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# Den of espionage, terror sieged



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## Iran's 9-month trade balance positive

**TEHRAN** — Iran's non-oil trade with other countries registered a \$100-million positive balance in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21 – December 21), according to the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO).

"In the first nine months of the current year, our exports reached \$31.9 billion

while the imports stood at \$31.8 billion," IRNA quoted Hamid Zadboum as saying on Tuesday.

Mentioning the great potentials of the country's neighbors for increasing exports, Zadboum said: "According to TPO studies, Iran's 15 neighboring countries imported about \$1.16 trillion of non-oil commodities in 2018." **→4**

## Zarif says Iran, China interested in expanding strategic ties

**TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Tuesday that Iran and China have developed ties to strategic level which shows the two countries are interested in expanding relations and interaction. During a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing, Zarif said that China plays a very important role in international developments, especially issues related to Iran.

He condemned the United States'

unilateral sanctions on Iran and urged the international community to counter unilateralism and support multilateralism.

For his part, Wang said Iran and China should continue talks and consultations.

During a press conference on Tuesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang said, "Wang noted that important changes are brewing surrounding the Iranian nuclear issue and the JCPOA is facing severe challenges." **→2**

## National unity newspaper comes into bookstores over 100 years after its publication

**TEHRAN** — Copies of Ettihad Newspaper, a leading paper that sought national unity in the early years after the Constitutional Revolution (1905 to 1911), have been published in a book over a century after the publication of its first edition.

Eighty-two copies of the newspaper, which was published in two editions every week, along with three special editions of the paper have been published in the book

itled "Ettihad Newspaper" ("Unity Newspaper"), publisher the National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) announced on Tuesday.

The editions were published between May 12, 1914 and May 4, 1915. Sheikh Musa Dastjerdi was the license holder and manager of the newspaper. The license of the paper was transferred to Seyyed Mohammad Yusefzadeh. **→16**



### EDITORIAL

**Mohammad Ghaderi**  
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## The secret of U.S. attacks on PMU positions in al-Qa'im

In an unprecedented move, which indicates the beginning of direct conflict between U.S.-Israeli coalition and the axis of resistance, the U.S. attacked the bases related to Iraq's Kata'ib Hezbollah, near the al-Qa'im border crossing. The move by the Americans reveals the U.S. desire to occupy Iraq and meet the interests of the Zionist regime.

considering the sensitive circumstances in Iraq and increased concern by the Zionist regime over boosting the missile power of the axis of resistance, the Americans targeted the bases that they knew were of great importance for the axis of resistance.

### ■ The beginning of a harsh response to U.S. aggressors

The U.S. intervention was directly aimed at fulfilling the Israeli plans, as it could carry out the attacks elsewhere in Iraq. Choosing al-Qa'im as the target indicates that the raids were far beyond a reaction to the attacks on the KI base in Kirkuk, suggesting that the strategic phase of confrontation of the two sides has begun.

Although, the Israelis were deeply pleased by the attacks, the U.S. Arab allies, with the exception of the Khalifa family that strongly backed the move, remained silent in the face of extreme backlash by Iraqi political groups.

### ■ What are the Americans looking for?

The U.S. in fact is trying to take the control of areas that it considers to be in favor of its projects. It does not intend to step back in the face of the axis of the resistance. The sources affiliated to the PMU have said that behind the scene game is over and the confrontation has emerged.

From the perspective of the Iraqi resistance groups' leaders, the U.S. has made a mistake in its calculations and adopted the game of "blood versus blood", so the Iraqi resistance movement insists on a proper response in proportion to the U.S. air raids.

### ■ Why the U.S. chose al-Qa'im?

The al-Bukamal-al-Qa'im border crossing is 450 km to Damascus and 340 km to Baghdad. The border crossing connects two cities of al-Qa'im in Iraq's Anbar province to the Syrian province of Deir ez-Zor by land, which are the closest cities to the common border. **→3**

## Cuban envoy raps U.S. sanctions, urges continued resistance

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — Cuba's ambassador to Tehran condemned the U.S. sanctions against independent nations, including Iran, calling for efforts to maintain the anti-U.S. resistance.

In an interview with Tasnim in Tehran, Alexis Bandrich Vega expounded on his country's policies to counter the US, and highlighted the common values of the revolutions in Cuba and Iran.

Asked about the common revolutionary sentiments in Iran and Cuba and both nations' refusal to give in to the Western imperialism, the ambassador said, "The political relations between the two governments and nations are good, and we have a lot in common. Both countries are working against imperialism. We have common stances in various areas, from human rights to the United Nations (issues).

"We have issued many statements against the United States' unilateral sanctions... In the areas that the Western countries are conducting a propaganda campaign against us, we tried to counteract them and observe multilateralism,

and we are opposing the abuse of politics and unilateralism."

Bandrich Vega also noted that a series of problems have obstructed the efforts to enhance the trade, economic and business cooperation between Tehran and Havana, saying, "The economic war that the United States has waged and has entangled all countries has also affected Cuba."

According to the ambassador, Cuba's main trade partners are Russia, Venezuela, China and Vietnam, and they are working with Havana on the basis of a mid- and long-term plan.

He also highlighted Cuba's efforts to settle its debts as soon as possible, maintain its unity in all conditions, and find new solutions in a constantly changing world.

"One of the revolutionary tips that (late Cuban leader) Fidel (Castro) taught us was that we should think positively despite all problems, and we should struggle and hope to overcome all problems. I also hold such a hope and positive attitude

that the relations between Iran and Cuba would reach the highest level, and we would achieve such perfect relations in spite of the distance and the sanctions," he added.

On the Trump administration's decision to roll back the Obama administration's deal with Cuba or the move to scrap the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Bandrich Vega said all American administrations pursue the same path, which is using every method to reach their goal.

"When Trump took power, his main purpose was to intensify the economic and trade sanctions (on Cuba) and to mount violence against the country... This (US) administration is by no means trustworthy, because lies and irresponsibility are among its mechanisms, and in general, I can say they (Americans) are not reliable."

Cuba does not insist on negotiations with the US, but it is always ready for dialogue, the ambassador added, stressing that Havana has a series of preconditions for talks. **→11**

## 'U.S. attack on PMU aggression against sovereign Iraq'

**TEHRAN (MNA)** — Hailing PMU and other resistance groups' role in challenging the U.S. policy in Iraq and Syria, American analyst and columnist Stephen Lendman says U.S. attack on PMU is aggression against sovereign Iraq.

U.S. forces launched deadly airstrikes against Kata'ib Hezbollah bases, which is part of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), on Sunday night, claiming that the attacks have been in response to alleged attacks targeting U.S. and coalition forces.

To know more about the real reasons

behind the U.S. illegal act against an independent country, the issue was discussed with American analyst and columnist Stephen Lendman.

Commenting on the role of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) in foiling the U.S. plots for the country and the region, Lendman said, "The PMUs and other resistance groups in Iraq, Syria and throughout the region are important to challenge the hostile U.S. presence in the region where they'll never be peace as long as Pentagon forces remain."

Being questioned about the reasons behind the U.S. attack on PMU, he reiterated, "The U.S. is waging forever regional wars, inventing pretexts to keep waging them."

Touching upon the illegitimacy of the U.S. attack on a sovereign country, he added, "I'm sure they'll be more incidents like Sunday's. They're aggression against sovereign Iraq and Syria, and of course, U.S. proxy war on Iran goes on by incidents like days of riots, violence, vandalism, and chaos last month."



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## Tehran Times says hello to 2020

Tehran Times staff celebrate New Year's Eve along with their sole Christian writer Hrand Baghdasaryan (C).



### REPORT

**Farnak Bakhtiari**  
Tehran Times journalist

## WHO keeps silent on U.S. sanctions affecting Iranian MPS patients

The World Health Organization (WHO) has kept silent on supplying medicine needed for Mucopolysaccharidosis (MPS) patients in Iran because of the sanctions imposed by the United States.

MPS are a group of metabolic disorders caused by the absence or malfunctioning of lysosomal enzymes needed to break down molecules called glycosaminoglycans (GAGs).

Individuals with MPS either do not produce enough of one of the eleven enzymes required to break down these sugar chains into simpler molecules, or they produce enzymes that do not work properly.

Over time, these GAGs collect in the cells, blood and connective tissues. The result is permanent, progressive cellular damage which affects appearance, physical abilities, organ and system functioning, and, in most cases, mental development.

On November 17, Iran's Health Minister Saeeed Namaki in separate letters to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Executive Director Henrietta H. Fore, and World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom, urged the international community to break the silence on inhumane sanctions imposed by the United States against the country.

But so far no action has been taken by the international community and it has remained silent on this inhumane behavior of the U.S..

Mehdi Shadnough, head of the Health Ministry's center for transplantation and disease management, said that "Cruel sanctions in the health sector, especially those targeting patients suffering from rare diseases, have created a great deal of anxiety and stress for the patients," IRNA reported on Tuesday.

He added that companies exclusively producing medicine for MPS patients, such as BioMarin Pharmaceutical Inc. of the U.S. and a South Korean company, have refused to export these drugs to Iran, threatening the lives of 335 patients in Iran. **→12**



## Rouhani congratulates heads of states on New Year

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has congratulated heads of states on the New Year of 2020.

“I hope that in the coming year, world leaders exercise collaboration away from unilateralism, and use thought and action based on justice and freedom, make a year full of peace and kindness for all human beings, and bring about a life full of peace and security and welfare for their nations by overcoming the challenges faced by the humanity,” the presidential website quoted Rouhani as saying in his message.

First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri also issued message to his Christian counterparts, congratulating the New Year.

He expressed hope that steps would be taken in line with promoting peace.

## Zarif says Europe's withdrawal from nuclear deal is unlikely

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has told IRNA in an interview published on Tuesday that it is unlikely that Europe withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

However, the chief diplomat said Europeans are unable act independently from Washington in regard to the JCPOA.

“Unfortunately, the Europeans could not take practical actions on the JCPOA independent from the United States,” Zarif remarked. Zarif added, “It is essential for the Europeans to take practical actions on JCPOA.”

He noted that Iran will reverse its decision to reduce commitments under the deal if Europeans take practical actions.

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

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

Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China, and Iran have been trying to salvage the pact. However, Europeans' efforts to protect trade with Iran against the U.S. sanctions have yielded nothing concrete so far.

On May 8, exactly one year after the U.S. abandoned the deal, Tehran announced that its “strategic patience” is over and began to partially reduce its commitments to the agreement at bi-monthly intervals.

Iran's moves are based on paragraph 36 of the JCPOA which “allows one side, under certain circumstances, to stop complying with the deal if the other side is out of compliance.”

In the first stage, Iran announced that it will not limit its stockpile of the nuclear fuel to 300 kilograms allowed under the deal. On that date (May 8) Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) said if the remaining parties to the JCPOA, especially Europeans, devise a mechanism to protect Iran from the sanctions' effect in the two-month deadline it will reverse its decision.

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

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

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

Iran has said it will reverse its decision if its economic interests are guaranteed.

## Security forces disband arms trafficking gang in western Iran

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian security forces, in a complicated operation, have dismantled an arms trafficking gang in the border areas of the western province of Kermanshah, a local official announced on Tuesday.

“In line with restoring security to the country's borders, the intelligence forces along with border regiment of Paveh city managed to disband an arms trafficking gang and seized a quantity of weapons and ammunition,” said Parviz Idepour, the governor of Paveh.

He further explained, “Seven arms traffickers affiliated to enemies' spy agencies were arrested and a sum of 55 fire arms, which are mostly used in street fighting by guerrillas, were seized in the operation.”



According to the report, the arms trafficking gang was organized in coordination with the enemies' spy agencies to foment insecurity in Iran.

In a similar operation late in October, the Iranian intelligence and security forces disbanded a notorious arms trafficking gang in the border areas of Kermanshah province.

The anti-terrorism forces of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s intelligence organization discovered and seized 259 rifles, 2 combat weapons and 3 hunting guns from the gang at the time.

## Russian FM Lavrov to visit Iran in 2020

**TEHRAN (ISNA)** — Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced on Monday that he will travel to Tehran in 2020.

After meeting with his Iranian counterpart in Moscow, Lavrov said he would gladly travel to Tehran next year upon an invitation by his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif.

“We are very pleased with the results of our talks” Lavrov stressed. “My friend and colleague has invited me to visit Tehran next year. It is my pleasure to accept the invitation,” Lavrov told reporters.

The two chief diplomats discussed a wide range of topics, from bilateral relations to the 2015 multinational nuclear deal, the escalating war in Libya, tensions in the Persian Gulf and the joint naval drills of Russia, Iran and China in the Gulf of Oman, Sputnik reported.

# Iran in worst days of sanctions: Rouhani

### Rouhani says Iran has lost \$200 billion due to sanctions

**POLITICAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday that the country is passing “the worst days” of sanctions imposed by the U.S., praising the people for their resistance and patience.

Addressing a ceremony arranged to inaugurate subway train in the western part of Alborz province, Rouhani hailed people for their firm stance and resistance in hard days of sanctions.

Pointing to the consequences of sanctions on the country, he said, “If we were not engaged in an imposed-economic war, we could enjoy a sum of \$200 billion out of which \$100 billion was income of crude export. Now we do not have that hefty amount of money.”

“We are managing the country without that \$200 billion income. People are not living comfortably, however we (the government) try as much as we can,” he went on to say.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rouhani said, “People should expect the government to understand (the problems), to draft required plan (to solve the problem) and try (to implement its plan) as much as it can. If the government does not manage to do its duty it should be criticized.”

Noting that no ruler or government in the world will last long, the president said, “The only issue that will remain forever is rendering services to the people.”

Earlier this month, Rouhani said that Iran was resisting sanctions but his country had not closed the door to negotiations.

“We have no way but resistance against sanctions, however, we have not closed door of negotiations,” Rouhani said during a speech at Insurance and Development Conference.

The president said if the sanctions against Iran were lifted, he would be ready



to meet the leaders of the countries party to the 2015 nuclear deal.

“If they remove sanctions, we are prepared for talks at the level of 5+1 group's heads of states,” Rouhani remarked.

The nuclear deal was signed between Iran and the 5+1 group (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council) plus Germany in July 2015.

Under the agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and confirmed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231, Iran was obligated to put limits on its nuclear program in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

However, Donald Trump, a presidential candidate favored by hawks in the U.S.

and Israel, started harsh attacks against the JCPOA, vowing to tear it up if elected president.

Finally, in May 2018, he officially abandoned the JCPOA and introduced the harshest ever sanctions in history against Iran.

The Trump administration not only returned the previous sanctions lifted under the nuclear deal it added new ones, including a total ban on Iran's oil exports. Trump's administration has even threatened to penalize any country or company that does business with Iran.

In response to the abrogation of the JCPOA by the U.S. and a failure by the remaining parties, particularly the Europeans, to protect Iran's economy from

## Zarif says Iran, China interested in expanding strategic ties

**1 →** The U.S. has unilaterally withdrawn from the JCPOA, shirked its international obligations and exerted maximum pressure on Iran. This is the root cause of the current tension over the Iranian nuclear issue. Wang stressed that the JCPOA, approved by the security council resolution, is an important outcome of multilateral diplomacy. To uphold the authority and effectiveness of the JCPOA means to uphold multilateralism, international law and basic norms governing international relations. China supports all constructive efforts to ease the current tension and safeguard the JCPOA. We hope that all parties to the JCPOA will stick to the right direction, stand up to external pressure, resolve existing differences through dialogue and consultation, and firmly uphold and implement the Iranian nuclear deal. China will resolutely safeguard international fairness and justice, opposes unilateralism and bullying behavior, and work for the political and diplomatic settlement of the Iranian nuclear issue.”

“Zarif commended and appreciated China's important role in upholding the JCPOA and briefed the Chinese side on what has been discussed regarding the nuclear issue with Russia, Europe among others. He said Iran is willing to maintain close communication with China, adhere to multilateralism while opposing unilateralism, earnestly uphold the JCPOA and defend its legitimate rights and interests. Iran attaches great importance to relations with China. It is committed to deepening cooperation with China and stands ready to work

with China to scale new heights in China-Iran comprehensive strategic partnership,” he said.

**■ Zarif hopes cooperation with China would expand in 2020**

In a tweet in Chinese language on Tuesday, Zarif expressed hope that Iran-China “strategic cooperation” would expand in 2020.

He also said that he was happy to spend the last night of 2019 in Beijing.

Prior to his visit to China, Zarif visited Russia on Sunday and Monday and held meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

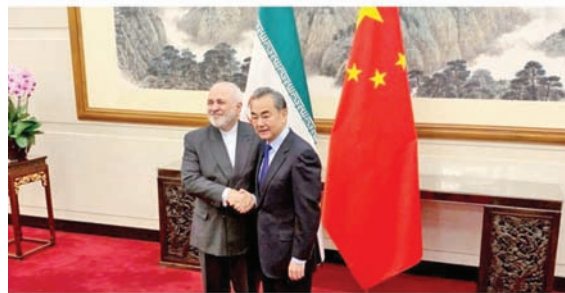
During the meeting, Zarif said that the U.S. has spread unilateralism and seeks to impose its demands on others and noted that collective cooperation is required to counter unilateralism.

**■ ‘Russia, China are Iran's strategic partners’**  
In an interview with IRNA published on Tuesday, Zarif also said that Russia and China are Iran's “close political and strategic partners”.

He said that the three countries must continue political consultations.

Pointing to Iran-Russia-China naval wargame, Zarif said that the exercise bore the message of opposing the U.S. unilateralism.

Iran, Russia, and China launched the naval wargame,



codenamed “Marine Security Belt”, in the Sea of Oman and the north of the Indian Ocean from December 27 to 30.

## Kuwait says respects Iran's territorial integrity

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled al-Jarallah has said that his country respects territorial integrity of Iran and that its foreign policy is based on “non-interference in internal affairs and good neighborliness”.

Kuwait's foreign policy was “based on respecting the sovereignty and non-in-

terference in internal affairs and good neighborliness,” al-Jarallah told Iran's Ambassador to Kuwait City Mohammad Irani on Sunday, KUNA reported.

The meeting came after Iran's Foreign Ministry on Saturday summoned Kuwait's charge d'affaires to Tehran to protest a recent meeting between Kuwaiti officials

and a representative of an anti-Iran terrorist group.

Jarallah said the anti-Iran meeting had taken place without permission from relevant Kuwaiti authorities.

Kuwaiti officials, the report added, have “begun taking necessary legal measures” over the “disappointing” affair, which was

undertaken in a “private” capacity.

According to reports, the speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, Marzouq al-Ghanim, recently met with a member of the al-Ahwaziya terrorist group on the sidelines of a parliamentary conference calling for the breakaway of the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz from the country.

## Kataeb Hezbollah blasts U.S. for turning Iraq into ground for avenging Iran

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Kataeb Hezbollah group, affiliated to Hashd al-Shaabi (popular forces), condemned the U.S. for attacking its positions in Iraq and using the country's soil as a ground to take revenge for its failures against Iran.

“When the U.S. wants to target a group in Iraq, it attributes them to Iran. The Americans label the Iraqi sons who have confronted the ISIL as affiliated to Iran,” spokesman of Iraq's Kataeb Hezbollah Mohammed Mohei told the Arabic-language service of RT on Tuesday.

He added that the strategic agreements signed between Baghdad and Washington do not allow the U.S. to establish permanent bases in Iraq, use Iraq's land as a platform against other countries or attack any Iraqi groups.

Separately, Mohei said in an interview with the Arabic-language Baghdad al-Youm news website that the leaders of Kataeb Hezbollah have in a meeting studied ways to respond to the U.S. attacks, and stated, “A proper response at a desirable level should be given to the aggression. The U.S. Sunday night attack flagrantly violated Iraq's sovereignty.”

The U.S. drones on Sunday bombarded a Hashd al-Shaabi base near the border with Syria in Iraq's Western province of Anbar, a Hashd Shaabi statement said.

The attack took place in the evening when the U.S.



drones bombarded the base of Hashd Shaabi's 45th Brigade near the border town of al-Qaim, the statement said.

The bombardment left tens of the brigade's members killed and wounded.

In reaction, Hashd al-Shaabi Lieutenant Commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis warned of a harsh response to the attack, saying that the blood of martyrs will not be wasted.

Also, Asa'eb al-Haq Movement, affiliated to the Iraqi popular forces of Hashd al-Shaabi, described the U.S.

deployment in Iraq as a threat to the country, calling on all political groups to react to Washington's “cowardly attack”.

Meantime, Qassem Moslih, the commander of Hashd al-Shaabi in al-Anbar province, said that the U.S. wanted to change the equations by bombing the popular forces' positions.

Also, resigned Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi in a message to the U.S. secretary of defense underlined his opposition to the attack, warning that bombing Hashd al-Shaabi positions is a dangerous tension which threatens the security of Iraq and the region.

Meantime, Head of the National Wisdom Movement of Iraq Ammar al-Hakim condemned the attack, describing it as clear violation of Iraq's sovereignty.

Also, Fali al-Khazali, a member of al-Fatah coalition in the Iraqi parliament, warned that the U.S. forces have started an obvious war against Iraq.

Meantime, Iraq's Hezbollah Brigades in a statement deplored the attack, terming it hostile aggression against the defenders of Iraq's borders.

Also, Iraqi President Barham Salih underlined that the attack was conducted against the two countries' agreements, describing it as unacceptable.



# IRGC slams U.S. attacks as violation of Iraq's sovereignty

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has strongly denounced the U.S. attacks on the Iraqi popular forces, emphasizing that the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) — also known as al-Hashd al-Shaabi — has the right to avenge the attacks.

According to international law and charters, the people of Iraq and al-Hashd al-Shaabi reserve the right to take revenge and respond to the recent crime committed by the Americans, the IRGC said in a statement on Monday, Tasnim reported.

The statement also described the attacks as a violation of Iraq's sovereignty.

The IRGC also stressed that the criminal act by the American forces once again proved that the U.S. is the root cause of insecurity, chaos and tensions in the region.

Eviction of "American occupying terrorists" from Iraq will guarantee the Arab country's stability and sustainable security, the statement added.

On Sunday, U.S. forces conducted drone strikes on a number of Kata'ib Hezbollah bases in Iraq's western Anbar province, killing at least 25 individuals and leaving another 51 injured, according to PMU.

Following the strikes, the Pentagon issued a statement saying that it had targeted three locations of the PMU forces in Iraq and two in Syria in response to alleged



attacks targeting American forces.

Baghdad and Tehran condemned the attacks.

Iraqi President Barham Salih condemned the attacks as being unacceptable and damaging for the country, adding that the strikes were contrary to security agreements inked between Baghdad and Washington,

according to the Iraqi News Agency (INA).

On Tuesday, dozens of protesters broke

into the U.S. embassy in Baghdad after smashing a main door and setting fire to a reception area.

The embassy was evacuated as many angry Iraqi demonstrators gathered outside the gates of the compound to condemn Washington's attack.

The protesters chanted "Death to America" and burned the U.S. flag.

The protesters further held up signs call-

ing for the U.S. mission to be shut down and for the parliament to order U.S. forces to leave Iraq.

Hashd al-Shabi commander Faleh al-Fayyadh and Kata'ib Hezbollah commander Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes along with other senior Hashd leaders were among the protesters.

Speaking to Reuters, Qais al-Khazali, the head of Asaib Ahl al-Haq — another PMU faction — said "Americans are unwanted in Iraq. They are a source of evil and we want them to leave."

Also on Tuesday, Iraqis held a massive funeral procession in the capital Baghdad for the victims of the attack, according to Press TV.

Caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi has announced three days of public mourning.

U.S. President Donald Trump accused Iran of being behind an attack on the U.S. embassy in Iraq, saying the U.S. will hold Iran "fully responsible".

"Iran killed an American contractor, wounding many. We strongly responded, and always will. Now Iran is orchestrating an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Iraq," Trump said via Twitter on Tuesday.

"They will be held fully responsible. In addition, we expect Iraq to use its forces to protect the Embassy, and so notified!" he added.

## Germany has turned blind eye to U.S. illegal interferences: Iran



**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Tuesday that Germany has turned a blind eye to the United States' "illegal interferences" in the Middle East region.

"Germany accuses Iran of destabilizing the region while it has turned a blind eye to the United States' illegal interferences as the main reason behind instability in West Asia," Mousavi tweeted.

He added, "Continuation of adopting such stances will seriously question Berlin's claim about playing effective role on the path of peace and stability."

Following the U.S. airstrikes against Iraqi forces on Sunday, the German Foreign Ministry on Monday said in a tweet on its website that "the increasing number of attacks by non-state militias is threatening the stability of #Iraq. Iran must end its policy of regional destabilization."

U.S. forces conducted drone strikes on a number of Kata'ib Hezbollah bases in Iraq's western Anbar province, killing at least 28 individuals and leaving another 51 injured, according to the PMU.

The targeted Kata'ib Hezbollah forces belonged to brigades 45 and 46 of the PMU, according to PMU official Jawad Kazim al-Rabi'awi.

Iraqi President Barham Salih called the attacks unacceptable, saying the strikes were contrary to security agreements inked

between Baghdad and Washington, according to the Iraqi News Agency (INA).

On Monday, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said the attacks once again exposed Washington's lies in fighting the Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group because it has "targeted positions of forces who have dealt heavy blows to Daesh terrorists in recent years."

Mousavi urged the U.S. to respect Iraq's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and stop intervening in the country's domestic affairs.

"With these attacks, the U.S. demonstrated its unwavering support for terrorism and disregard to independence and sovereignty of countries," the spokesman asserted.

Mousavi also said the United States must accept responsibility for consequences of this "illegal measure", and described presence of foreign forces in the region as a source of insecurity, unrest and crisis.

"The U.S. must end its occupying presence," he stated.

Foreign Minister Zarif also reacted to the incident, saying the U.S. kills people thousands of miles beyond its borders in the name of self-defense.

"The recent U.S. measure in Baghdad was merely an example of such U.S. behavior in the region," he said in Moscow on Monday, upon meeting with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov.

## U.S. officials vow to intensify Iran sanctions in 2020



**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — U.S. State Department officials have said Washington's maximum pressure policy against Iran will intensify in 2020.

"There will be more sanctions to come, and Iran's economic problems and challenges are going to compound in 2020," a senior State Department official said Monday, according to CNBC.

"They are already deep into a recession, and we are also seeing Iran come under greater diplomatic isolation."

Another senior State Department official was quoted by CNBC as saying that the Trump administration has sanctioned approximately 1,000 individuals and entities.

"What we are doing is denying the regime the revenue that it needs to run an expansionist foreign policy, and by that policy, Iran has less money to spend today than it did almost three years ago when we came into office," the official said.

U.S. President Donald Trump has adopted a maximum pressure policy against Iran since he walked away from the JCPOA. The policy includes sanctions on Iran's economy, especially its oil exports, and bans on top Iranian figures and organizations. At the same time, the U.S. president has pushed for talks with Tehran.

Iranian leaders have openly rejected the notion of talks with the U.S. as long as its illegal sanctions against Tehran are in place. Under the JCPOA, Iran had agreed to put

limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

Tehran has described the U.S. sanctions as "economic terrorism".

Trump himself has used the term "economic war" on Iran.

On Monday, U.S. special representative for Iran Brian Hook also emphasized that the Trump administration will continue its maximum pressure campaign in 2020.

Hook said the Islamic Republic is facing the worst financial crisis and political unrest in its 40-year history and in 2020 will face an even more difficult period.

"What we saw was an erosion of deterrence of Iran for the many years preceding president's election three years ago," he said, according to Radio Farda.

On Monday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said the enemies have realized that they cannot bring Iran to its knees through maximum pressure.

"Their entire goal was to get us to the negotiating table so that we resign ourselves to whatever demand they have, but this is impossible in our Islamic Iran," Press TV quoted Rouhani as saying.

Washington is engaged in an all-out economic war against the Islamic Republic, Rouhani said, adding, "It is wartime now and we haven't either chosen or begun this war."

The president added, "We have not even given a pretext for this war."

## One ton of opium seized in Bushehr

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Bushehr Province's Navy commander said forces have seized a ton of opium during two separate operations in the province.

Valiollah Rezaee Nezhad said on Tuesday that maritime guards seized some 600 kilograms of opium during a clash with traffickers in Bushehr's Bandar Ganaveh area, Mehr reported.

Rezaee also said that in another operation, Bushehr's police confiscated 400 kilograms of opium in collaboration with Hormozgan province's police.

Two boats and three motorcycles were seized during the two operations, and nine smugglers were arrested, he added.

Above 5 tons of illegal drugs have been seized during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (ending November 22, 2019) in the province, he said.

Iran is at the forefront of the fight against drug trafficking. So far, Iran has lost 3,800 forces during the fight against drug smuggling.

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

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

## IRGC seizes tanker smuggling over one million liters of fuel near Hormuz Strait

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — A tanker smuggling over one million liters of fuel was seized by the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) navy forces near the entrance of the Strait of Hormuz, an IRGC commander said on Monday.

Brigadier General Ali Azmaei, the commander of the 5th region of the IRGC navy, said that a sum of 16 crews, who were all Malaysian nationals, were arrested in the IRGC operation in Abu Musa Island waters in the Persian Gulf.

"A total quantity of 1,312,000 liters of fuel has been confiscated from the seized tanker," the commander added.

He further said that the IRGC navy has thus far seized six smuggling vessels.

In October, Police Chief of the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan Brigadier General Mohammad Qanbari said that the lucrative crime of fuel smuggling out of Iran was being seriously fought, adding that his forces confiscated nearly 7.8 million liters of smuggled fuel since the start of the local calendar year on March 21, 2019.

Brigadier General Qanbari said that through extensive operations carried out by police forces 7,796,792 liters of smuggled fuel had been seized in the province during the first 7 months of the current Iranian year (March 21- October 22), and it shows an increase compared to the corresponding period in last year.



3.9 million liters of diesel, 1.1 million liters of oil, 835,000 liters of gasoline, and 1.9 million liters of other types of fuel had been seized during the operations in addition to the dismantling of 104 fuel smuggling bands, he added.

149 fuel depots and 241 tank-trucks were confiscated, he said at the time.

As reported in early June, Iran launched a border market to sell diesel fuel to buyers in Pakistan and Afghanistan to counter smuggling of fuel at border areas.

## Ex-minister's daughter sentenced to 20 years in prison

**TEHRAN (MNA)** — Judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaeili said that Shabnam Nematzadeh has been sentenced to 20 years in prison for economic corruption.

In a Tuesday press conference, the spokesman said that the court has also sentenced Nematzadeh to 74 lashes and fined with some \$345,000 on charges of creating "major disruption in the distribution of public goods".

Nematzadeh, along with the other convict Ahmad Reza Lashkaripour, has also been permanently barred from public service.

She was arrested in September on charges of economic corruption in the medicine industry. She is the daughter of Mohammad Reza Nematzadeh, former minister of industry, mines, and trade.

The spokesman also said that the case of Vice-President Jahangiri's brother, who has also been charged with corruption, will be sent to the court and proceedings have already begun.

## The secret of U.S. attacks on PMU positions in al-Qa'im

**1→** 1. Washington is against the presence of the PMU in this area because the al-Bukamal-al-Qa'im border crossing raises the sensitivity of Tel Aviv. Israel considers the border crossing as Tehran's safe road to Beirut, and is therefore seeking to block it.

2. Al-Qa'im is the closest area to Ain Assad Air Base, where hundreds of U.S. troops are stationed. All U.S. troop commuting between Iraq and Syria is monitored by the base, so the Americans do not want any of PMU forces to be present there.

3. Kata'ib Hezbollah has been targeted along with other units operating under the PMU because brigades 45 deployed in Syrian-Iraqi border is one of the strongest units.

It can be concluded that the attacks on the PMU positions were in line with the ongoing U.S. and Zionist regime's moves to weaken the resistance movement against the aggressors.

The U.S. strikes are a violation of the Iraqi sovereignty and all international charters. The attacks show that U.S. troops in Iraq are acting against Iraq and its organizations.

The attacks will result in the unity of the Iraqi people with the PMU and efforts to dislodge U.S. troops from Iraq.

Undoubtedly, Washington will face a very dangerous situation, following the recent blunder against the PMU.

## Advisor condemns U.S. attacks in Iraq

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian parliament speaker, has condemned the U.S. attacks on Iraqi soil, suggesting that the U.S. has been supporting Daesh (ISIS) all along.

"During #ISIS crisis in #Iraq, the #US was informed abt its commanders' links w/ Daesh leaders in Mosul. No convincing response was given," Amir Abdollahian tweeted on Monday evening.

"The US is now violating Iraqi territorial integrity, independence & bombing antiterrorism stronghold," Amir Abdollahian said.

"#WhiteHouse apparent backing for ISIS," he added.

On Sunday, U.S. forces conducted drone strikes on a number of Kata'ib Hezbollah bases in Iraq's western Anbar province, killing at least 25 individuals and leaving another 51 injured, according to the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).

The targeted Kata'ib Hezbollah forces belonged to brigades 45 and 46 of the PMU, according to PMU official Jawad Kazim al-Rabi'awi.

Iraqi President Barham Salih condemned the attacks as



being unacceptable and damaging for the country, adding that the strikes were contrary to security agreements inked between Baghdad and Washington, according to the Iraqi News Agency (INA).

Major General Abdul Karim Khalaf, spokesman for the Commander-in-Chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces, also said that Adel Abdul-Mahdi, currently Iraq's caretaker prime minister, has voiced his opposition to the attacks in a message to U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper.

"Bombing PMU bases is a dangerous aggravation which endangers the security of Iraq and the region," Iraqi media sources cited Abdul-Mahdi as saying.

Iran also denounced U.S. airstrikes against Iraqi forces as a "clear example of terrorism".

"U.S. military aggression against the Iraqi soil and positions of al-Hashd al-Shaabi forces is a clear example of terrorism and is strongly condemned," Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said in a statement on Monday, using the Arabic name of the PMU.

Foreign Minister Zarif also reacted to the incident, saying the U.S. kills people thousands of miles beyond its borders in the name of self-defense.

"The recent U.S. measure in Baghdad was merely an example of such U.S. behavior in the region," he said in Moscow on Monday, upon meeting with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov.



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	377012.7
IFX	4946.93

Sources: tse.ir, ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,055 rials
GBP	55,108 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$66.51/b
WTI	\$61.55/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.93/b
Gold	\$1,523.35/oz
Silver	\$818.10/oz
Platinum	\$973.10/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

ICCIMA’s head to lead Iranian trade delegation to Portugal in Feb.

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN**— Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) will dispatch a delegation of Iranian traders and businessmen to Portugal on February 20, news portal of the chamber published on Tuesday.



ICCIMA Head Gholam-Hossein Shafe'i will reportedly lead the Iranian delegates during their trip to the European country. The visit is being coordinated by ICCIMA and Isfahan Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture.

World Bank: L.A., Caribbean lag behind in business reforms

The World Bank (WB) says economies in Latin America and the Caribbean continue to lag in terms of reforms as it relates to doing business in the region.

In its flagship publication Doing Business 2020, in which the World Bank Group flagship the regulations that enhance business activity and those that constrain it, the financial institution noted that of the 294 regulatory reforms implemented between May 2018 and May 2019 worldwide, 115 economies made it easier to do business.

"Economies in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean continue to lag in terms of reforms. Only two Sub-Saharan African economies rank in the top 50 on the ease of doing business; no Latin American economies rank in this group," the World Bank noted.

"Those economies that score well on Doing Business tend to benefit from higher levels of entrepreneurial activity and lower levels of corruption. While economic reasons are the main drivers of reform, the advancement of neighboring economies provides an additional impetus for regulatory change," the World Bank said, noting that "26 economies became less business-friendly, introducing 31 regulatory changes that stifle efficiency and quality of regulation".

Jamaica was the top named Caribbean Community country, ranked at number 71 of the 190 countries surveyed, followed by St Lucia (93) Trinidad and Tobago (105), Dominica (111), Antigua and Barbuda (113), The Bahamas (119), Barbados (128), St Vincent and the Grenadines (130), Guyana (134), Belize (135), St Kitts-Nevis (139), Grenada (146), Suriname (162) and Haiti (179).

The World Bank

The World Bank noted that economies that score highest on the ease of doing business share several common features, including the widespread use of electronic systems. It said all of the 20 top-ranking economies have online business incorporation processes, have electronic tax-filing platforms, and allow online procedures related to property transfers.

The regions with the most cumbersome tax compliance processes remain Latin America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The World Bank notes also that no economies from Latin America and the Caribbean appeared in the 10 top improvers list over the past two years.

"Moreover, not a single economy in Latin America and the Caribbean ranks among the top 50 on the ease of doing business. The regional leader on the ease of doing business score, Mexico, is still almost 12 percentage points below the average score of the 10 top-ranking economies," the report said.

Globally, reforms in the areas of dealing with construction permits and getting electricity have risen sharply in recent years, peaking in 2018/19 at 37 and 34, respectively.

"In the area of getting electricity, several Caribbean countries, including Barbados and Belize, invested in training utility personnel and capacity-building," the World Bank said, noting that the most common features of property registration reform included greater transparency of information, better reliability of infrastructure, and reduced taxes and fees.

(Source: thestkittsnevisobserver.com)

Rouhani inaugurates metro line worth \$238m

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani

inaugurated the Golshahr-Hashtgerd metro line in Alborz province, north-central Iran, on Tuesday, in a ceremony attended by senior officials including Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami.

As reported by IRNA, over 10 trillion rials (about \$238 million) have been spent on this project which was started in July 2018.

With this new line going operational, the Hashtgerd Subway Station will be linked to the Golshahr Subway Station in Alborz Province's center city Karaj (about 26 kilometers away) which is currently the last station of Tehran Metro's Line 5.

According to the officials, the new section has the capacity to transport 250,000 passengers per day.

Considering the increasing traffic and air pollution in Karaj and its satellite cities, the line can help alleviate both.

**Tehran-Shomal Freeway to be inaugurated before Feb.**

On the sidelines of the inauguration



President Hassan Rouhani inaugurates a new metro line in Alborz Province on Tuesday.

ceremony, transport minister told the press that the Tehran-North (Tehran-Shomal) Freeway is going to be inaugurated sooner than scheduled and before the Ten-Day Dawn (which starts on February 1 marking the victory of the Islamic Revolution).

"The construction of Section-1 of the freeway is nearly completed and currently over 3000 people are working to finish the projects sooner than scheduled," Eslami said.

Back in August, the official had said that sections 2 and 3 of the freeway, had nearly 30 percent of physical development.

The Tehran-North Freeway mega project consists of four phases spanning 121 km in total.

Sections 2 and 3 pass through mountainous terrain, are not easily accessible and will take longer to complete.

Section-4, which is 20 kilometers long and connects Marzanabad in Kelardash District to Chalus (both in Mazandaran), was inaugurated in March 2014.

Tehran-North Freeway is perhaps one of the most notorious projects in Iran, as it is above 20 years in the making.

TEDPIX, IFX rise on Tuesday

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — On Tuesday, Iran's stock market experienced growth for the fourth consecutive day since the start of current Iranian week (Saturday).

TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), rose 1,464 points to 377,012 on Tuesday, IRNA reported.

Some 6 billion securities worth 33.012 trillion rials (about \$786 million) were reportedly traded at TSE.

As previously announced, TEDPIX rose 49,000 points, or 16.7 percent, to stand at 353,997 points at the end of the past Iranian calendar month of Azar (ends on December 21).

Reportedly, some 82.215 billion securities worth 432.151 trillion rials (about \$10.29 billion) were traded through 10.153 million deals at TSE during the previous month, with growth of 61 percent and 76 percent in the number and value of traded securities, respectively, while 71 percent rise in the number of deals.

Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), also



witnessed growth of its index on Tuesday.

IFX, the main index of IFB, jumped rose 15 points to 4,946.

Some 2,934 billion securities worth 20.053 trillion rias (about \$477.4 million) were traded at IFB on Tuesday.

IFX rose 15 percent in the past Iranian calendar month of Azar, while experiencing a 102-percent rise since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019).

The index stood at 4,559 points at the end of the past month.

Value of trades at IFB rose 16 percent in the previous month and 85 percent since the year start.

Iran’s 9-month trade balance positive

**1→** The official further underlined the free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and said: "Three of the mentioned 15 neighbors, namely Russia, Armenia and Kazakhstan, are part of Eurasia and next year, when the free trade negotiations begin, we can make up to 85 percent of our trade with these countries under the free trade deal."

Iran's value of non-oil trade with other countries stood at over \$42 billion during the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-September 22, 1019).

According to a report released by Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), the country exported 70 million tons of commoditized worth \$20.948 billion and imported 16.5 million tons of products valued at \$21.221 billion during the first half.

China, Iraq, Turkey, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Afghanistan are among the top export destinations of Iranian products, while China, UAE, Turkey, India, and Germany are mostly the five major exporters of goods to Iran.

Iran shares border with fifteen countries, namely the United Arab Emirates, Iraq,

Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, Oman, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kuwait, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.

Based on the data published by TPO, the value of trade with the neighboring countries stood at over \$36.5 billion in the past Iranian calendar year, which is about 41 percent of the country's total non-oil trade in the mentioned time span.

Iran plans to launch 15 mega export projects to identify more target markets, according to TPO former head.

Mohammadreza Modoudi said with the implementation of these projects, which mainly focus on the markets of neighboring countries, identifying professional trade and promoting export of non-oil commodities will be put on agenda, Mehr news agency reported.

The official further referred to the \$1.7 billion positive trade balance in the country's non-oil trade in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2019), and said this positive balance was achieved through cooperation with the private sector.

Industry Ministry, ICCIMA to set up taskforce on free trade with Eurasia

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry and Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture are planning to form a taskforce on Iran's free trade with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) countries, the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced.

Hamid Zadboum made the announcement during a ceremony on honoring the exemplary exporters of Tehran Province held by Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) on Tuesday, ILNA reported.

The official said, "To have free trade with the EAEU countries we should put at least 85-90 percent of the commodities under the free trade condition. Some studies have been already started in this regard and as ICCIMA is strong in such studies we will set up a taskforce jointly with the chamber to specify such goods".

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

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



TPO Head Hamid Zadboum speaking in a ceremony on honoring the exemplary exporters of Tehran Province on Tuesday.

Iran is a very important market in the region and development of ties with this country is of high significance for the EAEU members.

Signing the free trade agreement between Iran and this union has laid the ground for the expansion of trade ties

These developing Asian economies will grow the fastest in 2020

By Ralph Jennings

The U.S.-China trade war and a slowdown in global import-export traffic are taking a toll on economic growth in developing Asia, prompting to the Asian Development Bank to cut its forecasts for the region. The Manila-based regional lender now expects to see 5.5% growth in 2020 for developing Asia, a group of 45 economies that includes China and India but not Japan.

The ADB says prolonged trade tensions are still the primary risk to the region's outlook, but a handful of countries are expected to outperform their neighbors next year. These are the economies it says will grow the fastest in 2020:

Bangladesh is forecast to add another 8% to its GDP on the back of increased foreign investment in low-cost textiles, garments and shoes. The country has grown at least 6% per year since 2011. Wages that average just \$101 per month help bring in some of that investment. Domestic demand and higher living standards add to the South Asian country's growth, says Rajiv Biswas, Asia Pacific chief economist with the market research firm IHS Markit. Foreign direct investment rose 19.5% in the first half of 2019 to \$1.7 billion on growing ease of doing business, according to local media reports.

India should grow 7.2% as it seeks to become a new powerhouse for manufactured goods including electronics, per government policy. A 7.2% GDP growth rate would mark a fall from 8.17% in 2016, and hover near levels of the past two years, World Bank figures show. A decline in output for eight core industries, some of which face a lack of credit, would

stop the economy from growing faster in 2020. However, the central bank has offered monetary stimulus and a tax cut this year for a bit of relief.

Tajikistan is forecast to grow 7% as the former Soviet republic gets a boost from its gold and silver mines, metal processing and remittances from about a million citizens who live abroad. Tajikistan's GDP had expanded 6.9% in 2016, 7.1% the following year and 7.3% last year. "Industry and services" has led growth along with "buoyant" domestic demand, the World Bank says.

Starting from a low base

Myanmar's economy should grow 6.8%. This country with a GDP of just \$67 billion is starting from a low base. "Myanmar's manufacturing export sector has been growing rapidly over the past five years, which is helping to support rapid economic growth," Biswas says. The Southeast Asian country been transitioning to a civilian-led government and adopting economic reforms aimed at attracting more investment. Infrastructure outlays and consumer spending are coming in behind the factory investment to raise the GDP. The economy has expanded accordingly at more than 6.5% annually over the past three years.

Cambodia is expected to grow 6.8%. China's investment in Cambodia has accelerated the GDP of this Southeast Asian country of 16.5 million people, piggybacking on a pickup in garment manufacturing like that seen in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Chinese investors are adding real estate, coastal resorts and infrastructure such as roads and, eventually, two airports. China had invested some \$2 billion in Cambodian infrastructure as of 2018. But 6.8% growth would



fail Cambodia's 7%-plus growth as logged by the World Bank every year since 2011.

Vietnam should grow 6.7% next year. The Southeast Asian country that has grown at more than 6% per year since 2012 is doing a lot of what Bangladesh does but shifting into more value-added manufactured goods such as electronics. Foreign investors still power the economy, to wit a 69.1% year-on-year increase in direct investment in the first five months of this year to \$16.74 billion.

The other developing Asian economies that the ADB forecasts will grow more than 6% include Nepal and the Maldives at 6.3% each, Laos and the Philippines both at 6.2% and Mongolia at 6.1%.

(Source: forbes.com)



# SP phases' offshore pipeline installations completed

**E N E R G Y** **TEHRAN** — Managing director of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of developing Iran's South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf, said the offshore pipelines for all the remaining phases of the field have been installed and will go operational by end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19, 2020).

"The offshore pipelines of the second chain of South Pars' phases 13, 14 and 22 to 24 will be operational this year to send gas to onshore refineries," Shana quoted Mohammad Meshkinfam as saying.

Meshkinfam said that the last platform of the phase 14 is loaded and will be transported to its designated offshore spot within a week, adding that the two remaining platforms of the phase 13 will also be loaded and installed by the yearend.

Back in September, Meshkinfam had announced that all the remaining platforms of the South Pars field will be installed by the end of the current Iranian calendar year.

"By the end of this year, the five remaining South Pars platforms at Sadra Industrial



Yard will be installed [on their designated offshore spots] and recovery from all South Pars gas blocks (except for phase 11) will

be realized," he told the state TV.

"After the full development of the South Pars joint field [Iran shares with Qatar], we

should consider maintaining production based on the prospect of supplying 75 percent of the country's gas consumption for 25 years," the official said.

The development of South Pars field started 22 years ago and 29 different phases were defined for the project along with a separate oil block.

The field, which Iran shares with Qatar, is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

Back in October, Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh announced that phase 14 of the South Pars gas field will be fully operational in the present Iranian calendar year.

Speaking to the press after a meeting with the representatives of the parliament's planning, budget and accounting committee, the minister emphasized that the oil ministry's plans for the next Iranian calendar year are mostly focused on the development of joint oil and gas fields.

## Tehran's daily gasoline consumption falls 11%

**E N E R G Y** **TEHRAN** — Average daily gasoline consumption in Tehran fell to 14.8 million liters in the current Iranian calendar month of Dey (started on December 22) from 16.6 in the past year's same month to register an 11 percent fall year-on-year, IRNA reported.

According to the data released by the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) following the implementation of the rationing scheme, daily gasoline consumption in the country has also fallen to 75 million liters from an average of 95 million liters last year.

Last week, the managing director of National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) Amir Vakilzadeh said the average daily consumption of gasoline in the last Iranian calendar month of Azar (November 22-December 21) reached 75.5 million liters, a decrease of 15.9 percent compared to 89.8 million liters in the same period last year.

Reducing the consumption of gasoline and gasoil and replacing them with natural gas is one of the government's

main goals for implementing the rationing scheme which will ultimately result in preserving the country's wealth and the environment.

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh had earlier pointed to curbing consumption and increasing export capacity as the most important goals of the gasoline rationing plan.

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

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

"On average, 100 million liters of gasoline is produced in the country on a daily basis. If we could reduce fuel consumption by 10 million liters and sell it to other Persian Gulf neighbors, we would export about four billion rials (about \$952,000) a



day, that would be 14 trillion rials a year," Mohammad-Ali Dehghan Dehnavi told ILNA.

## Oil prices edge down but set for biggest yearly rise since 2016

Oil prices edged lower on the final day of the year on Tuesday, but were on track for their biggest annual rise since 2016, supported by a thaw in U.S.-China trade dispute and ongoing supply cuts.

Brent crude futures for March delivery LCOc1, the new front month contract, were down 11 cents, or 0.2%, to 66.56 a barrel by 0158 GMT, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for February CLc1 was down 11 cents, or 0.2%, at \$61.57 per barrel. Brent for February delivery LCOGO closed on Monday at \$68.44.

Brent has gained about 24% in 2019 and WTI has risen roughly 36% for the year. Both

benchmarks are set for the biggest yearly gain in three years, backed by a breakthrough in U.S.-China trade talks and output cuts pledged by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies.

The White House's trade adviser said on Monday that the U.S.-China Phase 1 trade deal would likely be signed in the next week.

"Oil prices have followed the general de-risking drift into year-end despite a rise in Middle East tensions and last week's bullish-for-oil-price inventory draws as the broader markets appear to be losing some of that holiday cheer," said Stephen Innes, chief Asia market strategist at AxiTrader.

Tensions remain high in the Middle East after U.S. air strikes on Sunday against the Katib Hezbollah militia group in Iraq and Syria. Operations resumed at Iraq's Nassiriya oilfield resumed on Monday after protesters briefly halted production.

Looking ahead, U.S. crude inventories are expected to fall by about 3.2 million barrels in the week to Dec.27, heading for a third consecutive weekly fall, a preliminary Reuters poll showed on Monday. U.S. stockpiles fell by 5.5 million barrels in the week to Dec. 20. The figures will be released on Friday.

Innes said traders would also closely watch the EIA's U.S. October crude production fig-

ures, set to come out later on Tuesday.

"It's expected to show robust continuous growth in the agency's short-term outlook," he said.

The United States is on track to become a net petroleum exporter on an annual basis for the first time in 2020, with its oil output expected to rise by 930,000 barrels per day (bpd) to a record 13.18 million bpd next year, the EIA said earlier this month.

Brokers and analysts expect the growing U.S. supplies to offset cuts from OPEC in 2020 amid weakening worldwide demand, keeping oil prices rangebound.

(Source: reuters.com)

## Qatar makes huge leap in North Field Expansion, LNG production boost in general energy

Qatar's recent decision to scale up its liquefied natural gas (LNG) production capacity to 126mn tons per year (TPY) by 2027 is among the major strides the country's energy sector made in 2019.

The huge production boost by 64% (on the current 77mn TPY) will have a multiplier effect on the national economy over the coming decades and help Qatar consolidate its position as the world's top transhipper and producer of liquefied natural gas.

Effectively, Qatar's LNG production capacity will exceed 142mn TPY annually (by 2027), when the output from the Golden Pass LNG export facility located in Sabine Pass, Texas, is also accounted for.

The Golden Pass LNG export project, which is owned by the Golden Pass Products, is a joint venture of QP (70%) and ExxonMobil (30%).

Overall, Qatar's hydrocarbon production will account for nearly 6.7mn barrels oil equivalent per day with the LNG production capacity boost to 142mn TPY.

The expansion of Qatar's LNG facilities is considered as the world's largest and one of the energy sector's most lucrative projects.

The country may also maintain its position as the holder of the largest non-associated gas reserves in the world for the foreseeable future by establishing confirmed gas reserves of 1,760tn cu ft at the North Field.

This is in addition to more than 70bn barrels of condensates, and massive quantities of LPG, ethane, and helium, a huge quantity by any standard.

New studies have revealed that the North Field's productive layers extend well into Qatari land in Ras Laffan, paving the way for a new LNG production project in the north of Qatar.

Last month, QP completed fabrication of the first two jackets required for offshore facilities as part of its North Field Expansion (NFE) Project.

### ■ The installation contract

The NFE project's Engineering, Procurement, Construction and Installation contract for the jackets was awarded to McDermott in April this year.

McDermott was also awarded the Front End Engineering and Design contract for the associated topsides and pipelines in May.

During the past two years, Qatar Petroleum worked diligently to determine the degree to which the North Field extends towards the south west, as well as the possibility of



production from Qatar's northern coastal onshore areas.

The year saw the world's top LNG producer and exporter Qatargas achieving the "best in class" reliability performance of 98.8%. The company's production was also on target in 2019.

Qatargas maintained a "strong environmental and safety performance" as it achieved a flaring rate of 0.38 against a target of 0.44 this year, thanks to a successful flare reduction project whereas the greenhouse gas (GHG) emission rate showed 0.35 against a target of 0.42.

In the year under review, Laffan Refinery 1 marked 10 years of operation without any Lost Time Incident (LTI) and the company successfully completed two key environmental projects — the Waste Materials Management facility and the Treated Industrial and Process Water facility.

Laffan Refinery, operated by Qatargas, achieved a "strong reliability" of 98.6%, well ahead of the current year targets.

Qatar's first condensate refinery, Laffan Refinery, started production in September 2009.

The refinery processes untreated gas condensate to produce LPG, naphtha, jet fuel and gas oil.

Another major accomplishment this year was the golden jubilee of Qatar Fertilizer Company (QAFCO).

Qafco has a total production capacity of 3.8mn tons of ammonia and 5.6mn tons of urea annually. The fertilizer major has become the largest single-site producer of ammonia and urea in the world through six export-oriented integrated production lines.

The company was the "first building block" of Mesaieed Industrial City, the first Qatari petrochemical manufacturer

to export its products from Mesaieed ports to the world, and the first company to train and develop Qatari capabilities to work in and lead the petrochemical sector.

Qafco was also the "cornerstone" of the establishment of Industries Qatar, the largest listed company on the Qatari stock market. This listing has benefited the national economy.

### ■ In the energy sector

This month Qatar Petroleum announced the implementation of the 'In-Country Value Policy' in the energy sector (starting January 2020) through 'Tawteen', the localisation program for services and industries in Qatar's energy sector.

The ICV Policy will impact the tendering and awarding process, where suppliers and contractors who are contributing the most to the local economy will acquire a commercial advantage.

Launched in February, Tawteen received hundreds of applications through its investor portal from local investors and leading global suppliers for about 100 new investment opportunities it offers in various fields, including engineering services, maintenance, repair & overhaul (MRO), digital technologies, subsurface operations, chemicals and metals, as well as light equipment, business services and other services across the energy sector supply chain.

Another major Qatari company, Qatar Steel, was recently accredited with an exclusive recognition by TURKAK (Turkish Accreditation Institution, Turkey), for chemical and mechanical testing of carbon steel used for reinforcement of concrete in Qatar and around the world.

In addition, Qatar Steel is the first steel company to achieve a performance rating of 'very good' for the prestigious BES 6001 Responsible Sourcing Certification from CARES UK after the successful reassessment audit conducted along with CARES SCS Scheme Surveillance Audit.

Qatar Chemical Company (Q-Chem) recently received certification on the latest ISO Standard for occupational health and safety management system — ISO 45001:2018 — and re-certification on other internationally recognised standards.

At the 'Mustaqbalna' event earlier this month, HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi, also the President and CEO of Qatar of Petroleum, had emphasized that Qatarization was one of QP's top priorities.

"Our corporate strategy is focused on developing a highly capable and motivated workforce across the whole of QP with special emphasis on Qatari development," al-Kaabi noted.

(Source: Gulf Times)

## Iran's 2nd condensate refinery to go operational soon

**E N E R G Y** **TEHRAN** — Managing Director of Iran's Piroozi refinery which is the country's second gas condensate refinery said the refinery, which was ravaged by fire soon after it was inaugurated in 2016, is planned to go operational by the Iranian month of Bahman (starts on January 21, 2020), IRNA reported.

"If the barriers are removed, the capacity of the refinery will reach 50,000 barrels a day, which could generate up to \$1 billion of revenues for the country," Hamid Varesi told the press on Tuesday.

Noting that the refinery was inaugurated in 2016 but was set on fire in the same year, he said: "after the incident the refinery went out of operation, the reconstruction operations were started earlier this year and we hope that it will go operational by Bahman."

According to the official, when inaugurated, the refinery will be able to process 15,000 barrels of condensate per day.

Pointing out that the refinery's products include LPG, crude gasoline, kerosene and diesel, the official said the destination markets for the refinery's products will be the eastern neighbors and then the Persian Gulf states.

He explained the reason for the refinery fire in 2016 as a human error and added: "In the reconstruction operations various new safety and security layers have been designed and implemented."



## Oil prices face double whammy in 2020

By Simon Constable

Oil traders should look out below for the next 12 months.

Next year, the energy market faces a double whammy of a supply glut and lackluster demand that could send prices for crude oil down more than 10% from current levels.

While that might mean lower gasoline prices at the pump, it could put the squeeze on countries in the Middle East that rely on oil revenues.

The "oil market continues to see robust crude oil production from the U.S., Canada, and Brazil, which could lead to a supply glut in 2020," states a recent report from the Washington D.C. think tank the Institute of International Finance.

The report, written by a team led by Garbis Iradian, IIF chief economist for the Middle East and North Africa, forecasts world oil production to expand by 1.9 million barrels of oil a day in 2020 versus 2019. More than half that total will come from the U.S.

While that increase in supply is a little less than 2% of the total, the oil market is always finely balanced, so seemingly small changes in supply or demand can have a significant impact on prices.

IIF also states that the increase in supply will not get met by an equivalent jump in demand.

### ■ Slower global growth

"Slower global growth, even with an agreement on de-escalation of the trade war between the U.S. and China, could mean slower oil demand in 2020," the IIF report states.

"Slower global growth, even with an agreement on de-escalation of the trade war between the U.S. and China, could mean slower oil demand in 2020,"



In other words, next year will see weak demand growth and surging supply.

As a result, Iradian and his team see prices for Brent crude, the European benchmark price, averaging \$60 a barrel in 2020. That's down 12.9% from the recent futures price of \$68.71, according to Bloomberg data.

Don't expect the recent agreed cuts from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries cartel (OPEC) to help either.

Central to the matter is that while some key OPEC members are producing far more than their allocated production quota, Saudi Arabia has offset that overproduction by pumping far less oil than it agreed.

That 'helping hand' from Saudi may not last long now that it has successfully sold off a small stake in the state-owned oil company Aramco.

"We expect Saudi oil production to increase slightly in 2020," states the IIF report and adds that the increase will lead to a rise in oil inventories and then falling prices.

What does this mean for investors? There are three things to watch.

### ■ The falling oil prices

First, the lower prices will help U.S. consumers in the form of lower fuel costs. The cost of gasoline pump prices and futures prices for crude are inextricably linked over the long term. In other words, sooner or later, the falling oil prices translate into lower pump prices.

Still, as the crude market slumps expect gas prices to dip and U.S. consumers to spend the cash they've saved at the pump, thus helping boost the economy.

That should help lift prices of consumer discretionary stocks such as those held by the Consumer Discretionary Select Sector SPDR (XLY) exchange-traded fund. These companies, which include General Motors and Amazon.com, typically sell things that people want but don't always have to buy, such as a new car.

On the other hand, energy stocks, such as those held in the Energy Select Sector SPDR (XLE) ETF, might not do so well because of the subdued crude prices.

Then there is Saudi Arabia and the other the oil-producing countries in the region. Lower oil prices mean lower government revenues. Unfortunately, unlike in the U.S. or European Union, there are few other sources of revenue to offset the decline.

In the case of Saudi Arabia, any oil price below \$77 means that the government is spending more than it is raking in. While Saudi has a large stash of cash in its coffers, other countries have less and may feel the strain in their economies more.

In other words, investors should expect growth in the region to get hampered by falling energy prices next year.

(Source: forbes.com)



## Worst case for climate change isn't realistic

By Noah Smith

**NEW YORK** — In recent years, much of the commentary about climate change has gone from sternly serious to wildly despairing.

A new report from the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that the effects of climate change are accelerating and that the world has barely more than a decade to make deep cuts to greenhouse gas emissions and limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius by century's end.

Such reductions are extremely unlikely, given that global emissions rose this year and last. China, the world's biggest emitter by far, is still building coal-fired power plants, while the United States under President Donald Trump has abdicated leadership on the climate issue.

Warming of more than 1.5 degrees seems certain at this point and the world will have to deal with the consequences.

But how much, exactly, will Earth warm before the fossil-fuel era runs its course? That's harder to forecast because it depends not just on climate science but also on assumptions about emissions. And that, in turn, depends on technology and economics, both of which are notoriously hard things to predict.

The IPCC lays out several business-as-usual scenarios for how much greenhouse gas would be emitted without major policy action, but it doesn't say which scenario it thinks is more likely. The direst of these, called RCP8.5, implies that the planet would warm by an average of 5 degrees Celsius by 2100 — an absolutely catastrophic, civilization-ending level of warming. It's typically this doomsday scenario that motivates some observers to despair and others to call for reckless, flailing policies like the dismantling of capitalism.



The human race probably isn't doomed, but climate change is still an enormous catastrophe in the making that must be addressed. |

But a growing chorus of climate scientists and energy policy analysts has begun to question whether the dreaded RCP8.5 scenario should be taken seriously. The scenario assumes that after a brief flirtation with natural gas and renewable energy, the world returns to fueling industrialization primarily with coal. But it seems vanishingly unlikely that the global coal industry will increase sevenfold, as RCP8.5 envisions, even if natural gas proves to be a temporary phenomenon.

First of all, there probably just isn't that much accessible coal in the ground. Second, burning coal creates air pollution in addition to greenhouse gases, which gives countries an additional incentive to reduce its use. Third, the price of renewables has dropped to the point where building new coal plants is simply not economical in most places.

Despite China's new plants, overall global coal use fell 3 percent in 2019. India is turning away from coal, and so is Southeast Asia. Even Trump, despite his promise to restore the coal industry to its former glory, has managed to do nothing of the kind.

And as renewables get cheaper, it will become economical to retire existing coal and gas plants. McKinsey predicts that this will be the case in most of the world by 2030.

Banks are already beginning to pull out of the coal-power industry, not because of environmental pressure (since they're still funding coal for other industrial uses), but because they know there's just no future in coal plants. Gas won't be far behind, though a few gas plants will probably remain in service to back up solar plants when the sun isn't shining.

So the IPCC's commonly cited doomsday scenario looks like a rash flight of imagination. A group of climate scientists recently got together on Twitter and tried to figure out what a more realistic scenario looked like.

They fed energy predictions from the International Energy Agency (IEA) into climate models and found out that 3 degrees of warming is a much more likely business-as-usual scenario than 5 degrees.

But as the climate scientists noted, the IEA has consistently underestimated the growth of solar power; each year the agency predicts that growth in solar-power generation will slow, and each year it grows rapidly. If renewable technologies continue to surprise on the upside, warming could be limited to 2.5 degrees.

Now for the bad news: 2.5 degrees of warming will still be catastrophic for many people and countries, and 3 degrees even more so. Heat waves will become unbearable without air conditioning, even in high latitudes. All coral reefs will probably die. Many major cities will be drowned.

Even just 2 degrees of warming, which will be exceeded in any business-as-usual scenario, will have very serious global repercussions.

That's why a business-as-usual scenario is unacceptable. The human race probably isn't doomed, but climate change is still an enormous catastrophe in the making.

Big policy changes are needed — in the U.S., in China and in many other countries. Instead of embarking on the fool's errand of trying to dismantle capitalism, governments should utilize the combined resources of the public and private sectors. They should retire all coal plants as quickly as possible, steadily reduce natural gas usage and convert to all electric vehicles. Buildings need to be retrofitted to use electricity instead of gas. And new technologies for producing low-carbon steel and cement, and for carbon-free aviation, need to be researched, scaled up and disseminated internationally.

More rational climate scenarios don't give any excuse for complacency. But they do give human civilization a fighting chance.

Noah Smith is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist. He was an assistant professor of finance at Stoney Brook University, and he blogs at Noahpinion.

(Source: Bloomberg news)

# 45 mass killings leave 211 dead as United States hits horror high mark in 2019

The United States has seen more mass killings in 2019 than any year since the 1970s as the nation again fell victim to a large number of gun-related fatalities.

Thirty-three of the 41 mass killings — listed in a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University, which considers 'mass killings' to be where four or more people have been killed, excluding the perpetrator — were mass shootings.

The second-most mass killings in a year prior to 2019 was 38 in 2006.

The 211 people killed in this year's cases is still eclipsed by the 224 victims in 2017, when the deadliest mass shooting in modern US history took place in Las Vegas.

The mass shootings this year included three in August — one at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, another at Dayton, Ohio and a workplace shooting in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where 12 were killed.

James Densley, a criminologist and professor at Metropolitan State University in Minnesota, said the database confirmed and mirrored what his own research into exclusively mass shootings had shown.

"What makes this even more exceptional is that mass killings are going up at a time when general homicides, overall homicides, are going down," Mr Densley said.

"As a percentage of homicides, these mass killings are also accounting for more deaths.

### Attacks leave victims scarred

While the large death tolls attracted much of the attention, the killings inflicted a mental and physical toll on dozens of others. The database does not have a complete count of victims who were wounded, but among the three mass shootings in August alone, more than 65 people were injured.

Daniel Munoz, 28, of Odessa, was caught in the crossfire of the shooting that took place within a 16-kilometre stretch in West Texas.

He was on his way to meet a friend at a bar when he saw a gunman and the barrel of a firearm. Instinctively, he got down just as his car was sprayed with bullets.

Mr Munoz, who moved to Texas about a year ago to work in the oil industry, said he had actually been on edge since the Walmart shooting — which took place just 28 days earlier and about 480 kilometers away — and worried a shooting could happen anywhere at any time.



Daniel Munoz has been left scarred both mentally and physically from the aftermath of a mass shooting. (AP: Sue Ogrocki)

He remembers calling his mother after the El Paso shooting to encourage her to have a firearm at home or with her in case she needed to defend herself. He would say the same to friends, telling them before they went to a Walmart to bring a firearm in case they needed to protect themselves or others during an attack.

"You can't just always assume you're safe. In that moment, as soon as the El Paso shooting happened, I was on edge," Mr Munoz told The Associated Press.

In the months since, he has stayed clear of crowds and can only tolerate so much socializing.

He still drives the same car, still riddled with bullet holes on the side panels, a bullet hole in the headrest of the passenger seat and the words "evidence" scrawled on the doors. His shoulder remains pocked with bullet fragments.

### Family often involved

While August was the month with the most killings, they began early in January, when a man used an axe to kill four family members including his infant daughter.

The 42-year-old man stabbed to death his mother, stepfather, girlfriend and nine-month-old daughter in Clackamas County, Oregon. Two others, a roommate and an eight-year-old girl managed to escape; the rampage ended when responding police fatally shot the killer.

The incident in Oregon was one of 18 mass killings where family members were slain.

The majority of the killings involved people who knew each other — family disputes, drug or gang violence or people with beefs that directed their anger at co-workers or relatives.

## Africa faces major challenges in 2020

Terrorism, conflict resolution, border closures and immigration among issues expected to continue to dominate continent

**JOHANNESBURG** — Africa made great progress in a number of fields in 2019, including holding peaceful elections in many parts of the continent and increased economic growth.

But a number of unresolved challenges including terrorism, conflict resolution, border closures and immigration are among those expected to continue to dominate the continent in 2020.

### Terrorism

Barely four days before the end of 2019, a truck filled with explosives blew up at a busy intersection in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, killing at least 80 people and injuring 149 others.

Saturday's terror attack, which also claimed the lives of Turkish expats working in Somalia, was the worst in the past two years in the country, which faces attacks by the al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab terrorist group.

The terror outfit, which has carried out several terrorist attacks beyond Somalia in neighboring Kenya and Uganda, has been fighting to topple the UN-backed Somali government for years.

Al-Shabaab wants to introduce a strict version of Islamic law in Somalia, a country with a majority Muslim population.

Incidents of terrorism are also expected to continue causing havoc in northern Nigeria, where the Boko Haram terrorist group mainly operates, and in the Sahel region -- home to many terrorist groups including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Daesh/ISIS.

### South Sudan peace talks

Politicians in South Sudan are expected to continue holding talks to form a government of national unity in the first three months of 2020 after parties involved in talks failed to agree on a number of issues before the end of 2019.

President Salva Kiir and opposition leader Riek Machar signed a peace agreement in September 2018 requiring all parties, including rebel groups, to be



come part of a unity government which was expected to be formed on Nov. 12.

But politicians failed to agree on a number of issues, including the number of states and their boundaries, leading to a deadlock.

South Sudan, which reached a ceasefire recently, has been mired in conflict between the government of President Kiir and rebels led by Machar since December 2013.

The conflict has killed tens of thousands and displaced almost four million people from their homes, including over a million refugees, who have fled to neighboring countries.

### Conflicts in Libya, DRC, CAR

Conflicts are also expected to continue in a number of countries in 2020, including Libya and the Central African Republic (CAR), where various rebel groups have been fighting along religious lines. The Eastern Democratic Republic

of Congo (DRC), which has many rebel groups operating there, has been volatile and conflicts are expected to continue to dominate the region.

### Ebola

Ebola viral hemorrhagic fever, which broke out in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on Aug. 1, 2018, has so far claimed the lives of 2,231 people as of Sunday (December 29) out of 3,373 declared cases of the disease.

The disease, which presents signs and symptoms including fever, headaches, vomiting and diarrhea, is expected to remain a challenge in the DRC in 2020 as conflicts pose a danger to health workers and patients.

Armed groups have attacked Ebola health workers and health sites treating Ebola patients, hindering treatment efforts.

According to reports, the current Ebola outbreak in DRC is the second

deadliest on record after a 2014-2016 outbreak in West Africa that killed more than 11,300 people.

### Destruction due to floods

Recent floods in East Africa killed more than 200 people in the region and displaced at least three million others.

Crops and homes were destroyed. Experts fear the region might experience a food shortage in 2020 that could prompt calls for assistance from humanitarian agencies. Countries affected by the floods included Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan and Somalia.

### Poaching of rhinos, other wild animals

Wild animals, especially rhinos, have been a target of poachers in Africa throughout the year and this is expected to continue to be a major challenge in 2020 if governments are to conserve wildlife.

According to the International Rhino Foundation, poachers killed nearly 900 rhinos last year in Africa. While this is a decrease from 3.7 rhinos lost per day in 2015, 2018 still saw 2.4 rhinos killed per day — or one rhino every 10 hours.

The global rhino population has seen a steady decline, dropping from a high of 29,000 in 2017 to 27,300 today. Conservation groups, individuals and governments will need to do more to save wildlife in 2020.

### Tensions between Uganda, Rwanda

Uganda and Rwandan officials failed to reach an agreement this month after accusing each other of attempting to destabilize their countries.

Rwanda claims there are some armed groups operating in Uganda that want to destabilize it.

The former staunch allies have been at loggerheads since March 2019, with their armies massing around their boundaries.

Rwanda closed its borders with Uganda and the issue is expected to remain a challenge for the two countries to address in 2020.

(Source: Andalu Agency)

## Woman dies after being set on fire during surgery in Romania

Electric scalpel used despite patient being treated with alcohol-based disinfectant

A woman has died after being set on fire during surgery in Romania, the country's health ministry has said, in a case that has cast a spotlight on the ailing Romanian health system.

The patient, who had pancreatic cancer, died on Sunday after suffering burns to 40 percent of her body when surgeons used an electric scalpel despite her being

treated with an alcohol-based disinfectant.

Contact with the flammable disinfectant caused combustion and the patient "ignited like a torch", Emanuel Ungureanu, a Romanian politician, said on his Facebook page, citing medical staff at Floreasca urgent care hospital in Bucharest.

A nurse threw a bucket of water on the 66-year-old woman to prevent the fire from spreading. The health ministry said it would investigate the "unfortunate incident", which took place on 22

December.

"The surgeons should have been aware that it is prohibited to use an alcohol-based disinfectant during surgical procedures performed with an electric scalpel," the deputy minister, Horatiu Moldovan, said.

The victim's family said medical staff had spoken of an "accident" but declined to offer details.

Despite some improvements after an increase in funding, Romania's hospital

system is still beset by dilapidated equipment and a shortage of doctors, and finds itself at the heart of repeated scandals.

In relation to a nightclub fire in 2015 that killed 64 people — 26 on site and 38 others later — a former health minister stands accused of having delayed or blocked the transfer of burn victims abroad. Many subsequently died in ill-equipped Romanian hospitals. An inquiry is still ongoing.

(Source: Guardian)



# WikiLeaks releases even more OPCW Douma documents

By Dave DeCamp

**ANTIWAR** — On Friday, WikiLeaks released even more internal emails and documents from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) related to the alleged chemical attack in Douma, Syria, on April 7th 2018. The release is the fourth leak related to the alleged attack, an incident that was used as the pretext for an airstrike launched by the US, UK, and France against the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The OPCW published their final report on the Douma attack in March 2019, they concluded that the evidence provided “reasonable grounds that the use of a toxic chemical as a weapon took place” and that chemical was “likely molecular chlorine.” But since that report was published, multiple whistleblowers have come forward, and many documents have been leaked that suggest otherwise. The mounting evidence points to a cover up within the OPCW, a possible scandal that has gained virtually no attention from the mainstream media.

One of the new leaks is a series of emails between OPCW employees dated February 28th 2019, just two days before the final report was published. The emails show Sebastien Braha, the OPCW Chief of Cabinet, ordering the removal of a document from the OPCW’s secure registry. The email says, “Please get this document out of DRA (Documents Registry Archive) ... And please remove all traces, if any, of its delivery/storage/whatever in DRA.”

The document Braha ordered to be removed is an engineering assessment that studied two cylinders found in two separate locations in Douma. The allegation was that these cylinders were dropped out of a Syrian government aircraft and were the source of the chlorine gas. But this engineering assessment points to a different possibility.

The assessment was prepared by Ian Henderson, a longtime OPCW engineer. Henderson’s report concludes, “observations at the scene of the two locations, together with subsequent analysis, suggest that there is a higher probability that both cylinders were manually placed at those two locations rather than being delivered from aircraft.” If the cylinders were manually placed where they were found, it would point to the theory that the attack was staged by Jaysh al-Islam, the opposition group that the Syrian government was driving out of Douma. But Henderson’s assessment was left out of the final report.

This new leak corroborates a story Peter Hitchens wrote for The Mail on Sunday earlier this month. According to Hitchens, after making every effort to have his assessment included in the final report, Henderson decided to upload it to the DRA. After the document was uploaded, a senior OPCW official nicknamed “Voldemort” ordered it be erased. Hitchens wrote, “when ‘Voldemort’ heard about it, he sent an email to subordinates saying: ‘Please get this document out of DRA ... And please remove all traces, if any, of its delivery/storage/whatever in DRA.’”

Henderson leaked his engineering assessment to the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media, and it was published in May 2019. Since Henderson’s leak was published, his character has been smeared as a way to delegitimize his assessment. The common allegation is that Henderson was not part of the OPCW Fact Finding Mission (FFM) that went to Douma to investigate the alleged attack. The OPCW even told the Working Group in a statement that Henderson “has never been a member of the FFM.”

After Braha orders the engineering assessment to be removed from the DRA, he sends another email questioning Henderson’s work. The email reads, “Under whose authority was this work conducted, outside FFM authority and dedicated highly secured network, by someone who was not part of the FFM?” This is the last email we can see in the exchange. Critics of Henderson are pointing to this email as proof that he was not part of the FFM.

But evidence from previous leaks show that Henderson was indeed a member of the FFM that went to Douma. An email from a set of documents released by WikiLeaks on December 14th, addressed to a senior OPCW official, calls the allegation that Henderson was not part of the FFM a “falsehood.” The email dated May 20th 2019, reads, “Ian Henderson WAS part of the FFM and there is an abundance of official documentation, as well as other supporting proof that testifies to that.”



Another document released on December 14th is a memo addressed to OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias dated March 14th 2019. In the memo, the author, who is likely Ian Henderson, explains that the final OPCW report was not prepared by the FFM that went to Douma. The memo says the report was prepared by a “FFM core team” that only operated in “Country X,” with the exception of a paramedic that did go to Douma. “Country X” is likely Turkey since OPCW investigators went there to interview alleged witnesses.

This memo shows that there are two groups that can be called the “FFM.” One that went to Douma and had no say in the final report, and a team that only operated in “Country X.” Henderson was likely a member of the FFM that went to Douma, whose findings were ignored.

Another document released Friday was the minutes from an OPCW meeting with toxicologists that took place on June 6th 2018. According to the document, four OPCW employees met with “three Toxicologists/Clinical pharmacologists” and “one bioanalytical and toxicological chemist” who all specialize in chemical weapons. The meeting had two purposes. One was “to solicit expert advice on the value of exhuming suspected victims of the alleged chemical attack,” and the other purpose was “to elicit expert opinions from the forensic toxicologists regarding the observed and reported symptoms of the alleged victims.”

According to the minutes, the OPCW team was advised by the experts that there would be “little use” in exhuming the bodies and conducting autopsies, something the FFM never did.

With regards to the symptoms of the alleged victims, according to the minutes, “the chief expert summed up his conclusions by offering two possibilities that included on the one hand a real chemical attack and on the other, the possibility of the event being a propaganda exercise.” As far as the symptoms being consistent with exposure to chlorine gas, “the experts were conclusive in their statements that there was no correlation between symptoms and chlorine exposure.”

The document says the OPCW team that attended the meeting all agreed “that the key ‘take-away’ message from the meeting was that the symptoms observed were inconsistent with exposure to chlorine and no other obvious candidate chemical causing the symptoms could be identified.” WikiLeaks also released a set of emails from OPCW employees discussing the meeting, affirming the content of the leaked minutes.

The conclusion of the toxicologists and the OPCW team members that attended the meeting are consistent with the original interim report that was never published by the OPCW and was only made public after WikiLeaks released it on December 14th. That interim report says, “Some of the signs and symptoms described by witnesses and noted in photos and video recordings taken by witnesses, of the alleged victims are not consistent with exposure to chlorine-containing choking or blood agents such as chlorine

gas, phosgene or cyanogen chloride.” This part of the report was completely removed from the highly altered version of the interim report that was published on July 6th 2018.

WikiLeaks published an email on November 23rd from a member of the FFM that went to Douma, expressing his concern over the altered interim report. That email’s author had many issues with the changes to the interim report, among them was the section addressing the victim’s symptoms. The email reads, “The original report discusses in detail the inconsistency between the victims’ symptoms, as reported by witnesses and seen in video recordings. Omitting this section of the report has a serious negative impact ... The inconsistency was not only noted by the FFM team but strongly supported by three toxicologists with expertise in exposure to CW agents.”

The final report mentions two consultations with toxicologists, one in September 2018, and one in October 2018, but no details from the consultations are given. The final report says the symptoms of the alleged victims as described by witnesses and observed in open-sourced videos “indicate exposure to an inhalational irritant or toxic substance.” The report also says, “it is currently not possible to precisely link the cause of the signs and symptoms to a specific chemical.”

If the FFM that prepared the final report had proof that the symptoms of the alleged victims were consistent with chlorine exposure, it would no doubt have been included in the report. The absence of such an allegation shows that despite further consultations with toxicologists, that conclusion was never reached. Instead, the reader is lead to believe that the victims were killed by a chlorine gas since the ultimate conclusion of the report is that an attack using a toxic chemical that contained chlorine likely occurred.

Since these OPCW leaks have been coming out, employees of the investigative research website Bellingcat have been trying to sweep them under the rug (it is worth noting that Bellingcat receives grants from the US-government funded National Endowment for Democracy). The “investigators” at Bellingcat are now accusing WikiLeaks of selectively releasing these documents to fit a narrative, and are claiming that each new leak discredits the previous ones. It is more likely that WikiLeaks’ sources expected their original leaks to make a bigger splash, and decided to release more since they gained so little attention. And, as demonstrated above, the new leaks clearly support earlier ones.

No honest journalist or investigator can look at all these leaks and say there is nothing here. The evidence shows that the OPCW ignored its investigator’s findings to prepare a report that fit a particular narrative. The OPCW needs to release all of its member’s findings and explain why they chose to ignore some. The fact is, the alleged Douma chemical attack led to a US airstrike. If that airstrike was carried out under false pretenses it needs to be revealed.

## Iran, Russia, China countering U.S. influence in region: analyst

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — The joint naval drills of Iran, Russia and China in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman were aimed at countering US influence in the region, an American political analyst said.



“The three countries appear to have as their primary objectives the protection of the security of these routes, and countering the influence of the US in the region,” Keith Preston, the chief editor and director of attackthesystem.com, told Tasnim in an interview. The following is the full text of the interview.

■ On Friday, Iran, Russia and China started four days of joint maritime exercise, dubbed the “Marine Security Belt”, in an area of 17,000 square kilometers which consist of various tactical exercises, such as target practicing and rescuing ships from assault and incidents such as fires. What is your take on the joint naval drill?

A: The fact that Iran, Russia, and China are engaged in joint naval drills indicates that the leadership of each of these nations perceives potential threats that warrant their cooperation. The tensions that have taken place in the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz during the past year indicate a certain degree of instability in the region. Of course, the sea lanes that are present in the region are essential to international commerce, including the trade in petroleum. Iran, Russia, and China each have a vested interest in maintaining the security of the region, particularly after the attacks on oil tankers that occurred some months ago. Each of the three nations is clearly concerned about the United States’ role in the region as well, which they consider to be overly belligerent in a way that threatens the stability and security of the region’s sea lanes and naval transportation routes. The three countries appear to have as their primary objectives the protection of the security of these routes, and countering the influence of the US in the region.

■ In a post on his Twitter account on Friday night, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi published a photo of the logo of the naval drills and said, “The fact is that in the current transitional era, not everything happens in, nor by the West. We are truly living in a #Post\_Western\_world in which all global players have their share in its reality”. What are your thoughts on a post-western world?

A: I suspect that claims of a post-Western world are somewhat premature in the sense that Western powers continue to maintain the ability to exercise hegemony over much of the world. While Russia is a formidable military power on the Eurasian landmass, and possesses a sizable nuclear arsenal, it is also true that Russia has less than half the population of the United States, and less than half the population of the European Union. Additionally, Russia’s Gross Domestic Product measures that of South Korea. Russia is a long way from being able to compete with the West on an even footing. At present, China has approximately one half the GDP of the United States, even with four times the population. The United States maintains a network of hundreds of military bases across the world while Russia has no international bases outside of Syria and the CIS states, and, outside of the mainland, China only has a formal military presence on one base in East Africa. Both Russia and China have demonstrated impressive economic development in recent decades, and China’s efforts to engage in the development of Africa are quite significant as well. Iran has successfully forged a coalition of forces in the Middle East that are in resistance to Western hegemony. Certainly, an alliance between Russia, China, and Iran (and, by extension, between the BRICS and the Axis of Resistance) would be formidable. However, it is still premature to suggest that this alliance will be able to successfully challenge Western hegemony. It is likely that a more multipolar world order will evolve in the future, however, as the rift between the United States and the European Union potentially widens, and as the United States’ repeated imperial expeditions around the world continue to produce failure.

■ “The message of this exercise is peace, friendship and lasting security through cooperation and unity ... and its effect will be to show that Iran cannot be isolated,” according to Iranian flotilla chief Rear Admiral Gholamreza Tahani. How much do you think such drills can help improve security in the region?

A: The principal security threats that exist in the region at present are the ongoing efforts by the United States to destabilize nations that refuse to be incorporated into the global system of American hegemony, acts of aggression carried out by Saudi Arabia and the (Persian) Gulf States and terrorist activity sponsored by these regimes, ongoing Israeli expansionism and aggression by Israel against surrounding countries, and terrorist insurgencies that are often supported, at least tacitly, by the West. The recent incursions into Syria by Turkey are also a cause for concern. A greater level of cooperation by Russia, China, Iran, and by the forces represented by the BRICS and the Axis of Resistance, may serve as a deterrent to acts of aggression carried out by parties within the Atlanticist-Zionist-Wahhabi axis in a way that increases the level of stability and security in the region. However, there is also a greater risk for potential confrontation between the Western and Eastern powers as well.

■ In your perspective, what has prompted the three countries to form a triangle of sea power and hold the drills?

A: A convergence of interests has taken place where Russia, China, and Iran each regard the maintenance of the stability and security of the region as being in their individual and collective interests. Each of these nations is dependent on the security of the sea lands and naval transportation routes in the region in relation to the economies of these nations, as well as their defensive and national security needs. Clearly, the Western presence in the region, in collusion with Israel and the (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council, has been highly disruptive, and counter to the economic and military needs of the leading Eastern powers.

## Did Hamas and Zionism secretly line up against Iran’s allies in Gaza?

By Damir Nazarov

**WEST SIBERIA/ TYUMEN** — Hamas silence over the November aggression of Zionism during which the leaders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and Damascus were killed, suggests certain thoughts about the conformism and apathy of the ruling party in the Gaza Strip. This is not about secret agreements between the invaders and Hamas, but rather about a secret alliance against the leading Palestinian forces seeking to fight the colonialists. Otherwise, how to explain a number of facts, such as the non-interference of the military wing of Hamas - the Al-Qassam Brigade in the fight against the Zionists, on the side of the Al-Quds Brigade (military wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad)? Different theories go on this score, some write about the alleged “reluctance of Hamas to increase the scale of the confrontation, which will aggravate the situation in the Gaza Strip.” Others indicate that, with their silence, “Hamas showed Zionism about the existence of a strong ally in Gaza,” alluding to the military potential of the Palestinian Jihad, which carried out a series of shelling of Zionist positions in response to terrorist attacks by the invaders. But the opinions of political scientists loyal to Hamas fade against the backdrop of one important point, the killed figures of the Palestinian

Jihad, A - possessed considerable weight in the Gaza Strip (martyr Abu al-Atta), B - had a clear pro-Iranian orientation. For its part, Hamas is gradually losing credibility in Gaza due to a move away from direct resistance to the enemy, has moved away from Iran amid crises in Syria, Iraq and Yemen to the camp of enemies of the Islamic Republic, which automatically created and polarized the balance of forces within the blockade Sector between Hamas as a political party and resistance factions oriented to Tehran, where the key figure is precisely the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Remembering the hero, the martyr Abu al-Atta, he could be described as a strong national leader who possessed charisma that overshadowed giants such as Ismail Haniya and Yahya Sinwar. His oratory, political skills, commitment to the ideology of his movement in addition to military talent, made him a powerful politician who, in the event of open elections of any format in the Gaza Strip, could easily squeeze influential officials from Hamas.

Speaking of Iran, there are obvious traces of the provocations of Zionism. Over the past 40 years, all the fears, phobias and complexes of the invaders are associated with the Islamic Republic and its allies. PIJ plays one of the key roles in Tehran’s foreign policy, the Palestinian resistance movement is ideologically connected with the Islamic Republic of Iran



and in many vectors of its policy coordinates with the IRGC. Accordingly, attacks on PIJ are an element of the fight against the Iranians, which Zionism did not hide during the latest conflict in Gaza. Moreover, the killings of the “pro-Iranian” PIJ politicians according to the plan of Zionism should open the way to power within the movement for those who seek to join the “Axis of Conformism and Cooperation” with radical cosmopolitans, we are talking about the Qatar-Turkey-Saudi Arabia-Egypt alliance.

P.S. Hamas has previously been noted for

anti-Iranian behavior by banning the movement of Al-Sabirin in Gaza. Al-Sabirin is a PIJ breakaway organization that positions itself as “followers of the ideas of the martyr Fathi Shakaki” with reliance on Iran. Dependence on Qatar, the inability to strategically assess the situation, the gradual ideological degradation and the absence of a tendency to develop, gradually transforms the once vivid Islamic resistance movement into a pale shadow of itself. Hamas often criticizes Fatah, but in its political moves, it increasingly resembles its long-standing opponents.



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# The Quadrantid meteor shower is coming in 2020

If your New Year's resolution is to spend more time appreciating the wonders of space, you won't have to wait very long to put your plans into action: 2020's first meteor shower is coming between January 3 and January 4.

According to Inverse, the Quadrantid meteor shower consists of fireball meteors, which shine brighter and bolder than other meteors because they're made from larger particles of matter. And since the moon won't be visible during the Quadrantids's peak, the already-bright meteors won't have to compete with moonlight.

They will, however, have to compete with your habit of being soundly asleep in the middle of the night. The International Meteor Organization predicts that the shower's peak will occur around 3 a.m. EST on January 4, and only last for about four hours. It will take place in the northern part of the sky, so your chances of seeing the shower are better if you live in the Northern Hemisphere.

The meteor shower was named the Quadrantids because its radiant point—or the location in the sky from which the meteors seem to originate—was in a now-obsolete constellation called the Quadrans Muralis, identified in 1795 by French astronomer Jérôme Lalande and then omitted from the International Astronomical Union's list of constellations in 1922.

Luckily, there are a couple other recognizable landmarks, so to speak, to help you figure out where to direct your gaze come next Friday night. According to EarthSky, the Quadrantids's updated radiant point is near Arcturus, the brightest star of the Bootes constellation, and it's also not far from the Big Dipper.

In 2003, astronomer Peter Jenniskens suggested that



the Quadrantids's parent body was the asteroid 2003 EH1, rather than an icy comet like many other meteor showers. Though we don't know if that's true, we are pretty sure about

one thing: The chance to ring in the new year with a fireball sighting is worth losing a little sleep over.

(Source: msn)

## Scientist who edited babies' genes jailed for three years



China has jailed a researcher who made headlines around the world after announcing his involvement in the births of the first genetically-edited babies.

He Jiankui told an international gene editing conference in November last year he had led a project that resulted in the births of twin babies with an added resistance to the Aids infection.

While Dr. He did not provide any corroborating evidence or submit his research for peer review, after an investigation Chinese authorities confirmed the work had been carried out and that the researchers had "deliberately evaded oversight".

Dr. He was convicted on Monday of practicing medicine illegally and violating Chinese scientific research regulations, as well as forging ethical review documents. He was sentenced to three years in prison and fined 3 million Yuan (£330,000).

The sentencing, reported by the state-run Xinhua news agency, confirmed for the first time that a third baby — from a different mother to the twins — was born as part of the project before it was shut down by the authorities.

Two other people, researchers working under Dr. He, were convicted and received lesser sentences. Zhang Renli was sentenced to two years in prison and fined 1 million Yuan. Qin Jinzhou received an 18-month sentence, suspended for two years, and a 500,000

Yuan fine.

Dr. He had been held under armed guard at a university guesthouse since he declared his work to the world, including in major interviews with western media.

The court said he and his team "crossed the bottom line of ethics" and "in seeking fame and wealth, deliberately violated national regulations in scientific research and medical treatment".

Dr. He used gene-editing technology called Crispr to alter the genomes of embryos during the IVF process. Crispr is a low-cost, easy-to-use technique whereby an enzyme is targeted to cut out an unwanted section of DNA.

Since the method of targeting the enzyme which DNA to target was first described in 2012 and 2013, the technique has already led to major breakthroughs in crop development and fixing genetic diseases in animals.

But ethicists say using it to alter the DNA of human embryos is inherently problematic. Not only will the desired genetic change be passed on to all the subject's future offspring, but it is also impossible to know for sure what unintended consequences the editing process might have.

Human clinical trials have been carried out with Crispr — but as therapies for treating blood disorders like sickle cell anemia, not to alter a person's entire genetic make-up.

(Source: The Independent)

## Scientists say they've found a way to solve the 'oldest open question in astrophysics'



After almost 350 years, physicists have just arrived at a statistical solution for Newton's three-body problem — that is, the problem of figuring out how three similar objects or bodies are going to travel in space in a way that fits in with the laws of motion and gravity.

The researchers behind the latest study describe the three-body problem as "arguably the oldest open question in astrophysics", and while they haven't completely cracked the case, they've gotten closer than most by finding a statistical formula that fits this open question in certain scenarios.

In particular, they looked at a couple of centuries of previous research that puts forward the following idea: in unstable, chaotic three-body systems, one of those bodies eventually gets expelled, leaving behind a stable binary relationship between the two that are left.

While the researchers point out that they haven't come up with an exact, complete solution for the three-body problem, they have developed a working statistical method that covers a lot of these three-body to two-body events, one which can be very useful in helping physicists visualize complicated processes.

"When we compared our predictions to computer-generated models of their actual movements, we found a high degree of accuracy," says astrophysicist Nicholas Stone, from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The three laws of motion laid down by Isaac Newton in 1687 are these: that objects remain in a state of inertia unless acted upon by force, that the relationship

between acceleration and applied force is force equals mass times acceleration ( $F=ma$ ), and that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

So far so brilliant, as far as the basic physics of the Universe are concerned. But Newton ran into difficulties applying his rules to the Earth, Moon and Sun — the original three bodies. It actually became much harder to track three bodies with these mathematical rules.

While scientists have found fixes for special cases, a general formula for the three-body problem has proved elusive. It's like trying to apply a mathematical template to the butterfly effect — it's just too chaotic to track.

In this case, the researchers applied a probability hypothesis called ergodicity to help guide them to their answers, which uses the principles of averages to work out what's going to happen in a particular system. Importantly, over time, ergodic processes bear little relation to their original state (just like a three-body system).

What the new solution does is give scientists an understanding of how the two survivors of a three-body problem are going to behave in a variety of newly stable scenarios — and that sort of understanding can be crucial in astrophysics.

"Take three black holes that are orbiting one another," says Stone. "Their orbits will necessarily become unstable and even after one of them gets kicked out, we're still very interested in the relationship between the surviving black holes."

(Source: sciencealert.com)

## These are the most-read Science News stories of 2019

Science News drew more than 15 million visitors to our website this year. Here's a rundown of the most-read news stories of 2019 that didn't make our Top 10 list, as well as the most popular longer reads.

Top news stories

1. A chip made with carbon nanotubes, not silicon, marks a computing milestone

Researchers built a new kind of computer chip with thousands of carbon nanotube transistors. Though the prototype can't yet compete with silicon chips, carbon nanotube computing technology could lead to faster electronics.

2. People can sense Earth's magnetic field, brain waves suggest

People's brain waves showed a distinct pattern when exposed to an Earth-strength magnetic field pointing in a specific direction in the lab. That finding hints that humans may have magnetoreception, similar to birds and certain other organisms.

3. In a first, scientists took the temperature of a sonic black hole

The temperature of a lab-made black hole that traps sound instead of light agrees with a prediction by cosmologist Stephen Hawking: that black holes emit a small stream of particles called Hawking radiation.

4. Why kids may be at risk from vinyl floors and fire-resistant couches

Children from homes with all vinyl flooring and flame-



retardant couches had higher levels of some potentially harmful chemicals in blood and urine than other kids did, one study found. The finding suggests that these home furnishings release the chemicals quickly enough for them to build up in residents' bodies.

5. Archaeologists tie ancient bones to a revolt chronicled on the Rosetta Stone

An ancient soldier's skeleton unearthed from Egypt's Nile Delta may be physical proof of a revolt around 2,200 years ago. The Rosetta Stone describes the victory of pharaoh Ptolemy V, from a Greek dynasty, over a faction of the native Egyptian revolt. But archaeological evidence of the uprising is scarce.

Top feature stories

1. Vitamin D supplements aren't living up to their hype  
Vitamin D's popularity soared after findings hinted that it could protect against multiple sclerosis, asthma, depression,

heart disease, cancer and other ailments. But a series of studies has cast doubt on these supposed benefits.

2. Measles erases the immune system's memory

Measles wipes away the immune system's memories of germs it has previously fought. This "immune amnesia" can leave people at risk of infections from harmful viruses and bacteria for months to years.

3. With its burning grip, shingles can do lasting damage

The virus responsible for chicken pox can lay dormant for decades, only to reemerge later in life as shingles. The disease is more than just a painful rash. Shingles can damage arteries and may raise the risk of stroke and dementia, scientists are finding.

4. The CBD boom is way ahead of the science

Food, health and wellness products infused with cannabidiol, also known as CBD, are becoming increasingly popular. The substance, derived from cannabis plants, is sold as a remedy for pain, anxiety, insomnia and other conditions without getting the user high. But most health benefits attributed to CBD don't yet have scientific backing.

5. How the periodic table went from a sketch to an enduring masterpiece

Science News kicked off its coverage of the periodic table's 150th anniversary with a look at Russian chemist Dmitrii Mendeleev, whose original table had just 63 elements. Scientists have since added many more elements.

(Source: Sciencenews.org)

## 'Are we alone in the universe?' NASA's 2020 Mars rover will search for clues

Like any tourist, NASA's next Mars rover will want to bring home a few souvenirs.

But instead of piling them into a suitcase, the rover is going to have to drop its precious cargo onto the surface of the Red Planet and await another spacecraft to fetch them for the trip home.

It's all part of the most ambitious mission to Mars yet. Work is almost complete on the rover at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory near Los Angeles well ahead of a launch window that starts July 17 at the launch site in Florida.



With previous rovers having shown Mars had the building blocks of life, the goal of the next mission is to establish whether life has existed.

"This is the one we have been working toward," said Matt Wallace deputy project manager of Mars 2020. "Now we are really asking the question, 'Can we find any sign of life?'"

The trip will take about seven months. If all goes according to plan, the rover will come to life next February in an ancient river delta in a lake that filled the Jezero Crater. Its mission is expected to last two years.

The lakebed is considered ripe for exploration because life is supported by water. Just finding evidence of a single-cell organism would be a breakthrough.

"For all of human history we have asked, 'Are we alone in the universe?'" said Luther Beegle, principal investigator for one of the spacecraft's unique instruments, a new type of spectrometer with an ultraviolet laser.

The six-wheeled rover, yet to be given a formal name, looks similar to the last one, dubbed Curiosity. It's about the same size — about 10 feet long and 9 feet wide — but will weigh 278 pounds more than Curiosity. JPL engineers compare it to a Mini Cooper.

Where the vehicle at the heart of the \$2.5 billion exploration will really stand apart, however, is in its ability to analyze and process samples, then drop them into tubes for pickup by another Mars mission expected to launch in 2026. Samples will be carried inside the rover until they are deposited in individual tubes or in a bunch on the planet's surface.

Then, the future mission would robotically accomplish what it took humans to do on the moon 50 years ago by bringing back samples of soil and rocks for detailed study by scientists on Earth. Only in laboratories can samples be closely examined with electron microscopes and other advanced instruments.

That next spacecraft is yet to be developed. Wallace said it seemed wiser to divide the missions rather than try to design one to fly to Mars, collect samples and then bring them home. The space program has been successful in not overreaching, so "breaking it into pieces made more sense," he explained.

There was the challenge of dealing with the prospect of Mars' extreme temperature swings, developing seven major instruments for collecting and analyzing samples and equipping the rover with more than 20 different cameras and sensors. But the hardest part was trying to build it in a way that ensures samples will not be contaminated with anything from Earth.

Engineers and scientists building it had to wear sterile gloves, boots and clothing to avoid leaving any hairs or skin cells that could work their way into the sample collection system. The tools used to be build that system were also sterilized. Media allowed in the clean room last week to view the craft were issued special clothing, headgear and booties even though they didn't come within 10 feet of the rover.

Building it was "akin to a Swiss watch," said Zach Ousnamer, a rover assembly and test engineer. "It's the most complex mechanism we have put into any rover. The fact you can't touch that to do tweaks makes it very difficult."

Though the rover is nearly complete and will be ready to be shipped to Florida in about a month, installing the sample tubes will be one of the final steps as another protection from contamination.

"You're always a little nervous at this stage because this is the last opportunity to get in all the tests you want to get in," said Jessica Samuels, the lead flight system engineer. "But it's exciting. We're on track for a 2020 launch in July, and everything's coming together."

(Source: msn)

## The coolest LEGO in the universe

For the first time, LEGO has been cooled to the lowest temperature possible in an experiment which reveals a new use for the popular toy.

Its special properties mean it could be useful in the development of quantum computing.

A world leading team of ultra-low temperature physicists at Lancaster University decided to place a LEGO figure and four LEGO blocks inside their record-breaking dilution refrigerator.

This machine — specially made at the University — is the most effective refrigerator in the world, capable of reaching 1.6 millidegrees above absolute zero (minus 273.15 Centigrade), which is about 200,000 times colder than room temperature and 2,000 times colder than deep space.

The results — published in the journal Scientific Reports — were surprising.

Dr. Dmitry Zmeev, who led the research team, said: "Our results are significant because we found that the clamping arrangement between the LEGO blocks causes the LEGO structures to behave as an extremely good thermal insulator at cryogenic temperatures.

"This is very desirable for construction materials used for the design of future scientific equipment like dilution refrigerators."

Invented 50 years ago, the dilution refrigerator is at the center of a global multi-billion dollar industry and is crucial to the work of modern experimental physics and engineering, including the development of quantum computers.

The use of ABS plastic structures, such as LEGO, instead of the solid materials currently in use, means that any future thermal insulator could be produced at a significantly reduced cost.

(Source: Science Daily)



## Life may have first emerged in phosphorous-rich lakes

Phosphorous is one of the six main chemical ingredients necessary for life. Phosphorous atoms form DNA and RNA molecules, the building blocks of life's genetic code, but until now, scientists assumed the element was in short supply on primordial Earth.

In a new study, published Monday in the journal PNAS, scientists provide evidence that ancient soda lakes could have provided sufficient levels of phosphorous to spawn life.



Soda lakes, sometimes called alkaline lakes, are lakes featuring high rates of evaporation. The water left behind is salty and features a high pH, or low acidity. Samples collected from soda lakes across the world showed the carbonate-rich water can boast up to 50,000 times the levels of phosphorous found in the ocean.

"In most lakes, phosphate is limited because calcium combines with the phosphate to precipitate minerals called apatite," Jonathan Toner, a University of Washington research assistant professor of Earth and space sciences, told UPI in an email. "This doesn't happen in soda lakes because these lakes have very high concentrations of carbonate."

"Carbonate competes with phosphate to combine with calcium, and at the very high carbonate levels found in these lakes, calcium is removed by carbonate, not phosphate," Toner said. "This allows phosphate to accumulate. It's a fairly straightforward idea, which is part of its appeal."

To ensure the modern soda lakes were representative of the kind of environments that might have existed on early Earth, scientists conducted experiments and built models to measure the effects of modern biological activity on soda lake chemistry.

"First, we did lab experiments in the absence of biology to show that phosphate accumulates. Second, our models only take into account inorganic chemistry," Toner said. "Regardless, biology is active in many lakes all over the world, but all lakes (except for carbonate-rich ones) do not have high phosphate. So biology alone cannot cause high phosphate in lakes."

The analysis showed that even without biological activity, there would have been plenty of phosphorous available in soda lakes. There also would have been plenty of soda lakes.

"Soda lakes form in atmospheres high in carbon dioxide, and in the presence of fresh volcanic material," Toner said. "The early Earth satisfies both of these criteria. Models of the atmospheres of the early Earth indicate up to 1000 times more carbon dioxide than today. Plus, the early Earth would have been much more volcanically active because of a hotter mantle."

Previous research conducted by Toner and his colleague David Catling, a Washington professor of Earth and space sciences, suggested soda lakes can also generate significant levels of cyanide, which assists the formation of amino acids and nucleotides, the building blocks of proteins, DNA and RNA.

Most researchers investigating the origins of life are biochemists, but Toner's expertise is in geochemistry. One reason the phosphate problem persisted for so long, Toner estimates, is that biochemists didn't know where to look for large amounts of natural occurring phosphorous.

Toner and his colleagues hope to learn more about the potential for soda lakes to support primordial life by conducting further investigations of the inorganic and organic chemistry present in modern carbonate-rich lakes.

# ECO Cultural Institute seeks tourism boom, new president says

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — The newly-appointed president of the Economic Cooperation Organization Cultural Institute said on Monday that development of tourism industry is a priority of her mission through launching joint projects with other member states.

Sarvar Bakhti made the remarks in her inauguration ceremony which was held in Tehran, saying tourism causes nations of the region to gain a deeper understanding of each other, ISNA reported on Monday.

"Culture is the foundation of every society," she noted. "Today, more than ever we need to work on tourism and traveling in order to prepare for the recognition of nations. In this regard, conferences and workshops will be arranged to create an opportunity for nations to get to know each other."

Bakhti also held a meeting with ECO Secretary General Hadi Soleimanpour on the same day in which she presented main themes of programs which are to be implemented during her tenure, according to the institute's public relations.

Founded in 1985, ECO is an inter-governmental regional organization encompassing countries from Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia with more than 460 million inhabitants and over 8 million square kilometers connecting Russia to the Persian Gulf and China to Europe.

Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are the members of the organization.

ECO Cultural Institute is affiliated with ECO and aims at fostering understanding and the preservation of the rich cultural heritage of its members through common projects in the field of the media, literature, art, philosophy, sport and education.



Travelers visit Naqsh-e Rostam, an Achaemenid-era rock-hewn necropolis in southern Iran

## Italian tourism group visiting Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — A group of seventeen Italian sightseers have commenced an excursion across the southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province, which is amongst Iran's lesser-known destinations.

"Members of the group, who arrived in the province two days ago (on Saturday), first made a two-day visit to Zahedan (the provincial capital), before they leave for [the port city of] Chabahar," provincial tourism chief Alireza Jalalzaei said on Monday, IRNA reported.

Another Italian group will start a familiarization tour in the province in the month of Esfand (starting Feb. 20), Jalalzaei added.

Back in December, Sistan-Baluchestan welcomed a group of ten French and Brit-



ish tourists who had a ten-day tour, visiting attractions in Zabol, Nimruz, and Hamun. They also set up an overnight camp in the [UNESCO-registered] Lut desert.

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

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

## Imam Khomeini Intl. Airport ready to operate domestic flights



**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — Imam Khomeini International Airport has announced readiness to add domestic flights to its services, IKIA deputy director for airport operations has said.

"Passengers will have more options to choose from the domestic flights which are transferred to the airport," IKAC News quoted Hassan Khoshkhoo as saying on Tuesday.

The measure is expected to considerably reduce traffic at Tehran's International Mehrabad Airport, which currently oper-

ates domestic flights from the capital city.

According to the official, no particular route has been considered for permanent relocation to IKIA and the number of flights will be determined by market demand.

Imam Khomeini International Airport registered 47,446 takeoffs and landings in the last fiscal year that ended on March 20, 2019. Over 7.27 million passengers and 141,704 tons of cargos were transported from the airport during the period to rank third on the list of Iran's busiest airports in 2018.

## Tourism minister opens 11 eco-lodges in eastern province



**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — Iran's tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan on Monday inaugurated eleven eco-lodges during his visit to the eastern South Khorasan province.

The private sector has invested 103 billion rials (some \$2.5 million) and received 20 billion rials (some \$475,000) in bank loans to complete the projects, IRNA reported.

Iran's tourism ministry has set a target to help build 2,000 eco-lodges by 2021, believing such guest houses could cater to sustainable development and job creation

in the countryside and rural areas.

"Each eco-lodge unit averagely generates jobs for seven to eight people so that the scheme could create 160,000 jobs," Mounesan said in 2018.

Varied natural setting of the culturally-diverse country never disappoints visitors when it comes to eco-tourism, sightseeing and even tribal tourism as it is home to many regional people including ones with Turk and Arab elements in addition to the Kurds, Baloch, Bakhtyari, Lurs, and other smaller minorities such as Armenians, Assyrians, Jews, and others.



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Kakadu National Park

A World Heritage, Kakadu National Park is an archaeological and ethnological reserve in Australia, which has been inhabited continuously for more than 40,000 years

Kakadu National Park is a living cultural landscape with exceptional natural and cultural values. Kakadu's rock art provides a window into human civilization in the days before the last ice age.



Detailed paintings reveal insights into hunting and gathering practices, social structure and ritual ceremonies of Indigenous societies from the Pleistocene Epoch until the present.

The largest national park in Australia and one of the largest in the world's tropics, Kakadu preserves the greatest variety of ecosystems on the Australian continent including extensive areas of savanna woodlands, open forest, floodplains, mangroves, tidal mudflats, coastal areas and monsoon forests.

The park also has a huge diversity of flora and is one of the least impacted areas of the northern part of the Australian continent. Its spectacular scenery includes landscapes of arresting beauty, with escarpments up to 330 meters high extending in a jagged and unbroken line for hundreds of kilometers.

Many of the art and archaeological sites of the park are thousands of years old, showing a continuous temporal span of the hunting and gathering tradition from the Pleistocene Era until the present. While these sites exhibit great diversity, both in space and through time, the overwhelming picture is also one of a continuous cultural development.

(Source: UNESCO)

## The four biggest travel trends for 2020

By Alexandra Talty

From increased connectivity internationally to the advent of responsible tourism, the world of travel has changed dramatically in the past ten years.

People are talking about green travel and with the rise of carbon offsets for flying or hotels eschewing miniature bottles, it seems like the corporations have caught on. We're seeing social media influencers post non-descript locations in an effort to decrease over-tourism to beautiful places.

So which of these trends are here to stay for 2020? With the help of experts and data crunchers, here are my predictions for the biggest trends in travel for 2020.

**1. Sustainability will be cornerstone for high-end luxury travel experiences.**

Now that hotels and airlines are getting into the environmentally-friendly game, green travel is only going to become a bigger trend. And while the sector has a long way to go — some say it is one of the worst when it comes to single-use plastics — it is a step in the right direction.

With brands like Marriott swearing off single-use plastic toiletries, airports in Dubai banning all single-use plastic by the end of 2020, we're going to see green travel grow.

And when it comes to high-end experiences, zero-waste and carbon neutral will be the industry standard. Thanks to technology developments in sectors like solar, as well as consumer interest in green, luxury won't necessarily mean wasteful in 2020.

**2. Traveling off-the-beaten-path is the new Paris**  
As some destinations continue to dominate our social media feeds — Bali, I'm looking at you — there will be rise in so-called second-city travel.

Motivated in part to avoid crowds as well as higher prices, vacationers are beginning to see the benefit of checking out places that are a bit off the typical path.

And the numbers support this. According to Booking.com, 54% of global travelers want to play a part in reducing over-tourism and 51% interested in swapping destinations for a lesser known but similar alternative.

Either way, travelers are more likely to be taking the road less traveled in the year ahead.

**3. Big interest in 'new' ways of transport.**  
Call it the Greta Thunberg effect. As flight shame increases consumers are looking to more and different ways to travel.

In Europe domestic flights are reportedly down in a bid by people to decrease climate change. France has proposed

a ban on most internal flights.

According to Booking.com, over half of travelers don't mind taking time to reaching their destinations if they're traveling by a unique form of transport. As more consumers think about their environmental impact, there will be an increase in interest in older, most sustainable forms of transport like trains or boats.

**4. Motion-based travel is here to stay.**  
From walk throughs in beautiful places like the Pacific Coast Trail or Camino de Santiago to cycle-based trips in picturesque places like Ireland or Taiwan, motion-based travel is having a moment.

And the numbers back it up. According to Saddle Skeddaddle, UK's leading cycling vacation specialist, there was a 140% in cycle trip bookings from North America between 2014 and 2018.

With the rise of motion-based travel, the options for vacationers are more varied than ever. Think: bike-to-boat vacations in Croatia and swim-specific tours in the Maldives or the Bahamas.

So if you want your vacation to include some sweat in 2020, you're in luck.

(Source: Forbes)



# It doesn't have to be this way

By Scott Horton

**ANTIWAR** — This is all wrong. The entire war on terrorism, and every bit of the suffering, spending and lost liberty that has come with it, has been an unnecessary evil.

At the time of the September 11, 2001 attack which got this new era of war started, the enemy in Afghanistan numbered only 400 men. Their closest acolytes spread across the region, another few hundred. The George W. Bush administration could have negotiated their extradition. Short of that, special operations forces and the CIA Special Activities Division paramilitaries could have made short work of the small number of al Qaeda fighters, including Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri, if only they'd been allowed to. The whole mess could have been over by New Year's Day.

Instead, regime change was declared in Kabul and Baghdad, and later Tripoli, Sana'a and Damascus. The combination of Bush's Iraq War II and Barack Obama's half-regime change in Syria even led to the creation for three years of the "Islamic State" Caliphate of W. Bush's old war propaganda and bin Laden's wildest dreams in the lands where the Baathists used to rule; another regime which had to be changed.

Broadly defined, those fighters, not necessarily international terrorists, but fighters declared loyal to al Qaeda and its Islamic State spinoff, now number somewhere in the low tens of thousands from West Africa to Pakistan. Some war on terrorism.

Nevermind a counterfactual where a hero like Ron Paul or Harry Browne, or even the horrible Al Gore had won the presidency in the year 2000. If only George W. Bush had not hired Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and the neoconservatives, but instead had relied on the man the American people assumed would be running his foreign policy, his Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, none of this would have happened.

Of course in real life Powell clicked his heels and lied the American people into war with Iraq anyway. But there's little doubt that if Jr. had picked a run-of-the-mill VP and Secretary of Defense, and that they had kept the crazies in the basement, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during Bush Sr.'s Iraq War I in 1991 would have advised the son the same way he had told his father before: Don't go to Baghdad.

Without the destabilization of the region wrought by the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003-2011, including the rise of "al Qaeda in Iraq" and its veterans coming home to countries like Libya and Syria in the aftermath, there's little reason to think that there would have been major uprisings in those countries for Bush's successor Obama to arm and support.

Powell and Bush would've still probably wanted to stay on and expand the mission in Afghanistan, but contrary to some of the narratives spun in the new Afghan Papers release, there's no reason to think any of it would have gone any better if the U.S. kept its eye on the ball and not gone off to invade Iraq. Afghanistan's problems were never going to be fixed with infantry divisions either way.

But more than a million Iraqis, Libyans, Syrians and Yemenis would not have been killed. Nor would the more than 4,500 American soldiers who have been killed in the wars outside of Afghanistan in that time. Tens of thousands of Americans have been wounded. No one knows how many on "the other" side.

More than six trillion dollars would not have been diverted to such wasteful, destructive ends. Just two.

Another major consequence for the U.S. has been the exacerbation of enmity and resentment between American political factions. Much of our current state of tension can be traced back to the fight over invading Iraq in 2003 and the torture the Bush administration used to generate the lies to justify that war. Families were torn apart over partisan loyalty to horrible, dishonest men. It may be hard to remember or describe accurately now, but the stress was real. "How could fully half the population of this country not want to fight against Saddam Hussein who attacked us on 9/11?!" —filthy liberal traitors!" thought a hundred-million or so Americans.



"How in the world can you-all be so stupid?!" screamed the other half back at them. Abortion, gay marriage and other major cultural fault lines seemed like nothing in comparison at the time.

The entire edifice of the Homeland Security state erected around Washington since 2001 never had to be. The liberty lost to these institutions in this era will likely never be regained. In the late 1990s, when the Bill Clinton administration tried to institute new "Know your customer" regulations requiring banks to turn over records on all of their depositors to the feds on a regular basis, there was a huge outcry and the program was rolled back. But in the era of the War on Terrorism such regulations amounted to nothing but a footnote on massive power grabs such as the PATRIOT Act and the FBI, CIA and NSA's legal and illegal domestic spying programs.

Millions of people have been made to suffer the worst indignities at the hands of TSA goons at our airports.

Hundreds of Americans have been entrapped by government informants into bogus declarations of loyalty to terrorists and fake terrorist plots just to keep your family afraid while watching the nightly news.

In short, the American war on terrorism, in a mirror image of the tactics of our asymmetric enemies, has amounted to one big suicide attack itself. Our government lashes out in unreasoned violence and succeeds only in destroying everything it claimed it was here to protect.

This is what bin Laden wanted. He said it repeatedly back before the turn of the century. He would provoke the U.S. into the Afghan trap, destabilize the region, break America's bank, collapse our empire and force us out the hard way, just the same way the CIA had helped them to do to the Soviet Union in Afghanistan a generation before. Bush, Obama and Trump's wars in the Arab countries have just been icing on the cake. The U.S. has turned the entire region upside down and created open spaces for bin Ladenite militias to fight, where states used to be, for a thousand miles in every direction.

And as the current chief administrator of America's attempted military hegemony in the Middle East might complain, we, the American people, get absolutely nothing out of it whatsoever.

Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan's governments created this monster, Bush Sr. and Bill Clinton's governments turned them against us, then W. Bush and Barack Obama's governments exploited their violence

in order to make matters a hundred times worse.

Now, three years into Trump's presidency, despite all his talk about how invading the Middle East was the "worst decision ever," the commander in chief has only escalated every single one of the wars, excepting Pakistan: in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya and on down into West Africa. And there's no end in sight.

One of the worst parts of it all is that our government committed so much of this violence in the name of liberty and self-government, which has only helped to discredit the very best of what America truly does have to offer the world, if only we would live up to our ideals and show the rest of humanity what it looked like.

Instead, we got the whole dang century off on the wrong foot.

But it doesn't have to be this way. The American people can change it. As powerful as the war machine is, the question really all just comes down to public consensus. As this era comes to an end and a new one begins: do we believe in the government's bogus narratives still, or don't we anymore? Liberals, leftists and progressives care more about their own victimhood politics or they care more about what's happening to others? Conservatives just love to kick Arab ass or they're sick and tired of seeing good people die in no-win wars based on lies?

Government and TV cannot dictate the answers to these questions. It is up to the public to get it right and make it clear that this is what matters the most to us.

At some point power will have to give in. What will it take to make them?

Here at Antiwar.com, we've been doing our part for 25 years, bringing you the truth behind all of America's wars. Please join us by supporting our efforts at Antiwar.com/donate. Antiwar.com is a 510(c3) not-for-profit organization that relies on your support to do our important work. And you can write off your donations on your income taxes! What more can I say, besides, Thank you. It means everything.

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## Cuban envoy raps U.S. sanctions, urges continued resistance

**1 →** "In the negotiations, both countries must be respected, both countries must be considered equal, the values of both nations must be respected, and the independence and sovereignty of both countries must be recognized," he underlined.

"An important issue on which I insist is that neither the US nor any other foreign country could interfere in the basic tenets of our revolution or talk about them."

Asked about the US' hostile policies against Cuba and Iran and its attempts to counter their common revolutionary values, the envoy said Fidel Castro attached great significance to Iran. "One of the approaches we are trying to continue under any administration is that we follow Fidel Castro's path."

Hailing the Iranian nation and leadership for warding off the aggressors and sticking to the policy of resistance, Bandrich Vega said Cuba has been slapped with unfair sanctions for 60 years, but has always maintained its unity and safeguarded the Constitution.

"I must mention that unity was a key and a basic principle for reaching our goal... I can say it confidently that there is no doubt that we will never return to capitalism and the former situation, in which the country was under the hegemony of other countries," the Cuban ambassador underlined.

Asked about Washington's push for regime change in other countries by fomenting unrest and imposing economic sanctions, the envoy said history has proved that the US' ploys have been futile in Cuba and Iran.

"These (American) sanctions have failed, and will fail in future as well. Not only are the sanctions illegal, but they also violate international law and human rights."

Highlighting Cuba's commitment to even distribution of resources and social justice, the ambassador said Havana is also engaged in a battle against the US in the international arena. "In the United Nations polls, you can see how all countries vote in our favor and how we win by a majority."

The envoy further reaffirmed Cuba's commitment to supporting a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria, stressing that the Syrian people must decide their own fate without any direct or indirect interference of outsiders.

"Cuba also condemns the Israeli regime's attacks on Syria and the measures taken against that country (Syria). Cuba also condemns any support for paramilitary groups in Syria. We always pursue the negotiations held in Astana and Geneva. We wish Syria and its people peace and independence, and hope that the country could safeguard its sovereignty and independence.

"Cuba is proud to be the only Latin American country that deployed a military group to Syria and fought against the Zionist regime."

The ambassador further denounced the illegal US occupation of an area in Cuba's Guantanamo Bay, stressing that the US must lift the sanctions on Cuba and also pull out of the Guantanamo military zone.

"Fortunately, no military action has been taken against Cuba from that region in recent years, unlike the early years of the revolution. However, they (Americans) must withdraw from that area."

Bandrich Vega further decried the US plan for a maritime coalition in the Persian Gulf, stressing that regional security must be ensured by regional countries alone.

"The United States must shut down all of the military zones it has in other countries, and must return its military groups and corps to home," he said, adding, "Interference in the internal affairs of other countries has never yielded results and has always backfired."

"Nobody has allowed the United States to interfere, and nobody would interfere in the internal affairs of that country either. The world doesn't want to be like the US. The US must leave the world alone," the envoy underscored.

As regards the US' meddlesome policies on Bolivia, the Cuban ambassador said, "Latin America, referred to by some as the US' backyard, is facing a complicated situation. The US has always tried to put pressure on the independent countries (in the region) not only by imposing sanctions, but also through acts of interference, coups, and violent protests."

He went on to say that the US government resorts to force whenever it encounters pressure. "I believe that tough times are ahead, and I think the countries in the region (Latin America) must unite together and make efforts."

## Socialists pin Spain's future government formation on Catalan's release

Spain's state attorney called Monday for an imprisoned Catalan politician to be allowed to be sworn in as a member of the European Union Parliament, a step that could ease the way for a center-left governing alliance to take office in the country. The European Union's top court ruled this month that Oriol Junqueras, who served as Catalonia's vice president until 2017, had the right to parliamentary immunity when he was elected to the bloc's Parliament in May, when he was already on trial.

In response to the ruling, the Spanish state attorney's office Monday said that Junqueras should be allowed to leave prison to take his seat. But it said that a request should be made immediately for the European Parliament to drop the separatist politician's immunity, so that he would serve the 13-year prison term for his role in a secession bid two years ago.

The Supreme Court is expected to make a decision in coming days.

Junqueras remains the leader of the Catalan ERC party, whose 13 lawmakers' abstention from the 350-seat Congress of Deputies would allow the Socialists of caretaker Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and the anti-austerity United We Can (Unidas Podemos) to form a minority coalition government after months of political impasse in Spain.

The state attorney's move could lead ERC to abstain from the confidence vote, expected as soon as next week. ERC has said it will make its final decision in a party meeting next week.

(Source: AP)

## Joint naval drill with Russia, China shows Iran is not isolated: energy expert

By Payman Yazdani

**TEHRAN (MNA)** — Dr.Omid Shokri is of the view that the recent joint naval drill of Iran, Russia, and China shows that Iran is not isolated and shares some mutual interests with Russia and China.

The naval drills, the first of their kind, were launched on Friday with the aim of promoting the security of international trade in the strategic regions, as well as sharing experience among participants against piracy and marine terrorism.

The joint maneuvers with China and Russia can be considered as one of the greatest achievements of Iran's defense diplomacy, sending messages to the West amid US efforts to woo countries into a maritime coalition for patrols in the Persian Gulf.

To shed more light on the issue we reached out to Dr.Omid Shokri Kalehsar, Senior Energy Diplomacy, and Energy Security Analyst, contributor for United World International, an analyst at Gulf State Analytics.

Following is the text of our interview with him:

■ What is the importance of Iran, Russia, and China's joint military drill for these three countries from the energy perspective and also the importance of the region which the drill was held?

A: US sanctions against Iranian oil exports aimed at reducing Iran's oil exports not only reduced Iran's oil production and exports but also provided an opportunity for Iran's rivals in the oil market to gain part of Iran's share



of the world oil market. Iran was able to retain some of its share of the oil market, especially East Asia, by selling oil on the gray market. The control of resources and energy pathways (which play a role in energy security and economic growth of major energy-consuming countries) has always been a priority of world powers and factored in heavily to global political equations. The United States sees an opportunity to control oil trafficking in important export zones such as the Strait of Hormuz to reduce the economic growth of China and other countries.

For China, oil security is the most important issue in regard to energy security, while for other countries it is often gas or other fuels. According to the latest statistics, China is the biggest

beneficiaries of the Strait of Hormuz; they receive about 4 million barrels of oil per day from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates. Around 42% of China's imported oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz. China's main goal for participation in the naval drill is energy security. China has good relations with both Iran and Saudi and trying to solve any problem in the region which directly or indirectly treats china's energy security and china's economic growth.

After playing an active role in the Syrian crisis, Russia is trying to increase its influence and presence in the Middle East. Russia is by no means willing to control the US transit route and energy control resources. Last week, the US Senate approved a plan to ban

companies active in the Rolling Stream and Leaving Stream projects. Russian-American competition in the global energy market is increasing day by day. Reducing Russia's share of EU energy exports to the EU market is America's main goal.

China and Russia have incentives for a coalition with Iran, particularly the Russians who have suffered numerous sanctions and conflicts between the Russians, Americans, and Europeans after the invasion of the Crimea. The Chinese were attacked by Washington because of their political rivalries with the US. Chinese want to secure the Persian Gulf, the strategic region of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

■ Can Iran reach an alliance with Russia and China through the drill?

A: Looking at the larger geopolitics, it can be said that the Iran-China-Russia coalition is likely to form, and the joint patrol between Russia and China in the waters of Japan and South Korea in the East China Sea reinforces the possibility of becoming partners. The drone attacks on the Aramco refinery facility and drop in production and exports of the world's largest oil company made the US send more troops to Saudi Arabia at the request of bin Salman.

This naval drill shows that Iran is not isolated and shares some mutual interests with Russia and China at the moment, but it is not clear how long such collation will last; it should be noted that after the US withdrawal from JCPOA, both China and Russia energy firms' left Iran energy sector and other industries.



## Convert half of UK farmland to nature, urges top scientist

Half of the nation’s farmland needs to be transformed into woodlands and natural habitat to fight the climate crisis and restore wildlife, according to a former chief scientific adviser to the UK government.

Prof Sir Ian Boyd said such a change could mean the amount of cattle and sheep would fall by 90%, with farmers instead being paid for storing carbon dioxide, helping prevent floods and providing beautiful landscapes where people could boost their health and wellbeing.



Boyd said the public were subsidising the livestock industry to produce huge environmental damage. The professor spent seven years at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs before stepping down in August. Half of farmland, mostly uplands and pasture, produces just 20% of the UK’s food and would be better for used other public goods, he said.

Boyd, who became vegetarian during his time in Defra, said farmers were potentially “sitting on a goldmine” in terms of the payments they could receive for growing trees and removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

He said: “We need a large, radical transformation and we need to do it quickly, in the next decade. You can tick an immense number of boxes simultaneously.”

Farmers argue that uplands and pasture where livestock are reared cannot be used to grow crops. But Boyd said: “It would be much better to store carbon and water, grow trees and make the land available for people to improve their health and welfare.”

He said the 20% of food production lost by converting half of farmland could be made up by the development of vertical farms, where food is produced indoors in controlled and more efficient conditions. Boyd said: “I know there are big companies looking at how to really scale this up.”

A series of studies have concluded that people in rich nations need to eat much less meat to tackle the climate emergency and improve their health. “Most of the livestock production in the UK is unprofitable without public subsidy,” said Boyd. “The public are subsidising the production of livestock to produce huge environmental damages, all the way from greenhouse gas emissions to water pollution. Why should we continue to do that? It’s not sensible.

“If anybody asked me: ‘If there is one thing I can do to help save the planet, what would it be?’ I would say just eat a lot less meat. It’s the easiest thing to do. I’ve done it.”

People could reduce the meat they eat by 90% and have a perfectly balanced diet, Boyd said: “Freeing up 50% of the land would probably result in a reduction in the amount of livestock by about that amount, because it would be mostly livestock land we would be taking out of production.”

Farmers should be paid for changing the way land is used, he said. Current subsidies are largely based on the amount of land owned, but the government has pledged it will “move to a system based on public money for public goods” after the UK leaves the EU’s subsidy regime.

Farmland covers 70% of the UK, meaning that converting half to woodlands and parks would create new landscapes across a third of the country. In May, a report from Rewilding Britain called for a quarter of the nation to be returned to natural habitat.

The National Farmers Union recently published its plan to end the climate-heating emissions from agriculture by 2040. It said this could be done without cutting beef production or converting large areas of farmland into forest. Instead, the NFU said 75% of the UK’s agricultural emissions could be offset by growing plant fuel for power stations and then capturing and burying the carbon dioxide.

(Source: The Guardian)

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### Chinese poisoning

(September 18, 2002)

The authorities in China say a man has confessed to carrying out a mass poisoning last Saturday that has left at least thirty-eight people dead and hundreds of others severely ill. According to state run media the man has admitted to spreading powerful rat poison on food. This report from Rupert Wingfield-Hayes:

In the **aftermath** of Saturday’s mass poisoning in central China authorities **imposed** a **virtual news blackout**, refusing even to confirm how many people had died. Four days later they say they have the case **wrapped up**.

They say police have arrested a man who has admitted to spreading powerful rat poison on food at a popular snack shop in the town of Tangshan. Hundreds of people became suddenly and violently ill after eating food at the shop on Saturday morning.

Authorities now say thirty-eight people died, many of them children, on their way to a nearby school. State-run media says the man, who has admitted to carrying out the attack, claims he did so out of **revenge** over a business **dispute** with the owner of the shop. While the police account may well be true, there are serious concerns in China over the use of confessions. They’re often **extracted** under **duress** and, in such a **high profile** crime case as this, the police will have been under tremendous pressure to get a quick result.

#### Words

**aftermath:** the situation that results from an important event

**imposed:** forced to accept something

**virtual:** almost total

**news blackout:** censorship of all news

**wrapped up:** completed successfully

**dispute:** argument

**revenge:** the action of hurting or harming someone in return for an injury or wrong suffered at their hands

**extracted:** remove or take out, especially by effort or force

**duress:** forced to do something unwillingly

**high profile:** very important

(Source: BBC)

# WHO keeps silent on U.S. sanctions affecting Iranian MPS patients

**1 → EB patients wounded by U.S. sanctions**

Although food and medicine are claimed to be exempted from U.S. sanctions, financial and banking sanctions have limited the life-saving medicine trade which harshly targeted the patients suffering from Epidermolysis Bullosa (EB), a rare genetic disease that causes painful blistering of the skin.

Across the country, 700 people have been diagnosed with EB, but considering that EB is estimated to occur in 1 newborn

per 50,000 live births, it is suggested that in Iran 1,200 people are suffering EB.

In Iran, these patients are known as “butterflies” because their skin is as fragile as butterflies’ wings, EB patients are in desperate need of special bandages as even minor frictions cause severe painful blisters.

Without the bandages, they face difficulties even in their daily routine, including walking, eating or even breathing, and unfortunately there is no alternative treatment for such pain.



Exemptions for humanitarian trade (such as food, medicine and medical equipment) have not been effective in protecting Iranian patients from access to imported medicine, such as the bandages used for EB patients’ treatment.

Two or three years ago, access to wound

dressings was relatively easier for EB patients, but with the return of sanctions, over a year (May 2018-May 2029), 15 patients covered by EB Health House lost their lives like Ava a two-year-old girl in Ahvaz city who died of infection and lack of skin care.

## Dutch vet dedicates years to save Caspian seals in Iran

**ENVIRONMENT**  
**d e s k**

**TEHRAN** — Lenie ‘t Hart, a 78-year-old Dutch animal caretaker and animal rights activist, has spent 50 years on preserving seals, especially Caspian seals, which are exposed to environmental pollution and are at risk of extinction.

In 2008, Iran’s Department of Environment started the seal conservation program with the support of the Zeehondencrèche, a seal protection center founded by Lenie ‘t Hart.

She comes to Iran annually to help the endangered species of seals.

Caspian seal, the sole marine mammal inhabiting the Caspian Sea, is endangered according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), as recently demonstrated to have declined by more than 90 percent since the start of the 20th century.

According to the latest census conducted in 2016, the population of Caspian seals has reached less than 70,000; while their population once stood at about one million in the country.

Oil spill, industrial waste as well as heavy metals, agricultural pesticides, radioactive waste, wastewater and household waste entering the sea, and noise pollution caused by oil and gas refineries, and excessive boat traffic have pushed the species toward extinction through poisoning them.

Releasing and treatment of injured seals caught in fishing nets, recording data of seals, sampling live animals, and collecting tissue samples from carcasses to control Caspian ecosystem and its biological health, are among the measures Hart has taken in Iran.

She emphasizes that cooperation among Caspian Sea littoral states is essential to rescue the seals, adding “If the neighboring Caspian countries fail to find a suitable mechanism for rescuing the specie, the remaining population will be completely disappeared over the next ten years.”

She has set up a medical and research center with the help of Iranian colleagues in Ashuradeh, the only island of the Iranian coast of the Caspian Sea, to assist locals in rescuing the seals.

The Caspian seal medical and research center teaches fishermen the importance of seal protection by holding workshops. Now, fishermen cautiously rescue the seals trapped in fishing nets, and no longer see them as a dangerous piscivore. Moreover, the center rewards anyone who rescues a seal.

In addition to training the fishermen, she has asked Iranian Turkmen women whose husbands were fishermen to make carpets and rugs displaying seals’ picture.



She sells the rugs in the Netherlands and the revenue is provided to the fishermen’s families.

**■ Caspian seals population shrinking alarmingly**

Amir Shirazi, representative of the Caspian seal medical and research center in Iran, told IRNA on Monday that despite the sharp decline in this endangered population, hunting and exploitation of seals in Russia continues to be a serious problem which needs to be tackled.

The population of the valuable species in Iranian part of the Caspian Sea has also fallen sharply, which is mainly caused by being caught in the fisherman’s net, he lamented.

During the past hunting seasons (beginning on October 7), a number of Caspian seals were caught daily in the fisherman’s net, but this year only 4 cases have been reported, he stated.

He went on to say that another reason behind the decline of seals population in the country is the decline of fishes favored by seals such as Black Sea sprat, add-

ing, seals are likely to migrate due to insufficient food.

The Caspian Seal life can be divided into three periods, he said, adding, they spend the first period on breeding, the second period on hair shedding cycle and the final period of their life spends on migration to southern and central parts of the Caspian Sea including Iran, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan.

Caspian seals are usually born in Russian ice lands and due to the possibility of camouflage in ice and snow, or less likely to be hunted, but habitat destruction in Iran has resulted in a rare sad event, as two pups were born in Gilan province last year, but their carcass was found off the coast after a short time, he regretted.

Due to the occupation of the Caspian coastline in Iran by government agencies and individuals constructing villas and settlements, the Caspian seals can only rest on small parts of the shores of Miankaleh Wildlife Refuge and Ashuradeh Island if there are no fishermen, he lamented.

Increasing public knowledge and awareness of local communities is an effective step in achieving goals of protecting the seals in addition to involvement of prominent groups such as artists, athletes, and other social, cultural and political influencers, he concluded.

#### ■ Caspian seals included on CMS

Caspian seals are included in Appendices I and II of the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

As per the Appendix I of the Convention, poaching and illegal fishing activities is banned to save the animals from extinction, while Iran has not had a share in illegal fishing of the species since the very beginning, she concluded.

Over the 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CMS COP12) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), administered by UN Environment on October 28, 2017, Caspian seals were included on Appendices I and II of the Convention.

According to the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals Website, Appendix I comprises migratory species that have been assessed as being in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range.

Appendix II covers migratory species that have an unfavorable conservation status and that require international agreements for their conservation and management, as well as those that have a conservation status which would significantly benefit from the international cooperation that could be achieved by an international agreement.

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## Miankaleh peninsula faces serious risk of disappearing

Hossein Ali Ebrahimi, head of Mazandaran province department of department, has said that almost 20 percent of the peninsula’s wetlands have dried up.

Drought spell and climate change are two of the key factors contributing to the Miankaleh peninsula dryness, YJC quoted Ebrahimi as saying on Wednesday.

Unfortunately, the province of Mazandaran has also been negatively affected by climate change and less precipitation has increased the peninsula water deficits, Ebrahimi said, stating that additionally mismanagement, unsustainable agricultural practices, and severe depletion of the wells and groundwater resources have exacerbated Miankaleh peninsula’s condition.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “-ization, -isation”

■ **Meaning:** a word ending that indicates process or result

■ **For example:** The **characterization** is believable, but it’s still not a very good book.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Gnaw (away) at somebody/something

■ **Meaning:** to make someone feel worried or frightened, over a period of time

■ **For example:** Something was gnawing at the back of his mind.

### IDIOM

#### A breeze

■ **Meaning:** say that something was a breeze means that it was very easy or that everything went smoothly

■ **For example:** The interview was a breeze - barely 10 minutes and I got the job!

## تالاب میانکاله در معرض خشکی کامل

حسین علی ابراهیمی مدیر کل محیط زیست استان مازندران ۲۰ درصد از تالاب میانکاله کاملاً خشک شده است.

به گزارش روز چهارشنبه باشگاه خبرنگاران جوان ابراهیمی ادامه داد: تغییرات اقلیم شده و خشکسالی نیز بر این تالاب تاثیر گذار

گفت: متأسفانه استان مازندران نیز مانند سایر استان‌های کشور درگیر تغییرات اقلیم شده و خشکسالی نیز بر این استان تاثیر گذار بوده است به همین دلیل قسمتی تالاب میانکاله کاملاً خشک شده است. وی در ادامه افزود: علاوه بر تغییرات اقلیمی و کمبود نزولات آسمانی، نبود مدیریت صحیح منابع آبی برداشت غیرمجاز از چاه‌ها و و مناع آب زیرزمینی و کشاورزی ناپایدار در منطقه، وضعیت این تالاب بحرانی است.



# Den of espionage,terror sieged

Dozens of protesters broke into the U.S. embassy compound in Iraqi capital Baghdad on Tuesday after smashing a main door and setting fire to a reception area, prompting tear gas and sounds of gunfire.

Witnesses at the scene reported flames rising from inside the compound and at least three U.S. soldiers on the roof of the main building inside embassy.

Iraq's caretaker prime minister Adel Abdul Mahdi said that crowds should leave the compound "immediately."

"We recall that any aggression or harassment of foreign embassies will be firmly prohibited by the security forces," Abdel Mahdi's office said several hours after the attack began.

Meanwhile, U.S. Embassy in Baghdad has been evacuated after thousands of angry Iraqi demonstrators gathered outside the gates of the compound to condemn Washington's fatal military aggression that targeted Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).

Also on Tuesday, Iraqis held a massive funeral procession in the capital Baghdad for the victims of the U.S. air raids, which killed at least 25 PMU fighters from the Kata'ib Hezbollah faction and injured over 50 others in Anbar Province.

Caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi has announced three days of public mourning.

Thousands of angry protests managed to reach the U.S. diplomatic mission which is located in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, chanting 'Death to America' and burning U.S. flags.

The protesters further held up signs calling for the U.S. mission to be shut down and for the parliament to order U.S. forces



to leave Iraq.

"Parliament should oust U.S. troops, or else we will," one poster read.

Reuters cited two Iraqi Foreign Ministry sources as saying that the U.S. ambassador and other staff were evacuated from the embassy out of security concerns as protests raged outside.

Only a few embassy protection staff were left behind, according to the Reuters.

American forces deployed inside the compound have fired tear gas, flash bangs and stun grenades to disperse the crowd.

The protesters have breached the outer wall of the high-security compound. They have sprayed the words "Closed in the name of the people" on the gates of the American mission, throwing bricks and stones at the

surveillance cameras around the building.

Outside the mission, Iraqi security forces fired teargas as they tried to prevent the protesters from making their way into the diplomatic compound.

Only a small amount of teargas was used and the PMU members taking part in the rallies, using loud speakers, urged the crowd to disperse, a Reuters witness said.

The Iraqi caretaker premier called on the protesters to "immediately" leave the compound.

"We recall that any aggression or harassment of foreign embassies will be firmly prohibited by the security forces," Abdel Mahdi's office said.

■ **'U.S. unwanted in Iraq'**  
Hashd al-Shabi commander Faleh al-Fayyadh and Kata'ib Hezbollah commander

Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes along with other senior Hashd leaders were among the protesters.

Speaking to Reuters, Qais al-Khazali, the head of Asaib Ahl al-Haq — another PMU faction — said "Americans are unwanted in Iraq. They are a source of evil and we want them to leave."

Many protesters have set up tents, announcing plans for an indefinite sit-in until the embassy is closed and the ambassador expelled from the country.

Earlier in the day, Iraqi lawmakers chanted anti-U.S. slogans during a parliamentary session.

■ **Sadr says ready to work with Hashd al-Sha'abi to end U.S. presence**

Senior Iraqi Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr says he is willing to work with the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) -- better known as Hashd al-Sha'abi -- to end the United States military presence in Iraq through political and legal means.

In comments on Monday, Sadr warned that he will "take other actions" in cooperation with his rivals to kick out U.S. troops if political and legal means do not work.

He at the same time called on Iraqis to avoid "irresponsible actions" that can be used to justify attacks on the Arab country.

Fighters loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr fought U.S. troops for years following Washington's invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Sadr's comments came after the U.S. forces in Iraq carried out an airstrike on a number of PMU facilities in the western Anbar Province, which led to the killing of nearly 30 people and injuring of over 50 others.

(Source: agencies)

## Sultan Qaboos 'stable', treatment ongoing

Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said is in a "stable condition" and continuing a program of medical treatment, state television said on Tuesday, citing a statement from the sultan's office.

Concern had grown over the sultan's health after he spent a week in Belgium undergoing medical treatment this month and Omani authorities said nothing about his health after his return.

An ally of the West, Qaboos, 79, has ruled the Gulf Arab state since leading a bloodless coup in 1970 with the help of Britain, Oman's former colonial power.

Qaboos has no children and has not publicly named a successor. A 1996 statute says the ruling family will choose a successor within three days of the throne's becoming vacant.

If they fail to agree, a council of military and security officials, Supreme Court chiefs and heads of the two assemblies will put in power the person whose name has been secretly written by the sultan in a sealed letter.

In his first comments to the country since returning, the statement from the royal court said Qaboos thanked his people for the good wishes they had sent him.

(Source: AFP)

## Death toll from tribal clashes in Sudan's Darfur rises to 24

Sporadic tribal clashes between Arabs and non-Arabs continued Tuesday in Sudan's West Darfur province, as the death toll climbed to at least two dozen people, some of them burned to death, according to a local aid group working in the area.

Some of the 24 dead were children, said Adam Regal, a spokesman for a local organization that helps run refugee camps in the area. He said at least 17 others were wounded.

The clashes, which erupted over the weekend, pose a challenge to efforts by Sudan's transitional government to end decades long rebellions in areas like Darfur. Rebel groups from Darfur have now suspended their peace talks with the government in response to the tribal clashes and called for an investigation.

Sudan is on a fragile path to democracy after a popular uprising led the military to overthrow longtime autocratic President Omar al-Bashir in April. A military-civilian government now rules the country. One of its key priorities has been ending the insurgencies in Sudan's far-flung provinces in order to slash military spending, which takes up much of the national budget.

Regal shared footage showing burned properties, as well as graphic images of dead bodies and wounded people with blood-stained clothes. His aid group said looting and destruction of property by militias took place in at least three refugee camps in the town of Genena.

Sudan's ruling Sovereign Council said Monday they would deploy "sufficient" troops to the region to help contain the deadly clashes, which grew out of a skirmish between two people, one of whom, an Arab, was stabbed to death.

(Source: APO)

## UN envoy says UK 'contributed' to Assange's torture, urges British govt. to release him immediately

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer has published a letter to the UK government, asking it to end the detention of Julian Assange, warning that his health may soon reach a "critical" stage, including risk of death.

The scathing letter, which was penned by Melzer on October 29, urged the British authorities to review the WikiLeaks founder's prison conditions or release him immediately. However, having received no response from London in the last 60 days, Melzer decided to go public and publish the document in full on Tuesday.

In the letter, the UN special rapporteur described the detention regime that Assange has to endure in the clandestine top-security Belmarsh Prison as "unnecessary, disproportionate, and discriminatory." He said it was designed to "perpetuate [Assange's] exposure to psychological torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Melzer proceeded to admonish the British government for taking four months to respond to his previous letter of May 27, which was penned after Melzer visited Assange in the high-security facility on May 9.

Melzer wrote that a "thorough forensic and psychiatric examination" performed during his visit showed "a clear pattern of symptoms typical for persons having been exposed to psychological torture for a prolonged period of time." But instead of heeding his recommendations, the UK turned a blind eye to the findings, preferring not to do anything to alleviate the journalist's suffering.

(Source: RT)

## Kim calls for 'military countermeasures'

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has called for active "diplomatic and military countermeasures" to preserve the country's security in a lengthy speech at a key political conference possibly meant to legitimize important changes to his nuclear diplomacy with the United States.

Kim spoke during the ruling Workers' Party meeting, which is expected to continue for the fourth day on Tuesday, according to the Korean Central News Agency.

During his seven-hour speech on Monday, Kim issued national goals for rebuilding North Korea's economy and preparing active and "offensive political, diplomatic and military countermeasures for firmly preserving the sovereignty and security of the country," the state media said on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, Kim is expected to use his annual New Year's address to announce significant changes to his economic and security policies.

Some experts believe Kim could use the speech to declare he is suspending his nuclear negotiations with Washington, which are in a deadlock over disagreements in exchanging sanctions relief and disarmament, and he could possibly revive confrontation by lifting a self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and long-range missile tests.

(Source: al Jazeera)

## Trump, Putin discussed Russia attack, arms control, relations:White House

The U.S. German and Israeli ambassadors in Warsaw weighed in Monday against claims by Russian President Vladimir Putin that Poland bears part of the blame for the outbreak of World War II.

"Dear President Putin, Hitler and Stalin colluded to start WWII. That is a fact. Poland was a victim of this horrible conflict," Ambassador Georgette Mosbacher said on Twitter in English and Polish.

The Russian Embassy countered with a tweet saying: "Dear Ambassador, do you really think that you know about history any more than you do about diplomacy?"

World War II began on Sept. 1, 1939, when Nazi German troops invaded Poland. Two weeks later, the Soviet Red Army also attacked embattled Poland from the east, in what Poles still refer to as a "stab in the back." Days earlier, Germany and Russia had signed a pact with a secret protocol to carve up Poland and the Baltic states between themselves. Some six million Poles lost their lives during the whole of WWII.

Recently, Putin has argued that collusion between Western powers and Adolf Hitler paved the way for World War II. He also cast Poland as an anti-Semitic country that welcomed Hitler's plans to destroy Europe's Jews.

German Ambassador Rolf Nikel and Israeli Ambassador Alexander Ben Zvi took a stand Monday to blame the war's outbreak on the August 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact.

Polish historian Mariusz Wolos told the Onet portal that Putin is aiming at "creating discord between Poland and

the U.S. and the international Jewish diaspora."

He said Putin is trying to erase Stalin's alliance with Hitler from history.

British historian Roger Moorehouse tweeted to say that Putin's words "provoked a much better popular understanding of the pact's true nefarious nature and significance."

On Sunday, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki protested Putin's comments, saying they are deliberate "lies" and arguing that Putin is trying to deflect attention from recent political failures by Russia.

Poland did not invite Putin to international ceremonies Sept.1 in Warsaw marking the 80th anniversary of the war's outbreak. He is also not to attend Jan. 27 observances of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp that Nazi Germany operated in occupied Poland.

Relations between Russia and Poland have been tense since Poland threw off Moscow-controlled communist rule 30 years ago and began moving closer to the West. Poland has since joined NATO and the European Union, and has cultivated a close alliance with the United States.

Poland has also been making efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian gas and oil and has vocally opposed Nord Stream 2, a major Russian-German gas pipeline under construction that will transport Russian gas to Western Europe, bypassing Poland and Ukraine.

(Source: daily Star)

## U.S., German, Israeli envoys weigh in on Russian WWII claims

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(Source: APO)

## Thousands trapped on Australian beaches by dangerous bushfires

Thousands swarmed to beaches on Australia's east coast on Tuesday to escape fierce wildfires bearing down on several seaside towns, as the government readied naval vessels and military helicopters to aid firefighting and evacuations. Government officials called for Australian military support and assistance from U.S. and Canadian fire crews as authorities confirmed two people had died overnight, taking to 11 the total deaths in wildfires since the beginning of October.

The huge bushfires have destroyed more than 4 million hectares (10 million acres), with new blazes sparked into life almost daily by extremely hot and windy conditions in bushland left tinder dry after a

three-year drought.

Fueled by searing temperatures and high winds, more than 200 fires are now burning across the southeastern states of New South Wales and Victoria, threatening several towns and snapping their power, mobile and internet links.

"This is absolutely one of the worst fire seasons we've seen," Shane Fitzsimmons, commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service, told a briefing in Sydney.

"It's going to be a very long, difficult dangerous night still ahead. It's going to be another difficult day again tomorrow." Authorities said the main firefront was moving up the coast and warned those in its path to seek shelter close to the beach.

About 4,000 people in the town of Mallacoota in Victoria headed to the waterfront after the main road was cut off. Those who could not make it there scrambled for shelter in a gymnasium and other public buildings, as emergency sirens wailed.

Some of those trapped in the town posted images of blood-red, smoke-filled skies on social media. One beachfront photograph showed people lying shoulder-to-shoulder on the sand, some wearing gas masks.

It looked "a lot like Armageddon," said David Jeffrey, the owner of the Wave Oasis guesthouse, adding, "It's terrifying."

(Source: reuters)

## Israeli top court hears case on Netanyahu's future

Israel's Supreme Court has convened to hear a petition on whether an indicted member of parliament can form a new government, a key test case for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to see if he can prolong his political career after elections in March.

If the court decides Netanyahu is ineligible, it could precipitate a constitutional crisis in Israel, and exacerbate the already tenuous ties between the Israeli government and judiciary.

The court is not expected to hand down

an immediate ruling and may ask for a full panel of the court to convene on the matter. Either way, it was wading into uncharted territory.

Israeli law requires Cabinet ministers and mayors to resign if indicted, but does not specify so for a sitting prime minister.

There are no restrictions on Netanyahu to run in the March 2 election - the third polls in less than a year - but good governance groups are appealing whether he could be tasked with forming a new government if

he emerges victorious.

Given the shaky legal ground, the court could deem the scenario hypothetical and delay the case until that happens.

The hearing comes as Netanyahu appears poised to seek immunity from the corruption charges against him, delaying the prospect of a trial until the elections when he hopes to have a parliamentary majority coalition that will shield him from prosecution.

The request for immunity is likely to

languish under the current parliament.

Normally, a request for immunity would need to be approved by a parliamentary committee and then submitted to a full vote. But the committee charged with handling such matters does not exist because a government was never formed after September's election.

The attorney general cannot file the indictment until the question of immunity is settled, delaying any court proceedings.

(Source: al Jazeera)



Moreno happy to be ‘number one’ at Monaco after Spain split

Robert Moreno was unveiled as the new coach of Monaco on Monday, admitting his bitter bust-up with Spain boss Luis Enrique had paved the way for him to become “number one”.

Moreno, 42, takes over at 2004 European and 2017 French champions Monaco after Leonardo Jardim was sacked for the second time. However, he arrives at the Ligue 1 outfit having been accused of “disloyalty” by Enrique.

Moreno was previously Spain assistant coach but was promoted to the top job after Enrique resigned to take care of his nine-year-old daughter Xana, who died in August of cancer.

“I had nine extraordinary years at his side,” said Moreno on Monday. “But that is all in the past. Today is my presentation as Monaco coach. I have coached since I was 14 and obtained my UEFA licence at 25.

“I always wanted to become the number one. This is the start of that stage,” added Moreno who guided Spain through qualifying for Euro 2020 in the absence of Enrique.

He arrives at the Russian-backed principality club with the team in seventh place in Ligue 1 and 17 points behind leaders and defending champions PSG.

Jardim, who took Monaco to the league title in 2017, was fired at the weekend, just over a year since he was previously sent packing. Moreno said he had been considering a range of offers since his acrimonious November departure from the Spanish national team.

“The Monaco project had the best guarantees and conditions,” he said after signing a deal until June 2022.

“I knew that I wanted to work at a high level and I wanted a project that matched this desire. Coming here means growing as a coach and a person.”

(Source: Mirror)

Rangers say striker Morelos ‘racially abused’ in win over Celtic

Glasgow club Rangers have said striker Alfredo Morelos was racially abused during their 2-1 Scottish Premiership victory at ‘Old Firm’ rivals Celtic on Sunday.

Rangers got their first win at Celtic Park since 2010, closing the gap on the leaders to two points with a game in hand. Colombian striker Morelos was sent off in stoppage time after receiving a second booking for a dive in the box.

Morelos appeared to make a gesture with his hand across his neck to Celtic fans following his dismissal.

“We believe Alfredo was racially abused and we would expect now that all measures will be taken to identify and deal with those responsible,” a Rangers spokesman told Sky Sports.

Celtic said in a statement that they had not received any reports that the 23-year-old was racially abused.

“We are aware of the gestures made by the player towards Celtic supporters,” Celtic said. “We have received no reports of any racial abuse but would fully investigate any should these be brought to our attention.”

(Source: Goal)

Rooney gets starting nod from Derby boss

England’s record goalscorer Wayne Rooney will make his debut for second-tier Derby against Barnsley on Thursday, the club’s manager Phillip Cocu confirmed.

Rooney, 34, joined Derby as a player-coach from MLS side DC United but has been ineligible to play for his new side until January.

“If a player with the qualities, career and the experience of Rooney (is available) you have to be very happy and glad he is here,” said Cocu after Monday’s 2-1 home win over Charlton in the Championship.

“He’s fit, he can start but he will need a few games. Expectation will be high when he starts playing but we have to give him a few games to build up his minutes and get in the team.

“So maybe not perfect from the start but it’s important he will get in the team as soon as possible so we get a certain shape in our team.”

Rooney’s debut can’t come soon enough for Derby.

Their win on Monday moved them into 17th place in English football’s second-tier.

However, they are still nine points shy of the play-off spots and 21 behind the two automatic promotion places.

On Monday, teenage midfielder Jason Knight scored his first goals in professional football to give Derby the three points, ending a run of seven games without a win.

(Source: Sun)

‘Still a lot of fire’: Sharapova accepts Brisbane wildcard

Former world number one Maria Sharapova said Tuesday she still had “a lot of fire” as she attempts to resurrect her career after an injury-plagued 2019.

The five-time major winner will open her 2020 campaign in Brisbane after being awarded a wildcard by organizers in preparation for the Australian Open later in January.

“To be fair when I was younger I never saw myself playing past 30,” the 32-year-old Russian told reporters in Brisbane.

“But I still feel there is a lot in me to give. I still have a lot of fire in me and I am big competitor.”

Sharapova has not played since a first-round loss to career-long rival Serena Williams at the US Open in August.

She has slipped to 133 in the world rankings after a 2019 season ruined by a shoulder injury which limited her to 15 competitive matches.

“As long as the shoulder stays healthy and my body allows me to, I hope there is a lot of time left for me,” she said.

Sharapova won the Brisbane title in 2015 and joins a high-class field for next week’s event spearheaded by Australia’s world number one Ashleigh Barty and Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka.

World number two Karolina Pliskova is also playing as are fellow top 10 stars Elina Svitolina, Petra Kvitova and Kiki Bertens.

“It’s a fresh start after a tough last season,” said Sharapova. “There were a lot of ups and downs, there were times when I was ready but the shoulder wasn’t.

“But I have had a fairly good off season and I am motivated to compete. At this point in my career when I have that feeling, it’s a good sign.”

(Source: Mirror)

WADA better positioned to wipe out drug cheats, chief says

Outgoing WADA President Craig Reedie says the Russian doping scandal shows that clean sport is under attack, but the anti-doping organization now has the tools to better weed out drug cheats.

Taking stock of his six years at the helm of the World Anti-Doping Agency, the 78-year-old Briton insists the group is “stronger” than ever as it faces the “unprecedented” challenge of the doping crisis in Russia.

“Considering the last six years in particular, I am especially pleased to see how WADA responded to the challenges it faced since 2014, in particular the Russian doping crisis,” he said in his end-of-term message.

The crisis, he recalled, led to the creation within WADA of an “intelligence and investigations” service, which played “a decisive role” in the recent decision to exclude Russia from major world sports competitions for falsifying anti-doping data.

The Russian anti-doping agency RU-SADA announced Friday that it has challenged the exclusion.

Ultimately, it will be up to the Court of



Arbitration for Sport to rule on the matter, said Reedie, whose term officially ends Tuesday.

“Throughout this process WADA has shown it has the will, the expertise and the legal tools to stand up effectively to this unprecedented level of cheating and

corruption,” he said.

WADA decided on December 9 to ban Russia from participating in major international events for four years, including the 2020 and 2022 Olympic Games and the 2022 World Cup.

Only handpicked Russian athletes will

be able to participate in the competitions, but under a neutral flag and without the national anthem being played.

WADA estimated that Russia had “manipulated” the data of the Moscow anti-doping laboratory which were transmitted to it at the beginning of the year, an umpteenth rebound in a scandal which started with the revelation in 2015 of an institutional doping practiced since 2011 and involving senior officials, secret agents and trafficked urine vials.

The significant extent of state-sponsored doping in Russia, notably between 2011 and 2015, was revealed in an independent report by sports lawyer Richard McLaren, released in 2016.

The issue has dealt a colossal blow to the status of post-Soviet Russia as a major sports power after hosting events such as the 2013 World Athletics Championships, the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi and the 2018 World Cup.

The Sochi Games later became notorious for the number of doping violations by prominent Russian athletes.

(Source: AFP)

Raiola claims Manchester United could ruin Diego Maradona or Pele



Mino Raiola is a very busy man as we approach the January transfer window. Days after securing Zlatan Ibrahimovic’s return to AC Milan, the controversial agent has set his sights on a cut of another big move: Paul Pogba.

As much as Manchester United fans might want to ignore Raiola, he is potentially the one person who knows the truth about whether the World Cup winner will leave Old Trafford next month.

We say he has been busy, not just because he is preparing for the market to open, but also because of his extensive media duties.

He has already spoken to The Telegraph and Sky Sports about Pogba’s future, always saying conflicting things about the Frenchman’s situation.

However, his most damning comments come in Italian outlet La Repubblica, with whom he was speaking following Ibrahimovic’s arrival at the San Siro.

This time, it was a brief dig at United but one which makes it clear in no uncertain terms that he does not intend to do business with them again.

“Today, I wouldn’t bring anyone there,” he said. “They would also ruin [Diego] Maradona, Pele and [Paolo] Maldini.

“Paul needs a team and a club, one like the first, Juventus.”

Raiola also told Sky Sports that while he does, in fact expect Pogba to stay at

United until at least the summer, going forward he needs to be “in a club that I hope fights for the league and hopefully the Champions League”.

His warning that he won’t allow his clients to join the 20-time English champions may sound like an empty threat and a needless insult, but his prophecy has already started to come true this week after he oversaw the transfer of United target Erling Haaland to Borussia Dortmund.

Reports quickly emerged suggesting the Red Devils had themselves backed out of the deal because of Raiola’s demands, including a low buyout clause and a percentage of any future sales.

Yet he is likely to further irk Ed Woodward and co. by hinting to the Telegraph that United were the architects of such rumors.

“I do not know if Manchester United are briefing this but if they are then they are covering their own loss and that I find strange and disappointing,” he added.

While United were the team with “the most direct contact” with the Norwegian striker, he chose not to go to the Premier League because he felt Dortmund would be better for his development.

Judging by his latest comments, nobody would bet against Raiola having had a quiet word in Haaland’s ear either.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Arsenal against United recalls brighter times for faded giants



At the start of this decade, clashes between Arsenal and Manchester United were still potentially title-deciding affairs, but when the pair meet on New Year’s Day at the Emirates they will have more modest goals in mind.

United have not won a league title since Alex Ferguson’s final season in charge seven years ago, while Arsenal have to go back to 2004 for the last time they raised the Premier League trophy, during the reign of Arsene Wenger.

Both clubs entered this season hoping to finish in the top four, but while Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has guided United to fifth place, just a point off the Champions League spots, Arsenal languish in 12th, 11 points behind fourth-placed Chelsea after their home defeat to Frank Lampard’s side on Sunday.

Arsenal’s poor form led to the dismissal of their Spanish manager Unai Emery and the arrival of his compatriot, former Gunners midfielder Mikel Arteta.

Having left his role as Pep Guardiola’s assistant at Manchester City, Arteta is talking big despite beginning with a draw at Bournemouth before Sunday’s loss.

“We are the biggest football club in England, and we have to play a little bit with that arrogance, that belief,” Arteta told Sky Sports, urging the club’s fans to make the Emirates a fortress again.

“This stadium has to create fear again. I

used to hate coming here as an opponent, and we need to use that power. The opponent must be uncomfortable playing here,” he said.

“It was incredible to play here as an Arsenal player. It’s one of the most beautiful, exciting stadiums in the world. When this crowd gets going, and you feel them right behind the team, it’s an incredible place,” he added.

United head to London on the back of wins over Newcastle and Burnley, and with French forward Anthony Martial and England’s Marcus Rashford having struck five times in those games.

French midfielder Paul Pogba is expected to be part of the United squad for the clash with the Gunners as he continues his return from a three-month injury absence.

Runaway leaders Liverpool host Sheffield United on Thursday, looking to maintain their unbeaten run and 13-point advantage over second-placed Leicester City.

Brendan Rodgers’ Foxes are at Newcastle, while third-placed Manchester City have a tricky test at home to Everton, who have won both their games since appointing Carlo Ancelotti as their new manager.

David Moyes begins his second spell as West Ham United manager, following the dismissal of Chilean Manuel Pellegrini, when the Hammers host fellow strugglers Bournemouth.

(Source: Reuters)

Major progress made across Qatar’s FIFA World Cup™ stadiums portfolio in 2019

One of the Qatar’s Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy’s major highlights during 2019 was the inauguration of the spectacular Al Janoub Stadium. The 40,000-capacity venue, designed by architectural legend Zaha Hadid, was unveiled to the world in May when it hosted the Amir Cup final.

Al Janoub Stadium became the second FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ tournament venue to open after Khalifa International Stadium’s successful redevelopment was completed in 2017.

Six more stadiums are being constructed for Qatar 2022, with three of them – Education City Stadium, Al Bayt Stadium and Al Rayyan Stadium – in the final stages of delivery. All the venues will be completed and tested well in advance of the tournament, which kicks off on 21 November 2022.

Here is a rundown of the latest progress update from each of the stadiums:

■ **Khalifa International Stadium**

It’s been a busy year for Qatar’s national stadium. It hosted the IAAF World Athletics Championships in September and October before being a host venue for two major football tournaments: the Persian Gulf Cup and FIFA Club World Cup™.

■ **Al Janoub Stadium**

Al Janoub Stadium became the first Qatar 2022 to be built from scratch when it was inaugurated in May ahead of the Amir Cup final between Al Duhail and Al Sadd. Since then, the stadium has hosted a number of high-profile football matches, including FIFA World Cup™ qualifiers for the Qatar national team and the sold-out Persian Gulf Cup



semi-final between Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

■ **Education City Stadium**

Construction has been completed at the 40,000-capacity venue, nicknamed the ‘Diamond in the Desert’. The stadium had been due to host the second semi-final and final during the FIFA Club World Cup™ – but it wasn’t possible to organize the necessary test events and obtain the relevant health and safety permits prior to the tournament. The stadium will now open in 2020.

■ **Al Bayt Stadium**

Designed to resemble a Bedouin tent, the 60,000-capacity Al Bayt Stadium will host matches up to the semi-finals stage in 2022. Fit-out works are advancing rapidly, including the installation of furniture in the skyboxes and executive lounges. Access bridges are being built, while external work – such as tree planting, landscaping and the development of roads and car parks – is progressing.

■ **Al Rayyan Stadium**

The pitch was recently laid at this 40,000-capacity venue, which will host matches up to the quarter-finals stage in 2022. Seats are being installed at the stadium, while the external render has almost been completed. Roof cladding is also in progress.

■ **Lusail Stadium**

The venue for Qatar 2022’s opening match and final is progressing well. All 48 structural V-frames have been installed, along with six out of the 24 roof compression ring sections. Preparations for the cable net roof installation have commenced at the field of play level.

■ **Ras Abu Aboud Stadium**

This 40,000-capacity stadium will be constructed using the shipping containers which transport materials for its development. Post-2022, it will become the first fully demountable stadium in FIFA World Cup™ history. 158 containers have been delivered to the construction site, with 30 already installed. The fabrication for the steel structure is 25% complete, while the fabrication of bleachers, concourse slabs and roof steel continues. Underground utilities, including the drainage network, are more than 50% complete.

■ **Al Thumama Stadium**

Once complete, this 40,000-capacity venue will resemble the ‘gahfiya’ – a cap worn by men across the Middle East and Arab world. At present, 26 of the 40 façade columns have been installed, along with 14 out of 20 roof trusses. The bleacher installation has reached 90%, while blockworks are 97% complete.

(Source: Sc.qa)



# Kolakovic optimistic about securing spot at Olympics

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran volleyball head coach Igor Kolakovic is optimistic that his team can finish first at the 2020 Men's Asian Olympic Qualification Tournament.

Iranian have been drawn in Pool A along with China, Chinese Taipei and Kazakhstan.

Pool B consists of Australia, Qatar, India and Korea.

Eight teams will strut their stuff in the Men's Tokyo Volleyball Qualification 2020 at Jiangmen Sports Center Gymnasium, China from Jan. 7 to 12, 2020 to vie for the top honor and the lone ticket for the Tokyo 2020.

The volleyball training camp for the competition has kicked off in Tehran's Azadi Hall.

"We have an important tournament ahead and know that it will be difficult task because all participant teams will take part at the competition looking to book a berth at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics," Kolakovic told the reporters.

"The year 2019 has been a busy calendar year for FIVB and we have little time for recovery," he added.

"We have a lot of faith in our team and are hopeful of winning a berth at the Olympics, that's why we are here. We have no choice but to win a place at Tokyo," the Montenegrin coach stated.

Iran will participate at the 2020 Men's Asian Olympic Qualification Tournament without warm-up games.

"We invited Tunisia, Egypt and Qatar to Iran but they didn't accept our invitation. France also said they will host us in January and it doesn't work," Kolakovic concluded.

Iran will start the campaign with a match against Chinese Taipei on Jan. 7 and meet Kazakhstan and China in the following days.



## Iran chosen to host FIBA U16 Asian Championship



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran has been chosen to host the 2020 FIBA U16 Asian Championship by FIBA Asia.

The competition, which will be held Tehran from March 23 to April 2, 2020, brings 16 Asian teams together at the Azadi Hall.

The event will also act as the FIBA U17 Basketball World Cup qualification.

The top four teams will book their places

at the World Cup in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Iran have never participated in the last five editions of the FIBA U17 Basketball World Cup.

The FIBA U16 Asian Championship is an under 16 basketball championship in the International Basketball Federation's FIBA Asia zone. The event started in 2009 and is held bi-annually.

Iran won a bronze medal in the first edition held in 2009 in Johor Bahru, Malaysia.

## Jaber Sadeghzadeh retains Iran's Pahlavan title



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Jaber Sadeghzadeh retained title of Iran's Pahlavani Wrestling Championship for the sixth time on Monday.

He defeated Mehdi Hassanpour in the final match of the +100kg weight class.

The final day of Iran's Pahlavani Wrestling Championship was held on Monday in Tehran's Iran Mall.

Pahlavan of Iran is an annual Pahlavani Wrestling competition held in Iran,

in which athletes from across the country participate to achieve the title.

Though the competition has ancient roots, its modern form has been held since 1944.

Winner of this title is called Pahlavan and wears the special Bazouband (Armband).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) registered Pahlavani and Zourkhaneh rituals in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2014.

## Asian Paralympic Committee launch new Strategic Plan

The Asian Paralympic Committee (APC) launched its new Strategic Plan which will take the organization through to 2023 and follows the launch of the International Paralympic Committee's new plan which was unveiled in July.

Work began on the new plan in February at the APC's General Assembly and Conference when the NPCs who make up the APC's membership took part in facilitated workshops. These identified the key challenges that the Paralympic Movement in Asia faces and outlined the membership's vision for the role that the APC should play in meeting these challenges.

The process, led by an outside expert Eng. Hatim Abdulrahman, has seen the new Board of the APC discuss and develop a new Vision, Mission and Values for the organization and set five new strategic priorities with targeted outcomes.

The new vision is 'Make for an inclusive Asia through Para-sport' which aligns closely with the new IPC vision 'Make for an inclusive world through Para-sport'. The new Mission 'To lead the Paralympic movement in Asia, deliver successful and sustainable Asian Para Games and support the NPCs to enable Para-athletes to achieve sporting excellence from grassroot to elite level' reflects the role of the APC as the IPC's representative in the region and organizer of the Asian Para Games, the largest multi para-sport event outside of the Paralympic Games.

Speaking about the new Vision and Mission, APC President Majid Rashed said: "The Paralympic Movement in Asia has been growing rapidly, fueled in part by having three Paralympic Games in quick succession in our region. However, there is still a long way to go to ensure that Asian para-athletes get the opportunities and recognition that they deserve. Our new strategic plan will shape the APC's activity through to 2023 to make sure that the organization is focused on doing everything that we can to grow, develop and sustain the Movement right across Asia. We're looking forward to delivering the plan on behalf of our members and for the benefit of Asian para-athletes."

The plan also identifies three new values for the APC: Solidarity, Diversity and Sustainability. These are designed to specifically meet the needs of the region whilst complementing the Paralympic Values.

In addition, five new Strategic Priorities have been de-

veloped. These are:

- \* Enhance the positive impact of the Paralympic Movement in Asia
- \* Improve the standard of the Asian Para Games and leave a legacy
- \* Drive a cultural shift through Para Sport for an inclusive Asia
- \* Strengthen APC and Asian Para Games brands
- \* Develop excellence in our organization, operations and governance

Tarek Souei, APC CEO, said: "We welcome the new Strategic Plan and the sharper focus that it puts on our Executive Team to deliver on behalf of the Paralympic Movement in Asia. We are a very diverse region and face many different challenges but we all share the same vision to use the power of para-sport to drive inclusion not just for para-athletes but for all people with impairment across the region."

We saw this power in action in Indonesia in 2018 at the Asian Para Games and determined to build on this for the Hangzhou 2022 Asian Para Games"

(Source: Mediaoffice.ae)

## Lee, Paik out of Korea Republic squad

Korea Republic will be without Lee Kang-in and Paik Seung-ho for their challenge in AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020.

The Korea Football Association announced on Monday that Valencia CF midfielder Lee and SV Darmstadt 98 midfielder Paik Seung-ho are not available for the tournament which also serves as the Qualifiers for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Head coach Kim Hak-bum had announced his 22-man roster last Tuesday, leaving one spot open in hopes of filling it with either Lee or Paik.

According to the KFA, Valencia would have agreed to release Lee if not for his quad injury while Darmstadt wanted Paik to play in the group stage only, whereas Korea Republic wanted the 22-year-old for the entire competition.

German club SC Freiburg, however, have released midfielder Jeong Woo-yeong. The 20-year-old is the only Europe-based player on coach Kim's team.

Both Lee and Paik have played for



the senior national team.

Lee had an outstanding FIFA U-20 World Cup in June, winning the Golden Ball as Korea Republic emerged runners-up.

The KFA said FC Seoul defender Yoon Jong-gyu is the 23rd player in the squad and he will train Korea Republic for their training camp in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Korea Republic will face defending champions Uzbekistan, China PR and Islamic Republic of Iran in Group C at Thailand 2020.

They will open their campaign against China on January 9, before facing Iran (January 12) and Uzbekistan (January 15).

(Source: the-afc)

## Redskins fire Allen, begin offseason overhaul

Redskins owner Daniel Snyder fired team president Bruce Allen and the overhaul in Washington officially began Monday morning.

Before a well-publicized meeting with former Carolina Panthers head coach Ron Rivera began, Snyder made the announcement regarding Allen's ouster.

"As this season concludes, Bruce Allen has been relieved of his duties as president of the Washington Redskins and is no longer with the organization. Like our passionate fan base, I recognize we have not lived up to the high standards set by great Redskins teams, coaches and players who have come before us. As we reevaluate our team leadership, culture and process for winning football games, I am excited for the opportunities that lie ahead to renew our singular focus and purpose of bringing championship football back to Washington D.C.," Snyder said in a statement.

Allen was hired as Redskins general manager in December 2009. He previously worked in the front offices of the Oakland Raiders and Tampa Bay Buccaneers, win-



ning the Sporting News Executive of the Year award in 2002 when the Raiders won the AFC championship.

Starting with the 2010 season, the Redskins own the NFL's fourth-worst record at 62-96-1 under Allen's watch, including a 3-13 mark this season.

Washington made the playoffs twice in the past 10 seasons, losing both times in the wild-card round. In the Allen era, the Redskins have hired and fired two head coaches — Mike Shanahan and Jay Gruden. The Redskins also fired then-head coach Jim Zorn less than three weeks into Allen's tenure in Jan. 2010, and Bill Callahan is finishing this season as interim coach after Gruden was fired in early October.

(Source: Reuters)

## IOC confirms Iran's Marouf candidacy for election to Athletes' Commission

**MNA** —The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has confirmed the candidacy of Saeid Marouf, captain of the Iranian national volleyball team, for election to its Athletes' Commission.

The captain of the Iranian national volleyball team successfully passed the second round of requirements that would determine his eligibility as a candidate for the election to the IOC Athletes' Commission, and will now officially represent Iran among other candidates.

This stage included a test administered by the International Olympic Committee that confirmed Saeid Marouf's full eligibility to run for IOC Athletes' Commission election.

The IOC Athletes' Commission is a body maintained by the International Olympic Committee for the purpose of representing athletes. Established in 1981, its function is to act as "the link between active athletes and the IOC."

The Commission meets once or twice a year, and organizes an Athletes' Forum once every two years.

An election for Commission members is held at each edition of the Olympic Games, with members being chosen by a secret ballot of the athletes competing at those Games.

Four or five members are elected at each Summer Games and two or three at each Winter Games. They replace the group that was elected at the Games of the same series eight years earlier.

Marouf's candidacy makes Iran's first serious presence at the election to IOC Athletes' Commission. Iran has had no representative at this Commission so far.

The International Olympic Committee is a not-for-profit independent international organization made up of volunteers, which is committed to building a better world through sport. It redistributes more than 90 percent of its income to the wider sporting movement.

## FFIRI General Assembly to be held in May 2020

**TASNIM** — Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) General Assembly will be held on May 7, 2020.

On Monday, Heydar Baharvand was appointed as the federation's acting president.

Iran's Sports Minister Masoud Soltanifar has said that the activities should be carried out in accordance with the regulation by Baharvand until May.

Baharvand will work as acting president until the General Assembly elects its president in May.

Mehdi Taj resigned as president of Iran football federation on Sunday due to the heart problems.

He was hospitalized last week and the doctors recommended him to step off from his role.

## Esteghlal eye Irish forward Anthony Stokes

**IRNA** — Iranian football giant Esteghlal have set sight on signing Ex-Tractor forward Anthony Stokes.

The 31-year-old hitman left Tractor in July to Join TFF First League club Adana Demirspor on a two-year contract, with the option of a third.

The former Arsenal forward joined Tractor in June 2018 and scored 15 goals in 23 matches for the Iranian top-flight football club.

Now, Esteghlal are going to sign Stokes in the January transfer window.

The Blues also want to hire Zob Ahan striker Arsalan Motahari. Esteghlal sit fifth in Iran Professional League, five points behind leader Persepolis.

## Iranian top sports officials to meet IOC chief

**TASNIM** — Iran's National Olympic Committee President Reza Salehi Amiri and Sports Minister Masoud Soltanifar plan to travel to Lausanne, Switzerland in January.

The Iranian officials will travel to the Swiss city to meet International Olympic Committee (IOC) chief Thomas Bach.

A total of 1880 athletes aged 15-18 from 80 countries will descend upon Lausanne for the 2020 Youth Olympic Games, which will be held from January 9 to 22.

Iran will also send six athletes to the competition.

## North Korea pulls out of women's 2020 soccer qualifiers in South

North Korea has withdrawn its women's soccer team from the final round of 2020 Tokyo Olympics qualifiers being staged in South Korea in February, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has said.

The AFC said on Tuesday the North had sent a letter informing it of its withdrawal from the tournament and that global governing body FIFA was also aware of the decision.

The two Koreas remain technically at war after the Korean War ended in a truce and not a peace treaty, and while there was a flurry of sports diplomacy between the neighbours last year ties have again cooled over stalled negotiations over the North's nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.

"The AFC can confirm that DPR Korea Football Association sent an official letter to withdraw from the Women's Olympic Football Tournament 2020 Asian Qualifiers Final Round," the AFC said in an emailed statement.

The third round of group stage matches for the qualifying tournament will be held from Feb. 3-9 in South Korea and China.

North Korea were drawn in Group A alongside hosts South Korea, Vietnam and Myanmar. Australia are in Group B with hosts China, Taiwan and Thailand.

The top two teams from each group advance to a two-legged playoff in March. The two playoff winners will join Japan, who have already qualified by virtue of being hosts, at next year's Olympics in Tokyo.

(Source: Reuters)



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GUIDE TO  
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

He upon whom death rushes, offers an excuse and begs for respite, and he whose life is made long by God, shows negligence in worship and benevolence.

Imam Ali (AS)

## National unity newspaper comes into bookstores over 100 years after its publication

**1 →** As the managers had their origins in western Iran, the articles published in the newspaper about the impacts of World War I on the region are still informative.

Cover of “Ettehad Newspaper”.

The newspaper has a slogan on the top of its front page reading, “This newspaper is an adherent of freedom and independence in Iran and its policy is to call for unity and unanimity.” The slogan was changed into “The newspaper is an independent national newsletter” from the third edition onward.

The book has been published with help from media scholar Mehdi Khial.

## Rotterdam festival picks movies from Iran

**TEHRAN** — Three Iranian films will go on screen in the various sections of the International Film Festival Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Saeid Rustai’s acclaimed drama “Just 6.5” will be screened at the Voices Section of the festival, which will be held from January 22 to February 2. The film is about a police squad under the leadership of Samad who has been assigned to arrest Nasser Khakzad, a major drug trafficker in Tehran.

A scene from “Just 6.5” by Iranian director Saeid Rustai.

Documentaries “Filmfarsi” by Ehsan Khoshbakht and “Women According to Men” by Saeid Nuri will go on screen in the Deep Focus section of the festival. “Filmfarsi” is about the Iranian pre-revolutionary popular cinema including low budget thrillers and melodramas known as filmfarsi. “Women According to Men” with over 120 clips from archival films shot almost exclusively by male filmmakers portrays the domestic and social position of Iranian women from 1932 to the 1979 revolution. The complete lineup of the festival will be announced on January 15.

## UK publishes celebrity home addresses by mistake

**LONDON (AP)** — British officials have apologized after mistakenly publishing the home addresses of more than 1,000 people who received special honors including singers Elton John and Olivia Newton-John. The list also included Oscar-winning film directors, senior politicians and diplomats, popular athletes and people in sensitive defense roles. The addresses were published online for about an hour late Friday when the Cabinet Office posted the recipients of New Year’s Honors, including knighthoods.

# Fajr festival announces New Look competition lineup

**A R T TEHRAN** — Ten directorial debut feature-films will premiere in the New Look section of the 38th Fajr Film Festival, the organizers announced on Tuesday. “The Night”, a co-production between Iran and the U.S. by Iranian-American director Kurosh Ahari, and “Skin” co-directed by Bahram and Bahman Ark are among the films. “The Night” tells the story of a young Iranian couple who are trapped in a hotel in the U.S. and are threatened by some strangers. “Skin” tells the story of a mother and a son, who try to solve their problems by using dark magic. The lineup also includes “Silent Snail” by Behrang Dezfulizadeh about a woman who faces the dilemma of choosing between devotion and logic, “Enemies” by Ali Derakhshandeh about the loneliness of a middle-aged woman, and “Fathers” by Salem Salavati about generation gap. Also included are “Slaughterhouse” by Abbas Amini, “The Plainclothes” by Amir-Abbas Rabiei and “Day Zero” by Saeid Malekan. Successful documentary Mohammad Kart’s directorial debut feature film “Butterfly Stroke” and Mohammadreza Lotfi’s “Reset” are other entries to the New Look category. The 38th Fajr Film Festival will be held in Tehran from February 1 to 11.

A scene from “The Night” by Kurosh Ahari.

## Moradi Kermani’s “Water Urn” published in Italian

**CULTURE TEHRAN** — Iranian children’s book writer Hushang Moradi Kermani’s “The Water Urn” has been published in Italian. The Italian version named “L’Anfora” has been released by the publication of the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice on December 13, the publisher announced. “The Water Urn” has been rendered into Italian by Daniela Meneghini, an associate professor at the Department of Studies on Asia and Mediterranean Africa of Ca’ Foscari University. Having been translated into different languages, “The Water Urn” has so far gained several international awards. Set in a two-room schoolhouse in mid-20th century

Iran. “The Water Urn” is a heartwarming story about the daily misadventures and experiences of the village children and their beloved schoolmaster, Mr. Samadi. It provides an inspiring look at provincial life in a quintessential Iranian village where survival means that all members of a community must learn to work together to achieve a common goal. The 75-year-old Moradi Kermani is mostly known as a children’s writer, but his works also appeal to adults. He is the author of numerous bestsellers such as “You’re No Stranger Here” and “A Sweet Jam”. Most of his works have been translated into English, German, French, Spanish, Dutch, Arabic, Armenian, Turkish and several other languages.

Front cover of the Italian version of “The Water Urn” by Iranian children’s author Hushang Moradi Kermani.

## Iran Music Association, Turkish universities sign MOU

**A R T TEHRAN** — The Iran Music Association has signed two memorandums of understanding (MOU) with Turkey’s Kafkas University and Ankara University to expand bilateral cooperation on music. The MOUs were inked in Tehran on Monday by Iran Music Association director Ali Sabetnia, and Ali Kafkasiyali and Yavuz Selim Kafkasyali from Turkey, the association announced. The MOUs will help facilitate the participation of the countries’ musicians in each other’s festivals, Sabetnia said. Based on the MOUs, the association and the academic

centers will organize research panels on Iranian and Turkish music, and some albums of Iranian regional music will be recorded in Turkey. According to the MOUs, the Iran Music Association will collaborate with some musical centers in the Turkish cities of Ankara, Istanbul and Erzurum. Ali Kafkasiyali is the founder of the Union of Ashiqs in Turkey and the writer of “Anthology of Iranian Turkish Literature”. Yavuz Selim Kafkasyali teaches at the Department of Education of Kafkas University.

Members of the Iran Music Association and officials of Turkey’s Kafkas University and Ankara University meet in Tehran on December 30, 2019.

## Monty Python collaborator Neil Innes dies at age 75

In this Oct. 2, 2011 file photo, Monty Python collaborator and Rutles singer Neil Innes attends the screening of “George Harrison: Living in the Material World” at the BFI in London. (Ian West/PA via AP)

**LONDON (AP)** — Comedic writer and actor Neil Innes, who created a Beatles parody group called the Rutles and frequently worked with the members of Monty Python, has died at age 75. His agent confirmed Monday. Innes died of natural causes Sunday night, agent Nigel Morton said. A statement released on behalf of his family said: “We have lost a beautiful, kind, gentle soul whose music and songs touched the heart of everyone and whose intellect and search for truth inspired us all,” the statement said. “He died of natural causes quickly without warning and, I think, without pain.” Innes was such a frequent

collaborator of the Monty Python troupe that he sometimes was called the “seventh Python”. A musician as well as a writer, he wrote songs for the popular film “Monty Python and the Holy Grail,” appeared in “Life of Brian” and toured the U.K. and Canada with the group. He was also a member of the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band, later renamed the Bonzo Dog Band. One of the band’s hit songs, “I’m The Urban Spaceman”, won Innes an Ivor Novello award. Colleagues posted tributes to Innes on Twitter, including the prominent British actor Mark Gatiss, who fondly wrote “Sweet dreams, sweet idiot.”

## “Murder Mystery” tops Netflix 2019 shows, “The Crown” out of top 10

**NEW YORK (Reuters)** — Netflix Inc’s original film “Murder Mystery”, starring Jennifer Aniston and Adam Sandler, topped a list of the streaming service’s most popular releases of 2019 in the United States but its award-winning “The Crown” failed to make the top 10. Netflix said on Monday that science fiction series “Stranger Things” came in second, followed by the Michael Bay action movie “6 Underground.” The animated movie “Incredibles 2” and Martin Scorsese’s gangster film “The Irishman” took the fourth and fifth spots, respectively. The ranking was based on the number of households watching at least two minutes of a series, movie or special during its first 28 days on Netflix in 2019, the streaming service said. British royal series “The Crown”, whose first two seasons cost a reported \$130 million to make, did not appear in the top 10 list for either the U.S. or the UK or Canada despite having won major awards, including for its leading actors. Season 3 was released in November and Netflix did not supply any viewing data. Netflix, which boasts more than 158 million subscribers around the world, only selectively releases viewership figures for programming it considers a hit, and the numbers are not verified by a third party. Executives at Netflix have said they plan to be more transparent with audience data to satisfy Hollywood producers and stars and to help viewers decide what to watch.