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ARTICLE

Martin Love
Political analyst from
North Carolina

It must be always emphasized: Allah's mercy and compassion

Amid the madness, one thing is indisputable. Trump and Netanyahu are joined at the hip in part because both face the prospect, however remote, of eventually winding up in jail. Trump has been impeached but getting him out of the White House before November is a stretch, Natanyahu has been indicted on multiple corruption charges. Both think they avoid jail as long as they are in office. They planned and executed the demise of Soleimani through their respective appointees alongside the Mossad and the CIA. Worse, if conditions deteriorate even further between the U.S. and Iran, like into open warfare as prompted by the assassination of Qassem Soleimani and others, they may be even less likely to be fired ... until the publics of both the U.S. and Israel realize neither country can prevail over Iran and certainly not prevail over a Muslim world that may be, at long last, has become galvanized to kick Western forces out of West Asia and perhaps beyond. To say with deeds, "no more Western imperialism!"

There are so many possible scenarios ahead after Iran, as it has promised, retaliates for the unwarranted attacks in Iraq on Soleimani and others. And what might be the ripest target for Iran's retaliation? The place from whence the drone that bombed Soleimani's convoy was launched: al-Udeid air base in Qatar. Iran knows what's there and why it might be a ripe target. Moreover, if Iran does strike at all, and it seems it will, the world witnesses yet another impulsive action by Washington — retaliation upon retaliation (hardly an action befitting alleged (faux) "Christians" that also infest Trump's administrative ranks). If the U.S. then responds to what-ever revenge Iran exacts, Iran will unleash the totality of its very specific military capability on the western shores of the Persian Gulf. Does Trump want to see the devastation of oil production facilities in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE in addition to U.S. military and diplomatic facilities? The world economy would crater as oil prices would ascend to maybe \$200 a barrel. ➔7

Cyprus says to host U.S. rapid response unit for any Mideast evacuations

Cyprus on Wednesday accepted a request from Washington to station a rapid response unit on the island in case U.S. diplomatic missions or civilians need to be evacuated in the region following Iran's missile strike. Cypriot government spokesman Kyriacos Koushos told reporters that the request was accepted "for exclusively humanitarian operations" as was official policy. "The Republic...gave its consent for the temporary stationing in Cyprus of a rapid response unit whose task will be to evacuate U.S. diplomatic missions in the region, as well as U.S. citizens, if necessary," said Koushos. He said the request was made by the U.S. Authorities through the U.S. Embassy in Nicosia.

"It has been a long-standing practice for the Republic of Cyprus to provide facilities for humanitarian operations on the basis of requests from third countries," said Koushos. "We will continue to do so as a factor of stability and security in the region...thus taking advantage of our geographical location as well as our excellent relations with all the states of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East," he added. The request came after Iran fired a volley of missiles on Wednesday at Iraqi bases housing U.S. and other foreign troops, the Islamic republic's first act in its promised revenge for the U.S. killing of a top Iranian general.

The Pentagon said: "Iran launched more than a dozen ballistic missiles against U.S. military and coalition forces in Iraq. "It is clear that these missiles were launched from Iran and targeted at least two Iraqi military bases hosting U.S. military and coalition personnel." Nicosia-U.S. ties have blossomed of late —last month Washington lifted a 1987 arms embargo on Cyprus as a sign of warmer relations. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was also due to visit Cyprus on January 7 but postponed it due to tensions with Iran. A former UK colony, Cyprus hosts two sovereign British military bases. ➔13

Over 180 rallies planned across U.S. to protest Trump's 'march to war' with Iran

A coalition of progressive advocacy groups in the U.S. have called for massive rallies across the country to protest President Donald Trump's "military brinkmanship" against Iran and demand immediate de-escalation of tensions with Tehran following the U.S. assassination of a top Iranian general. "We will not be forced into another war," said the coalition, led by MoveOn, Indivisible, Win Without War, and other groups. "On Thursday, January 9, at 5 p.m local time, the anti-war majority in this country will get visible to oppose Trump's war and say #NoWar-WithIran," the coalition said. As of Wednesday, over 180 protests have been planned across the U.S., up from just 50 when the protests were first announced Tuesday afternoon. The protest organizers said we "will demand

that Congress intervene to stop Trump from taking the advice of war-hungry right-wing pundits and launching a devastating war with Iran." "America, this is an emergency," said activist Kai Newkirk. "If we spiral into war with Iran, millions could die. We have a short window of time to stop it. We need a massive protest. Everyone, if at all possible, must come out this Thursday, nationwide." "We need everyone in the streets," tweeted U.S. Representative Pramila Jayapal, a Democrat from the state of Washington and co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. "This is a critical time for the American people to be heard," she added. "This is Trump's fault. Since being elected, he has escalated, provoked, and threatened Iran. He chose to assassinate one of its political

leaders, knowing that Iran would retaliate," Indivisible, one of the protest organizers, said on its website. Angel Padilla, the national policy director of Indivisible, said in a statement on Tuesday that the missile attack by Iran was an "entirely predictable" and "avoidable" consequence of the White House's hawkish policies toward Iran and urged Congress "act decisively and fast to stop Trump's warmongering." Early on Wednesday, Iran responded to the assassination of Iranian Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the Middle East's most prominent anti-terror commander, striking the American airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar province in western Iraq and another in Erbil, the capital of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region. ➔13



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Shots of "Commander of Hearts" projected on Tehran's icon

Portrait photographs of the recently martyred Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani along with the three-colored flag of Iran are projected on Tehran's Azadi Tower (Borj-e Azadi) on January 6, 2020. Nicknamed as "Commander of Hearts", Soleimani was assassinated on the order of U.S. President Donald Trump in Baghdad early on January 3. The inverted-Y-shaped tower is considered by many as the icon of the Iranian capital.

147 Iranians, 32 foreigners killed as Ukrainian plane crashes near Tehran

TEHRAN — All 170 passengers and 9 crew members of a Ukrainian plane were killed as it crashed shortly after taking off from Tehran's Imam Khomeini airport. The Boeing 737 belonging to Ukraine International Airlines which was headed to Ukrainian capital city Kyiv crashed at 6:18 a.m. local time near the airport. Pir-Hossein Koulivand, head of Iran's Emergency Medical Services Organization, told ISNA that among 179 aboard, 147 were Iranians and 32 were foreign nationals. "22 ambulances and two bus ambulances have been dispatched to the site," Mo-

jtaba Khaledi, head of Emergency Medical Services Organization spokesman said. Morteza Salimi, head of Rescue and Relief Organization, also announced that 60 operational teams and two helicopters had been dispatched to the area. Mohammad Taghizadeh, deputy governor of Tehran said that 70 men, 81 women, 15 children and one infant were killed in the incident. Ali Al-ghasi Mehr, Tehran's prosecutor, announced that the bodies have been collected and transferred to forensics organization for identification.

'Iran ensures safety of commercial vessels passing through its waters'

TEHRAN — Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) said the foreign commercial vessels can pass through Iran's waters on their normal basis and Iranian ports do not apply any limitation on their passage. Mohammad Rastad made the remarks in response to the British Royal Navy's use of escorts for vessels commuting through

the Persian Gulf waters, IRIB reported on Wednesday. "There is no need for an escort and we have always emphasized that Iranian waters are among the safest in the world," Rastad said. "Fortunately, so far we haven't encountered any unusual situation in the country's commercial ports and all activities are continuing as usual," he added. ➔4

Putin-Assad meeting part of response to Soleimani assassination: Shaaban

Syrian Presidential Political and Media Adviser Bouthaina Shaaban said that the Russian president's meeting with Bashar al-Assad was part of a response to Gen. Soleimani's killing. Putin arrived in Damascus on Tuesday Jan. 8 on a visit to Syria. On January 3, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad condoled Iran over the assassination of Lt.

Gen. Soleimani, saying that the late commander's support for Syria will always be remembered by the Syrian nation. In a message to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the Syrian president expressed his and "the Arab people of Syria's warmest condolences" to the Leader and the Iranian nation. ➔13

Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis buried in Iraq's Najaf

Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, a leader of Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF, or Hashd al-Shaabi), has been buried at the Salam Cemetery in the Iraqi holy city of Najaf. Al-Muhandis was killed alongside Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and several others in a U.S. air raid outside Baghdad airport on Friday. His body was taken to Iran for the DNA test and was returned on Tuesday. "The DNA testing was completed successfully and he was flown to Basra, his hometown, for mourners to pay their respects," said PMF media representative Mohammad Hussein. "We were meant to bury him tonight [Tuesday], but because of the huge crowd that gathered at the funeral procession in Basra, things took longer than expected," said Hussein. Al-Muhandis, whose real name was Jamal Jaafar Ibrahim, was the top Iraqi adviser to Soleimani and founder of the Kataib Hezbollah armed group. He was also the de facto leader of the PMF, an umbrella group of mostly Iranian-backed Shia armed groups. Hundreds of people gathered on the streets of Najaf on Tuesday night to pay their final respects. Earlier, thousands of mourners had gathered in his hometown of Basra. Many raised flags of the paramilitary group and chanted "Death to America". Funeral processions were also held in several Iraqi cities earlier this week, including Baghdad and Karbala, where funeral prayers were held. (Source: al Jazeera)

Notification:

Tehran Times decides to cut pages from 16 to 12
Dear readers,
Print media in the world have faced a considerable cut in their circulation in recent years. The main reason for this has been a decrease in revenues and an increase in costs. In Iran print media are not fully developed economically as they are mostly financed by the government. However, since last year such aid has faced hurdles and caused problems for the print media. For this reason the Tehran Times has decided to change plan and focus more on its website and reduce consumption of paper. Hence, the Tehran Times will decrease its pages from 16 to 12 as of Saturday, January 11.

Rouhani to U.S.: ‘Your foot will be cut from the region’

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that the U.S. forces “cut the hand of Soleimani from his body” but the Iranian forces “will cut the Washington’s foot from the region”.

The U.S. military assassinated Qassem Soleimani, a top Iranian military commander, in Baghdad on January 3. According to reports, Soleimani’s body was cut into five pieces.

The remarks by the president also came hours after the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps fired dozens of ballistic missiles at U.S. military bases in Iraq in retaliation for the killing of General Soleimani. The Pentagon confirmed the missile strikes.



“They cut the hand of Soleimani from his body and everybody watched it adjacent to his body in all photos. The revenge for the act is cutting the Americans’ feet from the region,” Rouhani said.

The missiles were fired at the Ain al-Assad airbase in Anbar province early Wednesday morning.

Reportedly, about 80 U.S. troops have been killed in the missile strikes on the airbase from which drone attack took place against Soleimani.

Top Iranian political and military figures had vowed harsh revenge for the assassination of General Soleimani.

“U.S. can’t get rid of consequences of assassinating Soleimani” Rouhani went on to say that the U.S. can’t get rid of the impacts of killing General Soleimani. He said the assassination was an act of terrorism and in violation of international law.

“The U.S. assassinated criminally a great Iranian commander who was the guest of the Iraqi government. The move was in violation of international law,” Rouhani told a cabinet session.

“They were after sowing discord inside Iran, creating a situation of fear and disunity in the region and providing gap between the Iraqi government and people and Iran; of course, they failed to materialize their plots,” the president added.

He further pointed to the massive funeral ceremonies of General Soleimani and said, “The ceremony was not a normal presence, instead, it was a historic miracle of the Iranian people’s presence.”

“Hundreds of the U.S. military commanders could be gunned down if General Soleimani had only wanted to do so. But in addition to his braveness, Soleimani was one of the most moderate military commanders in the region as well as the entire world,” Rouhani went on to say.

“I express my thanks to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) that conducted a massive missile attack operation against the U.S. large base in the region to prove that we do not retreat in confronting the Americans,” he added.

Iran takes self-defense measure under UN Charter: Zarif

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Commenting on Iran’s retaliatory missile attacks on a U.S. military based in western Iraq early on Wednesday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the measure was taken under Article 51 of the UN Charter.



“Iran took & concluded proportionate measures in self-defense under Article 51 of UN Charter targeting base from which cowardly armed attack against our citizens & senior officials were launched,” Zarif wrote on his Twitter account.

Zarif added, “We do not seek escalation or war, but will defend ourselves against any aggression.”

In the first step of hard revenge on the U.S. over the assassination of Lt. General Soleimani, the IRGC fired tens of ballistic missiles at the Ain al-Assad base in Iraq at the early hours of Wednesday.

Trump backs away from further military conflict with Iran

President Trump backed away from further military confrontation with Iran on Wednesday after a barrage of missiles fired at American troops in Iraq, the New York Times reported.

“Iran appears to be standing down which is a good thing for all parties concerned and a very good thing for the world,” Trump said in a televised statement from the Grand Foyer of the White House, flanked by his vice president, cabinet secretaries and senior military officers in their uniforms.

However, he said he would impose more economic sanctions on Iran and called on NATO allies to become more involved in the Middle East.

“The United States is ready to embrace peace with all who seek it,” he said.

His comments came the morning after Iran fired a reported 22 ballistic missiles at a military base in Iraq that houses United States troops in response to last week’s American drone strike that killed Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, commander of Iran’s elite security and intelligence forces.

No American troops were injured or killed in the attacks, the president claimed.

In the hours since, some analysts expressed cautious optimism that the missile strikes might prove the end of the immediate conflict rather than the start of a larger confrontation that could spiral into a full-fledged war. Iran’s Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, said afterward that Iran had “concluded proportionate measures” in its retribution for General Soleimani’s death.

Ayatollah Khamenei: U.S. corruptive presence in region must come to an end

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday that the United States’ “corruptive presence” in the region must come to an end.

“This region does not accept presence of the United States. The people in the region and the regional governments rising from the people do not accept this issue,” he said during a speech in Qom.

The remarks by the Leader came a few hours after Iran fired dozens of ballistic missiles at two U.S. military bases in Iraq in retaliation to the U.S. assassination of top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3.

Top Iranian political and military figures had vowed “harsh revenge” for the martyrdom of General Soleimani.

“A slap was delivered last night,” the Leader remarked.

However, Ayatollah Khamenei said, such military actions are not enough and the U.S. forces must leave the region.

“The issue of revenge is another issue. They were slapped last night which is another issue. Such military actions will not be enough. The United States’ corruptive presence in the region must come to an end. They have brought war, sedition, destruction, and also destruction of infrastructures to the region.”

He added that the U.S. has acted in this way whenever it has entered.

“They insist on extending this corruption



and destruction to Iran. Their insistence on negotiations is preliminary to such presence and interference,” the Leader pointed out.

Ayatollah Khamenei added that the people are duty bound to know the enemy.

“We should not make mistake in knowing the enemy. Do not say that we all know. Enemy is global arrogance and the United States. However, comprehensive efforts are being made to change the people’s opinion through complicated methods of propaganda,” the Leader stated.

Ayatollah Khamenei noted that animosity

of the enemies is not something temporary.

“This animosity is inherent and constant and they hit us whenever they can. To counter them, we have to empower ourselves. We have to be empowered in areas of military, security, politics and economy to prevent enemy from hitting us,” he said.

He noted, “It is wrong to think that they leave animosity when we back down.”

■ **‘Martyrdom of Gen. Soleimani shows Islamic Revolution is alive’**

Ayatollah Khamenei also said that mar-

tyrdom of General Soleimani showed that the Islamic Revolution is alive.

“His martyrdom showed the world that the revolution is alive,” he said.

He said, “They wanted to pretend that the revolution in Iran is dead... However, his martyrdom showed that the revolution is alive.”

The Leader added the enemies tried to portray General Soleimani as a terrorist.

Soleimani was considered a legendary commander against terrorist groups, including Daesh (ISIS), in Iraq and Syria.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei said, “The United States is unfair and liar and we cannot attach value to its words.”

Pointing to mass participation of the people in funeral procession of General Soleimani in various cities, the Leader said, “The people slapped them [the U.S.] in the mouth.”

“You saw what happened in Tehran and other cities.”

The huge participation of people in the funeral processions for Soleimani in the cities of Ahvaz, Mashhad, Tehran, Qom and Kerman were highly surprising.

The massive crowding during the funeral procession in Kerman, the general’s hometown, 59 people were killed and many more injured in a stampede.

“I am upset about that bitter incident in Kerman and I express condolences to the families of the victims,” the Leader remarked.

Revenge started

IRGC fires missiles at U.S. air base to avenge Soleimani assassination

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Early on Wednesday, on the dead of the night, the Aerospace Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) fired ballistic missiles at the U.S. Ain al-Assad airbase in southwestern Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of IRGC Quds Force Commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

The missiles were launched at 1:45am to 2:15am at dawn, January 8, 2020.

Ain Al-Assad, an airbase in al Anbar province, is the main and the largest U.S. airbase in Iraq.

This is the first direct attack on the U.S. army since the Second World War.

IRGC officials said none of the missiles had been intercepted.

The missile attack operation was named after “Martyr Soleimani”.

General Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. air raid near the Baghdad international airport on Friday morning. It was an act of war against Iran.

Soleimani had gone to Baghdad to deliver a message to the Iraqi prime minister who is seeking to reduce tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The U.S. airstrike also martyred Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU) and some other forces of the PMU along with their guests. Top Iranian political and military figures had vowed “harsh revenge” for the martyrdom of General Soleimani.

A few hours after Iran fired dozens of ballistic missiles at the U.S. military base, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said that the United States’ “corruptive presence” in the region must come to an end.

“A slap was delivered last night,” the Leader remarked.

In the meantime, President Rouhani praised the missile attacks on the U.S. military base, saying, “They cut Soleimani’s hand from his body and everybody watched it adjacent to his body in photos. The revenge for the act is cutting the Americans’ feet from the region.”

■ **Military chief says there will be ‘harsher response in case of further mischief’**

Meanwhile, Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General

Mohammad Bagheri warned that the U.S. will face a “harsher response” if it conducts any “further mischief”.

“It is time that the wicked U.S. leaders understand the capabilities of the Islamic Republic and adopt a wise policy and pull their troops out of the region as soon as possible,” Bagheri stated.

■ **Zarif: Iran’s response is in accordance to UN Charter**

Also, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said his country’s missile attacks on Ain Al-Assad falls under the rules of the UN Charter, reminding that Iran has hit the airbase that has been used as the launchpad for assassinating General Soleimani.

“Iran took and concluded proportionate measures in self-defense under Article 51 of UN Charter targeting [the] base from which cowardly armed attack against our citizens and senior officials were launched,” Zarif wrote on his tweeter page on Wednesday morning.

■ **Zarif says Iran informed Iraq of missile attack on U.S. base**

Zarif also said Iran informed the Iraqi government of its retaliatory attack on the U.S. base, reaffirming Tehran’s respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Arab country.

“We attach high significance to Iraq’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, and we believe security should be [provided] based on mutual respect and [safeguarding] territorial integrity of all regional countries by all,” he added.

In relevant remarks, Ali Motahari, a senior lawmaker, said, “The main response will certainly be a complete expulsion of the U.S. forces from the Middle East and liberation of the occupied Palestine.”

The Iranian first vice president also announced on his official Twitter account that the IRGC Aerospace Force’s missile attacks on the airbase was a “crushing” and also a “deterrent” one.

Es’haq Jahangir attached Iran’s flag to his Twitter and wrote: “The first slap was strong, crushing and of course warning and deterrent.”

Iran’s television said over 80 U.S. forces have been reportedly killed in the missile strikes, citing a source close to the IRGC.

In letter to UN chief Iran says has right to self-defense against any threat or use of force

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations, has said that Iran has the right to defense itself against any threat or use of force.

In a letter to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday, Takht-Ravanchi said, “In conformity with international law and in exercising its inherent right to self-defense, Iran will take all necessary and proportionate measures against any threat or use of force.”

The letter by Tehran’s top diplomat to the UN came five days after the U.S. assassinated top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad.

Following is full text of his letter published by IRNA on Wednesday:

Pursuant to my letter dated 3 January 2020 regarding the terrorist attack by the armed forces of the United States of America against Martyr Major General Qassem Soleimani, the Commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and his companions on 3 January 2020 at the Baghdad International Airport, I am writing to draw your kind attention to yet another provocative statement by the United States threatening to use further force against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

On 3 January 2020 and almost immediately after the terrorist attack, the President of the United States threatened Iran “in particular”, stating, “We have all of those targets already fully identified, and I am ready and prepared to take whatever action is necessary”.

On 4 January 2020, the President of the United States once again threatened to “hit very fast and very hard” “52 Iranian sites”, including



some very important to “the Iranian culture”.

After a few hours on the same day, he threatened Iran again by stating, “We will hit them harder than they have ever been hit before”.

On 5 January 2020, when faced with the criticism that targeting Iran’s cultural sites would be considered a war crime under international law, he asserted anew that, “We’re not allowed to touch their cultural site? It doesn’t work that way”.

On the same day, he yet again brazenly threatened that “the United States will quickly [and] fully strike” Iran “in a disproportionate manner”.

Overall, only in three days, the President of the United States, through extremely provocative and harsh statements, has threatened five times to use force against a founding member of the United Nations.

Publicly repeating such provocative statements and unlawful threats are without a doubt a clear call for lawlessness, chaos, and disorder at the international level, particularly with respect to a highly important common good such as peace and security.

Such unbridled threats by the President of the United States indisputably constitute a gross violation of the peremptory norms of international law as well as the very fundamental principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, particularly its Article 2(4) that clearly prohibits the threat or use of force.

Given the confrontational nature of these inflammatory statements and threats, as well as the broad and adverse ramifications of the military adventurism of the United States on regional and international peace and security, it is crystal clear that this country bears the full responsibility for all consequences.

It is also evident that the threat to target Iranian cultural sites is certainly a flagrant violation of the basic norms and principles of international law, and any attack against such sites would be a war crime. Additionally, it should be born in mind that “damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind”.

Recalling that the current insecurity and instability in the broader Persian Gulf region is the direct result of the unlawful invasion of Iraq by the United States in 2003 as well as its massive military presence and its “divide and rule” policy in the region, it is also worth noting that all the abovesaid threats, including to dispatch more troops and “brand new beautiful equipment” to this already volatile region, would indeed further complicate the current tense situation.

I must also stress that the aforementioned statements and actions are only the tip of a submerged iceberg of hostile policies and unlawful practices, as well as the threats and plots of the United States against Iran over the past 40 years.

While the Islamic Republic of Iran does not seek war, it seriously warns against any further military adventurism against it. Iran is determined to continue to strongly protect its people, to vigorously defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity and to fully secure its national interests.

Accordingly, in conformity with international law and in exercising its inherent right to self-defense, Iran will take all necessary and proportionate measures against any threat or use of force.

This is in accordance with its inherent right under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, and Iran will not hesitate to exercise it when required.

The irresponsible policies and unlawful practices of the United States continue to not only endanger the very foundations of international law and order but also pose a real threat to international peace and security.

The international community should not condone or tolerate this situation and must demand that the United States put an end to its continued unlawful and destabilizing measures in such a volatile region as the Middle East, particularly by withdrawing all its forces from the region.

Likewise, the United Nations Security Council must condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the unlawful threats and unfettered policies of the United States as well as hold it accountable for all of its wrongful acts and unlawful practices while compelling it to abide by the principles and rules of international law.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

Defense chief vows ‘proportional response’ to any U.S. action

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Defense Minister Amir Hatami has vowed a “proportional response” to any action the United States might take against the Islamic Republic.

“The next measures of the Islamic Republic of Iran will be proportional to the Americans’ actions and this can go on,” Brigadier General Hatami said on Wednesday after the cabinet meeting.

Hatami said Iran will definitely seek driving the American forces, who have brought nothing but war, misery, terror and crime, out of the region.

The United States assassinated Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, Iran’s top anti-terror commander, and his comrades-in-arms in an airstrike in Baghdad on Friday morning.

The U.S. airstrike also martyred Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of the anti-terrorist Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

Soleimani is recognized internationally as a legendary commander in the battle against terrorist groups, especially Daesh (ISIS). He commanded forces who resisted ISIS which was advancing toward the Iraqi Kurdistan and came close to Baghdad.

Officials in Tehran and independent



generals in the world have said the Soleimani assassination amounts to an act of war against Iran.

On Wednesday morning, Iran carried out the Shahid (Martyr) Soleimani Operation against an American airbase in Iraq with tens of missiles.

Iran had vowed to take a “tough revenge”

for Soleimani’s blood.

In a statement, the IRGC warned the United States that any more aggression or movement will receive more “painful and crushing” response.

In his Wednesday remarks, Hatami described General Soleimani as a figure who was well-recognized internationally and was

very important for the Resistance Front.

“The Americans, in an atrocious act of terror, martyred this honorable martyr, who was a harbinger of peace and security for the region,” the minister said.

He said this move by the U.S. was a “mis-calculation”.

The minister added the Americans had imagined that they could drive a wedge between the Iranian and Iraq nations by killing General Soleimani.

He congratulated the Iranian nation and armed forces on the big victory of the Shahid Soleimani Operation, hoping that this would become an “unforgettable lesson” for the Americans.

The Iranian foreign minister also said on Wednesday that Iran had “concluded” its attacks on American forces and did “not seek escalation or war”.

“Iran took & concluded proportionate measures in self-defense under Article 51 of UN Charter targeting base from which cowardly armed attack against our citizens & senior officials were launched,” he tweeted after the attack.

“We do not seek escalation or war, but will defend ourselves against any aggression,” he added.

Over 80 U.S. forces dead in Iran’s missile strikes on targets in Iraq

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — More than 80 U.S. forces have reportedly been killed in Iranian missile strikes on U.S. targets in Iraq on Wednesday morning, the national TV quoted a source close to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as saying.

“According to the accurate reports of our sources in the field, at least 80 American troops were killed and some 200 others were wounded, who were immediately transferred out of the airbase by helicopters,” said an informed source at the IRGC.

In early hours of Wednesday, the IRGC fired missiles at the U.S. Ain al-Assad airbase in Anbar province in western

Iraq. The missile attacks were in retaliation to the U.S. assassination of IRGC Quds Force chief Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani on January in Baghdad.

The Ain al-Assad airbase was a strategic site for the U.S. which was used to support drone attacks.

The sources said as many as 20 critical points in the base were hit by 15 missiles and a significant number of UAVs and helicopters were destroyed.

“Despite the fact that the Americans had been on high alert, their air defense was unable to respond,” he said.

Senior political and military officials had promised to take

harsh revenge on the U.S. for the death of General Soleimani.

The source added that Iran has prepared plans to destroy 104 U.S. targets if the White House makes another mistake.

“As many as 104 critical U.S.-held points in the region have been identified, which would be attacked by the first mistake.”

In an early reaction to the missile strikes, President Trump said “all is well”!

“All is well! Missiles launched from Iran at two military bases located in Iraq. Assessment of casualties & damages taking place now. So far, so good!” Trump wrote in a post on Twitter.

Army: Any U.S. escalation to be met with ‘stronger response’

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Army has warned the United States that any new hostile move will draw a “stronger response” from the Islamic Republic.

In a statement on Wednesday after Iran attacked a U.S. military base in Iraq, the Army lauded the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) for the retaliatory missile attack on the terrorist U.S. forces in Iraq, Tasnim reported.

In the early hours of Wednesday, the IRGC attacked the U.S. airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar province in western Iraq in retaliation for the U.S. assassination of top Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

The Army described the crushing response to the American “terrorist and criminal measure” as Iran’s inalienable right, stressing that security of the Iranian nation and the Islamic establishment is the “red line” for the armed forces.

The enemy is well aware that the repetition of any crime and evil act against



Iran will turn the slap in the face into “crushing steel punches”, the statement warned.

In a speech on Wednesday morning, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the U.S. “received a slap in the face last night” after the IRGC missile attack, stressing that the presence of American forces in the region, which he said only causes corruption, must end.

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces has also warned the U.S. that any new evil act will draw Iran’s “stronger, more crushing, and broader” response.

Top general warns of stronger response to any new U.S. attacks

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces warned the U.S. that any new evil act will draw Iran’s “stronger, more crushing, and broader” response, hours after the IRGC stormed two U.S. military bases in Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of Lt. General Qassem Soleimani.

January, 08, 2020 - 09:14 Politics Comments

Top General Warns of Iran’s Stronger Response to Any New U.S. Attacks

In a statement on Wednesday morning, Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri said the missile attacks by the IRGC Aerospace Force in the early hours of Wednesday against the U.S. military bases in Iraq gave a warning to the “terrorist U.S. regime’s” authorities.

He said the attacks on the American forces in Iraq revealed only a tiny part of the capabilities of the Iranian Armed Forces and was carried out in response to the U.S. terrorist move to assassinate General Soleimani.

“From now on, any new evil act by the U.S. will face a stronger and more crushing



response with a broader range,” the senior Iranian general added.

“The time has come for the evil authorities of the United States to realize the Islamic Republic of Iran’s capabilities in a greater extent of global geography, adopt a principled approach, and pull the forces of their terrorist army out of the region as soon as possible,” Baqeri underlined.

In the early hours of Wednesday, the IRGC targeted two U.S. airbases in Iraq, including the U.S. airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar province in western Iraq, in retaliation for the U.S. assassination of top Iranian anti-terror commander, General Soleimani.

Pompeo orders diplomats not to meet with Iranian opposition groups

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has ordered all U.S. missions overseas not to meet with Iranian opposition groups without specific approval.

According to a copy of a cable sent to U.S. missions, Pompeo said meeting with Iranian opposition groups could further exacerbate tensions with the Islamic Republic.

“Many exiled Iranian opposition groups try to engage U.S. officials regularly to gain at least the appearance of tacit support and enhance their visibility and clout,” Pompeo said, CNN reported on Tuesday

He said that many of these groups “have previously or are currently using violent means in support of their political aims.”

“Direct U.S. government engagement with these groups could prove counterproductive to our policy goal of seeking a

comprehensive deal with the Iranian regime that addresses its destabilizing behavior,” Pompeo wrote.

He sent the instructions early this week.

It came in the aftermath of a Trump-ordered U.S. attack at Baghdad’s airport on Friday that killed top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani. Iran took revenge for the assassination in early hours of Wednesday.

In a statement, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) issued a warning to regional countries that bear U.S. bases.

IRGC pointed to the successful Shahid (Martyr) Soleimani Operation against the Ain al-Assad base with tens of surface-to-surface missiles.

The statement warned the United States that any more aggression will receive more “painful and crushing” response.

IRGC also issued a warning to all Washington allies that house military bases to the terrorist U.S. forces. “Any land

that becomes the source of aggressive and hostile measures against the Islamic Republic will be targeted.”

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei also said after the attack that the United States’ “corruptive presence” in the region must come to an end.

“This region does not accept presence of the United States. The people in the region and the regional governments rising from the people do not accept this issue,” he said during a speech in Qom.

“A slap was delivered last night,” the Leader remarked.

“The issue of revenge is another issue. They were slapped last night which is another issue. Such military actions will not be enough. The United States’ corruptive presence in the region must come to an end. They have brought war, sedition, destruction, and also destruction of infrastructures to the region.”

Oman: No chance for mediation .between Iran, U.S

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi has said there is no chance right now for mediation between Tehran and Washington amid the recent escalation of tension in the region, according to Iran Front Page.

The remarks came hours after Iranian missiles hit the U.S. Ain al-Assad base in western Iraq.

The missile attack was a response to U.S. assassination of Qassem Soleimani, a revered Iranian general, in Iraq’s Baghdad on Friday.

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



put maximum pressure on the Islamic Republic.

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

The assassination of Soleimani, however, has rendered the idea of talks between the two countries all but impossible.

South Korea says has no plan to dispatch navy fleet to Strait of Hormuz

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The South Korean Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Wednesday that his country has thus far not decided to forward any naval force to the Strait of Hormuz connecting the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman in the Middle East.

“We are assessing and monitoring developments, including escalation of tensions, in the (Persian Gulf) region,” Kim In Chol was quoted as saying by Yonhap news.

“We all have possible plans to safeguard our nationals, vessels and tankers,” he went on to say.

“We continue consulting other countries to promote efforts aimed at restoring peace and stability in the region,” the spokesman said.

Yonhap news reported that South Korea attaches great importance to the Strait of Hormuz through which the country imports



nearly 70 percent of its crude.

According to the new agency, South Korea’s financial authorities also said Wednesday that they will maintain round-the-clock tabs on financial markets over the escalating military tensions in the Middle East.

Yoo Kwang-yeol, first senior deputy governor at the Financial Supervisory Service, instructed officials to take swift countermeasures in case of increased volatility.

Vice president: IRGC missile attacks on U.S. base was a crushing, deterrent operation

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Iranian first vice president

announced on his official Twitter account on Wednesday that the IRGC airspace force’s missile attacks on the Ain al-Assad base in Iraq was a crushing and also a deterrent one.

Es’haq Jahangir attached Iran’s flag to his Twitter and wrote: “The first slap was strong, crushing and of course warning and deterrent.”

The IRGC on Wednesday targeted the Ain al-Assad air base in western Iraq which houses U.S. troops.

The attack on the major air base came after Iran pledged to retaliate against the U.S. for assassinating the top anti-terror commander, Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

According to Tasnim, tens of surface-to-surface missiles were fired at the strategic airbase but the exact number is not known yet.

The missile attacks were confirmed by the Pentagon.

The IRGC added that it would release more details about the strike.

The strike comes as no surprise since Iran had vowed to take a “harsh revenge”.

Sirens were reportedly heard and American helicopters flew over the airbase and the total alert was activated.

U.S. President Donald Trump was being briefed about the retaliatory strikes.

“We are aware of the reports of attacks on U.S. facilities in Iraq. The President has been briefed and is monitoring the situation closely and consulting with his national security team,” White House spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham said in a statement.

The Pentagon claimed that it would take necessary measures to protect the U.S. military forces amid heightened tensions in the region.

“We are working on initial battle damage assessments,” Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman said in statement.

“At approximately 5:30 pm (2230 GMT) on January 7, Iran launched more than a dozen ballistic missiles against U.S. military and coalition forces in Iraq,” Assistant to the U.S. Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Jonathan Hoffman said in a statement.

Iraq’s anti-terror Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), better known as Hashd al-Sha’abi, announced the start of Crushing Response Operation to the United States.

The White House was preparing for an address to the U.S. nation by Trump, the commander in chief, but it was announced later that the speech has been called off.

Iran ready to pull the trigger, ex-IRGC chief warns

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The former chief of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has warned the United States that Iran will take further retaliatory measures if they make a mistake, saying Iran is ready to pull the trigger.



“If the Americans make a mistake, they will see the outburst of anger of the Revolution forces,” Mohsen Rezaee said on Wednesday.

The remarks came after Iran attacked two American bases in Iraq on Wednesday morning, fulfilling Tehran’s promise to retaliate for the killing of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC Quds Force.

“In the next few hours, we will announce the death toll of Iran’s missile attack against Ain al-Assad [airbase],” Rezaee said.

“We proved that America, with all their advanced equipment and readiness, could not use their [defense] systems,” he added.

Envoy says Iran ready to forcefully respond to any adventurism

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian armed forces are ready to forcefully respond against any adventurism, says Iran’s ambassador to London.

“Iran in an act of self-defence as enshrined in the UN Charter, attacked two US military bases,” Hamid Baeidinejad said in a Twitter post on Wednesday.

“Iran does not seek escalation or war. Our armed forces are quite ready to forcefully respond against any adventurism. Iran’s people and government are fully behind their armed forces,” he added.

The remarks came hours after Iran responded to U.S. assassination of top anti-terror commander, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, and Iraq’s PMU second-in-command Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis with a barrage of missiles that hit U.S. air base in western Iraq.

Tehran had vowed to take a “tough revenge” over Soleimani’s assassination. In a live televised speech on Wednesday, hours after the retaliatory attacks, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei highlighted the need for the U.S. military presence in the region come to an end.



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	353807.5
IFX	4559.86

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,819 rials
GBP	55,119 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$68.72/b
WTI	\$62.82/b
OPEC Basket	\$70.89/b
Gold	\$1,581.10/oz
Silver	\$18.49/oz
Platinum	\$974.05/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

TEDPIX, IFX fall on Wednesday

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), dropped 5,035 points on Wednesday to stand at 353,807 points, IRNA reported.

As reported, 5.163 billion securities worth 20.15 trillion rials (about \$479.7 million) were traded at this market.

Also, in Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), the main index, IFX, fell 71 points to 4,559 on Wednesday, the same report confirmed.

Some 2.051 billion securities worth 11.641 billion rials (about \$277.1 million) were traded at IFB.

Tehran hosting intl. tire, rubber supply chain expo

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's third International Exhibition of Tire and Rubber Industry Supply Chain kicked off at the Olympic Hotel in Tehran on Tuesday, IRNA reported.

The exhibition's opening ceremony was attended by senior officials from the industry and representatives of 64 companies from China, South Korea, Italy, Turkey, and Canada.



Mehdi Sadeqi Niaraki, the director general of the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry's Industry Department, was among the officials who visited the exhibition to get acquainted with a number of manufacturers present in the event.

The three-day exhibition is hosting companies active in a variety of areas including tire and tube importers, rubber parts manufacturers, machinery manufacturers, machine importers, raw material manufacturers, raw material importers, research and engineering centers, companies active in rubber recycling, tire veneer manufacturers, startups, science companies, and laboratories.

‘Iran ensures safety of commercial vessels passing through its waters’

1 → According to the official, currently all the country's ports are operating at their full capacity and numerous vessels are loading and unloading their cargoes at Iranian ports.

“Due to the complete control of the Iranian fleet over the waters and under their supervision, we believe that there is no need for foreign fleets and their presence would not be beneficial,” the official stressed.

“We have repeatedly emphasized that the Islamic Republic navy is fully able of protecting all the passing vessels, not only in the Persian Gulf and the Oman Sea waters, but also in distant waters as well, so there seems to be no need for the British fleet to be escorted by security,” he added.

Housing rentals drop 1.5% in autumn

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Rent prices in Iran's housing market fell 1.5 percent during the past autumn from summer, IRNA reported citing the data provided by Statistical Center of Iran (SCI).

As previously reported, the country's housing market experienced a 70-percent rise in prices during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2019) compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Real estate deals were reportedly down by half during the nine-month period.

Some 50,247 deals were signed during the first nine months of this year, falling from 100,957 deals in the same time span of the previous year.

The number of real estate deals in Tehran City increased 137 percent during the ninth Iranian calendar month of Azar (ended on December 21) from its previous month.

As reported, some 9,664 deals were made in the past month, rising from 4,068 deals in its preceding month.

Housing prices also increased in the capital city during the past month, as the prices jumped 6.8 percent on monthly basis while 40 percent compared to the same month in the previous year.

Railway fleet to receive 300 domestically-made locomotives, wagons by mid-March

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami said the county's railway fleet is going to receive 300 new domestically-manufactured wagons and locomotives by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19).

Speaking in a meeting for reviewing the annual performance of the country's ministries on Wednesday, the official noted that the rail industry has also become self-sufficient in manufacturing and supplying rail tracks.

In this year, which is named as the year of “Pickup in Production” by the Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, the Transport Ministry and Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (known as RAI) is focused on renovating the railway fleet by relying on domestic producers.

In late December, Eslami and the Head of RAI Saied Rasouli unveiled some 243 new domestically-made locomotives and



wagons which were added to the country's railway fleet.

Valued at 3.4 trillion rials (about \$80.9 million), the mentioned wagons and

locomotives were made by three different companies namely, Wagon Pars, Iranian Rail Industries Development Company and Foolad Derakhshan Arak Company.

Also in September 2019, RAI celebrated the addition of 213 domestically-made wagons and locomotives to the country's fleet.

During the ceremony for unveiling the said locomotives and wagons, Rasouli said the number of domestically produced locomotives and wagons was increased by 58 percent, adding that according to a memorandum signed last year with the Budget and Planning Organization (BPO), by the end of the next Iranian calendar year (March 2021) another 974 locomotives will be added to the country's rail fleet.

Rasouli had also announced, in June 2019, that 20 trillion rials (about \$476.2 million) has been allocated for renovation of 1000 passenger and freight wagons and also locomotives in the current Iranian calendar year.

Iran, Vietnam mulling over inking preferential trade agreement

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran and Vietnam are considering signing a preferential trade agreement in order to boost the level of trade between the two countries to \$2 billion, IRNA reported.

The mentioned subject, among others, was discussed during an Iran-Vietnam business forum which was held in Tehran on Tuesday.

Facilitating visa issuance for Iranian businessmen by Vietnamese Embassy in Tehran and setting the stage for signing the preferential trade agreement and reaching a level of up to \$2 billion of bilateral trade were the main issues explored by the two countries' private sector representatives in the forum.

The forum was attended by Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Deputy Head for International Affairs Mohammad-Reza Karbasi, Vietnam's Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Le Quok Dawn, Vietnamese Ambassador in Tehran Nguyen Yen, and Head of Iran-Vietnam Joint Chamber of Commerce Mostafa Mousavi.

Speaking in the event, Karbasi emphasized that both Iranian

and Vietnamese government officials are seeking improvement of economic relations along with good political ties.

“Vietnam is a member of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and Iran is an ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) member, while both countries are part of the Eurasian Economic Agreement, so they could help each other entering into the mentioned markets”, the official said.

Pointing to the fact that the volume of trade between Iran and Vietnam decreased by 30 percent last year, Karbasi noted that the two sides should take necessary measures to identify and facilitate the development of trade.

The two sides also underlined bartering trade as a good solution for tackling the banking problems between the two countries.

Delivering his speech in the forum, Le Quok Dawn referred to the visits of the two countries' presidents to the other nation and said: “The fact is that there is a high level of political will for expansion of cooperation, so in practice, the current limiting barriers must be removed in order for the volume of trade between the two countries to reach the \$2 billion goal.”



ICCIMA Deputy Head for International Affairs Mohammad-Reza Karbasi (R), Vietnam's Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Le Quok Dawn (L), and Vietnamese Ambassador in Tehran Nguyen Yen (M) attend an Iran-Vietnam business forum in Tehran on Tuesday.

‘Issuing securities more than forecast will cause runaway inflation’

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Mohammad-Qoli Yousefi, an economist, believes that the higher number of securities that Iran's national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1399 (starts on March 20, 2020) has envisaged to be issued will make the country facing a runaway inflation.

In an interview conducted by the news portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Yousefi said, “The government is faced with budget deficit and wants to compensate the deficit through selling securities, but sales of 800 trillion rials (about \$19 billion) of securities will just make the national economy burdened with inflation”.

It is a temporary solution that the policy maker (the government) is suggesting, the economist lamented, adding issuance of more securities has not been suggested with the aim of collecting the liquidity from the market, while it is a decision made to compensate for budget deficit due to



severe drop in the oil income and also not receiving the anticipated tax revenues.

Budget bill's predicting issuance of more securities has been severely criticized by the private sector, as this sector says that 800 trillion rials is a high figure and if the government cannot repay on due time it will create some high debt for the next government.

Meanwhile, if the people cannot afford to buy the securities, the banks should buy them, and as the result the banks' sources for paying facilities will decrease, so the enterprises will receive less facilities and face lack of liquidity.

Indian economy may grow at 6 percent in 2020, says report

Fears of an economic crisis in India are likely to decrease and the country may recover from decelerating growth in 2020, a new report said on Tuesday.

According to U.S.-based private equity firm Blackstone, this year the Modi government is likely to continue business-friendly growth reforms, and the Indian economy is likely to grow at 6 percent, while the markets could rise by up to 20 percent.

Blackstone Vice Chairman Byron Wien has teamed up with Chief Investment Strategist Joe Zidle this year to deliver their list of ‘Ten Surprises for 2020’.

This is the 35th year that Wien has given his views on economic, financial market and political surprises for the coming year.

Wien defines a “surprise” as an event that the average investor would only assign a one out of three chance of taking place, but which Wien believes is “probable”, or having a better than 50 percent likelihood of happening.

Both China and the U.S. may keep their hands off Hong Kong in 2020 and will wait for the protests in the latter to settle down by itself, Wien predicted.

According to the report, economic problems in Russia may intensify even though the price of oil is rising this year. As a result, social unrest likely to spread in that country.

In 2020, anarchy and disharmony likely to spread throughout the world, creating turbulence in financial markets everywhere.

Investors may turn away from emerging market local currency debt, forcing spreads higher, Wien predicted.

■ Stagnant exports and rising unemployment

Meanwhile the analyst firm Brickwork Ratings said on Tuesday that the declining investment, stagnant exports and rising unemployment on the eve of the Union budget presentation pose formidable challenges to the Finance Minister in its formulation, Brickwork Ratings.

According to the rating agency, the reforms so far have yielded little, and despite a reduction of 135 basis points by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its policy rate, its transmission has been sluggish and the

impact is marginal.

The “crucial question is whether she can afford to deviate from the fiscal restructuring path laid down by the FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) Act to provide the stimulus to prop up the declining consumption and investment climate as also the ambitious announcement made regarding infra spending,” it said.

Given the subdued global and domestic environment, lingering twin balance sheet crisis and the relative ineffectiveness of monetary policy in the short term, most observers consider that the time is opportune for providing substantial fiscal stimulus for reviving the growth environment.

(Source: gulfoday.ae)

South African Rand weighed by Middle East turmoil



continuing load-shedding crisis with ripple effects on the economy, Moody's pending decision on South Africa's investment rating, as well as a continuing weak domestic economic growth outlook.’

Meanwhile, any further flare-ups between

the U.S. and Iran could continue to weaken the risk-sensitive South African Rand, with the geopolitical and economic atmosphere continuing to remain uncertain.

The Pound (GBP) rose against the South African Rand (ZAR) as MPs head back to the House of Commons following the Christmas recess period, with the revamped Brexit Withdrawal Agreement Bill now expected to progress essentially unchallenged this week.

Due to Prime Minister Boris Johnson's comfortable Conservative majority, the bill is expected to pass without much friction. Downing Street talks with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen are set to commence on Wednesday, boosting optimism for the Pound as a 31st January

Brexit looks increasingly likely.

‘Some no deal Brexit fears have been priced in earlier than we previously thought. We had thought it would take a while before Brexit would dominate the headlines again but PM Johnson's renewed promise not to extend the transition period, which is set to end on 31 December 2020, means investors have become slightly more concerned about Brexit.’

Brexit developments will remain in the driving seat for the GBP/ZAR exchange rate this week, with any further complications implicated in ‘phase two’ of the debates weakening the Pound as the New Year provides new Brexit uncertainties.

(Source: exchangerates.org.uk)

Iran's thermal power plants under annual overhauling program

ENERGY
desk

TEHRAN – Over 97,000 megawatts (MW) capacity of Iran's thermal power plants are going under a general overhauling program to get ready for the next year's demand peak period, IRNA reported on Wednesday, quoting a Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH) official.

According to Gholamreza Mehrdad, general manager of generation technical support at TPPH, the overhaul program is expected to finish by the end of the next Iranian calendar year's second month of Ordibehesht (May 20, 2020).

The annual overhaul program starts every year in early September and will continue until late May in the next year, the official said.

"A total of 674 short-term and long-term repair operations are anticipated to be carried out on a total 97,800 MW capacity of power plants, of which the operations for 46,700 MW have been currently executed or are in progress," Mehrdad explained.

As reported, so far 48 percent of the program



has been carried out.

Since the total capacity of the country's thermal power plants stands at about 80,000 MW, the mentioned figure indicates that some plants will go under more than one round of overhaul during the program.

Summer months constitute Iran's peak demand periods, so most of the power plant overhaul programs are scheduled to take place during autumn, winter and spring seasons.

Over two-thirds of Iran's thermal power plants are owned and operated by the country's private sector and private owners are currently generating nearly 67 percent of Iran's thermal power.

Currently, a total of 478 thermal power plants are operating throughout Iran which include both gas power plants and combined cycle plants.

Iran's total power generation capacity currently stands at about 85,000 MW, more than 90 percent of which is supplied by thermal power plants.

Oil jumps as Iran rocket strike on U.S. forces jolts markets

Oil prices jumped to their highest in months on Wednesday after Iran attacked American forces in Iraq in response to a U.S. strike that killed an Iranian general last week, raising the specter of a spiraling conflict and disrupted oil supplies.

But prices cooled a fraction after the early heat as analysts said market tension could ease as long as oil production facilities remain unaffected by attacks.

Brent crude futures rose \$1.56, or 2.3%, to \$69.83 by around 0207 GMT, after earlier rising to \$71.75, the highest since mid-September 2019.

West Texas Intermediate crude futures climbed \$1.25, or 2%, to \$63.95 a barrel. It earlier reached a high of \$65.85, the most since late April last year.

Iran's missile attack on U.S.-led forces in Iraq came

early on Wednesday, hours after the funeral of Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the country's elite Quds Force killed in a U.S. drone strike on January 3.

Tehran fired more than a dozen ballistic missiles from Iranian territory against at least two Iraqi military bases hosting U.S.-led coalition personnel, the U.S. military said on Tuesday.

"It's getting really serious ... but there is a feeling of achievement in terms of technical charts as Brent has surged to above \$70/barrel and near a high in September, 2019 after attacks on Saudi Arabian oil sites," said Hideshi Matsunaga, analyst at Sunward Trading in Tokyo.

"We have to see how much and what damage the latest attacks have caused, but oil markets may come down, just

like last September, if we can confirm that oil facilities have not been affected," he said.

Iranian news agency Mehr said Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps had targeted the base. Tehran has vowed retaliation for the killing of military commander Soleimani.

Sirens were heard and American helicopters were seen flying over Iraq's Ain al-Asad air base in Anbar Province early on Wednesday, according to Iraqi broadcaster al Mayadeen.

"We are working on initial battle damage assessments," Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman said in statement, adding that the bases targeted were at Al-Asad air base and another in Erbil, Iraq.

(Source: reuters.com)

UAE energy minister sees no immediate risk to oil flow through Strait of Hormuz

The United Arab Emirates' energy minister said on Wednesday he saw no immediate risk to oil passing through the vital gateway of the Strait of Hormuz after Iran attacked bases housing U.S. forces in Iraq. Iranian officials have said the missile strikes were a response to Friday's killing of top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad.

The situation is not a war, and what is happening now should not be exaggerated, Suhail al-Mazrouei said on the sidelines of a conference in Abu Dhabi, capital of the UAE, an OPEC producer. "We will not see a war," he added. "This is definitely an escalation between the United States, which is an ally, and Iran, which is a neighbor, and the last thing we want is more tension in the Middle East."

Oil prices were about 1% higher on Wednesday, but well below highs hit in a frenetic start to the trading day after the missile attacks raised the specter of a spiraling conflict and disruption to crude flows.

OPEC's Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo told the conference in Abu Dhabi that oil facilities in Iraq, the second-biggest producer in OPEC, were secured and output was continuing.

He said spare oil capacity stood at around 3-3.5 million barrels per day (bpd), the majority with Saudi Arabia, the top producer in the Organization of the

Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

No grounds for oil shortage fears
The UAE's Mazrouei said OPEC would respond to any possible oil shortages if necessary within its "limitations". But he saw no grounds for supply shortage fears, with healthy demand and global oil inventories hovering around the 5-year average. "We are not forecasting any shortage of supply unless there is a catastrophic escalation, which we don't see," he said.

Barkindo said he was confident that leaders in the Middle East were doing everything possible to restore normal conditions. The region was shaken last year by attacks on oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz and an assault on Saudi energy plants that initially halved the kingdom's crude output.

Asked what message he would send to U.S. President Donald Trump, Barkindo told the gathering that the United States' emergence as the biggest producer of crude oil and liquid gas should carry shared responsibility for energy market stability. "OPEC alone can't shoulder that responsibility. We invite the United States to join us in this noble objective," he said.

OPEC and its allies, a grouping known as OPEC+, has been capping production since 2017 to avert oversupply and support prices.

(Source: devdiscourse.com)

'Exponential' global solar growth to continue with 142GW added in 2020

More than 140GW of new PV plant is expected to be added to grids around the world this year, an almost 15% rise on 2019, as the global solar build-out continues its sprawling expansion, according to latest figures IHS Markit.

The forecast 142GW in installations to be added in 2020 would be seven times as large as the total operational fleet a decade ago, the analyst group noted, with growth "substantial in terms of geographic reach as well", as 43 countries are set to have solar plant capacity greater than 1GW, compared to seven in 2010.

"Another year of double-digit global demand growth in 2020 is proof of the continued and exponential growth of solar PV installations in the last decade," said IHS Markit clean technology & renewables director Edurne Zoco.

"If the 2010s were the decade of technology innovation, steep cost reductions, large subsidies and dominance by a few markets then 2020 marks the decade of emerging unsubsidized solar, diversification and expansion of solar installation demand across the globe, new corporate entry players and increasing competitiveness versus conventional energy sources."

Market-leader China will continue to account for an outsized share of new installations into the foreseeable future, according to IHS calculations, but the "over-reliance on China for global solar installation growth will continue to decrease in coming years as more

capacity is added elsewhere".

Solar installations out with China grew by as much as 53% in 2019, said Zoco, and the top ten sector markets are expected to see their collective share of total build-out fall to 73%, down from 94% in 2010, as emerging plays in South-east Asia, Latin American and the Middle East rise in prominence.

"China will remain in the preeminent position as the overall leader in solar installations. But this decade will see new markets emerging in South East Asia, Latin America and the Middle East," he said.

The major markets

"Still, the major markets will continue to be critical for the development of the solar industry, especially as test beds of technological innovation, policy development and new business models."

In the U.S., the world's second largest solar market, IHS Markit expects installations to grow 20% in 2020, with California, Texas, Florida, North Carolina and New York "key drivers" of rising demand over the next five years.

In Europe, where installations nearly doubled in 2019, the analyst group foresees the trajectory continuing with another 24GW-plus being added – a 5% increase year-on-year – led by construction in Spain, Germany, Netherlands, France, Italy and Ukraine, which could account for 63% of the total EU build in the coming year.

(Source: rechargenews.com)

Seeds of next LNG glut already being sown: report

By Angela Macdonald-Smith

The notorious cyclical nature of the global LNG sector is on full display, according to Bernstein Research, which is forecasting an earlier end to today's glut than most analysts but only to pave the way for another bout of oversupply.

A likely recovery in Asian demand growth for liquefied natural gas (LNG) together with the winding up of the current wave of new production capacity should tighten the current oversupplied market in the second half of 2020, Bernstein analysts led by Neil Beveridge said.

The relatively bullish view from the respected research firm rests partly on an expected recovery in Asian LNG demand growth from what it described as "surprisingly weak" 2.1 percent growth in 2019 when Chinese growth slowed markedly and the two prime Asian markets of Japan and Korea were the worst performing worldwide.

Chevron's Wheatstone plant in Western Australia is one of several new LNG plants to come online in recent years.

It comes as Reuters reported China imported a record monthly volume of LNG in December, overtaking Japan as the world's top importer for the second straight month, citing ship tracking data from its Refinitiv Eikon platform.

Bernstein said 2020 would mark the end of a five-year expansion in global LNG production capacity when an unprecedented 130 million tons a year of LNG was added to the market, pushing supply well beyond demand.

Much of the supply came from Australia, now the world's biggest exporter, which saw large export plants built in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

The glut set to come to an end

But while the glut is set to come to an end, which should lift rock-bottom spot prices, the race to give the green light



for new projects has intensified, the analysts said.

The winners in the next race would be low-cost producers with clear funding plans and some LNG service companies.

"Competition to sanction the next wave of LNG projects has intensified risking another glut in the mid-2020s," Bernstein said.

The "seeds of the next cycle are already being planted." Global Energy's Fereidun Fesharaki expects some U.S. LNG export capacity to shut down in 2020 due to low prices.

After a series of final investment decisions over the last 12 to 18 months, Bernstein expects a further 70 million tons a year of LNG projects to get the green light for construction over the next 18 months.

That project pipeline includes Woodside Petroleum's Scarborough project in Western Australia and an expansion in Papua New Guinea involving ASX-listed Oil Search and Santos that is being delayed by a lack of agreement with government on fiscal terms.

Low-cost expansion in Qatar

Also in the mix is a low-cost expansion in Qatar, the Rovuma project in Mozambique by ExxonMobil and Italy's ENI and a fourth LNG train at Freeport LNG on the U.S. Gulf Coast.

Woodside's Browse project "is a possibility" to get the

go-ahead in 2021, as targeted by the operator, given it is a "brownfield" expansion to supply the existing North West Shelf plant.

"With a further 110 million tons per annum of potential projects the competition for market space will be intense," Bernstein said.

Still, Woodside and Oil Search both earn places among the firm's top picks globally among upstream LNG companies, alongside industry leader Shell. France's Total which is involved in Papua LNG, U.S. independent Cheniere Energy and Japan's Inpex Corporation which owns the \$45 billion (\$65.4 billion) Ichthys LNG project in northern Australia and aims to develop the Abadi project in Indonesia.

Given the expansion in project construction, it also sees opportunities for investors among LNG construction companies and LNG shippers.

Bernstein expects only about 10 million tons a year of new LNG production capacity will come online between mid-2020 and 2023, just a third of the annual capacity additions over the last three years.

"This slowdown in supply additions will be positive for spot LNG and European gas prices with knock-on impacts for thermal coal prices which could be positive if the international gas market tightens," it said.

Asia's growth last year was the slowest since 2014-15 and was driven by mild winter weather at the start of 2019, the restart of nuclear power plants in Japan and Korea and higher domestic gas production in China.

But Bernstein is upbeat about the region's long-term growth potential, citing pro-gas policies in China and India and rapid growth in emerging markets such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Thailand.

(Source: afr.com)

OPEC secretary general says Iraqi oil facilities secure, production continuing

Iraqi oil facilities are secured and the country's production is continuing, OPEC's Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo said on Wednesday.

"It's a big relief that the facilities continue to be secured in Iraq, the production is continuing and effective," Barkindo said on the sidelines of a conference in Abu Dhabi.

He said he was optimistic Iraq would reach 100 percent compliance with OPEC cuts in time, despite current tensions.

In a message to U.S. President Donald Trump, Barkindo said the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) alone could not shoulder the responsibility of maintaining a stable oil market.

(Source: Reuters)

Can emerging economies leapfrog the energy transition?

Around half of current total global carbon emissions are a result of electricity and heat production. At the same time, there are still more 860 million people across the globe that lack access to energy. As countries strive to grow their economies, how can we effectively and efficiently balance people's need for access to reliable and affordable energy while ensuring that we continue to reduce global emissions?

As the signatory states of the Paris agreement seek to meet their emission-reduction targets, the integration of renewable energy sources will continue to increase; the nationally determined contributions (NDC) pledged at Paris have proven inadequate to meet climate goals, and the updated targets will require 3-3 times the current global capacity. A decarbonized grid in the near future seems very possible, especially with the falling costs of solar PV and wind energy, coupled with the rapid advancements in energy-storage technologies.

And as the spread of decentralized renewable energy sources increases, the role and responsibility of utility companies are also bound to transform in a myriad of ways; they could switch from being primarily distributors of energy to becoming energy aggregators, for example.

With the introduction of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies, we will be able to build smarter and more efficient grids. Smart meters coupled with IoT (Internet of Things) technology can assist grid balancing, demand-side management and load forecasting. Moreover, as the penetration and stability of smart grids increases, technologies like machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) can further enhance the management and distribution of energy.

The burgeoning electricity demand, especially in fast-growing developing countries like India and China, presents an opportunity to design new business and operational models that will leverage data to build the utilities of the future.

Growing renewable consumption

But how did this all start? In the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster, a handful of citizens in the German town of Schöna launched an initiative against nuclear power and simultaneously spearheaded Germany's earliest grassroots initiatives to cut energy consumption and grow renewable energy. The initiative that the Schöna "energy rebels" kick-started in the 1980s went on to become the cornerstone for the historic switch from fossil fuels and nuclear power to sustainable energy in Germany, the "Energiewende" (energy transition).

While there is room for speculation on how successful Germany has been in implementing the energy transition, developing countries in the Global South have taken up the baton and have been enabling energy access through a range of innovative technologies and business models.

A little over a decade ago, this story began with a simple lamp. Kerosene and paraffin have long been the primary source of lighting in many rural and peri-urban off-grid homes across the globe. The toxicity of kerosene and its harmful side effects are today well-documented, but in the early 2000s there were very few alternatives to this volatile and dangerous chemical.

Turning adversity into opportunity, social enterprises began designing solutions with the ambition to bring safe, bright, clean lighting and power to people around the globe.

They began with a basic consumer product - a solar lantern. These lamps have low upfront costs, need little maintenance, and do not pose the management problems typically associated with national grids. However, soon this single product wasn't enough.

Over the past decade, as more people have been able to access cleaner energy sources, more start-ups have emerged globally to design new solutions that can cater to rising demand and help people move up the energy ladder. Next came the relatively more expensive solar home systems (SHSs), which could generate more power, offer multiple light points and power a variety of appliances. Solar lanterns were now limiting and insufficient for some, and yet SHSs were too expensive. The solution was a financial innovation in the form of pay-as-you-go solar systems that operated on a lease-to-own model, leveraging micro-credit loans and mobile money to enable people to access this technology.

Further increased capacity

Over the past couple of years there has been a growing interest in mini-grids, which offer further increased capacity to support larger appliances and micro-enterprises at lower operational costs. Decentralized mini-grid companies have also innovated on the energy-as-a-service model by powering larger anchor businesses in order to help drive down the energy tariffs paid by people in the community.

Fossil fuels are geographically-concentrated resources and have historically been the core of geopolitical power for those countries that own, extract and market them. The present-day energy system thrives on scarcity and the concentration of power. Today, we stand on the brink of transitioning to an energy system of potential abundance.

The World Economic Forum's 2019 Energy Transition Index provides a framework that has defined security and access, environmental sustainability and economic development and growth as the three pillars that can help foster the next energy transition.

The first energy transition focused on promoting renewable energy by requiring utilities to generate a small portion of their power from renewable sources. This is actively ongoing in some developing countries. Other countries, such as Denmark and Germany, have already begun the second transition, where a significant portion of their energy is from renewables.

An increased renewables mix also results in large-scale intermittency, which necessitates frequent intervention to keep the grid in balance. The third transition focuses on decentralization, which simplifies energy management. This phase is likely to nudge the electricity supply industry from centralized infrastructures towards private businesses that leverage the shared economy to create more circular energy systems that build customized solutions for end users.

(Source: weforum.org)

Libya is now turning into an international conflict

By Mohamed Sameh

LUXEMBOURG — In July 2012, Libyans and the West celebrated the first post-Gaddafi democratic elections.

A less-fragmented Europe worked hard with the Barack Obama administration to see the Libyans pave their path out of autocratic legacy.

These days are long gone now. Disagreement on the elections results, which is blamed mainly on the Muslim Brotherhood, the assassination of the U.S. ambassador in Benghazi, the diverging internal and regional interests led Libya into chaos since 2013.

Events in the region did not help either and several neighboring countries turned into various forms of dictatorship.

In Egypt, the military, led by general Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, came back to power, halting any democratic



The death of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 led to chaos, not stability (Photo: gordontour)

aspiration, and human-rights violations peaked.

In Saudi Arabia, while opening the country for some basic freedoms, many blame the Crown Prince for the assassination of the Washington Post contributor Jamal Khashoggi and brutally dismembering his body.

In Syria, president Bashar al-Assad backed by Russian president Vladimir Putin managed to overcome every opposition.

In Turkey, thousands were detained after the failed coup and the country's politics and actions moved away from the EU and the NATO on a serious scale.

Tunisia remains the only democratic hope - even if fragile under economic pressure.

Since his coup declaration in February 2014, General Khalifa Haftar has been on the conquest, starting from the Libyan eastern border with Egypt and heading west towards the capital of the country.

Backed by general Sisi, together with the Russian military private contractor Wagner, which is also involved in eastern Ukraine, and the government of UAE, Haftar is now on the edge of Tripoli and Misrata.

Every European initiative sadly could not lead to an acceptable solution for all stakeholders, in particular with the different positions of France and Italy on the country gas resources and favorable trade relations.

On the ground, weapons continued to flow in the country and air strikes even targeted refugees camps.

In a desperate move, the UN-recognized Libyan government in Tripoli asked for military aid. Only Turkey, a NATO member, agreed and it is now a question of days before deployment, pending the decision of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on what and how many Turkish servicemen to send to Libya.

How many would be enough?

Last Friday (3 Januray) the EU spokesperson, as expected, condemned the decision of the Turkish parliament to authorize military deployments in Libya.

It is, however, imperative to seek, in parallel, every possible way for conciliation with Turkey, if regional war is to be avoided in the eastern Mediterranean.

The current anti-Turkey alliance of Egypt, Greece and Cyprus, while fully understandable, is further isolating and alienating the country with worrying consequences.

A military adventure in Libya without a conditional European agreement would not only worsen the situation but also triggers a high risk of Egyptian-Turkish confrontation in the Mediterranean.

Sisi has been reinforcing the Egyptian navy with German submarines and French Mistral class assault ships during the last four years.

It might not be too long before we see the Turkish ships targeted in the sea by unidentified missiles or its troops on the ground hit by terrorist attacks.

How would the NATO react?

Its indifference would hardly contribute to reinforcing its functioning as an alliance while itself under various threats, including on the Eastern borders.

Turkey, Canada and other members of the NATO are training the Ukrainian soldiers and navy to safeguard the country's territorial integrity and its borders under pressure.

The future of Libya as a democratic, stable and prosperous country requires both functioning democratic institutions and national army. This cannot be achieved by allowing Haftar to establish another authoritarian military regime in Tripoli. We have seen this before.

Italy, with its particular relations with Tripoli and Misrata, and UAE, with its significant influence in Egypt and Libya, can truly play a pivotal role in halting the Haftar offensive.

This would be the first and necessary step before coming back to dialogue. The recent comments of UAE minister of foreign affairs, Anwar Gargash, on the necessity "to put wisdom, balance and political solutions above confrontation and escalation" may represent a rare window of opportunity in a particularly dark moment.

It is time for brave decisions to close with this downwards spiral and inverse the trend before it is too late.

"Generals always prepare for the past war" said Winston Churchill. Let's try to avoid the coming one.

Dr Mohamed Sameh is a co-founder and advisor for International Relation of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF-Europe) and a former staff of the European Investment Bank in Luxembourg. (Source: EU Observer)

World reacts after Iran fires missiles at U.S. targets in Iraq

Iran launches missile strikes at U.S. facilities in Iraq, less than a week after U.S. killed top general.

Iran has fired more than a dozen missiles at two Iraqi military bases hosting U.S. troops, the Pentagon confirmed.

The missiles targeted the Ain al-Assad base in Anbar province and a facility near Erbil's airport in northern Iraq early on Wednesday morning; they were fired in retaliation for the assassination of top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani by the U.S., Iran said.

U.S. President Donald Trump said he would make a statement on the attacks on Wednesday morning in Washington, DC.

As tension increases, governments around the world are calling for a return to diplomacy and considering plans to withdraw their citizens.

Below are reactions from around the world.

European Union

The European Commission called for an immediate end to the use of weapons in the Middle East conflict amid escalating tensions between Washington and Tehran, urging efforts to restart dialogue.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told a news briefing before departing to London that she would discuss the situation with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

"The use of weapons must stop now to give space for dialogue," she told reporters after a meeting of her commissioners.

"We are called upon to do everything possible to rekindle talks. There cannot be enough of that. We have established and time-tested relations with many actors in the region and beyond to de-escalate the situation," she said.

Germany

German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said his country "rejects this aggression in the sharpest possible terms."

She told German public broadcaster ARD that "it's now particularly up to the Iranians not to engage in further escalation."

None of the German troops stationed in Iraq were injured.

UAE

The United Arab Emirates Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said it is essential that the region pulls back from current "troubling" tensions.

"De-escalation is both wise and necessary. A political path towards stability must follow," Gargash said on Twitter.

Poland

Poland's defense minister said polish troops stationed in Iraq were not hurt during Wednesday's missile attacks.

"None of the Polish soldiers in Iraq were hurt in rocket attacks on Al-Asad and Erbil bases. We are in constant contact with the commander of the Polish Military Contingent in Iraq," Mariusz Blaszczak wrote on Twitter.

United Kingdom

Britain condemned Iranian missile attacks on military bases in Iraq that hosted U.S.-led coalition forces including British personnel.

"We condemn this attack on Iraqi military bases hosting Coalition - including British - forces," British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said.

"We urge Iran not to repeat these reckless and dangerous attacks, and instead to pursue urgent de-escalation."

Iraq

Iraq's military said there were no Iraqi casualties among its forces in Wednesday's 22-missile attack on the two military installations.

"Iraq was subjected between 1:45 and 2:45 this morning of 8 January 2020 to bombardment by 22 missiles; 17 missiles fell on Ain al-Asad air base including two that did not explode ... and five on the city of Erbil that all fell on coalition headquarters. No casualties among Iraqi forces were recorded," the statement said.



Countries are considering the safety of their citizens in Iraq and Iran amid escalating tension between the US and Iran [Jonathan Ernst/Reuters]

Japan

Japan urged governments to do their utmost to help ease tensions following the missile strikes. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is expected to call off a visit this weekend to Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Spokesman Yoshihide Suga said Wednesday that his "government will coordinate with the related governments to collect intelligence while we ensure the safety of Japanese citizens in the region."

"Japan will also urge all related nations to do their utmost diplomatic effort to improve the relations," he added.

Japan is sending a warship to the Gulf to help safeguard Japanese vessels and oil tankers travelling through the area.

Australia

Following the attacks, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said all his country's troops and diplomatic staff in Iraq were safe.

Approximately 300 Australian defense personnel are stationed in Iraq.

Morrison said he had discussed the situation between the U.S. and Iran with Trump on Tuesday during a call about the bushfires raging in Australia.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Morrison said in reference to Soleimani's killing: "The United States have taken the action that they have to address what has been intelligence that they say they received, which was putting their interests at risk and under threat."

The Philippines

The Philippines has ordered its citizens to leave Iraq in the wake of the strikes by Iran, the Philippine foreign ministry said on Wednesday.

"The alert level in the entire Iraq has been raised to alert level 4 calling for mandatory evacuation," said Eduardo Mendez, spokesman at the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The department said there are 1,600 Philippine citizens working in Iraq, more than half in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq and the rest at U.S. and other foreign facilities in Baghdad.

A Philippine coastguard patrol vessel, newly acquired from France and en route to the Philippines, was ordered to sail to Oman and Dubai to assist citizens who may need to leave.

"Overseas Filipino workers will be brought to safer

ports where there may be airlifted, as the need arises," the coastguard said in a statement.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana, who heads a newly created committee to prepare the evacuations, said on Tuesday the government was preparing aircraft for Filipinos in Iraq and Iran who wished to come home or move to safer areas.

About 2.3 million people from the Philippines are working in the Middle East as domestic helpers, construction workers, engineers and nurses.

Pakistan

Pakistan has issued a statement advising citizens planning to visit Iraq to exercise "maximum caution".

"In view of recent developments and the prevailing security situation in the region, Pakistani nationals are advised to exercise maximum caution while planning visit to Iraq at this point," the statement read.

"Those already in Iraq are advised to remain in close contact with the Embassy of Pakistan in Baghdad."

Denmark

The Danish armed forces said in a post on Twitter that No Danish soldiers were injured or killed in Wednesday's missile strike on the Al-Asad air base in Iraq.

Denmark has about 130 soldiers at the base as part of the international coalition fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

India

India has advised its nationals to avoid all non-essential travel to Iraq until further notice.

Those already in the country have been told to be alert and avoid travelling around the country.

New Zealand

New Zealand's acting prime minister, Winston Peters, expressed concern over the escalation in hostilities between Iran and the U.S.

"Now is the time for restraint and de-escalation, and for diplomacy to take over.... the government has been informed that all New Zealand personnel are as safe as they can be in these developing circumstances," Peters said.

New Zealand has 50 military personnel in Iraq, where Iran attacked two bases on Wednesday. Camp Taji, where most of those personnel are stationed, was not attacked, Peters said

(Source: Al Jazeera And News Agencies)

Putin meets Assad in rare Syria visit amid U.S.-Iran tensions

Surprise visit comes as regional tensions intensify over Syria's ally Iran vowing response to Soleimani's assassination.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has met his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad during a rare visit to the Syrian capital as the prospect of war between Iran and the United States loomed over the region.

Tuesday's visit was Putin's first to Damascus and second to Syria, a key Iran ally, since the start of the nearly nine-year war that Russian troops joined in 2015 to support the Syrian government.

The two leaders listened to a military presentation by the commander of Russian forces in Syria, the Syrian presidency said in a statement along with a picture of the two leaders shaking hands.

Putin extended his greetings to Russian forces for Orthodox Christmas which is celebrated on January 7.

He also said enormous progress had been made in the Syrian conflict, Russian news agencies reported.

"In his conversation with Assad, Putin noted that we can now say with confidence that a huge distance has been travelled towards restoring Syrian statehood and the country's territorial integrity," the agencies quoted Kremlin spokesman



The two leaders listened to a military presentation by the commander of Russian forces in Syria [Syrian Presidency via AP]

Dmitry Peskov as saying.

Peskov told Interfax, RIA Novosti and TASS that Putin met al-Assad at a command post for Russian forces in Syria, driving through Damascus on the way.

"Putin also noted that on the streets of Damascus, the signs of how peace has been restored can be seen with the naked eye," according to Peskov.

Red flag anti-U.S. march in Delhi demands revenge for Soleimani assassination

The assassination of Iranian commander Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani in a U.S. drone strike has plunged the Middle East into turmoil. On Tuesday, an anti-U.S. protest march was held in Delhi.

NEW DELHI — A massive anti-U.S. march was carried out Tuesday in New Delhi in protest of the assassination of top Iranian commander Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad, Iraq.

The plan was for the protest march to end outside the U.S. Embassy, but it was stopped halfway by the authorities for security reasons.

The protests were led by prominent Shia cleric Maulana Kalbe Jawad Naqvi, and Mehmood Pracha.

One of the protesters explained the

significance of the red flag: "In ancient times, when tribes would go to war and the leader of one of the tribes was killed then that tribe would raise a red flag declaring war against the killers of their chief. This red flag signifies our demand for revenge against America," he said.

Earlier, the American Embassy issued a demonstration alert for its citizens to stay away from the embassy area for their own safety.

The assassination of Qassem Soleimani has evoked protests and demonstrations against

the U.S. across the globe, particularly in countries with Shia populations.

With India having a substantial number of Shia community members as its citizens, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs is looking at the sensitivity of the increasing tensions between the U.S. and Iran.

This also comes at a time when Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif is due to visit India for the Raisina Dialogue, a multilateral conference committed to addressing the most challenging issues facing the global



community, where he is likely to take the stage and the opportunity to hit out at America. (Source: India Today)

It must be always emphasized: Allah’s mercy and compassion

➔ Trump would lose big next November, but also consider that a crucial result of what the Trump gang has done in this nascent new year is the strong likelihood that Trump will be voted out of the White House in November WHATEVER he does. If he does NOT go to war, the Israelis from afar and fifth column Neocons infesting Washington like cockroaches, will likely permit Trump to be convicted on the impeachment charges put forth by the U.S. House of Representatives.

However, it must be said that Trump, unlike Neocons like Pompeo (also a crazy end-times evangelical!) and others around Trump, does not want a war with Iran.

But the murder of Soleimani and others virtually assures a war. So what now constitutes the red line in Trump’s mind? Probably the killing of American troops by Iran in the Middle East. What did he expect, though, murdering Iranian and Iraqi soldiers? No retaliation from Iran? O, the contradictions boggle the mind! Through weakness of mind and spirit, it appears that Trump fell into the trap Netanyahu and his supporters inside Israel and the U.S. have long hoped to spring – a situation that makes war almost inevitable. But here is a wild speculation:



Two of the greatest and maybe the most important of the many attributes of Allah, the one God, are mercy and compassion. This is part of the sublime Sura al-Fatiha of

the Qu’ran, and often appears elsewhere in the Qu’ran. Therefore, what if, and this is as fanciful and anything imaginable right now, Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran’s Supreme Leader,

came out and said: Iran is going to reserve retaliation for the death of Soleimani and others at the hands of the troubled Americans and Zionists. We will reserve retaliation and therefore obviate a probable response by the U.S. that would force expansion of a war that will engulf the entire Middle East and beyond, killing many people. But we will do so under these conditions: that the U.S. come back to the JCPOA and eliminate economic sanctions on Iran entirely, and on other countries it has hamstrung with sanctions. With that we can begin to jointly consider other ideas to reduce tensions of all kinds between us and others in the Middle East.

Why even suggest such a fanciful idea for Iran’s leaders to consider? Because the idea shines a light on the glories of Islam and its divine message to humanity, and also on the Islamic Republic, but it also ensures and insures the amplification of what the Islamic Republic already has gained from the fact of the cruelties of U.S. imperialism and the insane murders of Soleimani and comrades in Iraq this past week: sympathy and empathy, both of which are often derived from the actual expression of mercy and compassion.

U.S. should leave the region

TEHRAN (FNA) — It is by now clear that by assassinating the Iranian top military leadership, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, Washington is ostensibly preparing to re-enter into the Middle East, from where it had formerly gestured to pull out. Though Trump murmurs that he does not want a change of government or war with Tehran, the deployment of thousands of additional troops in the Persian Gulf nullifies his contentions. The US had hitherto invaded Iraq twice to make the Baghdad its strong foothold in the region and is now again baiting the impoverished nation for its sham strategic goals.

Unlike previously, when Washington used to employ such tactics of attacking sovereign countries and killing their leadership to legitimize its hostility and forge multilateral military alliances – this time, nations across the globe have rebuffed to buy the US impression of misconception about Iran.

Trump’s adverse action has been strongly disapproved and condemned by the world community as a whole and even some US allies and American political pundits and congressmen have come to blast him. While Iraq considered the step as “aggression” – China, France, Germany, Russia, Turkey, the UK, and others showed a very serene and objective approach and urged the sides, the US in particular, to exercise restraint that could otherwise entail grave consequences for regional peace and stability.

Americans, who were one-voiced on September 11, are now slating Trump for not taking the Congress on board for an airstrike in Iraq. Following the statement about Trump administration’s “provocative, escalatory and disproportionate military engagement” that put American citizens, military personnel and allies in danger – House Speaker

Nancy Pelosi said the House will “introduce and vote on a War Powers Resolution to limit the President’s military actions regarding Iran.”

Trump’s rival presidential candidate Senator Bernie Sanders urged Congress to reassert its constitutional responsibility for war while and furious Senator Chuck Schumer endorsed Sanders and planned “to fight him (Trump) tooth and nail” on starting an endless war. Many Americans also took to the streets to denounce the strike.

But all the fused international voices of peace negotiations and restraint seem to have no impact on the US as Trump continues to escalate the situation and push the region into yet another bloody war. After bragging about two trillion dollars of military equipment acquisitions, Trump issued a “legal notice” that the US would strike back in case of any Iranian reprisal, “perhaps in a disproportionate manner.” He also threatened to sanction Iraq if they expelled US occupying forces.

As opposed to putting itself accountable to the international community on its uncalled-for offensive, the US attitude is greatly brazen and deplorable. While it should be using the global diplomatic forums to ease the tensions with Iran, it is trying to create a more critical mess in the conceit of its military prowess and hegemonic posture.

At any rate, the US is the aggressor here – not a victim – which deliberately ripped up the international laws, violated the sovereignty of an independent country, and killed a serving Iranian army general, therefore is finding virtually no ally to rationalize its drone strike in Iraq.

Iran has promised to respond to the assassination – and they definitely will. They have been left with no other option unless they want to see their Generals be droned one by one.



Tehran’s response is a deterrent and could even help many others by making Trump understand the costs of his arrogant and hawkish policies and moves. What that response will be is hard to say. It’s not clear if Trump fully understands how this one action can totally upend his plans for the United States and in the foreign policy arena, and could also spell the death knell for his presidency. While there is some cheering going on among some of his supporters and the gaggle of neoconservative pundits, things could change as the body bags go come home. And there will be body bags unless he can pull out soon from what is a no-win situation for him or for the world.

Indeed, if Trump doesn’t break with the policy that has been a long-standing agenda for his neoconservative advisers, it could spell the death knell for his presidency – and a new conflagration for the world community.

General Soleimani was a brilliant strategist: Entessar

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN (MNA) — Nader Entessar, Professor Emeritus of Political Science from the University of South Alabama, lauded the capabilities and services of General Soleimani.

General Qasem Soleimani who was martyred by a US airstrike ordered by President Donald Trump at Baghdad International Airport on Friday, was hailed as a charismatic brave hero in Iran and beloved by the troops. Once, Iran’s leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called him a “living martyr”.

Soleimani devoted his life to defend Iran’s national interest in the region so he is considered as a national hero for Iranian people regardless of their different political and religious tendencies.

Many believe that Soleimani was not only a national hero for Iranian people

but also he was a person who played a significant role in defeating ISIL which is a real threat for the region and even for Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. He also had a great role in confronting the US regional policy and plans aiming at redesigning the map of countries in the Middle East.

To know more insight about the issue, we have reached out to Nader Entessar, Professor Emeritus of Political Science from the University of South Alabama.

“General Soleimani was the most significant geostrategic figure in post-monarchical Iran. He was a consummate professional who selflessly devoted his life to defend Iran and its national interests in the region. He was a brilliant strategist whose understanding of the US regional goals was unmatched among Iranians,” said the professor.



Trump’s Iran Aggression deserves full-throated opposition

By Peter Certo

ANTIWAR — Trump is betraying his voters and threatening millions of lives. Call him on it before it’s too late.

In a full-blown U.S. war with Iran, up to a million people could die initially.

Hundreds of thousands more could die in the vacuum to follow. Millions would be made refugees. That’s the conclusion of experts surveyed by Vox reporter Alex Ward. “The worst-case scenarios here are quite serious,” Middle East scholar Michael Hanna warned.

With the brazen assassination of Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani in Iraq, President Trump has brought us leaps and bounds closer to that conflagration – a decision Trump appears to have made while golfing at Mar-a-Lago.

Lawmakers need to move before it’s too late.

The Iranians may respond cautiously, perhaps forestalling a full-blown conflict. But there can be no doubt the White House has been driving in that direction from day one.

In a few short years, Trump has blown up the Iran nuclear deal, put a horrific economic stranglehold on the country, and sent a stunning 14,000 new troops to the Middle East since just last spring. Some 3,500 more are now on their way.

“Hope this is the first step to regime change in Tehran,” John Bolton tweeted about the assassination.

Bolton may have left the White House, but clearly his spirit lives on.

What next? Get ready to hear a lot about what a “bad guy” Soleimani was, and how Iran is a “state sponsor” of terrorism.

No doubt, Soleimani had blood on his hands – he was a general. Yet after two decades of US wars in the Middle East, that’s the pot calling the kettle black. It was the US who invaded Iraq, started a civil war, and paved the way for a literal terrorist state, ISIS, to occupy the country afterward (a force Soleimani himself was instrumental in dismantling).

That senseless war caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, exploded the terrorist threat, and is destabilizing the region to this day. Yet somehow, war hawks like Secretary of State Mike Pompeo can go on TV and – with a straight face – predict ordinary Iranians will essentially thank the US for murdering their general.

“People not only in Iraq but in Iran will view the American action last night as giving them freedom,” Pompeo said the morning after the assassination. You couldn’t caricature a better callback to Dick Cheney’s infamous prediction that Iraqis would “greet us as liberators” if you tried.

This warmongering should be as toxic politically as it is morally. Trump rode into office promising to end America’s wars, winning him crucial votes in swing states with large military and veteran populations. Huge bipartisan majori-

ties, including 58 percent of Republicans, say they want US troops out of the Middle East.

Trump is betraying them spectacularly.

Yet too many Democrats are merely objecting to Trump’s failure to consult them. Speaker Nancy Pelosi complained the strike “was taken without the consultation of the Congress.” South Bend mayor Pete Buttigieg offered colorlessly that “there are serious questions about how this decision was made.” Others complained about the apparent lack of a “strategy.”

It’s illegal for a president to unilaterally launch a war – that’s important. But these complaints make it sound like if you want to kill a million people for no reason, you just have to go to the DMV first. As if Trump’s base doesn’t love it when he cuts the line in Washington.

Senator Bernie Sanders, who warned that “Trump’s dangerous escalation brings us closer to another disastrous war in the Middle East that could cost countless lives and trillions more dollars,” came closer to communicating the real threat.

Millions of lives are at stake. Trump’s aggression demands – and voters will more likely reward – real opposition. Call him on it before it’s too late.

Peter Certo is the editorial manager of the Institute for Policy Studies and the editor of OtherWords.org. Reprinted from OtherWords.org with permission.

Trump only acting as booster for U.S. military-industrial complex: Italian analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A political expert based in Italy deplored US President Donald Trump’s “little regard for diplomacy” and said he is only acting as a booster for the US military-industrial complex, twisting the arms of Washington’s allies to force them to buy more weapons.

“By treating allies dismissively and having little regard for diplomacy, he hopes to show to the average Joe how committed he is to putting American interests above all else, thereby hopefully ensuring his reelection in 2020,” Federico Pieraccini, who is based in Milan, said in an interview with Tasnim.



“However, Trump is only acting as a booster for the US military-industrial complex, twisting the arms of US allies to force them to commit to spending a higher portion of their budgets on American military hardware,” he added.

Pieraccini is an independent freelance writer and political expert based in Milan, Italy. He specializes in international affairs, conflicts, politics, and strategies. He has covered conflicts in Ukraine, Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.

The following is the full text of the interview:

■ The US, with its “America First” policy, has moved away from its allies over the past two years and diminished US international participation in international organizations. First, Washington urged its NATO allies to bear the costs of the transatlantic alliance, then it pressured South Korea and Japan, and now the EU is under US pressures. In your opinion, can this change of approach be interpreted as a new trend in the world order?

A: The relative downsizing of Washington’s role in international affairs can partly explain its behavior in relation to allies and international organizations. The world is shifting away from a unipolar to a multipolar world order consisting of several poles constituted by peer competitors.

Trump’s abandonment of international agreements such as the Paris Agreement or the Iran nuclear deal is motivated by his desire to demonstrate to his base his “America First” bona fides. By treating allies dismissively and having little regard for diplomacy, he hopes to show to the average Joe how committed he is to putting American interests above all else, thereby hopefully ensuring his reelection in 2020. However, Trump is only acting as a booster for the US military-industrial complex, twisting the arms of US allies to force them to commit to spending a higher portion of their budgets on American military hardware.

■ Many analysts do not attribute these moves by the US government to Donald Trump, but rather they think the US is trying to save capitalism and the American economy from collapse. Do you agree?

A: I think the global trend towards de-dollarization will lead to the US dollar losing its status as the world reserve currency, which will, in turn, curb Washington’s ability to spend unlimited amounts on feeding the insatiable appetite of its war machine. If countries around the world increasingly cease to invest in US treasury bonds, then this will progressively curb the ability of the US to throw a trillion dollars a year at its arms industry. With a shrinking capacity to militarily strong-arm countries around the world into relying solely on the US dollar for trading in such things as oil, then countries will increasingly opt to rely on a basket of other currencies without having to worry about inviting Washington’s ire.

Trump is only following in the steps of his predecessors by continuing to wield the club of the US military and financial pressure against “rogue states” that may entertain the idea of using any currencies other than the US dollar to trade in such things as oil. However, this only drives the acceleration away from dependence on the US dollar and such things as the SWIFT payment network.

■ As you know, in the US defense budget for the 2020 fiscal year, there have been some cases of interference in the internal affairs of its European allies such as the US sanctions concerning the Nord Stream 2 (NS2) gas pipeline. Don’t you interpret this shift in US policy and the direct interference as a move to sacrifice European interests for its own benefits? Isn’t that a kind of bullying and totalitarianism by the US?

A: These measures do not have anything new or surprising. The US has a leadership in full schizophrenia seeing their allies and enemies working together on new projects arising from the developments in the multipolar environment in international relations. Historically, Washington has always feared an axis between Berlin-Moscow-Beijing meaning full Eurasian integration, precisely the trend that will accompany the next decade. The attempts by the United States to finance a military budget to counter the Sino-Russian-European trade initiatives will probably only serve to accelerate even more departure from the role of central hegemony of the United States. In no way can a nation think of limiting the growth and economic integration between countries, simply by threatening sanctions or worse.

■ Given the US foreign policy and the reactions from its rivals, like China and Russia, and allies, including France and Germany, what do you think about the future of world order?

A: As I have tried to reiterate in my answers, the world belongs to multiple nations. More poles of power will have to work together to give a shape to global relations. The last decade has seen the North American empire as a central figure as a hegemonic power. The next 10 years will see a full Eurasian integration of the European, African and Asian continent thanks to projects such as the Belt Road Initiative but also simply as a natural evolution of countries such as Russia, China, Indonesia, India, and the European continent.

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Aliens exist and could be on Earth right now

Aliens definitely exist and they could already be here on Earth, according to the first British astronaut in space.

Helen Sharman said there was “no two ways about” extraterrestrial life but they could be made out of entirely different elements to the life that we know exists around us.

And they might be on Earth without us knowing, she said.

Speaking to the Observer Magazine, Dr. Helen Sharman said: “Aliens exist, there’s no two ways about it. There are so many billions of stars out there in the universe that there must be all sorts of different forms of life.”

She added that although they may not be made up of carbon and nitrogen like humans, “it’s possible they’re here right now and we simply can’t see them”.

Dr. Sharman, 56, made history when she participated in a mission to the Soviet modular space station Mir in May 1991.

“There’s no greater beauty than looking at the Earth from up high – and I’ll never forget the first time I saw it,” she said.

“After take-off we left the atmosphere and suddenly light streamed in through the window. We were over the Pacific Ocean.

“The gloriously deep blue seas took my breath away.”

In the interview, she highlighted how she is often referred to as the first British woman in space, rather than simply the first Briton.

“It’s telling that we would otherwise assume it was a man,” she said.

“When Tim Peake went into space, some people simply forgot about me. A man going first would be the norm, so I’m thrilled that I got to upset that order.”

(Source: The Independent)



Hubble marks 30th anniversary year with portrait of massive barred spiral galaxy

The Hubble Space Telescope kicked off its 30th anniversary year with a new portrait of UGC 2885, a barred spiral galaxy that astronomers estimate is one of the largest in the local universe.

The massive galaxy is 2.5 times wider than the Milky Way and hosts ten times as many stars, but astronomers refer to it as a “gentle giant” because it has been sitting quietly for billions of years, boasting only modest rates of star formation.

The supermassive black hole at the center of UGC 2885 is also relatively quiet.

Because its diet doesn’t include much material from smaller satellite galaxies, the gentle giant must rely on its own internal hydrogen structures to fuel the birth of new stars.

The barred spiral galaxy, positioned within the constellation Perseus, is also sometimes referred to as “Rubin’s galaxy” -- named for the influential American astronomer Vera Rubin.

“My research was in large part inspired by Vera Rubin’s work in 1980 on the size of this galaxy,” Benne Holwerda, astronomer at the University of Louisville who photographed the galaxy using the Hubble Space Telescope, said in a news release. “We consider this a commemorative image. The goal of citing Dr. Rubin in our



observation was very much part of our original Hubble proposal.”

Astronomers remain somewhat befuddled by the massive size and quiet nature of UGC 2885. How did the spiral galaxy get so big while mostly avoiding violent collisions.

“It’s as big as you can make a disk galaxy without hitting anything else in space,” said Holwerda.

To find out how UGC 2885 got so big, Holwerda and his colleagues are surveying the globular star clusters located in the galaxy’s halo, or along the spiral galaxy’s outskirts. A large population of globular star clusters would suggest the galaxy swallowed up smaller satellite galaxies over many billions of years.

In the future, scientists hope to survey the galaxy’s center using the James Webb Space Telescope, set to launch in 2021.

(Source: UPI)

New methods to detect oxygen on exoplanets developed

Scientists have found a new way of finding oxygen on distant planets that could help them discover alien life.

The technique could be used by NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope to sniff oxygen on planets in distant solar systems.

That in turn could help discover planets that are alive, and could be home to extraterrestrial life.

One of the possible indicators of life on other planets is oxygen in its atmosphere. On Earth, oxygen is created when living organisms convert sunlight into chemical energy – and scientists think the same might happen on Earth.

Now scientists hope that the new technique could allow them to spot the same signal coming from other planets, and in so doing perhaps spot planets that might be home to alien life.

The breakthrough, described in a new paper published in Nature Astronomy, allows NASA’s telescope to detect one of the signals that comes from oxygen molecules when they collide with each other. As they do, they block out a specific part of the infrared spectrum, and the new telescope will be able to see that and give scientists a clue to the distant worlds’ atmosphere.

Technology like the James Webb Space Telescope is the best hope for examining



such distant planets, since they are too far away to ever visit or even to see in much detail, but it requires incredible advanced technology because of the weakness of the signals.

“Before our work, oxygen at similar levels as on Earth was thought to be undetectable with Webb,” Thomas Fauchez, from NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center and lead author of the study, said in a statement.

“This oxygen signal is known since the early 1980s from Earth’s atmospheric studies but has never been studied for exoplanet research.”

Spotting oxygen on a planet might not be a guarantee that something lives there. Scientists have proposed alternative explanations that could create oxygen on exoplanets, and so it might not be a definitive indication that the world is alive.

(Source: The Independent)

What’s ahead for science in 2020? Here’s what we’re watching

With a new year comes new science. Here’s a look at the events, projects and findings our reporters are watching — or wishing — for in 2020.

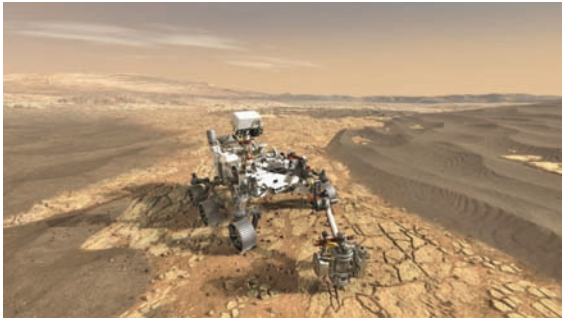
When astronomy writer Lisa Grossman and physics writer Emily Conover predicted in 2018 that the Event Horizon Telescope, or EHT, would soon capture an image of Sagittarius A*, the black hole at the Milky Way’s center, they were half right. EHT’s first image came through in 2019, but it was of the black hole at the center of galaxy M87. Grossman and Conover have their fingers crossed that Sagittarius A* gets its big moment in 2020.

Another cosmic recluse, dark matter, might also come into view in 2020. The LUX-Zeplin, or LZ, experiment, housed in a former gold mine in South Dakota, will begin its search for WIMPs, weakly interacting massive particles. These still-theoretical particles “have been the favored candidate for an explanation of dark matter,” Conover says. Other searches have failed, but LZ will be 20 times as sensitive as previous WIMP searches.

Grossman looks forward to the midyear launches of two Mars missions: NASA’s Mars 2020 and ExoMars, a joint mission of the European Space Agency and the Russian space agency Roscosmos. The missions’ rovers will search for signs of past life. NASA’s robotic explorer will also gather rocks for collection by a potential future mission that would bring bits of the Red Planet to Earth.

Physical sciences writer Maria Temming is meanwhile preparing for a more distant visitor. This year, astronomers identified the second known interstellar object in the solar system what appears to be a comet.

Biomedical writer Aimee Cunningham expects results from a clinical trial of a male birth control pill. An early test found that the hormonal pill is safe and suppresses hormone levels necessary for sperm production. The new



study will assess how well the pill does the job.

A potential drug for Alzheimer’s disease called aducanumab may move closer to approval. Pharmaceutical company Biogen is expected to seek U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval for the drug — “a move that promises to be controversial, considering the drug’s checkered past,” says neuroscience writer Laura Sanders. Aducanumab made our Top 10 list in 2016 after early studies suggested the drug can clear the amyloid-beta plaques seen in Alzheimer’s. But later results were disappointing, until recent reports that the highest dose of the drug seemed to slow memory decline.

Direct-to-consumer genetic testing companies could cause their own controversy, predicts molecular biology writer Tina Hesman Saey. Many of these companies, such as AncestryDNA, are expanding their services to offer more information about health, and the FDA may crack down on the kind of info that can be provided, Saey says.

Behavioral sciences writer Bruce Bower expects molecular biology to play a bigger role in human evolution studies. Increasingly, researchers are supplementing

mosphere influences the Antarctic Circumpolar Current, researchers analyzed fossil corals collected from the cold waters of Drake Passage.

As corals grow, their skeletons trap a variety of unique trace elements, like neodymium. These elements create a chemical fingerprint that can be used to study the ocean conditions in which they grew.

Neodymium patterns in the coral fossils from Drake Passage revealed an abrupt shift in ocean chemistry around 7,000 years ago.

The change lasted roughly 1,000 years. The chemical fingerprints, detailed this week in the journal PNAS, showed CO₂-rich water penetrated Drake Passage.

Previous studies have uncovered evidence that wind patterns in Antarctica have shifted periodically over the current interglacial period, the last 12,000 years, and authors of the latest study suggest a northward shift of the region’s westerly winds helped drive the upwelling of CO₂-rich water.

(Source: UPI)

Severe childhood deprivation reduces brain size, study finds

Children who experience severe deprivation early in life have smaller brains in adulthood, researchers have found.

The findings are based on scans of young adults who were adopted as children into UK families from Romania’s orphanages that rose under the regime of the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu.



Now experts say that despite the children having been adopted into loving, nurturing families in the early 1990s, the early neglect appears to have left its mark on their brain structures.

“I think the most striking finding is ... that the effects on the brain have persisted,” said Prof Edmund Sonuga-Barke, a co-author of the study from King’s College London, who added that the results showed neuroplasticity had limits.

“The idea that everything is recoverable, no matter what your experience ... isn’t necessarily true – even with the best care you can still see those signs of that earlier adversity,” he said.

The plight of the undernourished children, who had little social contact and received insufficient care, shocked the world when it came to light after the fall of the communist government in 1989. Ceaușescu’s oppressive policies had banned abortion and contraception, while those without children were taxed. As a result, large numbers of children ended up in orphanages living in terrible conditions.

Previous studies involving the adoptees have shown they had marked cognitive difficulties as children – although these improved considerably into adulthood – while they also had high rates of conditions including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and, as adults, high levels of anxiety and depression.

Writing in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Sonuga-Barke and colleagues told how they carried out brain scans and other measures of 67 Romanian adoptees who had spent between three and 41 months living in severe deprivation as children. At the time of the scans the adoptees were between 23 and 28 years old.

The team also took brain scans from 21 adults of a similar age who had been born and adopted in the UK before they were six months old.

The results revealed the Romanian adoptees had on average an 8.6% smaller brain overall than their UK peers. The team also found the size of the reduction was linked to the length of time spent in the Romanian orphanages: each additional month was linked to a 3cm³ lower total brain volume. “The more deprivation they had, the smaller their brains are,” said Sonuga-Barke.

The team’s analysis showed the smaller brain size explained the reduced IQ and, at least in part, the higher rates of ADHD found among the Romanian adoptees.

Among further findings, the team discovered that two areas of the brain showed a further size difference compared with the UK-born adoptees – although these did not vary with time spent in the orphanages.

One area, which included the right inferior frontal gyrus, was smaller in the Romanian adoptees even than expected from the reduced overall brain size. This area is a key center for executive control circuits.

The second area, which included the right inferior temporal gyrus – an important area for auditory and visual processing as well as some aspects of memory – was larger than expected from the smaller brain size among the Romanian adoptees and appears to have provided a protective effect. The larger this area, the fewer the symptoms of ADHD in the Romanian adoptees. However, the team said it was not clear if this area grew in response to deprivation, or whether some children were, somewhat fortunately, predisposed to a larger area.

“I don’t think there is any better evidence in the whole of [human] neuroscience, for a compensatory effect in a high-risk sample like this,” said Sonuga-Barke. He added the team were surprised to find no particular impact on the amygdala – the region of the brain that processes emotions.

While the study cannot prove that early childhood deprivation leads to a smaller brain, Sonuga-Barke said it was likely, noting genetic influences, ethnic differences, overall body size, and effects in the womb had been ruled out as explaining the link.

The team proposed a number of possible mechanisms including the absence of experiences that are important for normal brain development, and chronic stress that could damage the developing brain.

However Sonuga-Barke said it remained unclear which features of deprivation were responsible, and that poor nutrition did not appear to explain the link.

“We are fairly confident that there are psychological routes to these effects as well, linked to lack of stimulation, lack of social interaction, and lack of attachment and bonding,” he said.

Prof Denis Mareschal, from Birbeck, University of London, said the study highlighted the importance of providing enriched environments in early infancy and childhood.

But he urged caution, noting the deprivation in the Romanian orphanages was extreme. “It remains to be seen whether less extreme deprivations typical of deprived upbringings in low socioeconomic status neighborhoods in the UK would lead to similar long-term consequence on brain structure, or whether these milder forms of deprivations could be compensated for by subsequently experiencing enriched environments such as those provided by the Sure Start programs here in the UK.”

(Source: The Guardian)

Coral fossils show Southern Ocean current sensitive to wind conditions

Scientists knew the Antarctic Circumpolar Current, a cold current circling through the Southern Ocean, is driven by winds, but until now scientists weren’t sure of its stability.

New analysis of fossil coral skeletons suggests the ocean current is especially sensitive to winds, and that changes in the current influence the exchange of CO₂ between the Southern Ocean and the atmosphere.

“The Southern Ocean connects all the world’s oceans,” lead researcher Torben

Struve, a geochemist at the University of Oldenburg in Germany, said in a news release. “It’s one of the few places on Earth where water from great depths comes to the surface and at the same time surface water sinks to the depths.”

This overturning action helps distribute heat, nutrients, salt, oxygen and CO₂ to the world’s oceans, but until now, scientists weren’t sure of this system’s sensitivity to atmospheric changes.

To find out how the winds and the at-

U.S. unlikely to target Iran’s cultural sites, tourism minister says

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan said on Wednesday that a U.S. attack of Iran’s cultural heritage is ‘unlikely’ to happen.

Any attack on cultural centers contravenes international resolutions, Mounesan said, adding, “If America launches an attack on Iran’s cultural centers, the country will give a harsh response to it.”



Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan in an undated photo

“So, it is unlikely that the United States can take such measure.” Trump tweeted on Saturday that the U.S. has 52 Iranian locations within its sights. The president said that some of these sites are “at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture.” While the U.S. has not named the targets on its radar, Iran has 22 cultural sites on the UNESCO World Heritage list, including the ruins of the ancient city of Persepolis, as well as the site of Imam Square, and its royal mosque in Isfahan, and the Chogha Zanbil complex. The country has numerous other important cultural sites, such as the historic Nasir al-Mulk in Shiraz.

Over that past days, many cultural and political figures, artists and social media users have criticized Trump for his comments on targeting Iranian culture sites.

The United States and Iran are signatories to the 1954 Hague Convention for the protection of cultural property in armed conflicts.

The Egyptian pyramids may align with an ancient north star

On a clear night, the star Thuban is easy to spot. It’s sandwiched between the bowl of the Little Dipper to the left and the handle of the Big Dipper to the right.

For the ancient Egyptians, it may have served as the north star. About 4,700 years ago, when the Egyptians were building the earliest pyramids, Thuban was likely the axis around which all the other stars appeared to spin at night. Some researchers think the pyramids were built to point directly toward Thuban for that reason.


Today, the North Star is Polaris, a brighter star to Thuban’s right, because of the way the tilt of Earth’s axis (and where it points) has changed over time.

NASA astronomers still monitor the old north star — and many, many others — via the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS), a space telescope whose main purpose is to hunt for exoplanets. The two-year TESS mission watches the night sky in 24-by-90-degree strips, lingering on each portion for 27 days at a time.

As it searched for signs of exoplanets, TESS recently discovered that Thuban undergoes eclipses.

That’s because Thuban is actually a pair of stars. The larger star of the pair is more than four times bigger than the sun and 70% hotter, with a surface temperature of about 17,500 degrees Fahrenheit. Its partner is five times fainter than the larger star in the pair and about half its size.

(Source: Business Insider)




ROUND THE GLOBE

Lorentz National Park

Lorentz National Park is located in Indonesia’s Papua Province, along the ‘Pegunungan Mandala’ range, whose Puncak Cartenz is the highest peak in Southeast Asia.

The property covers an area of 2.35 million hectares, making it the largest conservation area in Southeast Asia and stretches for over 150 km from Irian Jaya’s central cordillera mountains in the north to the Arafura Sea in the south.



Designated as a National Park in 1997 under Decree of the Minister of Forestry the property contains an outstanding range of ecosystems, representative of the high level of biodiversity found across the region.

It is one of only three tropical regions in the world that have glaciers and its mosaic of land systems ranges from snow-capped mountain peaks to extensive lowland wetlands and coastal areas. The property also contains fossil sites, a high level of endemism and the richest biodiversity in the region.

Thirty-four vegetation types and 29 land systems have been identified within the property along with some 123 recorded mammal species, representing 80% of the total mammalian fauna of Irian Jaya.

Mammals recorded include two of the world’s three monotremes; the short-beaked echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*), and the long-beaked echidna (*Zaglossus bruijnii*) a New Guinea endemic. In addition it is also home to a large number of restricted range (45) and endemic (9) bird species.

The property has remarkable, cultural diversity, with seven ethnic groups, maintaining their traditional lifestyles.

(Source: UNESCO)

Iranians practiced farming, animal breeding 9,000 years ago, experts find

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — A group of Iranian archaeologists and researchers have found that farming and animal breeding were practiced some 9,000 years ago around the historical Tepe Ahranjan in Salmas, northwestern Iran.

The discovery was made during a demarcation project aimed to protect the ruined archaeological site of Tepe Ahranjan, ISNA quoted Afrasyab Geravand, head of the project, as saying on Tuesday.

Evidence suggest that the Ahranjan hill and its surroundings were one of the first and most important human settlements in the 7th millennium BC in northwestern Iran, Geravand said, adding, it showed that the inhabitants of this area were farmers and animal breeders.

Presence of “mother rocks” and obsidian tools in seven different colors, sabers, mortars, and stone utensils are amongst objects found in the region, a local tourism official said.

Previously, Geravand had said that the northwest of Iran, as a connection bridge between the Iranian plateau, the Caucasus, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, has always played an important role in the relations and cultural exchanges.

The region has long been a suitable place for settlement since ancient times due to the presence of permanent rivers, springs, animal and plant resources, fertile land and pastures, he explained.

The history of agriculture is the story of humankind’s development and cultivation of processes for producing food, feed, fiber, fuel, and other goods by the systematic raising of plants and animals. Prior to the development of plant cultivation, human beings were hunters and gatherers. The knowledge and skill of learning to care for the soil and growth of plants advanced the development of human society, allowing clans and tribes to stay in one location generation after generation. Archaeological evidence indicates that such developments occurred 10,000 or more years ago.



Local officials, experts visit the historical Tepe Ahranjan in Salmas county, northwest Iran.

Experts say that by 7000 BC, sowing and harvesting reached Mesopotamia and there, in the super fertile soil just north of the Persian Gulf, Sumerian ingenuity systematized it and scaled it up. By 6000 BC farming was entrenched on the banks of the Nile River. About this time, agriculture was developed independently in the Far East, probably in China, with rice rather than wheat as the primary crop.

Because of agriculture, cities as well as trade relations

between different regions and groups of people developed, further enabling the advancement of human societies and cultures. Agriculture has been an important aspect of economics throughout the centuries prior to and after the Industrial Revolution. Sustainable development of world food supplies impact the long-term survival of the species, so care must be taken to ensure that agricultural methods remain in harmony with the environment.

1,400 ancient cuneiform tablets identified from lost city of Irisagrig in Iraq

About 1,400 cuneiform tablets that were possibly stolen from Irisagrig, a 4,000-year-old lost city in Iraq, have just been revealed.

Even though archaeologists know the tablets originated in that lost Sumerian city, they don’t know where the city is now located. Only looters have that location, archaeologists said.

The newly examined tablets describe the palace of Irisagrig and the animals kept on the grounds, including lions and dogs; the tablets also detail a festival held in a temple dedicated to a god of mischief.



Cuneiform tablets from a lost city called Irisagrig in Iraq were returned to Iraq after being seized from Hobby Lobby. (Image: © Win McNamee/Getty Images)

The new find shows that the company Hobby Lobby — whose co-owner, Steve Green, helped found the Museum of the Bible in November 2017 in Washington, D.C. — had far more cuneiform tablets obtained (possibly illegally) from this city, and other sites in Iraq, than previously believed.

The 1,400 Irisagrig tablets, along with 600 cuneiform tablets from other archaeological sites in Iraq, are detailed in the book “Tablets From the Irisagrig Archive” (Eisenbrauns, 2019) by Marcel Sigrist, professor emeritus at Ecole

biblioque et archéologique française de Jerusalem, and Tohru Ozaki, a retired lecturer at the University of Shizuoka in Japan.

The tablets were recorded by hand, but not photographed, between 2012 and 2016, during which time “they were in Oklahoma in the storerooms of Hobby Lobby,” Sigrist told Live Science. “They bought these tablets — I never knew how it happened. It was not really my business” Sigrist said.

■ **Whopping number of tablets**

In 2017, Hobby Lobby paid a \$3 million fine for importing artifacts illegally from Iraq, and the company forfeited about 450 cuneiform tablets and 3,000 clay bullae (a type of seal) that were returned to Iraq, a settlement statement from the U.S. Department of Justice said. However, 223 of those 450 cuneiform tablets were seized in January 2011 in Memphis, Tennessee, by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Though Sigrist didn’t have the opportunity to study those tablets, another scholar, named Eckart Frahm, did. He described them in a 2017 interview with Live Science. A few of those 223 tablets contain 4,500-year-old magical incantations, Frahm said at the time.

The combination of the 1,400 newly published tablets from Irisagrig, 600 newly published tablets from other Iraq sites and 223 tablets that were seized in January 2011 means that the total number of cuneiform tablets once owned by Hobby Lobby exceeds 2,200.

■ **Now missing**

After the Sigrist and Ozaki studied the tablets, some of the artifacts now appear to be missing. John Marzulli, a

spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Justice, said that, aside from the 450 cuneiform tablets mentioned in the 2017 settlement statement that announced Hobby Lobby’s fine and forfeiture of artifacts, he has no information about any other cuneiform tablets once owned by Hobby Lobby.

A spokesperson for Iraq’s antiquities minister said that about 3,817 artifacts once owned by Hobby Lobby had been returned to the Iraq embassy. It’s unclear how many of these returned artifacts are cuneiform tablets; however, if 3,000 clay bullae were returned to Iraq, as the U.S. Department of Justice claims, that means that only up to 817 cuneiform tablets out of the 2,200 that Hobby Lobby had could have been returned to Iraq.

Sigrist said that after 2016 he never received any communication from Hobby Lobby. “When I approached them, I never received any answer anymore,” and he decided to describe the tablets in a publication so that scholars could become aware of the artifacts’ existence. Hobby Lobby has not responded to requests for comment.

(Source: Live Science)

How to make friends while traveling solo

Even in the best cases, traveling alone can get lonely. Here’s how to connect safely with the people you meet along the way.

Experiencing another culture on your own terms, at your own pace, with a budget of your own choosing can be an incredibly rewarding and insightful adventure. But while some may find such a journey liberating, others might worry about safety or a period of solitude in a strange, unfamiliar place. Humans, after all, are social animals.

Prospective solo travelers should know that, despite its label, solo travel does not have to mean you’re alone all the time. There are local communities to safely interact with as well as fellow globe-trotters in a similar position.

A 2016 report from travel research company Phocuswright found that a whopping 72 percent of hostel guests in the United States were traveling alone. Airbnb saw similar a trend in its data, with cities like Ho Chi Minh City, Cologne, and Johannesburg experiencing more than a 130 percent increase in individual bookings in 2016.

With solo traveling growing in popularity, it’s clear there are options to socialize with other travelers — it’s just a matter of putting yourself in the right position to do so. Here are some tactics you can use to meet and befriend people abroad, from tried-and-true methods to innovative new apps and technology.

■ **Go on ‘free’ walking tours**

The word free is in quotations because, assuming your tour guide is at least half-decent, you should tip them at the end (many earn the majority of their income on commission). But these walking tours can be worth every penny. Not only will the guide give you an informed and hopefully entertaining view of the locale, but you’ll have a chance to interact with other tourists and possibly come away with a new friend.

The leisurely pace in between stops gives you the opportunity to chat with fellow tour-goers, who you may discover are also traveling alone or as part of a small group they’re willing to let you join. Prominent cities often have multiple specialized tours — street art or local cuisine, for example — which provide additional chances to meet people and further learn about the place hosting you.

Several tour companies, like Sandeman’s New Europe or Free Tours by Foot, have outposts in popular cities and are generally safe options for the solo traveler. But don’t count out smaller or independent tour companies that may be better tailored to specific destinations. Visit the company website and read reviews left by travelers to make sure everything checks out. You can also look at ratings on separate websites like TripAdvisor for a

more comprehensive view.

If you’re staying in a hostel, the staff often has relationships with tour companies in the city. A hotel receptionist or concierge would also have recommendations.

■ **Use Airbnb to go on unique experiences hosted by locals**

Airbnb may be known more for its lodging arrangements, but it also wants to give you something to do at your destination. Airbnb Experiences connects travelers with local guides who lead guests on paid activities ranging from city tours to bar crawls and hobby and skill classes. Launched in late 2016, Experiences quickly became a popular feature.

So what’s the appeal? Similar to walking tours, Airbnb Experiences can be a fun way to mingle with fellow sightseers while gaining firsthand knowledge from experienced locals. And while you do have to pay upfront, costs usually cover expenses like transportation, food or equipment. Each booking page includes information from the host on what items they’ll provide, as well as what items you should bring, like activity-specific clothing or extra cash (for souvenirs, for example).

Since Experiences is embedded on the standard Airbnb platform, you’ll want to show the same caution when booking activities as you would with booking housing. Make sure to read through the description and photos carefully and pay attention to the Experience’s rating and reviews (Airbnb has neat little trophies visible on the page if the Experience has been rated five stars by a certain number of people.) If you have any questions or concerns, Airbnb will put you in touch with the host through its messaging system even if you haven’t booked the activity yet.

■ **Connect with like-minded explorers on social travel apps**

Prefer to cut out the middleman and connect directly with other travelers? Try your hand at the crop of social networking apps specifically designed for travel. Travello, free on iOS and Android, allows you to discover other travelers nearby, match itineraries for planned trips and join groups based on similar interests. You can also create a feed by posting photos and updates.

Tourlina, also free on iOS and Android, is exclusively for women and operates a lot like a dating app by swiping on potential travel companions with similar itineraries and timing. Women can also use the dating app Bumble’s BFF feature to meet platonic companions in the area. Other social media apps are ool options, with region-specific Facebook groups and subreddits to engage with travelers, expats, and locals in your destination of choice.



As with any first encounter brokered through social media, use caution when meeting people in real life. Meet in public spaces and consider video chatting beforehand. Travello also has a block/report feature if anyone conducts themselves inappropriately, resulting in an immediate ban from the app.

■ **Stay in hostels**

In a world of hospitable hotels and authentic Airbnbs, why do travelers elect to stay in hostels? Two reasons, really: Hostels are cheap and sociable. You’ll find college-esque dormitories with common lounge rooms and kitchens, and sometimes a bar or cafe.

It’s an ideal environment to meet other travelers, and hostel staffs are well aware of this — some will lead city tours or pub crawls designed to foster interaction between hostel mates. Others might host game nights in the common room or arrange family dinners.

Popular booking sites include Hostelworld, Hostelz, Hostels.com, and Hostelbookers, and all feature reviews and detailed information about available amenities and each hostel’s location. Novice solo travelers may want to consider staying near the city center for a convenient and safe option. During your research, pay attention to which hostels struck a chord with solo travelers in particular — those likely facilitate group activities and also provide good security for individuals. Female solo travelers can also often stay in female-only dorms.

Hostels are perhaps the quintessential way for young people to travel, but you’ll find all types of ages and backgrounds in one. And though the image of the lone backpacker bouncing from hostel to hostel has endured for decades, the data suggests the trend is more popular than ever.

(Source: The New York Times)

The many faces of Qassem Soleimani

By Guy Somerset

ANTIWAR — Several years ago at an American Independence Day celebration in Palm Beach I found myself sitting near a small child not much more than a toddler. We were witnessing the fireworks display which every municipality seems to delight in these days.

What made this exhibition slightly unique was its length — the flashing explosions and accompanying patriotic tunes went on for well over thirty minutes.

The duration of the spectacle had already continued long past mere uncomfortability though I was reluctant to voice any complaint, at which juncture the nearby youth rubbed its eyes and voiced everything for me... "Too long! It's too long!"

This has been much the same affect after interminable days of incessant American jingoism in the wake of the murder of Iranian military man Qassem Soleimani — too much, too long, too ridiculous.

There is a fine line between propaganda and prevarication as well as a not-so-fine line between political license and pejorative lies. Hopefully this small dose of reality can restore some balance to the discussion of recent events.

■ Who Was Soleimani — The Man

As with every public figure there are numerous personas, yet all originate with the objective facts.

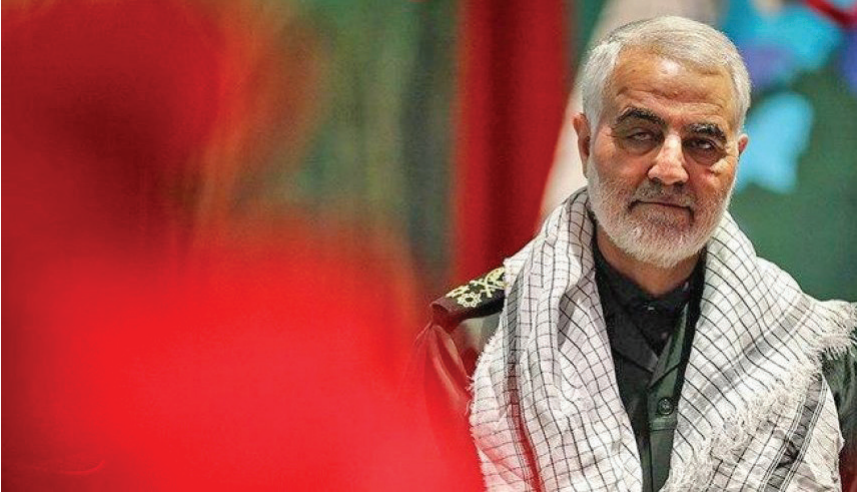
Qassem Soleimani was born an ordinary Iranian. He did not come from a wealthy family and his relatives had no particular influence by which to obtain him special privileges in education or a profession.

Thus — very importantly — the career of Soleimani was that of the proverbial self-made man. He worked hard doing construction (when he was 13 years old... to pay off debts of his father) and become "someone" while in his spare time lifting weights as a hobby.

He was not a participant in the 1979 Iranian Revolution but soon afterward choose the military as his vocation. Almost immediately following his induction he became trainer to other recruits.

Soleimani was involved in putting down the Kurdish Revolt of 1979 and later distinguished himself in the Iran-Iraq War. He not only served on the front lines but volunteered for more service. At some point he saw action at every region of conflict and was even in the midst of a chemical weapon attack by Iraqi forces.

One nickname given to him by his men was "The Goat Thief" since Soleimani often returned from missions with food for his hungry soldiers. He was regarded as a fair and determined leader by those under his



command. When orders from above seemed irrational or ill-advised he challenged them.

Eventually, Soleimani was promoted to intelligence and foreign operations. Throughout the succeeding decades he further denoted himself a calculating and clever man. His influence of late was most strongly evinced abroad through militias supported in various capacities by Iran and advised by the man himself.

■ Who Was Soleimani — The National Hero

In an age when American (and indeed, most Western) leaders have never seen combat it is difficult to impart the degree to which Soleimani stood out. While it is true that Iran (aside from the Revolution itself) lost almost every conflict in which it engaged this individual was considered heroic in his behavior.

There is a reason ancient Romans feared their Generals and it is because a General may become a hero even if a battle is lost. He must only behave bravely and with dignity. Curiously, a losing General is oftentimes even more popular than a victorious one as long as he has displayed these attributes — and Soleimani was widely regarded as having done so.

Moreover, as the "nobody from nowhere" who made good he gained even more gravitas than if he had been ushered into a leadership role. Every single poor Iranian of a martial demeanor saw himself in the General. That is the kind of adoration which cannot be bought for any price and which can only be earned by honor.

■ Who Was Soleimani — The Diplomat

Soleimani, whatever else one may think of him, was a stabilizing force in Iran and to a lesser extent in the wider sphere of Iranian

influence.

He was regarded by intelligence agencies as having tremendous input and perhaps even a "final say" on which individual would be chosen Iranian President. It was he who ensured no one too radical (or insufficiently devout) would be permitted to lead.

Due to this sway Soleimani was sometimes regarded as a "reclusive figure" by outside observers. While it is true the General was less visible prior to recent years, to refer to him in this way would be inaccurate.

On the contrary, there are many times travelers who encountered him on airplanes or in other incidents of private life were regaled by his garrulous war stories. He was soft-spoken and rarely raised his voice in meetings. Unlike several notables in the Middle East, he declined to allow admirers to offer a kiss.

For those who may consider such impact might have made Soleimani a target within his own country, it seems not to have been the case. The current Grand Ayatollah was known to have been close personal friends with the General as well as privately lent him money.

That last anecdote is important. Like Horatio Nelson himself, Qassem Soleimani was not an affluent man. He did not use his position to enrich himself — a concept totally incomprehensible to contemporary Western leaders in any capacity.

Who Was Soleimani — The Lies

In large measure the reason for this article was the degree to which lies have been told about Soleimani in the past week.

For one, there was no — absolutely none — involvement by Iran or specifically Soleimani with the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States as falsely claimed by U.S. Vice President Mike Pence.

For another, Soleimani actually personally assisted the United States in apprehending individuals associated with Al Qaeda following those incidents and only ceased cooperation when President George Bush denounced Iran as an "Axis of Evil."

For yet one more, there is a talking point that killing Soleimani was a "defensive act" — it was not. At most, it was a pre-emptive murder to avoid greater bloodshed. Even so, at this juncture the American administration has not released any evidence of what they claim to have prevented and offer no proof.

For additional perspective, multiple American intelligence assets in the media have stated Soleimani was not well-liked in Iran and that Iraqis would celebrate his death. As has been demonstrably shown, Soleimani was a beloved figure by a wide swath of Iranians. He was respected by a multitude of Iraqis as well. In fact, what appeared to be a state funeral with thousands in attendance did not occur in Iran but in Iraq. This was merely the pre-funeral ceremony for his remains before they were returned to Iran itself.

For a coup de grace, the most infuriating claim — even by alleged Iranian "experts" — is that the murder will be considered a declaration of war by the United States upon Iran akin to Iranians killing the American Secretary of Defense.

Does anyone on the street know the identity of the US Secretary of Defense? No, no one.

Let us be extremely clear — The murder of Qassem Soleimani is far more comparable to a situation in which General Dwight Eisenhower or General Nikita Khrushchev might have been slaughtered a year or two prior to entering political endeavors.

Soleimani was a figure larger than life for many Iranians. He was the epitome of a heroic ideal. The veritable "Abe Lincoln" of yore who built himself up from backwoods yokel into global statesman.

At a minimum, this was his reputation in Iran — a war hero, a wise counselor, a potential future President.

■ Who Was Soleimani — The Legacy

Importantly, none should read this as a hagiography or panegyric to the man. He was a diplomatic and military actor and as such did things with which many would disagree.

Soleimani may have been tangentially responsible for the attack which saw the death of an American mercenary. He was almost certainly involved in the protests at the American Embassy which followed.

One man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist.

Yet if there be condemnations, let them be based on the truth of his deeds rather than expedient lies.

With Suleimani assassination, Trump is doing the bidding of Washington's most vile cabal

By Jeremy Scahill

While the media focus for three years of the Trump presidency has centered around "Russia collusion" and impeachment, the most dangerous collusion of all was happening right out in the open — the Trump/Saudi/Israel/UAE drive to war with Iran.

On August 3, 2016 — just three months before Donald Trump would win the Electoral College vote and ascend to power — Blackwater founder Erik Prince arranged a meeting at Trump Tower. For decades, Prince had been agitating for a war with Iran and, as early as 2010, had developed a fantastical proposal for using mercenaries to wage it.

At this meeting was George Nader, an American citizen who had a long history of being a quiet emissary for the United States in the Middle East. Nader, who had also worked for Blackwater and Prince, was a convicted pedophile in the Czech Republic and is facing similar allegations in the United States. Nader worked as an adviser for the Emirati royals and has close ties to Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi crown prince.

There was also an Israeli at the Trump Tower meeting: Joel Zamel. He was there supposedly pitching a multimillion-dollar social media manipulation campaign to the Trump team. Zamel's company, Psy-Group, boasts of employing former Israeli intelligence operatives. Nader and Zamel were joined by Donald Trump Jr. According to the New York Times, the purpose of the meeting was "primarily to offer help to the Trump team, and it forged relationships between the men and Trump insiders that would develop over the coming months, past the election and well into President Trump's first year in office."

One major common goal ran through the agendas of all the participants in this Trump Tower meeting: regime change in Iran. Trump campaigned on belligerence toward Iran and trashing the Obama-led Iran nuclear deal, and he has followed through on those threats, filling his administration with the most vile, hawkish figures in the U.S. national security establishment. After appointing notorious warmonger John Bolton as national security adviser, Trump fired him last September. But despite reports that Trump had soured on Bolton because of his interventionist posture toward Iran, Bolton's firing merely opened the door for the equally belligerent Mike Pompeo to take over the administration's Iran policy at the State Department. Now Pompeo is the public face of the Suleimani assassination, while for his part, the fired Bolton didn't want to be left out of the gruesome victory lap:

Trump, who had no idea who Qassim Suleimani was until it was explained to him live on the radio by conservative journalist Hugh Hewitt in 2015, didn't seem to need many details to know that he wanted to crush the Iranian state.

Much as the neoconservatives came to power in 2001



after the election of George W. Bush with the goal of regime change in Iraq. Trump in his bumbling way assembled a team of extremists who viewed him as their best chance of wiping the Islamic Republic of Iran off the map.

While Barack Obama provided crucial military and intelligence support for Saudi Arabia's scorched earth campaign in Yemen, which killed untold numbers of civilians, Trump escalated that mass murder in a blatant effort to draw Iran militarily into a conflict. That was the agenda of the gulf monarchies and Israel, and it coincided neatly with the neoconservative dreams of overthrowing the Iranian government. As the U.S. and Saudi Arabia intensified their military attacks in Yemen, Iran began to insert itself more and more forcefully into Yemeni affairs, though Tehran was careful not to be tricked into offering this Trump/Saudi/UAE/Israel coalition a justification for wider war.

The assassination of Suleimani — a popular figure in Iran who is viewed as one of the major drivers of ISIS's defeat in Iraq — was one of only a handful of actions that the U.S. could have taken that would almost certainly lead to a war with Iran. This assassination, reportedly ordered directly by Trump, was advocated by the most dangerous and extreme players in the U.S. foreign policy establishment with that exact intent.

Assassination has been a central component of U.S. policy for many decades, though it has been whitewashed and normalized throughout history, most recently with Obama's favored term, "targeted killings." The U.S. Congress has intentionally never legislated the issue of assassination. Lawmakers have avoided even defining the word "assassination." While every president since Gerald Ford has upheld an executive order banning assassinations by U.S. personnel, they have each carried out assassinations with little to no congressional outcry.

In 1976, following Church Committee recommendations regarding allegations of assassination plots carried out by U.S. intelligence agencies, Ford signed an executive order banning "political assassination." Jimmy Carter subsequently issued a new order strengthening the prohibition by drop-

ping the word "political" and extending it to include persons "employed by or acting on behalf of the United States." In 1981, Ronald Reagan signed Executive Order 12333, which remains in effect today. The language seems clear enough: "No person employed by or acting on behalf of the United States Government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, assassination."

As I wrote in August 2017, reflecting on our Drone Papers series from two years earlier, "The Obama Administration, by institutionalizing a policy of drone-based killings of individuals judged to pose a threat to national security — without indictment or trial, through secret processes — bequeathed to our political culture, and thus to Donald Trump, a policy of assassination, in direct violation of Executive Order 12333 and, moreover, the Fifth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. To date, at least seven U.S. citizens are known to have been killed under this policy, including a 16-year-old boy. Only one American, the radical preacher Anwar al-Awlaki, was said to have been the 'intended target' of a strike."

While many Democratic politicians are offering their concerns about the consequences of Suleimani's assassination, they are prefacing it with remarks about how atrocious Suleimani was. Framing his assassination that way ultimately benefits the extremist cabal of foreign policy hawks who agitated for this very moment to arrive. There's no justification for assassinating foreign officials, including Suleimani. This is an aggressive act of war, an offensive act committed by the U.S. on the sovereign territory of a third country, Iraq. This assassination and the potential for a war it raises are, unfortunately, consistent with more than half a century of U.S. aggression against Iran and Iraq.

For three years, many Democrats have told the country that Trump is the gravest threat to a democratic system we have faced. And yet many leading Democrats have voted consistently to give Trump unprecedented military budgets and surveillance powers.

Five months ago, California Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna offered an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that would have prohibited this very type of action, but it was removed from the final bill. "Any member who voted for the NDAA — a blank check — can't now express dismay that Trump may have launched another war in the Middle East," Khanna wrote on Twitter after Suleimani's assassination. "My Amendment, which was stripped, would have cut off \$\$ for any offensive attack against Iran including against officials like Suleimani."

Trump is responsible for whatever comes next. But time and again, the worst foreign policy atrocities of his presidency have been enabled by the very politicians who claim to want him removed from office.

(Source: TheIntercept)

Cable news turns to Iraq war flunkies like Judith Miller for Iran insight

By Justin Baragona

DAILYBEAST — When it comes to cable news punditry, there are apparently no consequences for being spectacularly and horrifically wrong. Look no further than Judith Miller.

As the United States and Iran seem to be on a collision course following President Donald Trump's decision to kill Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, Fox News on Monday turned to Miller—arguably the reporter most disgraced by the Iraq War—for insight on the Iran crisis.

During her appearance on America's Newsroom, the former New York Times reporter and current Fox News contributor was asked to provide analysis on whether rising tensions in the Middle East will lead to an all-out war. Furthermore, throughout the 10-minute panel segment, she was pressed to weigh in on Democratic opposition to the administration's rationale for assassinating the Iranian general.

A news network turning to Miller for analysis on a Mideast conflict, however, seems especially strange considering her background.

Miller's reporting on Saddam Hussein's mythical cache of weapons of mass destruction in 2002 and 2003 was heavily cited and relied upon by senior officials in the Bush administration during the run-up to the Iraq War. Her blunderous reporting, which was often plastered at the top of the Times pages, is often viewed as having made the case for what ultimately turned out to be a war based on lies, misinformation, or half-truths.

In Sept. 2002, for instance, a Miller piece pointed to the interception of "aluminum tubes" headed for Iraq to assert that Saddam was looking to enrich nuclear material and expand his WMD arsenal. Her articles, which often cited multiple anonymous Bush administration officials, would then be publicly trumpeted for months by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, among others, to legitimize their calls for war with Iraq on the basis that Saddam was pursuing nuclear and biological weapons.

Following the Iraq invasion in spring 2003, Miller reported on claims passed to her by the U.S. military that an Iraqi scientist had told them that "Iraq destroyed chemical weapons and biological warfare equipment only days before the war began." According to the military, Miller wrote, "the scientist led Americans to a supply of material that proved to be the building blocks of illegal weapons, which he claimed to have buried as evidence of Iraq's illicit weapons programs."

Miller would later tout her story to insist that the American military had found its "smoking gun" when it came to WMDs, claiming the unnamed scientist was their "silver bullet." The report would eventually become something of an embarrassment for Miller's Times colleagues, who were dismayed that her "wacky-assed piece" was both submitted to the military for approval and peddled unsubstantiated claims that Miller could not actually corroborate.

It would later be discovered that much of Miller's reporting relied heavily on exiled Iraqi politician Ahmed Chalabi, who was also providing intelligence to the Bush administration—which turned out to be almost entirely false—alleging Saddam had WMDs and was tied to Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda.

Days after the government cut ties with Chalabi in 2004, the Times editorial board published a mea culpa on its coverage of Iraq, noting that many of its articles had leaned too heavily on Chalabi's claims. While refusing to place blame on any individual reports, the board expressed "regret" that the paper had pushed "controversial" allegations that were left "unchallenged."

A year later, Miller would be forced out by the Times. In a 2015 book, she attempted to defend her shaky reporting, placing a large portion of the blame on her editors while also claiming she was shocked the Bush administration would ever trumpet her articles so loudly.

But Miller, who has been a paid Fox News analyst for more than a decade, is not the only Bush-era Iraq cheerleader upon whom cable news outlets seem eager to ask for Iran insight.

In fact, several ex-Bush officials emerged as top boosters of Trump's escalatory actions following last week's slaying of Soleimani.

For example, just moments after the Pentagon acknowledged that Soleimani was killed by a U.S. airstrike, former Bush senior adviser Karl Rove and ex-White House press secretary Ari Fleischer—both members of that administration's war propaganda organization dubbed the White House Iraq Group—popped up on Fox News' Hannity to applaud the airstrike.

Rove, now a Fox News contributor, called it a "major victory, not only for the United States of America, but also for the cause of stability in moderation in the Middle East." Fleischer, also a paid network pundit, echoed the Bush White House's 2003 promise that Americans would be greeted by Iraqis as liberators.

"I think it's entirely possible this is going to be a catalyst inside Iran where the people celebrate this killing of Soleimani and puts pressure on the Iranian government to stop the terrorism, stop supporting all of the various terrorist movements it has around the world," proclaimed the former Bush spokesman, now an ardent Trump supporter.

In fact, it seems that few, if any, of the Bush era's biggest Iraq War boosters or flacks have suffered much consequences in the way of cable news airtime. Two Bush spokeswomen, MSNBC's Nicolle Wallace and Fox's Dana Perino, currently host daily cable news shows that will undoubtedly tackle the Iran crisis in weeks to come. Former Bush speechwriter David Frum (a former Daily Beast columnist best known for writing W's "Axis of Evil" speech), routinely appears as a pundit, most recently this Sunday on CNN's Reliable Sources.

And while not having officially worked for the Bush White House, key Iraq War boosters like John Podhoretz, Max Boot, and Bill Kristol have had thriving cable punditry careers. Podhoretz appeared recently on MSNBC to all-too-predictably defend Trump's airstrikes as a necessary deterrence.

While it may seem odd for cable news outlets to rely upon such voices in analyzing yet another potentially endless Middle East conflict, the truth is: They never actually went away.

Over 40,000 students from 129 countries studying at Iranian universities

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Over 40,000 students from 129 nationalities are studying at Iranian universities, Abdolhamid Alizadeh, director for overseas students at the science ministry, has said.



Under the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2021), the number of foreign students should increase from the current one percent of student population in the country to 1.8 percent, he added.

Of the 40,000 foreign students in the country, 29,000 are studying at universities run by the science ministry and the rest are students at Islamic Azad universities and universities affiliated to the health ministry, he said, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

To improve services for the international students, consular offices have been set up in 15 provinces across the country, he concluded.

2019 was second hottest year on record, data shows

The evidence mounted all year. All-time temperature records were broken in France, Germany and elsewhere; the Greenland ice sheet experienced exceptional melting; and, as 2019 came to a close, broiling temperatures contributed to devastating wildfires that continue in Australia.

Now European scientists have confirmed what had been suspected: 2019 was a very hot year, with global average temperatures the second highest on record. Only 2016 was hotter, and not by much — less than one-tenth of a degree Fahrenheit.

The finding, by the Copernicus Climate Change Service, an intergovernmental agency supported by the European Union, continues an unrelenting upward trend in temperatures as emissions of greenhouse gases trap heat in the atmosphere and change the climate.

Last year was more than 1 degree Fahrenheit (about 0.6 degree Celsius) above the average for the period between 1981 and 2010, the agency reported. Several months in 2019 had record average temperatures, with July being the hottest month ever, averaging 0.07 degree Fahrenheit (0.04 degree Celsius) higher than July 2016.

The record-holder for a full year is still 2016. Temperatures that year were influenced by a strong El Niño, when changes in sea temperature, atmospheric pressure and winds in the equatorial Pacific led to short-term variations in temperature. There was an El Niño last year, too, but it was weaker than in 2016.

(Source: The New York Times)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

American Police Confirm Ninth Sniper Victim

(October 16, 2002)

Police in America have confirmed that a woman who was shot on Monday night outside a hardware store near Washington was a victim of the serial killer who has murdered eight other people in the last two weeks. The police say they have picked up useful evidence from the scene. This report from Justin Webb. The **latest victim** was 47-year-old Linda Franklin. She'd been loading packages into her car in the parking area of a shopping Centre. Her husband was standing beside her. She was killed with one shot.

Mrs Franklin worked for **the FBI**, though there's no suggestion that she **was targeted** because of her job. It appears that she was selected, like the other victims, **at random** from those **going about their business** in a public place.

Police held their now familiar press briefing this morning, giving more details of the attack, but there was one difference. This time, the killer appeared to have been much more **reckless** about being seen.

An escape vehicle may have been **spotted** by witnesses and, according to Tom Manger of the local police, other useful **evidence was also recovered at the scene**.

«These investigations take time, they take patience. We are working through that process as quickly as we can. There was some additional information that we were able to get from last night's case and I am confident that ultimately that information is going to lead us to an arrest in this case.»

There is a public confidence as well that the **sniper** will be captured but, before he is, **a widespread fear** that there could be more victims.

Words

latest victim: here, the person most recently killed
the FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation. In the United States, the FBI is the police department, controlled by the central government, which investigates crimes where a national law is broken or where the country's security is threatened

was targeted: here, was chosen as a target

at random: if something is done at random, it is done without a definite plan or pattern

going about their business: doing what they normally do

reckless: careless; if you are reckless, you do not care about danger or the results of your actions

spotted: noticed

evidence was recovered at the scene: evidence was found at the place where the crime took place

sniper: someone who shoots at people from a hidden position

a widespread fear: many people are afraid; if something is widespread, it happens over a large area and affects many people

(Source: BBC)

South Korea pursues resumption of humanitarian trade with Iran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The South Korean foreign ministry has decided to continuously pursue the resumption of trade in humanitarian products with Iran through won-based accounts at Korean banks, IRNA news agency reported on Tuesday.

Financial transactions between Seoul and Tehran for shipments of food and medical items became effectively impossible after Washington toughened sanctions against the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) in September 2019, requiring third countries to provide information on trade with Iran.

In December 2019, Yonhap news agency reported that Tehran has called in the South Korean ambassador to Iran to lodge a complaint, urging Seoul to resume humanitarian trade with the country.

“The Iranian side expressed its position that it hopes for the humanitarian trade to be resumed and is discussing the matter with us,” a Korean foreign ministry official said, according to the report.

“We are in talks with Iran and the U.S. frequently so that the shipments of human-



itarian goods like medical supplies can be resumed using the won-based transaction system,” the official added.

During a meeting on Tuesday, the South Korean foreign ministry discussed with officials from the industry and economy ministries, and the Financial Services Commission the negative impact of recent tensions between the United States and Iran, which increased after assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

Soleimani, the IRGC Quds Force commander, was martyred in a U.S. terrorist assault in Baghdad on January 3.

The Korean officials decided to continuously pursue the resumption of trade in humanitarian products with Iran through won-based accounts at Korean banks and help South Korean firms retrieve outstanding contract money from their Iranian clients.

The participating officials decided to offer active support to minimize any damage to their businesses and ensure they can carry out their business activities stably, according to the South Korean ministry.

On the frontline of the climate emergency, Bangladesh adapts

In the scorching farmlands of south-west Bangladesh, a single coconut tree stands as a barometer of climate change.

Dulal Mondal, 70, a farmer, points halfway up the tree about two feet off the ground to indicate where the waters came the last time the area flooded.

“Next time if heavy rain comes I don’t think water will recede as there is no natural draining or anywhere for it to go,” he says.

Mondal lives in the Jessore district of Bangladesh where increased levels of salt in the water, uneven rainfall and flooding are creating great uncertainty for a whole farming community.

Bangladesh is one of dozens of countries on the frontline of the climate emergency. Here global heating is no theoretical calamity of the future, but a very real, present danger.

By 2050, it is predicted that one in seven people in the country will be displaced by climate breakdown. The sea level is projected to rise by 50cm over this time period and Bangladesh may lose approximately 11% of its land. Deadly storms are usually a question of when, not if.

Here, the climate crisis is so palpable that the debate is not about restricting carbon emissions or preventing global warming but about how to adapt to the change and survive in times of unpredictable weather.

For example, Mondal says that where once his peers would farm mainly rice, now they have taken to fishing. They use floating cages, allowing fish to breed in a secure area. Also, if water levels rise, the cages will too, so flooding is less of an issue.

“About 20 to 30 years ago there would be a minimum of two crops per farming family but now because of waterlogging we have no more than one,” he says. Each cage is owned by one home and yields about 15,000 taka (£135) in additional income for the families a year. It’s also a consistent source of food, which could be vital if natural disaster hits.

“In the last two years there was not too much rain but two years ago we were flooded,” Mondal says. “We worry about the future. If there is heavy rainfall the water could remain logged for a long period of time and we would have to take shelter on main road. We would stay there with our remaining belongings.”

This farming evolution is just one element of a whole range of climate change adaptive practices taking root across southern Bangladesh, an area long prone to cyclones, rising sea levels and drought.

“What’s important is investment in long-term development, to help people adapt to the effects that climate change is having now and help them to not only survive



but thrive in their new climate reality,” said Adib Hossain, the head of programmes implementation at Practical Action, one of the charities helping to make changes.

In this part of Bangladesh they have helped introduce effective fertilisers to increase crop growth as well as growing fish in cages and vegetation in sacks or beside rivers – a novel farming technique known as a “dyke garden”.

The cages are made using cheap materials. Bamboo poles form an outer frame that can float and is covered in netting. They have a top cover to prevent fish jumping and escaping, or being caught by birds. With a capacity of one cubic metre, they hold up to 300 fish at a time. These cages are used for two growing seasons each year.

The fish can be fed on scraps and waste – duckweed, oil cake, kitchen waste, rice bran and snails – and in just a few months they grow to full size.

A woman standing beside Mondal goes down in a small wooden boat and pulls up the mesh cage, within which fish jump up and splutter around. She drops the net and they swim around once more. For the worried farmers in this area, the introduction of these cages has been reassuring, a constant amid a lot of inconsistency.

In the nearby district of South Atulia another innovative technique has been employed. Land here is being used for fishing, with pools of water separated by a cracked mud path and spiky vegetation. Omal Biswas, 48, has three daughters and an adopted son. He used to farm rice once a year and during the monsoon he would fish in freshwater. Now he is able to make more money with dyke gardening techniques, growing vegetables around pools of water used for fishing.

Omal has just harvested a crop, he says. They grow bottle gourd, chillis, indian spinach, red amaranth, sponge

gourd, ridge gourd and tomatoes. “Before this technology was used I would yield around 20-25,000 taka a year but last year I harvested 120,000 taka through using different varieties of vegetables and growing more in the year.

“Now I can grow vegetables while fishing but I used to rotate the land. I eat the vegetables too,” he adds.

He adds that the additional income helps give them a better quality of life and now he has been able to buy six cows. “The cost of living is rising and the cost of production is increasing so it is a good portion of revenue,” he says.

Practical Action isn’t the only charity supporting farmers. The National Agriculture Technology Program (NATP 2) by the World Bank has also helped people adopt resilient farming methods.

Farmers have deployed ancient agricultural methods such as floating beds, which involve sowing crops onto floating islands made of the fast-growing water hyacinth. Crops such as cucumbers, gourds and eggplants flourish. Beds are raised so as to lie above the reach of tidal surges. In between, trenches serve as pools to farm fish and ducks.

Others have turned to shrimp farming after land was flooded but Practical Action has helped people do this in a more effective way.

Rubina Khatun is one woman who has benefited from this. “The cyclone affected my family. I swam across flood waters with my two sons and took refuge on the road and sheltered in a shop we own for two months. Then we returned to our home,” she says.

Shrimp farming is now a major source of income for her family. The technique used to farm the shrimp more effectively includes using deeper water so the temperature does not change as quickly, and adding a fertiliser made from oil cake, date juice and sugar cane among other things.

“I am not sure what I would do without it now,” Khatun says. “But this type of farming is weather dependent. We need rain. If there is less rainfall salinity increases.”

Despite efforts to improve the situation, Bangladesh remains at the mercy of sharp changes in weather patterns. Deep uncertainty persists for millions, even if these newfound techniques are helped to mitigate environmental impact.

“I am worried,” Khatun says. “Too much or too little rain, both are problematic.”

For her, however, the concept of climate change is a world away. “I can feel it in terms of rain but I am not aware of this. I have heard non-government-organisations talking about it but just as a concept. All I know is shrimp farming is a major source of income out of all the ones remaining, so it’s a reassurance.”

(Source: The Guardian)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Relief foundation creates over 1.5m jobs for the deprived

Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation has generated over 1.5m job opportunities for those financially struggling since the past 7 years, Hojatollah Abdolmaleki, the Foundation’s deputy director has announced. Job generation for the underprivileged is among the most important and tough responsibilities of the Foundation, he stated, YJC reported on Monday.

Since Iranian calendar year of 1390 (March 2011– March 2012) to 1396 (March 2017- March 2018), the Foundation has earmarked 100 trillion rials (nearly \$2.4 billion) to open up over 1.4 million job opportunities in order to facilitate income generation for the deprived, he explained.

He went on to add that last year (March 2018-March 2019), a total of 148,000 jobs were created by the Foundation’s budget of 23 trillion rials (around \$547 million).

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-iatric, -iatry”

■ **Meaning:** medicine

■ **For example:** *Pediatric* dentists are good for kids without obvious problems.

PHRASAL VERB

Hit upon something

■ **Meaning:** to have an idea or discover something suddenly or unexpectedly; come up with

■ **For example:** Then we hit on the idea of asking viewers to donate money over the Net.

IDIOM

Burn your fingers

■ **Explanation:** if you burn your fingers (or get your fingers burnt), you suffer financially as a result of foolish behavior

■ **For example:** Jack got his fingers burnt playing on the stock market.

Over 180 rallies planned across U.S. to protest Trump's 'march to war' with Iran

➔1 In an editorial on Wednesday, CNN said the U.S. assassination has brought America to the "brink of its first hot war" with Iran since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

U.S. Democrats said that Iran's missile attack was not a surprise, saying that it was an inevitable response to Trump's decision to assassinate the top general.

Pelosi warns 'America & world cannot afford war'

U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi says that the United States and the world cannot afford a war after Iran targeted the American airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar province in western Iraq to retaliate Washington's assassination of top Iranian anti-terror commander, Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

"Tens of surface-to-surface missiles" were fired at the strategic airbase early on Wednesday and the U.S. later confirmed the attack.

The IRGC has called for a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Arab country, asserting that it would not differentiate



between the U.S. and Israel in retaliating against the assassination of the Iranian national hero.

Meanwhile, Democrats said that Iran's missile attack was not a surprise, say-

ing that it was an inevitable response to Trump's decision last week to assassinate Soleimani.

"One action creates another reaction, unfortunately," said Rep. Barbara Lee

(D-Calif.), a longtime anti-war activist.

"I think everyone knows when the attack occurred to expect some kind of unfortunate response. And we've always said that this does not enhance our national security; it doesn't protect our troops; it doesn't protect American citizens," Lee said. "It's a spiral now."

Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), the House majority leader, delivered a similar assessment, saying that "I think there was not surprise in the room."

"No one ought to be surprised that if you attack a significant figure in another country — not in that country, but in Iraq, attacking Iranians" that the other country would retaliate, Hoyer added.

Meanwhile, former Vice President Joe Biden said Tuesday night that recent events were "predictable" given what he called the Trump administration's "close to ludicrous" foreign policy.

"What's happening in Iraq and Iran today was predictable," Biden said, according to The Philadelphia Inquirer.

(Source: agencies)

Iraq response to U.S. no less in size than that of Iran: Senior PMU cmdr.

A senior commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) says it is time for an Iraqi response to the recent U.S. assassination operation on the Arab country's soil, and that the reaction will be "no less than in size" than Tehran's missile strikes on two American bases in Iraq.

Qais al-Khazali, the leader of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq movement, a subdivision of the PMU or Hashd al-Sha'abi, took to Twitter on Wednesday to vow vengeance for the blood of the resistance group's second-in-command, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was assassinated in a U.S. drone strike on Friday along with senior Iranian commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and their companions in Baghdad.

"The initial Iranian response to the assassination of the martyred commander Soleimani has happened. Now it is time for the initial response to the assassination of martyred commander Muhandis," he tweeted.

Khazali noted that Iraq's response will match the strikes carried out by Iran in scale and proportion.

"And because Iraqis are brave and zealous, their response will not be less than that of Iran's. That is a promise," Khazali said.

Iran launched ballistic missiles at two Iraqi bases used by American forces early Wednesday in retaliation for last week's bloody drone raids.

(Source: Press TV)

Cyprus says to host U.S. rapid response unit for any Mideast evacuations

➔1 The United States imposed an embargo on the full island in 1987 with an aim to prevent an arms race and encourage a peaceful Cyprus settlement.

Critics say the step has been counterproductive by forcing Cyprus to seek other partners while Turkey, a NATO member, has stationed forces in northern Cyprus since its invasion in 1974.

U.S. officials have been concerned that the ban has brought EU member Cyprus closer to Russia, with the island in 2015 signing off on an access deal to its ports.

Under the new act, the United States will still restrict certain sensitive technologies to Cyprus unless

the U.S. certifies that the island is denying Russia military vessels port access for refueling and servicing.

In a standoff in 1997, Turkey threatened an attack on Cyprus if it went ahead with installing the advanced S-300 missile defense system from Russia.

The controversy is now a relic of another time, with Turkey facing the threat of sanctions for buying the S-400 system from Russia despite its NATO membership.

In 2006, Cyprus was used as a 'safe haven' to evacuate nearly 60,000 civilians from Lebanon in the largest operation of its kind since WWII.

(Source: financial Mirror)

Iraq PM confirms receiving 'signed' U.S. pullout letter

Amid confusion over a reported U.S. letter to Iraq announcing the steps its military would take to move out of Iraq, Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi confirms that Baghdad has actually received "signed and translated" copies from the U.S. Army concerning the withdrawal.

In a televised cabinet meeting on Tuesday, Abdul Mahdi clearly refuted all U.S. claims that the letter had been sent by mistake or it had been inauthentic.

On Sunday, the Iraqi Parliament voted unanimously in favor of a bill demanding the withdrawal of all foreign military forces led by the United States from the country.

The vote came only two days after U.S. airstrikes assassinated senior Iranian commander Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, and the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) anti-terror group, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in the Iraqi capital.

Earlier, various news agencies reported that Brigadier General William Seely, who oversees US Task Force Iraq, had sent a letter to the head of Iraq's Joint Operations Command on Monday, suggesting potential withdrawal of the forces belonging to a U.S.-led coalition, which has been operating in Iraq since 2014 under the pretext of fighting Daesh.

'Signed and translated'

U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper later denied that the

U.S. military had announced preparation for "movement out of Iraq," and the Pentagon claimed that an unsigned draft version of the letter had been sent by mistake.

Abdel Mahdi, however, said he had received signed and translated copies at 8:00 p.m. local time (1700 GMT) on Monday.

The letter discussed "redeploying with an aim to withdraw from the country. The expressions were very clear," he said. "It was an official letter written in such a manner," the premier told ministers.

"It's not a piece of paper that fell off the printer or reached us by coincidence," he added. The letters only contained a translation mistake that the U.S. military corrected and provided Baghdad with new versions, Abdul Mahdi noted.

The AFP said it had received a copy of the letter late Monday and verified its authenticity with both U.S. and Iraqi officials, the agency added.

In it, Seely informed his Iraqi counterparts that American troops were preparing to leave Iraq. Seely wrote the U.S.-led coalition would "be re-positioning forces in the coming days and weeks to prepare for onward movement."

"In order to conduct this task, Coalition Forces are required to take certain measures to ensure that the movement



out of Iraq is conducted in a safe and efficient manner," said the letter.

It said helicopters would be travelling in and around Baghdad's heavily-fortified Green Zone, where the US Embassy is located as part of the preparations.

The AFP, meanwhile, said its reporters could hear helicopters flying low over Baghdad throughout the night on Monday as well as Tuesday.

(Source: agencies)

Libya PM in Brussels as EU seeks ways to ease crisis

EU leaders met the head of Libya's UN-recognised government Wednesday as they scramble to contain the escalating crisis on their southern flank amid concerns about illegal migration and terrorism.

Fayez al-Sarraj, whose beleaguered Government of National Accord is facing an offensive by rival forces who control the country's east, met EU diplomatic chief Josep Borrell, who earlier cautioned that Libya was facing a "watershed point".

Borrell's warning came after military

strongman Khalifa Haftar's forces - who have support from the UAE, Egypt and Russia - seized control of the coastal city of Sirte as part of his drive to take Tripoli and oust the GNA.

As well as Borrell, Sarraj met the EU Council President Charles Michel and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, who a day earlier took part in emergency talks on Libya with his French, British and Italian counterparts.

"The situation is very dangerous," warned

Borrell, who Tuesday condemned Turkey for "interference" in the Libya conflict. Michel is due in Turkey this weekend for talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Ankara says it has sent 35 Turkish troops who are carrying out training and coordination tasks to support the GNA, insisting they will not take part in any fighting.

Libya has been plunged into chaos since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising that killed longstanding dictator Moamer Kadhafi, and is now divided between the GNA and Haftar's

rival authorities based in the country's east.

Tensions escalated last year when Haftar launched an offensive to capture Tripoli, helped by the UAE and by Russian mercenaries - although Moscow denies this.

The EU is keen to stop the conflict spiralling out of control, fearing that terror groups such as the Islamic State could exploit the instability to launch attacks and concerned the turmoil could lead to more migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean.

(Source: AFP)

Turkey, Russia launch TurkStream pipeline carrying gas to Europe

The presidents of Turkey and Russia formally launched the TurkStream pipeline Wednesday which will carry Russian natural gas to southern Europe through Turkey, part of Moscow's efforts to reduce shipments via Ukraine.

The pipeline project, stretching 930 km (580 miles) across the Black Sea, reinforces strong energy ties between Moscow and Ankara, which have also increased defense cooperation after Turkey bought advanced Russian missile defenses last year.

Russia and Turkey are also coordinating military deployments in northeast Syria, although they back opposing sides in the conflict in Syria's northwestern Idlib region and also in the battle for control of Libya.

Presidents Vladimir Putin and Tayyip Erdogan inaugurated the project at a ceremony in Istanbul also attended by the leaders of Serbia and Bulgaria.

The pipeline was a sign of "interaction and cooperation for the benefit of our people and the people of all Europe,



the whole world", Putin said at the inauguration ceremony.

Russia has already started European gas deliveries through the pipeline, gas operator Bulgarttransgaz said Sunday. The pipeline terminal is near the Turkish village of Kiyikoy, some 20 km (12 miles) from the Bulgarian border.

(Source: Daily Star)

Putin, Assad meeting is a part of a response to Gen. Soleimani assassination: Bouthaina Shaaban

➔1

Syria supports Iran's right to respond to U.S. aggression

Syria has expressed its "absolute solidarity" with Iran in the Islamic Republic's right to respond to U.S. aggression in light of assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and the second-in-command of Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

"The Syrian Arab Republic announces its full solidarity with the brotherly people of Iran in what they are facing, and it affirms Iran's right to defend itself in the face of the US threats and attacks," Syria's official news agency SANA quoted an unnamed official source at the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates said on Wednesday.

"Syria at the same time holds the US administration responsible for all the developments that are taking shape due to the latter's reckless policy and arrogant mentality. Such a policy governs US acts that could be best described as those of gangs rather than states," the source pointed out.

He added Washington should learn how to abandon its approach of subjugation and attempts to impose its hegemony on others.

The Syrian foreign ministry concluded, "The Syrian Arab Republic affirms that free states reserve the right to respond to any act of aggression against them in whatever manner they find suitable.

"The US should learn how to give up its approach of subjugating others and imposing its hegemony. Syria reiterates that the US administration is the foremost entity responsible for the escalation of strife and turmoil in the region."

Several killed in car bomb attack near Somali parliament

At least four people have been killed and 10 wounded when a car bomb exploded close to a checkpoint near Somalia's parliament in the capital Mogadishu, police said.

A plume of thick black smoke was seen over the city on Wednesday, and witnesses said a number of vehicles were on fire.

"Explosives were packed in a vehicle which the security forces think was trying to pass through the checkpoint but because he could not do that, the suicide bomber detonated it," said police officer Adan Abdullahi.

"Initial reports we have received indicate four people were killed and more than 10 others were wounded in the blast," Adan added.

Al-Qaeda-linked group, al-Shabab, claimed responsibility for the attack.

'There was chaos'

Abdirahman Mohamed, who was at a nearby grocery store when the blast occurred, said he saw several dead bodies.

"I saw the dead bodies of several people some of them killed by shrapnel inside their vehicles. There was chaos... and ambulances reached the scene soon after the blast," he said. Shamso Ali, another witness, described "smoke and chaos along the road, the blast was very heavy".

"Thanks to God I was a distance away but I saw the smoke and several vehicles caught on fire," he said.

Mogadishu is regularly hit by attacks by al-Shabab, which has fought for more than a decade to topple the Somali government.

Wednesday's attack comes after al-Shabab claimed a massive car bombing in Mogadishu on December 28, 2019, that killed 81 people.

The attack hit a busy checkpoint in the southwest of the city, leaving vehicles charred and twisted at a crossroads in the deadliest assault in two years in the Horn of Africa country. Scores more were wounded.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Sanchez sworn in as head of Spain's first coalition govt. in decades

Pedro Sanchez was sworn in as prime minister Wednesday, becoming head of Spain's first coalition government since the return of democracy in the 1970s.

He took the oath before King Felipe VI a day after being narrowly confirmed as premier in parliament and will take office as head of a minority coalition government with the radical leftwing Podemos.

In a brief televised appearance at the Zarzuela palace, Sanchez swore to uphold the constitution in a secular pledge with no Bible nor crucifix in sight -- as he did when first taking office in June 2018 which, back then, was a first.

The investiture draws a line under nearly a year of political deadlock in the eurozone's fourth-largest economy following inconclusive elections in April and again in November, both of which were won by the Socialists but without an absolute majority.

Sanchez will now focus on piecing together his government, with the line-up to be announced next week, party sources said.

He won Tuesday's confidence vote by an extremely tight margin in the bitterly-divided 350-seat chamber, with 167 votes in favour and 165 against -- and 18 crucial abstentions by Catalan and Basque separatist lawmakers.

November's election left the Socialists weakened, and even after the deal with Podemos, the two only accounted for 155 seats, 21 seats short of a majority, pushing Sanchez to seek support from smaller regional groups.

He also had to secure the all-important abstention of Catalan and Basque separatist parties, sparking a furious response from his rightwing rivals in the Popular Party (PP), centre-right Ciudadanos and the far-right Vox.

(Source: AFP)

Czech court ups sentence for Kvitova knife attacker

A Czech court said Wednesday it had raised the prison term for the man who had attacked two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova with a knife at her Czech home to 11 years from a previous eight.

"We have changed the crime classification from serious battery to a serious case of burglary with a longer prison term," Stanislav Cik, spokesman for the High Court in the eastern city of Olomouc, told AFP.

"The ruling is legitimate," he added.

The attacker and the prosecution had appealed against the original sentence.

The 29-year-old world number seven Kvitova suffered career-threatening injuries to her playing left hand as she fought off the intruder at her home in the eastern Czech town of Prostějov in December 2016.

Police said the attacker, identified as 34-year-old Radim Zondra, did not know whose flat he was entering after pretending to be a technician checking boilers.

After suffering the cuts, Kvitova offered him money to leave the flat, which he accepted.

Last March Zondra was sentenced to eight years in prison by a regional court while serving a prison term for another crime.

Kvitova, who has identified the attacker, is currently playing at Brisbane International tournament in the run-up to the Australian Open where she reached the finals last year.

Despite grim forecasts by doctors, who even warned she might lose her fingers, the 2011 and 2014 Wimbledon champion has recovered and continued her successful career.

(Source: AFP)

Skater left in life-threatening condition following fall in rehearsals

Police are investigating after a skater was left in a life-threatening condition following a fall during rehearsals for the Winter Youth Olympic Games opening ceremony in Switzerland.

The unnamed Russian skater, who lives in Germany, fell from a height of five meters as she was being lifted by a metal ring attached to a cable in the Vaudoise Arena ice rink.

The 35-year-old was seriously injured after "suddenly losing her balance" and falling on to the ice, according to police in Lausanne.

Lausanne 2020 organizers and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said they were "saddened to hear of an accident".

"Lausanne 2020 and the IOC wish the performer a fast and full recovery," they added in a statement.

The opening ceremony for the Winter Youth Olympic Games takes place on 9 January.

(Source: BBC)

Sources: Young in talks over Inter Milan move

Manchester United defender Ashley Young is in talks with Inter Milan, sources have told ESPN.

The 34-year-old could sign for the Italian side this month or, if United block the deal, sign a precontract agreement and move to Serie A on a free transfer at the end of the season.

Young's contract at Old Trafford is due to expire on June 30 and he has been free to negotiate with clubs outside England since Jan. 1.

He was left out of the squad ahead of the 3-1 defeat to Manchester City on Tuesday, although after the game United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer suggested he was not keen to let the England international leave midway through the season.

"Tonight is not the time to talk about players leaving because we need the players we have in the squad and we've got a few months left of this season," Solskjaer said.

"We can't weaken ourselves, we need to strengthen ourselves, if any movement is going to happen."

Young has made more than 250 appearances for United since arriving from Aston Villa under Sir Alex Ferguson in 2011.

He was named club captain in the summer following the departure of Antonio Valencia but has found opportunities limited this season with Solskjaer preferring Luke Shaw and Aaron Wan-Bissaka as his first-choice full-backs.

If Young does join Inter, he will be the third player make the switch to the San Siro in the last six months after Romelu Lukaku and Alexis Sanchez both joined Antonio Conte's side in the summer.

Inter are top of the Serie A table after 18 games, ahead of champions Juventus on goal difference. After finishing third in their Champions League group they have dropped down into the Europa League and could draw United later in the competition.

(Source: Soccernet)

Once homeless, Raiders' Jacobs buys dad house

Raiders running back Josh Jacobs was once homeless as a child, he and his four siblings sometimes living out of a car with their dad, Marty, on the north side of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

On Tuesday, the No. 24 pick of the 2019 draft, and a leading candidate for NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year, took to social media to say he had purchased a house for his father.

The Raiders also tweeted out video of Marty's reaction and said the home was in Oklahoma.

Jacobs rushed for 1,150 yards and seven touchdowns in averaging 4.8 yards per carry and caught 20 passes for 166 yards and eight first downs, despite missing three of the Raiders' final four games with a fracture in his right shoulder. His 88.5 rushing yards per game ranked third in the NFL, behind the Tennessee Titans' Derrick Henry (102.7) and the Cleveland Browns' Nick Chubb (93.4).

Before missing those games, Jacob had played through the pain after suffering the injury in Week 7.

He was selected with a pick acquired in the Khalil Mack trade of 2018.

Jacobs' journey from homelessness to high school stardom to Alabama to a first-round pick of the Raiders was documented in an ESPN SportsCenter Featured piece this past spring.

"Sleeping in the car, I always look back on it," Jacobs said at the time. "It's always going to be something that molded me into who I am. It might have been rough, but, I mean, it's my life."

(Source: ESPN)

Serena Williams, Federer and Nadal commit to Australian bushfires charity match



Kyrgios kick-started tennis' fundraising efforts last week when he pledged \$140 (200 AUD\$) for every ace he hits at upcoming tournaments with a number of other players since joining him.

Tennis Australia will also donate \$69 (100 AUD\$) for every ace hit across six tournaments, including the Australian Open, as well as granting \$700,000 (1 million AUD\$) to help rebuild tennis facilities damaged in the bushfires.

Maria Sharapova, who has been granted wildcard entry for the Australian Open, has donated \$17,400, with world No. 2 Novak Djokovic agreeing to match her.

Sharapova also announced on Wednesday that she had left 10 signed pairs of her tennis shoes in her Brisbane hotel that members of the public could buy with a \$206 (300 AUD\$) donation to the Australian Red Cross.

It's not only tennis stars who have pitched in with their support.

Australian cricket legend Shane Warne has auctioned the baggy green cap he wore throughout his test career, which has so far reached \$343,000 (500,000 AUD\$).

Several one-day batsmen, including Glenn Maxwell, Chris Lynn and D'Arcy Short, are donating \$250 (175 USD) for every six they hit at this year's Big Bash League, the country's professional Twenty20 competition.

READ: Stefanos Tsitsipas receives talking to from mum after on-court outburst

Alongside support from the league, nine Australian NBA players have agreed to contribute \$750,000 towards recovery efforts.

"We are heartbroken over the devastation these fires are causing all across our homeland," the players, which include Philadelphia 76ers' Ben Simmons and San Antonio Spurs' Patty Mills, said in a joint statement.

"Our thoughts are with our families, friends and all of the people of Australia. We hope you feel our love and support and know that we will continue to bring awareness to this crisis globally and provide assistance in any way we can."

Australian Open organizers have said that the tournament, scheduled to begin on January 20, will likely go ahead as planned despite initial fears that smoke blown over Melbourne from the fires could delay the start.

(Source: CNN)

Solskjaer searches for answers to save Man Utd season



Manchester United's demoralizing defeat against Manchester City in their League Cup semi-final laid bare their desperate need for reinforcements if they are to salvage anything from their stuttering season.

United conceded three first-half goals in a match at Old Trafford for the first time since May 1997 on Tuesday in their chastening 3-1 first-leg loss against Pep Guardiola's men.

Bernardo Silva's wonder strike, Riyad Mahrez's cool finish and an own goal from Andreas Pereira put City well on course for a third straight final before Marcus Rashford gave the hosts faint hope for the second leg on January 29.

The defeat was another stark reminder that United are light years behind the standards set by Premier League pacesetters Liverpool and defending champions City.

Manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said there would be no easy solutions as United attempt to claw their way back to the top of English football.

"I've said before it is not going to be a quick fix and the two teams you are talking about are probably two of the best teams in the world," he said.

"That's the task we have ahead of us, it's something that we've started. You can see we are still a way off but we've started something that needed doing."

The problem is that the shoots of recovery are hard to decipher, with United short of technical quality and fight against City.

United have had some impressive performances this season -- including a 2-1 victory at City in the league last month, wins against Chelsea and Spurs and a draw at home against Liverpool.

But they have stumbled badly against sides they would expect to beat, losing to Watford, Bournemouth, Newcastle

and West Ham, and face a tough battle to qualify for next season's Champions League.

United flaws

There are problems for Solskjaer to solve all over the pitch.

Rashford's recent form has helped paper over United's lack of depth up front after they opted not to replace Romelu Lukaku, who left for Inter Milan in August.

United's midfield looks desperately short of creativity in the absence of the injured Paul Pogba and with Jesse Lingard struggling to find his best form. Scott McTominay is also currently sidelined with a knee injury, depriving the side of steel.

And despite boosting their defence with the signings of Harry Maguire and Aaron Wan-Bissaka in the summer transfer window at considerable cost, United do not look like a cohesive unit at the back.

Maguire's arrival has not had the same galvanising impact that Virgil van Dijk's signing had at Liverpool, with United recording just three clean sheets in the Premier League this season. Only Norwich and Tottenham have had fewer.

Solskjaer did not sound over-confident that the January transfer window would yield obvious solutions.

"We are a young team and with the injuries we've had and illness it shows more and that's something we are looking at," he said.

"If there is something there for us I've got the backing to do something but if it is not the right thing we won't do anything."

Aston Villa midfielder Jack Grealish and Leicester midfielder James Maddison, as well as Dortmund's Jadon Sancho, have all seen their names linked with a move to Old Trafford.

(Source: Mirror)

Mane crowned Africa's best footballer having emerged as Liverpool's key man



Mo Salah is often viewed as the central protagonist to Liverpool's recent rise, with fellow forward Sadio Mane providing a quiet, industrial presence at the Egyptian's side.

But these days it's Mane, named African footballer of the year for the first time on Tuesday night in Cairo to deny Salah a third consecutive crown, who is the one scooping individual awards.

The Senegalese star has helped Liverpool win the Champions League, FIFA Club World Cup and UEFA Super Cup this year -- making the Merseysiders the first English side to hold all three trophies simultaneously -- as well as steering his country to the Africa Cup of Nations Final.

"I'm really happy and proud to win this. Football is my job, I love it," said Mane.

While Salah has been Liverpool's most prolific goalscorer over the course of the last two seasons, Mane's contributions haven't gone unnoticed.

He scored 26 goals in 50 appearances last season as Liverpool finished second in the league, and his 22 league goals were enough to see him share the English Premier League Golden Boot with Salah and Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

"I think Mo Salah tends to get more headlines than Mane does and other players get mentioned more than he does," Gareth Roberts, editor of Liverpool fanzine The Anfield Wrap, tells CNN Sport.

"There's probably a million and one reasons why that is, but certainly at Anfield, at Liverpool, amongst fans, he's appreciated as much as anyone else. We love him."

Mane was the most expensive African footballer of all-time when he was signed from Southampton for \$43 million in 2016, and since then has gone on to become a fan favorite at Anfield where, staggeringly, he is yet to lose a Premier League fixture.

"We've seen over the years several players come to Liverpool with big reputations for big money and they haven't really cut the mustard week in, week out," says Roberts.

"Sometimes you wonder about their passion to win, you wonder about how much they want it. There's never been that question with Sadio Mane. It's written large in the way he plays football ... you'd feel he would run through a wall now to try and win a football match for Liverpool."

Liverpool's best player for three seasons

Mane, who signed a long-term contract with the club in November 2018, has contributed 11 goals in 19 games so far this season.

His fitness will be crucial as the Reds -- now 13 points clear at the top of the Premier League -- negotiate a crowded fixture calendar in a bid to win their first title in 30 years.

"Sadio Mane's output has got basically better and better to the point where he's consistently been Liverpool's best player for three seasons now," Paul Machin, a Liverpool fan and presenter of the YouTube channel The Redmen TV, tells CNN Sport.

As Mane's performances have improved, so too, it seems, has his love for the game.

"There's something about him and the way he plays football," Machin adds. "I always talk about when Ronaldinho was at the peak of his powers at Barcelona and he played with a smile on his face. Mane looks like that.

"There's a lot of footballers out there and you get the impression that they're the best in the world but you don't get the impression that they love the game. I think there's something very contagious about Mane's joy of football."

(Source: Guardian)

Two-time Olympic champion Brownlee to bid for third gold

Alistair Brownlee is to target a third successive triathlon Olympic title in Tokyo later this year hoping to remain injury-free and able to play on his rivals' fear factor.

Brownlee will be 32 by the time the event takes place and has been competing in Iron Man competitions, but he told the BBC he could not resist the lure of standing on the top of the podium at the quadrennial global sporting showpiece for a third time.

It represents quite a U-turn by him as a year ago he said he would be absent from Tokyo.

His last World Series race over the Olympic distance of 1500m swim, 40km bike and 10km run ended with him trailing home in 44th place.

However, injury-free of late, the win-

ner of 37 of his 70 International Triathlon Union races is positive about his chances.

"In a really strange way, I'm in a better position now than I was before the last three Olympics," Brownlee said.

"In 2008 I didn't think I'd be going. In 2012 at this stage I'd torn my achilles.

"In 2016 I'd had an operation on my ankle; there were issues with my hamstring. This time I've got nothing wrong with me at all."

However, Brownlee is also hoping that his return to the event will intimidate his rivals.

"Fear? Yeah. Maybe. That's up to them, isn't it?" he said.

"Reputation? I guess. On one hand it's the old 'pressure is a privilege' thing.



"You're better having the aura than not having the aura.

"But it comes with expectation."

The older Brownlee is philosophical about

how his younger brother Jonny will take the news, having perhaps seen his chances lessen of securing a gold after bronze in London and silver in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

Alistair Brownlee, however, is not one for sentiment when it comes to racing.

Jonny said to him when they were both clear of the rest of the field in Rio they could ease up but Alistair, sensing his sibling was struggling, pressed the accelerator and sped away.

He is unrepentant and has no hesitation when asked would he repeat that in Tokyo.

"No! I'd still be absolutely ruthless," he laughs.

"I think Jonny is happy that I'll be racing, although he'd probably never say it.

(Source: Eurosport)

Iran ready for Uzbekistan match: Hamid Estili



The time is right to end Islamic Republic of Iran's four-decade absence from the Olympic Games, according to head coach Hamid Estili, ahead of his side's opening AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 match against Uzbekistan on Thursday.

Not since 1976 has Iran been represented in the Olympic football tournament, but a new generation of talented youngsters are hopeful of ending the drought as one of the three Asian sides to join Japan at Tokyo 2020.

While Estili acknowledged Team Melli Omid's struggles in years gone by at this age level, he believes the stars are aligning for his well-prepared squad, who will begin their campaign against the competition's defending champions at Tinsulanon Stadium.

"Iran's national team is usually among the top teams in Asia in the rankings," said Estili, who famously scored the opening goal in Iran's 2-1 win against the United States at the 1998 FIFA World Cup.

"We are a really strong, but in this age – U-23s, especially qualifying for the Olympic Games – we have had problems for many years with the calendar. The games were usually not falling on FIFA days where we had all of our best players available."

"It was a big problem that we had before, because the clubs needed their players and couldn't give them to us. But this time, starting from two years ago, we brought the players together and had many training camps and friendly matches with all of the players.

"I believe the past situation has now changed and we have a new chance to do well in this competition."

Estili's confidence is powered by a number of rising stars, many of whom come into the tournament with growing reputations as stars of the future, if not the present.

Omid Noorafkan and Mehdi Ghayedi have been standout players in the nation's domestic league this season, while Mohammad Mohebbi and Turkey-based Allahyar Sayyadmanesh have already received senior caps, creating a belief that Iran can prosper despite being drawn in a tough group also containing China PR and Korea Republic.

"I think all four teams in this group have a chance to qualify for the next round," declared Estili. "We know Uzbekistan very well and we know they have a good coach and players.

"We selected the best Iranian players in our Pro League and they deserve to be here. They have worked hard, and they want to give their best.

"We are Iran, and we know what we want to do."

While Iran look to buck a generational trend, Uzbekistan would be happy with more of the same after they won the Continental title in China two years ago.

Six of the title-winning squad from 2018 have returned, but they have a new coach in former FC Porto and Benfica star Ljubinko Drulovic, who aims to guide the Central Asian nation to the Olympics for the first time.

Five consecutive wins within the last month, and a healthy 23-man squad to choose from means Drulovic has ideal conditions to work with in that pursuit, but he insisted his side is focused only on Iran, and not the challenges to follow.

"Our group is very difficult, with four very difficult teams, but we were preparing for this," he said.

"At this moment, we are focused on the first game against Iran. After that we can prepare for the other two games.

"I think we have a chance, and we have good quality, but our opponents are very, very competitive."

Uzbekistan will be hoping for a strong showing from in-form striker Bobir Abdixolikov, who comes into the tournament having scored a bagful of goals in friendly matches over the last three weeks, including a hat-trick against Iraq last month and a brace against Qatar in Bangkok on Friday.

(Source: the-afc)

Korea beats Iran's women volleyball at Olympics qualification



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Korea d e s k eased past Iran in straight sets (25-15, 25-9, 25-19) in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand at the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) 2020 Olympic Qualification Tournament on Wednesday.

Team Melli had lost to Kazakhstan 3-0 in Pool B along on Tuesday and are scheduled to meet Indonesia on Thursday.

Elaheh Poorsaleh scored 13 points for Iran and Sohwi Kang led the Korean team with 15 points.

Pool A consists of Chinese Taipei, Australia and Thailand.

The top two teams from each pool will contest the cross semi-final encounters, with Pool A winner taking on Pool B second place and Pool B winner battling it out with Pool A second place.

The two winners in the semi-finals set up a final showdown, where only the eventual winner will secure their berth to the Tokyo 2020. The two losing sides will fight it out in the third-place playoff encounter.

Iran cruise past Kazakhstan at Olympic Volleyball Qualification Tournament



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran's d e s k men's volleyball team defeated Kazakhstan 3-0 (28-26, 25-16, 25-18) at the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) 2020 Olympic Qualification Tournament in Jiangmen, China on Wednesday.

Morteza Sharifi led Team Melli with 19 points and Kazakhstan's Maxim Michsenko scored 14 points.

Iran will meet China on Thursday.

A total of eight teams, divided into two round-robin pools leading up to crossed

semifinals and a final – to stamp one Olympic visa on January 12.

In Pool A, hosts China, most recently finishing fifth at home at Beijing 2008, are targeting their third Olympic appearance, in the company of reigning 2019 Asian champions Iran, who finished fifth at Rio 2016, their only Olympic participation so far, as well as Kazakhstan and Chinese Taipei, who have never made it to the Games as such.

Australia, Qatar, India and South Korea are in Pool B.

Peyrovani quits as Persepolis sporting director

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Afshin Peyrovani has resigned d e s k from Persepolis after just two months in charge as sporting director Tuesday night.

Persepolis Argentine coach Gabriel Calderon had before said he would not work with the club if Peyrovani stayed on in his role.

Former Persepolis captain replaced Mohsen Khalili in the post in mid-October.



Peyrovani, 47, played in Persepolis for 11 years from 1993 to 2004.

He also coached Persepolis for a while after the departure of Afshin Ghotbi in November 2008.

Peyrovani worked as sporting director of Iran national football team in 2016 but parted company with Team Melli after falling down with Carlos Queiroz.

He has made 66 appearances for Iran national football team and represented the team at the 1998 FIFA World Cup.

Ali Daei linked with Team Melli job

PLDC — Ex-Iran forward Ali Daei has been linked with Iran national football team hotseat.

Mahmoud Shie, a member of Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) board of directors, has said Daei also is among the candidates to lead Team Melli.

Team Melli are without a coach after parting company with Belgian coach Marc Wilmots in early December.

Yahya Golmohammadi, who currently leads Shahr Khodro, and Branko Ivankovic are also among the candidates.

Daei, who holds the record for most international goals with 109 goals, played for Team Melli from 1993 to 2006.

He was also appointed as Iran coach in 2008 but during his tenure as the team coach, Team Melli managed the weakest World Cup Qualification results in its history with only one win out of five games.

With less than three months remaining until the restart of the 2022 FIFA World Cup qualification, the Iranian federation has not introduced the new head coach.

Team Melli will host Hong Kong on March 26 in Tehran and meet Cambodia five days later in an away match.

Iran will face Bahrain and Iraq on June 4 and 9 in Tehran.

Esteghlal completes signing of Arsalan Motahari

TASNIM — Esteghlal football team of Iran completed January signing of Amir Arsalan Motahari on Wednesday.

The 26-year-old forward has joined the Blues on an 18-month contract.

The details of the contract fee have not been revealed.

Motahari started his football career in 2014 in Naft Tehran and has also played in Iranian teams Tractor and Pars Jonoubi and Omani team Saham.

Also, Esteghlal have reportedly reached an agreement with South African attacking midfielder Ayanda Patosi.

Group A - MD1: Iraq 1-1 Australia

Mohammed Qasim struck with a long range beauty to cancel out Reno Piscopo's equally stunning free-kick as Iraq and Australia settled for a 1-1 draw in their opening AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 Group A match at the Thammasat Stadium on Wednesday.

Qasim had only been on the field eight minutes before earning Abdulghani Shahad's side a point having seen Piscopo give the Olyroos the lead with a high quality strike into the top corner of Ali Khadim's goal.

Piscopo, who had been a threat throughout his 64 minutes on the field, put Australia ahead just two minutes before he was replaced by Zachary Duncan when he arrowed his free-kick from 25 yards beyond the outstretched hands of Khadim.

That goal was no less than the Australians deserved after dominating the second half until that point, with Iraq having offered little after an even first half.

A moment's silence was held prior to kick off in memory of those affected by the fires in Australia and, as the game developed, it was Graham Arnold's side who had the first sight of goal.

With eight minutes on the clock, Piscopo attempted to curl his free-kick inside the left post of Khadim's goal while at the other end Sadeq Zamil squandered a gilt-edged chance when, with time to pick his spot, he headed Hussein Jabbar's corner well wide.

Piscopo was in the thick of the action for the Australians throughout much of the opening 45 minutes, shooting straight at Khadim from distance before later rolling the ball across the face of the Iraqi goal to leave his teammates frustrated.

But, after Piscopo put his side in front in the 62nd minute, the Australians' advantage was to last just 15 minutes as Qasim pounced from 20 yards out, brushing aside Keanu Baccus before hitting a low shot that beat Thomas Glover via the inside of his left post.

Glover managed to put a hand on the ball to push it wide minutes later when Jabbar tried his luck from distance, while Dylan Ryan's glancing header at the other end three minutes from time hit the post leaving both teams to share the points.

Iraq play Bahrain next on Saturday while Australia will face hosts Thailand on the same day.

(Source: the-afc)

Iranian para athlete Azimi suspended for anti-doping violation

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has suspended Iranian Para athlete Asadollah Azimi for nine months for committing an anti-doping violation.

The Rio 2016 Paralympian who competes in the F53 class in athletics returned an adverse analytical finding for hydrochlorothiazide in a urine sample provided on 17 August 2019 in an out of competition test in Tehran, Iran. This substance is included on the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) 2019 Prohibited List under the category S5. Diuretics and Masking Agents.

As a result of his violation, Asadollah will be ineligible for competition for nine months from 17 August 2019 to 17 May 2020. All his results obtained from 17 August 2019 and onwards will be disqualified including forfeiture of any medals, points, records and prizes.

The IPC would like to remind all athletes the principle of strict liability applies to anti-doping matters and that any athletes who need to take a prohibited substance



for medical reasons should seek a Therapeutic Use Exemption.

Each athlete is strictly liable for the substances found in his or her sample, and that an anti-doping rule violation occurs whenever a prohibited substance (or its metabolites or markers) is found in his or her bodily specimen, whether or not the athlete intentionally or unintentionally used a prohibited substance or was negligent or otherwise at fault.

As a signatory of the World Anti-Doping Code (WADC), the IPC remains committed to a doping-free sporting environment at all levels. The IPC, together with the International Federations and the National Paralympic Committees, established the IPC Anti-Doping Code to prevent doping in sport for Paralympic athletes, in the spirit of fair play. The IPC Anti-Doping Code is in conformity with the general principles of the WADC.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

■ Managing Director: Mohammad Shojaeian
■ Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com

» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000

» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450

» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807

» Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603

» www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433

» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com

» Printed at: Jame Jam Barta Borna - 44197737

Tehrantimes79 Tehrantimesdaily

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.O. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713

GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Opposition wears out thought.

Imam Ali (AS)

Leev to restage “The Kitchen” in Tehran

A R T TEHRAN — A troupe from the Leev Theater Academy will perform British writer Arnold Wesker’s 1957 play “The Kitchen” at Tehran’s Shahrzad Theater on Saturday.

Leev CEO Hassan Majuni has previously directed the play for several times across Iran.

The troupe performed the play at Tehran’s Molavi Hall in October. It was also staged in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz during summer.



Members of the Leev Theater Academy perform Arnold Wesker’s “The Kitchen” at Tehran’s Paliz Theater in November 2016. (Theater.ir/Mehdi Ashena)

In addition, the play was staged at the Hamun Theater in the northern Iranian city of Rasht in winter 2018.

The academy also took the play on stage at Paliz Theater in Tehran during autumn 2016 and winter 2017.

“The Kitchen” was Wesker’s first work and is his most frequently performed play. It has been produced in sixty cities including Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, Paris — where it was the first widely recognized production by Théâtre du Soleil in 1967 — Moscow, Montreal and Zurich.

The play follows the staff in a café’s kitchen during the course of a busy morning.

British filmmaker James Hill made a screen adaptation of the play in 1961.

Amirhossein Bayat is the translator of the play, which will be on stage for about two months.

Iranian cultural official meets Indian researchers

C U L T U R E TEHRAN — Iran’s Deputy Culture Minister for Cultural Affairs Mohsen Javadi held a meeting with a group of Indian researchers at the Indian Council of Philosophical Research in New Delhi on Tuesday.



Iran’s Deputy Culture Minister for Cultural Affairs Mohsen Javadi and a number of Indian researchers at the Indian Council of Philosophical Research in New Delhi on January 7, 2020. (ICFR)

Javadi heads an Iranian cultural delegation visiting the 28th New Delhi World Book Fair, which will run until January 12, the Iran Cultural Fairs Institute (ICFI) announced on Wednesday.

Javadi gave a brief explanation about the differences between the morals in Western and Eastern societies. He also talked about the differences between the religion of Islam and those in India and stressed on cultural dialogue between Iran and India.

He said that the two countries enjoy cultural affinities and that is why Iran is seeking to expand relations with India.

The Iranian House of Writers director Niknam Hosseiniur, and Iran’s cultural attaché in New Delhi Mohammad-Ali Rabbani were also participating in the meeting.

Michael Moore asks Americans not to believe Trump’s lies about Iran

A R T TEHRAN — Oscar-winning American filmmaker Michael Moore has called on the people of the U.S. not to trust Trump’s lies about Iran and the assassination of Quds Force commander Lieutenant General Martyr Qassem Soleimani.

“Remember—everything you hear from Trump and his cronies about Iran, like everything else he says, is a lie,” he wrote in an Instagram post after Iranian missile strikes on U.S. targets in Iraq on Wednesday morning.

“Thankfully many in the media tonight are saying the same thing regarding his lies about this war,” he noted.

“I’m telling you, this Soleimani was planning no attack on America. It’s all made up by Trump,” the director of acclaimed documentaries “Bowling for Columbine” and “Fahrenheit 11/9” added.

He also pointed to the role of the U.S. in the devastating events in Iranian history including the 1953 coup and installing a dictator as the king of Iran as well as helping Saddam Hussein to invade Iran in 1980.

“It amazes me that Iran has never attacked this country, never bombed or blew up anything in our country, never killed Americans on this soil, never tried to destroy us — considering what we have done to them,” Moore wrote.

“The retaliation by Iran has begun. I pray that our sons and daughters in the armed forces are ok. I trust and expect that Iran will keep its promise and kill no American civilians,” he added.

Earlier on Monday, Moore published a



Director Michael Moore attends a press conference for his documentary “Capitalism: A Love Story” at Toshohall in Tokyo, Japan on November 30, 2009. (Getty Images/Kiyoshi Ota)

Persian post on Tweeter and Instagram, apologizing to Iranians on behalf of Americans.

He also asked Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani not to respond to the assassination of commander Soleimani with violence.

“Let me and millions of Americans fix this peacefully by voting Trump out of office or for the Senate to remove him from office,” he said.

Iran launches campaign against Instagram censorship of posts on Soleimani’s assassination



C U L T U R E TEHRAN — The Iran Digital Media Organization of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has announced that it has launched a campaign against Instagram over suspending dozens of Iranian accounts and deleting numerous Iranian users’ posts condemning the assassination of Quds Force chief Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani by the U.S. government.

“This decision proves again the one-sided current of spreading information and the new method of U.S. control over social networks heavily depending on the government, and shows that those who pretend they are supporters of freedom of information place no value on freedom and the rights of the social network users,” the organization said in a statement published on Tuesday.

The organization asked the Iranian Instagram users to join the campaign

on <https://www.farhang.gov.ir/fa/instagrammediaterror>.

The organization expressed hope that the campaign could help file a lawsuit against Instagram in an international court.

Following the assassination of Quds Force chief Lieutenant General Soleimani in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on last Friday, millions of Iranian individuals and organizations sent posts on social networks, including Instagram, condemning the assassination carried out by Trump’s order.

Afterwards, a large number of Iranian celebrities and cultural organizations announced that their Instagram posts on the assassination of Soleiman have been deleted or their accounts have been suspended.

In posts published on other social networks, the celebrities and cultural organizations have said that Instagram’s decision to suspend the accounts has violated their basic right to freedom of expression.

Iranian doc “Aqil” dedicated to Martyr Soleimani



A scene from Iranian director Behzad Sheikh’s documentary “Aqil”

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian director Behzad Sheikh has dedicated his latest documentary “Aqil” to Quds Force commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and the deputy commander of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who were assassinated in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on Friday.

The documentary had its premiere during the 10th Ammar Popular Film Festival in Tehran on Tuesday.

It tells the story of a young Iranian man name Aqil whose father asked in his will for one of his rings to be donated to the holy shrine of Imam Hussein (AS) in the Iraqi city of Karbala.

Aqil decides to take the ring to Karbala during the Arbaeen march, in which Iranians and Shia Muslims from other countries embark on a journey to Karbala to observe the day of Arbaeen, which marks the end of the 40-day mourning period following the martyrdom of the Imam and his loyal companions on Ashura.

“If we had not had great men such as martyrs Soleimani and Abu Mahdi, Iranians would never see great Shia gatherings such as the Arbaeen march, and consequently, the documentary would never have been made,” the film crew said in a statement before the screening of “Aqil”.

Amir-Hassan Khajavi is the producer of the documentary, which was filmed in Iran and Iraq.

The 10th Ammar Popular Film Festival will come to an end tonight.



A poster for a retrospective of calligraphic painter Mohammad Ehsai at Tehran’s Boom Gallery.

Tehran gallery to host retrospective of calligraphic painter Mohammad Ehsai

A R T TEHRAN — A retrospective renowned Iranian calligraphic painter Mohammad Ehsai will open at Tehran’s Boom Gallery on Friday.

A collection of artworks created over the past 40 years have been selected from the gallery’s treasure trove and the personal collection of the artist to be showcased at the exhibition, the gallery announced on Wednesday.

Born in 1939 in Qazvin, Ehsai is believed to be one of the pioneers of calligraphic painting in Iran. His artworks are world-famous and usually sell good at international auctions.

The exhibit will be running until March 6 at the gallery located at 11 Armaghaneh Alley, Vali-e Asr Ave. near Niayesh Highway.

Dark drama “Joker” leads BAFTA nominations with 11 nods

L O N D O N (Reuters) — “Joker”, a dark origins story about the comic book villain, led nominations for the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) awards on Tuesday, but Britain’s top movie honors drew criticism over the lack of diversity in the acting categories.

Netflix film “The Irishman”, a star-studded gangster drama directed by Martin Scorsese and Quentin Tarantino’s “Once Upon a Time in Hollywood”, which won the best comedy/musical Golden Globe on Sunday, got 10 nominations each.

Also fresh from its triumph at the Golden Globes - where it picked up best drama and best director for Sam Mendes - immersive World War

One drama “1917” received nine nominations.

The four movies will compete against South Korean director Bong Joon-ho’s darkly comic “Parasite” for best film at the Feb. 2 awards in London as well as for best director.

“Joker”, directed by Todd Phillips, won the Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival and a Golden Globe acting prize for Joaquin Phoenix, who has received critical acclaim for his transformation from vulnerable loner into confident villain in the movie. Phoenix got a BAFTA leading actor nod.

He will compete against Leonardo DiCaprio in “Once Upon a Time in Hollywood”, Adam Driver for Netflix divorce drama “Marriage Story”, Golden Globe winner Taron Egerton

in Elton John musical biopic “Rocketman” and Jonathan Pryce in papal drama “The Two Popes”.

However, soon after BAFTA announced the acting contenders, online critics lamented the lack of diversity, using the hashtag #BaftasSoWhite on social media.

The leading actress list featured Scarlett Johansson for “Marriage Story”, Saoirse Ronan for the latest adaptation of “Little Women”, Charlize Theron for “Bombshell”, a drama about sexual harassment allegations at Fox News, Jessie Buckley for musical drama “Wild Rose” and Renee Zellweger for “Judy”.

Johansson was also nominated as supporting actress for “Jojo Rabbit”, a comic satire set during World War Two which in

total got six nominations.

She faces competition from “Marriage Story” co-star Laura Dern, Florence Pugh for “Little Women” and twice-nominated Robbie for “Bombshell” and “Once Upon a Time in Hollywood”.

Nominees for supporting actor were Al Pacino and Joe Pesci for “The Irishman”, Tom Hanks for “A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood”, Anthony Hopkins for “The Two Popes” and Brad Pitt for “Once Upon a Time in Hollywood”.

Asked about the acting categories “seem(ing) very white”, BAFTA Chief Executive Amanda Berry told BBC Radio 4’s “Today” program: “I’m going to totally agree with you. That’s how I felt when I first saw the list.”