trade deal will bolster oil demand in 2020 and the prospect of lower U.S. crude supplies.

The 'Phase One' agreement between the world's two largest economies has been "absolutely completed," Larry Kudlow, a top White House adviser, said on Monday, adding that U.S. exports to China will double under the deal.

Brent crude LCO1, the global benchmark, slipped 12 cents to \$65.22 a barrel by 0945 GMT, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude CL1 eased 14 cents to \$60.07.

"Christmas has definitely arrived early for oil producers," said Craig Erlam, analyst at brokerage OANDA. "Brent could get closer to \$70 before the rally starts to run on fumes."

The prolonged trade dispute has been a dampener for oil demand and weighed on prices. Banks including JP Morgan and Goldman Sachs have revised up their



2020 price forecasts in the wake of the improving trade outlook and a new OPEC-led agreement to curb output.

The "risk-on tone is still noticeable," said Tamas Varga of oil broker PVM. The "next event to look out for is the weekly U.S. oil inventory statistics."

Supply reports from oil industry group the American Petroleum Institute and the government's Energy Information Administration are expected to show U.S. crude inventories probably fell last week.

The first of the two, from the API, was scheduled for release at 04:30 P.M. EST (2130 GMT) on Tuesday. The government report follows on Wednesday.

Also supporting prices, the Organization of the Petroleum of Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies like Russia - a grouping known as OPEC+ - are making a further oil supply cut of 500,000 barrels per day from Jan. 1 to support the market.

This comes on top of the existing deal to trim supply by 1.2 million bpd that came into effect on Jan. 1 this year. (Source: reuters.com)

The 5 biggest threats to oil and gas in 2020

By Tsvetana Paraskova

After quite an eventful 2019 in which oil demand growth slowed to its lowest in years and investors questioned the performance of oil and gas stocks, the energy sector meets 2020 with a package of risks that could further dampen the mood about the industry and investors' outlook for stocks.

Depressed oil demand growth, a possible shift in U.S. policies at home and abroad after the presidential election, the continued pressure on the industry to address climate change, the stock market's lack of confidence in energy stocks, and adequate levels of financing for natural gas projects are the five key risks ahead for the energy sector next year, Wood Mackenzie's Simon Flowers writes.

1-Weak oil demand growth

This year, oil demand growth has been at its weakest since 2011, as slowing global economic growth and the U.S.-China trade war weighed on every economy in the world, including on the fastest-growing oil import markets in Asia—China and India.

The phase one trade deal last week is a de-escalation of the trade dispute and could help the outlook on oil demand growth for 2020.

Almost all forecasters and analysts expect demand growth to pick up next year from the very low growth this year.

WoodMac sees oil demand growth more than doubling to 1.35 million bpd from just 600,000 bpd this year, thanks to marine diesel fuels in China and natural gas liquids (NGLs) demand for the growing U.S. petrochemicals capacity.

Yet, the International Energy Agency



(IEA) continues to see an oversupply on the market, especially in the first half of 2020, despite efforts from the OPEC+ coalition to strictly stick to the production cuts in Q1 and pledges by OPEC's leader Saudi Arabia that it will continue to cut more than it is expected to.

If oil demand growth in 2020 were to disappoint again, OPEC+ will face an uphill task in rebalancing the market, WoodMac says.

2-Elections and energy policies

If a Democratic candidate were to beat President Donald Trump in the 2020 election, they could not only try to scale down U.S. exploration and production, but they could rethink U.S. policies globally, which would significantly impact the energy industry and markets.

For example, current sanctions on Iran and Venezuela are keeping some 2 million bpd of oil off the market, so if a President Democrat were to rethink current U.S. policies regarding the sanctions and the Iran nuclear deal, the market could sud-

denly become much more oversupplied than it already is.

Senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, two of the front-runners in the Democratic Party's race for nomination, have promised to ban fracking, on a collision course with the oil industry and even with some Democratic governors in some western oil states.

It is doubtful, however, that a President can single-handedly pass legislation that would stall U.S. oil and gas fracking, according to WoodMac.

3-Policies to fight climate change

The European Union's (EU) "green new deal" could trigger global acceptance of carbon taxes and tariffs to protect EU products from imports with high carbon footprint, for example, WoodMac's Flowers says.

Under the Green Deal, the EU pledges to cut emissions by at least 50 percent by 2030 from the current target of cutting emissions by 40 percent. This pledge could have a significant impact on energy companies, according to WoodMac's

director of corporate research Valentina Kretzschmar.

Europe's oil and gas producers will continue to feel the pressure to follow Repsol's lead and commit to net zero carbon emissions, she said.

"And oil and gas exporters to Europe, including Russian gas and U.S. LNG, could face a diminishing demand outlook and an impact on their revenues from carbon taxes," Kretzschmar noted.

4-Oil and gas sector credibility in the energy transition

The "hated" oil and gas sector has not managed to 'sell' to the markets the idea that it could be part of the solution, not the problem. Investors have been shunning energy stocks amid concerns about oil demand in the future.

According to WoodMac, Big Oil and the national oil companies should follow Repsol's lead in pledging carbon neutrality by 2050.

5-Financing for the 'transition fuel'

Last but not least, the world will need adequate levels of financing for gas and liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects, because right now, it's natural gas that will play the 'transition fuel' role to keep power supply steady in a growing mix of solar and wind power globally.

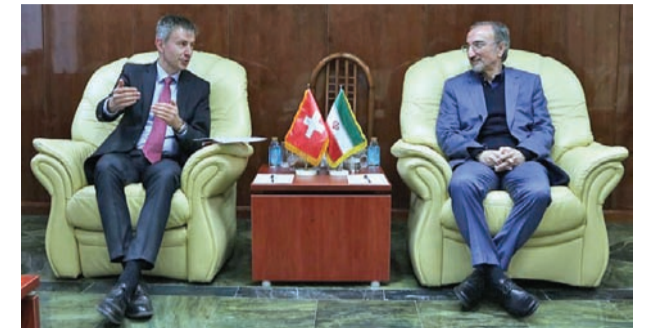
The "industry needs to work harder in 2020 to demonstrate the benefits of gas and its environmental credentials - in tandem with carbon capture and storage - to ensure that finance for much-needed gas projects doesn't dry up," WoodMac's Flowers said.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Switzerland asks Iran to join "Blue Peace" movement

E N E R G Y TEHRAN — Swiss Ambassador to Tehran Markus Leitner called on Iranian Energy Ministry to join the Blue Peace movement, the portal of the Energy Ministry (Paven) reported.

Leitner who met with Iran's Deputy Energy Minister for Water and Wastewater Affairs Ghasem Taghizadeh Khamesi on Monday said Blue Peace is a movement started by Switzerland for water cooperation beyond borders, sectors and generations in order to foster peace, stability and sustainable development in the region.



Swiss Ambassador to Tehran Markus Leitner (L) holds talks with Iran's Deputy Energy Minister for Water and Wastewater Affairs Ghasem Taghizadeh Khamesi at the place of the ministry on Monday.

In the meeting, Taghizadeh mentioned the Swiss government's suggestion for establishment of a regional cooperation center for startups active in the fields of water and wastewater, saying that "With 3000 years of history behind Iran's water sector, our country has great potentials and capacities in terms of expertise and equipment."

Referring to the Iranian use of Qanat (subterranean aqueduct) in ancient times, Taghizadeh added: "Using aqueducts in the country is an indication that Iranians have used various innovative ways to access water and for managing their water resources."

Recently the Switzerland-based International Centre for Water Management Services (CEWAS) held a workshop for Iranian startups active in the field of water and wastewater in collaboration with Iran's Water and Wastewater Engineering Company in Tehran, during which it proposed to establish a regional cooperation center for startups in the field.

Iran is going to cooperate with Switzerland in this regard and the country will be the hub for CEWAS activities in the region.

Renewables to become the new normal at remote mines

The Energy and Mines World Congress in Toronto provided insights into the recent developments of onsite renewable energy applications at remote mines.

Generally, the year 2019 has been identified as the tipping point. The business case for partly substituting expensive fuel like diesel, heavy fuel oil (HFO) or gas by solar and wind had been positive on paper for years. However, actual projects have evolved slowly.

In 2019, almost a dozen new projects have been officially announced and at the same time many more projects are under development and on the verge of being announced.

Nick Holland, CEO of Gold Fields, a mining company focused on integrating renewables, pointed out in his keynote that costs savings are possible and a cost-efficient decentralisation of power generation enabled by renewables comes with further advantages: "Renewables make for great business - lower cost and supply security. Independence from the grid is critical - microgrids are the future."

Mining companies see the need to decarbonise and pursue initiatives that go well beyond renewables, such as electrification of mining vehicles. These initiatives could further increase the electricity demand in mining and in the long run the need for locally generated renewable energy.

Renewable energy solutions

Miners are gaining trust in renewable energy solutions. The fear of production losses has been decreasing over the past years with every new renewable energy system that has been added to a mine globally.

Before, the general attitude was characterized by 'wait and see', but the mode has been changing in 2019 to 'let's act now'. The individual decision makers today run a relatively low perceived risk by driving forward renewable energy projects.

The solutions that are being built now are often more sophisticated than they were before, and they incorporate a higher share of renewables that is also enabled by storage solutions.

The epicenters of these developments are Australia and Sub-Saharan Africa, two regions having substantial areas with insufficient public grids and typically excellent solar resources.

At the same time, renewable energy development also has a local driver. Though the mining sector is rather global, the political pressure on mining players to add renewables creates additional speed on a local level.

In comparison to the physical lifetime of solar and wind assets, the lifetime of mines or the mining licenses are often rather short. In addition, miners are used to relatively short-term energy supply for diesel, HFO and gas.

Long-term purchase agreements for renewable energy often require a change of thinking and have slowed down the development of many projects in the past.

An approach for future growth

More and more companies have come up with redeployable solar solutions that allow for offering short-term PPAs. On the hardware-side, the costs of redeployable solar solutions have come down, but at the same time this approach is a bet on future growth of this segment.

Redeployability also means that new target projects need to be available within a reasonable time period in the future. If not, the solar assets would have to be stored in warehouses until new deployment, which can prove to be costly.

Several newly announced projects combine solar and wind power. One of the biggest disadvantages of solar and wind solutions is that they generate unsteady energy.

Solar and wind output are often negatively correlated, which means that when solar irradiation is high wind speeds are typically low, and vice versa. This phenomenon allows for increasing the renewable energy share in the system while minimizing the need for storage.

In his presentation at the Energy and Mines World Congress, Thomas Hillig, Managing Director of THEnergy, said that for mining companies it makes sense to consider all sustainability levers and that also hydro could experience a renaissance: "In a research project that is supported by the German government with approximately \$1 million, THEnergy is analysing in collaboration with two universities, RWTH Aachen and TU München, the potential of hydro-electric solutions in the mining sector. We are still looking for mines in Peru to participate - free of any charge."

(Source: globalminingreview.com)

Move to multipolarity driving U.S.-China rift

GLOBAL TIMES — China and the US agreed on the text of the phase one trade deal on Friday. How will the deal influence China-US relations? Is there any possibility for the two countries to decouple in the future? Global Times (GT) reporter Li Qingqing talked to Susan Thornton (Thornton), former US acting assistant secretary of state, on the sidelines of the 2nd Round of China-US Leading Scholars Dialogue held on Friday and Saturday in Shanghai.

■ China and the US agreed on the text of the phase one trade deal on Friday. How do you think a final trade deal, if reached, will shape China-US relations in the long term? Will it stop bilateral relations from worsening?

A: The phase one trade deal being concluded is an excellent first step. We need to get this done in order to have a chance to move into a more productive and constructive mode. So, I am very happy that we were able to reach this phase one deal, assuming it is going to be finished and signed. Depending on what happens with that and many other things, we will see if we go on to phase two. My feeling is that the trade relationship between the US and China is so



big and so complicated that we will probably never stop having conversations about trade frictions, trade problems and trying to reach new agreements. And I think that's not a bad thing for US-China relations.

■ Although many don't think a new cold war similar to the one between the Soviet Union and the US will happen between China and the US, many fields such as people-to-people exchange have suffered. What's your take?

A: I don't think a new cold war is coming. I think there are a lot of things about the Cold War that are very different from the situation between the US and China today. Frankly, the current atmosphere and environment of globalization are two situations different from the Cold War period.

■ The US has recently passed bills on Hong Kong and Xinjiang. How will the US policy on Taiwan be changing in the short and long term?

A: I think the US policy on Taiwan has been pretty consistent. I do not think it will change very much in the short term. I think it will depend a lot on what China's actions and changes in its position are. But for the US policy, I think we have done a good job of keeping stability across the Taiwan Straits for the last 40 years, and that is something in the interests of Beijing, Washington and Taipei. So, I expect the US policy on Taiwan will continue.

■ It seems that China-US decoupling is happening, especially in technology. How do you see the trend? Will it spread to other broader fields?

A: I think this is probably the most urgent issue for the US and China to tackle. There are a lot of countries involved. But it is very important for the public to have trust in technology, and it is also going to be important for the technological ecosystem to develop with interconnections. Having the development of separate spheres of technology is not desirable. My hope is that we can start working on some rules and can agree upon approaches that will allow us to not have this technological decoupling. I think it is in the interest of everybody.

■ Many Chinese people feel that US President Donald Trump's policy is very unpredictable, even mutable. In terms of China policy, which sector in the US has the biggest influence over his China policy?

A: I think President Trump's approach to the US-China relationship has focused on two big issues. A big focus for him, even before he was in office, was the US-China trade relationship and the US trade relationships with many other countries. The other thing that Trump is very interested in is the issue of trying to reach a deal on the denuclearization of North Korea. I think he hoped very much that he could work with China to get that deal. There have been frustrations on the US part, and probably on China's part, too. But I still very much hope that the US and China could figure out a way to get us into a process where we can continue talking to North Korea about the denuclearization. I think that would be beneficial to all sides.

■ How do you see the future international order in the context of intensifying competition between China and the US?

A: I think there is a big change under way in the international order. We have had 30 years of basically a unipolar system after the end of the Cold War. Now, we are moving into a much more multipolar system and that is one of the underlying causes of the trouble in adjusting the US-China relationship and other things in the international system. The US and China need the international system to continue to be strong as we have both been the enormous beneficiaries of this system. Maybe China was not quite ready to be a big player in contributing to the strengthening of the international system, but I think it's learning now that it should step up and do that. But China cannot do it alone, and the US cannot do it alone. We need other countries to participate and work together on that.

Changing label of Iran's sanctions to make it harder to remove sanctions: Nephew

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN (MNA) — Richard Nephew, who served as the lead sanctions expert for the US team negotiating with Iran, is of the opinion that "It is true that this is the Trump Administration's intention: to make it much harder to remove the sanctions in the future because now entities and individuals are considered "terrorists" in addition to "proliferators".

The fellow at the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University, says that it is harder to see US pressure on Iran "the president has the authority to remove these designations no matter what they are, provided that they are not required explicitly under US law. The term "nuclear-related sanctions" has no legal standing in US law, only in the JCPOA as a term of art."

Following is the text of the interview:

■ The United States recently sanctioned Iran's central bank under the label "fight against terrorism". What changes has this label made to Iranian trade?

A: I do not believe that this decision has made any real difference in Iranian trade, though this is because the existing sanctions were already sufficiently severe as to preclude much of it. This is a difficulty that the United States will soon have, as there are few "new" sectors, entities or individuals to sanction that has not already been sanctioned or affected by other measures already in place. Of course, the existing measures will continue to have very serious economic impacts so the degree to which measures are "new" is only meaningful as part of the political narrative for the Administration.

■ A few days ago US sanctioned IRISL. IRISL was sanctioned beforehand and changed its sanction's label. What is the effect of changing the label of IRISL on shipping the agricultural commodities, food, medicine, and medical devices to Iran via IRISL?

A: This measure will potentially have a meaningful effect. Previously, IRISL was sanctioned but only as an element of the Iranian government. The sanctions did not preclude foreign business with IRISL. Now, the sanctions will create real costs for foreign entities or individuals who do business with it, essentially recreating the situation that existed for IRISL prior to the JCPOA. Ultimately, I suspect that this measure will have less impact on Iranian humanitarian trade than could be anticipated, simply because there are other cargo carriers that will be prepared to operate in and with Iran. But, there are many fewer of them today than in the past.

To address the immediate humanitarian risks, the United States has permitted transactions to "wind down"



with IRISL for six months. This is an unusual situation and reflects a sense in the US government that taking precipitous action here could be damaging, if not to humanitarian trade than to the narrative that the United States is not trying to deny such trade.

■ President Trump has changed some labels of Iran sanctions. Since removing them are not under the President's authorization. Then, the US future president is not able to remove them that were under the label of Iran nuclear program sanctions. What is your opinion?

A: It is true that this is the Trump Administration's intention: to make it much harder to remove the sanctions in the future because now entities and individuals are considered "terrorists" in addition to "proliferators."

Ultimately, though, the president has the authority to remove these designations no matter what they are, provided that they are not required explicitly under US law. The term "nuclear-related sanctions" has no legal standing in US law, only in the JCPOA as a term of art. Grouping those sanctions made sense in 2013-

2015 but it may make sense to broaden the definition of what sanctions could be removed if a future deal is negotiated with Iran in a future administration.

It is also worth noting: the fact that so many US officials and their supporters outside in the think tank community have said explicitly that they are changing the nature of these sanctions from "nuclear-related" to something broader in order to make it hard to negotiate a new deal with Iran will make it politically easier for a future Administration to change the terminology used.

■ Are there other sanctions to be imposed on Iran?
A: Almost certainly. There are entities and individuals not sanctioned, sectors not targeted thus far. But, of course, there is a difference between whether such sanctions could be imposed and whether those sanctions will be impactful in excess of the pressure created by existing measures. In my view, there are few sanctions that could yet be imposed on Iran that would have the power of the measures already imposed.

U.S. is still lying about unwind able war in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (FNA) — A confidential trove of government documents published by American media outlets reveals that senior US officials lied about the war in Afghanistan throughout the 18-year campaign, making rosy pronouncements they knew to be false and hiding unmistakable evidence the war had become unwinnable.

The documents were generated by a federal project examining the root failures of the longest armed conflict in US history. They include more than 2,000 pages of previously unpublished notes of interviews with people who played a direct role in the war, from generals and diplomats to aid workers and Afghan officials.

The US government tried to shield the identities of the vast majority of those interviewed for the project and conceal nearly all of their remarks. In the interviews, more than 400 insiders have offered unrestrained criticism of what went wrong in Afghanistan and how the United States became mired in nearly two decades of warfare.

The interviews, through an extensive array of voices, bring into sharp relief the core failings of the war that persist to this day. They underscore how three presidents — George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump — and their military commanders have been unable to deliver on their claims to prevail in Afghanistan.



But letting the Afghanistan war continue for so many years has been a terrible mistake. Roughly 2,400 US service members and 4,000 American contractors have been killed there, including four just over recent days.

The war in Afghanistan has become a multigenerational exercise in absurdity. Many of the soldiers now fighting and dying were infants when the war began. Yet almost two decades and more than a trillion dollars later, the US-backed Afghan government controls only 55 percent of

the nation's territory and 65 percent of its population.

One thing the world has learned is that American interventionism can create more failed states than it "liberates". Such was the case in Iraq and Libya. The threat of "failing states" has been there all along. Instability does yield insecurity. The only thing that can ultimately guarantee the independence and self-determination of the Afghan people is an Afghan government that has its own independence and self-determination.

Even the most strident warmongers understand that the war in Afghanistan is unwinnable. Their alternative to withdrawal is to maintain an indefinite troop presence, akin to the permanent stationing of US troops in Germany and Japan after World War II. This is a ludicrous idea. America's occupation won't guarantee the security and prosperity of the war-torn country.

The political will to end the war in Afghanistan exists. One recent poll shows that fewer than half of Americans say the initial decision to use military force in Afghanistan was correct. Another new poll finds that a majority of Americans would support a decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, while only about one in five would oppose it.

The unwinnable war will go on for as long as Afghans themselves are resistant to US occupation. Washington and its NATO allies can dispatch a million troops in Afghanistan and it would only have a short-term effect on the security situation.

Afghanistan's conflict will only end through political arrangements by the Afghans themselves. The sooner the US and company come around to that concept and finally end their occupation the sooner international money and resources can be invested to rebuild Afghanistan.

U.S. needs open-mindedness in 5G race with China

By Wang Wenwen

GLOBAL TIMES - China leads the world's 5G development, which the US calls a race.

Earlier this year, US President Donald Trump said, "The race to 5G is on and America must win." The question is, how?

Over the past year, we have seen the US ramp up efforts to squeeze out Chinese tech giant Huawei as a 5G supplier and even pressure its allies to close the door on the Chinese telecommunications company, which aims to force China to retreat or give way to the strategic information, communication and technology industry and use the US dominant supply position as leverage in the global 5G race.

On Monday, the US House passed legislation that would bar the US government from buying telecommunications equipment from companies deemed to be national security threats, including Huawei, citing "malicious foreign interference."

But still, China has embraced 5G at a faster pace. In early November, China rolled out its commercial 5G networks nationwide, and one week later it launched research and development efforts into 6G networks.

Despite the US lead in cutting-edge innovation, American elites are well aware of the fact that their country is falling



behind China in 5G. In a recent Washington Post op-ed, Chairman of the Paulson Institute Henry M. Paulson Jr., also former US treasury secretary, acknowledged that "Washington needs to focus not simply on trying to slow China down, but on accelerating efforts at home" to close the gap with China quickly.

Such rethink comes in time, and China can be the very example to the US on how to catch up. China used to be a laggard 40 years ago, but gradually rose to become the world's second-largest economy through state efforts and

the hard work of all Chinese people, which the US despises but simply has no way to duplicate. China's response to the US squeeze has been to deepen its domestic market and open it further and to invest more in 5G development.

This is the way China faces up to competition headwinds. On the contrary, the US way is to crack down on others at the cost of its own development. Paulson rightly pointed out that openness has been the comparative advantage of the US, but what is happening in the 5G race is perhaps the start of the US losing its traditional competitive spirit and national advantage.

China used to look to the US during its development. While China still lags behind the US in terms of scientific investment and AI talent, the Chinese government, companies and social sectors have all made scientific input an important budgetary component. The government is also thinking of measures to make the country's scientific strategy facilitate the professional pursuit of individuals.

As both China and the US have recognized 5G as a critical enabler of future competitiveness and the US is poised to catch up, the ball is now in the US court. Will it be open-minded enough to engage in healthy competition with China?

'Crows in the Rain is a pathway to every person's infinite inner world'

By Marjohn Sheikhi

TEHRAN (MNA) — In an exclusive interview with Mehr, the successful Tehran-based post-rock band 'Crows in the Rain' aptly described the band as a "pathway to every person's infinite inner world."

Post-rock is one of those really tricky genres. The music could either be the best thing you've ever heard in your life and will continue to be on loop to the end of time, or it may come across as generic and repetitive and completely unmemorable and already ticked off your playlist after the first listen.

Fortunately for the Tehran-based 'Crows in the Rain', their music falls into the first category. Each track could easily be someone's favorite, and I, personally, have a hard time skipping on any of them. The music, composed on piano, electric guitar, bass and drums, tugs at your heartstrings with its mournful, melancholic tone, and revitalizes your artistic calling, no matter how much or little of it you think you have.

"What has attracted us to this particular genre is its ability to represent the infinite magnificence of the smallest moments we have lived," the band said in explanation of the appeal of the post-rock genre that brought Crows in the Rain into existence some five years ago.

Faithful to the band's name, each track sounds like the gentle pitter-patter of rain against the windowpane and a pleasant scent of the petrichor that comes after.

"Emotions such as sorrow, loss, grievance...have always acted as strong driving forces for our music and we find great fragility and infinite purity in these emotions."

Bands, even the highly successful and well-established ones, are hardly ever consistent with the quality of the music they produce. That has never seemed to be an issue for the Crows in the Rain, with four albums already under their belt, and a fifth one soon to be released.

When asked about their 'secret', the band said "We have a principle in our band which is no piece is released unless we are deeply influenced or moved by it when we listen to it."

What follows is my interview with Crows in the Rain about the story behind the formation of the band, their aspirations, the process of composing a piece, and the joyful moments and challenges they have encountered along the way to be where they are today.

■ The first time I listened to a track by 'Crows in the Rain', which was 'You Are Still Here Floating' from your 2016 album, I didn't even entertain the possibility that the band would actually be hailing from Iran. Please tell us about the band. How and why it was formed, the members and their musical backgrounds, the visions, etc.?

A: There was no initial planning for the formation of the band. The idea behind forming a band stemmed from the friendship between Masih and Hamed. As mentioned in many other interviews, in October 2014 on a rainy day, we (Masih and Hamed) got together and played for the first time and decided to record everything we played. Hours later, our very first piece was composed and recorded entirely from improvisation. We stood by the window while listening to our first piece and looking outside; it was raining heavily while a flock of crows was flying above the house. This was the inspiration for the name of the group.

Hamed Fahimi Joo is our guitarist who has had many experiences playing in genres such as Rock, Fusion, Blues, and Experimental in other bands before. Masih Taj, who's another member of our band, was a pianist before the band was formed; however, he did not have any professional career in music before Crows in the Rain. In 2017, after the release of the second album, Ashkan Karimi also joined the band as the bassist. He started pursuing his musical career as a bassist professionally after joining the band. Lastly, Masood Keramat is a drummer who joined us later and is currently an active member of our band. Masood had had years of experience in the field of music, playing in genres such as Progressive, Rock, and Experimental.

■ As someone who favors dark, melancholic vibes above all else, listening to your music is a real treat that never disappoints. From your first released track 'Forgotten Childhood' (2016) to the latest album 'Sorrow for An Unfinished Dream' (2019), the traces of sorrow and suffering are palpable. Where do these acute feelings come from? And how do you keep this consistency and distinctive sound in all of the tracks you have so far released?

A: We have always strived to play music solely for the sake of music itself and what we experience in our inner world. Certainly, every band has their visions and dreams. One of our biggest and most important visions is to enable anyone who listens to our music to explore and delve into their inner world which they may suppress or ignore and to listen to and perhaps grasp an experience of that world within.

We have a principle in our band which is no piece is released unless we are deeply influenced or moved by it when we listen to it and every time we choose the pieces that affect us between the ones we have composed, we come to the understanding that these tracks are filled with the emotions that we are experiencing in ourselves. Emotions such as sorrow, loss, grievance, etc. have always acted as strong driving forces for our music and we find great fragility and infinite purity in these emotions. From the start till now these emotions have been and are still the essence of any new music we create and produce and despite all the changes along the way, we have always tried to keep the purity



of this essence.

■ What is the appeal of the post-rock genre that brought 'Crows in the Rain' into existence?

A: We don't insist on playing in the Post Rock genre but till today, Post Rock has given us the best possible platform for expressing what we experience in ourselves. Apart from this matter, what has attracted us to this particular genre is its ability to represent the infinite magnificence of the smallest moments we have lived.

■ Your band name is indeed a very interesting choice, and also very telling of the sound of your music. So are the artworks for each album. Tell us about the story behind them. Why haven't we yet heard a track by your band with crows cawing in the rain in the background?

A: We talked about the story behind our band's name earlier but regarding the sound of rain and crows, these elements were included in the first track ever recorded and the name of the track is "Crows in the Rain" which has not been performed live or released anywhere till today. Perhaps in the near future, this piece, along with other pieces will be released.

■ You performed several live concerts in Iran. How were the experience and feedback? When will be your next concert in Iran?

A: For our first concert, we had serious concerns about selling out the tickets but in just an hour and a half, we were sold out! In that concert, we played the tracks that were supposed to be released in the third album and our audience had never heard them before. The feedback we received during and after the concert was remarkably positive and a surprise to us and that became a motivation to have another concert at a bigger venue, the main hall of Azadi Tower with 300 seats available, in less than a month. Later we also had concerts at the University of Tehran, Evan Shams Hall, and Niavaran cultural center.

Yet, from the first day of forming this band, we decided to dedicate ourselves to creating music regardless of its career-wise successes or setbacks and we didn't draft a set plan for any of the events and concerts or other sides of this journey in advance. This is still a core principle to us and makes us genuinely excited and enthusiastic about every event we have as if it is our very first concert. This has allowed us to connect with our audiences on a much deeper level.

When we are performing live on the stage, where there's less distance with our audience, expressing our emotions in the form of music with them feels as if we are sharing our world with them and they are sharing theirs with us and I think this builds up this strange and unique atmosphere in the room that creates a distinctive experience for each and all of us.

Our next concert will be after the release of the fifth album, in winter 2020. Based on what we have planned, we'll have a concert in Tehran and some other cities in Iran as well. Information on the time and the venue of these concerts will be announced soon.

■ Have you performed in any other country? Do you have any plans to? What about working with a foreign musician as collaboration?

A: Yes, we've had offers to perform in other countries such as China and some European countries such as Germany and Switzerland. Besides, we are planning for next year's events. We've also talked to some foreign bands and international record labels for future collaborations which we'll inform our audiences about this news soon.

■ How do you describe the experience of being a non-mainstream musician in Iran? How has living in Iran influenced your musical development? Do you face any particular challenges for reaching your targeted audience, and if yes, how do you overcome them?

A: We were well aware that Post Rock is not a mainstream

genre in the music industry around the world since the beginning; hence, this has never been a serious concern to us. For sure we've faced many challenges in our way due to the restrictions implemented in Iran. Challenges particularly with regards to the limitations in the music industry of Iran and communicating with the audience; Nonetheless, these challenges have prompted our growth and development in many ways too. It's also worth mentioning that the cultural context of our country and society has created a distinct effect on our music too.

As mentioned, Post Rock, in many parts of the world, is not a well-distinguished genre but particularly in Iran, there have never been any attempts to promote a platform for this genre or any other non-mainstream genres to be introduced and publicized on a big scale. This, however, has never acted as a setback for us; therefore, we don't feel the need to overcome this hindrance and any progress we've ever made, small or big, has always brought us joy and delight.

■ Your latest album, 'Sorrow for An Unfinished Dream', judging by the name of some of the tracks, seems to be built on the true story of the Japanese girl Sadako, who tried to make a thousand origami cranes to be granted a wish, which in her case, was to live through her disease Leukemia caused by the radiation in the wake of Hiroshima bombing. Tell us more about the album, and why you decided to focus on this story in particular.

A: We used Sadako Sasaki's story as a shell to develop and express the emotions we experienced during composing the tracks of this album. Each track has a special meaning to each of the members of our band and Sadako's story truly gave us a unique approach to articulate our mind. It's worth mentioning that we have always had a special interest in the Japanese culture and we composed a track called Hiroshima which we included in that album (named "This is our cry" in the tracklist) and this helped us significantly in shaping the concept of the album.

■ How do you go about composing a track? Tell me about the process, the inspiration, and the challenges. Which member(s) is in charge of coming up with the idea and the general sound of each track?

A: All of the tracks we have ever composed have been based on improvisation. We always gather together and one of us starts playing based on whatever emotions they are experiencing at that moment and the other members slowly join and start playing along and develop the piece that's being crafted. This process continues until the end of the piece. The entire course of composing a piece is generated through an empathetic and telepathic process between us as a group; hence we can't consider any singular member of our band to be the sole composer of any track.

■ Where are you planning to take the band next, music-wise? Are you working on a new album?

A: We certainly have short term and long term agendas; however, we're not restricting ourselves to these plans and we try to navigate our path through this journey with an open mind and flexibility. Currently, we've finished recording the fifth album, mix and mastering have been finalized and if all goes according to plan, our fifth album will be released this winter. Our vision is to move towards a purer and more exclusive genre with its distinct signature inscribed to Crows in the Rain. The atmosphere, melodies, and emotions in the upcoming album are dissimilar to any of our previous pieces and perhaps this album is the beginning of a new chapter for Crows in the Rain.

■ If you could describe 'Crows in the Rain' -- its sound, its visions, its concept -- with non-musical terms, how would you do it?

A: Crows in the Rain is a pathway to every person's infinite inner world.

UNHCR representative: Iran region's top assistance provider to refugees

IRAN DAILY — Iran ranks first in the region in terms of providing services to refugees, and is single-handedly shouldering the load of accepting and settling refugees in many different aspects, said the representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Iran.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with Iran Daily, Ivo Freijns, added the Islamic Republic is the world's sixth top refugee destination.

He noted that Iran provides refugees living in the country with the same services, structures and facilities it offers its nationals and refrains from discriminating against them, adding, thus, the Islamic Republic is worthy of appreciation for its efforts.

Commenting on the 40th year of Afghan refugees' presence in Iran, Freijns expressed gratitude toward the country for the services it has provided Afghan nationals with and its equal treatment of them throughout all these years.

Turning to his upcoming visit, along with an Iranian delegation, to Geneva for taking part in the first Global Refugee Forum which will take place on December 17 and 18, 2019, he said, "Our most important message in this trip will be that Iran should not be left alone in carrying out this enormous task (hosting refugees). Our message is that although 40 years of hosting Afghan refugees is a long time, this must not cause the international community to stop assisting the country in this great challenge."

Shifting to Washington's sanctions on Tehran, Freijns



added, "We, along with our partners, express our concern over the economic circumstances in Iran which not only are impacting refugees in the country, but also affecting Iranians themselves."

In May 2018, President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, signed between Iran and the P5+1 in July 2015, and reimposed Washington's unilateral sanctions on Tehran, whose consequences include limiting money transfer to and from the Islamic Republic.

On Iran's assistance for refugees, he said it is of great importance that governments support refugees and those who leave their countries for another state due to different reasons.

Freijns added thus, Iran's acceptance of a large number of refugees, whose lives had been at risk, and hosting them in the country for years, alone, are instances of international support for refugees.

In addition, he said, Iran provides refugees with a large number of services allowing them to live in the country like other citizens and use the same services Iranians are being offered.

In Iran, refugees can go to school and pursue their studies at all various educational stages and even enter university, the UNHCR representative noted, adding, they are also provided with the same health and treatment services Iranian nationals have access to.

"A major part of the refugees in Iran are from Afghanistan. Resolving the problem faced by Afghan refugees in Iran and their repatriation to their own country fail to be solely dependent on providing sufficient humanitarian assistance. First, security must be ensured in Afghanistan so that fewer individuals would emigrate from the country and, then, the ground should be prepared for the [voluntary] repatriation of other Afghan refugees."

This, he stressed, to a large extent pertains to the Afghan government, urging that by ensuring security in the country, with the international community's assistance, the Afghan government should prepare the ground for the repatriation of its nationals.

"Until that happens, we are required to continue supporting [Afghan] refugees. To this end, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Iranian Interior Ministry's Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs support those refugees who come and express willingness to return to their own country and provide them with transportation facilities and financial assistance to facilitate their repatriation."

Freijns emphasized that "I must explicitly announce that [the extent of] the UNHCR's capability directly depends on the financial assistance provided by governments and our credit is provided this way. Receiving this assistance has become more difficult in the past few years. This comes as the number of the demands and tasks requested from the UNHCR, as an organization responsible for assisting refugees, increases continuously. However, the amount of the financial resources we receive, fails to be in proportion to the demands requested from us, which makes our task difficult."

He added that the UNHCR's solution to this problem has been to assign different degrees of priority to its measures to support refugees.

"Reaching out to vulnerable refugees has been among our top priorities. We have done our best to prioritize them. In addition, the UNHCR has attempted to incorporate refugees into the [host] countries' national systems in such a way that each state's national services can be accessible by the refugees."

Miko Peled: Zionism intolerant, violent and racist, exact opposite of Judaism

TEHRAN (FNA) — Miko Peled, prominent anti-Israeli activist, says Israel provides a racist context to people in the occupied lands; hence, everyone raised in that society will suffer from being treated different degrees of racism.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with FNA, Peled said, "Israel pretends the Arabs are minority, which is untrue. Majority of Israelis are Arabs, but they are treated like minorities without rights."

Miko Peled is a Tel Aviv-born author and activist. He was born and raised in Tel Aviv, but turned into a prominent anti-Zionist activist. He is the author of 'The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine, and Injustice, the Story of the Holy Land Foundation Five. Below is the full text of the interview:

■ People in Israel are not treated the same, and they do not tolerate one another. How do you find the society there?

A: It is not surprising that Israel is a society with a high level of intolerance. Because it is a racist society. Israel is wholly built on a racist ideology which is called Zionism. Children are raised in that society and getting faced with a racist education system. Even in the school time, those who have come from European countries in comparison to those who are from Arab countries, go to better school. One who grows up there will end up in racism, in a racist and intolerant society. What is interesting about Israel is that it pretends to be a very liberal and tolerant society, but there is no question that the society is racist and different levels of society are intolerant

of one another.

■ How is the hierarchical society formed in Israel?

A: The higher one is on the ladder, the less tolerance people show toward him. People with European background are considered better off in terms of schools and opportunities in comparison to Israelis whose parents with probably darker skin come from Arab countries. Blacks, Ethiopians and Arab Palestinians are suffering a big deal of racism and intolerance, as well. Israel pretends the Arabs are minority, which is untrue. Majority of Israelis are Arabs, but they are treated like minorities without rights. Non-Jews are guaranteed to suffer from discrimination in every aspect of the life. That is the nature of that society.

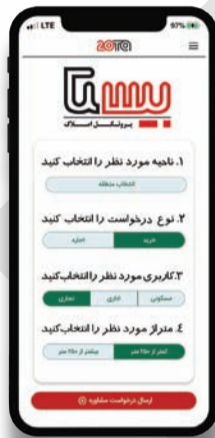
■ Israel claims to be a Jewish state. Are Israelis ranked based on the religion?

A: Israel claims it is a Jewish state, and it claims Zionism is a Jewish ideology. But both of these claims are false. Israel is not Jewish, as it treats the Orthodox Jews very poorly, and the ultra-orthodox Jews even worst. The Israeli Rabbinate is in charge of all of the life-cycle events which is an attempt to control the religion which allows them to run a state religion. This is how Israel operates, and does not provide much choice to people who do not want to be a part of that. Many Jews around the world have technically no interest in Israel and they are happy with where they are as a minority wherever they reside. Zionism is the exact opposite of Judaism, as it is intolerant, violent and racist.

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بهترین مشاوره، برترین سرویس، بالاترین رضایت مالکین محترم املاک مبله و غیر مبله، مسکونی، اداری و تجاری، ویلا و مستغلات شما را جهت اجاره به سفارتخانه ها و شرکت های خارجی نیازمندیم.

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SpaceX launches Asian communication satellite

By Paul Brinkmann

SpaceX successfully launched on Monday evening a communications satellite that is owned jointly by two companies, one in Japan and one in Malaysia, aboard a Falcon 9 rocket from Florida.

The rocket launched as planned at 7:10 p.m. EST from Launch Complex 40 at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. The late autumn weather was ideal for the launch with light clouds and light breeze.

The company confirmed that the spacecraft had reached its intended orbit about 28 minutes after launch.

The first-stage booster flew back and landed on the company's dromedary, "Of Course I Still Love You," stationed in the Atlantic Ocean. It was the 47th booster recovery for the space company.

The Boeing-built satellite, called JCSAT 18/Kacific 1, is designed to provide mobile and broadband services across the Asia-Pacific region. The owners are Tokyo-based



SKY Perfect JSAT Corp. and Singapore-based Kacific Broadband Satellites.

The first-stage booster for Monday's launch was used previously on two SpaceX cargo missions to the International Space Station, CRS-17 in May and CRS-18 in July.

SpaceX attempted to catch the rocket nose cone, or fairing, with two other ships, Ms. Tree and Ms. Chief, but the two pieces fell into the ocean. The company said on Twitter it would fish them out and attempt to refurbish the fairing anyway.

The Earth was already 'stressed' before dinosaur extinction

Scientists agree today's climate crisis is primarily driven by human activity – but before the problems we inadvertently engineered existed, similar processes have occurred on numerous occasions.

Researchers investigating the state of the planet at the time the dinosaurs were wiped out after a colossal asteroid impact, say they have new evidence Earth was already unstable due to a rapid increase in carbon in the oceans.

The study, led by researchers at Northwestern University, is the first to measure the calcium isotope composition of fossilized clam and snail shells, which date back to the Cretaceous-Paleogene mass extinction event.

The researchers found that – in the run-up to the extinction event – the shells' chemistry shifted in response to a surge of carbon in the oceans.

This carbon influx was likely due to long-term eruptions from the Deccan Traps – one of the largest volcanic features on Earth – about 200,000-square-miles of solidified basalt located in modern India.

During the years leading up to the asteroid impact, the Deccan Traps spewed massive amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere. The concentration of CO₂ acidified the oceans, directly affecting the organisms living there.

"Our data suggest that the environment was changing before the asteroid impact," said Benjamin Linzmeier, the study's first author. "Those changes appear to correlate with the eruption of the Deccan Traps."

"The Earth was clearly under stress before the major mass extinction event," said Andrew D Jacobson, a senior author of the paper.

"The asteroid impact coincides with pre-existing carbon cycle instability.

But that doesn't mean we have answers to what actually



caused the extinction."

The study will be published in the January 2020 issue of the journal *Geology*, which comes out later this month.

Previous studies have explored the potential effects of the Deccan Traps eruptions on the mass extinction event, but many have examined bulk sediments and used different chemical tracers.

By focusing on a specific organism, the researchers gained a more precise, higher-resolution record of the ocean's chemistry.

"Shells grow quickly and change with water chemistry," Dr. Linzmeier said. "Because they live for such a short period of time, each shell is a short, preserved snapshot of the ocean's chemistry."

Seashells mostly are composed of calcium carbonate, the same mineral found in chalk, limestone and some antacid

tablets. Carbon dioxide in water dissolves calcium carbonate. During the formation of the shells, CO₂ likely affects shell composition even without dissolving them.

For this study, the researchers examined shells collected from the Lopez de Bertodano Formation, a well-preserved, fossil-rich area on the west side of Seymour Island in Antarctica. They analyzed the shells' calcium isotope compositions using a state-of-the-art technique developed in Jacobson's laboratory at Northwestern. The method involves dissolving shell samples to separate calcium from various other elements, followed by analysis with a mass spectrometer.

"We can measure calcium isotope variations with high precision," Jacobson said. "And those isotope variations are like fingerprints to help us understand what happened."

Using this method, the team found surprising information. "We expected to see some changes in the shells' composition, but we were surprised by how quickly the changes occurred," Dr. Linzmeier said. "We also were surprised that we didn't see more change associated with the extinction horizon itself."

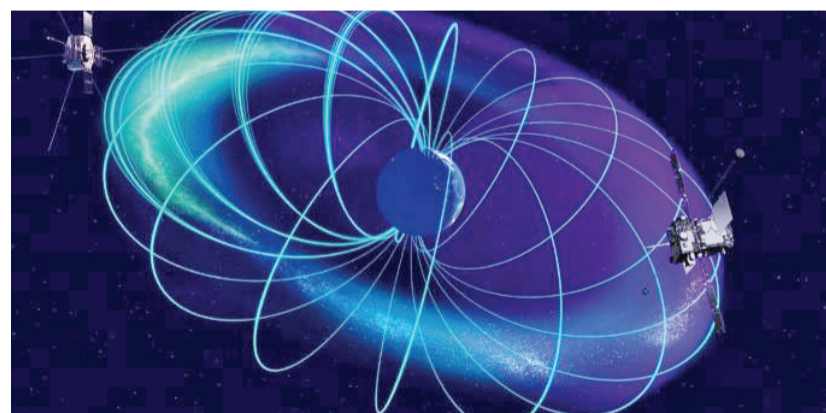
The researchers said that understanding how the Earth responded to past extreme warming and CO₂ input can help us prepare for how the planet will respond to current, human-caused climate change.

"To some degree, we think that ancient ocean acidification events are good analogs for what's happening now with anthropogenic CO₂ emissions," Professor Jacobson said.

"Perhaps we can use this work as a tool to better predict what might happen in the future. We can't ignore the rock record. The Earth system is sensitive to large and rapid additions of CO₂. Current emissions will have environmental consequences."

(Source: *The Independent*)

Finding a killer electron hot spot in Earth's Van Allen radiation belts



A collaboration between researchers in Japan, the USA, and Russia has found a hot spot in Earth's radiation belt where killer electrons, which can cause serious anomalies in satellites, form. The finding, published in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*, could help scientists more accurately forecast when these killer (relativistic) electrons will form.

Professor Yoshizumi Miyoshi of the Institute for Space-Earth Environmental Research at Nagoya University and colleagues compared data from two satellites situated on opposite sides of the Earth: the Arase satellite, developed by the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), and NASA's Van Allen Probes. Both satellites gather data from the Van Allen radiation belts, zones of energetic particles originating largely from solar wind. Energetic particles in the belts are trapped by Earth's magnetic field.

Scientists have known that electrons in Van Allen radiation belts that interact with ultralow frequency plasma waves accelerate to reach the speed of light. However, it has

not been clear when or where these killer electrons start to accelerate.

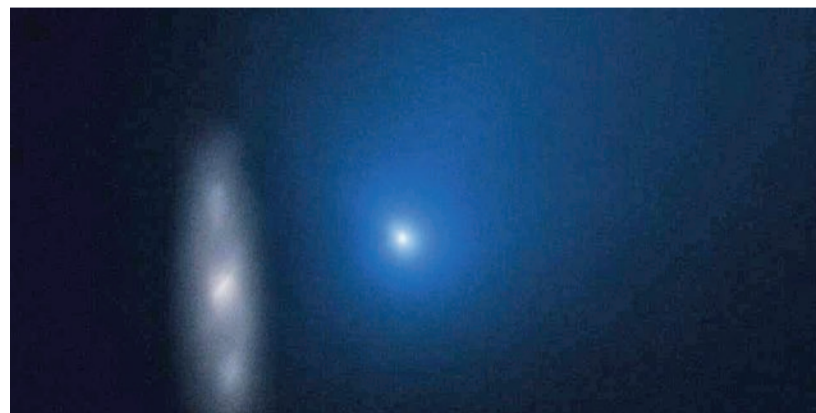
To gain more insight about the electrons, Professor Miyoshi and his colleagues analyzed data generated on March 30, 2017, by the Arase satellite and Van Allen Probe. On one side of the Earth, the Van Allen Probe identified characteristic signs of an interaction between ultralow frequency waves and energetic electrons. On the opposite side, at the same point in time, the Arase satellite identified high-energy electron signatures, but no ultralow frequency waves.

The measurements indicate that the interaction region between electrons and waves is limited, but that the killer electrons then continue to travel on an eastward path around the Earth's magnetosphere.

"An important topic in space weather science is understanding the dynamics of killer electrons in the Van Allen radiation belt," says Miyoshi. "The results of this study will improve the modelling and lead to more accurate forecasting of killer electrons in Van Allen radiation belts."

(Source: *eurekaalert.org*)

Stunning image of mysterious interstellar object released



NASA has released never-before-seen images of 2I/Borisov, only the second known object to have visited our solar system from elsewhere.

The image shows the comet in front of a distant spiral galaxy, which can be made out to the side. But the focus of the images is the bright blue center of the image, which was taken by the Hubble Space Telescope as it tracked the comet through space.

The picture shows the comet on its way through our solar system as it makes its way back into the interstellar space where it once flew.

2I/Borisov was first spotted in August by a Crimean amateur astronomer who would give it its name, and caused a flurry of excitement across the world. Scientists quickly determined that it was the second interstellar object known to have visited our solar system, after the famous 'Oumuamua, and the first comet.

Since then, scientists have been taking images of the comet as it moves nearer to the Earth and can be seen in better detail. The first observations from Hubble came in October, and the new images come

from November and December, offering a better look at the size and other details of the visitor.

When this image was taken, the object was 326 million kilometers from Earth. Scientists can now use it and other observations to learn more about the comet.

"Hubble gives us the best measure of the size of comet Borisov's nucleus, which is the really important part of the comet," said David Jewitt, a professor of planetary science and astronomy at the University of California Los Angeles, whose team has captured the best and sharpest images of this first interstellar comet.

"Surprisingly, our Hubble images show that its nucleus is more than 15 times smaller than earlier investigations suggested it might be. The radius is smaller than half a kilometer. This is important because knowing the size helps us to determine the total number, and mass, of such objects in the Solar System, and in the Milky Way. Borisov is the first known interstellar comet, and we would like to know how many others there are."

(Source: *The Independent*)

Dinosaurs faced global warming, elevated mercury levels, fossil shells show

Scientists have been trying to figure out what killed off the dinosaurs for decades. Most agree the asteroid or comet that struck the Yucatan Peninsula some 66 million years ago, the Chicxulub meteorite, played a significant role in snuffing them out, but the significance of the Deccan Traps eruptions has puzzled scientists.

Now, new research -- published Monday in the journal *Nature Communications* -- suggests the volcanic activity had a significant impact on Earth's climate, and perhaps,

on the dinosaurs, too.

Researchers performed a global survey of ancient marine mollusk shells, revealing the chemical signatures of mercury contamination and ocean warming. The signatures match the timing of the Deccan Traps eruptions.

Scientists compared the ancient shells with freshwater clam shells collected near a mercury contamination site in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. The chemical signatures matched.

"For the first time, we can provide insights into the distinct

climatic and environmental impacts of Deccan Traps volcanism by analyzing a single material," lead study author Kyle Meyer, researcher at the University of Michigan, said in a news release. "It was incredibly surprising to see that the exact same samples where marine temperatures showed an abrupt warming signal also exhibited the highest mercury concentrations, and that these concentrations were of similar magnitude to a site of significant modern industrial mercury contamination."

(Source: *UPI*)

NASA's treasure map for water ice on Mars

NASA has big plans for returning astronauts to the Moon in 2024, a stepping stone on the path to sending humans to Mars. But where should the first people on the Red Planet land?

A new paper published in *Geophysical Research Letters* will help by providing a map of water ice believed to be as little as an inch (2.5 centimeters) below the surface.

Water ice will be a key consideration for any potential landing site. With little room to spare aboard a spacecraft, any human missions to Mars will have to harvest what's already available for drinking water and making rocket fuel.



NASA calls this concept "in situ resource utilization," and it's an important factor in selecting human landing sites on Mars. Satellites orbiting Mars are essential in helping scientists determine the best places for building the first Martian research station. The authors of the new paper make use of data from two of those spacecraft, NASA's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO) and Mars Odyssey orbiter, to locate water ice that could potentially be within reach of astronauts on the Red Planet.

"You wouldn't need a backhoe to dig up this ice. You could use a shovel," said the paper's lead author, Sylvain Piqueux of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. "We're continuing to collect data on buried ice on Mars, zeroing in on the best places for astronauts to land."

Liquid water can't last in the thin air of Mars; with so little air pressure, it evaporates from a solid to a gas when exposed to the atmosphere. Martian water ice is locked away underground throughout the planet's mid-latitudes. These regions near the poles have been studied by NASA's Phoenix lander, which scraped up ice, and MRO, which has taken many images from space of meteor impacts that have excavated this ice. To find ice that astronauts could easily dig up, the study's authors relied on two heat-sensitive instruments: MRO's Mars Climate Sounder and the Thermal Emission Imaging System (THEMIS) camera on Mars Odyssey.

Why use heat-sensitive instruments when looking for ice? Buried water ice changes the temperature of the Martian surface. The study's authors cross-referenced temperatures suggestive of ice with other data, such as reservoirs of ice detected by radar or seen after meteor impacts. Data from Odyssey's Gamma Ray Spectrometer, which is tailor-made for mapping water ice deposits, were also useful.

As expected, all these data suggest a trove of water ice throughout the Martian poles and mid-latitudes. But the map reveals particularly shallow deposits that future mission planners may want to study further.

While there are lots of places on Mars scientists would like to visit, few would make practical landing sites for astronauts. Most scientists have homed in on the northern and southern mid-latitudes, which have more plentiful sunlight and warmer temperatures than the poles. But there's a heavy preference for landing in the northern hemisphere, which is generally lower in elevation and provides more atmosphere to slow a landing spacecraft.

A large portion of a region called Arcadia Planitia is the most tempting target in the northern hemisphere. The map shows lots of blue and purple in this region, representing water ice less than one foot (30 centimeters) below the surface; warm colors are over two feet (60 centimeters) deep. Sprawling black zones on the map represent areas where a landing spacecraft would sink into fine dust.

Piqueux is planning a comprehensive campaign to continue studying buried ice across different seasons, watching how the abundance of this resource changes over time.

The more we look for near-surface ice, the more we find," said MRO Deputy Project Scientist Leslie Tamppari of JPL. "Observing Mars with multiple spacecraft over the course of years continues to provide us with new ways of discovering this ice."

(Source: *Science Daily*)

Huge burst of stars resulted in 100,000 supernova explosions

Scientists have discovered a spectacular burst of stars in our early galaxy, a flurry of formation that resulted in 100,000 supernova explosions.

The discovery was part of a new survey of the Milky Way, which found new details about how the stars that make up our galaxy were born.

And it allowed the researchers to discover evidence of the dramatic event that brought the stars that surround us into being. The finding changes our understanding of the story of the Milky Way. Its stars were not formed in one continuous process, they say – but instead in a bright flash that lit up the galaxy.

"Our unprecedented survey of a large part of the Galactic center has given us detailed insights into the formation process of stars in this region of the Milky Way," says Rainer Schödel from the Institute of Astrophysics of Andalusia in Granada, Spain, who led the observations.

"Contrary to what had been accepted up to now, we found that the formation of stars has not been continuous," adds Francisco Noguera-Lara, who led two new studies of the Milky Way central region while at the same institute in Granada.

In the study, researchers found that roughly 80 per cent of the stars in our Milky Way were formed during its earliest years, between about eight and 13.5 billion years ago. After that came about six billions years during which very few stars were born.

But that quiet period was brought to a dramatic close with a crescendo of star formation, roughly a billion years ago, when stars with a mass of up to a few tens of million Suns formed in its center over the course of just 100 million years.

That area is now relatively quiet, birthing stars at a rate of one or two of our own Suns each year. But the new observations from the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope (VLT) allowed to look at it and peer into its path, and how it would have looked in its past.

"The conditions in the studied region during this burst of activity must have resembled those in 'starburst' galaxies, which form stars at rates of more than 100 solar masses per year," said Noguera-Lara, who is now based at the Max Planck Institute for Astronomy in Heidelberg, Germany, in a statement.

(Source: *The Independent*)

Iran closes southwestern border to Iraqi travelers

TOURISM TEHRAN — Iran has closed its southwestern Chazabeh border crossing with Iraq to inbound travelers due to insecurity and unrest in the neighboring country. “The ban on the entry of Iraqi citizens is enforced by two countries’ border crossings due to the continued insecurity in Iraq,” IRNA quoted Ahmad Sobhani, director of the border terminal, as saying on Sunday.



The official added that Iran has prohibited Iranian passengers and pilgrims from visiting Iraqi cities, particularly the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf, since two weeks ago for security reasons. Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs late in October called on Iranians to postpone traveling to the neighboring country until further notice.

In a travel advisory issued on October 29, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged Iranian travelers and pilgrims to put off traveling to Iraq in the wake of escalation of anti-government protests in the country.

In July, Iran’s economic charge d’affaires in Najaf, Aref Abbasi, announced that the number of Iraqi nationals visiting Iran is gaining momentum this year as the Islamic Republic endeavors to boost its tourism revenues in the face of U.S. sanctions.

Some two million Iraqi nationals visited Iran during the first seven months of the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20), constituting Iran’s largest source of inbound passengers. In return, hundreds of thousands of Iranian pilgrims head for the holy Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala each year.

Over 50 firms seek to invest in IKAC’s free trade zone

TOURISM TEHRAN — Over 50 Iranian companies have put in requests to invest in [the newly established] free trade zone of the Imam Khomeini Airport City, IKAC managing director Ali Rostami said.



Due to its closeness to the capital Tehran and access to surrounding areas, there are many investment opportunities in IKAC for domestic and foreign companies, he added.

He made the remarks in the opening ceremony of the 4th International Exhibition of Transportation, Logistics and Related Industries at the Imam Khomeini Mosalla on Sunday.

The ceremony was also attended by Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami, tens of relevant officials, business people and traders as well.

Tehran, Rome seeking enhanced cultural heritage co-op, Italian envoy says

TOURISM TEHRAN — Italian ambassador to Iran Giuseppe Perrone on Monday said that the two countries are in talks to deepen bilateral cooperation, particularly in the field of cultural heritage.

The envoy noted that “the project aims to make sure that Iran develops its capabilities to attract more foreign tourists and better organize its tourism industries.”

He made the remarks in an interview with IRNA on Tuesday on the sidelines of a ceremony to launch a joint project for developing cultural heritage and tourism between the two countries.

He described Iran “as a country that

is very rich in terms of cultural sites and archeological sites... so there is a lot for people to discover,” adding “Iran is a country that has a great and [un-]tapped potential and when it comes to tourism, cultural heritage, it has a lot to offer.”

He further said, “The project will have a follow-up mission by the Iranian side to Italy to share the details and engage in cooperation. The project relates to the promotion of sites through technologies in a cooperative approach, new techniques, etc.”

“Italian tourists are fond of Iran because it has a natural diversity that is appealing to them. Italians are also fond of Iran’s unique antiquities,” Perrone told



Rome’s ambassador to Tehran Giuseppe Perrone speaks in an undated photo

IRNA in an interview released in October.

Architecture in Iran has a long history that is spectacular for Italian tourists. Pocket-friendly prices in Iran can be another reason for traveling to the country, the official stated.

For more than 20 centuries Iran and Italy have been the embodiment of Eastern and Western civilizations and such a long history of relationships and many histor-

ical, religious and cultural commonalities between the two nations has helped Iran and Italy better understanding each other today, the ambassador added.

In November, Tehran and Rome marked 60 years of collaboration in the fields of cultural heritage and archaeology in a conference, which was held at the National Museum of Iran in downtown Tehran.

Omani airliner announces more flights to Iran

TOURISM TEHRAN — Oman budget carrier SalamAir will add more flights to Iranian cities of Tehran and Shiraz in the near future thanks to high demands from customers.

The airliner declared the expansion of its non-stop Muscat to Shiraz service from the current three to seven flights per week yet it is set to add two more flights to the existing four flights on the Muscat-Tehran route, Trade Arabia reported on Monday.

Captain Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir, said: “The response from travelers in this sector has been phenomenal since we announced the route. Shiraz and Tehran continue to be a key market for SalamAir and we are delighted to offer more flights to meet the growing demand. The new flight will provide travelers an additional option to travel to these two popular cities. We



look forward to offering affordable travel to our guests.”

“SalamAir is also keen on contributing to deepening both commerce and tourism

ties between Oman and Iran.”

SalamAir, which was the first operator to Shiraz from Oman, has a seat factor of above 80 percent to the destination. The

airline has been operating flights to the popular city known for its medical tourism, pleasant weather and amazing historical and tourist attractions since February 2018, the report said.

The carrier connected Muscat with Iran’s capital city Tehran on June 9, 2019. The airliner currently operates three Airbus A320 aircraft and five Airbus A320Neo aircraft making it the first Omani carrier to utilize the highly-rated single aisle aircraft.

In October, Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Ali Asghar Mounesan met with his Omani counterpart Ahmed bin Nasser al-Mahrizi in Muscat to promote bilateral ties particularly in the arena of health and medical tourism.

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

Iranian airline to start Ahvaz-Sohar route



TOURISM TEHRAN — Iran’s Qeshm Air has announced it will launch a flight service between Ahvaz, capital of Khuzestan province, and Oman’s port city of Sohar, in January 2020.

The weekly service is scheduled to take its maiden flight on Bahman 1 (January 21, 2020) and it will be operated on Tuesdays, director of Khuzestan airports said on Sunday.

Ahvaz airport currently operates flights to Dubai and Kuwait, Mohammadreza Rezaei added.

Commenting on the new route, provincial tourism chief Seyyed Hekmatollah Mousavi noted that it could help expand tourism with the Sultanate, the report said.

Khuzestan province is home to three UNESCO World Heritage sites of Susa, Tchogha Zanbil and Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System yet it is a region of raw beauty where its visitors could spend weeks exploring. The province is also a cradle for handicrafts and arts whose crafters inherited from their preceding generations.

Ancient skeleton with ‘extremely rare form of dwarfism’ dating back 5,000 years unearthed in China

The remains are of a human who would have suffered from a very uncommon form of dwarfism around 5,000 years ago

The skeleton was unearthed at a burial site near the Yellow River in east-central China.

It was found alongside the remains of other people who lived between 3300 and 2900 BC.

All of the skeletons were found with their hands on top of their bodies apart from the skeleton with dwarfism.

Instead, the hands were tucked behind its back.

Archaeologists first noticed that the remains appeared shorter and weaker than the rest.

After further investigation they were

able to diagnose the young adult with skeletal dysplasia.

This medical term covers a range of conditions that affect bone development but most people know it as dwarfism.

The condition is rare in modern humans but shows up even less in the archaeological record.

In fact, less than 40 ancient cases have been discovered.

Co-author of the research Sian Halcrow, an archaeologist at the University of Otago in New Zealand, told Forbes: “I think it is important for us to recognize that disability and difference can be found in the past, but these did not necessarily have negative connotations socially or culturally.”

“The ancient historical texts show that they may, in fact, have been revered in some situations.”

The skeleton’s teeth enabled the archaeologists to determine that it was the remains of a young adult.

They also discovered that the skeleton had short limbs and a small head and trunk. In more common forms of dwarfism the limbs grow disproportionately smaller than the head and torso.

This led the authors to diagnose the Neolithic skeleton with a condition called “proportionate dwarfism”.

Proportionate dwarfism is rare in both the archaeological record and amongst living humans.

Experts think the skeleton’s short

stature could have been due to an underactive thyroid or pituitary gland in their early life.

This would have affected the ancient human’s hormone levels and stunted bone growth, organ function and potentially cognitive development.

The archaeologists aren’t sure how the individual would have been treated when they were alive.

It’s likely they needed the support of others to survive but the difference in the way the remains were laid out alongside other skeletons indicate there’s a chance they were treated like an outsider.

This research has been published in the International Journal of Paleopathology.

(Source: The Sun)

609-year-old mosque is transported 2½ miles from ancient Turkish city which is due to be flooded when a new dam is built

A 609-year-old mosque is being transported two-and-a-half miles away from an ancient Turkish city that is due to be flooded.

The Er-Rizk Mosque is being moved from Hasankeyf, which is going to be flooded because of construction of the Ilisu dam, to the new Hasankeyf Culture Park.

The building, which weighs a whopping 1,700 tons, was transported on a Self-Propelled Modular Transporter along the Tigris River.

The mosque’s minaret, which was built in 1409 under the order of Ayyubids’ ruler Ebu’l Mefahir Suleyman, was moved separately.

All of the historic sites in Hasankeyf have been gradually transported to prepare for the construction of



The Er-Rizk Mosque is being moved from Hasankeyf, which is going to be flooded because of construction of the Ilisu dam, to the new Hasankeyf Culture Park

the new dam.

Six structures have already been relocated - Artuklu Hamam (bathhouse), Sultan Süleyman Koç Mosque, Imam Abdullah Zawayah, Zeynel Abidin Mausoleum and Eyyubi Mosque were among the previously relocated structures along with the middle entrance of a castle.

The mosque, which is the largest in Hasankeyf, was taken apart piece by piece and reassembled on the platform under supervision from the State Hydraulic Works and the General Directorate of Cultural Assets and Museums, according to the Daily Sabah.

It will be reconstructed upon its arrival in the cultural park. Its journey was estimated at seven hours.

(Source: Daily Mail)

ROUND THE GLOBE

Heard and McDonald Islands

Heard and McDonald Islands are remote sub-Antarctic volcanic islands located in the southern Indian Ocean about half-way between Australia and South Africa, and just over 1,600 kilometers from Antarctica.



The property covers a total area of 658,903 hectares of which about 37,000 hectares is terrestrial, and the remainder marine.

The islands are a unique wilderness, containing outstanding examples of biological and physical processes continuing in an environment essentially undisturbed by humans.

Heard Island is dominated by Big Ben (an active volcano rising to a height of 2,745 meters), and is largely covered by snow and glaciers.

McDonald Island is much smaller, covering only 100 hectares at the time of inscription, and is surrounded by several smaller rocks and islands.

The only active sub-Antarctic volcanoes are found on these islands, with the volcano on McDonald Island erupting after inscription and doubling the size of the island.

The island group’s physical processes provide valuable indicators of the role of crustal plates in the formation of ocean basins and continents, of dynamic glacial changes in the coastal and submarine environment, and of atmospheric and oceanic warming.

The large populations of marine birds and mammals, combined with a virtual absence of introduced species, provide a unique arena for the maintenance of biological and evolutionary processes.

(Source: UNESCO)

Why JMI attack makes me angry and sad?

By Imran Raza

INDIA — Unstoppable tears, unfathomable grief, acute insomnia, and utter restlessness. That's how I would describe my condition since past few days. On Sunday, I checked my Whatsapp only to be taken aback by some horrifying stories posted by some of my former classmates at Jamia Milia Islamia (JMI) University New Delhi. The visuals were extremely disturbing with gory details that literally shook me. My thoughts quickly turned to my alma mater, and all my friends there. I knew the situation was far from normal. Our beautiful university was under seige.

The first person I could think of was my sister, who studies at JMI. I dialed her number and found that she was not in campus. I heaved a sigh of relief. But I was worried for my friends who were trapped inside the campus with the marauding Delhi Police sleuths brazenly attacking the university.

I started messaging everyone I could think of to make sense of the madness. Friends told me that police had barged inside the university campus, assaulting students and teachers. They did not even spare female students and staff. University properties were vandalized and teargas canisters were fired in the air to terrify students.

As I could see in videos, there was blood everywhere, from classrooms to library and streets. All hell had broken loose and our beautiful university campus had been turned into a garrison. I just couldn't believe what my eyes were seeing. It was surreal. For us, the students of Jamia, to be unsafe inside our campus was unimaginable. Now it was a bitter reality unfolding before our eyes.

Girls, stuck at the hostel, had shared a blackout video with "Please help" inscribed in the foreground, pleading for help and assistance. They had switched off lights for fear of being noticed by police. In another viral video, a



boy was seen getting mercilessly thrashed by the police, before a few brave girls came to his rescue by confronting the policemen.

Another video showed blood smeared carpets in the university mosque. Images of me praying there last year flashed back in my mind, tearing my heart into pieces. Police had resorted to teargas shelling and lathi-charge

inside the mosque. Images showed police firing from the gates inside the campus while students were paraded with their hands up. For a moment, they looked like criminals, not students.

Students were told to evacuate the university as soon as possible. My dear friend Asad was hit by a stick, my close friend Sumayya's sister was badly injured, my junior Faiz was missing and couldn't be contacted. A pall of gloom descended on me. I lost my appetite and my calm.

One of the videos circulated online had a familiar face in it. It was one of the guards of the university who had served in Indian army also, showing his arms bruised and leg bleeding. I had never spoken to him but I still had his smiling face etched in my mind.

Every visual of a boy being hit felt as if I was being hit, every scream of a crying girl seemed as if my sister was crying. If this wasn't enough, another video showed my previous alma mater, Aligarh Muslim University on boil. The situation there was even worse. Police had set fire to hostel rooms, assaulted students. Internet was shut down, enforcing communication blockade.

I was at Jamia just a year and a half ago. I spent five eventful years of my life there that shaped me into what I am today. It is extremely painful to see my alma mater go through this. But at the same time I am immensely proud of students there for their spirited resistance against this communal project. We need to reclaim the idea of India from the Hindutva brigade, the idea in which all Indians co-exist peacefully.

Today my soul is moving around the campus of Jamia, and my body, with my head down, fists clenched out of frustration, is bleeding. I assure myself this brutality will definitely end when our awaited savior will come.

(Author is a student at Ahlulbayt International University, Tehran)

Syrians will resist

By Damir Nazarov

WEST SIBERIA/ TYUMEN — The American occupation in Syria raises the question: What do the Yankees expect from Syria? In the words of local imperialist puppets represented by the Military council Deir Zor and part-time field commanders of the SDF: "Americans are called upon to provide assistance to the Kurdish insurgents in the fight against Assad and the Iranians". In fact, on the one hand - the American occupiers are a symbol of cooperation between Zionism and the Saudis, and on the other hand - with the Pro-American Kurds.



This tandem is used by the SDF for anti-Iranian policy. After the Iranians appeared in the North-East of Syria in the liberated areas, the States changed the decision to "complete withdrawal of troops", thereby intending to "instill confidence" in their local puppets. The "Support" of the SDF project against the Islamic Republic is not the sole cause of the American occupation.

Washington is using several levers to fight Tehran and its allies. Turkey, a longtime NATO ally, is helping him in this direction. An example of such cooperation in Syria is NATO's General support for terrorists. Groups of panturkists, jihadists and "democratic oppositionists" are glad of the American presence in Syria, which do not hide their aspirations for a direct Alliance with NATO against Assad, Iran and even Russia.

The partial withdrawal of American fighters from Syria is dictated by Washington's plans to grant unlimited powers to Turkey in its plans to capture and assimilate all of Northern Syria, with the subsequent advance deep into the Arab Republic. The great Satan in the best tradition of American politics uses his puppets to implement tactical plans. Washington, as previously London, never work with one side in any conflict, but beware of a situation in which they can remain without an alternative in case of an emergency or become a "hostage" of relations with a sole ally (in such situations, they say that "the tail wagging the dog"). Under the current circumstances, it should be added once again that Ankara, like the SDF, are two sides of the same coin. The two lugs of the American spear in the body of Syria.

Local resistance to the imperialists from allies and supporters of the Islamic revolutionary guard Corps in Syria periodically report their presence - in the form of guerrilla operations. The purpose of these operations is the desire to convey to Washington that the occupiers are walking under the gun and if they do not get out, at any time the local forces associated with the Axis of Resistance can organize armed resistance.

Tehran has local allies in the North and East of Syria: the military-political party Liwa al-Baqir, various local Arab and Kurdish tribes, local guerrillas. In the event of any confrontation, representatives of the "Great Satan" and his loyalists will suffer enormous damage from the Syrian resistance.

Martyr Qasim Umar Sokoto

By Abdullahi Junaidi

NIGERIA/ KATSINA — On February 2018, Martyr Qasim Umar Sokoto was mercilessly shot with poisoned bullets by Nigerian security agent in Abuja during #FreeZakzaky peaceful protest, demanding the release of Sheikh Zakzaky and his wife from illegal detention. Martyr Qasim Umar has later succumbed to martyrdom after he suffered for 3 weeks.



Martyr Qasim Umar Sokoto was the representative of Islamic movement under the leadership of Sheikh Zakzaky in Sokoto state.

He was so brave and courage who always led #FreeZakzaky protest in Abuja capital of Nigeria and other major cities in Nigeria like Kano and Kaduna among others.

Tyrant President Buhari considered Martyr Qasim Umar as a threat to him and his gang as they continue to hold Sheikh Zakzaky and his wife in illegal detention, America and Saudi Arabia ordered their proxy server in Nigeria, President Buhari to definitely eliminate Martyr Qasim Umar from existence.

Former military dictator, tyrant President Buhari security have made so many attempts to assassinate him on his way to Abuja and other trips he had, but ended up woefully failed.

Chief of savage Wahhabi barbarians in Nigeria, bloodthirsty Tukur Buratai met with Govt stakeholders in Sokoto state weeks before Qasim's murder, Buratai went with the assassination plan of Martyr Qasim Umar, but Sokoto state Govt didn't want to be held responsible for the murder, so they planned to shot him not in Sokoto state but in Abuja capital of Nigeria.

The blood of Martyr Qasim Umar Sokoto will never go in vain, we must one day take the revenge of his murder and that of other followers of Sheikh Zakzaky by God grace.

Will Asia pioneer the "de-dollarization" process?

By Zhang Yansheng

MODERN DIPLOMACY — Denmark-based Saxo Bank has released a new batch of "outrageous" predictions for 2020 that it believes could potentially destabilize the entire international system existing today. The bank's experts predict, among other things, that in the coming year, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) may launch "a new reserve asset, called the Asian Drawing Right, or ADR, with 1 ADR equivalent to 2 US dollars, making the ADR the world's largest currency unit."

Blockchain technology will give the ADR additional reliability and ensure maximum transparency of payments effectively making it a conventional unit in a basket of leading world currencies and gold, with the Chinese yuan heavily prominent in the mix and the US dollar weighted at below 20 percent.

According to the Danish bank, this step is clearly aimed at de-dollarizing regional trade. Local economies will multilaterally agree to begin conducting all trade in the region in ADRs only, with major oil exporters Russia and the OPEC nations happy to sign up on their growing reliance on the Asian market.

The ADR will quickly take a sizable chunk of global trade away from the US dollar, leaving the United States ever shorter of the inflows it needs to fund its double-digit deficits. The US dollar will lose 20 percent against the ADR within months and 30 percent against gold.

By the close of the 1990s, Southeast Asian countries had started coming forward as the main competitors for US companies with local political and economic elites getting increasingly wary of the imbalances of the "unipolar model of globalization" where capital continues to accumulate mainly in countries issuing world reserve currencies. It looks like the world's leading powers now have in mind the scenario of a possible collapse of the modern world order. The policy of sanctions and financial and economic pressure, which has recently been pursued by Washington raises the prospects of a financial system or systems being created that would be independent of the United States. In Asia and Eurasia, new political alliances are emerging, including in the form of region-wide financial institutions.

The processes currently unfolding in the financial and economic life of Asia and elsewhere in the world, are in large part associated with the trade war that has been going on between the United States and China for the past few years, taking in ever new trade and economic sectors and now threatening to spill over into the sphere of finance as well. Still, the scope of this rivalry has not yet reached a Cold War level. In fact, Saxo Bank predicts an escalation of the US-China trade war to a level typical of the Great Depression era. If this is what is going to happen, the US dollar, this symbol of US dominance in the global financial system, may effectively be weaponized to undermine the development potential of any outside rivals, China included, who would no longer be able to make financial



settlements, receive and issue loans, and finance their existing obligations. And all this without any immediate threat of the use of military force. One possible way of avoiding this scenario would be to create a regional reserve currency not directly dependent on either the US dollar or the Chinese yuan.

Another major factor in the evolution of the financial architecture of Asia is that China, now the world's second biggest economy, wants to be able to "better defend its economic interests and influence decision-making processes pertaining to global economic development." To this end, Beijing "needs to participate in international institutions where its voice will carry decisive weight." The creation of AIIB in 2014, where half of the bank's capital currently belongs to Beijing, was just one step in this direction. Many experts believe that China wields an unofficial veto right in the Bank's key decisions. However, as noted by Professor A. Kuznetsov, official Beijing keeps insisting that "newly created institutions present competition, not an alternative," to the IMF and the World Bank.

Overall, the Asian reserve currency's prospects depend on how regional and global financial and economic trends are perceived by the major global economies. Ever since the emergence of the global money concept, there has been only one leading world currency in use: first the Dutch guilder, then the British pound and later the US dollar. Right now, expert opinions relevant to the dynamics of the US dollar's share in the global currency vary significantly. According to a European Central Bank report released in June 2019, "the US dollar remains the world reserve currency, but its predominance has been significantly shaken." This trend towards a diversification of reserves and a year-on-year contraction of the US dollar's share in the world central banks' reserves is likewise acknowledged by a review of global trends released by the International Monetary Fund. The greenback is gradually being replaced by the euro, the Japanese yen and the Chinese yuan. There are more and more payment mechanisms independent of the United States popping up, with The Economist writing about China working hard to create its own international payment system based on the yuan. There has also been talk about China paying in yuan for

its Iranian oil imports.

Is all this enough to predicate the emergence of an alternative payment system though? The US dollar still accounts for a significant share of investment and global trade, including in oil, natural gas and metals. There are at least three factors still preventing the yuan from becoming a world currency: the high cost of "financial transactions associated with the receipt and distribution of information"; "China's overdependence on Hong Kong as a regional offshore financial center," and the People's Republic's inability "to exert political influence on other world economic centers, mainly the US and the EU." There are still four factors testifying to the yuan's increasing value as a regional currency: the projected "growth of the Asian countries' incomes" leading to "an increase in demand for Chinese goods"; "the implementation of multilateral projects as part of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, resulting in increased yuan usage in the countries of Central and Southeast Asia"; "The development of the Asian bond market leading to the standardization of international debt in RMB"; "increased demand for RMB by commercial banks and enterprises as part of the Multilateral Initiative to conduct swap operations between central banks."

Finally, the process of the yuan's "internationalization" is slowed down by the Chinese authorities' need to maintain short-term growth, while simultaneously countering "adverse external shocks."

Well, at the end of the day the global financial system may "naturally" break up into several relatively independent currency zones: the dollar, the euro and the yuan (or yen). In future, the world may likewise rest on a similar balance of power. However, these currency zones will inevitably find themselves competing among themselves, which will be a test of strength for all currency macro-regions. At the same time, the countries of the Asia-Pacific region will face a hard choice. As recently as the dawn of this century, uniting around the Japanese yen was seen by most of them as the most logical option. Now that the People's Republic of China has turned into a regional economic powerhouse and the world's second economy, the need for closer interaction between the economies of the Asia-Pacific region and the Chinese yuan is

becoming increasingly evident. Meanwhile, the low level of mutual trust between a number of leading Asian countries and China may become a hurdle on the way of creating a common reserve currency.

Finally, the past 3-4 years have seen a slowdown in China's economic growth, which, in turn, could drive down commodity prices worldwide. As a result, raw materials exporters, including Russia and Saudi Arabia, whose budget deficit this year exceeds four percent of GDP, will find themselves on the losing end. Meanwhile, China and Saudi Arabia account for a significant part of the US public debt. Faced with mounting economic woes, Beijing and Riyadh might be forced, together or separately, to start selling US government bonds, "which will inevitably send their value into a tailspin," with a knock-on effect in the financial markets and the bankruptcy of a number of leading financial institutions. Such a course of events may be fraught with a new financial meltdown.

An "end of the dollar's dominance" for any other reasons, including a "sudden" emergence of a very strong alternative reserve currency, would "result, first and foremost, in a large-scale economic crisis in the People's Republic," "a collapse of oil prices" and a quick slump in "economic activity around the globe." Therefore, China, as a founding member of the AIIB, which Saxo Bank calls the potential issuer of ADR, is hardly interested in a depreciation of the US dollar.

One should also bear in mind the fact that all leading EU countries, including Britain, Germany, Italy and France, happen to be members of the AIIB. Therefore it can be assumed that Europeans, who are intent on strengthening the euro's global standing, may not be all too happy about the prospect of a new reserve currency coming along that could challenge not only the dollar, but the single European currency as well.

Although the emerging economies' share in global savings is currently close to 50 percent, "this money keeps flowing, via international reservation channels, into the Anglo-Saxon center of the global financial system, with limited possibilities for its productive placement."

The current model of globalization is losing momentum too. This can somewhat reduce frustration with development imbalances, but per se it will hardly be able to correct the overall structural imbalances of the global economy. Economists warn about the dangers of creating a system of payments alternative to the dollar, which could bring about exchange rate fluctuations and a chaotic "capital spillovers" from one reserve currency to another and back. One thing is clear: the harder Washington tries to destroy the established "rules of the game," the louder the calls for the creation of global or regional financial systems alternative to the dollar will get. However, the creation of such systems will require large-scale and lengthy political and organizational efforts, while the price tag will be prohibitively high too. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that anyone will venture to predict exactly when this is going to happen.

Terrorism makes peace building impossible: Jani Hezarroudi

GORGAN — Association for Defending Victims of Terrorism (ADVT) Public Relations – Expert meeting “World without Terrorism” was held in Andisheh conference hall at Islamic Azad University of Gorgan on 16 December 2019.

The meeting was organized by ADVT office in Golestan Province in cooperation with Islamic Azad University, Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs of the province and was attended by security and political deputy of the Provincial Government, executive director of women affairs of Provincial Government, director of Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs of the province, figures of the province, the crippled and families of the victims of the province, and students on the occasion of the International Day of World without Violence.

Farideh Jani Hezarroudi, officer of ADVT office at Golestan said “Terror and terrorism are the most challenging issues of the world today and serious threats to global peace and security. This vicious phenomenon, which is recruited by the dominant powers, endangers peace and security of human society with a continuous violence and made peace building impossible.”

She added that “One of the most important goals of terrorist attacks is to create insecurity and horror in human society. The presence of victims of terrorism and their families in raising the awareness of the public opinion at national and international level plays an important role in revealing the real nature of the terrorist groups which are pursuing their inhumane acts by abusing human rights concepts.”

Hojjat al-Eslam Seyed Ali Taheri, the president of Islamic Azad University of Gorgan stated “We live in a world where politicians of hegemonic states strive to distort the realities of the world for their own interests.” He continued “Although Islam is considered as a peaceful religion, many efforts have been made to accuse this religion of terrorism, while Muslims, especially the Iranian people, have suffered the most in the past few decades.”

The president of Islamic Azad University of Gorgan said “Hegemonic powers seeks to increase the cost for independent countries and put the stigma of terrorism on Islamic nations by backing terrorist groups such as ISIS. But this shame is still evident in their inhumane policies. Today, there is no one in the country who is unaware of the crimes of the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (hypocrites). The young generation must know how we made effort for the Islamic Revolution until now.”

Son of the martyr of terrorism said “We must narrate these crimes of the hypocrites for the society and commemorate the families of the martyrs and the victims of terrorism. The young generation of today are the future leaders of the country, and such scientific meetings on the martyrs of terrorism should continue for raising the awareness of the society.”

In another part of the meeting, Ms. Ehsaneh Ahmadi Golsefidi, university lecturer of psychology argued that “Terrorism and its motivation are very important and according to the hierarchy we can divide the roots of terrorism into the physiological needs, the need for safety, the need for belonging, the need for respect, and the need for self-healing, respectively. What we are looking at is the psychological consequence of terrorism, that is, fear, and this fear today is so pervasive that it cannot be defined geographically. The purpose of terror, as the word itself implies, is to terrorize and spread fear among the people. For this goal, the terrorists target the civilians, and the selection of these targets will cause anxiety among the people.”

The university lecturer pointed out “The message of terrorism is clear and the terrorist wants to say that anyone can be targeted anywhere and anytime, and this is what increases the anxiety of terrorist acts.”

Dr Ahmadi concluded “Causes such as the role of personality disorder, disruption of thinking, lack of satisfaction of biological and psychological needs are some of the reasons people tend to commit terrorist acts.”

Ms. Alizadeh, professor of international law at university said “In modern international law, peace can only be achieved when international security is emphasized globally and extensively at international level for preventing violence and extremism.”

She continued “Regarding the new concept of peace, approaches have also changed. The obligation to maintain peace and to try to prevent violence and extremism based on the modern definition of the international community is not only the responsibility of governments, but also of other international actors, such as international organizations, real and legal persons and parties.” (Source: ADVT)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Anti-gravity device could change air travel

(July 29, 2002) Speaking at the state opening of the Zimbabwean parliament, President Robert Mugabe again attacked Britain and praised his government’s widely criticized policy of seizing white-owned farm land. This report from Ragueh Omaar:

The idea of **anti-gravity** is doubted by many scientists. But the involvement of the world’s largest aerospace company lends it new **credibility**. Documents obtained by the magazine, *Janes Defence Weekly*, and seen by the BBC, show that Boeing is using the **research** of a Russian scientist, Doctor Evgeny Podkletnov, in a programme **code-named** Project Grasp.

The project is run by the top-secret Phantom Works in Seattle, the part of the company which handles Boeing’s most **sensitive** programmes. Doctor Podkletnov claims to have built a **device** which can shield objects from gravity, making them, in effect, lighter and easier to lift. Doctor Podkletnov’s work is viewed with **suspicion** by some, but the head of the Phantom Works, George Mullner, told *Janes* that the science appeared to be **valid** and **plausible**. We shouldn’t however expect anti-gravity aircraft in the near future. The idea is still highly experimental and it’s not yet clear whether it can be engineered into something that works.

Words

anti-: a prefix used to form words that describe something that prevents or destroys something else - here, prevention of gravity
gravity: the force that makes things fall when you drop them
credibility: if someone or something has credibility, people believe in them or trust them

research: work that involves studying something and trying to discover facts about it

code-named: a code-name given to something that is secret

sensitive: here, secret

device: machine

suspicion: if something is viewed with suspicion it is not trusted

valid: based on sound reasoning - true

plausible: believable

(Source: BBC)

Tehran hosting Asian-Pacific Astronomy Olympiad 2019

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — The 15th **d e s k** Asian-Pacific Astronomy Olympiads (APAO 2019) kicked off in Tehran on Sunday, ISNA news agency reported.

The Asian-Pacific Astronomy Olympiad is a regional annual astronomy event for high school students from Asian countries. It provides a program for teams of students that did not qualify for the International Astronomy Olympiad (IAO) and the APAO follows the IAO on the calendar. The APAO was founded on April 25, 2005.

Teams of Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Korea, Nepal, Pakistan, Asian part of Russia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam took part in the APAOs.

The APAO consists of three tests including, theory, data analysis and observation, the Olympiad’s secretary Seyed Amir Mousavi said.

In the theory test, participants are challenged by solving a number of numerical tests, in the data analysis test, students face a set of real data and practice real data analysis, while the observation test is a practical test



that assesses participants’ observation skills overnight, he explained.

He went on to say that after Michael G. Gavrilov, Founding Chairman of the IAO paid a visit to Iran, it was decided to hold the 2019 APAO in Tehran.

A team of national medalists of IAO, along with Gavrilov, are responsible to set the questions, with students from China, Russia and Iran taking apart, he stated, noting, “On the sidelines of the event, we also plan to introduce Tehran’s cultural and tourist attractions to participants, so they visit various sights in Tehran during their stay.”

“I believe that the competitive aspect of the Olympiads is not the main part of it, what matters most is the interaction and empathy between students of different nationalities,” he highlighted.

“We need to be more active in international conferences and events to maintain our place as a leading country in the field of education,” he concluded.

The event will close on December 23.

The last edition of APAO was held in Lijiang, China on November 24-December 2, 2018.

Telecom Innovation 2019 opens in Tehran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The 20th **d e s k** International Exhibition of Telecommunications, Information Technology, also known as Telecom Innovation 2019, opened on Tuesday at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground.

The exhibition showcases a broad picture of the whole telecom market in Iran, with stands from equipment and infrastructure vendors, satellite operators, wholesale carriers, VAS solutions suppliers, OSS/BSS vendors and more.

It is organized by the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Ministry,



the Communications Regulatory Authority, the Telecommunications Infrastructure

Company (TIC) and the Telecommunications Company of Iran (TCI).

Over the three-day event, the market’s most dynamic companies across the telecoms ecosystem attend the event.

The exhibition covers mobile communications, communication and internet services, navigation, networks, information technology, peripherals and components, storage systems and equipment, services, card technologies, office automation - equipment, accessories and system software.

An audience of about 40,000 trade visitors and more than 300 exhibitors are expected to join Iran telecom innovations 2019. The exhibition runs until December 20.

FAO, Iran ink agreement to support sustainable development of marine cage culture

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Iran Fisheries Organization (IFO) announced a new project that will strengthen national capacity for sustainable management and development of marine cage culture – the farming of fish inside net-cages in the marine environment.

Funded by FAO, this two-year Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) project will improve Iran’s marine cage culture capacities and support the Government’s efforts to achieve its long-term goal of 900,000 tonnes of fish product annually from marine cage culture.

“Through allocating USD 292,000 to this project, FAO assists the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to sustainably increase the production from marine cage culture in the country,” said FAO Representative to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr Gerold Bödeker at the signing ceremony. He added that “during the implementation phase of the project, farm managers and extension practitioners will be trained.”

Iran ranks second in the Middle East and 17th in the world’s total aquaculture production. Aquaculture pro-

duction in Iran constitutes roughly 40 percent of total fish production and 10 percent of agricultural exports of the Country, which accounts for about 1 percent of overall national GDP.

However, due to climate change and sharp decline in precipitation during recent years and shortage of available freshwater; marine cage culture is a key priority for the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to supply animal proteins, healthy food and alternative livelihood.

Yet, the country is facing some challenges in cage culture development, such as insufficient know-how, inadequate up-to-date and appropriate technologies and equipment; general shortage of relevant expertise within cage culture sector and government institutions; improper marketing plan for cage culture productions, and inadequate supply of fingerlings of cultured species.

Mentioning the low production cost from cage culture in supplying animal protein at the signing ceremony, the Director of Aquaculture Development Department of Iran Fisheries Organization, Mr Hussein Ali Abdolhay asserts that this joint project constitutes an integral



Gerold Bödeker, FAO Representative to Iran (R), Hussein Ali Abdolhay, deputy head of Iran Fisheries Organization.

part to achieve a resilient economy.

(Source: FAO)

Iranian top researchers, technologists honored

1 -> A number of 400 technological achievements will be showcased at the exhibition with technological-based supply and demand approach.

The 7th laboratory equipment and chemicals exhibition (Iran Lab 2019)

was also inaugurated concurrent with the exhibition, participated by leading knowledge-based companies and domestic producers.

Over 9,000 laboratory equipment produced by 350 knowledge-based

companies will be displayed at Iran Lab 2019.

The event focuses on 13 sectors including oil and petrochemical, electricity, electronics and software, civil engineering, mechanics, chemistry and

metallurgy, agriculture and environment, basic physics, general laboratory equipment, laboratory materials, medical and biomedical engineering, equipment, testing, industrial testing and calibration services.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

‘Playing to learn’ scheme piloted in elementary schools

A plan dubbed “playing to learn” aiming at using educational games toward deeper learning was implemented for first time in elementary schools across the capital, with the Education Minister in attendance, Fars reported on Saturday.

Through the first phase of the scheme, 1,000 schools from 10 provinces nationwide will implement the playing to learn scheme, including Tehran, Khorasan Razavi, Fars, Hamedan, Mazandaran, Kordestan, Kerman, West Azarbaijan, Qazvin, and Sistan-Baluchestan. According to the report, schools regarding their proper environment and conditions volunteered and chose to hold game-based classes and assess the results, currently in each province 50 girls’ schools and 50 boys’ schools among state-run and private schools have piloted the scheme; 20 percent of which are private schools.

آغاز اجرای آزمایشی طرح «بازی و یادگیری» در مدارس ابتدایی تهران

به گزارش روز شنبه خبرگزاری فارس اجرای آزمایشی طرح «بازی و یادگیری» به منظور آموزش عمیق مفاهیم کتب درسی توسط بازی با حضور وزیر آموزش و پرورش در تعدادی از مدارس ابتدایی شهر تهران آغاز شد. قرار است این طرح در ۱۰۰۰ مدرسه ۱۰ استان کشور اجرا شود در فاز اول اجرای طرح، استان‌های خراسان رضوی، شهر تهران، فارس، همدان، مازندران، کردستان، کرمان، آذربایجان غربی، قزوین و سیستان و بلوچستان قرار دارند. ملاک‌های انتخاب مدارس اجرای پروژه بازی و یادگیری شامل اعلام آمادگی داوطلبانه مدارس با توجه به امکان سنجی محیط و شرایط مدرسه است که تعداد ۵۰ مدرسه دخترانه و ۵۰ مدرسه پسرانه انتخاب شدند و این مدارس از بین مدارس دولتی و مدارس غیردولتی انتخاب شده‌اند؛ همچنین در این فاز اجرا، حداکثر ۲۰ درصد مدارس غیردولتی شامل اجرای پروژه می‌شوند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“hepato-, hepat-”

Meaning: liver

For example: There is no specific treatment for this disease and complete recovery from any form of **hepatitis** may take four months or longer.

PHRASAL VERB

Hang over something/somebody

Meaning: if something bad is hanging over you, you are worried or anxious about it

For example: It’s not very nice to have huge debts hanging over your head.

IDIOM

Have a brush with something

Explanation: when you have a brush with something, such as the law, you encounter or experience it briefly

For example: He had a brush with the law for speeding a few years ago, but he has had a clean record ever since.

New leaks: Trump's Palestine deal seeks shared al-Quds, Saudi role

➔1 excluding the Israeli settlement blocs that would remain part of the occupied territories.

Shared Jerusalem al-Quds

Additionally, Jerusalem al-Quds — whose eastern sector was occupied by Israel during the Six-Day War in 1967 and illegally annexed — would not be split but would rather be "shared" between Israel and the Palestinian state, with the Arab population of the city becoming residents of Palestine.

The Jerusalem al-Quds municipality would become responsible for the entire city, while the Palestinian state would be responsible for education and would pay the Israeli municipality taxes and utilities.

Jews would not be allowed to purchase Arab homes and vice versa, while no additional areas would be annexed to Jerusalem al-Quds and the city's holy sites would preserve their status quo.

Al-Aqsa custodianship shifts to Riyadh

Meanwhile, the al-Aqsa Mosque, which is currently administered by the Waqf — an arm of the Jordanian Ministry of Sacred Properties — will be placed under Saudi Arabia's control.

Egypt gives territory to new Palestine

Regarding the Gaza Strip, the draft deal stipulates that Egypt would grant land to the new Palestinian state to be used for industrial, agricultural and commercial purposes as well as the building of an airport. However, Palestinians would not be allowed to live in the lands provided by Egypt.

Moreover, a highway and a pipeline for treated water would be built between Gaza and the West Bank.



\$30bn funding

The wealthy Persian Gulf Arab states, the United States and the European Union would economically sponsor the Washington-crafted deal, providing 70, 20, and 10 percent of the funds, respectively.

"An amount of \$30 billion will be allocated over a period of 5 years for projects related to the new Palestinian state," the purported draft deal said.

The contributions by the Persian Gulf countries would be split proportionate to their oil production capacity.

Palestinians pay for protection

Furthermore, an agreement would be signed between Israel and the new Palestinian state, with the Tel Aviv regime providing protection to Palestine from "external aggression," while Palestinians

pay for it.

The amount the Palestinians will have to pay for protection would be negotiated between the Arab nations and Israel.

Timetable for 'disarming' Hamas, building Palestinian airport

Upon the signing of the so-called peace plan, Hamas would hand over its weapons to Egypt and its members would receive monthly salaries from Arab nations.

Gaza's sea borders and land crossings with Israel and Egypt would be opened to international trade.

A year after the agreement is implemented, elections would be held in Palestine. All Palestinian prisoners would be gradually released from Israeli jails over a period of three years.

Within five years, a seaport and an airport

would be constructed for the Palestinian state. Until that time, Palestinians would use Israeli ports.

Palestine's borders would be open to the passage of civilians and goods.

A Chinese company would build a highway that rises 30 meters above the ground connecting Gaza to the West Bank.

The Jordan Valley would remain under Israeli control. Highway 90 would be expanded to link the Palestinian state with Jordan.

Penalties for objection

If Israel rejects the deal, the U.S. will end economic support for the regime.

If Hamas and the PLO oppose the agreement, Washington will end all financial support it provides to Palestinians and prevent funding provided by other countries.

If the PLO accepts the plan and Hamas or the Islamic Jihad dismiss it, then the two groups would bear the responsibility of their decision.

In any military confrontation between Israel and Hamas, the U.S. will support Israel.

That U.S. plan on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — which is widely reported to be biased towards the Tel Aviv regime — has already been unanimously rejected by all Palestinian factions.

The U.S. unveiled the economic portion of its initiative during a conference in Bahrain in June despite a Palestinian boycott.

Palestinians stopped recognizing the U.S. as a mediator in the conflict with the Tel Aviv regime in 2017, after Trump recognized occupied Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel's "capital" in defiance of international law.

(Source: press TV)

Fresh protests hit India over anti-Muslim law

A fresh round of protests has broken out against an anti-Muslim citizenship law in India, amid evidence of excessive force used by police to suppress public outcry.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), which was passed by Hindu-nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government last week, aims to purportedly save religious minorities from persecution in neighboring Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan by offering them an easy path to Indian citizenship.

Critics say Modi has designed the discriminatory law explicitly to exclude Muslims from the possibility of acquiring refugee status in India and, eventually, citizenship.

India's 200 million Muslims view the measure as the government's first step toward making them second-class citizens, and protests over the law have since been ongoing in the South Asian country.

The new protests were staged in the

eastern city of Kolkata in India's West Bengal State as well as in the southern-most state of Kerala, local sources said on Tuesday, with several other rallies planned in the capital, New Delhi, later in the day.

Authorities imposed internet blackouts and used force to shut down rallies and sit-ins across several states to quell the unrest.

Police said ten people had been arrested for rioting and mob violence on Tuesday.

Kolkata was also the scene of mass demonstrations on Monday as thousands of protesters took to the streets in a march led by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, a fierce critic of Modi.

The new round of rallies took place as petitions calling for a probe into allegations of police brutality at two universities in northern India were heard by the Supreme Court on Tuesday.

(Source: agencies)

Myanmar seizes boat carrying 173 Rohingya Muslims: military spokesman

Myanmar detained 173 Rohingya Muslims on a boat off the southern coast, authorities said Tuesday, amid signs that more members of the minority group are making perilous sea voyages to escape persecution.

The navy seized the vessel carrying the group, including 22 children, off the coast of Tanintharyi Division's Kawthaung township Sunday, military spokesman Tun Tun Nyi said.

"Our navy found them on a suspicious boat in the sea," he told Reuters by phone. "The police will proceed according to the law."

More than 730,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar to Bangladesh in 2017 to escape a military-led crackdown that UN investigators have said was carried out with "genocidal intent" and included mass killings and rapes.

Myanmar has denied widespread atrocities, framing the violence as a response

to attacks by Rohingya militants, but has acknowledged killings at Inn Din village, where soldiers and Buddhist villagers murdered 10 Muslim men, as well as in another village, Gu Dar Pyin. Myanmar has also denied persecution.

Some 600,000 Rohingya remain in largely Buddhist Myanmar, confined to camps and villages in the western Rakhine state where they are unable to travel freely or access healthcare and education.

Three Rohingya living in Myanmar's western Rakhine state told Reuters by phone they had heard the boat was bound for Malaysia. They asked not to be named for fear of retribution.

For years, Rohingya on both sides of the border have boarded boats organized by smugglers in the dry months between November and March, when the sea is calm. The dangerous journey to Thailand and Malaysia has cost many lives.

(Source: Daily Star)

Pakistani special court sentences Musharraf to death in high treason case

Pakistan's former president Pervez Musharraf has been sentenced to death in a high treason case. The retired general was tried in absentia after leaving the country several years ago to undergo medical treatment.

The special court in Islamabad backed capital punishment in a split 2-1 vote. Musharraf, who held the power in Pakistan for a decade, was accused of subverting the Pakistani constitution to keep power.

The court announced its verdict on Tuesday after a weeks-long delay as the Pakistani government and Musharraf's defense team made a last-ditch attempt to prolong the case, which was launched in 2013. The decision is subject to appeal.

Earlier Musharraf complained from a hospital bed in Dubai, where he's been living in recent years, that his trial was unfair. The video has been broadcast by Pakistani media. He urged the court to take a statement from him at the hospital and confirm the state of his health.

Musharraf has been mostly living in exile since

losing power in 2008. He returned to Pakistan in 2013 to take part in a general election, but was disqualified and put under house arrest on charges related to his decision to impose a state of emergency in 2007. The following year, he was allowed to leave the country again to seek medical treatment.

The former Pakistani leader says his prosecution is politically motivated and that his only goal was to serve Pakistan as a military commander and later as president. Two weeks ago, he was sent to a hospital in Dubai after reportedly suffering heart and blood pressure problems.

He remains a controversial figure in Pakistan. Critics say Musharraf undermined democracy when he staged a bloodless military coup in 1999 and concentrated too much power in his own hands. Public pressure stopped him from entrenching further in 2007, when he suspended the constitution for six weeks to seek re-election. Musharraf admitted he opened up the country to the CIA's anti-terror



drone operations, which have caused scores of civilian deaths, and have since been banned by Pakistan's parliament.

Supporters view him as a defender of Pakistani interests, who stood up to militants, built up Pakistani nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis India, and improved women's rights.

(Source: RT)

Turkey plans to set up military base in Libya

Turkey is planning to establish a military base in Libya aimed at providing greater support for the Tripoli-based unity Government of National Accord (GNA) in the wake of a military deal signed between the two sides last month.

Local media reported Monday that the military base will be established in Tripoli, and that Ankara had already started to prepare and provide necessary equipment to the base in support of Libya's internationally-recognized government led by Fayeze al-Sarraj.

Turkish daily Yeni Shafak quoted military sources as saying that Ankara had asked the armed forces to equip ships and warplanes in preparation for the transfer of Turkish forces to Libya.

The sources said that the transfer process to Tripoli have already begun, with ships transferring drones, tanks, special forces and commando units.

Sources also revealed cargo planes and helicopters have been prepared and alerted to take off towards the GNA-held Misrata Airport.

A day earlier, media reports suggested that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had held talks with Sarraj in Istanbul, just days after the Turkish leader said he was ready to send troops into Libya upon Tripoli's request.

During the previous meeting between the two men in Istanbul late last month, Ankara and Tripoli signed an accord on expanded security and military

cooperation as well as delimitation of maritime jurisdiction.

The November military deal was introduced in the Turkish parliament on Saturday.

If the military agreement is approved by lawmakers, the GNA can request vehicles, equipment and weapons for use in army, navy and air operations. It also provisions for new intelligence sharing.

Since 2014, Libya has been divided between two rival governments: the House of Representatives based in the eastern city of Tobruk and the GNA.

Renegade Libyan general Khalifa Haftar, who is commander-in-chief of

the so-called Libyan National Army (LNA), supports the eastern government. In April, he launched an offensive to capture the capital Tripoli and oust the GNA.

Despite intense and deadly clashes between the two sides, Haftar has so far failed to achieve his objective and his offensive stalled outside the capital.

Libya plunged into chaos in 2011, when a popular uprising and a NATO intervention led to the ouster of long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi and his execution by unruly fighters.

Sarraj's government has been attempting to establish order ever since.

(Source: Press TV)

Malaysia to host major summit of Muslim leaders

➔1 But Mahathir's office swiftly rejected the suggestion, insisting the summit "is not intended to create a new bloc".

There have however been signs Riyadh is unhappy about the event, with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan cancelling his attendance after travelling to the kingdom at the weekend, reportedly to assuage his ally's concerns.

While calls have been growing for the summit to address the Uighurs' plight, analysts believe leaders are unlikely to take a hard line for fear of damaging vital economic ties with Beijing.

They are seen as more likely to condemn the treatment of Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar — who fled their mostly Buddhist homeland in droves in 2017 after a bloody military crackdown — and the Palestinians, which would come at a lower cost.

Following the summit, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani heads to Japan on Friday in the first trip to the country by an Iranian head of state for two decades, official news agency IRNA reported.

For 94-year-old Mahathir, the world's oldest leader and in his second stint as premier, the most important outcome could be boosting Malaysia's international reputation which suffered under a corruption-mired regime that was ousted last year.

The summit is "a vehicle to return (Mahathir) and Malaysia into a position of prominence in the Islamic world," said Shahrman Lockman, an analyst from Malaysian think-tank the Institute of Strategic and International Studies.

(Source: AFP)

Berri, Hariri say new govt 'urgent'

Lebanon's caretaker prime minister and parliament speaker agreed Tuesday on the need to speed up the formation of a new government as it has become "urgent."

Speaker Nabih Berri and caretaker Prime Minister Saad Hariri met in Ain al-Tineh to discuss the latest developments in the political impasse.

A statement from Berri's office, after the meeting, said that both sides agreed on the need for speeding up the formation of a new government and the "need to approach this in a calm atmosphere."

(Source: Daily Star)

Costs by inexperienced crown prince for Saudi Arabia

➔1 Recent events in Lebanon and Iraq that led to political and security problems along with efforts by the Saudi-affiliated media such as Iran International TV and the Saudi-owned Al Arabiya TV to exploit the recent popular protests in Iran are just few examples of the Saudi interventionist approach.

Riyadh must learn lessons from the consequences of the aggressive policy toward the countries in the region and of enormous economic and security losses. Saudi Arabia should be aware that pursuing previous policies with tactical changes will also result in unpredictable costs for the country.

How Guterres suppressed the Western media warfare against Iran

➔1 A few days ago, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres affirmed in an official statement that the UN is "unable to independently corroborate" Iran's role in attacks on the Aramco oil facilities.

In fact, statement by Guterres has suppressed the Western propaganda campaign against Iran over the past three months, which sought to describe the Islamic Republic as a destabilizing factor in regional and international developments. The West was trying to justify the continued killings and aggressions by the Saudi-UAE coalition in Yemen, which are being carried out through financial and military support by the U.S., the Zionist regime, Britain, France and Germany.

China, Russia press UN to ease N. Korea sanctions

China Tuesday urged the UN Security Council to unanimously back its joint proposal with Russia to ease sanctions on North Korea, warning that dialogue to resolve nuclear tensions must not regress.

The nuclear-armed North has issued increasingly strident declarations in recent weeks, even promising an ominous "Christmas gift" if Washington does not come up with some concessions.

For his part, US President Donald Trump said Monday that he would be "disappointed" if North Korea had "something in the works," warning that if it did, "we'll take care of it."

"We're watching it very closely," Trump said at the White House. Negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang have been largely stalled since the collapse of a February summit in Hanoi between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

The North is under heavy US and United Nations sanctions over its nuclear program, but it has been frustrated at the lack of relief after it declared a moratorium on nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests.

"It is an important and sensitive period for the peninsula, and the urgency of a political solution has further increased," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a regular press briefing in Beijing.

The international community should "prevent the peninsula from falling back into tense confrontation, and avoid a serious reversal of the situation," Geng added.

Russia and China introduced a draft joint resolution at the United Nations on Monday seeking to lift some of the punitive measures that have been enforced on Pyongyang over its nuclear activities.

"We hope that the Security Council will unanimously support the political settlement of the Peninsula issue" and encourage Washington and Pyongyang to "respect each other's concerns," Geng said. He said "contact should be restored as soon as possible to break the deadlock and to prevent the dialogue process from derailing or even regressing."

While Beijing is Pyongyang's most important diplomatic ally and key economic lifeline, it has backed sanctions against its neighbor in the wake of its nuclear activities.

(Source: AFP)

Man City won't stand in way of Arteta joining Arsenal

Manchester City will not stand in Mikel Arteta's way if he wants to become the new manager of Arsenal, several British media outlets reported Monday.

Reports added that while Premier League champions City were unhappy at a lack of a formal approach for Arteta, currently an assistant to manager Pep Guardiola, they will stop the Spanish midfielder joining Arsenal.

Arteta played for north London side Arsenal and he has also been linked with the managerial vacancy at Premier League rivals Everton, another of his former clubs.

But speculation that Arteta could be returning to north London as the successor to sacked Gunners boss Unai Emery intensified when pictures emerged of managing director Vinai Venkatesham outside his house in the early hours of Monday morning.

City won 3-0 at Arsenal on Sunday but reports said no approach for Arteta was made when club officials met during the game.

It is understood two meetings have taken place and City are unhappy that the London club did not ask for permission to speak to Arteta.

Defeat left Arsenal as close to the relegation zone as they are the top four and meant interim manager Freddie Ljungberg has won just one of his four league games since the former Gunners midfielder was brought in following Emery's sacking last month.

Arsenal are on a run of just one win from 12 games and Nicolas Pepe, their club-record signing, said the players had to take the blame for a woeful run of results.

"Us players have to do better quickly," he said. "We have won only one game out of the last 12. It is not enough, we are Arsenal."

(Source: AFP)

Real and Barca braced for unusual security steps ahead of 'Clasico'

Real Madrid and Barcelona may find it easier to get themselves psyched up for their rescheduled 'Clasico' La Liga clash on Wednesday, because both sides will spend the hours before the match cooped up in the same hotel.

To minimize the disruption from Catalan independence protests planned for the afternoon, the police have recommended that the two teams stay in the same hotel in the hours ahead of the match and then make the short journey to the Camp Nou at the same time.

"We have been told to travel together and that's what we will do," said Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane.

"I don't know if that is giving in (to the protesters). It's something different and we just have to follow the rules. We don't need to do any more explaining. The important thing is that the game is going ahead and that's that."

The protest, taking place in several areas around the stadium four hours before kickoff, has been called by Democratic Tsunami, the group who organized disruptive actions in October in response to the jailing of Catalan independence leaders.

Those protests led league organizers to postpone the Barca-Real match planned for Oct. 26, and when Wednesday's demonstration was announced it led to fears that the match might have to be called off again.

But authorities have promised the game will go ahead and Democratic Tsunami, which says 25,000 people will attend the protest, say they do not want to disrupt the match and only wish to call for dialogue between the Spanish and Catalan authorities.

(Source: Reuters)

Schalke keeper Nuebel banned for four games for kung-fu foul

Schalke 04 goalkeeper Alexander Nuebel has been suspended for four games and fined for a brutal kung-fu style foul on Eintracht Frankfurt's Mijat Gacinovic that earned him a straight red card, the German Football Association said on Tuesday.

The 23-year-old Germany youth international and Schalke captain charged out of his goal and tried to kick the ball away, but with his leg at full stretch he crashed into the chest of the Frankfurt midfielder in the match on Sunday.

Gacinovic tumbled to the ground and was left with several bruised ribs and cuts to the chest, while the referee sent Nuebel off. Schalke eventually won the game 1-0.

Nuebel will be out until late January, with the league breaking for winter after this weekend and resuming in mid-January. He was also fined 12,000 euros over the incident.

Gacinovic said later that it was an accident and that he did not blame the keeper.

(Source: Goal)

St Etienne hit with stadium ban over fireworks during PSG match

St Etienne have been ordered to play their Ligue 1 matches behind closed doors until further notice for "wide use of fireworks" in the stands during Sunday's home defeat by Paris St Germain, the French Football League (LFP) said.

The home supporters set off flares and fireworks at the Stade Geoffroy-Guichard as PSG forward Kylian Mbappe fired home an 89th-minute goal in a 4-0 win for the visitors.

The referee was forced to blow the whistle in the last minute and stoppage time was not played.

"In view of the particularly serious facts, there will be a total closed-door measure," the LFP said in a statement.

Paris St Germain extended their lead at the top of the Ligue 1 standings to seven points with a game in hand, courtesy of two goals from Mbappe and one each from Neymar and Mauro Icardi.

(Source: Reuters)

Van Nistelrooy, Stekelenburg join Dutch staff for Euro 2020

Ex-Netherlands internationals Ruud van Nistelrooy and Maarten Stekelenburg will join the national team's coaching set-up for Euro 2020, the Dutch Football Association (KNVB) announced on Tuesday.

Former Manchester United striker Van Nistelrooy, 43, will be released from his role as PSV Eindhoven's youth coach for the competition.

"It is a wonderful opportunity for me as an assistant coach to be part of the staff of the Orange for this final tournament," van Nistelrooy said in a KNVB statement.

Stekelenburg, 47, starts his role alongside boss Ronald Koeman immediately.

"After all the great years with the KNVB youth teams, this is of course an excellent opportunity to work at the highest level," said Stekelenburg, who coached the Dutch under 19 side.

(Source: SoccerNet)

Zidane and Valverde to meet in Clasico battle of the survivors

Zinedine Zidane and Ernesto Valverde might have been fearing for their jobs if they had lost a Clasico back in October but its postponement means that on Wednesday they can face each other feeling more secure.

Stalling in the autumn, Real Madrid and Barcelona have rolled through the gears in the lead-up to Christmas, meaning the winner of Wednesday's crunch meeting at Camp Nou will move seven points clear of third place.

More importantly, in what increasingly looks like a two-pronged title chase, the winner will pull three ahead of the loser, with one round Liga matches left before the two-week winter break.

Yet even for the loser, providing defeat is not a humiliation, the consequences will not be so grave.

The gap in the table will be small and considering where both these teams were only a few weeks ago, when every week brought a new name linked with coaching jobs and every goal conceded planted another seed of doubt.

For Real Madrid, Jose Mourinho was out of work and in the public eye, his increasingly frequent media showings even appearing to irk the usually immovable Zidane.

"Football forgets what you've done in the past," said Zidane in October.

"I'm not going to tell you what they say doesn't bother me because it bothers me, but I can't prevent people giving their opinions." For Barcelona, Ronald Koeman had surged into view after the Dutch Federa-



tion confirmed a clause in his contract that allows him to join Barca after Euro 2020 next summer.

But if the rumours were an irritation, form on the pitch was a real concern.

Barcelona's malaise was short-lived. They won only two of their opening five games. Results improved but performances were ponderous and the weaknesses all-too-familiar, the kind that had also gone unfixed before, only to prove costly later in the season.

In that sense, Valverde was carrying the weight of previous disappointments and he was blamed for a leaky defence, lack of style and failure to get the best out of Antoine Griezmann.

"At the start of the season, it's not about winning one title, it's about winning three or four," said Valverde in November. "So the frustration when you don't win a game is high."

Zidane also shouldered burdens from last season. Even if it was not his team that limped its way through the final months, he was in charge and some wondered why nothing had changed.

Suspensions grew when Madrid drew two of their first four league games and were thrashed away at Paris Saint-Germain.

More life

When they lost away at newly-promoted Mallorca, a week before the Clasico was meant

to be played, it felt like results might unravel.

"We must have consistency," said Zidane.

"We have to have more life in our game." Madrid did that as Zidane found a more settled side including the dynamic midfielder he has long-wanted in Fede Valverde as well as an 18-year-old gem in Rodrygo and arguably the world's most in-form striker in Karim Benzema.

Eden Hazard got fit too and sparked in spells before injuring his ankle earlier this month, which will rule him out until the new year.

As Madrid hit their stride, Barcelona accelerated to keep up and the uncertainty around Valverde, although not gone, has, for now at least, faded.

Their improvement cannot be entirely credited to the return of Lionel Messi, but his eight goals, including two hat-tricks, and four assists in six games have certainly helped. Griezmann is finding his feet too, with three goals in his last five.

"It is true we were struggling but we have also done things well," Valverde said last month. "Leaders in La Liga, first in our Champions League group. We have to follow our path."

Judgement on Zidane's second coming will be guided by Madrid's staying power in the league while for Valverde, success will hinge on Europe, where recapturing the trophy after four barren seasons seems now to be the minimum for Barcelona.

(Source: AFP)

Klopp laments timing of Club World Cup as Liverpool prepare for semi-final



Jurgen Klopp insists Liverpool are fully focused on winning this week's Club World Cup ahead of their semi-final against Monterrey of Mexico but hit out at the timing of the competition and questioned FIFA's plans to expand the tournament in future.

"We are here now and we are completely focused on it, but if you had asked me beforehand if I think that there should be a Club World Cup in the middle of our season, I would say no, in my honest opinion," Klopp told journalists at the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha, where Liverpool face Monterrey on Wednesday.

The Anfield club have had to take time out from their seemingly relentless march towards the Premier League title to travel to Qatar for the tournament, in which they are Europe's representatives thanks to their Champions League triumph last season.

If Liverpool win against the Mexicans, they will advance to a final on Saturday against either Flamengo of Brazil or Saudi side Al Hilal, while even if they lose their semi-final they will remain in Qatar for a third-place play-off at the weekend.

Their Premier League trip to West Ham United, scheduled for this weekend, was postponed as a result, and they have been forced to play their League Cup quarter-final at Aston Villa on Tuesday with a squad

of academy players due to the lack of alternatives in a packed schedule.

After the competition concludes, they will rush back home to prepare for a trip to Leicester City -- their closest title challengers -- next Thursday, on the Boxing Day holiday in the United Kingdom.

FIFA recently confirmed plans to expand the current seven-team Club World Cup played in December to a 24-team competition which will start in China in 2021 and will be played in June and July -- that means a clash with the next Africa Cup of Nations, to be held at the same time.

The existing format is particularly unloved in Europe, even if European clubs have won the last six editions.

Klopp added: "Can it be an even bigger tournament in the future? I don't know. We have to make sure that we have great competitions, but not at the same time, that's all."

"I like now being here because we have a lot of fans in this part of the world, they usually have to follow us at night time if they want to watch our games so that's nice that we can come closer from time to time."

"But everybody needs to think about it. If there is time for a tournament which is nice."

(Source: Mirror)

Serie A criticized for anti-racism artwork featuring apes



Italy's top-flight Serie A soccer league launched a new anti-racism campaign on Monday by presenting artwork featuring three side-by-side paintings of apes but the move has been described by campaign group Fare as a sick joke.

The league said the paintings by Italian artist Simone Fugazzotto would be exhibited permanently at the entrance to its main hall "to underline the commitment of the world of football against all forms of discrimination."

It said the artwork "aims to spread the values of integration, multiculturalism and brotherhood".

The paintings drew an angry backlash on social media from outside Italy, although there was little reaction inside the country itself.

"These creations are an outrage, they will be counter-productive and continue the dehumanization of people of African heritage," said anti-racism group Fare. "It is difficult to see what Serie A was thinking, who did they consult?"

"Once again Italian football leaves the world speechless. In a country in which the authorities fail to deal with racism week after week #SerieA have launched a campaign that looks like a sick joke."

Milan-born Fugazzotto, described as being "known for his disruptive works", is famous in Italy and almost all his art involves drawings of chimpanzees.

He said he got the idea for the paintings after Napoli's Senegalese defender Kalidou Koulibaly suffered racist insults during a match at Inter Milan last season.

"I got so angry that... I got an idea. Why not stop censoring the word monkey in football but turn the concept around and say instead that in the end we're all apes?" he said.

"Because if we are human beings, monkeys, reincarnated souls, energy or aliens who cares. The important thing is to hear a concept of equality and brotherhood."

Italian football has been plagued by racism with Inter Milan Belgium forward Romelu Lukaku and Brescia's Italian striker Mario Balotelli having been subjected to racist insults from rival fans during matches this season.

A veteran Italian pundit was dropped from a Sunday night round table programme after suggesting Lukaku could only be stopped by giving him bananas to eat, while Brescia's president said Balotelli's problem was that he was "black" and he was "trying to get whiter".

Both men said their comments were not intended to be taken seriously.

Earlier this month, Italian sports daily Corriere dello Sport used the headline 'Black Friday' along with a picture of Lukaku and AS Roma's England defender Chris Smalling to preview last Friday's match between their clubs in Milan.

(Source: Reuters)

Tennis in 2019: Nadal on top as new faces make mark in women's game

Rafael Nadal finished the season on top of the world to give the men's rankings a familiar look but a new crop of women is showing the old guard can be overthrown.

The Spanish world number one and Novak Djokovic won two Grand Slams each in 2019, holding Father Time and their young rivals at bay for another year.

But Ashleigh Barty and teenager Bianca Andreescu were two new faces on the list of women's Major winners as familiar names slipped from view.

AFP Sport looks at some of the big talking points of the season. He beat Novak Djokovic in the final and lost just three matches in the rest of the season, winning the French Open and the US Open before inspiring Spain to Davis Cup glory on home soil, finishing as world number one for a fifth time.

With a combined age of 103, Nadal, Djokovic and Roger Federer continue to dominate men's tennis and it takes a brave punter to predict their imminent demise.

But there is at least the sense of a credible challenge from an exciting crop of youngsters including Daniil Medvedev, who pushed Nadal all the way in the US Open final, and ATP Finals winner Stefanos Tsitsipas.

"I believe I'm really close to being crowned a Grand Slam



champion," said Tsitsipas after beating Dominic Thiem in the final in London.

Australia's Ashleigh Barty, 23, rose from the relative anonymity of 15th in the world at the end of 2018 to the rankings a year later, winning the French Open and the WTA Finals along the way.

Teenager Bianca Andreescu of Canada soared even more

dramatically, from 178th to fifth in the world, beating Serena Williams in the final of the US Open to become the first Canadian to win a Grand Slam singles title.

"NextGen is here," Andreescu announced during her winning run at Flushing Meadows.

"You see many fresh faces and I think we're only going to get better from here."

Roger Federer had two Wimbledon championship points on his own serve to beat Novak Djokovic and win his 21st Grand Slam title. That would have taken him six clear of the Serbian on the all-time list and three clear of Rafael Nadal at the time.

Instead, he faltered. Djokovic, in a match lasting a shade under five hours, won his 16th Grand Slam and two months later Nadal won his 19th.

"It's such an incredible opportunity missed," said the Swiss veteran, now 38 and who must fear his days as the all-time leader on the list are numbered.

Serena Williams is running out of opportunities to win the 24th Grand Slam singles title that would pull her level with Margaret Court's record.

(Source: France 24)

“Sports for All” meeting held in Tehran

S P O R T S TEHRAN — “Sports for all — fostering inclusion of persons with disabilities” meeting was held in National Olympic and Paralympic Academy of Iran on Monday.

The one-day seminar was headed by Cvetan Cvetkovski, the officer in charge of UNESCO Cluster Office in Tehran, to highlight the important role played by sports and physical education in fostering inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Hojjatollah Ayoubi, Secretary-General of the Iranian National Commission for UNESCO, Abdolhamid Ahmadi, Deputy Minister of Sports and Youth, and sports-women and sportsmen with disabilities were among the attendees.

“I would like to start by expressing my sincere appreciation to the National Olympic and Paralympic Committees and Academy, the Municipality of Tehran, the Iranian Federation of Sports for All, the Iran Sports Federation for the Disabled, and the University of Tehran. Your cooperation and contribution to this event are highly appreciated. Without your cordial help, the success of this activity would not become possible,” Cvetkovski said.

“Lastly but also most importantly, I would like to sincerely thank all the athletes, sportswomen and sportsmen present here. It is you who are the real heroines and heroes of the event. In a sense, the event is not only a one-day occasion, but also a life lesson. To be with you here reminds us one of the most principal lessons in life, and that is always to march on smiling no matter what obstacles are lying there in our way. You help us understand more profoundly than ever the great value of sports for stimulating the vitality of human kind. I



feel truly inspired by your optimism and determination,” he added.

“I would also like to pay tribute to the Government of Iran for the hard work they have done in promotion of sports and physical education for persons with disabilities. Iran has positioned itself as a regional model in fostering inclusion of people with disabili-

ties through sports and physical education. This has brought along true benefits in their physical and mental health and their everyday life and activities.

“In addition, the hard work developed by the national authorities has been considered as best practice by the International Paralympic Committee and it is also well

reflected in the successful results that Iranian athletes obtain in all Paralympic competitions. As Nelson Mandela once famously said, “Sports has the power to change the world”. And in fact, we need that power today more than ever before, to strengthen the grounds for more inclusive, healthy and peaceful societies,” Cvetkovski stated.

Egypt victorious over Iran at FINA World Junior Water Polo



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Egypt defeated Iran 11-7 at the FINA World Men’s Junior Water Polo Championships on Tuesday.

The Persians started the competition with a 15-7 win over Kuwait at the new Al-Nasir Sport Club Kuwait, but suffered three successive losses against the U.S. (27-4), Italy (16-4) and Montenegro (17-4).

Iran will play Brazil on Wednesday in the competition’s classification.

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.

The 2009 championships were played with U18 teams each, but in 2011 the FINA switched to U20 teams again.

Iran, Kazakhstan seal first win at AVC Continental Cup



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Favorites Iran and Kazakhstan got their AVC Beach Volleyball Continental Cup Phase 1 – Central Zone campaigns off to winning starts, with the former outclassing Sri Lanka 2-0 and the latter powering past hosts India with the same margin.

The double-gender tournament, which is being held between December 16 and 18, attracted four men’s and three women’s teams to vie for the top honor

and a berth in each gender to test their mettle in the 8-team 2020 AVC Beach Volleyball Continental Cup Finals, where only the eventual winners will qualify for the Tokyo 2020.

The men’s competition featured top seeds Iran, second seeds Kazakhstan, third seeds India and fourth seeds Sri Lanka, while Kazakhstan are top seeds in the women’s event, with Sri Lanka and India awarded second and third seedings respectively.

Japan’s Ikee leaves hospital, aiming for Paris 2024

TOKYO (Reuters) — Japanese swimmer Rikako Ikee, who was diagnosed with leukemia earlier this year, said on Tuesday that she has been discharged from hospital and will be aiming to compete and win medals at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Ikee sprang onto the world stage at last year’s Asian Games at the age of 18, winning a record six gold medals in the pool and setting the year’s fastest time in the world in the 100m butterfly.

A big medal hope for hosts Japan for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, Ikee was then diagnosed with leukemia in February.

“Finally, I get out of hospital,” she wrote on Twitter.

“It has been hard, long days but I have lots of encouragement and now want to go back to my life.”

Ikee, whose gold medal haul was the most for a female athlete at a single Asian Games, also picked up two relay silvers to match North Korean shooter So Gin Man’s



record tally of eight medals.

Ikee said she is still awaiting approval from her doctors to begin training in the water but that she has been doing basic training already.

“I will aim for Paris 2024 and I will work hard to get medals there,” the 19-year-old wrote.

Ikee holds Japanese national records over 50, 100 and 200 meters in freestyle, as well as 50 and 100 meters in butterfly and was named Japanese Swimmer of the Year in 2018.

Ertz named U.S. Soccer’s female player of the year

World Cup winning midfielder Julie Ertz was named U.S. Soccer’s female player of the year.

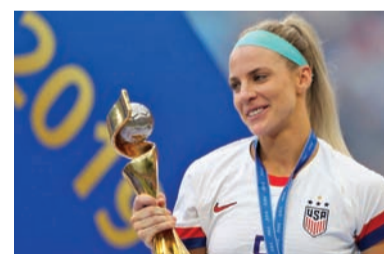
Ertz, who also won the award in 2017, played a key role in her country’s World Cup triumph and also led her club Chicago Red Stars to the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL) title game for the first time.

“All of my team mates just had such an amazing year and we all know it takes an entire team to win a World Cup or have a successful club season,” Ertz, 27, said in a statement released by U.S. Soccer.

“It’s emotional to be recognized in this way and it’s a cherry on top of a beautiful 2019. It’s incredible.”

Ertz was the U.S.’s midfield anchor at the World Cup, ensuring that they did not concede more than one goal in any game.

She also led the Chicago Red Stars



to a second-placed finish in the league standings and was a key player in the team’s playoff run, which ended in a 4-0 defeat to the North Carolina Courage.

“It’s been a whirlwind of a year and one that I’m extremely grateful for,” said Ertz.

“My team lifted me up in so many ways and our experiences on and off the field in 2019 just encapsulate the love I have for the national team and for wearing this crest and what it represents.”

(Source: Reuters)

Iraqi refugee sets sights on Paralympics

ATHENS (Reuters) — On his fifth attempt, Iraqi refugee Wisam Sami finally succeeded in reaching Greece with thousands of others fleeing war in his homeland. Now he is setting his sights on the Paralympics.

Four years after reaching Greece on a journey that took him from war-torn Mosul to Athens via Turkey, Sami is hoping to bag a spot to compete in fencing at Tokyo 2020.

Sami, who was left with a permanent limp in his right leg after a medical mistake at an Iraqi hospital when he was three, has spent the past two years training to be a wheelchair fencer.

He has competed internationally this year and is now hopeful he could be selected. The Paralympics, as well

as the Olympics, have had a refugees team since the Rio Games in 2016.

“I am just following my dreams,” Sami told Reuters.

Sami spent six months living in a tent in a refugee camp on the island of Samos before moving to the mainland with support from the U.N. refugee agency UNHCR.

A project by Greece’s Paralympic Committee for refugees caught Sami’s eye in 2017 and since then he has been developing his sabre skills at a gym.

“It gives me more excitement and I feel more strong,” said Sami, who used to work as a photographic designer in Mosul.

Sami’s coach Leonidas Koukos, who is also aide to the head coach of the Greek Paralympic team, said that as a

player, Sami, 29, was quick and determined.

“He was watching the movement the opponent was making and the next exact moment he was making the counter movement,” said Koukos. “This is very, very good. This is his best skill.”

Sami competed in the International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation Wheelchair fencing world cup in Warsaw in July and there are plans for him to compete in Italy and Hungary to give him additional exposure to competitions.

The International Paralympic Committee gives wild cards to refugees to compete in a refugee team under the IPC flag.

“If I train more this helps me go to Tokyo,” Sami said. “This is the best moment for me.”

Iranian athlete wins the Powerlifting World Championships

IRNA — Mehdi Ghanbari, Iranian athlete and member of the national power lifting team or weightlifting Iran, won the first place in the World Championships, the caretaker of Astara body-building squad said on Tuesday.

Astara is a Caspian city in Gilan Province. It lies on the border with Azerbaijan Republic and on the Caspian Sea.

Mehdi Noruzi said on Monday that a tournament was held in Moscow, Russia on December 10-15, with 3,000 athletes from 40 countries competing in different ages.

He said that out of 22 Iranian athletes competing in the 140 minus weight category in the breaststroke and broke the record and won the championship with a 245 kg weightlifting.

He said that out of 22 Iranian athletes competing in the tournament, 10 athletes won top honors and the first one received a gold medal from Astara at the Powerlifting World Championships.

Brazilian forward Jonathas de Jesus linked with Persepolis

TASNIM — Brazilian striker Jonathas de Jesus has been linked with a move to Iranian football club Persepolis.

The 30-year-old currently plays in Brazilian club Corinthians.

Jonathas started his playing career in Cruzeiro of Brazil in 2006 and was transferred to Alkmaar. He has also played in Italian clubs Brescia, Pescara and Torino.

He joined Real Sociedad in 2015 and has also played in Rubin Kazan and Hannover 96.

Persepolis are going to strengthen attack in January for the Iran Professional League and 2020 AFC Champions League.

Iranian skiers win four medals at Murat Dedeman FIS Cup

IRNA — Four Iranian skiers claimed medals at the Murat Dedeman FIS Cup underway in Palandoken, Erzurum in Turkey.

In the women’s slalom, Turkey’s Ozlem Carikcioglu won the gold medal, clocking 1:36.67 and Iran’s Atefeh Ahmadi (1:37.51) and Sadaf Saveh Shemshaki (1:38.05) claimed silver and bronze medals respectively.

In the men’s slalom, Tiriell Luka Abramovich from Turkey took the gold medal with a time of 1:25.39 and Behnam Kia Shemshaki (1:26.99) and Morteza Jafari (1:27.15) from Iran won silver and bronze, respectively.

The international tournament has brought seven countries together.

Ali Karimi to compete at Dubai Marathon 2020

Former Iran and Persepolis midfielder Ali Karimi will participate at the Dubai Marathon 2020.

He has made the announcement via his Instagram account on Tuesday.

The Dubai Marathon (official name Standard Chartered Dubai Marathon) is an annual marathon running race held in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates.

This event is considered as one of the first sporting events on the city’s calendar, and taking advantage of the cooler winter temperatures.

The Dubai Marathon will be held on January 24.

The event features 42km, 10km and 4km fun run.

(Source: Persian Football)

Canoeing research center to be established in Iran

IRNA — The Islamic Republic of Iran is to establish canoeing research center to serve Asian countries in the field.

Iran’s proposal to create a research center for canoeing in the country was offered at the 19th canoeing confederation annual congress that was held in Thailand.

Also, Iran’s Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province has been chosen as a hub for teaching canoeing in a bid to promote this sport in the Middle East.

Tabatabaei comes 1st at Spanish chess festival

IRNA — Mohammad Amin Tabatabaei from Iran finished in the first place at the sixth edition of the Sunway Sitges chess festival underway in Sitges, Spain.



In blitz tournament, he won the gold with eight points (six wins, two draws).

Indian chess players Erigaisi Arjun and Nihal Sarin finished in second and third place, respectively with 7.5 and 7 points.

The competition is taking place in the Spanish city from December 13 to 22.

The tournament is a 10-round Swiss. The total prize fund is 27,155 euros with a 5,000 first prize.

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Oppressors are of three groups, those who oppress their superiors through sins, those who bully their inferiors, and those who support oppressors.

Imam Ali (AS)

“Goodbye, Commander” published in Arabic

TEHRAN — “Goodbye, Commander”, a memoir of martyr Brigadier General Hossein Hamedani’s widow, Fatemeh Cheraghnoorzi, has been published in Arabic.



This photo shows copies of the Persian and Arabic versions of “Goodbye Commander”.

Hamedani, who was a senior military advisor to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), was martyred in October 2015 during a mission in Syria.

The book, compiled by Hamid Hesam, recounts Cheraghnoorzi’s memories of their stay in Syria, publisher Besat has announced.

The story of “Goodbye, Commander”, translated into Arabic by Masud Ahmadi, begins in 2011 when the commander and his family left Iran to join Syrian forces in their war against ISIS. The book also returns to the 1960s and continues with the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war and multiple missions of the commander during the war.

“Yeva” tops at Vitre Iranian film festival

TEHRAN — Iranian-Armenian filmmaker Anahid Abad’s acclaimed drama “Yeva” won first prize at the 1st edition of the New Images of Iran (Nouvelles Images d’Iran), an Iranian film festival in Vitre, France on Sunday.

Produced by Farabi and the National Cinema Center of Armenia, the film tells the story of Yeva, a young woman who escapes her influential in-laws with her daughter Nareh after her husband’s tragic death, and takes refuge in one of the villages in the Karabakh region. She is a complete stranger in this ballgame and is obliged to live her daily life in disguise.



“Yeva” by Iranian-Armenian filmmaker Anahid Abad.

“Yeva” was Armenia’s submission to the 90th Academy Awards, but it did not make the shortlist.

“A House on 41st Street” by Hamidreza Qorbani and “Villa Dwellers” by Monir Qeidi took second and third prizes respectively.

“Villa Dwellers” is about the wives of the Iranian army commanders, who live in residential villas for army forces in southern Iran during the Iran-Iraq war.

“A House on 41st Street” is about a middle-class family in Tehran, which falls apart when one brother kills another brother over a bounced check.

A lineup of 12 Iranian short and feature films was screened at the festival, which was held from December 11 to 15.

The movies were selected by a committee composed of Iranian filmmaker Abolfazl Jalili, Vitre Mayor Pierre Méhaignerie, Franco-Iranian Center director Alireza Khalili, member of the editorial board of Paris-Tehran Magazine Fatemeh Shadman, founder of the Garromedia Cultural Association Laurent Garreau, French literature expert Vahid Yaghubi and French art historian Jean-Claude Voisin.

The New Images of Iran was organized by the Franco-Iranian Center in collaboration with Aurore Cinema, House of World Cultures, Ouest France and World Trade Center Rennes Bretagne along with several other French centers and Iran’s Farabi Cinema Foundation.

German-U.S. doc “Ringside” named best at Cinéma Vérité festival

TEHRAN — “Ringside”, a German-U.S. documentary about boxing talents Kenny Jr. and Destyne Jr., was picked as best film in the international competition of the 13th Cinéma Vérité, Iran’s major documentary film festival, the organizers announced on Monday.

Directed by André Hörmann looks at the dangerous, volatile world of Chicago’s South Side from the perspective of two remarkably gifted young boxers and the fathers who train them; as one begins a rising career in the ring, the other serves time in prison.

The closing ceremony of the festival was organized at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall.

Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Ostadali received an honorable mention in the feature-length documentary category for his “Lunar Eclipse”, which is about a student in an Islamic seminary who is faced with the dilemma of choosing between living as a cleric or pursuing a career in documentary cinema.

The special jury award in this category was shared by “Sheep Hero” by Dutch filmmaker Ton van Zantvoort and “No Place for Angels” by Iranian director Sam Kalantari.

In the mid-length category, “Breathless Animals” by American filmmaker Lei Lei was named best documentary.

The film is about a Chinese woman who speaks only in voiceover and is never seen. Her account is one of hardship, of a mother who died young, of a father sent to a farm for reform during the Cultural Revolution, of all the things the family lacked.

The award for best short documentary in the international competition remained at home as Iranian director Jafar Najafi’s “Asho” won the award. The film is about a shepherd boy who is obsessed with Hollywood movies and wants to become an actor.

“Spoon”, a co-production of Latvia,



German director André Hörmann (R) receives his award from jury members Mehrdad Oskui (L) and Zlatina Rousseva during the closing ceremony of the 13th Cinéma Vérité at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall on December 16, 2019.

Norway, and Lithuania by Laila Pakalnina and “Then Comes the Evening”, a co-production between Serbia and Bosnia by Maja Novakovic, shared the special jury prize in the short and mid-length categories.

In the national competition, the award for best documentary went to “The Barrage” produced by Morteza Sha’bani.

Directed by Morteza Payeshenas and

Hossein Momen, the film is about a fierce battle between Iranian forces and ISIS terrorists in Syria.

Mohsen Ostadali was selected as best director for “Lunar Eclipse”, and the special jury award was presented to Mohammad-Sadeq Esmaeili for his “Ador” about the repercussions of living in the shantytowns outside of the central

Iranian city of Kerman.

Morteza Payeshenas and Hossein Momen received the award for best director in the mid-length film section, and “The Waterfall” by Ali Shahabinejad won the award for best short.

The Cinéma Vérité festival is organized every year in December by Iran’s Documentary and Experimental Film Center (DEFC).



Iranian band Anu gives a performance in Konya on December 15, 2019 to commemorate the 746th death anniversary of Rumi. (Anadolu)

Iranian band Anu commemorates Rumi in Konya

TEHRAN — Iranian band Anu gave a performance in the Turkish town of Konya on Sunday in a series of programs arranged to commemorate the 746th death anniversary of the Persian mystic and poet, Molana Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207-1273).

The performance took place in a tent set up by the Konya Culture and Tourism Directorate in Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi Square across from the mausoleum of Rumi, Turkey’s state-run news agency Anadolu has reported in Persian.

“This is the second year the band is giving performances at the ceremony,” the band conductor Mohammadreza Najmi said.

Konya’s Culture and Tourism director Abdusettar Yazar also said that a number of programs are organized every year from December 7 to 17 to observe the death anniversary of Rumi.

This year the programs include performances of sama, a Sufi ecstatic dance, exhibitions of calligraphy, handicrafts and live music performances.

He also added that since the love of Rumi finds common ground among the people in Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan, these countries have been organizing programs over the past few years to introduce the great person to the world.

Iranian culture minister, Slovenian ambassador meet in Tehran

TEHRAN — The Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, and Slovenian Ambassador Kristina Radej meet in Tehran on Tuesday.

The expansion of cultural relations between the two countries was discussed at the meeting.

Radej said that her country has had longstanding relations and cooperation with Iran, and announced her country’s

readiness to expand its cultural ties with Iran in music area.

She noted that the expansion of cultural relations will help people of the two countries develop greater understanding of each other.

Salehi for his part also noted that the two countries have signed some cultural memorandums of understanding (MOU), which give the two countries significant prospects for cultural collaborations in the future.



Slovenian Ambassador Kristina Radej (L) and Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi (3rd L) meet in Tehran on December 17, 2019.

French New Wave film legend Anna Karina dies at 79



French film actress Anna Karina and director Costa Gavras arrive for a screening at the Cannes Film Festival, Cannes, France, May 16, 2009. (Reuters/Eric Gaillard)

PARIS (Reuters) — Danish-born actress Anna Karina, one of the most acclaimed luminaries of influential French New Wave cinema, has died of cancer at age 79, her agent said on Sunday.

Karina, famous for her Kohl-rimmed blue eyes, was the frequent muse of director Jean-Luc Godard, her first husband, starring in seven of his films including “A Woman is a Woman”, “Pierrot Le Fou” and “Bande à Part” (Band of Outsiders).

Her agent Laurent Balandras told French media that she passed away in Paris on Saturday in the company of her fourth husband, American director Dennis Berry.

“Her gaze was the gaze of the Nouvelle Vague (New Wave). It will remain so forever,” French Culture Minister Franck Riester tweeted about Karina, an icon of 1960s chic. “Today, French cinema has been orphaned. It has lost one of its legends.”

Karina also worked with other great directors including Lucchino Visconti, Jacques Rivette and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and had leading roles in some major English-language productions in the late 1960s and early 1980s.

She later did some directing and had a singing career, recording “Sous Le Soleil Exactement” by Serge Gainsbourg.

Singapore artist channels ‘creepy-cute’ with baby heads in sushi rolls



SINGAPORE (Reuters) — At first glance the works of Singaporean artist Qixuan Lim have a familiar, edible appearance.

But upon a closer look at the sardine tin - and it’s packed with tiny human hearts made of clay, cherubic arms and legs or other human body parts.

“I think my art has always been about that combination of things that people find sort of traditionally, typically cute, but having a darker twist and a darker element to it,” says Lim, who is known by her social media accounts and by her fans as QimmyShimmy.

“There are still a lot of aesthetics and ideas of beauty that are tied onto our

perceptions of what is beauty.”

The 28-year old studied in the Netherlands is now a full-time information designer. She first showed her works in her bedroom.

But upon a closer look at the sardine tin - and it’s packed with tiny human hearts made of clay, cherubic arms and legs or other human body parts.

Now back in Singapore, Lim describes herself as a part-time artist. She has no studio but creates most of her works in her bedroom. She uses the oven in the kitchen as a kiln. Despite her modest production facilities, her macabre works are continuing to attract fans and she recently exhibited her creations at a gallery in Japan, where “creepy-cute” is a trend in pop culture.