



Palermo and CFT are extremely dangerous **3**



Iran-Russia-China naval wargame shows power of army **3**



Jahanbakhsh scores stunning goal against Chelsea **15**



Davud Mirbaqeri begins filming "Salman Farsi" **16**



U.S. taking revenge on Hashd al-Shaabi for Daesh

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Rouhani inaugurates development projects worth \$491m in northwestern Iran

TEHRAN — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, on Wednesday, inaugurated several development projects during a visit to Ardebil Province, northwestern Iran, IRNA reported.

As reported, 93 development projects worth 20.653 trillion rials (about \$491.7 million) in addition to 50 economic projects were inaugurated during Rouhani's trip.

The mentioned projects would create job opportunities for 4,350 people in various sectors including water and energy, aviation, infrastructure, mining, industry and production.

Three airport projects worth 910 billion rials (about \$21.6 million) were among the major projects inaugurated during Rouhani's visit. **→4**

Iran summons Swiss envoy over U.S. 'warmongering words'

TEHRAN — Swiss Ambassador to Tehran Markus Leitner, whose country represents the U.S. interests in Iran, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday to hear Tehran's strong protest to Washington's "warmongering words" and baseless allegations against the Islamic Republic.

Foreign Ministry Director General for American Affairs Mohsen Baharvand delivered Iran's memo of official protest to

the Swiss envoy, saying the Americans' warmongering words against Iran are in violation of the United Nations Charter.

The U.S. forces on Sunday conducted drone strikes on a number of the Kata'ib Hezbollah positions, which is part of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, in western Anbar province, killing at least 25 individuals and leaving another 51 injured. **→2**

U.S. troops fire tear gas at protesters in Baghdad

Hundreds of Iraqi members of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and their supporters hurled stones at the United States embassy in Baghdad for a second day on Wednesday, while security forces fired tear gas and stun grenades in a bid to drive them away.

U.S. troops also fired tear gas to disperse the protests, led by the Iranian-backed PMF - an umbrella grouping of paramilitary organizations that mostly consists

of Iranian-backed Shia militias and that was integrated into Iraq's armed forces.

They were gathered outside the U.S. embassy compound in Baghdad for a second consecutive day. Dozens had camped out at the gates of the embassy where they stayed the night. The protesters lit a fire on the roof of the reception area on Wednesday, as smoke rose from the building. Protesters also firebombed a second gate, setting another fire. **→13**



REPORT

Salman Parviz
Journalist

Riyadh's Aramco struggle

On the surface Aramco's blockbuster IPO might seem like a sure bet. But investors who are looking to put their money into world's most profitable company have to factor a number of risks before rolling the dice.

After an almost four-year delay Aramco's shares were floated on December 11 at Riyadh's small Tadawul exchange in Riyadh only to domestic investors. Aramco is the world's most valuable company, leaving behind giants like Apple which recently clocked up \$1.27 trillion in shareholder value passing the 13-digit market capitalization value for the first time.

The original plan was to split Aramco listing on stock exchanges in London, New York and Riyadh but due to lack of global investor confidence and the need for transparency that would be required in international stock exchanges, the shares were listed only at Tadawul where the Saudi royal family maintains strict control.

Instead of five percent only 1.5 percent of Aramco's shares have been floated only to regional and domestic clientele. For the rest of Aramco's shares there is a long road ahead.

Questions remain about the future for domestic and international investors about the sustainability of Aramco and the oil dependent Saudi economy in general. Is the Aramco IPO a \$2 trillion bubble waiting to burst? Some of the reasons for lack of investor confidence and outlook are regional instability, human rights record in Saudi Arabia, lack of transparency, future of fossil fuel market, the need for Saudi economy to diversify, ..., the list goes on. Some of these reasons are discussed below:

Kashoggi murder: Global backlash on journalist Jamal Kashoggi's murder on October 2018 in Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. CIA and many Western governments believe was ordered by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (AKA MBS) personally.

The murder of Kashoggi triggered Saudi Arabia's biggest diplomatic crisis since the 9/11 attacks as world leaders and business executives sought to distance themselves from Riyadh. Recently documents were released to the lawyers representing families of 9/11 victims that implicate Saudi involvement in 9/11. A potential lawsuit by U.S. courts seizing Saudi assets is a real possibility in the future. This ought to make international investors more nervous. **→6**

A peek into Christmas celebration in Iran

By Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

TEHRAN (MNA) — One may not expect Christmas celebration in a country where 99 percent of its population is Muslim, but surprise is awaiting you in the case of Iran.

Christians comprise less than one percent of Iran's population, however, they are enjoying the freedom to perform their rituals and celebrate their festivities.

Most of the Christians in Iran are Armenians who have lived here for centuries. Assyrians, Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelical Christians constitute the rest of Christians in Iran.

Armenians follow the Oriental Orthodox denomination of Christianity and accordingly, celebrate Christmas on January 6, concurrent with the Epiphany.

To better understand the rituals of these people on the eve of Christmas, I reached out to

our long-serving colleagues at the Tehran Times Daily, Herand Baghdasarian. As an Armenian Christian, he has been working in the daily for 21 years in different sections.

I asked him to give a general explanation about his community's traditions for Christmas. "Christians in Iran have their own peculiar Christmas festivities and rituals. On Christmas Day, which falls on January 6th, Christians celebrate Jesus Christ's birthday by feasting on a traditional chicken stew called 'harissa', or on a roast turkey," he said.

"Like other Christian nations, Armenians design and decorate the Christmas tree, buy new clothes and usually give gifts to children.

Asked about the coexistence of Muslims and Christians in Iran, he highlighted that these two have lived peacefully along with each other. "Iranian Armenians, are Iranians of Armenian

ethnicity who speak Armenian as their mother tongue. Armenians have lived in Iran for millennia," he said, noting, "They have lived peacefully and friendly with their Muslim people."

"After the Islamic Revolution, Armenians have also served in the Iranian Army and many have died in the action," Baghdasarian said, referring to the eight years of Iraqi imposed war on Iran (1980-1988), also known as Sacred Defense, where thousands of Armenians went to the frontline along with their Muslim brothers to defend the country. The Armenian Diocese of Tehran told me that 114 Armenians from across the country have been martyred during the war.

Baghdasarian went on to point to his community's position in Iran's politics, saying, "The Armenians remain the powerful religious minority in Iran. They have two seats in the Iranian Parliament." **→10**

Joint message of Iran, Russia and China to the world

By Alireza Majidi

After the U.S. failed to form an international coalition in the Persian Gulf, Iranian, Russian and Chinese armies launched a joint naval maneuver, codenamed "Naval Security Belt", in the northern part of the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman. The drill started on December 27 and lasted for four days.

Many media outlets interpreted the maneuver as a "clear warning to America". Some main political and geopolitical aspects of the wargame are given here:

Iran's dominant position in the region cannot be overlooked

The most significant aspect of the maneuver

is Tehran's clear message to those countries that seek to isolate Iran through economic and political pressure. Through holding this joint maneuver, Tehran sent this warning to the foes that Islamic Republic is a power that world powers such as Russia and China cannot close their eyes to.

The Turkish Anatolia news agency, quoting experts, said, "The maneuver is a clear message from Tehran to Washington." The state-run news agency also said the maneuver was conducted at a time that Iran is decreasing its commitments to the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In its editorial, the Al-Rai Elium newspaper also said "An Iran which is facing the harsh U.S. blockade will profit furthest from this maneuver

since it will shatter the U.S. blockade, at least psychologically, and shows that Iran is not an isolated country and has strategic friends at the international level."

The widespread coverage of the joint exercise by regional and overseas media indicated that Tehran has selected a suitable time and good thing to indirectly show its power to the United States.

From Iran's success to Washington's failure to establish international coalition

The joint marine maneuver took place at a time that the United States has launched an intensive effort in the recent months to form a global naval alliance to allegedly secure the Persian Gulf. In its preliminary calculations, after the Fujairah events, **→3**



Actress Shahla Riahi, who was also Iran's first female filmmaker, dies at 93

TEHRAN — Actress Shahla Riahi, who presented herself as Iran's first female director in 1957 by making "Marjan", died of Alzheimer's in Tehran on Tuesday. She was 93.

Reports published by Persian news agencies about Riahi's death were confirmed by her son, Manuchehr Riahi, in an interview with IRNA on Wednesday.

Riahi began her acting career at the age of 17 by a suggestion from her husband, Esmail Riahi, a stage director and screenwriter. **→16**



ARTICLE

Yuram Abdullah Weiler
Analyst and journalist

A Cognitive Disorder: U.S. actions fueling regional insecurity

“Security—just like climate change—does not know borders and is thus indivisible.”

—Iran Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif

The United States has launched unilateral attacks against five bases of Kataib Hezbollah, a part of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which played a decisive role in the defeat of the Daesh (ISIL) terrorists. The U.S. actions were condemned by Iran and others as a flagrant violation of Iraq's sovereignty, and cited as further evidence of the destabilizing presence of American forces and weaponry in the region. The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) stated that the attacks "show that the U.S. is the main factor behind insecurity, chaos, tension and warmongering in this region."

The December 29, 2019 air strikes on five Kataib Hezbollah positions in Iraq and Syria, which resulted in 25 deaths and 55 injuries, were allegedly in retaliation for an earlier two-rocket assault on Friday, December 27 that hit Iraqi military compound K-1 near Kirkuk killing a single U.S. civilian contractor. Washington blamed the attack on Iran and Kataib Hezbollah without, as has become customary, presenting any supporting evidence to back the assertion. Categorizing the U.S. bombing of the PMF bases as "terrorism," Tehran denied any involvement in the Friday rocket strike on the Iraqi base. "This claim without any evidence cannot justify bombing and killing people in violation of international law," Iranian government spokesman Ali Rabiei said. Furthermore, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi noted that by targeting forces that have been fighting terrorists, the U.S. raids "disproved the U.S.' claim on fighting the ISIL terrorist group in Iraq."

The Iraqi government officially denounced the U.S. unilateral intervention as a "dangerous violation of the rules of engagement that govern the work of U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq." Kataib Hezbollah spokesman Mohammed Mohieh condemned the U.S. aggression. **→2**

Iran calls U.S. sanctions ‘failed project’

POLITICAL d e s k TEHRAN — Mahmoud Vaezi, the presidential chief of staff, said on Tuesday that the United States’ sanctions against Iran is “a failed project”.

“We have passed the difficult situation through the people’s resistance and comprehensive efforts,” Vaezi said during a meeting with a group of businessmen and entrepreneurs in Ardabil Province.



He added, “Sanction cannot continue.”

The people’s resistance has proven that the U.S., the Zionist regime of Israel and their regional allies cannot reach their objective through sanctions, the presidential chief of staff pointed out.

“Iran will continue the path of progress and development despite sanctions and maximum pressure,” he said.

Iran has said that it has adopted “maximum resistance” in the face of the U.S. “maximum pressure”.

On December 24, Iranian First Vice President Es’haq Jahangiri said that the U.S. policies to collapse the Iranian economy have failed.

“Iran has stood on its feet despite the United States’ animosities, and policies to collapse Iran’s economy have ended in failure,” Jahangiri said.

The vice president noted that the U.S. failure shows Iran’s economic capacities.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on December 23 that the White House has no way in the standoff with Iran except putting an end to its policy of “maximum pressure” on the Islamic Republic.

“The current situation will pass. Soon or late, the United States has to refrain from adopting the policy of maximum pressure on Iran before or after 2020 presidential election,” Rouhani said during a meeting with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

Donald Trump, who unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the multilateral 2015 nuclear deal in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions against Iran under his officially stated “maximum pressure” strategy, has been trying to reach the Islamic republic for dialogue.

Government spokesman Ali Rabiei said on December 23 that the U.S. has gained nothing by adopting the policy of maximum pressure against Tehran, noting such approaches cannot bring the Iranian people to their knees.

Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on December 1 that maximum pressure is a “wrong policy” and the U.S. must stop it.

Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has called policy of “maximum pressure” on Tehran bankrupt.

“We have been pressuring them. Maximum pressure... we’re seeing the unfolding of really a bankruptcy of approach,” he told CBS News.

Iran summons Swiss envoy over U.S. ‘warmongering words’

1 → The U.S. attack prompted massive public anger in Iraq on Tuesday, with protesters storming the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and seizing the building after American diplomatic personnel had been forced to evacuate.



Following attack on the embassy, U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday accused Iran of being responsible for the attack.

“Iran will be held fully responsible for lives lost, or damage incurred, at any of our facilities. They will pay a very BIG PRICE! This is not a Warning, it is a Threat. Happy New Year!” Trump tweeted.

Baharvand told Leitner that Iraq is an independent country with an independence-seeking honorable people.

“The U.S. army has killed at least 25 young Iraqis and injured tens more without providing any evidence to prove their fault.”

Baharvand said it is quite obvious that the Iraqis react to such a move.

“Naturally, the Iraqi people react against a country that has occupied their land and has killed their young fellow countrymen.”

He went on to say that the U.S. army is seeking to hatch more dangerous plot for the entire region as they targeted two military centers of pro-Damascus forces in Syria to further destabilize the region and use it as a pretext for deployment of more forces in Iraq and Syria.

“The U.S. officials should refrain from ‘externalization’ and should not accuse our country without any reason,” Baharvand said in the meeting with Leitner.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry official called on the Swiss ambassador to convey this message to the U.S. that Tehran is not after starting a war with any country, reminding that, however, the Armed Forces of Iran will not tolerate any act of aggression and will immediately and strongly respond to it.

“The U.S. government, instead of accusing others, must learn how to talk with other nations and must halt occupying (other countries),” Baharvand added.

On Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi warned the White House of any miscalculation and inconsiderate response.

In a statement, he advised the U.S. to review its “destructive policies”.

“How do you expect the Iraqi people to keep silence over all these crimes?” he asked.

He said, “The United States has ignored freedom- and independence-seeking Iraqi people and has also supported Saddam [Saddam Hussein, a former Iraqi president] and has created Daesh. It [the U.S.] has forgotten killing and looting the Iraqis and seems to have forgotten that the Iraqi people are still under occupation.”

The diplomat categorically rejected Washington’s groundless accusation that the Islamic Republic is behind anti-U.S. protests in Iraq.

Leader: U.S. taking revenge on Hashd al-Shaabi for Daesh

POLITICAL d e s k TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has said the United States’ attacks on al-Hashd al-Shaabi was an act of retaliation against the forces for beating the Daesh (ISIS) terrorist group.

“See what they (the Americans) are doing in Iraq and Syria. They are taking vengeance on Hashd al-Shaabi for Daesh,” Ayatollah Khamenei said on Wednesday.

The Leader explained that Hashd al-Shaabi had crushed Daesh, which was created and backed by the Americans, in different areas.

“Now they are taking vengeance,” Ayatollah Khamenei reiterated as he was addressing a group of nurses on the National Nurse Day, which marks the birth anniversary of Lady Zeinab, granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

“The Iranian government, nation and I strongly condemn this malicious act by America,” 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 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 calling for the U.S. mission to be shut down and for the parliament to order U.S. forces to leave Iraq.

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.

Quoting Ayatollah Khamenei’s Wednesday remarks, his Twitter account, which is run by his office, responded to Trump in a series of tweets.

“That guy has tweeted that we see Iran responsible for the events in Baghdad & we

“That guy (Trump) has tweeted that we see Iran responsible for the events in Baghdad & we will respond to Iran. 1st: You can’t do anything. 2nd: If you were logical—which you’re not— you’d see that your crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan... have made nations hate you,” the Leader tweeted, according to khamenei_ir.

U.S. seeking to divert attention from brutal killing of Iraqis by levelling charges against Iran: envoy

Iran warns White House of any inconsiderate move

POLITICAL d e s k TEHRAN — Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations, said on Tuesday that the United States seeks to divert attention from 17 years of occupying Iraq and brutal killing of the Iraqi people by leveling accusations against Iran.

Following an attack on the U.S. embassy in Baghdad on Tuesday, U.S. President Donald Trump accused Iran of being responsible for the attack.

“Iran will be held fully responsible for lives lost, or damage incurred, at any of our facilities. They will pay a very BIG PRICE! This is not a Warning, it is a Threat. Happy New Year!” Trump tweeted on Tuesday.

According to the Daily Mail, Trump said on Tuesday that he thought there wouldn’t be war with Iran.

Angry protesters broke into the U.S. embassy compound in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on Tuesday after smashing the main door and setting fire to a reception area, prompting tear gas and sounds of gunfire. The attack on the embassy took place after the U.S. launched air raids on positions of Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), killing at least

25 forces and injuring over 50 others in Anbar Province.

Also on Tuesday, Iraqis held a massive funeral procession in Baghdad for the victims of the U.S. air raids.

Takht-Ravanchi said that Popular Mobilization Units is an Iraqi group which is supervised by the Iraqi government.

He added that the group played an important role in fighting Daesh and its defeat in Iraq.

“How do you expect the Iraqi people to keep silence over all these crimes?” the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman asks the U.S.

Rouhani: U.S. should return to right track if it really wants to talk to Iran

POLITICAL d e s k TEHRAN— Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, in a ceremony in Ardabil province on Wednesday, voiced his country’s readiness to resume talks with the U.S. provided that Washington returns to the 2015 nuclear deal and fulfils its obligations under the pact, including lift of sanctions.

“A plot has been hatched against us (by the U.S.) to damage our greatness to force us to be surrendered and to be obedient, however, it is not possible in face of our nation; instead, they should return from their wrong path they started once,” the president said.

“We are ready for negotiations whenever

they (the U.S. officials) confess their wrong policy. We are ready to talk to you, to listen your words. You should listen to our words too,” Rouhani said.

“You are not a superior government than the Iranian government. We respect your people, but, we strongly protest your ruling system. We condemn your measures, but meantime, we remind that the returning path is open to you,” the president advised the U.S. officials.

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 the 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 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

will respond to Iran. 1st: You can’t do anything. 2nd: If you were logical—which you’re not—you’d see that your crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan... have made nations hate you,” @khamenei_ir tweeted.

“If the Islamic Republic decides to challenge & fight, it will do so unequivocally. We’re not after wars, but we strongly defend the Iranian nation’s interests, dignity, & glory. If anyone threatens that, we will unhesitatingly confront & strike them,” read another tweet.

In his speech, Ayatollah Khamenei also addressed the widespread protests across Iran in November 2019, saying, “People have economic demands, mostly rightful ones. In the recent events, people had demands, but the enemy had prepared agents to cause sedition. It used the opportunity to harm the country.”

“With their insight and astuteness, people withdrew and the seditionists were left alone,” he added.

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

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

Soon after the protests erupted, the Leader supported the government’s decision and condemned any act of sabotage carried out by some “hooligans” and supported by Iran’s enemies.

“You see in the past two days, all the centers of evil in the world have been encouraging such acts against us. From the sinister Pahlavi dynasty to the vicious and criminal gang of Monafegin (the MEK terrorist group); they are constantly encouraging hooliganism via the internet and other means,” the Leader stated at the time.

Ayatollah Khamenei urged the authorities to take good care of the affected people and assuage the hardship caused by the move.

He also called on the people to take note of the enemies’ plots to disrupt Iran’s security and take a separate path from the rioters that try to foment insecurity in the country.

■ Iran warns White House of any ‘inconsiderate move’

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has warned the White House of any miscalculation and “inconsiderate move”.

In a statement on Tuesday, he advised the U.S. to review its “destructive policies”.

“How do you expect the Iraqi people to keep silence over all these crimes?” he asked.

He said, “The United States has ignored freedom- and independence-seeking Iraqi people and has also supported Saddam [Saddam Hussein, the former Iraqi dictator] and has created Daesh. It [the U.S.] has forgotten killing and looting the Iraqis and seems to have forgotten that the Iraqi people are still under occupation.”

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 the termination of the economic and financial sanctions.

However, in May 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump 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.

A Cognitive Disorder: U.S. actions fueling regional insecurity

1 → stating, “Our battle with America and its mercenaries is now open to all possibilities.” Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani censured the “atrocious aggression” and called for respecting Iraq’s sovereignty. Iraqi cleric Moqtada al-Sadr denounced the continuing American interference in Iraq and affirmed his intent to cooperate with political rivals in order to rid his country of U.S. forces. “Today I am ready to throw out occupiers through political and legal ways,” Seyyed al-Sadr announced, adding, “Is there anyone to help?”

Iraqi interim head and former Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi was notified of the U.S. attack, by U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper about half hour before the “precision defensive strikes” were executed, and while insisting that he tried to stop the attack, he ultimately relented due to “insistence” by American officials. Abdul-Mahdi, who had resigned his position on December 1 due to violent unrest in the country but remains as caretaker until a new prime minister can be chosen, criticized the U.S. for violating Iraq’s sovereignty. “American forces acted on their political priorities,” he charged in a statement, “not those of the Iraqis.” Members of the Iraqi Parliament called for a review of the agreement with Washington that allows 5,200 troops to remain in the country, charging that the illegal U.S. strike on the PMU bases effectively nullified the agreement. Iraqi MP Jaber Al-Jaberi expressed his view that the U.S. strike shows “that they have lost hope in the Iraqi government and its ability to control the militias.”

Displaying the typical imperial mindset, U.S. assistant secretary of state David Schenker insisted that the U.S. acted with “restraint” in the attacks, which were intended to send a clear message to Iran. “We thought it important to hit a significant target set to send a very clear message to them about how serious we take American lives,” Schenker explained. While the retaliatory killing of 25 Kataib Hezbollah members for the death of one American would be unhesitatingly declared an inordinately excessive retaliation by most in the civilized world, Schenker maintained that not only was the U.S. strike “proportionate,” but also that it did not represent an escalation. “We don’t want an escalation here,” he insisted, “We want a de-escalation.” However, the U.S. attack has already provoked an escalatory response of four Katyusha missiles being fired only a few hours later at the al-Taji military base north of Baghdad, which houses American troops.

Back in August of 2018, deputy PMF chairman Jamal Jafaar Mohammed Ali Ebrahimi, who is better known as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, stated that it was U.S. and Israeli forces that bombed a munitions depot and a series of other sites used by PMF in Iraq. At the time, Muhandis accused the U.S. of deploying Israeli drones and using Iraqi airspace to hit PMF installations. “The U.S. is using the drones to target the PMF and Iraqi bases, rather than targeting Daesh [ISIL],” he stated, maintaining that the PMF had a right to defend themselves against American and Israeli aggressions. At the same time, Israeli entity prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu,

arrogantly claiming a right to strike Iranian-backed Iraqi militias and interests anywhere in Middle East with impunity, brazenly stated, “Iran has no immunity anywhere... We will act—and currently are acting—against them, wherever it is necessary.”

When it comes to security, the United States and the Israeli entity are still playing a zero-sum game, that is, an increase in one side’s security reduces that of the others. As Dr. Zarif explained at the Doha Forum in December, without specifically mentioning the U.S. or its Zionist ally, some “global actors” view the turmoil in the region as an opportunity for weapons sales. The erroneous zero-sum thinking on the part of the U.S. and other western powers is that with the purchase of weaponry, one country’s security is enhanced to the detriment of the others. Calling this view on their part “a cognitive disorder,” he pointed out that “this outside presence has neither enhanced the security of outside actors, nor that of the region.”

America most assuredly has a chronic cognitive disorder as can be seen by the tenacity with which Americans cling to the notion that weaponry increases security. Another immoral aspect of this devastating disorder is that U.S. arms sales are primarily for economic and employment benefits; little regard is paid to other factors. Undoubtedly, these U.S. actions are fueling insecurity in the Persian Gulf region. How ironic is it that a flood of firearms and lax regulations governing their possession have also caused security problems within the United States itself.

Palermo and CFT are extremely dangerous, says Expediency Council chief Amoli Larijani

Mohsen Rezaee says politicizing FATF and pressing Expediency Council to approve it are ‘suspicious’

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Chairman of the Expediency Council Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani has said accession to Palermo Convention and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) is extremely dangerous for Iran's national security.

“If you ask my personal opinion, Palermo and CFT are extremely detrimental to national security,” Amoli Larijani said on Wednesday, adding, “Especially the CFT which is very dangerous.”

He said Iran has grown more suspicious of the Americans and their servants and the countries that are members of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) over time.

“This is clear. I want to say that they are really dangerous individuals. They are corrupt individuals. Of course, they were already corrupt and dangerous. Their Barjam (Iran nuclear deal) showed how cheap of individuals they are and the CFT is worse than Barjam,” said Amoli Larijani, according to Mehr.

Ratifying the FATF-related bills has become a contentious issue in Iran.

Mohsen Rezaee, secretary of the Expediency Council, said on Wednesday that politicizing the issue of FATF and exerting pressure on the council to approve it are



“suspicious”. Rezaee said the issue is being discussed by the opponents and proponents in the council.

The parliament passed the FATF in October 2018. However, the oversight Guardian Council rejected the bill.

Whenever there is a dispute between the parliament and the Guardian Council on a bill, it will be referred to the Expediency Council for final decision. Now it is up to the Expediency Council to reject or ratify the FATF.

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

“If before February 2020, Iran does not enact the Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions in line with the FATF Standards, then the FATF will fully lift the suspension of counter-measures and call on its members and urge all jurisdictions to apply effective counter-measures, in line with recommendation 19,” the FATF said in a statement, Reuters reported.

One of the actions Iran is required to take to appease the FATF is to ratify the CFT.

The government is pushing for the approval of the FATF, but some figures argue that such act could not resolve any problems, including the sanctions that the United States imposed on Iran after it withdrew from the 2015 nuclear agreement.

U.S. President Donald Trump has adopted a maximum pressure policy against Iran since he walked away from the nuclear deal, also known as the JCPOA. The policy includes sanctions on Iran's economy, especially its oil exports, and bans on top Iranian figures and organizations.

Joint message of Iran, Russia and China to the world

1→ the Pentagon expected to form the coalition with participation of great powers; in line with that policy Washington asked more than 60 countries to join the coalition. Reportedly, Abu Dhabi even entered talks with Moscow to convince Russia to join the coalition. But except Washington's traditional allies such as England and Australia, no country accepted to join the coalition.

Enormous efforts by the Pentagon to form the alliance failed. Only seven countries that three of which host the alliance joined the coalition. In other words, if we disregard Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia - which are the host to the coalition - only England, Australia and Albania admitted to be in the coalition. A contrast between this coalition and the number of countries that participated in the operations inside Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks demonstrates how the situation has changed for Washington.

In this regard, there are two things to note. First, even France, which except Africa, has established its only overseas military base in the UAE, refused to join the coalition. Also Japan, rather than joining the U.S. Navy, has decided to separately send its self-defense forces to north of the Indian

Ocean. India, which has heavy interests in the Persian Gulf, did not undertake to join the coalition as well. Even a country such as Kuwait, which is a traditional ally of Saudi Arabia and is located in the Persian Gulf region, rejected to join the coalition. Similarly, Egypt, which is frequently present at U.S. coalitions and is politically and economically dependent on the UAE and Saudi Arabia, avoided to join the coalition. To this list we should add certain countries like Germany and Belgium, which are usually sensitive to crude oil export from the Persian Gulf; they also declined to join the coalition for different reasons.

In the face of the U.S. failure to form a big global coalition to supposedly protect the Persian Gulf, by holding this joint maneuver - which is unprecedented in the history of the region - Tehran sent a warning to the Pentagon. Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran has reached a level of power that not only it can never be taken for granted in calculations but it has succeeded to bring together emerging powers and form a strong bloc against enmity.

■ Chabahar port is stable against sanctions pressure

One of the issues that should be noted in

scrutinizing this maneuver is the situation of Chabahar Port as the host of the maneuver. From a geopolitical point of view, Chabahar port is very important and India has invested heavily in it. For Central Asian countries the port is going to serve as a gateway to high seas. If this is accomplished, Iran's geopolitical weight will rise meaningfully.

The sensitivity toward Chabahar port and its cold rivalry with Pakistan's Gwadar Port are so great that in the former six-month sanctions exemptions by Donald Trump the port was given waivers! Now, Tehran, with its joint maneuver with China and Russia, has revealed that the geopolitical importance of the port is highly noticed by great powers, and that China spreads red carpet for the development and security of Chabahar.

■ Promising prospects for geostrategic collaboration between Tehran, Beijing and Moscow

One of the greatest accomplishments of this maneuver was to show the level collaboration between Iran, China and Russia. For the first time in history, China and Russia participated in a naval maneuver in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman region. The wargame at a time that the harshest sanctions in history are being introduced against Iran shows that

Beijing and Moscow have a great potential to establish “strategic partnership” with Iran.

Probably this issue, more than any other thing, has caused concern among the White House officials and anti-Iran lobbyists in Washington.

■ India's predicament in making a big decision

India is seeking to form an influential global alliance with China and Russia to compete the West. India has also invested billions of dollars in Chabahar port and is working hard to make it a rival to Gwadar port and to turn it into Central Asia's gateway to the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf. Nevertheless, under pressure by Washington, New Delhi has lowered its level of cooperation with Tehran since past year, and even some sources have claimed that India no longer purchases oil from Iran. Similarly, India has the least collaboration with Tehran in other economic and political areas.

In such a situation, China and Russia as two superior powers participated in the joint drill which started from Chabahar port. In view of this fact, New Delhi should reassess its prior calculation and reconsider submissiveness in the face of pressure by Washington.

Failure to join FATF is harmful to country: expert

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — A senior political analyst has said that failure to join the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is harmful to the country.

“Opposition to regulations of the FATF is harmful to the country and will make the situation of the country worse and will add to the economic problems. So, this issue must not be viewed just from political and factional aspects. There should be more comprehensive view on the country's interests,” Davoud Hermidas-Bavand, professor of political science and international law, told ISNA in an interview published on Wednesday.

He noted that failure to conform to banking and financial standards will cause serious problems.

However, Mohsen Rezaee, secretary of the Expediency Council, said on Wednesday that politicizing the issue of FATF and exerting pressure on the council to approve it are “suspicious”. Rezaee said the issue is being discussed by the opponents and proponents in the council.

On December 24, Rezaee said that Palermo and CFT bills are still under assessment in the council. “The FATF-related bills (Palermo and CFT) are still under evaluation in the Expediency Council, so, I can't say anything now (about the outcome of assessment),” Rezaee said, according to Fars.

Diako Hosseini, director of the World Studies Program at the Presidential Centre for Strategic Studies, told IRNA in an interview published on Monday that being blacklisted by the FATF will have serious consequences.

“The consequences can be equal to return to the United Nations Security Council's sanctions against Iran,” Hosseini said.

He noted that a wise decision must be taken regarding the country's situation.

Abolfazl Soroush, a member of the Hope parliamentary faction, told ISNA in an interview published on Saturday that joining the FATF will prevent economic isolation of Iran.

“The truth is that Iran's joining to the FATF will not result in a miracle, however, it will prevent worsening of the country's economic situation,” he said.

He noted that joining the FATF does not mean an end to the United States' sanctions, however, it will prevent more economic pressure on the country.

Mehdi Zakarian, an expert on international relations, also told IRNA in an interview published on Saturday that “standards of the FATF have turned into an international convention in countering corruption and money laundering, and Iran is required to join it in order to be present at the international arena.”

Hossein Abbasinejad, the dean of the faculty of economics at the University of Tehran, also told IRNA in an interview published on Saturday that it is wise to take a decision in line with the country's interests.

He said that refusing to approve bills related the FATF will cause more economic problems for the country.

The FATF must be studied regardless of factional disputes, Abbasinejad noted.

In a letter to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, a number of MPs have pushed for the approval of the FATF by the Expediency Council.

MP Shahabuddin Bimeghdar told IRNA on Wednesday that it is said in the letter that being blacklisted by the FATF will isolate the economy which is already restricted by the United States' “cruel sanctions”.

The MPs said failure to join the FATF will cause “closure of the bank accounts in foreign countries”, “accusations of money laundering against the country”, “international distrust”, “financial and banking crisis”, “inefficiency of Iranian bank branches in foreign countries” and also “destabilization in stock exchange market”.

In October 2018, the parliament voted to join the FATF. However, the Guardian Council rejected it. Now the ball is



in the Expediency Council's court.

When there is a dispute between parliament and the Guardian Council the issue is referred to as the Expediency Council for final arbitration.

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

“If before February 2020, Iran does not enact the Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions in line with the FATF Standards, then the FATF will fully lift the suspension of counter-measures and call on its members and urge all jurisdictions to apply effective counter-measures, in line with recommendation 19,” the FATF said in a statement, Reuters reported.

The government is pushing for the approval of the FATF.

Medicine import impossible due to sanctions, Iranian health minister writes to WHO chief

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Minister of Health Saeed Namaki has strongly criticized the U.S. sanctions against Iran, saying the sanctions have made it virtually impossible for Iran to import medicine and medical equipment.

Namaki made the remarks in a letter to the director-general of World Health Organization (WHO).

He said the Iranian people have fallen victim to an economic war waged against them by the United States, Iran Press reported on Wednesday.

He stated that while the U.S. government claims that the sanctions do not include medicine, foodstuff, and medical equipment, it has blocked almost all of Iran's financial transactions.

“Following my earlier letter dated 17 November 2019, the situation has aggravated and the international community, especially the UN representatives, have done nothing in this respect,” Namaki added.

He argued that Iran has always been after constructive and dignified interaction with the world based on mutual respect while condemning Washington's unilateral exit from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and reinstatement of sanctions against Iran.

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

Tehran has repeatedly said that the U.S. sanctions will prevent it from buying medicine.

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

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

In December, Zarif mentioned U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a tweet, saying, “@SecPompeo once again admits that US #EconomicTerrorism on Iran is designed to starve, and in the case of medical supplies, kill our innocent citizens.”

“#EconomicTerrorism kills,” he tweeted.

Army chief: Iran-Russia-China naval wargame shows power of army

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Army Chief Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said on Wednesday that Iran-Russia-China naval wargame showed the power of army.

During a meeting with Ayatollah Lotfollah Dezhkam, the Friday prayer leader of Shiraz, Mousavi said, “Enemies have made efforts to weaken armed forces over the past 40 years through imposing sanctions, however, the sanctions made the army more powerful.”

Habibollah Sayyari, the deputy army chief for coordination affairs, said on Wednesday that Iran has turned into a naval power in the region and the Iran-Russia-China wargame proves it.

Iran, Russia, and China conducted the naval wargame, code-named “Marine Security Belt”, in the Sea of Oman and north of the Indian Ocean from December 27 to 30.

Iran, Pakistan hold joint border meeting

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 23rd border meeting of Iran and Pakistan kicked off in Quetta in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan on Wednesday.

Mohammad Hadi Marashi, the deputy governor of Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province for security affairs, leads the Iranian delegation. The Pakistani delegation is also chaired by Feiz Asqar, Baluchistan province's secretary general.

The Iranian and Pakistan officials, who have attended the three-day meeting, are to exchange views over various issues, including expansion of trade ties, restoration of sustainable security to the common borders, joint campaign against terrorism, countering illegal crossing at borders, and anti-drug trafficking cooperation.

The 20th version of the meeting was held in the port city of Chabahar, the 21st in the Pakistani port city of Gwadar, and the 22nd one in Zahedan in southeastern Iran.

Earlier this month, in a meeting in Islamabad, Iran's Navy chief and his Pakistani counterpart discussed new avenues to expand naval cooperation.

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

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

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

In March 2019, the Supreme Leader's top aide for international affairs Ali Akbar Velayati told Pakistan's Railways Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad that Saudi Arabia and Israel were arming anti-Iran terrorist groups inside Pakistan, urging Islamabad to prevent third parties from destroying the two neighbors' ties.

The Pakistani government should not allow other countries “like Saudi Arabia and the Zionists” to undermine Tehran-Islamabad ties and foment crises along the common border, Velayati said during the meeting with Ahmad.

He said the terrorist groups that recently killed a number of Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) forces in Sistan-Baluchistan receive arms and money from Saudi Arabia and Israel.

DAMASCUS (SANA) — Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Ali Asqar Khaji, a senior aide to the Iranian foreign minister for political affairs, held meeting in Damascus on Tuesday, conferring on the latest developments in the Arab country as well as expansion of all-out ties.

During the meeting, Khaji briefed President al-Assad on the most recent developments regarding the latest Astana meeting over crisis in the war-hit country.

President al-Assad pointed to the attempts by the other side in the meeting to obstruct the work of the committee under various pretexts to make it deviate from its tasks and goals.

The Iranian delegation also discussed the most impor-



tant points tackled during the recent meeting in Geneva between Iran, Russia, and Turkey, with the delegation members lauding the progress made by the Syrian Army in the Syrian al-Jazeera area and congratulating President al-Assad and the Syrian people over the victories being achieved by the military operation in Idlib.

President al-Assad said that the goal of the battle of Idlib is to eliminate the terrorism which threatens security and safety of Syrian citizens.

The meeting also touched upon bolster of bilateral relations, with Khaji asserting that Iran always has provided and will provide support for the interests of the Syrian people and the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	384099.6
IFX	5030.77

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,021 rials
GBP	55,673 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$66.00/b
WTI	\$61.06/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.93/b
Gold	\$1,519.20/oz
Silver	\$17.93/oz
Platinum	\$970.55/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Stocks end 2019 near record highs, dollar slides

The dollar slid to a six-month low on Tuesday as progress on U.S.-China trade tensions led investors to higher-risk assets, while a year-end rally that lifted global equity markets to record highs stayed alive on the last trading day of 2019.

A gauge of world stock markets and stocks on Wall Street rebounded late in the session after trading lower most of the day, marking an end to a remarkable year for investors. Many equity indices, long-term bonds, oil and gold posted double-digit gains in 2019.

U.S. President Donald Trump said the Phase 1 trade pact with China would be signed on Jan. 15 at the White House, though confusion remains about details of the agreement.



Hope of an imminent deal has been a key driver for lifting global equities to their best year since 2009, up 24 percent for the year and 88 percent for the decade.

MSCI's all-country world index of stock performance in 49 nations rose 0.86 point or 0.15 percent, to 565.24. The index is less than 3 points shy of an all-time high set on Friday, when the three major U.S. indices also posted record peaks.

The breakthrough in U.S.-China trade talks and a British election earlier in December pointing to a smoother exit from the European Union have boosted investor sentiment, but the outlook for equities next year is not as buoyant, said David Kelly, chief global strategist at JPMorgan Asset Management.

"This is a year in which everybody will celebrate," he said. Going forward, however, Kelly said it will be hard to achieve similar gains, with U.S. equities likely to advance by mid-single digits annually for several years. International markets, especially emerging markets, are poised to do better, he said.

"The U.S. stock market rally could continue but at some stage there's going to be a significant correction, and the more it goes up, the more it's going to correct," he said.

In shortened trading sessions ahead of New Year's Eve celebrations, the pan-European STOXX 600 index closed down 0.08 percent. French, British and Spanish listed stocks lost between 0.1 percent and 0.7 percent, while Frankfurt and Milan bourses were shut for the year-end holidays.

On Wall Street, the Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 76.3 points, or 0.27 percent, to 28,538.44 and the S&P 500 gained 9.49 points, or 0.29 percent, to 3,230.78. The Nasdaq Composite added 26.61 points, or 0.3 percent, to 8,972.60.

Emerging market stocks lost 0.34 percent. Bourses in Asia diverged. China mainland stocks gained 0.4 percent after data showed manufacturing activity in the world's second-largest economy expanded for a second straight month in December.

China's Purchasing Managers' Index showing economic trends in the manufacturing and service sectors was unchanged at 50.2 in December from November, but still remained above the 50-point mark that separates growth from contraction.

In Hong Kong, stocks fell 0.5 percent as protesters geared up for pro-democracy rallies on New Year's Eve. Markets in Japan and South Korea were closed for a holiday.

The dollar's slide came close to wiping out the year's gains, as the pound and trade-sensitive currencies rallied on improving U.S.-China trade relations and the outlook for global growth.

The decline of the dollar is one of the biggest bets in the FX market for 2020. "We could be right at a turning point where global growth re-accelerates relative to U.S. growth, and that could mean a weaker dollar over time," Kelly said.

The dollar was strong for much of 2019 thanks to the relative outperformance of the U.S. economy and investors' preference for a safe-haven currency amid the trade dispute. But the dollar's gains for the year shriveled in December. Investors bought up currencies linked to global trade, sending the Australian dollar, Chinese yuan and Scandinavian crowns to multi-month or multi-week highs against the greenback.

The dollar index, which tracks the greenback against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.237 point or 0.24 percent, to 96.503 and the euro was last up 0.14 percent, at \$1.1213.

The Japanese yen strengthened 0.22 percent versus the greenback at 108.65 per dollar, while Sterling was last trading at \$1.3245, up 1.01 percent on the day.

The weak dollar helped lift spot gold to its highest since Sept. 25 at \$1,525.20 an ounce. The metal was set to post its biggest yearly gain since 2010, rising more than 18 percent.

U.S. gold futures settled up 0.3 percent at \$1,523.10. The benchmark U.S. Treasury 10-year note fell 7/32 in price to yield 1.9192 percent.

(Source: Reuters)

Development projects worth \$491m inaugurated in northwestern Iran

➔ These projects included the upgrading of the terminals, bands and the pavilion of the Ardabil Airport.

Ahmadbiglu Dam in Meshkinshahr City was another important project that the president inaugurated on Wednesday.

Over 1.37 trillion rials (about \$32.38 million) was spent for the completion of the dam, which will add 27.4 million cubic meters to the country's dam capacity.

Some 10.5 million cubic meters of the dam's capacity is going to be used in the agricultural sector, 5.5 million cubic meters for supplying drinking water and the rest will flow into Moshginchai River.

A Truck manufacturing company, several dams and hospitals, numerous factories and roads were among the inaugurated projects.

Rouhani was accompanied by senior officials during the visit including Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, and Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani.

The water and electricity projects inaugurated during Rouhani's visit were part of a major program called "A B Iran" [the acronyms A and B stand for water, electricity in Persian], in which 10 trillion rials (over \$238 million) of projects are set to be inaugurated in each of the country's



Accompanied by Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian (middle) and Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani (L), President Hassan Rouhani (R) inaugurates a dam in Ardebil province on Wednesday.

provinces, on average. Based on the "A B Iran" program, Energy Ministry inaugurates some water, electricity projects across the country every week.

TEDPIX posts a new record

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), hit the record high of 380,000 points on Wednesday, IRNA reported.

The index gained 7,087 points to stand at 384,099.

Some 5.102 billion securities worth 32.161 trillion rials (about \$765.7 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 Wednesday. IFX, the main index of IFB, jumped 84 points to the high level of 5,030 points.

Some 2.177 billion securities worth 73.265 trillion rias (about \$1.744 billion) were traded at IFB on Wednesday.

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.

Construction sector's productivity growth rate negative in past 2 years

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Head of the National Iranian Productivity Organization (NIPO) says the annual productivity growth rate in the country's construction sector has been negative for the past two years, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

"The annual productivity growth rate in the construction sector has been -1.3 percent in the years of 1396 [March 2017-March 2018] and 1397 [March 2018-March 2019]," Fatemeh Pahlevani said.

Speaking in an event on the sidelines of the 2nd International Exhibition and Conference on Iranian Construction Industry, Pahlevani said based on the country's Sixth Five-year National Development Plan,



the productivity rate in the construction sector is set to be 2.8.

According to the official, the annual productivity rate for the transport and warehousing sector has been five percent while the target rate for this sector was set to be 2.1 percent.

Pahlevani further noted that the desirable performance of the transport and warehousing sector is mainly due to the use of new technologies and modification and improvement of processes and operations planning.

"The transport sector's productivity growth cannot be attributed to the development of transport infrastructure in the construction sector," she added.

2019, a year defined by trade wars, Brexit, lower interest rates and record Stocks

Investors charged into the trading year with a renewed sense of confidence after the Federal Reserve signaled further increases in U.S. interest rates during the final weeks of 2018.

However, market players across the globe were left empty-handed in January after the Federal Reserve executed one of its sharpest policy U-turns in recent memory. Not only were interest rates left unchanged at 2.5%, but Fed Chair Jerome Powell also expressed concerns over slowing growth in China and Europe, trade tensions, Brexit and the federal government shutdown. The S&P 500 and Dow Jones gained more than 7% in January despite the Fed's caution. Those marked the biggest gains since January 1987.

In February, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned governments to gear up for a possible economic storm as growth falls short of expectations. Rising fears over trade tensions and tariffs, financial tightening, uncertainty related to Brexit and spillover impact from China's slowdown prompted the IMF to lower its global economic growth forecasts for 2019 from 3.7% to 3.5%. A highly anticipated summit between Donald Trump and the

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un also ended without an agreement this month – ultimately hitting risk sentiment.

Risk aversion made an unwelcome return in March as global recession fears sent investors rushing towards bonds and safe-haven assets while stocks tumbled. The Treasury yield curve inverted for the first time since the last financial crisis which triggered fears of an impending global recession and looser monetary policy. The S&P 500 concluded march gaining only 1% while Gold struggled to benefit from the risk-off sentiment, ending the month on a muted note.

Oil was under the spotlight in April after the Trump administration announced it will no longer grant sanction waivers to any country that imported Iranian Oil. The prospects of 1 million barrels per day being wiped off the markets sent Oil prices surging to a fresh 2019 high above \$66.50. The European Central Bank left interest rates unchanged at -0.4% but warned of 'risks' to eurozone growth.

Donald Trump escalated the trade war with China in May by announcing plans to hike the tariff imposed on \$200 billion of

Chinese goods from 10% to 25%. China wasted no time retaliating by imposing new tariffs on \$60 billion of U.S. import. The tit-for-tat trade war fueled concerns over slowing global growth and weighed heavily on investor sentiment. In the United Kingdom, the Brexit drama reached new heights after Theresa May announced she will step down as Conservative party leader on June 7, essentially paving the way for a leadership contest inside the party.

The Federal Reserve cut interest rates the first time in more than a decade in July, as it tried to keep America's record-long economic expansion going by shielding the economy from mounting global risks. This move by the Fed opened the path for other central banks across the world to ease monetary policy in the face of slowing global growth. Trade uncertainty also forced the IMF to cut its growth forecast for the global economy for 2019 and 2020. It predicted growth of 3.2% in 2019, down from its April forecast of 3.3%.

Global markets tumbled around the world in August after Donald Trump threatened to impose tariffs on \$300bn (£247.6bn) of Chinese goods. The risk aversion boosted appetite for safe-haven assets with Gold concluding

the month 5.2% higher above \$1440.

In September, the Federal Reserve cut interest rates a second time as a safety net against geopolitical risks, trade tensions and slowing global growth. The central bank also cut interest rates for the third time in October. The European Union also agreed to extend the Brexit deadline to January 31.

December was a monumental month for financial markets as the UK general elections and U.S. tariff deadline left investors on edge. A landslide Conservative win in the general election on December 12 opened a near term path for Brexit while investors heaved a sigh of relief after Trump announced a 'phase one' deal. Despite the growing concerns and trade uncertainty, global equity markets performed well in 2019 with the S&P 500 gaining over 28% year to date.

As 2019 came to an end, investors may start pondering how U.S.-China trade developments, Brexit and other geopolitical risk factors will influence financial markets in 2020. Will the new trading year be as volatile as 2019? This is a question on the mind of many market players.

(Source: Yahoo Finance)

Trump says U.S. and China will sign trade deal in January

President Trump said Tuesday that the United States and China would sign a "very large and comprehensive" trade deal at the White House on Jan. 15, though exact details of the agreement were not released.

The signing would cement the first phase of an agreement that took nearly two years to negotiate and would formalize a trade truce between the world's two largest economies. The president, who announced the date of the ceremony on Twitter, said that "high level representatives of China" would attend the signing ceremony and that he planned to travel to China "at a later date" to begin talks on the second phase of the agreement.

Mr. Trump did not say whether Xi Jinping, the Chinese leader, would be in attendance or name any representatives from China who might attend the ceremony.

Text of the agreement, reached in mid-December, has not been made public, and its exact contents have yet to be fully vetted by experts or the many businesses that have suffered from the protracted trade fight with China. The deal would reduce only a small portion of the tariffs that Mr. Trump imposed on \$360 billion worth of Chinese goods, leaving

many levies in place.

Officials from both countries have said the agreement includes commitments from China to increase purchases of American farm and energy products, places limits on Beijing's ability to weaken its currency and provides enhanced protections to American companies doing business in China. The agreement also would reduce tariffs on about \$120 billion worth of goods, and forestalled new tariffs that were scheduled for Dec. 15.

In announcing the agreement, the United States said that China's farm purchases were expected to grow to at least \$40 billion annually over a period of two years and that total exports of food, energy, manufactured goods and services to China would increase by a total of \$200 billion. Chinese officials, however, have remained vague when describing what they agreed to buy and on what timeline.

Details on China's purchase commitments could be left out of the text of the agreement that is made public because officials have been concerned that commodities markets could be distorted if such information is released. The deal is expected to have some flexibility so that China can tailor its purchases to market demand.

Peter Navarro, the White House trade adviser, told CNBC on Tuesday that the American negotiating team was working out the final details before the signing, which had been expected during the first week of January.

"We're just waiting for the Chinese translation of the 86-page agreement," he said.

The trade dispute between the United States and China rattled the world economy during the last 19 months as both countries raised tariffs and other trade barriers while negotiations sputtered and stalled. By breaking the agreement into pieces, China was able to avoid additional tariffs and Mr. Trump secured a policy win heading into his re-election campaign.

Yet the first phase of the agreement does not address many of the most significant concerns that the United States has with China's economic practices, particularly its industrial policy and subsidies of state-owned enterprises. Mr. Trump has said those issues will be addressed in future talks and has said the remaining tariffs will continue to exert pressure on China to accede to America's demands.

(Source: The New York Times)

Domestic firms to develop 28 southern oil reserves

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Managing Director of Iran's Petropars Group, which is the Monitoring and Controlling (MC) body in a project for maintaining and enhancing oil production in 28 reserves operated by the National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC), said the project will be completely handled by domestic firms.

"The project which includes more than a hundred sub-projects, including drilling of about 280 new wells and repairing hundreds of wells, could boost domestic trade and employment," Shana quoted Hamidreza Masoudi as saying.

According to the official, the projects will be awarded under Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) and Engineering, Procurement, Drilling (EPD) contracts and all the funding will be supplied from domestic sources.

Major steps have been taken in this national project, including the planning and reviewing services, determining the implementation procedures, reviewing technical documentation and designs, presentation of the framework and con-



firmation of bidding documents, and etc., Masoudi said.

The official noted that following the government's policies for supporting domestic

production, in this project various financial facilities have been envisaged for contractors to supply materials and equipment.

Back in May, NISOC's Managing Di-

rector Bijan Alipour announced a plan for development of 28 oil reserves in southern Iran through operation-based contracts.

"In this regard, 29 investment packages have been defined among which 11 packages received necessary licenses to go on tender" he said.

According to the official, with these reserves developed, the company's oil production capacity would increase by 340,000 barrels over the next two years.

Later in December, Alipour said NISOC has started implementing the program for maintaining and enhancing oil production in 28 reserves operated by the company.

"About 70 percent of the program is implemented in Khuzestan province [southwestern Iran] and 30 percent in other neighboring provinces in the vicinity of the National Iranian South Oil Company's territory," he said.

In the preparation and implementation of this program, promoting domestic production through the use of the domestic workforce, domestic technology, and Iran-made equipment has been a priority for NISOC, Alipour emphasized.

NIOPDC fully supplies low sulfur fuel oil for shipping fleet

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Managing Director of National Iranian Oil Product Distribution Company (NIOPDC)'s Markazi Department said low sulfur fuel oil needed for the country's vessels and ships is fully supplied and distributed by the company, Shana reported on Tuesday citing the Oil Ministry.

Saied Jamshidi noted that Imam Khomeini Oil Refinery in the Markazi province has allocated separate lines, tanks and loading arms to store and ship the needed fuel for the maritime fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL).

Mentioning some rumors that NIOPDC is not supplying enough low-sulfur fuel for the IRISL fleet, Jamshidi said "The main problem in this regard has been the contractors' failure in fulfilling their commitments."

According to Jamshidi, since November 6, Imam Khomeini Refinery has transferred 20,000 tons of low-sulfur fuel oil to some agreed storages via pipeline, however, the IRISL's contractors have fulfilled to deliver the product to the vessels.

The International Maritime Organization introduced new regulations to reduce air pollution resulted from the use of high-sulfur fuels by vessels.

Based on the new regulations, sculpture will be cut drastically from global shipping transport fuels in 2020.

From 1 January 2020, ships will only be allowed to use fuel oil with a very low sulfur content, under rules brought in by the International Maritime Organization. This cut in sulfur content has been more than a decade in the planning, and almost all shipping around the world is expected to comply, or face penalties.



Britain's zero-carbon power outstrips fossil fuels in 2019



Britain, the birthplace of coal power, produced more electricity from zero-carbon sources such as wind, solar and nuclear than from fossil fuel plants for the first time in 2019, National Grid said on Wednesday.

Having built the world's first coal-fired power plant in the 1880s, coal became Britain's dominant electricity source and a major economic driver for the next century. But last year Britain became the first G7 country to commit to reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 and in November will host the United Nations' international climate talks in Glasgow.

"As we enter a new decade, this truly is a historic moment," said National Grid Chief Executive John Pettigrew, referring to the company's latest data.

The data shows wind, solar, hydro, nuclear and imports produced about 48.5 percent of

Britain's electricity in 2019 while fossil fuels such as coal and gas contributed about 43 percent. The rest came from biomass.

The increase in zero-carbon power marks a huge shift from almost two decades ago when fossil fuels provided about three quarters of the country's electricity.

The shift has been mainly thanks to a rapid increase in Britain's renewable power capacity, with wind, solar and hydro producing more than a quarter of the country's electricity in 2019, up from only 2.3 percent in 1990.

This figure is expected to continue to grow as more large offshore wind farms are built. The National Grid data shows that 8 per-

cent of Britain's electricity came from imports from Europe via interconnectors with France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Ireland.

About 66 percent of these imports came from zero-carbon generation.

The data confirmed expectations for growth in low-carbon power published by National Grid in mid-2019, based on data for the first five months of the year.

Britain's windy coastlines in particular have proved to be an ideal host for large wind projects, with the northwest coast of England home to the world's largest offshore wind farm, Orsted's Walney Extension.

(Source: Reuters)

European fuel oil markets face a whirlwind of change in 2020

The International Maritime Organization-mandated reduction in sulfur limits for fuels burnt on the high seas from January 1, 2020 will bring the biggest change to oil product markets in decades.

Fuel oil trade flows and historic supply-and-demand dynamics will alter radically next year with refiners and shippers trying to comply with the rules. A greater appetite for lighter and sweeter crudes at one end and a loss of demand for dirty fuels at the other will have far-reaching implications across Europe and beyond.

Northwest Europe is expected to be balanced to long for 0.5 percent sulfur fuel oil in 2020, according to market sources, following the completion of several refinery upgrades, and increasing imports of sweet crude barrels which produce lower sulfur fuels.

Prior to the lower sulfur cap regulation, Northwest Europe was net long 3.5 percent sulfur fuel oil, sending supply east to Singapore as well as down to Mediterranean ports. However, as forecast by Platts Analytics, declining demand for 3.5 percent fuel oil is set to see a collapse in the east-west arbitrage.

The East-West spread -- which measures 380 CST Singapore fuel oil cargoes against 3.5 percent sulfur FOB Rotterdam barges, indicating the openness of the arbitrage east -- has widened towards the end of 2019. The average spread across Q3 2019 was \$47.65/mt, considerably higher than the figure for Q3 2018 at \$15.19/mt. Despite stronger values, Platts has not seen an increase in the number of vessels heading eastwards. As the deadline approaches, with volatile prices and dropping demand for higher sulfur fuel oil, traders became increasingly less likely to try and work the arbitrage for fear of being stranded with product and no buyer.

Whether the arbitrage between Singapore and Rotterdam will continue for 0.5 percent in the same way it traditionally did for 3.5 percent remains unclear.

Meanwhile, the Mediterranean, known for its complex refining capacity, is expected to reverse its position from being net-short HSFO, to net-long for 0.5 percent marine fuel, as companies look to use low sulfur straight run fuels in their bunker pool.

Demand for light sweet crude grades across Europe has risen as refineries adjusted their slates for lower sulfur oil production ahead of the regulation, with sources noting that demand for Algeria's premier grade has particularly benefited as it is an ideal grade to blend with heavier and sourer barrels.

Algerian low-sulfur straight-run fuel oil -- always highly



prized for its quality -- is drawing attention from refiners globally. European and Singapore-based players have been paying high values to import LSSR from Skikda, Algeria, when typically about 80 percent-90 percent of those cargoes would have headed to the US, one source said.

Approximately 400,000 mt of LSSR per month is exported from the 335,000 b/d refinery complex at Skikda, with the US traditionally having been a key buyer, particularly during the summer months to produce gasoline.

Thus, a tug of war has emerged between several countries willing to pay higher values for Algerian barrels.

■ West African quality

West African grades have also received increased interest. Some refiners which previously never bought West African crude have now entered the market as IMO 2020 changes the landscape for crude buyers, according to sources.

Looking at the availability of compliant fuels in Europe, the share of 0.5 percent fuel oil sales in the bunker pool in the Amsterdam-Rotterdam-Antwerp region and in the western Mediterranean has already surpassed 90 percent, market sources said mid-December.

However, the amount of supply available in Europe, and a potential surplus for arbitrage opportunities, is still in question. Traders have told Platts they believe the European market is more likely to fill local shorts rather than export product. One market participant told Platts that the time and costs incurred in building a 0.5 percent sulfur cargo for arbitraging east were not viable as traders will struggle to find buyers who will meet the price.

■ Russian upgrades slow

Russia's fuel oil output dropped significantly in the

last few years, down from about 80 million mt a few years ago to about 50 million mt in 2018. This figure will likely remain stable in the next few years until all refinery modernization programs are completed. Some refineries, like Lukoil's Volgograd, switched to 0.5 percent fuel oil, whereas Perm fully halted fuel oil output, but upgrades are progressing more slowly at others. Lukoil's Nizhny Novgorod and Gazprom Neft's Omsk target completion and subsequent fall of fuel oil output around 2021, but for Gazprom Neft's Moscow refinery the timeline is 2024 while Rosneft, which operates the majority of Russia's biggest refineries, plans to complete its refinery modernization program by 2025.

The 13 million mt/year bunker market is expected to contract next year, which potentially will add to the export flows. With fuel oil exports accounting for almost 90 percent of output, Russia is looking at ways to ease the pressure by increasing bitumen output and deferring the sulfur cap on bunker fuel used on its internal waterways.

But a new excise planned by the Russian government from April 2020 is likely to put even more pressure on refineries as the tax will likely push domestic fuel oil prices up and hit local demand. Analysts are already questioning the timing of this measure.

■ Emerging exporting markets

Interestingly, with historic patterns changing in light of a cleaner era of bunker fuels, new players to the bunkers market are being watched closely for their supply impact to the wider market. In particular, eyes are on China and Brazil 0.5 percent sulfur marine fuel flows.

The top four state-owned refiners in China have commenced production of VLSFO which could boost production capacity to 18 million mt/year in 2020, according to data from the Marine Bunker Exchange. Previously, China was a small player in fuel oil production despite its large refining sector due to its use of the product for domestic consumption and being hit by value-added taxes, analysts from ESAI have said. As China takes advantage of greater low-sulfur fuel oil exports opportunities from a potential tax refund, VLSFO production is expected to rise by 27.9 percent to 550,000 b/d early next year to potentially "dominate" the regional bunker market, ESAI said.

In addition, Brazil's state oil giant Petrobras said in its Q3 sales report that IMO 2020 had created export opportunities for low-sulfur fuel oil, particularly in the Singapore market.

(Source: Platts)

Oil's turbulent 2019: Saudi supply panic to freight rate frenzy

It's been a tumultuous 2019 for the oil market. The year has seen surging crude prices due to attacks on key Saudi Arabian energy facilities and skyrocketing freight rates after American sanctions on Chinese shipping companies. On another front, oil processing margins in Asia have slumped to the lowest in more than a decade, while IMO 2020 is rattling the market.

Here are four charts that showcase the key events in 2019:

■ Strike surge

Brent oil jumped by almost 15 percent on Sept. 16 -- the most ever in a single day -- following an attack on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais, which halved the kingdom's output. While production has returned to normal, prices remain elevated and are set for the biggest yearly gain since 2016 after a breakthrough in U.S.-China trade talks and a pledge by OPEC+ to deepen cuts.

■ Freight frenzy

The cost of hauling oil from the Middle Eastern Persia Gulf to China surged to a record high in mid-October after the U.S. slapped sanctions on a number of Chinese shipping companies including a unit of COSCO for transporting Iranian crude. While the daily spot rate for the key Asian route has eased about 61 percent since the surge, it's still about three-fold more than the five-year average, according to Galbraiths data.

■ Tanker cost soars

Cost to hire a supertanker for Asia's key route rose versus its 5-year average.

■ Processing pain

Profits from processing Dubai crude into fuels have crashed in the final few months of the year, defying an expected rally in diesel margins forecast ahead of the adoption of new ship-fuels from Jan. 1. Asia's complex refining margins have averaged -50 cents a barrel in December, compared with the five-year average of \$4.81 a barrel.

■ Shipping shake-up

The price gap of light oil versus the heavier variety has ballooned as the impending change to ship-fuel standards near. For January sales to Asia, Saudi Arabia's Extra Light crude was priced \$5.95 a barrel higher than Arab Heavy, the widest gap between the two varieties in more than five years.

While the availability of light oil was hampered after the Saudi attacks, refiners have been snapping up oil that produce less pollutive fuels ahead of the shakeup in the shipping sector.

(Source: Bloomberg)

S.Korea's Dec. crude oil imports down 6.1% y/y

South Korea's crude oil imports in December fell 6.1 percent from a year earlier to 87.3 million barrels, preliminary data from the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy showed on Wednesday.

The Asian country imported 90.9 million barrels in November, 4.7 percent less than a year earlier.

However, South Korea's U.S. crude oil imports rose 80.4 percent in November from a year earlier, with imports in the first 11 months soaring 165.3 percent, customs data showed on Sunday.

South Korea, the world's fifth-largest crude oil importer, shipped in 1.56 million tons of U.S. crude oil in November, or 382,357 barrels per day (bpd), according to the customs data. That was up 80.4 percent from 867,687 tons a year earlier, but down 12.9 percent from nearly 1.8 million tons in October.

The United States was South Korea's No. 4 crude oil supplier in November after Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq.

"November South Korea's U.S. crude volume was actually steady to October," Emma Li, senior oil analyst with Refinitiv.

But Li said, a rise in freight rates in October, which affected November-loading vessels, would weigh on January and February arrivals.

Freight rates surged in October amid a tanker shortage following U.S. sanctions against Chinese shipper COSCO over alleged Iranian oil cargoes.

South Korea has imported over 1 million tons of U.S. crude oil every month this year, hitting the highest monthly intake of 1.91 million tons in July, or 450,838 bpd, the data showed.

South Korea's U.S. crude imports were 16.09 million tons in the first 11 months of the year, or 353,115 bpd, up 165.3 percent from 6.07 million tons over the same period a year earlier.

(Source: Reuters)

Saudi plan to wean off oil sees success even as economy stalls

Saudi Arabia's economy shrank 0.5% in the third quarter, a contraction that was broadly expected even as the kingdom's goal of weaning itself off crude began to pay off with solid growth in non-oil sectors.

The overall economy was weighed down by shrinkage of 6.4% in the country's oil sector, according to data released Tuesday by the General Authority for Statistics. Overall growth for 2019 is expected to accelerate to a modest 0.4%, according to the latest government estimates, before climbing to 2.3% next year.

Non-oil sectors of the economy grew 4.3% in the third quarter compared to about 2% for the same period of 2018, a sign of Crown Prince's Mohammed bin Salman's initiative to diversify the world's top oil exporter's economy from crude.

Earlier this year, Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan said the government plans to gradually reduce spending as private-sector growth picks up and businesses take the lead.

(Source: Bloomberg)

U.S. crude stocks fell in latest week: API

U.S. crude oil stocks fell in the most recent week while gasoline inventories declined and distillate stocks rose, data from industry group the American Petroleum Institute showed on Tuesday.

Crude inventories fell by 7.8 million barrels in the week to Dec. 27, to 436 million barrels, compared with analysts' expectations for a draw of 3.2 million barrels.

Crude stocks at the Cushing, Oklahoma, delivery hub fell by 1.4 million barrels, API said.

Refinery crude runs rose by 74,000 barrels per day, API data showed. Gasoline stocks fell by 776,000 barrels, compared with analysts' expectations in a Reuters poll for a 2.1 million-barrel gain.

Distillate fuel inventories, which include diesel and heating oil, rose by 2.8 million barrels, compared with expectations for a 1.8 million-barrel gain, the data showed.

U.S. crude imports fell last week by 447,000 barrels per day to 5.97 million bpd.

(Source: Reuters)

Talking racism in the UK

The reactions to recent statements by Stormzy and Gary Neville show just how hard it is to discuss racism in public.

By Jeffrey Boakye

If the old “bread and circuses” idea holds any truth, then as long as we are entertained, we will keep quiet and stay in our place. Two of the biggest circus arenas are popular music and modern sport, entertaining millions of us and keeping our attention away from the failings of the ruling elite.

Let the working man have his football, let the kids have their noisy dance music, and God forbid that the stars of the show should ever use their platform to comment on problems that cripple the nation.

That is what it felt like this weekend, when on two separate instances celebrities called out racism in the United Kingdom. The reactions to their statements prove just how much we need to speak out on this topic in the first place.

First, we had Stormzy, the grime superstar, who is no stranger to political controversy, putting it on record (literally) that the government is not to be trusted and vocalizing a generation’s disdain for our current prime minister, Boris Johnson.

In response to a question over whether the UK is still racist, he told Italian newspaper La Repubblica “definitely, 100 percent”. This was swiftly and erroneously translated into headlines claiming Stormzy had said that the UK is 100 percent racist, followed by a social media troll-a-thon from people who think he is getting too big for his boots, citing a list of crimes against knowing your place. Highlights include accusations of ungratefulness and even calls for Stormzy to consider returning to his ethnic home of Ghana. Oh, the audacity.



In a recent interview British singer Stormzy said he believed there is a lot of racism in the UK [File: Vianney Le Caer/Invision/AP]

Then, in the “ivory tower” of the Sky Sports pundit box, we found former football player Gary Neville having the nerve to state, on camera, following a racist incident during the Tottenham vs Chelsea game, that racism is an endemic problem not only in UK football, but in UK society at large - not least of all within the country’s dominant political parties.

It was a special moment, seeing this loyal representative of English football so frustrated by racism in the beautiful game that he could not help but steam into the breadth of the problem, on the pitch and beyond. It was a move that was met with a real-time shush-shushing from Sky Sports presenter David Jones, who felt the need to add a disclaimer to Neville’s comments, saying that they were not the views of Sky Sports. Jones has since apologized, tweeting that he is “sorry to have spoiled ... an important discussion on racism”.

Apart from both being well-known British men, Neville and Stormzy represent very different corners: one very much an established member of one of the country’s most enduring sporting traditions, the other - the ultimate outsider, son of immigrants from a former colony, finding success in marginalized black music and breaking through from a plucky underdog into people’s champion.

Neville is far from the millennial revolutionary that Stormzy has become, but even he could not quite get away with saying it as it is.

Both of these incidents prove that mainstream discourse is simply not ready or willing to hear the truth about race politics in the UK, so much so that anyone bold enough to state the obvious truth - that racism exists in this country - becomes a target for reprimand.

At a time when the political center seems to be shifting inexorably towards the right (just think about the impact of former Home Minister and Prime Minister Theresa May’s “hostile environment” for immigrants or the ongoing Windrush scandal), political divisions are deepening daily.

It is a scary time to speak out against the racism and prejudice that permeates British society and its oldest institutions. It is a scary time to stand up for victims of racism whose plight is all too often rendered invisible by those who do not want to see the ugly truth. Those that do, be they sports commentators or chart-topping musicians, face being silenced or vilified with a swiftness that reminds us who is really in charge: people in power structures that will not be challenged.

But challenge them we must. Support for Stormzy and Neville in the wake of their comments proves that many of us are willing to force the agenda and seek change. The UK does have a problem with racism, that is a fact. And the problem will not go away until those who refuse to see give way to those who do.

Jeffrey Boakye is the author of Black, Listed: Black British Culture Explored.

(Source: Aljazeera)

WHO launches new report on global tobacco use trends

Number of males using tobacco globally on the decline, showing that government-led control efforts work to save lives, protect health, beat tobacco.

For the first time, the World Health Organization projects that the number of males using tobacco is on the decline, indicating a powerful shift in the global tobacco epidemic. The findings, published today in a new WHO report, demonstrate how government-led action can protect communities from tobacco, save lives and prevent people suffering tobacco-related harm.

“Declines in tobacco use amongst males mark a turning point in the fight against tobacco,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “For many years now we had witnessed a steady rise in the number of males using deadly tobacco products. But now, for the first time, we are seeing a decline in male use, driven by governments being tougher on the tobacco industry. WHO will continue working closely with countries to maintain this downward trend.”

During nearly the past two decades, overall global tobacco use has fallen, from 1.397 billion in 2000 to 1.337 billion in 2018, or by approximately 60 million people, according to the WHO global report on trends in prevalence of tobacco use 2000-2025 third edition.

(Source: WHO)

Riyadh’s Aramco struggle

Aramco’s IPO reaches \$2tn mark but sceptics ask for how long and what’s next?

➔ A verdict from a closed-door trial of Khashoggi’s murder was recently criticized by UN investigator as a “mockery” of justice.

The impact of Kashoggi’s slaying became apparent early when Saudi Arabia hosted The World Economic Forum, also referred to as “Davos in the Desert” in 2018. Presidents, prime ministers and business leaders boycotted the summit.

However, a year after the flagship investor meeting many leaders were back for the summit last October, including India’s Narendra Modi, Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro, King Abdullah II of Jordan and four African leaders were among 6000 people from 30 countries.

The Public Investment Fund, Riyadh’s sovereign wealth fund is the organizer of the event.

■ **Tanker attacks:** Attacks on tankers across Persian Gulf started again last summer endangering global energy security.

■ **Aramco attack:** Drone attacks of September 14 on world’s largest oil processing facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais, owned by Aramco. The attacks decimated Saudi oil output by some five million barrels per day cutting of some five percent of global oil supply. Although the Yemen’s Houthi rebels initially claimed responsibility and UN has questioned evidence against Iran involvement over the drone attacks, U.S. and Saudi Arabia have blamed Iran for the attack. Tehran has denied responsibility.

In September the rating agency Fitch downgraded Saudi Arabia’s credit rating to A from A+, citing rising geopolitical and military tensions in the Persian Gulf following attacks on Aramco’s oil facilities.

In an interview MBS said he hoped a military response could be avoided, fearing that war with Iran would “collapse the global economy”.

■ **Yemen war:** In March 2015, then Saudi defense minister MBS launched what was meant to be a short and decisive bombing campaign in Yemen. Now with tens of thousands of civilians killed and global media backlash against the Saudi led coalition and with 14 million people at risk of starvation this war has been identified the worst humanitarian crisis of our times by the UN.

■ **Vision 2030:** The part-privatization of Aramco is the centerpiece of MBS’s “Vision 2030” program, a grand plan to modernize the Saudi economy, reduce its reliance on oil and open the way for foreign investment. The main pillar of the project is the privatization of Aramco.



Aramco’s oil facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais in the kingdom’s Eastern Province were attacked on September 14 [AP/Amr Nabil]

Vision 2030’s flagship project is a vast, high tech business zone in northwestern Saudi Arabia called NEOM that will cost \$500 billion.

Currently two-thirds of employed Saudis work for the state and under Vision 2030 it is supposed to go down to 20 percent.

With rampant poverty in Saudi Arabia today and austerity plans further alleviating the situation and with lack of interest from private sector there is very little confidence if this vision will materialize.

Despite some austerity measures the budget deficit is set to rise to \$50bn in 2020 from \$35bn in 2019.

■ **Climate change:** Global shift towards electric cars and worsening climate change effects could dampen the demand for oil in the future. As renewables get cheaper, it will become economical to retire existing coal and gas plants.

■ **Shale oil:** Having learned to wring oil from shale with fracking, the United States has vaulted to the top of

the oil producer rankings, with 12.5 million barrels per day of output, double 2010 levels. Shale oil production exceeds 9 million bpd, from below one million bpd in 2010, making the United States an oil exporter for the first time in 40 years.

The shale boom is partly why conversations around energy have switched from peak supply to peak demand. Surging output comes alongside environmental concerns, meaning an oil glut is likelier than shortages.

Aramco is the world’s first two trillion dollar company. Transparency is minimal regarding Saudi spare production capacity, the remaining unexplored reserves and their ownership, and production costs are to name just another few of the economic factors. Saudi human rights records remain dismal. When a journalist can be murdered inside a Saudi consulate abroad, possibilities of human rights abuse inside the country can just be imagined.

To make Aramco a viable investor option is going to be a struggle for Riyadh.

‘Survival will be our first priority’: Huawei sees a tough 2020

Chinese telecoms giant expects revenue growth to slow down in 2020 as U.S. sanctions take their toll.

China’s Huawei Technologies has said on Tuesday that its full-year revenue would likely jump 18 percent in 2019 to 850 billion yuan (\$122bn), lower than its earlier projections, as a trade blacklisting by the United States curbed growth and disrupted its ability to source key parts.

The world’s biggest maker of telecom network equipment and the No 2 manufacturer of smartphones, was all but banned by the U.S. in May from doing business with US companies, preventing its access to technology like Google’s Android operating system.

The U.S. government alleges Huawei equipment poses national security risks because it could be used by the Chinese government to spy on users. Huawei has repeatedly denied its products are a security threat.

Huawei’s Rotating Chairman Eric Xu revealed the numbers in a New Year’s message to employees and customers in which he also forecast 2020 to be a “difficult year”, saying the firm was unlikely to grow as rapidly as it did in the first half of this year.

“Survival will be our first priority” in 2020, said Xu.

Its 18-percent revenue growth forecast for 2019 is less than that of 2018, when Huawei’s annual revenue rose 19.5 percent.

The company did not break down fourth-quarter figures but, according to



Huawei’s newest Mate 30 smartphone first went on sale in September but it cannot access a licensed version of Google’s Android operating system because of US trade curbs [File: Michaela Handrek-Rehle/Bloomberg]

Reuters calculations based on its previous statements, revenue in the quarter to end December 31 rose to 239.2 billion yuan (\$23.3bn), up 3.9 percent from a year earlier and slower than the 27 percent increase it reported in the third quarter.

“The external environment is becoming

more complicated than ever, and downward pressure on the global economy has intensified,” Xu said.

“In the long term, the U.S. government will continue to suppress the development of leading technology - a challenging environment for Huawei to survive and thrive.”

Xu also said Huawei had shipped 240 million smartphones this year, a 20-percent increase from 2018. Huawei has mainly sold smartphones that were launched before the ban.

The newest Mate 30 smartphone first went on sale in September but it cannot access a licensed version of Google’s Android operating system because of the trade curbs.

Xu said in his letter that Huawei would in 2020 “go all out” to build its Huawei Mobile Services ecosystem, which comprises services such as cloud storage and an app gallery, describing it as “the foundation of our ability to sell smart devices in markets outside China”.

It is also developing its own mobile operating system known as Harmony, although analysts are skeptical that the system is a viable alternative to Android.

Huawei’s reputation was dented earlier this month after details of the dismissal and wrongful detention of a former employee went viral.

In his letter, Xu said they would continue to remove mediocre managers and complacent employees as Huawei needed to rid the company of complacency, and that they would dismiss managers performing in the bottom 10 percent every year.

(Source: Aljazeera)

From Blackjack bomber to ‘Soviet Concorde’: Legendary Russian planes left behind by Tupolev’s late chief designer

Built to keep up pace with the U.S. and boost the USSR’s booming airlines, his planes were a true engineering marvel of the time. We recall the most iconic jets designed by Valentin Bliznyuk, who has died at 91.

Bliznyuk passed away on Monday, the Tupolev design bureau confirmed, offering condolences to his family. “He was an outstanding aircraft designer, a talented organizer, a responsive and attentive leader and friend” who had made “an invaluable contribution to the Russian aircraft industry,” their tribute said.

A native of eastern Kazakhstan, Bliznyuk joined the famed design bureau back in the early 1950s, years before the golden age of Soviet aviation. But the Cold War was in full swing, with the military looking out for a strategic bomber able to reach the U.S. coast if an all-out nuclear war broke out.

■ **Tu-95**

As a young engineer in his 20s, Bliznyuk was involved in designing and building the legendary Tu-95 turboprop airplane, which would become a backbone of the Soviet and Russian Air Force for decades to come. Known to NATO as ‘Bear’ – a stereotypical reference to Russia’s might – the Tu-95 made her maiden flight in 1952 and entered service four years later.

Throughout its decades-long lifetime,

the ‘Bear’ was repeatedly upgraded to meet the requirements of modern warfare. Its avionics became more sophisticated and the weaponry more powerful; initially built to carry nuclear bombs, the Tu-95 has been retrofitted to fire long-range Kh-101 cruise missiles.

The Russian Air Force is expected to take delivery of its latest variant, the Tu-95MSM, in the coming years. It will reportedly be furnished with advanced electronics and navigation equipment as well as new, more

fuel-efficient engines.

The Tu-144 manifested the best of Soviet plane-making prowess, but its flying career was unfortunate. As designers struggled to deal with snowballing failures and flaws, higher oil prices during the 1970s started to catch up with the Soviet Union.

Although it happened much later than in the West, fuel efficiency became crucial for Aeroflot, as did the Tu-144’s commercial performance. It was retired from passenger service in 1978 following two crashes, but

unlike its Western rival, it didn’t result in any fatalities during its 55 regular flights.

■ **Tu-160**

Bliznyuk was finally propelled to fame in the late 1970s when he was appointed the chief designer of Tupolev’s flagship supersonic project, the Tu-160. It was designed to carry and launch heavy nuclear-capable missiles after breaching NATO air defenses at Mach 2.05.

The Tu-160 is able to spread or sweep her wings, a unique feature allowing it to safely fly at supersonic or subsonic speeds. While NATO calls it the ‘Blackjack,’ Russian pilots prefer a more romantic name – the ‘White Swan,’ in reference to its anti-heatwave painting and elegant design.

Being the largest and heaviest supersonic military aircraft ever built, and the fastest bomber now in use, the Tu-160 is ready to step into the future. The Tu-160M upgrade programmer began in the mid-2010s, and the first advanced aircraft was rolled out in 2017.

Aside from building new planes, Russia will seriously modernize its existing planes, with essentially only hulls remaining in place. The military is expected to receive the Tu-160M in 2021, the Defense Ministry said earlier this year.

(Source: RT)



FILE PHOTOS: Tu-144, Tu-160 and Tu-95. (RIA Novosti; Reuters)

Iraq: America’s other ‘Longest War’

By Thomas Knapp

ANTIWAR — As the calendar prepared to flip from 2019 to 2020, protesters stormed the US embassy in Baghdad. As I write this, the action – a response to US airstrikes in Iraq and Syria which killed at least 25 and wounded more than 50 – hasn’t yet become a reprise of the Iran hostage crisis of 40 years ago, but it’s eerily reminiscent.

Although few Americans seem to notice, Iraq is arguably the second-longest war in US history.

Mainstream media often refer to the 18-year US occupation of Afghanistan as “America’s longest war.” That claim is wrong on its face.

Setting aside a century of “Indian wars” and two decades of involvement in Vietnam prior to the 1965 escalation, the Korean War handily takes the “longest war” prize: It began in 1950 and has merely been in ceasefire status, with occasional flare-ups and no final settlement, since 1953. If wars were people, the Korean War would be collecting Social Security.

The US war in Iraq is approaching its 28th birthday, also with no end in sight.

It began in January of 1991 with Operation Desert Storm (“the liberation of Kuwait” from Iraqi occupation). The 12 years between that “mother of all battles” and the 2003 US invasion were punctuated by US bombings to facilitate a Kurdish secession movement



in the north, protect persecuted Shiites in the south, and provide convenient distractions from assorted Clinton administration peccadilloes.

Following the short, sharp conventional fighting phase of the invasion, the war remained a very hot conflict – a combination of civil war and anti-occupation insurgency – for years following US president George W. Bush’s “mission accomplished” announce-

ment in May of 2003.

A brief cooling period accompanied Barack Obama’s 2009 inauguration, but by 2014 American troops (and “civilian contractors,” i.e., mercenaries) were once again arriving to intervene in the new regime’s fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The airstrikes which sparked the current protests were carried out in response to a rocket attack on a regime military base in

which one of the aforementioned American mercenaries was killed.

The bigger picture:

The US government is using Iraq as a staging area for its ongoing actions in Syria and against Iran (which it blames for this specific rocket attack and for its backing of militias in Iraq in general).

US president Donald Trump talks a good “let’s get out of all these stupid wars” game. But in actuality he has increased, and continues to increase, the size of US military deployments to, and the tempo of US military operations in, the Middle East and Central Asia.

Several thousand US troops remain in Iraq and the war looks likely to stretch into a fourth decade.

There is, of course, an alternative: Trump could put his money where his mouth is and begin withdrawing US troops from the region instead of continuing to pour American blood and treasure into a series of conflicts which should never have happened in the first place.

Peace on Earth? Maybe not. But the US going home and minding its own business would be a good start.

Thomas L. Knapp is director and senior news analyst at the William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism. He lives and works in north central Florida. This article is reprinted with permission from William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism.

Iraq’s PMU a key check and balance against U.S.-sponsored terrorism: Cartalucci

TEHRAN (MNA) — Anthony Cartalucci, Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher, says Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) play an undeniably significant role in foiling the US’ plots in the country as the forces have many “homefield” advantages over America and its proxies.

US forces on Sunday conducted drone strikes on a number of bases for Kata’ib Hezbollah, which is part of Iraq’s PMU, known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha’abi, in western Anbar province, killing at least 25 individuals and leaving another 51 injured. The US attack prompted massive public anger in Iraq on Tuesday, with protesters storming the US Embassy in Baghdad and seizing the building after American diplomatic personnel had been forced to evacuate.

Many believe these aggressive measures come from Washington’s fear of the empowerment of such forces that disturb the activities of its mercenaries in the region.

In an interview with Mehr News Agency, the Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher Anthony Cartalucci elaborated on the PMU’s role in nipping the US’ plots in the bud and the reasons behind American’s assault against the popular units’ positions in Iraq. How do you see the role of Iraq’s PMU in foiling the US plots for the country?

The popular mobilization units have been a key check and balance against US-led state-sponsored terrorism across the Middle East. They have served on the front line against Al Qaeda, ISIL, and various affiliates and allies. They also help serve as a check and balance within nations like Iraq which still stand divided after years of extensive US meddling and political interference. Whatever direction the Iraqi military may go in, there is at least the PMU’s to ensure communities have a means of defending against deliberately coaxed sectarian violence. The PMU also serves as an indirect - and thus difficult to disrupt - form of influence Iran and its allies can exert across the region to counter America’s likewise indirect methods of projecting power and influence. Because the PMU’s are drawn from the region and sponsored by nations in the region, they have many “homefield” advantages over America and its proxies.

Why did the US attack the PMU?

The US is losing not only its regime-change war in Syria but also its influence over nations like Iraq despite literally militarily occupying them. The attack on PMU’s is meant to provoke conflict, invite escalation, and serve as an attempted show of power.

Unfortunately for Washington - the region has watched

the US wage large scale war and covert war for now nearly 2 decades. A handful of additional airstrikes makes little difference and if anything serves to illustrate American impotence. The PMU’s and their sponsors must exercise caution and patience - continue on with the successful formula they’ve used to help usher the region out from under US hegemony - and avoid falling into traps sprung by such provocations.

Isn’t the US attack a violation of Iraq’s sovereignty?

The US attacks are most certainly an absolute violation of Iraq’s (and Syria’s) sovereignty. The US carried out the attacks unilaterally and in direct contravention to international law. They also found themselves condemned strongly by the Iraqi government itself. The PMU’s have served on the front line against terrorist groups the US itself - at least superficially - acknowledges must be confronted and eliminated. Thus the US essentially ignored Iraqi sovereignty, Iraq’s best interests, all in an effort to attack militias engaged in a critical battle against internationally recognized terrorist groups.

In many ways, these attacks serve as a new low point in US foreign policy. We can only hope that in the new year to come more rational minds prevail in Washington and the Middle East can find relief from this enduring belligerence.

Charles Dunaway: Israeli corruption among worst in world

TEHRAN (FNA) — Charles Dunaway, journalist and political commentator, says Israel has become increasingly corrupt with the Likud party in power for decades.

“In the early years after the Nakba, much of the corruption involved attempts to strengthen the ruling party... As the nation grew more prosperous, corruption moved toward election funding and jobs for political supporters. The current scandals are more focused on money and personal gain,” Dunaway said in an exclusive interview with FNA.

Charles Dunaway is an American radio host and journalist who runs an online political forum. His program is focused on international news, primarily from media sources outside the United States’ sphere of influence.

Below is the full text of the interview:

■ What is the status of corruption among

the heads of the Israeli regime?

A: Financial corruption is the most common form of government criminality worldwide. Israel, like any other polity, becomes increasingly corrupt when a single group stays in power for a long time. The Likud party ruled Israel for 15 years ending in 1992 and now has been in power for over a decade. Bribery at the highest levels of government is often the result of a powerful government ruling over a growing and developing economy, which has been the case in Israel for many decades.

Transparency International ranked Israel 34th on its corruption transparency index for 2018. While among the worst rankings in the developed world, Israel ranked as 3rd least corrupt in the MENA region after UAE and Qatar. Of course the methodologies of such reports often reflect a Western-oriented bias.

Many nations rated among the most corrupt are designated enemies of the United States.

■ Almost every Israeli prime minister has been accused of corruption. Why has bribery been so rampant for decades?

A: A number of factors could be at play. Members of the Knesset are immune from prosecution under Israeli law and that certainly plays a role. In the early years after the Nakba, much of the corruption involved attempts to strengthen the ruling party and thus the occupation government. As the nation grew more prosperous, corruption moved toward election funding and jobs for political supporters. The current scandals are more focused on money and personal gain. Doron Navot of Haifa University also notes that the Israeli government views the United States as a role model and the US

has one of the most corrupt political systems in the developed world. He also credits the West Bank settlement expansion’s role in political appointments and in support for leaders with a hawkish agenda.

■ How has the Israeli regime’s corruption impacted the people?

A: Corruption always results in a loss of faith in government and respect for political leaders. In Israel this is reflected in the political stalemate and lower turnouts, especially among Palestinians living in Israel who, like poorer people everywhere, suffer most from the harmful effects of political corruption. Bribery also tilts the playing field for Israeli companies. Those with close ties to officials prosper while others languish, without regard for the value of the industry to the nation or the viability of its products.

Syria doesn’t need divisive cross-border aid

TEHRAN (FNA) — Back in December, Russia and China cast their vetos at the UN Security Council (UNSC) to block cross-border aid deliveries from Turkey and Iraq to Syrian civilians.

The resolution drafted by Belgium, Kuwait and Germany would have allowed cross-border humanitarian deliveries for a further 12 months.

Since 2014, some NGOs have operated in Syria from four posts monitored by the UN in Turkey, Iraq and Jordan. The current authorization for the four border crossings in Turkey, Iraq and Jordan would end in January 10, 2020 and some of the UNSC wanted to extend these deliveries for another year.

The cross-border aid deliveries are very sensitive topics in the Syria issue. After the UN adopted Resolution 2165 in 2014, UN agencies and some NGOs started to truck assistance from Iraq, Turkey and Jordan into parts of Syria to help Syrian refugees. The aid largely played an important role to the Syria relief operation and many refugees benefited from the resolution.

However, the cross-border aid has also led to problems. On the one hand, the UN agencies are not able to cover all the necessities and demands of the refugees inside Syria, while some NGOs play

a much larger role.

Although these NGOs operated under the supervision of UN, in reality it is very difficult or even impossible for UN officials to monitor every truck or every item. Some NGOs have close ties with states hostile to the Syrian government, such as Turkey and European states, and some weapons were transferred into the hands of Syrian rebel groups and terrorists inside Syria.

On the other hand, the assistance operated by some NGOs only targeted the Syrian dissidents or Syrian refugee camps controlled by Syrian rebel groups, rather than all those displaced.

Warfare has led to a mass exodus of Syrian refugees especially to neighboring states, totaling nearly six million. This does not count the number of people displaced within Syria.

Therefore, it is highly necessary for the international community to rescue and help all the Syrian people, just as the Joint Statement by Iran, Russia and Turkey on December 11 which called for “humanitarian assistance to all Syrians throughout the country without discrimination, politicization and preconditions.”

It is not the first time that China and Russia veto the proposed resolution in the UN Security Council. They believe that

it is highly necessary and important to settle the international crises, including the Syria issue, through political manner, such as dialogue and negotiation based on the principle of respect and maintenance of Syrian territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Although the US and some European states have labeled the Syrian government as “illegal” and treat some Syrian opposition groups as the representative of “all Syrian people,” the Syrian government led by President Bashar al-Assad still holds the post in UN, and therefore it is necessary to respect the willingness and attitude of Syrian government and voters.

After years of operation, Resolution 2165 has become a way to get around the Syrian government’s restriction over aids to Syrian rebel groups controlled area. The political attitudes become the only standard of distributing the relief goods and further widen the division between Syria government and opposition groups.

It is against this backdrop that it makes no sense to extend the cross-border aid resolution. It will only give the upper hand to militant groups at the expense of ordinary Syrians.

Second Announcement



N.I.S.O.C

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY AHVAZ-IRAN

TENDER NO.: 01-31-9280037

National Iranian South Oilfields Company (NISOC) intends to purchase the following goods

items	Material Description	Quantity
26	PARTS FOR "COPPER-BESSEMER" GAS TURBINE TYPE COBERA 182 SERIAL NOS. SN 401.2.3.4.5 AND 6 RT RP REF.COOPER-BESSEMER S.A PARTS FOR "COOPER ROLLS" POWER GAS TURBINE TURBINE TYPE RT 48 SERIAL NOS.884 RT.885 RT AND 886 RT REF. COOPER ROLLS LTD	2797 Nos

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their “Intention to participate” letter via Fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 2, available at: WWW.nisoc.ir , not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 90,820 EURO or 4,277,288,808 RIAL, in favor of NISOC

Tender documents including the materials thorough technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: WWW.nisoc.ir-material procurement management tab

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P. NISOC’S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI,IRAN PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D. SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC’S MATERIAL APPROVAL NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex

Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran

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The Tehran Times new pocket-sized glossary is now available on the market. The reader-friendly is a rich source of the most common journalistic terminology collected by the daily's retired staff.

It can benefit a wide range of tastes from students to professional journalists. Persian equivalents have been given for all entries, including idioms and expressions. The glossary also includes example sentences for entries the authors thought it would be a bit difficult to learn.

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Iran 2019 scientific and academic breakthroughs

Over the past year, Iranian researchers, scientists and engineers have achieved many honors and pulled off some impressive feats.

According to an ISCA report, Iran made remarkable achievements in science and technology in 2019, ranging from holding notable scientific meetings, symposiums and conferences, exporting Iranian-produced biopharmaceuticals, winning awards in significant international arenas, having achievements in various fields of nanotechnology, biotechnology and stem cells, and many other successes from the ocean to space.

* Iranian scientists make a domestic nuclear fusion plasma confinement device

In January 2019, for the first time Iranian scientists from Amirkabir University could build a nuclear fusion plasma confinement device by relying on the use of a completely domestic technology. The device, due to its similar surface to the world's best tokamaks (magnetic confinement devices), is suitable for conducting basic research on technologies related to confinement and measurement of plasma parameters for obtaining the technology for generating nuclear fusion energy in the country.

* Iranian researchers create genosensor to detect HTLV-I

Also a group of researchers at University of Tehran designed a genosensor which can detect HTLV-I, the cause of T-cell leukemia and T-cell lymphoma. The HTLV-I is a recognized cancer virus which can cause blood cancer. This project uses fluorescent carbon dots to detect HTLV-I virus. The product makes the detection process of the virus affordable and fast compared to other common methods.

* Iranian-produced biopharmaceuticals exported to 17 countries

In February 2019, Mostafa Ghanei, Chairman of the Biotechnology Development Council, announced that the country enjoys desirable conditions regarding the production of biopharmaceuticals, adding that the Iranian produced biotech drugs are currently being exported to 17 countries in the world.

He estimated that about \$1 billion would be saved each year due to the country's self-sufficiency in producing its required biopharmaceuticals, adding "currently, biopharmaceuticals top the list of Iran's imported medicine, and the Biotechnology Development Council has plans to replace this imported volume with domestic production in three years."



* Iranian students shine in 2019 U.S. Int'l Architecture Competition

In this month, Iranian students from University of Science and Technology won a citation award at 'the 2019 International Architecture at Zero' competition in the US. They received the award for its plan, called BREATHOOD CUBIC. The plan aims at using climate potentials as a way to prevent using non-renewable energies.

Iranian engineers could break the monopoly of producing SAC500 catalyst

In March 2019, for the first time in the country, SAC500 catalyst has been put into operation for the production of

heavy polyethylene pipe (PE100). Chief Executive of Petrochemical Research and Technology Company (PRTC) Ali Pajouhan stated that Islamic Republic of Iran managed to break the monopoly of producing SAC500 catalyst which was earlier manufactured by a few number of countries in the world.

The hi-tech SAC500 catalyst is widely used for producing heavy polyethylene grades. Elsewhere in his remarks, he pointed out that Islamic Republic of Iran is a serious rival to world's leading companies that undertake manufacturing this type of catalyst.

(Source: Iscanews)

These six incredible discoveries from the past decade have changed science forever

By Ivan Couronne and Issam Ahmed

From finding the building blocks for life on Mars to breakthroughs in gene editing and the rise of artificial intelligence, here are six major scientific discoveries that shaped the 2010s - and what leading experts say could come next.

■ Are we alone?

We don't yet know whether there was ever life on Mars - but thanks to a small, six-wheeled robot, we do know the Red Planet was habitable.

Shortly after landing on 6 August 2012, NASA's Curiosity rover discovered rounded pebbles - new evidence that rivers flowed there billions of years ago.

The proof has since multiplied, showing there was in fact a lot of water on Mars - the surface was covered in hot springs, lakes, and maybe even oceans.

Curiosity also discovered what NASA calls the building blocks of life, complex organic molecules, in 2014.

And so the hunt continues for signs that Earth-based life is not (or wasn't always) alone.

Two new rovers will be launched next year - America's Mars 2020 and Europe's Rosalind Franklin rovers, looking for ancient microbes.

"Going into the coming decade, Mars research will shift from the question 'Was Mars habitable?' to 'Did (or does) Mars support life?'" said Emily Lakdawalla, a geologist at The Planetary Society.

■ Einstein was right (again)

We had long thought of the little corner of the Universe that we call home as unique, but observations made thanks to the Kepler space telescope blew apart those pretensions.

Launched in 2009, the Kepler mission helped identify more than 2,600 planets outside of our Solar System, also known as exoplanets - and astronomers believe each star has a planet, meaning there are billions out there.

Kepler's successor TESS was launched by NASA in 2018, as we scope out the potential for extraterrestrial life.

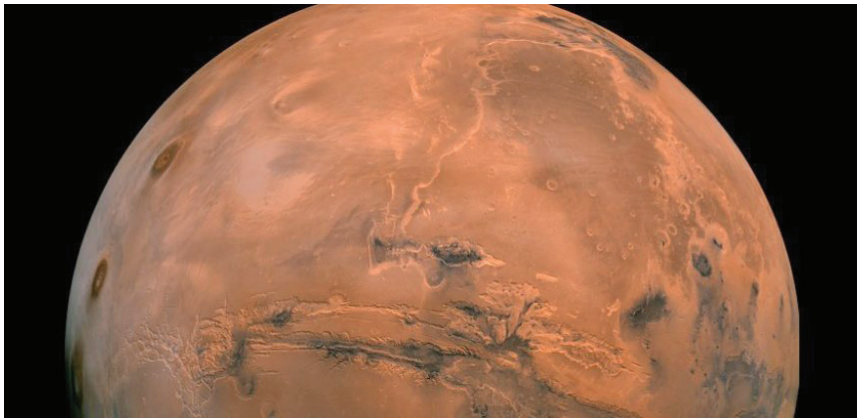
Expect more detailed analysis of the chemical composition of these planets' atmospheres in the 2020s, said Tim Swindle, an astrophysicist at the University of Arizona.

We also got our first glimpse of a black hole this year thanks to the groundbreaking work of the Event Horizon Telescope collaboration.

"What I predict is that by the end of the next decade, we will be making high quality real-time movies of black holes that reveal not just how they look, but how they act on the cosmic stage," Shep Doleman, the project's director, told AFP.

But one event from the decade undoubtedly stood above the rest: the detection for the first time on September 14, 2015 of gravitational waves, ripples in the fabric of the universe.

The collision of two black holes 1.3 billion



years earlier was so powerful it spread waves throughout the cosmos that bend space and travel at the speed of light. That morning, they finally reached Earth.

The phenomenon had been predicted by Albert Einstein in his theory of relativity, and here was proof he was right all along.

Three Americans won the Nobel prize in physics in 2017 for their work on the project, and there have been many more gravitational waves detected since.

Cosmologists meanwhile continue to debate the origin and composition of the universe. The invisible dark matter that makes up its vast majority remains one of the greatest puzzles to solve.

"We're dying to know what it might be," said cosmologist James Peebles, who won this year's Nobel prize in physics.

■ Welcome to the CRISPR era

Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR) - a family of DNA sequences - is a phrase that doesn't exactly roll off the tongue.

But the field of biomedicine can now be divided into two eras, one defined during the past decade: before and after CRISPR-Cas9 (or CRISPR for short), the basis for a gene editing technology.

"CRISPR-based gene editing stands above all the others," William Kaelin, a 2019 Nobel prize winner for medicine, told AFP.

In 2012, Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer Doudna reported that they had developed the new tool that exploits the immune defense system of bacteria to edit the genes of other organisms.

It is much simpler than preceding technology, cheaper and easy to use in small labs.

Charpentier and Doudna were showered in awards. But the technique is also far from perfect and can create unintended mutations.

Experts believe this may have happened to Chinese twins born in 2018 as a result of edits performed by a researcher who was widely criticized for ignoring scientific and ethical norms.

Still, CRISPR remains one of the biggest science stories of recent years, with Kaelin predicting an "explosion" in its use to combat human disease.

■ Immunotherapy to the fore

For decades, doctors had three main weapons to fight cancer: surgery, chemotherapy drugs, and radiation.

The 2010s saw the rise of a fourth, one that was long doubted: immunotherapy, or leveraging the body's own immune system to target tumor cells.

One of the most advanced techniques is known as CAR T-cell therapy, in which a patient's T-cells - part of their immune system - are collected from their blood, modified and reinfused into the body.

A wave of drugs have hit the market since the mid-2010s for more and more types of cancer including melanomas, lymphomas, leukemias and lung cancers - heralding what some oncologists hope could be a golden era.

For William Cance, scientific director of the American Cancer Society, the next decade could bring new immunotherapies that are "better and cheaper" than what we have now.

■ Meet the relatives

The decade began with a major new addition to the human family tree: Denisovans, named after the Denisova Cave in the Altai Mountains of Siberia.

Scientists sequenced the DNA of a female juvenile's finger bone in 2010, finding it was distinct both from genetically modern humans and Neanderthals, our most famous ancient cousins who lived alongside us until around 40,000 years ago.

The mysterious hominin species is thought to have ranged from Siberia to Indonesia, but the only remains have been found in the Altai region and Tibet.

We also learned that, unlike previously assumed, Homo sapiens bred extensively with Neanderthals - and our relatives were not the brutish simpletons previously assumed but were responsible for artworks, such as the handprints in a Spanish cave they were credited for crafting in 2018.

They also wore jewelry, and buried their dead with flowers - just like we do.

Next came Homo naledi, remains of which were discovered in South Africa in 2015, while this year, paleontologists classified yet another species found in the Philippines: a small-sized hominin called Homo luzonensis.

Advances in DNA testing have led to a revolution in our ability to sequence genetic material tens of thousands of years old, helping unravel ancient migrations, like that of the Bronze Age herders who left the steppes 5,000 years ago, spreading Indo-European languages to Europe and Asia.

"This discovery has led to a revolution in our ability to study human evolution and how we came to be in a way never possible before," said Vagheesh Narasimhan, a geneticist at Harvard Medical School.

One exciting new avenue for the next decade is paleoproteomics, which allows scientists to analyze bones millions of years old.

"Using this technique, it will be possible to sort out many fossils whose evolutionary position is unclear," said Aida Gomez-Robles, an anthropologist at University College London.

■ AI levels up

Machine learning - what we most commonly mean when talking about "artificial intelligence" - came into its own in the 2010s.

Using statistics to identify patterns in vast datasets, machine learning today powers everything from voice assistants to recommendations on Netflix and Facebook.

So-called "deep learning" takes this process even further and begins to mimic some of the complexity of a human brain.

It is the technology behind some of the most eye-catching breakthroughs of the decade: from Google's AlphaGo, which beat the world champion of the fiendishly difficult game Go in 2017, to the advent of real-time voice translations and advanced facial recognition on Facebook.

In 2016, for example, Google Translate - launched a decade earlier - transformed from a service that provided results that were stilted at best, nonsensical at worst, to one that offered translations that were far more natural and accurate.

At times, the results even seemed polished.

"Certainly the biggest breakthrough in the 2010s was deep learning - the discovery that artificial neural networks could be scaled up to many real-world tasks," said Henry Kautz, a computer science professor at the University of Rochester.

"In applied research, I think AI has the potential to power new methods for scientific discovery," from enhancing the strength of materials to discovering new drugs and even making breakthroughs in physics, Kautz said.

For Max Jaderberg, a research scientist at DeepMind, owned by Google's parent company Alphabet, the next big leap will come via "algorithms that can learn to discover information, and rapidly adapt and internalize and act on this new knowledge," as opposed to depending on humans to feed them the correct data.

That could eventually pave the way to "artificial general intelligence", or a machine capable of performing any tasks humans can, rather than excelling at a single function.

Astronomers warn of threat to view of Universe

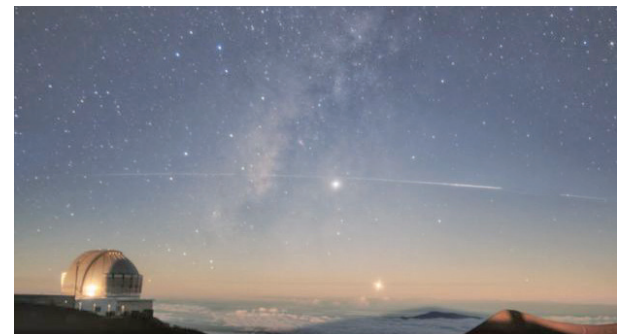
Astronomers are warning that their view of the Universe could be under threat.

From next week, a campaign to launch thousands of new satellites will begin in earnest, offering high-speed internet access from space.

But the first fleets of these spacecraft, which have already been sent into orbit by U.S. company SpaceX, are affecting images of the night sky.

They are appearing as bright white streaks, so dazzling that they are competing with the stars.

Scientists are worried that future "mega-constellations" of satellites could obscure images from optical telescopes and interfere with radio astronomy observations.



Dr. Dave Clements, an astrophysicist from Imperial College London, told BBC News: "The night sky is a commons - and what we have here is a tragedy of the commons."

The companies involved said they were working with astronomers to minimize the impact of the satellites.

* Why are so many satellites being launched?

It's all about high-speed internet access.

Instead of being constrained by wires and cables, satellites can beam internet access down to the ground from space.

And if you have lots of them in orbit, it means even the most remote regions can get connectivity.

To give you an idea of the numbers, there are currently just 2,200 active satellites flying around the Earth.

But as of next week, the Starlink constellation - a project by U.S. company SpaceX - will start sending batches of 60 satellites into orbit every few weeks. This will mean about 1,500 satellites have been launched by the end of next year, and by the mid-2020s there could be a fleet of 12,000.

UK company OneWeb are aiming for about 650 satellites - but this could rise to 2,000 if there is enough customer demand.

While Amazon have a constellation of 3,200 spacecraft planned.

* Why are astronomers worried?

In May and November, Starlink sent 120 satellites into orbits below 500km.

But stargazers were concerned when the spacecraft appeared as bright white flashes on their images.

Dhara Patel, an astronomer at the Royal Observatory Greenwich said: "These satellites are about the size of a table, but they're very reflective, and their panels reflect lots of the Sun's light, which means that we can see them in images that we take with telescopes."

"These satellites are also big radiowave users... and that means they can interfere with the signals that astronomers using. So it also affects radio astronomy as well."

She warns that problem will grow as the numbers of satellites in orbit increase.

* What could this mean for research?

Dr. Clements believes the satellites could have a real impact on observations.

"They present a foreground between what we're observing from the Earth and the rest of the Universe. So they get in the way of everything."

"And you'll miss whatever is behind them, whether that's a nearby potentially hazardous asteroid or the most distant Quasar in the Universe."

He said it would be particularly troublesome for telescopes taking large surveys of the sky, such as the future Large Synoptic Survey Telescope (LSST) in Chile.

He explained: "What we want to do with LSST and other telescopes is to make a real-time motion picture of how the sky is changing..."

"Now we have these satellites that interrupt observations, and it's like someone's walking around firing a flashbulb every now and again."

But Prof Martin Barstow, an astrophysicist from the University of Leicester said some of the problems could be fixed.

"The numbers of satellites do sound frightening, but actually space is big - so when you superimpose them all on the sky, the density of these things is not going to be very large," he said.

"And because the satellites have known positions, you can mitigate. A satellite is going to be a dot in an image and it might appear as a transient burst of light - but you will know about it and can remove it from the image."

"It will cost effort and work for observatories to deal with it, but it can be done."

For radioastronomy, however, the constellations could pose more of an issue - especially for relatively new telescopes, such as the Square Kilometer Array (SKA).

The radio signals the satellites use will be different from the ones astronomers are looking for, but they could still interfere, said Prof Barstow.

* What do the companies involved say?

SpaceX told the BBC that they were actively working with international astronomers to minimize the impact of the Starlink satellites.

For their next launch, they are trialing a special coating that is designed to make the spacecraft less bright to see if this will help. OneWeb said they wanted to be a "thought leader in responsible space" and were putting their satellites into an orbit of 1,200km so they would not interfere with astronomical observations.

Ruth Pritchard-Kelly, vice president of OneWeb, said: "We chose an orbit as part of our dedication to responsible use of outer space... And we've also talked to the astronomy community before we launched to make sure that that our satellites won't be too reflective, and that there won't be radio interference with their radio astronomy."

She added that it shouldn't be a case of having to choose between connectivity and astronomy.

"There is no question that the entire world is entitled to be connected to the internet.... So it's going to happen. And probably three or four of these systems are going to happen," she said.

"And the question will be working with the other stakeholders to make sure that we're not interfering with them, whether they are existing satellite technologies, or the mobile phone on the ground, or the astronomy community."

"We know we're going to work it out with everybody."

Stargazers will be watching the skies to see if a compromise can be found.

(Source: BBC)

New director of Iran's National Carpet Center appointed

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani on Tuesday appointed Farahnaz Rafe' as the new director of the National Carpet Center. Rafe' replaced Fereshteh Dastpak who held the post since June 2018.



Farahnaz Rafe', the new director of Iran's National Carpet Center

"Given the high status of the Iranian handmade carpet as a cultural and artistic heritage, I expect [you] to do more efforts to maintain and improve its status both in quantity and quality by the means of adopting serious and effective strategies, plans and measures," the minister instructed Rafe', IRNA reported.

Persian carpets are sought after internationally for their delicate designs and good quality. A medallion pattern is arguably the most characteristic feature of all types of Persian rugs. However, there is tremendous variation in the shapes and sizes of the medallions as well as the way they are used in various rugs. It's not wrong to say that no two rugs will have the same medallion layout.

Over 5,397,000 tons of Iranian carpets, worth \$424.451 million, were exported to over 70 countries with the U.S. standing on top of the importers list, during the past fiscal year (ended March 20, 2019). Germany, the UK, Italy, France, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, Russia, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden and Norway as well as Hungary, Romania, Poland and Ireland are major importers of Iranian carpet.

Turkish Airlines says reaches compensation deal over Boeing 737 MAX

ISTANBUL (Reuters) — Turkish Airlines has agreed a compensation deal with planemaker Boeing Co over the grounding of the Boeing 737 MAX following two fatal crashes, the carrier said on Tuesday.

It did not specify the size of the payment but Turkey's Hurriyet newspaper reported that it was worth \$225 million including \$150 million in compensation and \$75 million covering things such as spare parts and training.

The 737 MAX has been grounded since March after a Lion Air crash in Indonesia and an Ethiopian Airlines crash killed 346 people within five months, costing the plane manufacturer more than \$9 billion so far.

Analysts say the full extent of the damage suffered by Boeing's airline customers would depend on the timing of the 737 MAX's return to service, making a settlement between the planemaker and Turkish Airlines noteworthy while the jet remains grounded.

"Either they (Turkish Airlines) have a pretty good feeling for when this will end, or the carrier has somehow lined up alternative capacity to mitigate the damage at this point," Richard Aboulafia, vice president of analysis at aviation consulting firm Teal Group said.



ROUND THE GLOBE

Archaeological site of Mystras

Mystras, the 'wonder of the Morea', lies in the southeast of the Peloponnese. The town developed down the hillside from the fortress built in 1249 by the prince of Achaia, William II of Villehardouin, at the top of a 620 m high hill overlooking Sparta, Greece.



The Franks surrendered the castle to the Byzantines in 1262, it was the center of Byzantine power in southern Greece, first as the base of the military governor and from 1348 as the seat of the Despotate of Morea.

Captured by the Turks in 1460, it was occupied thereafter by them and the Venetians. After 1834 the inhabitants of Mystras gradually started to move to the modern town of Sparta leaving only the breath-taking medieval ruins, standing in a beautiful landscape.

Mystras, as the center of Byzantine power, quickly attracted inhabitants and institutions; the bishopric was transferred there from Sparta, with its cathedral, the Metropolis or church of Hagios Demetrios, built after 1264.

Many monasteries were founded there, including those of the Brontochion and the monastery of Christos Zoodotes (Christ the Giver of Life). Under the Despots, Mystras reached its zenith with the building of churches, outstanding examples of Late Byzantine church architecture, such as Hagioi Theodoroi (1290-1295), the Hodegetria (c. 1310), the Hagia Sophia (1350-1365), the Peribleptos (3rd quarter of the 14th century), the Evangelistria (late 14th – early 15th century) and the Pantanassa (c. 1430).

The city was a major piece on the political chessboard of the time and was developed and beautified as befitted its role as a centre of power and culture. The city's complex history is clearly evident in its fortifications, palaces, churches, convents, houses, streets and public squares.

(Source: UNESCO)

Iran's first 'modern university' reopens to visitors

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 19th-century madrasa of Dar ul-Funun in Tehran, known as Iran's first modern university, has reopened doors to visitors while undergoing restoration work.

The center was opened by Mirza Taqi Khan Farahani (1807-1852), who was nicknamed 'Amir Kabir' who was chancellor under Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, appearing to be one of the most capable and innovative figures in the whole Qajar period.

"This historic school is a symbol for commencement of modern educational system in the country, and (now) all cultural and municipal bodies should work together in order to complete restoring it as soon as possible," IRIB quoted Tehran province's tourism chief Parham Janfeshan as saying on Tuesday.

The Ministry of Education currently assumes ownership of the historical center which is a symbol for the start of modern education era in the country. It is located near the grand bazaar in downtown Tehran.

The cultural heritage [department of Tehran] is ready to provide any technical and advisory support to the Ministry of Education to expedite Dar ul-Fonun's restoration project, the official said.

"The history and identity of the educational system in Tehran is tied to Dar ul-Fonun school and to the name of Amir Kabir, which can be very appealing to domestic and foreign tourists and visitors."

Travel agencies and tour operators may put visits to Dar ul-Fonun on their schedules, Janfeshan proposed.

Established in 1851, Dar ul-Funun has an atmospheric garden that is hemmed by walls featuring Persian poetry inscribed on decorative tiles. Parts of the property have recently been handsomely restored with the aim of making it into a museum on education.

According to Encyclopedia Iranica, the number of students in its first year reflected an immediate popularity of Dar ul-Funun, with about 105 students enrolling in seven main subjects.



A view of Dar ul-Funun in downtown Tehran

Iran exports \$146m of handicrafts since March

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Handicraft exports from Iran reached \$146 million since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2019), deputy tourism minister said on Tuesday.

"Iraq and Persian Gulf littoral countries are among the main target markets for Iranian handicrafts," Pouya Mahmoudian said, IRNA reported.

Handicrafts exports of the country reached \$289 million in the past Iranian calendar year 1397, showing three percent growth year on year, according to data announced

by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

The exports include traditional ceramics, pottery vessels, handwoven textiles, glasswork, woodwork, metalwork, embroideries, personal ornaments as well as precious and semi-precious gemstones.

Dozens of Iranian handicrafts have gained the UNESCO Seal of Excellence during the past couple of years. Some 75 percent of Iranian handicrafts are produced by females, Masoumeh Ebtekar, vice president for women's and family affairs, said in April 2018.



Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Deputy Minister Pouya Mahmoudian (front R) visits a crafts workshop in the village of Khorashad, northeast Iran, December 31, 2019.

A peek into Christmas celebration in Iran

→ **1** He referred to the need for training the youth generation for following the community's traditions. "The rising generation follows the past traditions and religious rituals like their forefathers; Parents must educate their children to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors on observing and perpetuating these rituals."

Armenians have mainly gathered in Majidieh neighborhood in Tehran, and Jolfa neighborhood in Isfahan. Taking a walk in these regions at the time of Christmas, one cannot ignore

the energy and spirit of the community that is preparing for the New Year.

I asked Baghdasarian where he wishes to spend Christmas celebrations and the answer was Isfahan. "I prefer the city of Isfahan since Christmas festivities are tremendously fascinating in Jolfa district where pine trees are beautifully decorated with string lights."

"Vank Cathedral is the most significant church in Iran. Shops are crowded and people are very busy shopping, walking around and taking photos," he concluded.



Festive lights and Santa Claus figures decorate window displays of some shops in Tehran as shoppers visit streets to purchase Christmas presents on a mild and overcast night, December 28, 2019.

Tips for keeping it together as a digital nomad

By Geoffrey Morrison

Sure, being able to work remotely and travel nonstop is a blast. But it's not without downtime and difficult moments.

For most of the last five years I've lived as a digital nomad, working while traveling for months at a time across dozens of countries and five continents. For the most part, this is as fun as it sounds. It isn't, however, an unbroken chain of big beach umbrellas, little drink umbrellas and a few scattered minutes spent working. You have the occasional bad day. Working in a humid hostel with dial-up internet speeds, worrying about deadlines and that meeting scheduled for 4 a.m. can take the glamour out of it all.

In the end, though, it's worth it. Here are some tricks I've learned to keep those bad days to a minimum.

■ **No one understands what you are doing**

No matter how much you have explained it, no one will truly get it. The mind-set of "work" only being possible in an office, and only having two weeks each year for vacation, is pervasive (and in my opinion, troubling). You are going to have to make an extra effort to maintain relationships, both work and personal. Be wary of boss changes as well. Just because your old boss did not mind you working remotely does not mean their replacement understands why you are Skyping into meetings from Chiang Mai, Thailand.

■ **Always be on the lookout for new work**

This is especially important for freelancers,



but employees need to think about it, too. My father taught me that you're going to lose 10 percent of your clients each year just through unavoidable attrition. So if you are not finding new work, you're going to make less money every year. Or if you are an employee and your boss says come home now or you are fired — well, what's that choice look like? A solid backup plan, multiple regular clients, or both, are really the only safe way to be a digital nomad, wherever you are, whether New York City or Hong Kong.

■ **Make new friends**

As an introvert, this was the part I found most difficult as a digital nomad. The thing is, it's rather vital. Isolation is not good for mental health.

The turning point for me was when I realized that nearly everyone staying in a hostel is there by themselves and most want someone else to make the first introduction. Just simply asking where someone is from can lead to a fascinating conversation. Or not. That's fine too. If you don't make a new

friend today, you probably will tomorrow.

■ **Embrace the cloud**

Though you cannot entirely prevent hard drive crashes or theft, you can minimize the destructive effects by using Google Drive, Apple iCloud or one of the options recommended by Wirecutter, the New York Times company that reviews products and services. Having a cloud-based backup means that even if you lose your computer, your work will be safe. This has saved me numerous times. I can't imagine being a digital nomad without it.

■ **Self-care**

Living on a strict budget is the main way most digital nomads keep the party going. That means choosing hostels over hotels, and, often, instant ramen over sushi. But sometimes you need a hotel and some sushi. Not feeling guilty about that splurge is one of the key aspects to enjoying that splurge. Having a day to relax in the quiet, or soaking in a hot tub, or really whatever you need to reset — sometimes you just need to do exactly that.

■ **It's a marathon, not a sprint**

Slow down. One of the biggest mistakes I made early on was moving too often. Now my general rule is no less than three nights in any one place. If the place feels right, has good food and has a convenient place to work, I'll stay longer. But that's me. You'll have to figure out how many days are right for you. It might take some time, though, to recalibrate to a slower travel speed.

(Source: The New York Times)

This American died for our lies in Afghanistan

By Peter Van Buren

It's common this time of year to write summary articles trying to make sense of the last 12 months; you'll soon see them popping up everywhere. But all of them will omit one of the most important stories of the year. For the first time in some two decades, America hasn't started a new war.

A total of 6,857 American service members have died in war since the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. George W. Bush began that war, then invaded Iraq in 2003. Barack Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, then immediately expanded the war in Afghanistan. He went on to restart America's war in Iraq after it was over the first time, launch a new war that turned Libya into a failed state and triggered refugee flows still disrupting European politics, engage the U.S. in Yemen, and abet a humanitarian crisis in Syria. So three full years without a new war is news indeed.

This year also brought mainstream confirmation of the truth behind the Afghan war. The Washington Post, long an advocate for all the wars everywhere, took a tiny step of penance in publishing the Afghanistan Papers, which show that the American public has been lied to every step of the way over the past 18 years about progress in Afghanistan and the possibility of some sort of success. Government officials from the president(s) to the grunt(s) issued positive statements they knew to be false while hiding evidence that the war was unwinnable. The so-called Afghanistan Papers are actually thousands of pages of notes created by the Special Inspector for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), a watchdog federal agency created to oversee the spending of close to \$1 trillion in reconstruction money.

The SIGAR documents (all quotes are from the Post's Afghanistan Papers reporting) are blunt. "We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan—we didn't know what we were doing," said Douglas Lute, a three-star Army general who served as the White House's Afghan war czar during the Bush and Obama administrations. He added: "What are we trying to do here? We didn't have the foggiest notion of what we were undertaking. ...If the American people knew the magnitude of this dysfunction, 2,400 lives lost. Who will say this was in vain?" There are plenty of similar sentiments going back a decade, with hints of the same almost to the first months of the conflict. Dead men tell no tales, they say, but the record of lies is as stark, final, and unambiguous as the death toll itself.

But Afghanistan was always supposed to be more than a "kinetic" war. The real battles were for the hearts and minds of the Afghan people, with money as the weapon. One of the core lies told to the public, and on the ground in Afghanistan, was that a large portion of the reconstruction money would be spent on education. "We were building schools next to empty schools, and it just didn't make sense," a Special Forces officer explained. "The local Afghans said they wanted their kids out herding goats." Sure, people have to eat, but America would create an Afghan democracy from the primeval mud, with cluster bombs as its Adam, and schools for boys and girls as its Eve.

And it is on that bruised prayer of a lie that Anne Smedinghoff, the only State Department Foreign Service Officer to lose a life in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, died one April morning in 2013 long after the Afghanistan Papers show her bosses in Washington knew the war was unwinnable.

This is what all those lies translated to on the ground. Anne was a diplomat, just 25 years old, assigned by the State Department to create good press in Afghanistan so the people at home could



see we were winning. It was a hard fight, her work was supposed to show, but the sacrifices were worth it because we were accomplishing this. This, in the very specific case that destroyed Anne, was handing out unneeded books in front of an unused school building to Afghans who lacked clean water 12 years into America's longest war so she and (important) more senior people could be photographed doing so. Inside the Beltway, this was called a "happy snap," photos of Americans doing good with (albeit always in the background) smiling Afghans lapping it up. Yet through a series of grossly preventable micro-errors in security nested like Russian dolls inside the macro-error of what Anne or any American was doing in rural Zabul, Anne's body was riddled by jagged fragments of steel from an IED.

The school where Anne was killed was "built" by the U.S. in October 2009, only to enjoy a \$135,000 "renovation" a few months later that included "foundation work, installation of new windows and doors, interior and exterior paint, electricity and a garden." The original contractor did miserable work but got away with it in the we'll-check-later Potemkin world of the Afghanistan Papers. The Army noted as the school opened that "the many smiles on the faces of both men and women showed all were filled with joy and excitement during this special occasion." That the Afghans in the area likely needed sewage processing to lower infant mortality levels was irrelevant.

The limited official reporting on what happened to Anne bungled most of the details. State clung (as they later did with Benghazi) to the weak tea that the "cause" of Anne's death was the actions of the bad guys—anything we did up to our very presence on the ground was treated as a kind of minor detail. The desire not to look too deep was underscored by then-secretary of state John Kerry, who said that Anne "tragically gave her young life working to give young Afghans the opportunity to have a better future," and enjoined the media into blending Anne's death into what the entire world now knows was the fake narrative Anne herself died trying to create.

Kerry is an easy target because of his Vietnam-era protests, including his famous statement to Congress in 1971 about that war: "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?" To the State Department, what mattered in the life and then death of Anne Smedinghoff was never such a question, but simply damage control for what the Afghanistan Papers show was an already-failed story.

Anne was only one of thousands of Americans and literally-only-God-knows how many Afghans who died for our lies in Afghanistan. That's why the biggest story of 2019 is the one no one is talking about—that for the first time in decades, we seem to be slowing this all down. In 2019, only 34 American service members died in war. In 2009 it was 459; in 2003 it was 526.

Someone will inevitably dismiss my writing here as playing politics with a young woman's death. But if you read just one more sentence, read this: Anne's presence in Afghanistan was about politics, and her death delivering books for a photo-op was a political act in support of lies. That thrusts her into the role of symbolism, whether anyone likes it or not, and our job is to determine what it is that she symbolizes and try to learn from it.

On the same day that Anne died, an airstrike inadvertently killed 10 Afghan children.

There are nights it takes a fair amount of tequila to abort thoughts about why no one gets impeached for wasting human lives. I am ashamed to admit that I usually just drink from the bottle. But tonight I'll use a glass, so I can raise it to Anne. I know she wasn't the last to die for the Afghan mistake, and that there will be "papers" for places like Libya and Syria, too. But there's always hope at the bottom of a glass, isn't there?

Peter Van Buren, a 24-year State Department veteran, is the author of We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People, Hooper's War: A Novel of WWII Japan, and Ghosts of Tom Joad: A Story of the #99 Percent.

(Source: The American Conservative)

Mercenary nation: Litigious 'solutions' to systemic problems

By Maj. Danny Sjursen

ANTIWAR — Contractors were the bane of my existence. It was first apparent to me in Iraq in 2007, at the height of the civil war. A bunch of Blackwater mercenaries had decided to swing through my assigned sector and shoot up a bunch of civilians in a crowded public square. As they do...

The next day I had to clean up the mess. See, Iraqis didn't understand the distinction between (officially) uniformed white boys and quasi-uniformed mercenaries making three-times the pay to do the same work. Why should they? Heck, it's their country. Vaguely camouflaged Christians with pale skin were all the same to them. Our actions; our sins — we shared them. Regardless.

I always resented that. Here I was, all of 23-years old, trying to pacify a dense Baghdad neighborhood through a combination of charisma and kindness, "hearts and minds," and all. Then these mercenary bastards would swing through, massacre civilians, and leave it to me to explain away the war crime to the locals. Truth is, both in Iraq and Afghanistan, these fellas were a worse enemy than the insurgents. Implicitly, they served as, essentially, recruiting sergeants for the "terrorists," all the while earning six-figure salaries while my troopers — the heart and soul — made \$40k (max!) to wage America's endless, hopeless, wars! The contrast was as staggering as it was instructive.

So, I guess you could say I was feeling somewhat vindicated when I recently read that a bunch of Gold Star families had decided to sue some contractors for paying off the Taliban in Afghanistan to keep their business running. I mean it was the worst kept secret of that war — which I also fought — that American-run firms would routinely pay kickbacks to the Taliban as a means to an end — the end being profits and protection to ensure those profits.



Afghanistan was, and is, an ugly place. It's long been said that the land is the "graveyard of empires," but it's also the place that binaries, platitudes, and morals go to die. Tim O'Brien, the finest novelist of the Vietnam generation, once wrote: "If you don't care for obscenity, you don't care for the truth; if you don't care for the truth, watch how you vote. Send guys to war, they come home talking dirty." That could sum up the entire American crusade in Afghanistan, in Central Asia, in the Greater Middle East even.

Which brings me to my main point: what does it say about a war if supplying it, maintaining it, requires paying extortion money to the Taliban, to the purported enemy? What does it say about a war if private corporate contractors are, by default, working at cross-purposes from the American troops? Surely that wasn't the case on D-Day, in the Second World War, when the U.S. Army fought nazism. Yet here we are.

The litigant families may never be able to prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the contractors who paid off the Taliban directly caused the deaths of their sons. But they don't have to. It's a civil, not a criminal, case. Beyond a reasonable doubt doesn't apply. Preponderance of evidence will do. And there's plenty of that. The Gold Star families should win, must win. Sure, there's some sentimentality in my position — I'm aware — but I'm also rationally correct. Of course the contractors contributed to the mess that stole the lives of some 2,400 American soldiers.

But here's the rub: in doing so, the mercenaries didn't act alone. They were but a symptom of a failed modern method of American war-making; a symptom of a nearly two-decade crusade of absurdity. A crusade, mind you, that defined my adult life. Only a nation so arrogant, so self-important, and self-righteous as ours would dare attempt to build a Jeffersonian "democracy" in Afghanistan. The very enterprise borders on tragicomedy. Yet how few actually question the foundation of American military policy these days. Would a reinstitution of the draft change the calculus? Maybe. But, of course, that's not even on the table in the iPhone, digital-to-the-end America of 2019...or is it 2020?

The Gold Star families are going to lose, though. That's my hunch. On the merits of the case, maybe they should. Holding a bunch of corporations vaguely accountable for the very real, visceral, deaths of their sons and daughters is a stretch. Then again, so was OJ's acquittal. In the face of irrefutable DNA evidence of his (obvious) guilt, a jury of his peers decided to acquit him, mainly, I think, as penance for an LAPD that had veritably waged war on the black community for decades. So, while I'm not one to condone the vicious murder of Ron and Nicole, I can't help but think an OJ-level legal fluke is in order. To hell with these contractors. Money they have; souls they don't.

I, for one, would like to see a bunch of lower-middle-class families — the ones that serve their sons and daughters up to this country's silly wars — secure a windfall. Maybe their legal case is flawed, but so is American foreign policy. Count me a hopeless romantic, but I still believe in happy endings. I sure hope they get to spend next Christmas on a beach in St. John...

Danny Sjursen is a retired US Army officer and regular contributor to Antiwar.com His work has appeared in the LA Times, The Nation, Huff Post, The Hill, Salon, Truthdig, Tom Dispatch, among other publications. He served combat tours with reconnaissance units in Iraq and Afghanistan and later taught history at his alma mater, West Point. He is the author of a memoir and critical analysis of the Iraq War, Ghostriders of Baghdad: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Myth of the Surge. Follow him on Twitter at @SkepticalVet.

Ugandan analyst: Nigerian Govt. should respect law, release Sheikh Zakzaky

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A Ugandan analyst and journalist urged the Nigerian government to respect the rule of law and release Muslim cleric Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, adding that when "the custodian of the law becomes the violator of the law, then that is self-defeating".

"The Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, says the interests of 180 million Nigerians conflict with the interests of (Sheikh Ibrahim) Zakzaky and his followers, describing his detention as "protective custody". The federal high court in Abuja clearly pronounced itself that there are no relevant provisions of the national security agencies act of the 1999 constitution (as amended), that justify the continued incarceration of Zakzaky, which by the way, has been the propellant of an avalanche of deadly protests by his followers, whose many lives have been lost. So if the custodian of the law becomes the violator of the law, then that is self-defeating in some way. Respect for the rule of law must be upheld at all times, and it should not be selective," Hamza Kyeyune from Kampala, Uganda, told Tasnim.

Following is the full text of the interview.

Tasnim: In December 2015, the Nigerian army raided Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky's residence and nearby buildings in the northern city of Zaria, Kaduna State. The top Muslim cleric and



his wife were injured in the deadly raid. They have been in prison for four years despite a high court ruling granting them freedom. Why do you think the Nigerian government does not comply with the court order and set them free?

Kyeyune: The Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, says the interests of 180 million Nigerians conflict with the interests of (Sheikh Ibrahim) Zakzaky and his followers, describing his detention as "protective

custody". The federal high court in Abuja clearly pronounced itself that there are no relevant provisions of the national security agencies act of the 1999 constitution (as amended), that justify the continued incarceration of Zakzaky, which by the way, has been the propellant of an avalanche of deadly protests by his followers, whose many lives have been lost.

So if the custodian of the law becomes the violator of the law, then that is self-defeating in some way. Respect

for the rule of law must be upheld at all times, and it should not be selective.

Tasnim: According to Amnesty International's research, more than 350 IMN (Islamic Movement of Nigeria) members were killed by security forces only between December 12 and 14, 2015 in Zaria. The number has been on the rise since then. Why do you think Abuja has targeted the religious movement?

Kyeyune: In order to rule effectively you need an enemy so that you can sell protection to your people and thus, somebody always gets targeted. One of the rules of this game is that the opponent has to be believably dangerous, truly scary.

Tasnim: Do you believe that the international community and groups including those that introduce themselves as advocates of human rights have done enough to prevent such acts of violence by Nigerian authorities?

Kyeyune: You know, there is so much the International Community can do. Amnesty International documented the 3-day bloodbath at Zaria and pointed out that the mass slaughter of hundreds of Nigerian unarmed citizens by soldiers in Zaria and the attempted cover-up of this crime demonstrate utter contempt for human life and accountability. Human Rights Watch (HRW) condemned the brutal attack, United Nations Human Rights Council, discussed the massacre and continued detention of Zakzaky...but such cases tend to drag on for long!

York to ban private car journeys from city center within three years

The medieval city of York has announced plans to ban private car journeys from the city centre within three years in an effort to cut carbon emissions.

Councillors spelled out the “unashamedly ambitious” goal that would follow the lead of Bristol, which is due to become the first UK city to ban diesel cars by 2021.

The historic Yorkshire city, which attracts nearly 7 million visitors a year, is one of several UK cities with illegally high levels of air pollution.



The ban would stop all non-essential private car journeys inside York’s city walls by 2023, with an exemption for people who rely on cars such as disabled residents.

Jonny Crawshaw, a Labour councillor in the city, said: “People’s first response might be to be a bit anxious about what we’re proposing. But that doesn’t mean it’s not the right thing to do. The public mood is changing – particularly in relation to climate change.”

Councillors voted in favour of the plans by a majority. The City of York council is aiming to become carbon neutral by 2030, 20 years before the British government’s net zero target.

The UK government has been ordered by the courts to bring air pollution levels down to legal limits in the shortest possible time. A pollution map released by campaigners in February found levels of air pollution that exceed safety limits in almost 2,000 locations across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The worst place for nitrogen dioxide pollution in 2017 was Kensington and Chelsea, followed by Leeds and Doncaster.

York, which attracts millions of tourists every year to its medieval walls, cobbled streets and 13th-century Gothic cathedral, does not escape the smog.

According to the data, compiled by Friends of the Earth, 12 locations in the city centre exceeded national air quality standards of 40 micrograms of nitrogen dioxide per cubic metre (ug/m3).

A bus stop on Rougier Street was the city’s most polluted spot in 2018, the data shows, followed by a taxi rank outside the railway station (59.9 and 57.7 ug/m3 respectively).

Crawshaw, who represents a city-centre ward on City of York council, said the proposal was not about stopping tourism or preventing those living in the city centre from having a car.

He said: “This is about reducing and removing non-essential car journeys across the whole city, while improving the range and attractiveness of alternative travel options.

“Fewer cars on York’s roads would enable faster, more reliable public transport from the suburbs and villages into the city centre. Fewer cars on the roads would make cycling feel safer and a more viable option for more people.”

York and Bristol have gone further than the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, who has imposed clean-air zones and levies in the capital to reduce air pollution.

(Source: The Guardian)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

German Elections

(September 23, 2002)

Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has won the German elections. His Social Democrats, together with their partners, the Greens, are preparing for another four-year term in government, although they have a greatly reduced majority. This report from William Horsley: What a night it was for Germany: **a desperately close race** between the two candidates for Chancellor, declarations of victory by both, then the figures turned slightly in favour of Gerhard Schroeder and the Greens. At last, the official result came: Mr Schroeder and his Green partners are back in power with **an overall majority** of just nine seats.

The former communists in eastern Germany, the Party of Democratic Socialism, suffered badly, **holding onto** only two **seats**. The loser, Christian Democrat Edmund Stoiber, said the new government would be so weak he aims to **topple** it within a year.

But Gerhard Schroeder will be formally **sworn in** within weeks. Then he faces **a sea of troubles** - a relationship with America **scarred** by his **campaign rhetoric** against US policy on Iraq, trouble with Germany’s European partners and an economy in urgent need of **resuscitation**. Mr Schroeder’s opponents have accused him of leading Germany into international isolation.

■ **Words**
a desperately close race: only won (or lost) by a small amount
an overall majority: official announcements or statements
holding onto: keeping and not losing
seats: the highest total number
topple: cause to lose power
sworn in: requested to solemnly promise to fulfil his duties as Chancellor

a sea of troubles: a very large number of problems
scarred: damaged in a lasting way
campaign rhetoric: political speeches intended to convince or impress people

resuscitation: being made active and successful again

(Source: BBC)



Wild sheep breeding site set up in northwestern Iran

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — A 10-hectare **d e s k** site has been launched in Maku Free Zone located in northwestern province of West Azarbaijan for breeding Armenian mouflon (the mountain sheep), ISNA reported on Sunday.

The wild sheep breeding site aims to flourish tourism in the area, in addition to producing meat and establishing a hunting tourism center so that nature and hunting enthusiasts can experience a legal hunt.

Hunting tourism is one of the most lucrative types of tourism in the world, with every hunter bringing a revenue of \$10,000 to the country.

However, it results in preserving habitats, protected areas, and improving the livelihoods of rangers and even conserving the endangered species.

The Armenian mouflon (*Ovis orientalis gmelini*) is an endangered subspecies of mouflon endemic to Iran, Armenia, and Nakhchivan (Azerbaijan).

O. o. gmelini is found in northwestern Iran, although were transferred to Kabudan (Kaboodan) Island in Lake Urmia in 1895 and 1906.

A study carried out in the 1970s at the island found that their number declined from around 3,500 in 1970 to 1,000 in 1973.

The Iranian red sheep lives mostly in open rough terrain at medium or high altitudes,



where they inhabit rocky hill country, lowland and highland steppes, rocky semideserts, grass-covered slopes, and alpine meadows. They spend the summer at the highest



elevations, right below the permanent snow. In winter, they move lower and may come into the valleys. They may live up to 18 years.

In Iran, hunting of the specie is allowed

only under permit, outside the protected areas, between September and February. Within the protected areas, grazing of domestic livestock is strictly controlled.

Article by Iranian researchers on Altmetric’s Top 100 list

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — An article by Iranian researchers has been listed by Altmetric website among the world’s top 100 articles that most captured the public’s imagination in 2019, IRNA news agency reported on Wednesday.

The Altmetric Top 100 is an annual list of the research that has most captured the public’s imagination each year, which is released since 2013.

The article presented, for the first time in the world, very precise and unprecedented evidence of the association between drinking tea at temperatures hotter than 60 degrees with a 90 percent increased risk of squamous cell carcinoma (the most prevalent esophageal cancer worldwide).

Esophageal cancer is one of the most common cancers in the world. With an estimated 456,000 new cases and 400,000 deaths annually, esophageal cancer was the eighth most common cancer and the sixth leading cause of cancer deaths worldwide in 2012.

The article by Farhad Eslami, researcher at the center



of gastroenterology and liver disease of Tehran University of Medical Sciences, led by Reza Malekzadeh and in

Humans responsible for protecting world’s biodiversity

By Payam Mohebbi

TEHRAN — Perhaps many of us do not know why we should think of a word called biodiversity and want to protect it.

We all need to have a systematic view of the entire universe, just as our bodies work as a system, the universe is a large ecosystem, with all its components working together balanced. So there is this fact, that just as if an organ has a problem could disrupt the whole human life, any animal in the world face a problem, humanity would also face difficulties.

If we want to reach a common approach on biodiversity, we can see that the more balanced the system is, the better it will perform,

through which humanity can enjoy the benefits of the system, such as the ever-lasting desire of humans in discovering the elixir of life and extending the lifespan which actually fulfilled through inventing antibiotics, that has raised the life expectancy all over the world.

It is important to note that as life expectancy has increased, the need for food on the planet has also expanded, an issue that resulted in depletion of the world’s natural resources, including forests, rangelands and pastures which exacerbated day by day in response to human needs.

Indeed, the greatest factor that disrupts the global ecosystem is humanity; it is noteworthy that we risk our lives and are not aware of it.

Thanks to these conditions, we have come



to a conclusion that human being must act flexible in the environment and deal with problems, we cannot change all the living organisms for our own benefit. Otherwise, we are definitely endangering our future.

Perhaps with the discovery of antibiotics many living creatures have been killed, but later we found out that they also worked on

other organisms for their own survival and with many mutations many diseases already have been back.

This is where we see how weak we are as human beings with all our ideas, and in many cases we cannot do anything for ourselves.

So it is better today to think of the world as an ecosystem for the sake of survival, giving up our selfishness and stop endangering the entire global ecosystem for human benefit.

To do so, we have to avoid polluting the air and natural resources, land use changes, deforestation, construction on river beds. Let’s just assume that nature has proven to all of us that every once in a while it can take away its right and endanger us.

The author is head of Tehran Pet Hospital

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

Clean air bill projected to create 10,000 green jobs

The clean air bill, proposed by the Department of Environment to curb air pollution, is projected to generate some 10,000 green jobs over the course of the sixth five-year national development plan (2016-2021), an environmental official said.

In line with the one of the articles of clean air bill units of Health, Safety, and the Environment (HSE), with regard to health and safety of the employees, customers, and contractors as well as the protection of the environment are bound to be established in all industrial and manufacturing enterprises, Shina Ansari told ISNA news agency.

“Accordingly, those graduates in the field of environment can apply for job opportunities in HSE units,” Ansari added.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-bound”

■ **Meaning:** restricted by or confined to
■ **For example:** For everyone from **deskbound** office workers to managers in meetings, this is the latest addition to one of the best-selling book series.

PHRASAL VERB

Trade down

■ **Meaning:** to replace something you own with something cheaper, or buy a cheaper type of thing than before
■ **For example:** Many of their customers are trading down to cheaper cigarettes.

IDIOM

Make a mountain out of a molehill

■ **Explanation:** to exaggerate or put too much focus on a minor issue and make it seem like a major one
■ **For example:** You got one B and you’re acting like you’re failing the class. You’re making a mountain out of a molehill, if you ask me.

ایجاد ۱۰ هزار فرصت شغلی نتیجه اجرای لایحه هوای پاک

مدیرکل دفتر پایش فراگیر سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست ضمن اشاره به مواد قانون هوای پاک - که به پیشنهاد سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست اخیرا به تصویب مجلس شورای اسلامی رسید- از ایجاد ۱۰ هزار فرصت شغلی طی برنامه ششم توسعه از طریق اجرای مواد این قانون خبر داد. شینا انصاری در گفت‌وگو با ایسنا افزود: در ماده ۱۶ لایحه هوای پاک، کلیه مراکز و واحدهای صنعتی و تولیدی، برای انجام امور مربوط به سلامت و ایمنی مشتریان و کارمندان و کارفرمایان مکلف به ایجاد واحدهای سلامت، بهداشت و محیط زیست (HSE) و به کارگیری نیروهای متخصص این حوزه هستند بنابراین تعداد زیادی از فارغ التحصیلان محیط زیست می‌توانند جذب هسته‌ها و بخش‌های زیست محیطی صنایع متوسط و بزرگ کشور به منظور پایش صنایع شوند.

Kim ends freeze of nuclear and missile tests

Trump says he thinks North Korea's Kim is a 'man of his word'

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Wednesday said his country would continue developing nuclear programs and introduce a "new strategic weapon" in the near future, state media KCNA said after the United States missed a year-end deadline for a restart of denuclearization talks.

As the U.S. makes "gangster-like demands" including continuing joint military drills with South Korea, adopting cutting-edge weapons and imposing sanctions, there were no grounds for North Korea to be bound any longer by the self-declared nuclear and inter-continental ballistic missile test moratorium, Kim said, according to KCNA. Kim convened a rare four-day meeting of the ruling Workers' Party's policy-making committee, started since Saturday, as the U.S. had not responded to his repeated calls for concessions to reopen negotiations, dismissing the deadline as artificial.

He pledged to further develop North Korea's nuclear deterrent, but left the door open for dialogue, saying the "scope and depth" of that deterrent will be "properly coordinated depending on" the attitude of the U.S.

"The world will witness a new strategic weapon to be possessed by the DPRK in the near future," Kim said, using the acronym for North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.



"We will reliably put on constant alert the powerful nuclear deterrent capable of containing the nuclear threats from the U.S. and guaranteeing our long-term security."

Hours after Kim's statement, U.S. President Donald Trump told reporters said Kim had signed a contract about denuclearization and that he thought the North Korean leader was a "man of his word."

Trump said he got along with Kim and "we have to do what we have to do."

"But he did sign a contract, he did sign an agreement talking about denuclearization. ... That was done in Singapore, and I think he's a man of his word, so we're going to find out," he added.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he hoped North Korea would "choose

peace and prosperity over conflict and war."

Kim had previously said he might have to seek a "new path" if Washington failed to meet his expectations.

U.S. military commanders said Pyongyang's actions could include the testing of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which it has halted since 2017, alongside nuclear warhead tests.

'Strategic weapons'

Tension had been rising in the run-up to the year-end deadline as North Korea conducted a series of weapons tests and waged a war of words with Trump.

The nuclear talks have made little headway though Kim and Trump have met three times.

A working-level meeting in Stockholm in October fell apart, with a North Korean chief negotiator accusing U.S. officials of sticking to their old stance. KCNA quoted Kim as saying that there would "never be denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula" if Washington adhered to what he called its hostile policy.

We "will steadily develop necessary and prerequisite strategic weapons for the security of the state until the U.S. rolls back its hostile policy towards the DPRK and lasting and durable peacekeeping mechanism is built," Kim said.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Taiwan leader spurns China's offer to unify under Hong Kong model

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen said on Wednesday the island would not accept a "one country, two systems" political formula Beijing has suggested could be used to unify the democratic island, saying such an arrangement had failed in Hong Kong.

China claims Taiwan as its territory, to be brought under Beijing's control by force if necessary.

Taiwan says it is an independent country called the Republic of China, its official name.

Tsai, who is seeking re-election in a January 11 vote, also promised in a New Year's speech to defend Taiwan's sovereignty, saying her government would build a mechanism to safeguard freedom and democracy as Beijing ramps up pressure on the island.

Fear of China has become a significant element in the

campaign, boosted by months of anti-government protests in Chinese-ruled Hong Kong.

"Hong Kong people have showed us that 'one country, two systems' is definitely not feasible," Tsai said, referring to the political arrangement that guaranteed certain freedoms in the former British colony of Hong Kong after it was returned to China in 1997.

"Under 'one country, two systems', the situation continues to deteriorate in Hong Kong. The credibility of 'one country, two systems' has been sullied by the government's abuse of power," Tsai said.

Hong Kong has been hit by months of anti-government protests triggered by widespread resentment of perceived efforts by Beijing to exert control of the city despite the promises of autonomy.

Taiwan's Parliament passed an anti-infiltration law on Tuesday to combat perceived threats from China, further straining ties between Taiwan and Beijing.

Tsai said the law will protect Taiwan's democracy and cross-strait exchanges will not be affected amid worries that the legislation may damage business ties with China.

China suspects Tsai and her independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party of pushing for the island's formal independence and has threatened it with war if there was any such move.

Tsai denies seeking independence and reiterated that she would not unilaterally change the status quo with China.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Yemeni forces, allies shoot down Saudi-led surveillance drone in Hajjah

Yemeni army forces, supported by allied fighters from the Popular Committees, have intercepted and targeted an unmanned aerial vehicle belonging to the Saudi-led military coalition as it was flying in the skies over the country's northwestern province of Hajjah.

The Spokesman for Yemeni Armed Forces Brigadier General Yahya Saree said Yemeni forces and their allies shot down the drone while it was on a reconnaissance mission in al-Tina area of the Hayran district on Tuesday morning.

He identified the downed aircraft as a Chinese-made Phantom unmanned aerial vehicle.

The development came only a day after Yemeni air defense forces and their allies shot down a Turkish-built Vestel Karayel drone with a precision missile.

Saree said the aircraft was struck as it was on a surveillance mission over al-Salif coastal village in Yemen's western province of Hudaydah.

Earlier on Monday, Yemeni forces had intercepted and targeted a Saudi-led spy drone as it was flying over the Razih district of the country's northwestern province of Sa'ada.

Also on Tuesday, the Saudi-led coal-

ition launched four Katyusha rockets at a residential area in the al-Hali district of Hudaydah province, but there were no immediate reports about possible casualties and the extent of damage caused.

Saudi-led troops also sprayed houses and private properties in the Kilo 16 district of Hudaydah with bullets, damaging a number of them. No immediate reports of casualties were available though.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of former

president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi back to power and crushing the Houthi Ansarullah movement.

The US-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a non-profit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past four and a half years.

The UN says over 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger.

(Source: Press TV)

Prominent Saudi dissident cleric without basic human rights in prison: Son

The son of prominent Saudi dissident Muslim cleric Sheikh Salman al-Awdah says his father is subjected to treatment that infringes upon his basic rights and that he is denied urgent medical care, as a crackdown led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman against pro-democracy campaigners, Muslim preachers and intellectuals continues in the country.

The rights group Prisoners of Conscience, which is an independent non-governmental organization advocating human rights in Saudi Arabia, announced in a post on its official Twitter page on Tuesday that the 63-year-old cleric's son Abdullah al-Awdah has recently told BBC news network that the imprisoned scholar had been deprived of sleep for several days and thrown into solitary confinement.

He added that food was served to him in small bags thrown to him, and he had to open the bags with his mouth as he hands were bound.

Abdullah further noted that whenever his father is moved from one place to another, prison guards would take him and violently throw him into the car without any respect for his age and seniority.

The Arabic-language Saudi newspaper Okaz reported on September 4, 2018 that Saudi public prosecutors had



leveled 37 counts against Awdah, and even demanded his execution.

Saudi authorities detained the prominent Muslim scholar on September 7 last year and have been holding him in solitary confinement without charge or trial ever since.

Officials have imposed travel bans on members of his family as well. A family member told Human Rights

Watch that the distinguished cleric was being held over his refusal to comply with an order by Saudi authorities to tweet a specific text to support the Saudi-led blockade of Qatar.

Awdah, instead, posted a tweet, saying, "May God harmonize between their hearts for the good of their people," - an apparent call for reconciliation between the Persian Gulf littoral states, the U.S.-based rights group said in a statement.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt all cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar on June 5, 2017, after officially accusing it of "sponsoring terrorism."

Qatar said the move was unjustified and based on false claims and assumptions.

Saudi Arabia has stepped up politically-motivated arrests, prosecution and conviction of peaceful dissident writers and human rights campaigners.

Over the past years, Riyadh has also redefined its anti-terrorism laws to target activism.

In January 2016, Saudi authorities executed Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, who was an outspoken critic of the Riyadh regime. Nimr had been arrested in Qatif, Eastern Province, in 2012.

(Source: Press TV)

Israeli forces detained over 5,500 Palestinians, including women, children, in 2019: Rights groups

A number of Palestinian rights groups say Israeli military forces have arrested more than 5,500 Palestinians, including 889 children and 128 girls and women, across the occupied West Bank throughout the current year.

The Palestinian groups, including the Palestinian Prisoners Society (PPS), announced in a statement that the number of Palestinian detainees currently being kept behind bars in Israeli detention centers stands at around 5,000, including 50 women and 200 children.

Approximately 450 inmates are under the so-called administrative detention, which is a sort of imprisonment without trial or charge that allows Israel to incarcerate Palestinians for up to six months, extendable an infinite number of times.

The statement added that around 700 of the prisoners suffer from various illnesses, and that there are 10 cancer patients and 200 others with chronic diseases among them.

"In 2019, Israeli authorities intensified arbitrary arrest campaigns against women and children, who suffered various forms of torture both during and after arrest," it read.

The statement further noted that five Palestinian detainees died in Israeli prisons due to lack of proper medical treatment and deliberate medical negligence in 2019.

The rights groups said more than 50 prisoners went on hunger strike in protest against the policies of the Israeli prison services, as well as against the policy of administrative detention.

"Israeli occupation authorities violate all

the rules of international and humanitarian laws, and reinforce their flagrant violations through the judicial system," they said.

The rights groups called for local, regional and international bodies to put pressure on the Israeli regime in order to stop its violations of Palestinian prisoners.

Last month, the PPS said in a report that arrested Palestinian children have experienced numerous rights violations at the hands of Israeli forces.

They are often taken away from their homes late at night and are kept under harsh conditions, the report said.

It noted that arrested children are deprived of their right to education, which constitutes a clear violation of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Earlier this year, the Palestinian Pris-

oners' Association and the Prisoners of Conscience and Human Rights Protection Organization announced in a joint statement that 216 Palestinians have lost their lives in Israeli prisons since 1967.

Among these, seven were shot, whilst 72 others were tortured to death and 59 died due to lack of medical care.

The statement noted that Palestinians in Israeli prisons were being subjected to "inhumane" treatment, including physical and psychological torture.

Some 60% of the prisoners have suffered "brutal physical assaults."

The statement finally urged UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to launch a special committee to investigate Palestinian deaths in Israeli prisons.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. troops fire tear gas at protesters in Baghdad

➔1 Meanwhile, U.S. soldiers were seen on the roof of the main embassy building, as Washington said it was deploying 750 additional troops to the region.

Iraqis call for withdrawal from U.S. embassy

The PMF later on Wednesday issued a statement calling on its supporters to withdraw from the compound in response to an appeal by the Iraqi government, saying "your message has been received."

Some of the protesters could be seen taking down their tents, while others vowed to stay. A spokesman for the Kataib Hezbollah militia, Mohammed Mohieh, told The Associated Press news agency that the sit-in "will continue."

The protests mark a new turn in the tensions between Washington and Tehran playing out across the Middle East. U.S. President Donald Trump, who faces re-election in 2020, on Tuesday threatened to retaliate against Iran but said later he did not want to go to war.

The protests also cast uncertainty over the continued presence of U.S. troops in Iraq.

Crowds had rallied on Tuesday to protest against deadly U.S. air strikes on armed group Kataib Hezbollah bases in Iraq and Syria, setting fires, throwing rocks and smashing surveillance cameras. They did not breach the huge embassy's main compound, however.

Overnight, demonstrators pitched tents and camped outside the embassy walls.

Al Jazeera's Simona Foltyn, reporting from Baghdad, said the security presence near the checkpoint leading to the embassy was significantly higher on Wednesday morning compared to the previous days.

(Source: agencies)

French hardline union calls for more strikes to counter Macron's pension reform

French hardline union CGT called on Wednesday for more strikes in France this month after president Emmanuel Macron pledged to push through an overhaul of the pension system following weeks of nationwide strikes by trade unions.

Macron said in a traditional New Year's Eve address on Tuesday that he expected his government to quickly find a compromise with unions on the reform, but without departing from the principles laid out by ministers.

Unions are trying to force the former investment banker to abandon his overhaul of France's pension system with nationwide strikes since Dec. 5 that have crippled public transport.

"I was under the impression of having heard these words a thousand times," Philippe Martinez, the head of the CGT union, told BFM television of Macron's address.

"I still do not see anything new in the government's position. The alarm signal needs to be louder, we need strikes everywhere," Martinez said.

Martinez said his organization would take part in a meeting between unions and the government on Jan. 7.

(Source: AFP)

India approves third moon mission, months after landing failure

India has approved its third lunar mission months after its last one failed to successfully land on the moon, its space agency said on Wednesday, the latest effort in its ambitions to become a low-cost space power.

The Chandrayaan-3 mission will have a lander and a rover, but not an orbiter, Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) Chairman K. Sivan told reporters at its headquarters in Bengaluru, according to an official telecast.

The Chandrayaan-2 mission in September successfully deployed a lunar orbiter that relays scientific data back to earth, but was unable to place a rover on the lunar surface after a "hard" landing.

That mission had aimed to land on the south pole of the moon, where no other lunar mission had gone before. The region is believed to contain water as craters in the region are largely unaffected by the high temperatures of the sun.

ISRO had hoped to confirm the presence of water in the form of ice, first detected on its mission in 2008.

Chandrayaan-3 will have a "similar configuration" as the previous mission, Sivan said.

Only the United States, Russia and China have landed on the moon. Beijing's Chang'e-4 probe touched down on the far side of the moon last year, while Israel made an unsuccessful attempt to land its Beresheet spacecraft on the moon in April 2019.

India's third lunar mission will likely launch in 2020 and will cost less than its previous mission, the PTI news agency reported on Tuesday, citing Jitendra Singh, junior minister for the department of space.

Sivan also said ISRO was making "good progress" for its human space-flight mission slated for late 2021, adding that four astronauts had been picked for training, which will be planned later this month. The project, called Gaganyaan, would cost less than 100 billion rupees (\$1.4 billion), the government said in 2018.

India has developed a reputation for pioneering affordable satellite launches and space missions. Its unmanned Mars mission in 2014 cost just \$74 million, less than the budget of the Hollywood space blockbuster "Gravity".

Sivan also announced that ISRO had begun the land acquisition process for a second spaceport in the southern port city of Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu state.

(Source: DPA)

Benfica reach deal with Dortmund for midfielder Weigl

Portuguese champions Benfica have agreed a deal with Borussia Dortmund to sign German midfielder Julian Weigl for 20 million euros (17 million pounds), the clubs announced on Tuesday.

Weigl, 24, had been a permanent fixture in Dortmund's midfield since his move from 1860 Munich in 2015, making 171 appearances for the club and winning the DFB Pokal in 2016-17 and the German Super Cup earlier this season.

"Julian approached us with this wish and we agreed — also because of his service to the club," Dortmund sporting director Michael Zorc said in a statement "We wish him all the best for the future."

Dortmund said the deal is subject to a successful medical exam, with Weigl expected to sign a contract in the coming days.

Benfica lead the Portuguese league standings with 39 points from 14 matches — four points ahead of second-placed Porto — and next play away at Vitoria Guimaraes on Saturday.

(Source: Reuters)

Venus Williams pulls out of Brisbane International

Venus Williams pulled out of the season-opening Brisbane International on Wednesday after a "setback" during practice.

The American veteran said she still hoped to play at the Adelaide International later this month ahead of the Australian Open, the first Grand Slam of the year.

"Unfortunately I will not be starting my season in Brisbane due to an unexpected setback during my training," the 39-year-old seven-time major winner said in a statement.

"I look forward to being in Australia in the new year and will see everyone in Adelaide."

The tournament, featuring a strong field including world number one Ashleigh Barty and Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka, gets underway on January 6.

Organizers will announce a replacement for Williams on Thursday.

(Source: AFP)

Barcelona submit Olmo bid

Barcelona have tabled an offer for Dinamo Zagreb's Spanish midfielder Dani Olmo, the Catalonia-based newspaper Mundo Deportivo has reported.

MD says that this bid for Olmo, who spent seven years in Barça's youth set-up between 2007 and 2014, is not likely to be accepted by the Croatian champions. However, with Blaugrana sources confirming to AS their interest in bringing the 21-year-old back to the Camp Nou, the offer is seen at the club as the first step towards a deal, either in January or in the summer window.



Speaking to the Spanish television programme 'Jugones' last week, Olmo admitted that he's eyeing a move from Dinamo, where he has made 124 first-team appearances in five seasons. "Last summer was the ideal moment to take the next step, but in the end it didn't happen and, as I said then, I was happy [to stay] because I wanted to play in the Champions League," he said. "But I think my cycle there has ended and it's time to take the next step to keep on improving."

AS understands that Dinamo are open to negotiating a transfer following their European elimination, but will not accept any less than 30 to 35 million euros for a player who was included in UEFA's Champions League 'breakthrough team' for 2019. Atlético Madrid have also targeted Olmo this January after being impressed by his displays, although the purchase of a striker is their current priority.

(Source: Marca)

Pioli: 'Ibra Milan reference'

Stefano Pioli confirms Milan have signed Zlatan Ibrahimovic to be "the reference point in our attack. He'll stimulate the whole team."

Ibrahimovic is about to embark on his second spell at Milan, having won the Scudetto first time out, and Pioli admits he "can't wait" to coach the 38-year-old.

"Ibra is a warrior, a leader, a charismatic player who has a great sense of responsibility and a great desire to win," he told Corriere della Sera.

"He'll stimulate the whole team, his contribution will be crucial. Being the youngest team in the League, we've encountered some limitations in terms of a competitive streak.

"Ibra is the kind of player, person and leader who can help us fill that void. I thank the club. Gazidis, Maldini, Boban and Massara worked a lot during the holidays.

"He can do it all, he knows how set up his teammates, he knows how to occupy the box well and he'll know how to be the reference point in our attack.

"I spoke to him on the phone, he's very fired up and he can't wait to train with us, just like I can't wait to coach him.

(Source: Football Italia)

The forgotten sportspeople of the decade

With the year, and the decade, having drawn to a close, some of those who were shining in the early 2010s have somewhat fizzled out.

We take a look at the sports stars who either failed to reach their potential or suffered a sharp fall from grace.

■ Balotelli loses golden status

Winner of the Golden Boy prize in 2010, it seemed as though Mario Balotelli would go on to become one of the best players in the world.

Despite a relatively good spell at Manchester City after joining from Inter, where he scored 20 goals in 54 matches, the Italian's attitude and effort often proved a hindrance for the coaches he had across various European clubs.

■ Radamel Falcao, the tiger who lost his bite

The Colombian striker arrived at Atletico Madrid after leaving FC Porto where he won the Europa League.

He quickly became a Rojiblanco idol after spending two incredible campaigns at the Vicente Calderon, and then went to Monaco.

At the Principality, he lost his predatory instinct and went off to Manchester United and Chelsea, before returning to Monaco. He is now at Galatasaray.

■ Di Matteo's dream finished as quickly as it started

Roberto Di Matteo may have won the



Champions League with Chelsea in 2012, but his name will certainly not go down alongside some of the greats who lifted the trophy.

The Italian coach was able to guide the Blues to the biggest club title, but he was fired just months after. His next destinations were Schalke and Aston Villa but he had little success and has not coached a club since 2016.

■ Casey Stoner, problems of all kinds

Casey Stoner was the MotoGP World Champion in 2007 and 2011 but has not got back on the motorbike competitively since January 2018,.



He now suffers from a chronic fatigue syndrome that prevents him from practically doing any sporting activity, a medical condition that already had him on the ropes during his last years as a rider.

■ Chris Horner, an old surprise

Chris Horner managed to win his first major stage race, the Tour of Spain, at 42 years old.

He went on to sign for Lampre, but left the sport through the back door as he found no space in teams with aspirations for greater races.

■ Teddy Tamgho won it all between 2010 and 2013

The French triple jump athlete won the World Indoor Athletics Championships in Doha, the Circuit de Charade and the European Indoor Athletics Championships. In 2013 he won the World Athletics Championships in Moscow. But injuries have not allowed him to continue his winning ways.

■ Oden's injury-ravaged career

Greg Oden, who was first pick in the NBA Draft in 2008 and considered one of the greatest talents in history, but is having a career marked by injuries which have not allowed him to fulfil his potential.

■ Ernests Gulbis, a millionaire in crisis

Ernests Gulbis looked to be heading for the top, particularly after his great Roland Garros in 2014 where he reached the semi-finals.

Now, he has 14 defeats in his last 15 games and recently lost to the world number 443.

■ Jelena Ostapenko, not reaching her potential

The 22-year-old Latvian still has age on her side and the possibility of getting out of her current rut.

The expectations on her were tremendous after winning Roland Garros in 2017, but she hasn't managed to reach anywhere near those heights since.

(Source: Marca)

'Dark-humored' video cost me my job, says former referee Madley



Former Premier League referee Bobby Madley has revealed that he was sacked because a tasteless video he described as a "dark-humored joke" between friends was sent to his employers.

Madley has not officiated in the Premier League since August 2018 and the Professional Game Match Officials Limited (PGMOL) had said at the time that he was relocating to Norway.

However, the 32-year-old said the video, where he mocked a parent with a walking impairment, was forwarded to the PGMOL which resulted in a formal disciplinary hearing and his subsequent dismissal.

Madley said the video was made in response to being "fat shamed" in a newspaper article titled 'Bobby Bobby' written by former referee Mark Halsey, who claimed he made mistakes because he was overweight.

"As I sat in my car with my phone in hand, a person walked past my car in front of me who had a walking impairment. The next part I am ashamed of," Madley explained in a blog post "I took a six-second film, I

said nothing. I did this in Snapchat, which is where I take all of my films that I intend to save to my phone.

"On the video I wrote, 'I have a chance of winning the parents race this year.' Out of context I accept this reads shamefully... However, my intention was that the joke was aimed at myself."

Madley said the video, sent as a private text to somebody he trusted, was meant to be nothing more than a joke and was not intended to be seen by anyone else, claiming his "world fell apart" after the video came to light.

"I regret taking the video, I regret sending that video and, whilst it was a dark-humored joke, it was just that. A joke. It was not intended to shame anyone," he added.

"Whilst I absolutely understand the importance of an employer taking discrimination seriously, as they did, the decision to this day still stuns me.

"I will never be able to accept that the decision taken was either necessary nor was it proportionate to the act... The last 18 months have been mental torture for me."

(Source: source: Reuters)

Harden-Westbrook combine to stop Nuggets



James Harden scored 35 points and Russell Westbrook finished with 28 as the Houston Rockets cooled off the Denver Nuggets with a 130-104 win on Tuesday.

Harden also had six assists while Westbrook contributed seven helpers, avenging an earlier loss to the Nuggets.

Nikola Jokic scored 21 points to lead Denver, who had won nine of their last 10 games.

Denver defeated the Rockets 105-95 on November 20 by double-teaming Harden which put more pressure on his teammates to try and pick up the slack.

The Rockets moved the ball quickly on Tuesday, seizing control of the contest with a 19-3 burst to open the fourth quarter.

Clint Capela had a double-double for Houston (16 points, 10 rebounds) while Isaiah Hartenstein finished with 16 points and 12 boards off the bench.

Monte Morris came off the bench to score 18 points for Denver. Paul Millsap had 13 points and nine boards for Denver while Jamal Murray and Will Barton totaled 22 points on 10-of-30 shooting.

Elsewhere, Domantas Sabonis tallied 23 points and 10 rebounds as the Indiana Pacers beat the Joel Embiid-less Philadelphia

76ers 115-97 in Indianapolis.

TJ Warren scored 21 points, Myles Turner tallied 14 and Jeremy Lamb had 13 for the Pacers, who improved to 15-3 at home.

Doug McDermott also had 12 points for Indiana, while former 76er TJ McConnell added 11 points and 10 assists, ending a modest two-game losing skid for the Pacers.

"We played great basketball," Pacers' coach Nate McMillan said. "We established our defense, got stops and were able to get into transition.

"With 35 assists we were making their defense move and work. I just loved the tempo we established at the defensive end of the floor as well as the offensive end."

Philadelphia looked disorganized without all-star center Embiid, who has an injured left knee. They have won just three of seven games this season when Embiid sat out.

Ben Simmons had 18 points and 10 rebounds and Josh Richardson scored 20 points for the Sixers.

Since beating the Milwaukee Bucks 121-109 on Christmas Day, the Sixers have dropped three consecutive road games in Orlando, Miami and Indianapolis.

(Source: Eurosport)

Mane set to be crowned king of Africa as troubles rumble on

Liverpool sharpshooter Sadio Mane is expected to become the first African football headline-maker of 2020 by winning the Player of the Year award in Egypt next week.

The January 7 ceremony will set in motion a year sure to be full of drama on and off the field with 2022 World Cup and 2021 Cup of Nations qualifiers in the mix.

AFP Sport looks at some of the issues facing the most popular sport in a continent where good footballers and bad administrators often share the media stage.

■ Awards

Consistent Liverpool scorer and Senegal talisman Mane is favored to become the second star from his country after El Hadji Diouf to be named Player of the Year.

His rivals are Liverpool teammate Mohamed Salah, the Egyptian who won the last two editions, and Algerian Riyad Mahrez of Manchester City.

The Player of the Year, and the winners of seven other male and female categories, will be announced at a ceremony in Egyptian Red Sea resort Hurghada.

■ World Cup

A couple of weeks after the awards banquet, Egypt will host another eagerly anticipated event, the draw in Cairo for the group stage of World Cup qualifying.

The latest FIFA rankings are expected to determine the seedings, meaning Senegal, Tunisia, Nigeria, Algeria, Morocco, Ghana, Egypt, Cameroon, Mali and DR Congo will be in pot one.

All those nations except Mali have played at the World Cup, and an Ivory Coast team that can call on the dazzling footwork



of Wilfried Zaha could be the most dangerous second seeds.

■ Cup of Nations

Trouble lies ahead after a change from a January/February to June/July tournament this year to avoid tug of wars between clubs and countries over the services of Europe-based stars.

The first revamped Club World Cup, featuring 24 teams, is set for June 17 to July 4 2021 in China, effectively ruling out a mid-year Cup of Nations in Cameroon.

Senior CAF officials say off the record that a return to January/February dates is likely, and with it the possibility that an increasing number of players will put clubs first.

■ Nations Championship

Tunisia have reportedly decided because of fixture congestion to withdraw from the 2020 edition in Cameroon of the tournament for footballers playing in their country of birth.

Traditionally a biennial January/February competition, it is slated for April 4 to 25 this year in three southern Cameroon cities, the capital, Yaounde, Douala and Limbe.

The 16-nation championship will test the readiness of Cameroon to stage the Cup of Nations next year after construction delays led to them being replaced by Egypt as 2019 hosts.

■ Champions League

Tunisian club Esperance have been erratic as they seek an unprecedented third straight title, battling to overcome a Chadian club then defying the odds to defeat Raja in Casablanca.

They have lost several 2019 title-winning stars, including Algeria winger Youcef Belalili, and the starting line-up for a group match last weekend included only four Tunisians.

Record eight-time champions Al Ahly of Egypt, TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa and Casablanca clubs Raja and Wydad are potential threats.

■ Confederation Cup

A new name will be engraved on the trophy this year as recent winners Ahly, Etoile Sahel of Tunisia, Mazembe, Raja and Zamalek of Egypt are all competing in the Champions League.

Judged by group form up to the halfway mark, Cairo outfit Pyramids could become the third Egyptian winners of a competition modelled on the UEFA Europa League.

Emirati Salem Al Shamsi has invested millions in a squad dominated by Egyptians but also containing stars from Burkina Faso, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Tunisia and Uganda.

(Source: AFP)

Jahanbakhsh scores stunning goal against Chelsea

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Brighton winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh started 2020 in style as the Iranian scored a stunning acrobatic bicycle kick against Chelsea on Wednesday at the Amex Stadium.

Jahanbakhsh came off the bench in the 69th minute with his team 1-0 down after Chelsea skipper Cesar Azpilicueta's opener early in the game, but salvaged a point with an acrobatic strike six minutes from time.

There was nothing goalkeeper Kepa could do, however, when Jahanbakhsh connected with his bicycle kick that flew into the left corner in remarkable fashion.

The tears flowed for Jahanbakhsh on 28 December as he finally scored his first goal for the Seagulls, but his goal against Chelsea on New Year's Day was perhaps even more memorable.

The Iranian international winger has struggled since becoming Brighton's club-record signing in summer 2018, but two goals in as many games suggest that the 26-year-old is beginning to find his feet in Prem.

Brighton fans could scarcely believe what they had seen, and neither could Chelsea as the goal hit their top-four hopes.

Jahanbakhsh joined from Dutch side AZ Alkmaar for a club record fee of around £17 million in July 2018.

The social media plaudits also poured in for a goal that illuminated the first day of Premier League action in the new decade.

Speaking about his overhead kick, the Iranian said: "It's a decent feeling, I can't describe how happy I am. I've tried to keep my mentality high and when I found out I was going to play, I had a good feeling."

"I had a feeling I could impact the game and when [Lewis Dunk] gave me the ball the only way to hit it was with the bicycle kick and it just went in the right direction."

"It's the best goal of my career so far."



Persian leopard symbol of Iran's Foolad club



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian football club Foolad Khuzestan have chosen the Persian leopard as a symbol of the club.

Another Iranian club Zob Ahan of Isfahan have previously chosen Gando as a symbol of their club. Gando or short-muzzle crocodile, which is known as Iranian crocodile, is considered the largest reptile of Iran.

Now, Foolad Khuzestan are set to follow in the footsteps of Zob Ahan to protect the endangered species.

The Persian leopard is listed as Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List; the population is estimated at fewer than 871-1,290 mature individuals and consid-

ered declining.

According to the Department of Environment, 156 leopards have been killed in Iran from 2005 to 2014, nearly 20 leopards a year. Studies indicate that currently there are less than 500 leopards nationwide.

Persian leopards are mainly threatened by poaching, depletion of their prey base due to poaching, human disturbances, habitat loss due to deforestation, fire, agricultural expansion, overgrazing, and infrastructure development.

In Iran, primary threats are habitat disturbances followed by illegal hunting and excess of livestock in the leopard habitats. The leopards' chances for survival outside protected areas appear very slim.

Hadi Saei appointed Iran's taekwondo technical manager



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Two-time Olympics gold medal winner Hadi Saei has been appointed as technical manager of Iran taekwondo team on Wednesday.

The 43-year-old has been chosen by head of Iran taekwondo federation Mohammad Pooladgar.

Iran national taekwondo team prepare for the Asian Seniors Taekwondo Championship 2020, slated for March 3 to 6 in Beirut, Lebanon.

Iran will also send two athletes to the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

Armin Hadipour in the -58kg and Mirhashem Hosseini in the -68kg will represent Iran in the prestigious event.

Saei is the most successful Iranian athlete in Olympic history and the most titled champion in this sport by winning nine world class titles (two Olympics titles in 2004 and 2008, two world championships titles, four world cup titles and one world Olympic qualification tournament).

He has been practicing the sport since he was six years old. Having previously competed in Lightweight (67-72 kg), he is the 1999 World Champion and 2003 World Championship silver medalist.

When the Iranian town of Bam was devastated in the 2003 earthquake, Saei put his medals on auction to raise money for the victims.

IPC President Andrew Parsons welcomes 2020

Paralympic year is finally here and as IPC President I cannot begin to tell you how excited I am for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games to begin on 25 August.

Having followed the progress of Tokyo 2020 from bid phase through to the present day, I am sure the Games, featuring 4,350 of the world's best Para athletes, will be outstanding, a game-changer for the Paralympic Movement and transformational for the world's one billion persons with disabilities.

We will witness outstanding sport played out in front of huge crowds and the biggest global TV audience ever seen for a Paralympics. We will see athletes do things no-one thought humanly possible, and through sport we will raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, advance the human rights agenda and drive social inclusion.

Strap yourselves in, the Games are going to be truly amazing!

■ First sell-out Games

I believe Tokyo 2020 will make history by becoming the first Paralympics to sell-out ahead of the Opening Ceremony. With around 2.3 million tickets overall, it is absolutely mind blowing that an unprecedented 3.1 million tickets were requested from the Japanese public during the first Paralympic ticket window.

With the second Paralympic ticket window for Japanese residents taking place between 15 and 29 January and international tickets still available via CoSport, I expect the demand for tickets to remain at the highest level.

■ Biggest global TV audience

If you cannot get a ticket then do not worry, more broadcasters than ever before will be showing the action and viewers will have more sports to choose from. Twenty-one disciplines from 19 sports will be broadcast live from Tokyo, far more than the 12 sports shown during Rio 2016.

With more broadcasters and more sports, Tokyo 2020 will smash all viewing records, exceeding the cumulative audience of 4.1 billion people who enjoyed Rio 2016.

As well as increased broadcast coverage, more than 3,000 of the world's media applied to attend and cover the Games. This is almost double the number who covered Rio 2016 and has meant that for the first time in Paralympic history we have had to limit the number who can attend.

■ Best Games for sport

The driving force behind the growing interest in the



Paralympics is the ever-improving performances of Para athletes; the progress has been nothing short of sensational.

Since becoming IPC President in 2017 I've had the privilege to attend multiple World Championships and have been greatly impressed at what I have seen. The action in all 22 sports is fantastic and hugely competitive and a lot of credit should go to the National Paralympic Committees and International Federations.

With superb venues full of cheering crowds, I am certain that Tokyo 2020 will be the best Paralympics to date in terms of sporting performances with all 539 medal events providing a real treat for spectators and TV viewers alike.

■ Outstanding legacies

What excites me the most about Tokyo 2020 is the impact the Paralympics will have on society. Through sport, the Games will act as a catalyst to empower persons with disabilities, influence political leaders to pursue the inclusion agenda and advance societal change. So much progress has already been made, progress that probably would not have taken place had Tokyo not won the right to stage the Paralympics in 2013.

■ Already we have seen:

- Universal Design Act introduced encouraging facilities to be barrier-free
- New legislation passed to improve hotel accessibility
- Paralympic sport education now part of the school curriculum nationwide

- Haneda Airport named the world's best airport for people with reduced mobility

- Almost 90 per cent of train stations and airport terminals and 94 per cent of bus terminals benefit from flat floors. By the time of the Games, the aim is for all transport hubs to be 100 per cent accessible

- Significant increase in the number of accessible trains and low-floor buses

- Improved accessibility of pavements in Tokyo
- Increased investment in Para sport

- Widespread promotion of Para sport by Tokyo 2020, Tokyo Metropolitan Government and commercial partners

- Increase in the number of persons with disabilities in employment

The Paralympic Games advance human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals more than any other sport event; they truly are a celebration of human diversity and human potential. In the lead up to and during the Games we will be implementing a range of activities, together with the United Nations SDG Action Campaign, to promote the impact the Paralympic Games have on society. We will also be launching our biggest ever communications campaign to further empower the lives of the world's one billion persons with disabilities.

■ Transforming lives

Historically, persons with disabilities have been on the edges of Japanese society due to a feeling of over-protection. Happily, the Paralympics Games are changing this, and growing awareness is shifting attitudes in the right direction.

These attitudes will change much more once the Games begin and I know the performances of Para athletes will open peoples' eyes and minds. Change starts with sport and thanks to the Paralympics Japanese people will start to understand that persons with disabilities can do far more than they thought possible, not only can they compete, they can work, have fun, travel and lead full lives just like anyone else.

I am hugely excited and believe Tokyo 2020 will be the Paralympics that have the biggest impact on driving social change, raising the bar even higher for Paris 2024 and LA 2028.

Enjoy Paralympic year, the Games will be spectacular, and I hope to see you in Tokyo this summer.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Unity is our strategy at AFC U23 Championship: Hamid Estili

TASNIM — Iran U23 football team coach Hamid Estili says that unity is their most important strategy in the Asian championship.

Iran have been drawn in Group C of the AFC U-23 Championship Thailand 2020 along with defending champion Uzbekistan, Korea Republic and China PR.

The competition will be held in Thailand from January 8 to 26.

"Iran have been drawn in a tough group but we will do our best to make our people happy. Our strategy in the competition is our unity," Estili told the reporters on Wednesday.

"We have some problems in our defensive line and must solve the problem. In the friendly match against Qatar, we wasted a two-goal lead in the last minutes," he added.

"I would like to thank Mr. Salehi Amiri (Iran's NOC head) and Soltanifar (sports minister) because of their supports. I hope we have a good start in our first match against Uzbekistan," Estili concluded.

Persepolis end title-winning year: AFC

Iranian heavyweight Persepolis ended a title-winning year by making significant steps on two fronts.

Defending league champions Persepolis finished the decade in memorable fashion, advancing to the semi-finals of Hazfi Cup last Monday before leapfrogging Sepahan into top spot of the Iran Pro League on Friday.

The Tehran giants beat Shahrddari Mahshahr in the Cup semi-final, with Ali Alipour scoring both goals in a 2-0 win, then defeated Nasaji Mazandaran 1-0 in the league four days later despite playing the final 30 minutes with 10 men after the sending off of Mohsen Rabikhah.

The latter result took Gabriel Claderon's side to 34 points from 16 matches, with Sepahan's 4-2 defeat away to Sanat Naft Abadan — their first all season in league competition — creating a three-point gap at the top of the pile.

Sepahan's New Year's Eve clash against Sanat Naft gives the Isfahan-based club the chance to end 2019 as league leaders, but it is far from a two-way battle, with Tractor, Sanat Naft, Esteghlal and Shahr Khodro all very much within striking distance with 14 rounds remaining.

(Source: AFC)

Tractor eye Japanese star Yuma Suzuki

Iranian football team Tractor has reportedly shown an interest in signing Sint-Truiden forward Yuma Suzuki.

The 23-year-old striker, who joined the Belgian team from Kashima Antlers in the summer, has three-year remaining on his contract.



The Iranian club have offered five million euros to sign the Japanese star in the January transfer window.

Tractor also want to sign Iraq international forward Alaa Abbas.

Tractor sit third in Iran Professional League with 30 points, four points behind leaders Persepolis.

(Source: Voetbalbelgie.be)

Two Persepolis players deemed surplus to requirements

TASNIM — Two Persepolis players have been deemed surplus to requirements at the Iranian club.

Omid Alishah and Adam Hemati are allowed to leave the club in the January transfer window.

Persepolis are going to strengthen for the 2020 AFC Champions League and have negotiated with Paykan striker Shahrar Moghanloo and Sanat Naft Abadan forward Issa Alekassir.

The Reds ended a title-winning year, ahead of Sepahan, Tractor and Esteghlal.

Persepolis are going to win Iran league for the fourth time in a row and also want to defend title at the Hazfi Cup.

Shot-stopper Margush gets late Australia call-up

Adelaide United goalkeeper Daniel Margush has been called up to Australia's squad for the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 after Sydney FC shot-stopper Thomas Heward-Belle was ruled out of the tournament due to injury.

Heward-Belle sustained an injury in Sunday's Y-League encounter against Central Coast Mariners in Kogarah and following assessment over the past 48 hours it has been determined that he won't be fit to participate in the tournament.

Margush will join his teammates Kuala Lumpur ahead of their friendly against Korea Republic on Friday, before the team travels to Bangkok on Saturday.

Australia open their Group A campaign against Iraq on January 8 followed by Thailand (January 11) and Bahrain (January 14).

(Source: AFC)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Loyalty to criminals is treason to God, and treason
to criminals is loyalty to God.

Imam Ali (AS)

Davud Mirbaqeri begins filming “Salman Farsi”

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Davud Mirbaqeri, who is most famous for his series on distinguished personalities from early Islamic history such as “Mokhtarnameh” and “Imam Ali (AS)”, started shooting his new project “Salman Farsi” in the deserts of Kerman Province on Sunday, a public relations team for the series announced on Wednesday.



Iranian director Davud Mirbaqeri in an undated photo.

The series is about the life story of the Iranian companion of the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (S), Salman Farsi.

Actor Alireza Shojanuri will portray Salman’s middle-age and old-age, while actors Farhad Aslani, Mohammadreza Hedayati and Mohammad Feili will also collaborate on the project.

The crew will soon move to the locations on Qeshm Island in southern Iran to continue filming the series, which is being produced by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB).

The story of the series will be recounted in three seasons starting with Ancient Iran, followed by the Byzantine Empire and finally early Islam.

Salman Farsi was one of several individuals of Persian origin residing in Arabia, probably as a consequence of Sassanid involvement in Yemen. He was among the freedmen (mawali) of the Prophet Muhammad (S) and became the model of Persian converts and the symbol of the role that Persia and Persians would play in the future of Islam.

According to certain traditional narrations, Salman Farsi was the first who translated parts of the Holy Quran into Persian during the 7th century.

Mirbaqeri has earlier estimated that the series would take about five years to complete.

Qashqai music maestro Forud Gorginpur dies at 74

A R T **TEHRAN** — Forud Gorginpur, a maestro of Qashqai music who was also a kamancheh and violin virtuoso, died of heart failure on Tuesday in Tehran. He was 74.

Born in 1945, Gorginpur belonged to the Qashqai, a large nomad group that lives in central and southern Iran. He was the son of setar virtuoso Habibkhan, and his brother, Farhad, was also a great master of Qashqai music.

Forud first began with accordion and violin, and later moved Tehran to pursue his interests with musicians Ali Tajvidi and Habibollah Badiei.

He was a Persian literature graduate of the University of Shiraz, and continued his studies in music at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran.

He spent 40 years collecting Qashqai songs, which were on the verge of being forgotten.

“Kuroghlu”, “Separation” and “Turkamansahra” are among his noteworthy albums.

The Qashqai nomads are Turkic-speaking peoples who enjoy a strong sense of ethnic identity and are one of Iran’s many national tribes.

They are also renowned for their music, magnificent pile carpets and other woven wool products.



Qashqai music maestro Forud Gorginpur in an undated photo.

Iranian critics pick “The Irishman” as best film of 2019

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian critics have picked “The Irishman”, the American epic crime film directed by Martin Scorsese, as the best film of 2019.

The film was selected during a poll of 42 critics conducted by Cine Eye, an online film magazine directed by top Iranian critic Parviz Jahed.

“Parasite”, a South Korean black comedy thriller by Bong Joon-ho, “Once Upon a Time in Hollywood” by Quentin Tarantino, “Marriage Story” by Noah Baumbach and “Pain and Glory”, a Spanish drama by Pedro Almodóvar, came next.

The films are followed by Todd Phillips’ psychological thriller “Joker”, Martha Stephens’ “To the Stars”, Claire Denis’ science fiction movie “High Life”, Joanna Hogg’s “The Souvenir”, Robert Eggers’ psychological horror film “The Lighthouse”, Nadav Lapid’s French drama “Synonyms” and Lulu Wang’s comedy-drama “The Farewell”.

Hushang Golmakani, Keivan Kasirian, Hossein Moazzezinia, Ali Azari, Bijan Ashtori, Aran Javidan, Azadeh Jafari, Ehsan Tahmasbi and Hesam Nasiri were among the critics participating in the poll.



“The Irishman” by Martin Scorsese.

Actress Shahla Riahi, who was also Iran’s first female filmmaker, dies at 93

1 → Her brilliant performance as the leading actress in director Moezzeddivan Fekri’s play “Harun al-Rashid’s Policy” presented her as a young, promising talent.

By playing a leading role in Fekri’s movie “Golden Dreams” in 1952, she was introduced to Iran’s cinema.

After working with numerous stage and screen directors, she tried her hand at filmmaking with “Marjan”, which was about a group of gypsies who settle near a village. Squeezed by pressures of life, a man from the gypsies steals a sheep from the village. The young

teacher of the village traps the man, locking him up in a schoolroom. Marjan, the daughter of the man, goes to the school to visit her father and the teacher falls in love with the girl.

After “Marjan”, Riahi made no more films. “Acting was easier for me, so I put my focus on this area,” she once said in an interview.

Riahi played roles in over 70 movies, including “Delshodegan” by Ali Hatami and “Two Movies with One Ticket” Dariush Farhang.

She also played roles in several TV series, the most popular one was “At Home” co-directed by Bijan Birang and Masud Rasam in 1986.

In the children’s TV series, she portrayed Aziz Khanum, a lovely landlord who deals with the problems the children of her tenants and neighbors create during their summertime holiday.

Riahi made a cameo appearance in 2017 in director Saman Moqaddam’s comedy “Sperm Whale: Roya’s Selection”, which was her swansong.

Freewill Theater Company to restage “The Gingerbread Man” in Tehran

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Freewill Theater Company led by Iranian director Maryam Kazemi will restage “The Gingerbread Man”, a play written by English children’s writer David Wood, at Iran’s Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) in Tehran in mid-February.

Based on the 19th-century fairy tale, the play takes place on an antique kitchen dresser. The Gingerbread Man, newly baked by the Big Ones, meets Mr. Salt, Miss Pepper and Herr Von Cuckoo, who lives in the cuckoo-clock. He has a sore throat and has lost his voice and might end up in the

trash if he doesn’t recover it.

The Gingerbread Man’s efforts to help Cuckoo’s sore throat are hampered by the villainous scavenger Sleek the Mouse and by The Old Bag, an old tea-bag who lives in the teapot on the top shelf.

“The Gingerbread Man” premiered in Tehran in 2014. It was one of the successful productions staged by Freewill at the IIDCYA.

Kazemi has said that she needs to find an actor to fill the place of Hossein Moheb Ahari who passed away last January after a lengthy battle with lymphoma.



Cast members perform “The Gingerbread Man” at the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in Tehran on April 24, 2014.

Book analyzing Iranian children’s view of toys published

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — A book analyzing Iranian children’s view of toys has been published by the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA).

Co-written by Sajjad Khani, Mehdi Izadkhan and Mohammad Asadi, “Iranian Children and Toys: An Analysis on Behavior of Consumers” was unveiled during the Fifth National Festival of Toys at the IIDCYA on Tuesday.

IIDCYA Supervising Council director Vida Maleki said that the writers tried to study the challenges existing

in the field of toys and reflect the results in the book.

Speaking at the ceremony, Izadkhan also said that there is not much information about the cultural industry, adding, “We need to collect more information and transfer them to the society.”

IIDCYA official Ruhollah Kazemizadeh in his brief words said that the book is good for parents and those who are involved with toys to raise their knowledge of toys’ impacts on children.

The festival of toys opened on December 28 and will end on Friday.



IIDCYA officials unveil the book “Iranian Children and Toys, an Analysis on Behavior of Consumers” in Tehran on December 31, 2019. (IIDCYA/Mohsen Roshandeh)

In 2019, the box office belonged to Disney

NEW YORK (AP) — Every movie year offers up a parade of hits and flops. But in 2019, no winner was in the same galaxy as the Walt Disney Co. And the biggest loser might have been anyone less thrilled about the box-office domination of franchise films.

In 2019, Disney dominated American moviegoing more than any studio ever has before — roughly 38% of all domestic moviegoing.

The year’s top five films were all Disney movies, and it played a hand in the sixth. Disney’s Marvel Studios produced the Sony Pictures release “Spider-Man: Far From Home.”

Disney banked about \$13 billion in worldwide box office in 2019, including a record number of \$1 billion releases. Once “Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker” (\$724.8 million through Sunday) inevitably reaches that milestone, it will mark the studio’s seventh such \$1 billion movie in 2019. The others were: “Avengers: Endgame” (the highest grossing release ever, not accounting for inflation, with \$2.8 billion), “The Lion King,” “Captain Marvel,” “Aladdin,” “Toy Story 4” and “Frozen II.”

Disney’s unprecedented market share includes films from 20th Century Fox, the 84-year-old studio that Disney gobbled up in March in a \$71.3 billion acquisition.

Despite Disney’s considerable firepower, overall ticket sales in U.S. and Canada theaters were down 4.4% from the year

before through Sunday, according to data firm Comscore. The upper echelons of the box office may be stratospheric, but the lower realms — where critics’ scores are rotten and word of mouth is faster than opening weekend — are dismal. The movies are increasingly a zero-sum game. You’re either “The Lion King” or you’re “Cats.”

“There’s plenty of capacity to bring people to the movie screen,” says Cathleen Taff, distribution chief for Disney. “What I think we’re doing is competing for their time. If it’s not great, they do have other options. But when it is great, people show up. And we’ve seen that this year with seven \$1 billion movies.”

Disney’s considerable role in today’s moviegoing hasn’t been without critics. They have lamented its mega-blockbusters as products, not cinema. Before Martin Scorsese’s criticisms of Disney’s Marvel movies sparked headlines, he lamented the monopolizing of the multiplex, disturbed by the sight of “Avengers: Endgame” playing on 11 of a theater’s 12 screens.

If the big-screen experience is narrowing, the small screen is expanding. Streaming services proliferated in 2019 with the launch of Apple TV Plus (although it pushed back its first big movie release) and Disney Plus. Amazon also reshaped its release strategy, shortening the theatrical window for some of its movies to just two weeks.

T.S. Eliot letters to muse to be unveiled after 60 years

NEW YORK (AP) — After more than 60 years spent sealed up in a library storage facility, about 1,000 letters written by poet T.S. Eliot to confidante Emily Hale will be unveiled this week, and scholars hope they will reveal the extent of a relationship that’s been speculated about for decades.

Many consider Hale to not only be his close friend, but also his muse, and they hope their correspondence will offer insight into the more intimate details about Eliot’s life and work. Students, researchers and scholars can read the letters at Princeton University Library starting Thursday.

“I think it’s perhaps the literary event of the decade,” says Anthony Cuda, an Eliot scholar and director of the T.S. Eliot International Summer School. “I don’t know of anything more awaited or significant. It’s momentous to have these letters coming out.”

Lifelong friends, Hale and Eliot exchanged letters for about 25 years beginning in 1930. The two met in 1912 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but did not rekindle their friendship until 1927. Eliot was already living in England and Hale taught drama at U.S. universities, including Scripps College in California.

In 1956, Hale donated the letters under an agreement they wouldn’t be opened until 50 years after either her or Eliot’s death, whichever came second. Eliot died in 1965. Hale died four years later.

Biographers say Eliot ordered Hale’s letters to him to be burned.

Their relationship “must have been incredibly important and their correspondence must have been remarkably intimate for him to be so concerned about the publication,” Cuda says.

T.S. Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1888 and gained notoriety as a poet early in life. He was only 26 when “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” became his first professionally published poem.

His best known works include “The Waste Land,” “The Hollow Men” and “Four Quartets.”

The first poem in the “Quartets” series, called “Burnt Norton,” piques the interest of enthusiasts of the poet, says Eliot scholar Frances Dickey, because of lines that suggest missed opportunities and what might have been with his muse. The poem is named after a home in England that Eliot visited with Hale in 1934.

“His relationship with her seems to be deep and meaningful and it’s a door he chose not to open,” she said.

The letters could also reveal details about Eliot’s conversion to Anglicanism, something he deeply cherished, Dickey says.

Dickey, who served as one of the editors on “The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot”, said the poet was deeply ashamed of his marriage to his first wife, Vivienne Haigh-Wood, whom he was with for more than 15 years.