



**Zarif meets
Oman's new sultan
in Muscat** **3**



**Majlis voices
unwavering support
for IRGC** **3**



**Iranian-made ALS
medicine saves \$42,000
per patient annually** **9**



**Iranian strike on U.S.
bases in Iraq only first
part of response** **10**

U.S., friends responsible for volatility in the region

Qatar's Emir calls for comprehensive regional dialogue



See page 2

British ambassador to Tehran summoned to Foreign Ministry

TEHRAN — British Ambassador Rob Macaire, who was arrested briefly by Iran during demonstrations in Tehran on Saturday afternoon, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry on Sunday afternoon.

The British ambassador was summoned for his "unconventional behavior and presence" in the illegal gatherings, the Foreign Ministry said.

The ministry said he was summoned

to hear Iran's official protest to him and the British government.

The British diplomat was reminded that his presence in illegal gatherings has no conformity with his responsibility as his country's political representative in Iran and that his behavior is in contrast to the 1961 Vienna convention on diplomatic relationship, the ministry said.

It added the British government should provide answers in this regard. **→2**

Iran had no intention to hide causes of plane crash: Shamkhani

TEHRAN — Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said on Sunday that Iran had no intention to hide causes of the Ukrainian plane crash on Wednesday.

"From the beginning of the crash, we had no intention to hide its causes," he said during a memorial service for two victims of the crash.

It took time to announce the causes due to necessity to investigate all hypotheses, especially "possible actions of the enemies in jamming", "hack of the systems" and "the issue of infiltration", explained Shamkhani who served as defense minister in the Khatami administration from 1997 to 2005. **→2**

KRG supports Baghdad's decision on U.S. troop pullout from Iraq

The president of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region, Nechirvan Barzani, says the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) supports a decision made by the central government in Baghdad concerning the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from the country.

Speaking in a meeting with Iraq's caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi in Erbil on Saturday, Barzani highlighted that the KRG throws its weight behind

any decision taken by Baghdad, and that Kurdish officials back the resolution passed by Iraqi lawmakers that calls for the expulsion of foreign forces.

The Iraqi MPs approved the resolution after the United States assassinated 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). **→10**



EDITORIAL
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Trump's terrorist act to derail public opinion

By his wrong calculations, Trump committed a terrorist act against two senior Iranian and Iraqi military officials, and faced the U.S. with another serious challenge.

There are several points regarding the recent terrorist attack that led to the martyrdom of Commander Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes, including the timing of the U.S. presidential election and Trump's unfavorable conditions in the domestic arena.

Analyzing Western and Arab media, we come to the conclusion that the U.S. president's terrorist act was purely due to his personal reasons. Since taking office in the White House, Trump has been heavily involved in various issues and cases against himself that have caused a crisis of domestic legitimacy for him and the government.

Some of the cases against the U.S. president are as follows:

The tax evasion case: with some tricks and tax fraud techniques, Trump has been able to multiply the inheritance and wealth left by his father. According to reports, the current U.S. president, along with his brothers and sisters, has hidden millions of dollars of his father's wealth by founding a fake company and has not paid his tax.

The moral corruption case: the case was stated against Trump since the 2016 election, with many people complaining to courts and informing media that they have been sexually harassed by Trump.

According to the reports by Western and American media, many people who have been sexually harassed by Trump were paid hush-money by his lawyers during the 2016 presidential campaign to drop their complaints.

The impeachment case: Trump is the third U.S. president to be impeached among 45 presidents in the country's history.

The House of Representatives reviewed the Trump impeachment inquiry on December 19, 2018 and approved both of the charges of "abuse of power" and "disruption to the investigation process", then submitted the case to the Senate. **→7**

Who is the new Sultan of Oman?

By Farzad Farhadi

TEHRAN — Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimur sworn in as the ninth Sultan of Oman. Haitham bin Tariq was born in 1954 and in some cases served as special envoy to the late sultan Qaboos Bin Saeed.

The new sultan is the cousin of the late sultan and his genealogy goes back to one of the oldest Arab families ruled in the country. He graduated from the Oxford University Foreign Service Program in 1979. The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Political Affairs was among his other executive positions. He was sent to the Arab League Summit in Jordan as Oman's representative during his last mission.

He has previously held various positions, in-

cluding the Chairman of the committee for the future vision of "Oman 2040" and the Minister of Heritage and Culture from February 2002 to January 2020. Haitham bin Tariq also held several posts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such as the secretary general and the deputy foreign minister for political affairs. He was the first head of the Oman Football Association from 1983 to 1986.

Unlike the late Sultan of Oman, who had no children, Haitham bin Tariq has four children.

The new sultan was named after request by the Defense Council to appoint Qaboos bin Said's successor.

A few weeks earlier and following the heightened speculations over the worsening physical conditions of Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Guardian

newspaper released a report on his successor. According to the newspaper, when the physical conditions of the late sultan worsened, he had secretly named his preferred successor in a sealed envelope and submitted it to the royal family council.

The succession process involves the opening of sealed letters in the court in Muscat identifying the sultan's choice of successor, if the court cannot agree among itself.

Qaboos has no children and has not publicly appointed a successor but he secretly recorded his choice in a sealed envelope addressed to the royal family council.

The name of the most important successors of the late sultan was also published earlier. **→7**

Trump repeats Syria intention: U.S. troops are taking the oil

U.S. President Donald Trump has once again revealed his intention to take possession of Syrian oil in what is seen by experts as a move that would amount to a war crime.

Defending his decision to leave some American troops in the war-torn country, Trump told Fox News Friday night that "they say he left troops in Syria... do you know what I did? I took the oil."

"The only troops I have are taking the oil, they are protecting the oil," Trump said, prompting the interviewer, Laura Ingraham, to try to correct him by saying the soldiers were there to guard the facilities. But the president cut her off.

"I don't know, maybe we should take it, but we have the oil. Right now, the United States

has the oil. We have the oil."

Trump has before too publicly mused about stealing Syria's oil reserves.

In October, after ordering the withdrawal of American forces from Syria, Trump said he wanted a U.S. oil firm to go to the Arab country to tap its oil.

"What I intend to do, perhaps, is make a deal with an ExxonMobil or one of our great companies to go in there and do it properly," he said back then.

In a major U-turn in the U.S. military policy, the White House announced on October 6 that the U.S. would be withdrawing its forces from northeastern Syria, clearing the path for an expected Turkish incursion into the region.



Iran volleyball qualify for Tokyo 2020

TEHRAN — Iran eased past China in straight sets (25-14, 25-22, 25-14) on Sunday at the AVC Men's Tokyo Volleyball Qualification tournament to book a place at the 2020 Olympic Games as the best Asian team.

Iran's Mohammad Mousavi scored a match-high 16 points and Chuan Jiang scored 13 points for China.

It was a rematch between two Asian giants since Iran had defeated China 3-0 in Pool A on Thursday.

"I am so happy my players played very nice volleyball, they deserved to represent Asia to play in the Olympics," Iran coach Igor Kolakovich said after the match. **→11**



ARTICLE
Martin Love
Political analyst from
North Carolina

Protesters in Iran may be bolstering U.S. imperialism

From afar it can be upsetting to hear about protests at some universities in Iran, allegedly spawned by anger over the unintentional downing of the commercial aircraft near Tehran. One can understand the anger over the horrible accident of mistaken identity, but let's get real about this tragic event.

The most important to say is that if anyone blames the U.S. for the accident, they most definitely are not alone. In fact, even a candidate for the White House in November, Tulsi Gabbard, a U.S. House representative from Hawaii and a veteran who has consistently opposed U.S. "wars of choice", has stated that ultimate blame must be placed on the U.S. She is not alone in Congress, as if to say, if Qassem Soleimani and others had not been assassinated, the aircraft would never have been hit by a rocket because a rocket would never have been fired. Which is true.

Iran's military would not have been in such a heightened state of alert over possible attacks by U.S. cruise missiles or whatever. That Iran was in such a hair-trigger state of alert says something quite positive about Iran's defenses, except that someone apparently made a grievous error and mistook the airliner for a foreign intrusion near Tehran. In wars or near wars, mistakes are legion. It's just terribly unfortunate THIS mistake occurred, especially after Iran had so carefully calibrated its superb initial response to the U.S. murders in Iraq. It is even possible the radar "signature" of the Ukrainian airliner might have been altered to appear as something different: the Israelis or the U.S. have the technology to do this, it has been suggested.

Protests, simply that they happen, are a healthy sign that a society that has not become so repressive and totalitarian that citizens are cowed by state power and don't express themselves. Anyone who was around and young during the Vietnam War, and also possibly subject to the military draft, engaged in massive protests and demonstrations against that war, and this was all to the good for they were a major factor in ending that monstrous bout of imperialism. **→7**

U.S. must leave Iraq: ex-diplomat

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Hassan Danaeefar, the former d e s k Iranian ambassador to Iraq, has said it is essential that the United States leave Iraq now that the Iraqi parliament has voted to expel American forces from the country. The Iraqi people have the experience of fighting the U.S. occupation, the ambassador said, predicting the Iraqis will rise against U.S. forces if they refuse to leave the country.



“So, if the occupant does not respect the Iraqis’ approval, they [the Iraqis] will fight them,” he told Tasnim news agency in an interview published by Sunday.

He noted that if the U.S. refuses to leave, Iraq can file complaint in international courts.

The Iraqi Parliament voted on January 5 to expel the U.S. troops from Iraq.

The session came two days after a U.S. drone strike on a convoy at Baghdad airport which killed Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani

and Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) deputy chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The U.S. invaded Iraq in March 2003 under the false claim that the country was hiding weapons of mass destruction. The invasion took place despite repeated confirmations by international bodies, including the UN’s International Atomic Energy Agency, that Iraq did not have any secret weapons program.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi, Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations, has said that the U.S. must leave the region, noting that the U.S. is unwelcome in the region.

“Iraq and the region are dissatisfied with the presence of the United States, and the United States must respect the Iraqi parliament’s approval to end the United States’ military presence,” IRNA quoted him as saying on Saturday in an interview with Aljazeera.

He said the Iraqi parliament’s approval is the result of more than 17 years of the U.S. occupation of the country.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday that the U.S. “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,” the Leader said during a speech in Qom.

Iran had no intention to hide causes of Ukrainian plane crash: Shamkhani

1 → He also expressed sympathy with the families of the victims.

The passenger plane, with 176 people aboard, was mistakenly downed on Wednesday morning by the IRGC air defense system. It happened a few hours after Iran fired dozens of missiles at the U.S. airbase inside Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of Iranian Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3.

The victims of the crash included 82 Iranians, 63 Canadians, 11 Ukrainians, 10 Swedes, four Afghans, three Germans, and three British nationals.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani spoke via phone Saturday about the Ukrainian passenger jet, according to a readout of the phone call from the Canadian government.

According to CNN, Rouhani expressed “profound regret for the shooting down of the aircraft by the Iranian military.”

Trudeau insisted on the need for a complete and thorough investigation, saying Canada was ready to deploy air safety experts to facilitate black box examination and DNA specialists to assist with victim identification and the return of remains to Canada.

Trudeau and Rouhani agreed “on the importance of de-escalation and dialogue to reduce tensions and promote stability in the region.” Trudeau said the incident is “an example of how heightened tensions can have tragic consequences for innocent civilians.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Saturday that Iran pleaded guilty to shooting down the plane even before completion of international commission’s work.

Ukraine International Airlines said in a statement that the plane was a Boeing 737-800 NG, “built in 2016 and delivered directly to the airline from the manufacturer.”

British ambassador to Tehran summoned to Foreign Ministry

1 → Ambassador Macaire was accused of “inciting” the protesters in front of Amir Kabir University.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araghchi said Ambassador Macaire was temporarily arrested for participating in the “illegal gathering” in Tehran.

“He wasn’t detained but arrested as an unknown foreigner in an illegal gathering. When police informed me a man’s arrested who claims to be UK Amb, I said IMPOSSIBLE! only after my phone conversation w him I identified, out of big surprise, that it’s him. 15 min later he was free,” Araghchi tweeted on Sunday.

The comments came in response to a recent tweet by head of European Union foreign policy Josep Borrell who expressed concerns over the envoy’s “temporary detention”.

“Very concerned about the temporary detention of the UK Ambassador @HMATehran in Iran. Full respect of the Vienna convention is a must. The EU calls for de-escalation and space for diplomacy,” Borrell wrote.

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, a member of the Iranian Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said on Sunday that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must make the arrangements to expel the British ambassador, the Tasnim news agency reported.

On Saturday, a group of students had gathered inside the university to voice their protest after Iran officially announced the downing of a Ukrainian passenger plane by mistake on Wednesday morning.

The Armed Force General Staff said the air defense unintentionally shot down the passenger plane amid the highest level of readiness because of a possible military strike by the U.S.

Iran has said those responsible for this “disaster” will be brought to justice.

Leader holds U.S. and its friends responsible for volatile situation in the region

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Leader of d e s k the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei held talks late on Sunday with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani who made a one-day trip to Iran.

At the meeting which President Hassan Rouhani was also present, the Leader said the current volatile situation in the region entails more strengthening of relations between regional countries and also the need not to be influenced by foreigners.

Ayatollah Khamenei said Iran is wholeheartedly seeking closer ties with countries in the region.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly announced and Mr. President has also clearly said that Iran is ready for closer cooperation with the countries of the region.”

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei went on to say that the United States and its friends are first and foremost responsible for the volatile situation in the region.

“The reason for this corruptive situation is America and his friends and the only way to counter it is reliance on intra-regional cooperation,” the Leader noted.

The Leader also praised the good political relationship between Iran and Qatar, suggesting economic cooperation in parallel with political interactions.

“Economic relations of the two countries is not at the level of political relations, and cooperation between Iran and Qatar should develop in all areas more than ever,” Ayatollah Khamenei suggested.

Of course, the Leader added, certain countries which have come to the region from other parts of the world do not like to see development of ties between regional countries but this is not their business and that regional countries and nations do not accept orders and interferences by foreigners.



■ Qatar’s Emir calls for comprehensive regional dialogue

For his part, the Qatari Emir expressed happiness over the meeting with the Leader and backed the statement by Ayatollah Khamenei on the need to develop regional cooperation.

“We fully agree with Your Excellency’s remarks about the need to increase regional cooperation and believe that comprehensive dialogue should take place between regional countries.

The Qatari ruler also pointed to his talks with the Iranian officials in Tehran, saying it was agreed that the joint commission of the

two countries be held in Tehran within the next three months and “we hope that economic relations grow to the level of political ties.”

He also thanked Iran for its support and aid to Qatar when it was under sanctions.

In June of 2017, Saudi Arabia along with Bahrain, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) abruptly cut off diplomatic relations with Qatar and closed land, sea and air routes to the country. The severing of relations also included withdrawing ambassadors and imposing trade and travel bans on Doha.

The Islamic Republic rushed to the help of Qatar and opened its airspace to about 100

Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim says Iran is an influential country in the region and any security cooperation without Iran’s involvement has no value.

First video from U.S. base in Iraq describes alarm, massive impact

(Press TV) — CNN has taken the first tour of the American Ain al-Asad air base in Iraq, which was hit by Iran’s missile strike in retaliation for the U.S. assassination of senior commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

It showed ruined remains of the living and sleeping quarters, saying there was a fire that ended up raging those sites.

“It’s clear that Iran wasn’t that concerned with trying to save U.S. lives. A lot of these impacts did happen in places where they could potentially have caused significant U.S. casualties,” CNN reported.

It said Iran’s attack lasted around two hours, only targeting the U.S. areas of Ain al-Assad, which comprise around a quarter of the facility situated in Iraq’s western Anbar Province.

The first strike hit at 1:34 a.m. local time and after a brief pause of around 15 minutes, the next volley began, according to the report. Two more volleys of missiles followed over the next two hours.

U.S. Lieutenant Colonel Staci Colemsan claimed that

American personnel had sheltered in bunkers before the missile strike due to advanced warnings.

In the early hours of Wednesday, Iran launched several missiles at Ain al-Assad and another American military base in Kurdistan’s regional capital, Erbil, in revenge for the U.S. terrorist act of assassinating General Soleimani and his companions in Baghdad.

None of the missiles were intercepted and they hit their targets precisely despite a high level of readiness in U.S. bases across the region in the wake of Iran’s pledge to take revenge for the targeted killings.

Hours after the attack, President Donald Trump claimed that U.S. forces had “suffered no casualties, all of our soldiers were safe and only minimal damage was sustained.”

The Al Mayadeen TV channel, however, reported that the Americans had prevented Iraqi soldiers and intelligence forces from approaching the targeted air base.

Iraqi lawmaker Naim al-Aboudi told the channel that the American-run section of Ain al-Asad had been com-

pletely demolished in Iran’s missile strike.

Another Iraqi MP, Hassan Salem told the Al Forat TV network, that Iran’s missile attack was like an earthquake that inflicted damage on the U.S. base and caused fatalities among the American service members deployed there.

The casualties had been transferred to Tel Aviv, he added.

The lawmaker further called on the U.S. to let Iraqi intelligence services and media personnel into the base to inspect the damage for themselves and find out the truth about the aftermath of the Iranian raid.

Speaking on Thursday, head of the Aerospace Division of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said dozens of U.S. troops had been killed and injured in Iran’s operation.

Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh said after the attack, the U.S. military had conducted at least nine sorties of C-130 flights taking the wounded to Jordan and Israel while Chinook helicopters transferred the injured to the U.S. hospital in Baghdad.

Rouhani and Canadian PM hold phone talks on the ill-fated Ukrainian plane

Iran welcomes international cooperation in the probe into the plane crash

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — President d e s k Hassan Rouhani and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau held a phone conversation on Saturday evening on the unintentional downing of a Ukrainian passenger plan near Tehran on Wednesday morning.

Rouhani said Iran welcomes international assistance in the probe into the downing of the Ukrainian plane with 176 people aboard including 63 Canadians.

“Iran welcomes any international cooperation within the framework of international law to precisely shed light on this incident, and will provide all consular facilities to that end, and we are ready for the continuation of talks between the foreign ministers of Iran and Canada in this regard,” Rouhani told Trudeau.

“So far fruitful investigations have been conducted to find the reasons for this incident, and rapid, careful and complementary examinations are also underway until reaching the final result,” Rouhani explained.

The United States is considered the chief culprit in the repeated tragic incidents that happen one after another. The latest one was the tragic downing of the Ukrainian jetliner. U.S. President Donald Trump’s erratic and hot-headed behavior first started by abrogating the 2015 nuclear deal, imposing the harshest ever sanctions in history against Iran to the assassination of top Iranian military Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3.

To respond to the U.S. act of war, on January 8 Iran fired missiles at a U.S. military base in Iraq from which U.S. drones had been flown to kill the Iranian general. Since the armed forces had been put on the highest level of alert during the missile attack, the air defense base near Tehran had mistaken the Ukrainian plane for a cruise missile by

the enemy.

In his talks with the Canadian prime minister, Rouhani said the security situation in the delicate Middle East region has reached a “dangerous” point because of the U.S. behavior and suggested that “we all must make efforts to return full stability and security to the region.”

■ **“Heightened tensions can have tragic consequences for innocent civilians”**

According to a readout of the phone call from the Canadian government, Rouhani expressed “profound regret for the shooting down of the aircraft by the Iranian military.”

Trudeau insisted on the need for a complete and thorough investigation, saying Canada was ready to deploy air safety experts to facilitate black box examination and DNA specialists to assist with victim identification and the return of remains to Canada.

Trudeau and Rouhani agreed “on the importance of de-escalation and dialogue to reduce tensions and promote stability in the region.” Trudeau said the incident is “an example of how heightened tensions can have tragic consequences for innocent civilians.”

Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the commander the IRGC aerospace unit, told a press conference on Saturday that the operator of the air defense base near Tehran had mistaken the jetliner with a cruise missile.

Iran has taken full responsibility for the mistake and apologized to all families and the countries that have been affected by this tragedy.

“Our profound regrets, apologies, and condolences to our people, to the families of all victims, and to other affected nations,” Zarif tweeted on Saturday.

Zarif added, “Human error at time of crisis caused by U.S. adventurism led to disaster.”

Putin, Merkel agree nuclear deal should be kept by all means



By staff and agency

Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have agreed that preserving the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, is a matter of “tremendous importance” and should be kept by all means necessary.

During a joint press conference in Moscow on Saturday, Merkel said that “everything must be done to keep the JCPOA going” and vowed to use “all the diplomatic tools to help this agreement.”

According to RT, Putin described the deal as “tremendously important” and said that both Moscow and Berlin agree that all parties need to “come back to the deal.”

Putin further expressed hope that a special-purpose vehicle called INSTEX, created to facilitate trade with Iran and circumvent U.S. sanctions, would soon “be up and running” and that European nations “would deliver on their promise to create an independent mechanism free of the dollar influence.”

The European Union has established INSTEX to continue trade with Iran without suffering from U.S. sanctions, however, the mechanism is yet to be operationalized.

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

Under the JCPOA, Iran promised to put

more Qatari flights a day during the blockade.

■ **Iran will stand beside Qatar, Rouhani says**

President also said on Sunday that Iran has stood and will stand beside Qatar in the future.

“At a juncture of time, certain regional countries imposed restrictions on Qatar, but Iran stood beside Qatar and will stand based on its duties as a neighbor,” Rouhani said during a joint press conference with the Qatari Emir.

Rouhani said that the two countries have very good relationship in various areas of economy, science and culture.

“A joint commission will be formed in future months and we hope that the two countries would reach agreements in economic cooperation, investment, technology and other areas,” the president stated.

He also said that Iran and Qatar will expand political ties.

For his part, the Qatari Emir said that Doha will never forget Tehran’s help in difficult days.

“We praise the Islamic Republic of Iran’s stance in recent years, especially when Qatar was under blockade,” the Emir said.

Sheikh Tamim also called for expansion of relations.

■ **Rouhani accepts Sheikh Tamim’s invitation to visit Qatar**

In a meeting of top Iranian and Qatari delegations, Rouhani accepted Sheikh Tamim’s invitation to visit Qatar.

Rouhani said that Qatar is a brotherly and friendly country and called for expansion of economic and naval cooperation.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran have held consultations with Qatar which should be continued,” he said.

Sheikh Tamim said that Iran is an influential country in the region and any security cooperation without Iran’s participation has no value.

Majlis voices unwavering support for IRGC

Lawmakers condole families of plane crash victims

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iranian lawmakers have issued a statement to extend their condolences to families of the victims of a Ukrainian plane, which was accidentally shot down by the IRGC Aerospace Force on Wednesday.

Ahmad Amirabadi read out the statement during an open session of the parliament on Sunday. The statement was backed by 186 members of the parliament, according to ISNA.

The MPs said that Iran's revenge against the U.S. for the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, which was demanded by millions of proud Iranian nationals, astonished the world and showed the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' bravery, power, and tactfulness.

The sweetness of this great victory for the Iranian nation ended as soon as the news of the downing of the Ukrainian plane came out, they said.

"We deeply sympathize with the families of the honorable martyrs and we share their grief," the lawmakers remarked.

They also asked the "noble people of Iran" to attend the martyrs' funeral.

In the statement, the MPs also thanked Soleimani's comrades-in-arms in the IRGC for admitting their mistake with honesty.

"Our strong and overwhelming support for the IRGC is eternal," they asserted.

■ IRGC chief responds to MPs' questions

Also on Sunday, Chief of the IRGC Major



General Hossein Salami attended a close session of the parliament to respond to the lawmakers' questions.

During the session, recent incidents including the assassination of General Soleimani, Iran's military attack on U.S. military bases in Iraq and the downing of the Ukrainian airplane were discussed.

All 176 crew members and passengers, 147 of whom were Iranians, died in the Ukraine International Airlines (UIA) crash which came

a few minutes after take-off from Tehran to Kiev on Wednesday.

The General Staff of the Armed Forces issued a statement on Saturday saying that the Ukrainian plane crash was caused by a "human error".

"The Ukrainian passenger plane was hit unintentionally and due to humane error, which unfortunately led to the martyrdom of a number of our people and also a number of foreign nationals," the statement read.

Foreign Ministry forms special working group to ease consular affairs for plane crash victims



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — A special working group has been established by the Foreign Ministry to facilitate consular affairs for the victims of the Ukrainian passenger plane that was shot down mistakenly by Iran's air defense system on Wednesday morning, the ministry spokesman announced on Sunday.

Abbas Mousavi said the working group is to immediately handle consular affairs and deal with the requests of the victims' families.

He further said that all the political and consular missions have been ordered to carefully deal with the requests of the victims' families.

On Saturday morning, the Armed Forces General Staff released a statement announcing "human error" led to the downing of the Ukrainian passenger plane near Tehran's Imam Khomeini Airport. All 176 people on board lost their lives.

The victims of the plane crash included 82 Iranians, 63 Canadians, 11 Ukrainians, 10 Swedes, four Afghans, three Germans, and three Britons.

The incident happened a few hours after Iran fired dozens of ballistic missiles at a U.S. airbase inside Iraq in retaliation for assassination of top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani on January 3.

Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the

Aerospace Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), told a press conference on Saturday that the operator of the air defense base near Tehran mistook the doomed jetliner with a cruise missile.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei on Saturday expressed deep condolences to the bereaved families, urging the Armed Forces General Staff to launch investigations into the downing of the plane.

Ayatollah Khamenei ordered the Armed Forces General Staff to probe possible failures and shortcoming that led to such a "painful" incident.

The Leader asked relevant officials to devise a mechanism to prevent such incidents in the future.

Also, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif expressed apologies and condolences to all who were affected by the tragic plane crash, blaming the U.S. adventurism for disaster.

"Preliminary conclusions of internal investigation by Armed Forces: Human error at time of crisis caused by US adventurism led to disaster," Zarif tweeted on Saturday.

"Our profound regrets, apologies, and condolences to our people, to the families of all victims, and to other affected nations," Zarif added.

U.S. tried but failed to assassinate another Iranian commander: reports



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — U.S. military reportedly carried out a failed attack against another Iranian commander in Yemen on the same day that it assassinated Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and other Iranian and Iraqi military officers in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad.

The Washington Post and other U.S.-based news outlets quoted anonymous American officials on Friday, saying that the unsuccessful U.S. attack in Yemen targeted Abdul Reza Shahlaei, identifying him as a "top military commander for Iran's Quds Force" based in Yemen.

According to the New York Times, the Trump administration had offered a \$15 million reward for information about Shahlaei, also accusing him of involvement in a shadowy and unsubstantiated plot in 2011 to kill the Saudi ambassador to Washington.

The reports also said that the second attack by the American forces would raise questions on whether the assassination of Soleimani was part of the Trump administration's bid to take down the leadership of Iran's IRGC Quds Force or prevent what the White House has claimed as "an imminent attack on Americans" by Iranians.

It comes as U.S. lawmakers have strongly criticized the rationale offered by the

"Following threats made by the U.S. President [Donald Trump] and military commanders of attacking targets on the soil of the Islamic Republic of Iran in case of Iran's retaliatory operation, and due to unprecedented increase in movements in the region's airspace, Iranian armed forces were at the utmost level of readiness and alert," it added.

It came in the aftermath of a Trump-ordered U.S. attack at Baghdad's airport on January 3 that killed top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani.

On January 4, Trump tweeted that if Iran attacks any American assets to avenge the killing of Qassem Soleimani, the U.S. has 52 targets across the Islamic Republic that "WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD."

"Let this serve as a WARNING that if Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets, we have.....targeted 52 Iranian sites (representing the 52 American hostages taken by Iran many years ago), some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD," Trump said. "The USA wants no more threats!"

Nevertheless, Iran took revenge for the assassination in the early hours of Wednesday by conducting the Shahid (Martyr) Soleimani Operation against the Ain al-Assad base in Iraq with tens of surface-to-surface missiles.

Trump administration's security team for launching the attack against Soleimani.

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tried to dodge a question on Friday morning inquiring about the specifics of the "imminent attack" claim and other contradictory official statements, which American legislators have dismissed as "insufficient" and unconvincing.

On Thursday, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution to forbid Trump from ordering further military action against Iran, though the vote was largely symbolic and done mostly along party lines.

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

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.

It came days after the United States assassinated Soleimani in an airstrike in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad.

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

(in 2003), the worst crime of this millennium," Chomsky said.

The United States assassinated Soleimani, Iran's top anti-terror commander, and his comrades-in-arms in an airstrike in Baghdad on January 3.

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 more than ten missiles.

Iran had vowed to take "tough revenge" for Soleimani's blood.

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

Zarif meets Oman's new sultan in Muscat

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has met with Oman's new sultan, Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, in Oman's capital Muscat.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Zarif arrived in Muscat on Sunday morning to attend the commemoration ceremony of Sultan Qaboos, the late Omani ruler.

Zarif met Haitham bin Tariq on the sidelines of the ceremony, where the two sides discussed issues of mutual interests, Tasnim reported.



The chief Iranian diplomat offered his condolences over the demise of Sultan Qaboos.

He voiced Iran's readiness to boost and deepen its relations with Oman in all areas.

Sultan Qaboos's death was announced by the official Oman News Agency. The announcement did not mention the cause, but Qaboos had been receiving treatment in Europe for cancer since at least 2014.

He was the Middle East's longest-ruling monarch who transformed his Persian Gulf kingdom from an isolated enclave into a developed nation known for brokering quiet talks between global foes.

In a tweet on Saturday, Zarif expressed his condolence to the Omani government and people over his demise.

In his Arabic-language tweet, Zarif said, "Sultan Qaboos' demise is a great loss for the region."

Iran downplays fresh U.S. sanctions

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi on Saturday condemned the new U.S. sanctions on Iran, saying sanctions on senior Iranian officials as well as metal industries will bring nothing for Washington.

"The American regime will finally be forced to accept its failure," Mousavi said.

He went on to say that sanctions are a clear violation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that endorsed the 2015 nuclear deal.



"Unfortunately, the Americans have adopted unilateral, illegal and fruitless behaviors and are stressing to repeat them," he added.

The Trump administration imposed more sanctions on Iran on Friday in response to Iran's missile attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq on January 8. Iran's missile attacks were in response to the U.S. assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC Quds Force in Baghdad on January 3.

The U.S. introduced sanctions on Iran's metal industries and eight senior military and national security officials who the U.S. said were involved in the ballistic missile attack on the U.S. air base in western Iraq. Among them were the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, the armed forces deputy chief of staff and the commander of the Basij.

Iran sets up 24/7 hotline to help bereaved families of Ukrainian plane victims

TEHRAN (FNA) — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif announced on Sunday that a round-the-clock hotline has been established by the ministry to offer service to the bereaved families of the Ukrainian passenger plane which was inadvertently downed on Wednesday.

"As part of practical measures to assist families of the victims of #PS752 tragic disaster, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has set up a hotline. It is manned 24/7," Zarif announced in a tweet on his official Twitter page today.

The top diplomat also added that the Iranian embassies around the world have been instructed to facilitate assistance to the families and friends of the victims.

Late on Saturday, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi said that a special workgroup will take charge of the consular affairs of those killed in the Ukrainian passenger plane incident near Tehran.

"A working group was set up in the foreign ministry's department for parliamentary affairs upon order by President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to immediately handle consular affairs of the dead people in the incident and deal with the requests of the victims' families," Mousavi said.

The Iranian foreign ministry spokesman said that all the political and consular missions have been ordered to deal with the requests of the families of the victims of the passenger plane crash.

"The Iranian Foreign Ministry considers itself partner to the sorrows of those affected by the accident," Mousavi noted while expressing the hope that the small services would relieve an iota of the impacts of the incident.

Soleimani assassination is at least international terrorism, says Chomsky

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Renowned American scholar Noam Chomsky believes the assassination of Iran's top general Qassem Soleimani is at least an act of international terrorism.

"It (Soleimani's assassination) is at least international terrorism, arguably worse," Chomsky told the Hindustan Times.

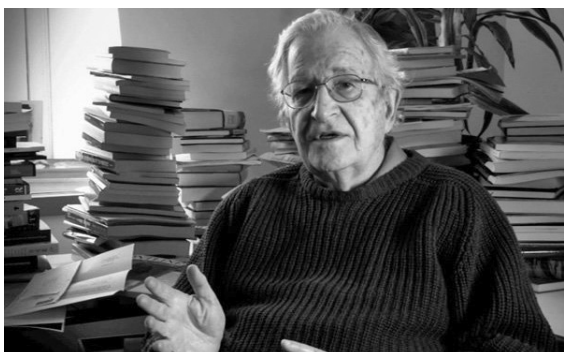
He was responding to a question on Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif who described Soleimani's killing by a U.S. drone strike as an instance of "international terrorism".

After the U.S. killed the IRGC Quds Force chief in a drone attack in Baghdad on January 3, Zarif tweeted, "The US' act of international terrorism, targeting & assassinating General Soleimani... is extremely dangerous & a foolish escalation. The US bears responsibility for all consequences of its rogue adventurism."

Chomsky suggested that Soleimani's killing is a violation of international law.

He pointed out, "International law is quite explicit on these matters. It bars the threat or use of force in international affairs, with narrow exceptions that plainly do not apply here (in the case of Soleimani's death)."

Chomsky also feels that there is no sign that the U.S. military's domination in West Asia will diminish over the



coming weeks and months.

U.S. military presence in the region hasn't diminished "from the norm over the years and I see little reason to expect it to. All unpredictable. Depends on how matters develop", he said.

However, he argued that the domination of American military power in the region is now much less compared with what it was in 2003.

"It is diminishing from the peak during the invasion of Iraq

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	375650.2
IFX	4894.25

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,687 rials
GBP	54,868 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$64.98/b
WTI	\$59.04/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.26/b
Gold	\$1,564.10/oz
Silver	\$18.18/oz
Platinum	\$983.65/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Stock market witnessing growth

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — After climbing on Saturday, the main indexes of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) and Iran over-the-counter (OTC) market known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB) witnessed growth also on Sunday.

TEDPIX, the main index of TSE, rose 1,842 points to 375,650, IRNA reported.



As reported, 5.336 billion securities valued at 29.369 trillion rials (about \$699.2 million) were traded at this market.

Meanwhile, IFX, the main index of IFB, jumped 248 points to 4,894, as 1.687 billion securities worth 15.073 trillion rials (about \$358.8 million) were traded at the OTC market on Sunday.

MIDEX 2020 to showcase Iran’s architecture, interior design industry

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The 10th edition of Iran’s International Exhibition of Architecture, Interior Design, and Modern House (Midex 2020) will be hosting 220 foreign and Iranian companies during January 14-17 at the Tehran Permanente International Fairground.

According to the organizers, the exhibition will bring together 212 domestic companies and eight foreign exhibitors from Germany, South Korea, Italy, Belgium, France and China for presenting their latest achievements, products and services, Public Relations Department of Iran International Exhibitions Company reported.

As reported, in addition to private companies, some government organizations and agencies will also present their capabilities in various areas of architectural and interior design and decoration, as well as their latest achievements and productions in the fields of nanotechnology and biotechnology, in this year’s exhibition.

The exhibition is going to feature a variety of products and services like prefabricated houses, lighting equipment, outdoor furniture and equipment, interior decoration, curtains, wallpapers, decorative coatings, decorative accessories, sports furniture and entertainment, electronics including remote control systems, as well as building safety systems, material filtration systems and etc.

Malaysia’s economy likely to better this year, says minister

Malaysia’s economy is expected to do better in 2020 as the manufacturing sector’s purchasing managers index for December 2019 rose to a 15-month high, Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng said.

The PMI rose 0.5 to 50.0 points in December 2019, the highest reading in 15 months, Lim said.

This came after the November 2019 PMI improved by 0.2 to 49.5 points from 49.3 points in October 2019.

The “PMI manufacturing improvement suggests the domestic economy would grow faster in the coming months,” he said in a statement on Saturday.

The “government expects the Malaysian gross domestic product to grow robustly at 4.7 percent in 2019, before accelerating to 4.8 percent this year,” he added.

Lim said the local economy would be supported by major infrastructure works namely Pan-Borneo Highway, Light Rail Transit 3, Mass Rapid Transit 2 and the East Coast Rail Link valued at RM120 billion.

He said the building of Bandar Malaysia with a gross development value of RM140 billion and the RM450 million digital stimulus of e-wallets providing RM30 free shopping money would also boost the economy.

The “government is boosting employment opportunities and income of youth, fresh graduates and women through the RM6.5 billion Malaysia@Work program,” he added.

Lim said the five-year program provides 350,000 job opportunities for the unemployed by giving monthly wage incentive of RM500 to workers and RM300 monthly to employers for taking in local workers.

(Source: nst.com.my)

NPC to inaugurate 23 new petchem projects in Assaluyeh

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — National Petrochemical Company (NPC) is planning on inaugurating 23 petrochemical projects in Assaluyeh petrochemical zone in southwestern Bushehr province, Shana reported, quoting an official with NPC.

“The country’s petrochemical production capacity will increase significantly with the inauguration of 23 projects in Phases 1 and 2 of Assaluyeh [petrochemical zone], and the new projects will also diversify our petrochemical products greatly,” Director of NPC’s Projects Ali-Mohammad Bosazqadeh said.

Emphasizing the need to accelerate the completion of development projects by utilizing the existing capacities in the country, the official said: “Currently, various projects are being developed throughout the country and having 23 major projects under development, Pars Special Economic Energy Zone (PSEEZ) has a special place in this regard.”

According to Bossazqadeh, the mentioned projects, 21 of which are in the phase 1 of Assaluyeh zone, have reported to have between five to 99.7 percent of physical progress.



He further noted that with the mentioned projects going operational a great part of the

country’s petrochemical value chain will be supplied by the Assaluyeh petrochemical zone.

Over \$357m invested in agricultural sector since Mar. 2019

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran’s Agricultural Mechanization Development Center (AMDC) says 15 trillion rials (about \$357.1 million) has been invested in the field of agricultural machinery since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019).

Speaking in a press conference on Saturday, Kambiz Abbasi said currently 95 percent of the country’s required agricultural machinery is supplied by domestic producers.

“Only in [the last calendar year of] 1398 (March 2018-March 2019) 13,100 tractors and 300 combine harvesters were received by the country’s farmers,” he added.

Abbasi criticized the recent increases in the price of agricultural machinery and said: “In the past year, the prices of domestically produced agricultural machinery witnessed an increase of between 50-85 percent while the increase in the prices of imported machinery was even higher.”

The official pointed to some of the problems that the manufacturers of

agricultural machinery are facing in the country, saying “the tires of the agricultural machinery is fully supplied by imports, and many manufacturers now have a shortage of tires to complete their production line.”

He further called on the Industry Ministry to resolve this problem as soon as possible.

Back in August 2019, Abbasi said the government allocated two trillion rials (about \$47.6 million) for agricultural mechanization. According to Abbasi, more than 82 trillion rials (about \$1.95 billion) of investment has been attracted in this area in the past six years.

In the past forty years, since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has witnessed a remarkable improvement in various sectors and the agriculture industry has been one of the areas in which the country has undergone huge development.

Implementing billions of dollars worth of development, research and educational projects across the country is an indication of the significant improvements in this sector.

Special support for private sector required under current condition: industry min.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian

Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani said his ministry should support private sector in a special way during the current condition (sanctions), Shata reported.

Making the remarks during a session with his deputies on Saturday, the minister reiterated, “One of the general policies of the ministry in the current [Iranian calendar] year (began on March 2019) has been cooperation with the private sector and fortunately this policy has brought fruitful results in promoting production in the country”.

Last month, Iran’s First Vice-President Es’haq Jahangiri said that the private sector has been assisting the government in confronting the U.S. economic war against Iran.

Touching upon measures adopted by the country’s private sector, the official said, “The country’s private sector has taken giant strides in facing the U.S. economic

In May 2019, Bossazqadeh had announced that NPC is planning on completing the petrochemical value chain in Assaluyeh petrochemical zone.

“Development of mid-stream and down-stream projects in Assaluyeh has for long been considered as a strategy for NPC,” he said.

According to the official, production of the country’s petrochemical products including methanol is planned to increase by 2021.

“Completion of various phases of South Pars gas field had added to feedstock supply of petrochemical plants operating in the region and that will lead to a raise in the output,” he said.

The port city of Assaluyeh is home to a number of petrochemical complexes which receive gas and gas condensate feedstock from the giant South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf.

The huge offshore field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world’s reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

war against Iran.”

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

Finance and economic affairs minister has also appreciated the role that the private sector is playing to help the country sustain its non-oil exports during the sanctions time, saying, “Fortunately, we managed to continue our non-oil exports, despite all difficulties and limitations, through the aids of private sector.”

Farhad Dejpasand made the remarks during the 90th meeting of the government-private sector negotiation council, which was held at the place of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) in last November, attended by ICCIMA Head Gholam-Hossein Shafeie and Iran’s Securities and Exchange Organization Head Shapour Mohammadi.

Iran accounts for 41% of tire production in West Asia

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Having the annual production capacity of 426,000 tons of tire, Iran accounts for 41 percent of tire output in the West Asian region, the deputy director of non-metal industries office of Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry announced.

Mohsen Safdari further said that 11 tire production units are active in the country creating jobs for 14,500 people, IRIB reported.

The official said 426,000 tons is the nominal capacity, while the real output is less than this figure as some units are working with 60-70 percent of their capacity.

He put the country’s imports of tires at 97,000 tons worth \$320 million and exports at 8,500 tons valued at \$30 million in the past Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2019) and said the export figure is low as the Industry Ministry decided to ban the export of this product due to regulate domestic market since the second half of the previous year.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Safdari said tire consumption in the country is anticipated to reach 330,000 tons in the current Iranian year, saying that 24 million tires of passenger cars are required while domestic production is predicted to hit 20 million.

“Iranian tire industry is dependent on foreign raw materials



by 40 percent, so we are self-reliant by 60 percent in this field”, the official announced.

Earlier this month, Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani said production of the heavy vehicles tire in the country will be more than domestic consumption of the product.

Making the remarks during visiting some industrial units in Parand Industrial Park in southwest of Tehran on January 3, the minister said, “We have five production projects ready to be implemented in this due that will oversupply

China’s economy to maintain steady growth in 2020 despite headwinds: economists

China is capable of maintaining steady economic growth in the year to come and beyond, buoyed by multiple driving forces, despite mounting downward pressure, economists have said.

The “gross domestic product growth in China in 2020 is likely to be stable,” said Xu Gao, chief economist of Bank of China International Ltd, at a panel held in New York this week.

Chinese policymakers have “ample policy ammunition to maintain a stable growth,” Xu said, adding he expects the nation to embrace a friendlier policy environment in the coming year as it heads to boost economic growth.

The economist also pointed out that the biggest upward potential for the Chinese economy lies in the massive number of high-skilled and low-cost human resources.

Themed on “Forecast of China’s Economy for 2020,” the panel featured a group of leading Chinese and American economists, who shared their insights on macro-economic trends, reform possibilities, as well as expected challenges and opportunities in 2020 and beyond.

Panelists lauded China’s vigorous efforts in deepening further reform and opening up, while tackling challenges in recent years.

“That’s really important. It’s a really big deal. We even see it (the reform) with respect to the state enterprise,” said Barry Naughton, an economist with the School of Global Policy and Strategy at the University of California, San Diego.

He also said China is leading the way in the adoption of decentralized, convenient and cashless payment systems, which is “really impressive.”

■ China’s economic growth

Huang Yiping, professor and deputy dean of the National School of Development at Peking University, said he is “confident” about the prospects for China’s economic growth.

The “Chinese economy is entering into a new phase of development,” which has inevitably caused some problems in the financial sector, said Huang.

“We actually see in concrete steps moving ahead (toward financial reform and opening-up),” he said, adding “I’m confident and I’m optimistic that we are moving in the right direction.”

China has vowed to keep opening up its financial sector while controlling risks, with the country introducing 34 opening-up policies in the banking and insurance sectors in the past two years, including expanding the business scope of foreign-invested firms and easing market access.

“There is growth momentum in its domestic (economy),” Nicholas Lardy, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, told Xinhua on the sidelines of the panel.

The “very strong consumption from households, the growth of disposable income and consumption, I think, will continue to be a very important driver of China’s economic growth,” he said.

China, the world’s largest developing economy, registered a 6.2-percent growth year on year during the first three quarters of 2019, within the government’s annual target of 6-6.5 percent, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics.

Consumption continued to be the mainstay in driving up demand, with final consumption contributing 60.5 percent



to economic growth in the January-September period.

Lardy also noted sustained resilience in the Chinese economy, bolstered by the nation’s “very entrepreneurial” private firms. “They increase productivity and become more competitive,” he said.

Catherine Mann, global chief economist at Citi, told Xinhua that productivity, appropriate capital investment, and demographics are the key foundations for economic growth going forward, noting “China is very well suited on the education side.”

The half-day event was presented by the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations and Peking University’s China Center for Economic Research.

(Source: hellenicshippingnews.com)

Kish Island to host seminar on indigenizing petchem catalysts

ENERGY TEHRAN — Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC) is going to hold a seminar on the indigenization of petrochemical industry catalysts in Kish Island on January 16, IRIB reported.

According to the seminar's executive secretary, Islamic Republic has successfully indigenized the technology used to produce two major catalysts used in petrochemical, and refining industries.

"Two important and strategic catalysts used in the country's petrochemical and refining industries, namely methanol synthesis catalyst and LTSC catalyst, have been indigenized, which will be unveiled at the seminar on catalyst indigenization," Mohammad-Amin Ebrahimi said.

Underlining the significance of the mentioned catalysts, Ebrahimi said these two catalysts were previously supplied from some European companies and after the re-imposition of the U.S. sanctions the industry was facing problems in this regard.

"Now, we have become self-sufficient in producing these catalysts and we have received the



technical approval from the country's petroleum industry research institute," he added.

Mentioning the seminar, Ebrahimi said

for the first time in the country, the mentioned seminar is aimed to create a common language and synergy between catalyst producers and

consumers and also to discuss and evaluate the performance of the native catalysts.

Back in September 2019, Managing Director of Iran's Petrochemical Research and Technology Company (PRTC) said the country's petrochemical complexes were keen on utilizing domestic catalysts in their operations.

Ali Pajouhan said that significant steps were taken for domestic production of catalysts used in petrochemical processes in Iran.

He said 13 petrochemical companies had purchased the catalysts and would use them in their operations.

Petrochemical is Iran's most important industry after oil and gas. The National Petrochemical Company hopes to lift output capacity to 120 million tons per annum by 2022.

The petrochemical industry has played a key role in domestic economic growth as it creates value-added and reduces the sale of oil and gas on which the economy has been dependent for decades.

With abundant hydrocarbon reserves and new private sector investments, Iran is working hard to maintain its global status in the key sector and broaden its scope.

Iran manages to save \$1.6b worth of electricity in summer peak period

ENERGY TEHRAN — Head of Iran's Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution Management Company, known as Tavanir, said by applying consumption management programs the Energy Ministry managed to prevent the consumption of 70 trillion rials (about \$1.66 billion) worth of electricity during the summer peak period, IRNA reported.

During the past summer, by spending 3 trillion-4 trillion rials (about \$71 million-\$95 million) on encouraging consumption management programs, the Energy Ministry managed to prevent the consumption of 70 trillion rials worth of electricity, Mohammad-Hassan Motevalizadeh said on Sunday.

"Implementation of this program allowed us to pass the summer without any power outages," the official said in a meeting of directors of the Energy Ministry subsidiaries' public relations departments.

He noted that Iran's electricity network has 100 percent coverage across the country, adding that this is an indication of Iranian electricity industry's leadership in the region and the world.

Back in August 2019, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian had said that consumption management programs had reduced the summer peak electricity consumption by 3300 megawatts (MW).

"This summer, about 3,300 MW of electricity was managed and this amount of saving prevented the construction of a new 7,000-MW power plant with \$5 billion of investment," Ardakanian said.

According to the official, based on the ministry data and statistics, the country's electricity consumption was expected to reach nearly 61,000 MW in the summer peak period, however so far the highest consumption level has not exceeded 57,000 MW.

"This means that proper consumption patterns are being widespread in the country, promising a future of comfort, security, and prosperity," he said.

In the past decade, constant temperature rising and significant decrease of rainfalls across Iran has put the country in a hard situation regarding electricity supply during peak consumption periods.

Last year, the volume of water behind the country's dams



went so down that electricity output from hydropower plants fell to a decade low. The situation was worsen by a jump in electricity consumption due to a heat-wave that blanketed the country during summer and consequently led to a huge gap between actual power generation and consumption.

In this regard, the Energy Ministry has been following new strategies in recent years to manage the consumption and lessen the electricity losses in the national grid.

How far has renewable energy come in the last 20 years

By Irina Slav

This isn't a revolution. It's an evolution, and while that may lack the shock and awe of something like the shale boom, its long-term impact is extreme. This is the world of renewable energy, and three decades of progress shows a clear and undeniable pattern.

It's hard to believe that we've been using solar and wind power for about thirty years now. The technology behind this type of renewable power generation may be even older, but the first data for solar and wind generation dates back only to 1990.

Even more fascinating is the fact that Europe was not among the first adopters of solar and wind. The greenest continent today only ventured into the two in 1997.

The energy world has changed in the past twenty years.

Some renewable energy sources have been around forever. Take Iceland, for example, and its geysers. Iceland is the top global performer in renewable energy thanks to its geothermal resources. Or, there is Costa Rica: the tiny nation boasted 100-percent renewable energy generation for more than two straight months twice over two years.

There is also the UK, which was rightfully proud of having more of its electricity generated from renewable sources than fossil fuels during 2019. It's perhaps worth noting that the biggest share of this zero-carbon electricity came from nuclear power—26.5 percent of the energy mix—and some renewable energy purists shun nuclear as an alternative to fossil fuels.

Yet it is an emissions-free source of electricity nevertheless and deserves its place among zero-carbon generation sources.

The list of examples demonstrating the world's evolution in energy sourcing and use could continue. The important outcome of all these examples, however, is that when something makes economic sense, it will be used. This brings us to the topic of renewable energy costs and the role of these costs in the growing adoption of renewable power generation systems.

■ The solar and wind power

Once upon a time in the 1990s, both solar and wind power was expensive, not to mention lacking in efficiency. In 1992, the highest efficiency rate for solar panels was 16 percent. This grew to 17.8 by 2012 and to almost 30 percent in 2016. Today, there are photovoltaic



materials that can reach efficiency rates of over 40 percent. Meanwhile, costs fell from an average cost of solar panel installation in the U.S. was \$8.50 per watt in 2009. Today, it is about \$2.96 per watt.

In wind, the efficiency improvements over the last 20 years have been a lot more spectacular because the technology allows for spectacular improvements. In the United States, the average generating capacity of new turbines in 2018 was 239 percent higher than in 1998, at 2.4 MW. This was the result of taller hubs and longer turbine blades. At the same time, installation costs have been falling. In 2018 a kW of installed capacity cost \$1,470 in the U.S., down as much as 40 percent from 2009.

This combination of falling costs, rising efficiency ratios and government support have been the key drivers of wind and solar.

There have been reports about solar and wind becoming cost-competitive with coal in some parts of the world, yet government subsidies are still a big factor in investment decisions.

A case in point is China, where Beijing's moved to cut subsidies for new solar and wind capacity after it realized the subsidy tab had grown to a staggering \$15.6 billion by 2017. Beijing is still paying that off, and is now requiring that wind and solar developers first prove that their projects are cost-competitive with coal-powered generation.

Besides subsidies, pro-renewables legislation has also had a part to play in the energy transformation of the world over the last 20 years, especially over the last decade.

The proliferation of social networks has made everyone more aware of topics such as climate change and emissions, and has spurred a lot of real-life protests against these. These protests, in

turn, have pushed politicians to approve clean energy initiatives and set ambitious timetables for going 100-percent green.

■ Clean energy ambitions

Everyone seems to have 100-percent green energy plans these days, including some of the world's worst emissions offenders such as China and India. Europe is in the lead as regards clean energy ambitions, and while the U.S. has yet to catch up in terms of such ambitions, the share of renewable energy in the world's largest oil producer is rising steadily.

Unfortunately, reality begs to differ from the ambitions of politicians and the sincere desires for a cleaner future of millions of people. The world had total renewable energy capacity of 2.356 million MW at the end of 2018, up from 1.135 million MW in 2009, according to data from IRENA.

Still, emissions are rising.

These hit a record high in 2018 despite the growing adoption of renewable energy and are now expected to have broken this record in 2019. The culprits: China and India along with other developing nations with heavy industries that require cheap and reliable power, which most renewable installations cannot guarantee for lack of storage capacity.

The good news, according to the Global Carbon Project that tracks emissions, is that despite the record-high level of emissions, the increase is slowing down. Fossil fuel-related emissions rose 2 percent in 2018 but are expected to have added just another 0.6 percent in 2019.

The renewables revolution will likely never happen. What is happening, however, is a renewables evolution. That's arguably a much more reliable way to change the ways in which the world sources its energy and the ways it uses it. Revolutions, as opposed to evolution, tend to eat their children, after all.

(Source: oilprice.com)

ONE STEP INTERNATIONAL TENDER SECOND ANNOUNCEMENT

55/98/25365
13/01/2020



Agricultural Support Services Company



Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture

AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT SERVICES COMPANY

Agricultural Support Services Company, hereinafter will be referred as ASSC, affiliated to Ministry of Agriculture-Jahad of I.R of Iran, is considering the purchase of the below 11 items of emulsifiers and technicals, through one step international tender.

1- 27000 Kgs Cartaphydrochloride Tech Min.95 pct.	7- 5000 Kgs Emulsifier FF ₆ or similar product
2- 8000 Kgs Fipronil (premix 20%) Tech 18.8-21.2 pct.	8- 8400 Stabilizer PAP
3- 3000 Kgs Deltamethrin Tech Min. 98.5 pct.	9- 5000 Kgs Emulsifier MS or similar product
4- 5500 Kgs Permethrin Tech Min. 95 pct.	10- 12000 Kgs Adjuvant NP85 or P-Z
5- 85000 Kgs Chlorpyrifos Tech Min. 97 pct.	11- 4200 Kgs Phosphoric acid 85 pct.
6- 9000 Kgs Emulsifier FF ₄ or similar product	-----

All of the qualified and interested companies are invited to receive tender documents from Sunday dated 12/01/2020 until Monday dated 20/01/2020 (7 working days) from our purchasing committee (located at the 9th floor, no. 1, fourth alley, Gandhi st., Tehran, Iran).

The bidders are requested to submit their letters of introduction, along with remittance bill of I.Rials 1,200,000 to ASSC's account no. 4001039704005791 with SHEBA no. IR250100004001039704005791 at the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran through payment order of SATNA or PAYA with the 30 character identification code of 358039782263500650000000000006.

The bidders are requested to submit their sealed and stamped envelopes containing offers latest on Wednesday dated 19/02/2020 at 04:00 PM to our security office located on the 8th floor. Meanwhile the meeting for the opening of the envelopes will be held on Saturday Dated 22/02/2020 at 2:00 PM with the presence of bidder's representatives at our purchasing committee hall (9th floor, no. 1, Fourth Alley, Gandhi st., Tehran, Iran).

We would like to emphasize that the bid bond amount should be in cash or bank guarantee as follows:

- 1- € 23147 for Cartaphydrochloride Tech Min 95 pct. equivalent to Iranian Rials 1090000000
- 2- € 36954 for Fipronil (premix 20%) Tech 18.8-21.2 pct. equivalent to Iranian Rials 1739000000
- 3- € 8610 for Deltamethrin Tech Min 98.5 pct. equivalent to Iranian Rials 405153000
- 4- € 3293 for Permethrin Tech 95 pct. equivalent to Iranian Rials 154950000
- 5- € 25685 for Chlorpyrifos Tech Min 97 pct. equivalent to Iranian Rials 1208000000
- 6- € 5900 for Emulsifier FF₄ or similar product equivalent to Iranian Rials 277650000
- 7- € 3267 for Emulsifier FF₆ or similar product equivalent to Iranian Rials 153750000
- 8- € 3570 for Stabilizer PAP equivalent to Iranian Rials 168000000
- 9- € 3305 for Emulsifier MS or similar product equivalent to Iranian Rials 155500000
- 10- € 6745 for Adjuvant NP85 or P-Z equivalent to Iranian Rials 317400000
- 11- € 893 for Phosphoric acid 85 pct. equivalent to Iranian Rials 42000000

For more information, you may refer to our website www.assc.ir, and <http://iets.mporg.ir> or contact us by phone no. 00982188776325.

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U.S. provoking crises in Eurasia to gain more foreign investment: Italian author

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — An Italian author and geopolitical analyst explained about the “dollar cycle” strategy implemented by the Deep State and said Washington provokes crises in Eurasia to drain foreign investment to the US.

“To provoke crises in Eurasia to drain foreign investment to the US and the purchase of American government bonds is the “dollar cycle” strategy implemented by the Deep State with stars and stripes,” Stefano Vernole, the head of External Relations at the Eurasia Mediterranean Study Center, told Tasnim in an interview.

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: Certainly, Donald Trump’s attitude partially contrasts with that geopolitical trend that, since 1999, had entrusted NATO with the role of global gendarme for the protection of the interests of the United States first and for allied / vassal in the second place. Trumpian nationalism has gone so far as to hope, at least in words, for the end of US global interventionism in favor of a retreat on its national interests. How concretely feasible this is controversial; in fact, we are talking about a country that owns about 1000 military bases scattered around the world and which can hardly continue to impose the dollar as the dominant currency in international trade and in particular for the purchase of raw materials without exerting constant geopolitical pressure. I, therefore, do not see in the Trump Doctrine a real departure from the historical principles of American exceptionalism (“manifest destiny”, “indispensable nation” ...), even if some competition between its Administration and certain sectors of the Deep State is undeniable. However, it seems to me more a tactical behavior than the fruit of a strategic vision; from this point of view a possible second term of Trump will be clarifying, that of Obama was. Trump’s election is certainly due to a global trend, that is, the spirit of revenge of a middle class impoverished by the 2008 economic crisis which was caused precisely by the collapse of US mortgages. The parable of the current American President is very similar to that of the Gorbachev-Yeltsin couple; they wanted to reform the Soviet Union by freeing Russia from the burden of the other confederate countries but ended up smashing the whole system, Trump could therefore be the liquidator of the historic US



imperialism. However, the current tenant of the White House could also become the last card available to the neo-cons lobbies to block China’s geopolitical rise and the new multipolar international system: the signs are so far conflicting.

■ 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: It is certainly a suggestive thesis, especially since it goes well with the identification of the new strategic enemy of the USA in China, after the USSR and the Islamic world in the past. Even the current good economic results of the Trump Administration cannot make us forget that the general debt of companies in the United States is high, but according to a report by the Bank of International Settlements, the real problem is that of leverage loans. That is, “leveraged loans”, granted to high-risk companies that have on average a debt that is four times higher than the revenue. To date, they amount to almost 1400 billion and are likely to repeat the phenomenon that triggered the 2008 economic crisis: subprime mortgages granted to people who could not pay them back. If we look at the United States and Europe there is the risk of a new financial bubble linked to a disproportionate increase in share prices compared to dividends given to shareholders. It will be necessary to understand how long the financial system will be able to withstand this disproportion. But why do prices keep rising? The answer is always the same when it comes to bubbles: the profit resulting from financial speculation. Another problem that should not be underestimated is that of banks. Just look at the trend of the so-called non-performing loans, or the loans

that the banks have disbursed and know with relative certainty that they will not get back. In summary, the massive injection of money into the American economy by the Federal Reserve Bank risks to provoke a financial bubble 4 times higher than that which burst in 2008, when the world economy was brought to its knees. It’s a ten-year problem, the US has long chosen the speculative economy at the expense of the productive one, China has done the exact opposite with the Belt and Road Initiative. To provoke crises in Eurasia to drain foreign investment to the US and the purchase of American government bonds is the “dollar cycle” strategy implemented by the Deep State with stars and stripes.

■ 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: In fact, the United States continues to enjoy the comparative advantage gained with the Second World War and subsequently with the excuse of the “Cold War”. The cost of transatlantic ties for individual states and for the European Union itself is incalculable and certainly does not concern only the most recent measures adopted by the Trump administration. On the other hand, in Europe we want to be more realistic than the king and even the current US President has been accused of wanting to break the unity of the West ... In reality, it is precisely the key to the problem, we want to close our eyes on the obvious differences of interest between Brussels and Washington in the name of

an absolutely ridiculous “commonality of values”. How can Europe rebel against US diktats if it does not have an army autonomous from NATO? How can Europe assert its common interests in the international arena if it does not even have a Foreign Minister? Then what values are we talking about, if the European Union has failed to adopt even a Constitution? As long as the situation in Europe remains this, the United States will have a good game in imposing its decisions; the implementation in the rest of the world is more complicated, where the BRICS countries and those of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization move in a completely different logic. The problem of American bullying, therefore, remains entirely within the European field, where the exit of Great Britain will cause other problems.

■ 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: Except for wars or financial catastrophes, which are always possible but difficult to place temporarily, for some years we will witness other shocks due to a new international settlement currently being defined. Faithfulness to traditional alliances seems to be increasingly questionable while remaining within certain limits; nation states look at their contingent interests, without worrying too much about the consequences of their attitude on the world stability. With the creation of an alternative internet system, Russia officially enters the club of the revisionist countries of the American World Order, joining China as a strategic rival of the United States in the 21st century. I continue to believe that from a geopolitical point of view, the control of events in the Middle and Near East continues to play a decisive role in the future of humanity. The Franco-German axis, as well as European construction, are strongly weakening and could soon be shattered; at that point, Germany could rediscover its Eurasian vocation and France will have to decide whether to continue to play the role of pivot player in Europe for the US administrations, as happened by the Sarkozy Presidency to date or to find its Gaullist heritage by looking more at Moscow than in Washington. Turkey and Iran are the two regional powers whose stability will be decisive for the stabilization project of the Mediterranean basin wanted by Moscow and Beijing. This is still a very open challenge because it is marked by continuous changes in front, for example in Latin America, due essentially to the existence of two opposing lobbies within not only NATO countries but also within non-aligned nations. A contrast between globalist forces and patriotic forces that will determine the future destinies of the world in the years to come.

Who is the new Sultan of Oman?

1 → 1. Asa’ad bin Tariq bin Taimur al Said: Asa’ad was born in 1954. He studied at the same military academy where Sultan Qaboos graduated. Asa’ad bin Tariq was the personal representative of Sultan Qaboos and has held many important positions so far. Omani observers also believe he has the support of the armed forces as he has commanded divisions such as the armored brigade for several years and is a brigadier general.

He has been the personal envoy of Sultan Qaboos on several occasions to convey his messages to countries’ leaders and attend the Arab League Summit and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Persian Gulf on behalf of the sultan. Asa’ad manages many economic projects in Oman and enjoys economic partnerships and friendly relations with the leaders of the Persian Gulf states.

2. Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimur: Haitham was also born in 1954. He has been the Minister of Heritage and Culture for more than a decade. Sometimes he was

the sultan’s special envoy to some of the meetings and ceremonies, such as the British royal wedding in 2011. He has his own certain characteristics and is referred to as a rebellious person. He also has many economic interests in Oman.

3. Shihab bin Tariq bin Taimur Al Said: Shihab was born in 1956. He was a close advisor to Sultan Qaboos and a naval commander. He chairs the Research Council of Oman. He carries out many economic activities in Oman and is an ambitious person. In the past, it is said that he disagreed with Sultan Qaboos on some matters.

4. Taimur bin Asaad bin Tariq bin Taimur al Said: Taimur who was born in 1981, is the secretary-general of the Research Council. He has conducted several important plans in Oman and is a member of the board of Bank Dhofar, one of the most important Omani banks. Taimur is active in the media and is known as a popular figure. He has studied in Scotland and Britain and has completed courses in the United States.



5. Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said: Fahd was born in 1944 and serves as the deputy prime minister for the council of ministers.

Ali Mourad: General Soleimani to inspire youth, soldiers of Muslim nations forever

TEHRAN (FNA) —Ali Mourad, journalist, says the history of modern resistance shows American and Israeli policy of assassinating resistance figures always results in stronger resistance.

In an exclusive interview with FNA, Ali Mourad said the US’s terror plan was also for its domestic policy, adding, “Trump chose this timing to conduct this crime to save himself and Benjamin Netanyahu from what they are going to face in their trials. Bill Clinton launched a military assault on Iraq in 1998 as his impeachment inquiry was being discussed.”

Ali Mourad is a freelance researcher with the focus on Persian Gulf Affairs, and a contributing writer at Al-Akhbar newspaper in Lebanon.

Below is the full text of the interview:

■ Why did the US assassinate General Soleimani?

A: Trump chose this timing to conduct this crime to save himself and Benjamin Netanyahu from what they are going to face in their trials. Bill Clinton launched a military assault on Iraq in 1998 as his impeachment inquiry was being discussed in the US House of Representatives. Trump believes that removing General Soleimani from the picture would make Israel safer. I personally do not think the US political elite (whether Democrats or Repub-



licans) is sad for assassinating Soleimani. Democrats are attacking Trump due to their political battle with him; not because they admire or feel sorry for the assassination of the resistance General.

■ The White House could have targeted another resistance figure; why General Soleimani was chosen?

A: General Soleimani has been attacking the US strategy

since the 90’s. He supported the Lebanese and Palestinian resistances. He was responsible for boosting the strength of the resisting forces in the region. Martyr Soleimani struck the ISIS project and defeated it both in Syria and Iraq. For all those reasons Soleimani was on the US-Israeli assassination list. Trump thinks by eliminating him he would both do Israel a favor and reduce the threat on US interests in the Persian Gulf region, which will soon prove wrong.

■ Do you believe General Soleimani’s assassination will end the resistance against imperialism in the Middle East region?

A: It is true that General Soleimani was a field commander busy following the fronts; but that does not mean that he was not preparing the strategic grounds for the battle of expelling the US from the West Asia. Throughout the modern history of the Axis of Resistance, the US-Israeli policy of assassinating leaders proved to be a failing and backfiring one. It was once experienced in Lebanon with Sayid Abbass Moussawi, and later with the leaders of the Palestinian resistance in Palestine. The power of the member elements of this Axis always grew bigger. General Soleimani always has and always will inspire the youth and committed soldiers throughout the Islamic world.

Trump’s terrorist act to derail public opinion

1 → It is expected that Trump impeachment inquiry would not get the required votes in the Senate due to the majority of Republicans. No U.S. president has so far been removed by the vote of the House of Representative, but the approval of the impeachment inquiry against the president indicates his political incompetence.

The Russian case and the 2016 U.S. election: another case against Trump is related to his collusion with Russia and its role in the results of the last presidential election. Trump has always rejected this issue and claimed that this is just an accusation against him by Democrats as the loser of the election.



The Ukrainian case: This case is about Trump’s phone call on July 6 with Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky, in which he asked his Ukrainian counterpart to file a lawsuit against Joe Biden’s son to defame his rival in the 2020 election.

In this connection, Trump is said that has paid a 400-million-dollar military aid to Ukraine provided that it cooperates with his lawyer Rudy Giuliani in Hunter Biden’s case.

Given the numerous domestic conflicts with his rivals and various economic, political and moral cases, Trump seems to have no choice but to derail American public opinion during the time left to the upcoming election.

The U.S. president has made a huge mistake in his calculations by assassinating two senior Iranian and Iraqi military officials, and involved the U.S. in a serious challenge in foreign policy arena.

The Americans know that they are the exciter of the dangerous adventure in the region, but they will not be the ones who determine how to end the game.

Another point regarding the assassination of Gen. Soleimani is the irrational stance and approach that European have taken to the terrorist act by the United States.

Europeans should keep in mind that Trump’s actions stemmed from his personal issues inside the country to affect public opinion by diverting news and media. The U.S. president is seeking to improve the country’s position in the region and compensate his failures in the region and foreign policy.

It is better for European countries to not overlook the facts in order to please and serve the U.S president and government and not sacrifice their national interests for the sake of Trump’s foolishness.

Protesters in Iran may be bolstering U.S. imperialism

1 → Certainly protesters in Iran have a right to be upset, but at the same time, Iranian leaders, after dithering for a couple days while initial investigations were underway, did own up to the mistake and expressed great sorrow and remorse. Also, there are probably a group of hardcore dissidents in Iran that are encouraged by foreigners to stir up trouble whenever possible.

The U.S., by comparison, has never formally apologized for any of its horrendous foreign policies in the Mideast over many decades that took the lives of millions of innocent people. It never apologized for shooting down an Iranian airliner over the Persian Gulf, and former President George H.W. Bush said the U.S. would never apologize. (Iran actually is more accountable than Boeing has been, which built a defective 737 model and covered it up until well after two planes crashed, murdering several hundred passengers, and then recently allowed the fired CEO to walk away with millions of dollars in severance pay.)

But for now, at least Trump’s popularity seem to be fraying. His only hope for reelection may be bringing the troops home from the Mideast. And what is most insufferable are his Tweets claiming that he has stood with Iranians since his Presidency began, and that he is following protests in Iran closely, allegedly inspired by the courage of Iranians. A bigger lie is hard to imagine. Troop has not even stood for Americans in his stance on behalf of Netanyahu.

The primary point is this. It would be completely misguided for Iranians to think Trump cares about Iranians or Iran. One clear indication of this is just whom his administration has been backing for a desired regime change, such as the cultish MEK, which until a few years ago even the U.S. designated a terrorist organization. IF protesters in Iran imagine that by slamming the current government they may somehow usher in the fall of the Islamic Republic and a better government, they are sadly mistaken. The U.S. will exploit any changes in Iran for itself, not for anyone else, as long as the U.S. is trying to wreck the Islamic Republic.

Never before has imperialism by the U.S. been more naked, aggressive, crude, transparent and self-serving. This is obvious regarding Iraq right now:

Trump, hearing the demands of Iraqis that U.S. troops leave, has not only refused to leave, but has threatened the confiscation of more than a billion dollars in oil revenue currently located at the New York Federal Reserve Bank. This is nothing but blatant extortion, and European silence so far about the various U.S. threats suggest possible complicity, or at least fear.

The U.S. has again become an illegal occupation force inside Iraq, as it has been in Syria, and will aim to do the same by force or by proxy to Iran if Iranians fail to remain united against U.S. threats come what may. So one must say to Iranians who protest too much: cast blame where it is warranted, not on your government which is trying the supremely difficult task of keeping Iran independent of U.S. control. The U.S. under Trump wants nothing more than continuance of militant “empire”, control of oil resources and subjugation for foreign lands. There will be a time for disgruntled Iranians to address their concerns aloud, but only after external threats have been fully vanquished and the economy is once again thriving because sanctions are no more and the U.S. has lost what little support it still has in the Middle East.

Iran’s flag carrier seeking to re-establish flights to Sweden

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iran’s flag carrier is seeking a way for restoring direct flights connecting Tehran to Stockholm and Gothenburg, which have recently come to a halt.



Iran Air is scheduled to operate Tehran-Stockholm services on Saturdays and Wednesdays as well as Tehran-Gothenburg flights on Mondays, IRNA reported on January 11.

Sweden’s Transport Agency announced on January 10 that it had temporarily halted Iran Air flights between Sweden and Iran after the crash of a Ukrainian airliner near Tehran on January 8 which killed all 176 people on board.

“The reason is the uncertainty around the accident and the security of civil aviation,” the agency said in a statement.

Sweden’s foreign ministry said that seven Swedish citizens and a total of 17 people who lived in the Nordic country died in the crash, Reuters reported.

President Hassan Rouhani has said investigations will continue to identify and prosecute all those involved in the unintentional downing of the Ukrainian airliner.

By shedding light to the cause of the tragic accident, Iran is seeking to resume flights to the mentioned destinations.

“Sweden is likely to reconsider its decision, otherwise, Iran Air has to take alternate flights to transport its passengers,” the Iranian airliner announced.

56% of Indian travelers they would like to include at least one hostel in their trip

As the popularity of hostels continues to grow, Booking.com shares insight into what’s trending when it comes to the shared accommodation industry, from where travelers are planning their trips, what they want to do during their stays, and how the company continues to innovate and deliver a great product to support this savvy travel segment.

“From the first hostel joining our global platform in 2000 to over 33,000 hostel properties listed on our platform today, including everything from traditional youth hostels and yoga retreats to a converted Boeing 747 jumbo jet and up-scale “poshtels,” the hostel industry has expanded significantly in India and globally.

“We listed our first hostel in India in 2010, and we’ve witnessed this segment grow consistently; going beyond just a backpacker seeking a bunk bed, it has become increasingly diverse and expansive. We at Booking.com are constantly working to make the hostel industry even more accessible to travellers in India and globally,” says Ritu Mehrotra, Country Manager, India, Sri Lanka and Maldives at Booking.com

Hostels provide a welcome retreat whether you’re close to home, or further afield. Many nationalities frequently book hostels in destinations that include their home country as well as destinations abroad. So while globally, Spain, Japan, Russia, United Kingdom and Thailand top the list of destination countries booked by hostel travelers; locally, India, Thailand, United Kingdom, Germany, and Spain are some of the most commonly booked countries.

(Source: Travel Daily News)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Heart of Neolithic Orkney

The group of monuments that make up the Heart of Neolithic Orkney consists of a remarkably well-preserved settlement, a large chambered tomb, and two stone circles with surrounding henges, together with a number of associated burial and ceremonial sites.



The group constitutes a major relict cultural landscape graphically depicting life five thousand years ago in this remote archipelago.

The four monuments that make up the Heart of Neolithic Orkney are unquestionably among the most important Neolithic sites in Western Europe. These are the Ring of Brodgar, Stones of Stenness, Maeshowe and Skara Brae. They provide exceptional evidence of the material and spiritual standards as well as the beliefs and social structures of this dynamic period of prehistory.

The four main monuments, consisting of the four substantial surviving standing stones of the elliptical Stones of Stenness and the surrounding ditch and bank of the henge, the thirty-six surviving stones of the circular Ring of Brodgar with the thirteen Neolithic and Bronze Age mounds that are found around it and the stone setting known as the Comet Stone, the large stone chambered tomb of Maeshowe, whose passage points close to midwinter sunset, and the sophisticated settlement of Skara Brae with its stone built houses connected by narrow roofed passages, together with the Barnhouse Stone and the Watch Stone, serve as a paradigm of the megalithic culture of north-western Europe that is unparalleled.

(Source: UNESCO)

Iran tourism will rebound despite suffering a severe blow: minister

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iran’s tourism minister on Sunday said that the country’s tourism industry has suffered a major setback but it will certainly return to “normal”.

Ali-Asghar Mounesan made the remarks referring to the Ukrainian plane crash on January 8 near Tehran that killed all 176 people on board.

“These events are a major blow to tourism, but we will leave it behind by the means of new plans and we will definitely return to normal,” the minister said, ISNA reported.

“A lot of efforts in the arena of [travel] advertisements were made with the participation of the private sector during the current [Iranian calendar] year (started March 21, 2019). We introduced Iran to target countries, but now we are facing with a situation where new procedures are needed.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mounesan pointed to recent news that say inbound tours witnessed a 70 percent fall after the plane crash incident, noting, “Some countries issued travel advisories [against traveling to Iran] that led to tour cancellations.”

“70 percent drop is definitely a substantial figure. For [travelers from] some countries the drop is greater and for some lesser.”

He concluded that the ministry in mulling over new travel markets in order to rebound.

Moreover, international safety warnings have been issued for tourists and other travelers heading to prime destinations in the Middle East in the wake of the assassination of the top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani by U.S. forces on January 3.

The U.S. State Department and British Foreign Commonwealth Office were among the many government bodies to issue “do not travel” advisories for Iran.

However, neither Russian travelers were reportedly calling off their Iran trips nor airlines the flights passing through Iranian airspace following the deadly Ukrainian



One of the largest city squares in the world, Naqsh-e Jahan Square (Pattern of the World Square), is in the city of Isfahan, built in the early 17th Century.

plane crash, the Moscow Times reported.

Some 6.7 million foreign nationals have visited Iran during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year, according to data announced by Mojtaba Karimi who presides over Foreign Ministry’s visa and passport department.

Iran welcomed some 7.8 million foreign nationals last year, achieving 52.5 percent

increase year on year.

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, Iraq was the main source of tourism for Iran in 2018, constituting 24% of all inbound visitors. Azerbaijan with (17%), Turkey (8%), Pakistan (4%) and Bahrain (2%) constituted other major sources while the remaining 46% came from the rest of the world.

The ancient land embraces hundreds of historical sites such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 22 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, the country aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

New restoration season starts on historical mosque in Zanjan

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – A fresh season of restoration has recently started on historical Mirzaei Mosque in Zanjan, west-central Iran, CHTN reported on Saturday.

The monument is famous as the Chahar Mehrabeh (having four mihrabs) mosque and it is situated near the historical bazaar of the city. (Mihrab is referred to niche in the wall of a mosque or a room in the mosque that indicates the direction of Mecca.)

The main prayer hall of the congregational mosque is built in Chehel Sotoun (forty columns) style, which is mostly compared to the 17th-century Chehel Sotoun palace in Isfahan.

Mirzaei Mosque is located in the ‘Lower’ bazaar area and has been most probably constructed in the late Safavid



era to early Qajar period, sources say. The mosque is divided into two parts named as being the ancient beauty for nocturnal prayers and the ‘new’ mosque. Two dates can be noted on the southern portico and another date on the gateway being 1301 AH and 1382 AH respectively.

Situated on a high plain, surrounded by stark, eroded hills, Zanjan is a deserved travel destination and it also makes a perfect base for wider explorations. The architectural wonder of Soltaniyeh is nearby, while the battered hoodoos of Behestan Castle and the bizarrely striped Colourful Mountains lie further afield. Enticingly scenic roads radiate to Khal Khal and the Caspian, the subterranean delights of the Katala Khor Caves, and the superbly lonely Takht-e Soleiman ruins.

3 skeletons found in Connecticut basement might be from ‘revolutionary war soldiers’

Archaeologists have discovered what may be the remains of soldiers who fought in the [American] Revolutionary War. But it’s a mystery whose side they were on; they could have been Yankees, British or even colonists who sided with the king, known as Loyalists.

Archaeologists are now planning to spend months, if not years, studying the skeletal remains to learn more about these three individuals, including, if possible, where their loyalties lay.

“I can’t be 100% [certain] yet. I don’t have that smoking gun” about whether these individuals were revolutionary soldiers, Nicholas Bellantoni, the interim emeritus Connecticut state archaeologist, told Live Science. “There’s more work to be done.”

The skeletons were found when the owners of a 1790 home in Ridgefield, Connecticut, decided to put in a concrete floor over their dirt basement in December 2019. The basement was an addition to the house, which means that these individuals were buried there and later the house was expanded, covering the graves.

The house itself is located near the site of the 1777 Battle of Ridgefield, in which British troops on their way to fight George Washington’s army farther south in the Hudson Valley came across 700 patriot fighters in Ridgefield, according to the Keeler Tavern Museum, in Ridgefield.

The Americans put up a barricade across one of the town’s main streets, and the American militia, led by Gens. Benedict Arnold and Benjamin Silliman, held back the British, according to the Keeler Tavern Museum.

Although 4,435 Americans died in the Revolutionary War, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, it’s extremely rare to find the human remains of soldiers who fought in that conflict, said Bellantoni, who has nearly 30 years experience

working as an archaeologist in Connecticut.

“As far as I know, certainly in New England, this is the first archaeologically excavated remains from the Revolutionary War,” he said.

It’s possible that more than three skeletons are buried at the site, Bellantoni said. A team of archaeologists plans to use ground-penetrating radar to determine if there are more remains in the area.

Both the Americans and the British buried their dead in Ridgefield after the battle, Bellantoni said. The three individuals recovered so far were buried in the same shallow grave about 4 feet (1.2 meters) under what was ground level at that time, another clue that they likely died in the battle and were hastily buried afterward, Bellantoni said.

Archaeologists also found several brass and pewter buttons alongside the skeletons. Further analysis may reveal if these buttons have any insignia that would identify these men as soldiers. The buttons “are very corroded and rusted, so right now we cannot tell until we get them cleaned up, X-rayed and so forth,” Bellantoni said.

However, other signs suggest that the men weren’t soldiers. A preliminary examination has failed to find any signs of trauma, “but that may come when we do the forensic work on the skeletons in the lab,” Bellantoni said. Researchers are still studying CT (computed tomography) scans of the bones that were made at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut, Bellantoni said.

Experts from across the country, including the University of Connecticut, Quinnipiac University, Yale University, the University of Florida and the University of California, Santa Cruz, are planning to study the remains. The bones and teeth



Gen. George Washington’s army marches to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania in 1777. (Image: © Shutterstock)

can yield all kinds of information, including whether these individuals had any infections or whether they had enough nutrition as children, said Jaime Ullinger, an associate professor of anthropology and co-director of the Bioanthropology Research Institute at Quinnipiac. Chemical analyses could help scientists figure out where these individuals were born and lived, said Ullinger, who is involved in the skeletal examinations.

“There is a lot more analysis that can be done with the skeletons, that can be done with the buttons, that can be done around the historical archives relating to this time period, and so we are hoping to pull all of these things together,” Ullinger told Live Science.

(Source: Live Science)

Royal Caribbean announces 2021 itineraries

Royal Caribbean International has announced its China itineraries for the first half of 2021. The spectrum of the Seas, the cruise line’s newest ship, will sail from Shanghai on 4- to 7-night sailings. These new itineraries promise exciting new destinations and shore excursions for the whole family.

Spectrum will be offering nearly 30 sailings in Japan. These 4- to 5-night cruises will be sailing to multiple destinations, from the islands of Okinawa to the beaches of the Yaeyama Islands. The Quantum Ultra Class ship’s 7-night cruises will include overnight stays in select destinations, in which guests can spend more time in port exploring the local, vibrant culture.

Other destinations include some of Japan’s most famed cities, such as Shimonoseki, Maizuru, Niigata and Hakodate (Hokkaido). Here, guests can explore the Niigata City Aquarium, the hot springs of Hokkaido and much more.

Guests aboard the Spectrum will also have the opportunity to choose from a lineup of new shore excursions designed to enhance the destination experience. Through local celebrations in new and unique locales, these excursions cover a variety of themes and routes, turning traditional sightseeing into an immersive adventure.

Meanwhile, the newly amplified Voyager of the Seas will

call Shanghai home during the summer of 2021. After a \$97 million makeover in 2019, Voyager will be embarking on a series of 4- and 5-night Japan cruises to several of the nation’s ports of call, such as Fukuoka, Nagasaki, Kumamoto and Kagoshima.

Voyager touts thrilling features that make for an unforgettable family vacation: from The Perfect Storm duo of racer waterslides to the reinvigorated Vitality Spa and redesigned kids and teens spaces, Voyager will offer the standout family summer vacation in the region.

(Source: Travel Plus)

Memorial for plane crash victims to be set up in Tehran

SOCIETY TEHRAN — A memorial for the victims of the Ukrainian plane crash incident will be set up in the capital, IRNA news agency reported on Sunday.

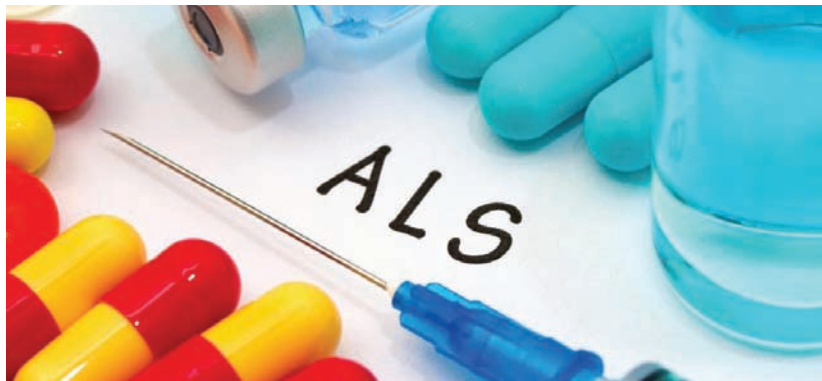
Tehran City Council approved a plan urging the municipality to set up a memorial for the plane crash victims. The municipality is obliged to define, within a week, an appropriate location for the installation of the memorial and, in addition, to install tribute banners, the report added.

Tehran City Council member Ahmad Masjed Jame'ei said that the incident has triggered people's emotions, "so we have suggested that a memorial should be set up to share sympathy with their families and the citizens as well."

A Ukrainian airliner was shot down shortly after taking off from Tehran's Imam Khomeini airport on January 8, killing all 167 passengers and 9 crew members.



Iranian-made ALS medicine saves \$42,000 per patient annually



SOCIETY TEHRAN — The Iranian-made medicine for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), called Alsava, will reduce treatment costs from currently \$47,000 to \$5,000 per patient annually, IRNA reported.

The first Iranian-made medicine was unveiled during a ceremony in Tehran on Sunday.

High cost of treatment prompted Iranian pharmacists to try and produce the domestic one, which was previously imported from Japan and costed patients over 20 billion rials (nearly \$47,000) annually.

Two knowledge-based companies have

succeeded in producing the medicine, which reduces the treatment costs by up to 18 billion rials (nearly \$42,000).

ALS is a specific disease that causes the death of neurons controlling voluntary muscles, which is characterized by stiff muscles, muscle twitching, and gradually worsening weakness due to muscles decreasing in size.

The disease can affect people of any age, but usually starts around the age of 60 and in inherited cases around the age of 50. The average survival from onset to death is two to four years, though this can vary, and about 10% survive longer than 10 years.

One dead, one missing as flooding hits southern Iran



SOCIETY TEHRAN — Torrential rain has triggered flooding in southern parts of the country, leaving one dead and one missing so far, head of Rescue and Relief Organization Morteza Salimi said.

During the last 72 hours, 13 cities of Sistan-Baluchestan province were affected by floods, he stated.

Referring to rescue and relief operations in 40 towns and villages in the province, Salimi said that 1,248 people have been rescued

and 327 provided with emergency accommodation.

Mohsen Heydari, director of provincial meteorological organization, told ISNA that the maximum rainfall was reported at 186 mm from Nikshahr county, while the average annual rainfall is 113 mm in the province.

Heavy rainfall for the second day led to school closure in 12 cities of Sistan-Baluchestan.

Severe flooding also left some 23 roads impassable in the province.

One of the world's largest fish declared extinct

One of the world's largest freshwater fish has been declared extinct.

The Chinese paddlefish, which grew as long as 7 metres, lived in the Yangtze River in China and had a lineage dating back at least 34 million years.

Scientists believe it failed to survive overfishing, habitat fragmentation and a loss of biodiversity in its native habitat.

A research paper published in the journal Science of the Total Environment said populations of the fish, also known as the Chinese swordfish, had declined drastically since the late 1970s.

"As no individuals exist in captivity, and no living tissues are conserved for potential resurrection, the fish should be considered extinct," the paper said, pointing to criteria for inclusion on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List.

In the 1970s the Gezhouba Dam was built on the main



stream of the Yangtze and the opening of the Three Gorges dam project followed in 2003, the same year the last live Chinese paddlefish was sighted.

Surveys in 2017 and 2018 counted fish species in the river, but did not encounter a single specimen of the Chinese paddlefish.

The researchers estimate the fish became extinct between 2005 and 2010.

"The extinction of the paddlefish is a huge loss and reflects the critical status of the Yangtze River ecosystem," said Pan Wenjing, a forest and oceans manager at Greenpeace East Asia.

"The ecology of the Yangtze River is close to collapse due to human activity in past decades," she said. "China has launched its campaign trying to recover the Yangtze River's environment, and some ambitious policies have been introduced, such as the 10-year ban on fishing activity."

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Kani Barazan international wetland overflows after a decade

Recent downpours made Kani Barazan international wetland full to bursting its banks which is unprecedented over the past ten years, Mahabad chief of department of environment (DOE) has stated.

Kani Barazan wetland, located in Mahabad county in northwestern province of West Azarbaijan, was once recorded as the first bird-sighting site in the country. Stretching to 910 hectares, Kani Barazan wetland is home to various bird species including, flamingo, little cormorant, great white pelican, stilt, sternidae, great crested grebe, graylag goose, lesser white-fronted goose, heron, common shelduck and etc.

The wetland retains 16 million cubic meters of water, which is already overflowed, IRNA quoted Farooq Sokhanvar as saying on Sunday.

"The overflowed water is entering three wetlands near the Lake Urmia, as it is part of southern ecology of Lake Urmia," he further stated.

آب تالاب بین المللی «کانی برازان» پس از ۱۰ سال سرریز شد

رئیس اداره حفاظت محیط زیست مه‌باد گفت: آب تالاب بین المللی «کانی برازان» این شهرستان پس از ۱۰ سال و بر اثر بارش های مناسب سرریز شد.

تالاب بین المللی کانی برازان مه‌باد با وسعتی افزون بر ۹۱۰ هکتار یکی از مهمترین تالاب های اقماری جنوب دریاچه ارومیه و با ارزش ترین زیستگاه های انواع پرندگان آبی و کنار آبی مهاجر و بومی در شمال غرب کشور به شمار می رود.

فاروق سخنور روز یکشنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا اظهار داشت: هم اکنون ظرفیت ۱۶ میلیون مترمکعبی این تالاب پر شده و به صورت میانگین سه مترمکعب آب ورودی آن از سه دریاچه خروجی به سمت سه تالاب اقماری دریاچه ارومیه هدایت می شود.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"hist- or histo- or histi- or histio-"

■ **Meaning:** tissue

■ **For example:** The *histology* indicated chronic active antral gastritis in all patients.

PHRASAL VERB

Pick through something

■ **Meaning:** to search through a pile of things to find things that you want

■ **For example:** Police are still picking through the rubble looking for clues to the cause of the explosion.

IDIOM

Darken someone's door

■ **Explanation:** If you darken somebody's door, you come as an unwanted or unwelcome visitor

■ **For example:** just get out of here and never darken my door again!

Eleven dead and hundreds of thousands lose power as storms sweep U.S.

At least 11 people have been killed and hundreds of thousands of homes hit by power cuts as storms sweep across parts of the US south and east, bringing snow, hail and hurricane-force winds.

More than 1,000 flights have been cancelled as unrelenting rain and gales lash seven states along the east of the country from Texas.



Forecasters warned more than 18 million people remained at risk of tornadoes and flooding, and more snow was on its way.

Golfball-sized hail and up to 5ins of snow fell on Friday night and early Saturday as the storms pushed through the southeast and Great Lakes into Maine, the National Weather Service (NWS) said.

Firefighters found the bodies of an elderly couple near their demolished trailer in Bossier Parish, Louisiana. Their home had been carried 200ft from its foundations amid 135mph winds.

Up to another 12ins were expected in parts of Illinois, Michigan, northern New York and New England.

The Alabama Emergency Management Agency said that an "embedded tornado within a long line of intense thunderstorms" caused the deaths of three people.

A 75-year-old man in Oil City, Pennsylvania, was in bed when a tree fell on his home, crushing him to death, authorities said.

"The real danger comes from the wind and ice accumulation," warned NWS forecaster Bob Oravec.

More than half an inch of ice was predicted to clog highways and roads in the coming hours, he added.

"The ice and wind will make driving treacherous, and trees can snap and knock out power and do other damage."

Widespread downed trees and power lines caused travel disruption.

A firefighter and a police officer in Lubbock, Texas, were killed after a car slid on an icy highway as they were investigating an accident.

At Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, about 1,000 flights were cancelled and hundreds more delayed, according to flightaware.com.

Many streams already are at or near flood levels because of earlier storms, and more heavy rain could lead to flash flooding, forecasters said.

Parts of Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Missouri, Illinois and Indiana were under flash flood warnings on Saturday.

Lightning was suspected of being the cause of two house fires in north Texas, and tornadoes damaged or destroyed homes and other buildings in Arkansas, Missouri and Oklahoma, but no injuries were reported.

(Source: The Independent)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Rural China health plan

(October 30, 2002)

China has announced an ambitious plan to improve the health of its huge rural population. The plan will try to prevent children catching common diseases. It will also try to stop the return of tuberculosis and the growing threat of AIDS. This report by Rupert Wingfield-Hayes.

These are **impressive targets**. By 2010 **more than ninety percent** of China's **rural children** will be **inoculated against** common diseases. Ninety-five percent of counties will have anti-tuberculosis programmes and three-quarters of rural townships will provide treatment for AIDS patients.

But this plan is also a **glaring admission** of just how bad the health care situation in rural China has become. It was never good but since the break-up of the communes twenty years ago, China's rural health system has **all but collapsed**.

Chinese peasants must now pay to see a doctor, if they can find one, but few have the money. Tuberculosis is once more on the rise and AIDS is taking hold across a **huge swathe** of central China. It's being spread by blood selling - a common way for poor farmers to earn extra cash. Perhaps a million have already been infected with HIV.

The new plan promises **appropriate** health care for AIDS patients. It's certainly a **noble goal** but the reality today is that tens of thousands of AIDS patients in rural China have **no access** to the expensive drugs needed to control the disease and are simply being left to die.

Words

impressive targets: important, ambitious aims

more than ninety percent: more than 90 in each 100

rural children: children living in country areas and villages

inoculated against: to inoculate against a disease is to introduce a weak form of the disease into a body as a protection against the disease

a glaring admission: a very clear agreement that something is true

all but collapsed: nearly stopped working

a huge swathe: a very large area

appropriate: correct

a noble goal: a morally good aim

no access to: no way of using

(Source: BBC)



Every action has a reaction. We have one planet; one chance.

Libyan forces loyal to Haftar announce conditional ceasefire

Fighters in eastern Libya loyal to renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar have announced a ceasefire in the western region, which includes the capital Tripoli, starting 00:01am on Sunday (22:01 GMT), conditioned on acceptance by their rivals, a spokesman said.

Forces loyal to Haftar have been battling forces aligned with the internationally-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) - with the aim of capturing Tripoli - since April.

Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) on Thursday rebuffed a call by Turkey and Russia for the warring parties to declare a ceasefire amid clashes and air raids in a conflict drawing increasing foreign involvement and concern.

However, LNA spokesman Ahmed Mismari said in a video statement late on Saturday that the LNA accepted a truce in the west "provided that the other party abides by the ceasefire."

He warned that "any breach will be met with a harsh response".

Al Jazeera's Mahmoud Abdelwahed, reporting from Tripoli, said the fact that the warring factions agreed to a ceasefire did not mean an end to hostilities.

"[This is] especially with the UN-recognized government demanding that Haftar's forces pull out from southern Tripoli as a prerequisite to any settlement in this conflict," he said.

The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) welcomed the truce and urged the warring parties "to strictly abide by the ceasefire and make a room for peaceful efforts to address all disputes through a Libyan-Libyan dialogue".

Turkey backs the Tripoli-based GNA headed by Fayez al-Sarraj, while Russian military contractors have been deployed alongside the eastern forces.

(Source: al Jazeera)

'I'm spending all my money to get rid of Trump': Michael Bloomberg

U.S. presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg told Reuters he is ready to spend much of his vast fortune to oust Republican President Donald Trump from the White House in 2020, rejecting criticism from rivals for the Democratic nomination that the billionaire is trying to buy the U.S. election.



Ranked by Forbes as the eighth-richest American, Bloomberg has flooded U.S. airwaves and social media feeds with messages that he stands the best chance to beat Trump, spending more on campaign ads since he launched his campaign in November than his main Democratic rivals have over the last year.

"Number one priority is to get rid of Donald Trump. I'm spending all my money to get rid of Trump," Bloomberg told Reuters aboard his campaign bus on Saturday, during a nearly 300-mile (483-km) drive across Texas, one of the 14 states that will vote on Super Tuesday on March 3.

"Do you want me to spend more or less? End of story."

U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, one of the leading Democratic presidential contenders who has vowed to get money out of politics, blasted Bloomberg when he launched his campaign with a \$37-million TV advertising blitz, accusing the former New York City mayor of trying to buy American democracy.

"These are just political things they say, hoping they catch on and they don't like me doing it, because it competes with them, not because it's bad policy," Bloomberg said.

(Source: Reuters)

Trump repeats Syria intention: U.S. troops are taking the oil

→ 1 Trump's remarks contradicted earlier remarks by his Defense Secretary Mark Esper, who tried to justify the presence of «500 to 600-ish troops» in Syria by alleging they were seeking to deny ISIS - an acronym used by U.S. officials to refer to Daesh terrorist group - access to Syrian oil reserves.

Taking hold of a foreign country's oil reserves without permission from the sovereign authority would be a serious breach of international law.

In addition, the Geneva Convention, to which the U.S. is a signatory, explicitly forbids the looting of property during conflict, referring to it as a war crime.

In December, a senior adviser to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said Damascus planned to file a lawsuit against Washington for plundering the Arab country's oil resources.

Bouthaina Shaaban said the United States had no right to Syria's oil, warning the U.S. of popular opposition and operations against the presence of its troops at Syrian oil fields.

Shaaban was referring to Trump's September announcement to retain American forces in Syria to secure oil reserves there.

Benjamin Friedman, policy director at think tank Defense Priorities and adjunct professor at the George Washington University, told The Independent last year, "The president appears to believe that the U.S. can sell the oil, based on his statements in the past about Iraqi oil and Libyan oil ... thinking that we can loot countries."

"Taking the profits from the sale of Syrian oil for the U.S. treasury would be illegal. That would probably qualify as pillaging under the law."

(Source: agencies)

Iranian strike on U.S. bases in Iraq only first part of response: Nasrallah

The Iranian strike on U.S. bases in Iraq in response to the killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani was only the first step of a "long path" of retaliation, Hezbollah's secretary-general said Sunday.

"What happened at the Ain al-Asad [base] is a merely a slap in the face of America, this attack was also a message to the Zionist entity... let the stupid Netanyahu know the wrong spot he put his entity in. The worst criminal in the world today is the US. Even Israel that has been committing crimes in the region is protected by the US. Even ISIL that has been destroying the region is doing it for the sake of the US return to the region." Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah said during a speech marking one week of memorial for the deaths of Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

"The response to Soleimani's death is not a single operation but a long path that must remove U.S. military presence from the region," he added.

Soleimani, who led Iran's Quds Force,



and Muhandis were killed along with several Iraqi and Iranian militia members in a U.S. drone strike outside Baghdad on Jan. 3.

Last week, the Hezbollah leader said that the only "just retaliation" for the deaths was the targeting of U.S. troops.

Iran responded on Wednesday with missile attacks on U.S. air bases in Iraq's Erbil and Ain al-Asad.

Nasrallah said the strikes demonstrated Iran's military strength, and that it can respond to "powerful nations" such as the U.S.

"Time will reveal that after Qassem Soleimani there will be no place for those arrogant and tyrants. Trump put the Iraqis in front of two choices, either he leaves and take their wealth or stays and takes their oil," he added.

Nasrallah also said to Massoud Barzani "you should show gratitude for Haj Qassem, when the whole world refused to help you, Hajj Qassem came to help you along with his companions while you were shivering from fear."

(Source: al Menar)

Over a dozen Saudi servicemen to be expelled from U.S.

Over a dozen Saudi servicemen accused of harboring links to extremist groups and possessing child pornography will be expelled from U.S. military bases, according to media reports.

This comes after the FBI conducted an investigation into a shooting rampage by a Saudi officer at a Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida last month that killed and injured several people.

Early in December, Mohammed Al-shamrani, who was receiving pilot training at the base, opened fire in a classroom, killing three sailors and wounding eight others before he was shot dead by the sheriff's deputies.

The Saudis to be expelled are not accused of aiding the 21-year-old Saudi Air Force second lieutenant in the shooting, but some of them are believed to have been linked to other extremist movements, CNN reported citing a person familiar with the situation.

Some others are also accused of possessing child pornography, according to a defense official and the person familiar with the situation.

The FBI probe also showed that several others had not reported the shooter's disturbing behavior prior to the attack, according to The Washington Post.

"In the wake of the Pensacola tragedy, the Department of Defense restricted to classroom training programs foreign military students from Saudi Arabia while we



conducted a review and enhancement of our foreign student vetting procedures," said Lt. Col. Robert Carver, a spokesman for the Department of Defense. "That training pause is still in place while we implement new screening and security measures."

The Justice Department is expected to conclude that the incident was in fact an act of terrorism, CNN cited a U.S. official as saying.

The Pensacola base is a major training site for the Navy and home to its aerobatic flight demonstration squadron, the Blue Angels. Naval Air Station Pensacola employs more than 16,000 military and 7,400 civilian personnel, according to the base's website.

Currently, some 5,000 international military personnel are being trained in the United States, including approximately 850 Saudis among all branches.

(Source: Press TV)

Australian PM proposes high-powered inquiry into bushfires response

After weeks of criticism over the handling of the bushfires scorching Australia, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Sunday he will propose a national review into the response to the disaster, as the fires claimed another firefighter's life.

The Australian bush has been burning for nearly three months and the fires have killed 28 people, claimed 2,000 homes and consumed millions of acres of land and wildlife. The crisis is becoming increasingly political as the country looks at the causes and the government's response.

"There is obviously a need for a national review of the response," Morrison said in an interview with ABC television.

Asked whether it should be a Royal Commission, a powerful judicial inquiry, Morrison said, "I think that is what would be necessary and I will be taking a proposal through the cabinet to that end, but it must be done with consultations with the states and territories."

Morrison said that the inquiry would examine the response to the crisis, including the deployment of emergency services to battle the fires at a state and local level, the role of the federal government, and the impact of climate change.

Bushfires are common during Australia's summer months, but this fire season started unusually early, often moving quickly and unpredictably, and leaving swaths of the drought-stricken land a scorched earth.

Cooler weather conditions over the weekend have brought a temporary respite,



but a firefighter died on duty in Victoria, where new flames sparked. Authorities said the risk was far from over and more hot weather is expected.

Smoke again sheathed Sydney on Sunday, almost a new normal for the country's biggest city, moving the air quality into hazardous territory, according to the NSW Department of Primary Industry index.

Facing increasing pressure to do more to tackle climate change, Morrison, who has so far been defiant in rejecting any links between his government's conservative climate policies and the bushfires, said his government will look into improving its performance on curbing emissions.

"We want to reduce emissions and do the best job we possibly can and get better and better and better at it," he said. "I want to do that with a balanced policy which recognizes Australia's broader national economic interests and social interest."

(Source: Reuters)

Putin says Syrian president should invite Trump to visit Damascus

Russian President Vladimir Putin said during his visit to Damascus that his Syrian counterpart Bashar Assad should invite U.S. President Donald Trump.

In his interview with the TV program "Moscow. Kremlin. Putin" on the Rossiya-1 TV Channel on Sunday, the Russian leader expressed readiness to send this invitation to the US president.

During Putin's visit to Syria, Assad spoke about Apostle Paul, whose conversion occurred on the road to Damascus. The Syrian leader joked that "if Trump traveled that road he would be OK." Putin suggested inviting Trump to Damascus saying that he would "cope with that." "Invite him and he will come!" Putin said.

Assad voiced readiness to do that and Putin said: "I will tell him this."

Putin paid a visit to Damascus on Tuesday. The Russian leader met with Syrian President Bashar Assad in the Russian command point in Syria. The two leaders listened to the military's report on the situation in the country's region. Later they held bilateral talks. The presidents also visited the Umayyad Mosque, also known as the Great Mosque of Damascus.

Later Putin visited an Orthodox church in Damascus, the Mariamite Cathedral, where he met with Patriarch John X, the primate of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch



and All The East.

Last week, Putin has made a surprise visit to Syria's capital, Damascus, meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and observing "signs of peaceful life" in the city.

The two leaders met at the command center of the Russian forces in the Arab country's capital on Tuesday, just a few hours after Putin's plane landed in the Damascus International Airport, Syria's official news agency SANA reported.

According to RT, at the meeting, Putin and Assad lis-

tened to reports by military officials on the conditions on the ground in various regions of Syria, which has been receiving assistance from Russia in the form of counter-terrorism airstrikes since September 2015.

During their meeting, the Russian president told Assad that "signs of peaceful life are visible to the naked eye on the streets of Damascus," according to Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

"In his conversation with Assad, Putin noted that we can now say with confidence that a huge distance has been traveled toward restoring Syrian statehood and the country's territorial integrity," Peskov further quoted the Russian leader as saying.

The Russian airstrikes have helped Syrian forces clear nearly all of the Arab country from the presence of foreign-backed militants, who began a reign of terror there in 2011.

During his visit, Putin also hailed the latest advances made by Syrian government forces.

According to the Kremlin, the Russian president will visit several facilities in the Arab country during the trip.

The last time Putin visited Syria was in December 2017, when he only briefly stopped at the Russian base of Hmeimim on the Mediterranean coast.

(Source: TASS)

KRG supports Baghdad's decision on U.S. troop pullout from Iraq

→ 1 Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, in an airstrike near Baghdad International Airport.

Abdul-Mahdi and Barzani also discussed the latest developments in Iraq, tensions between the United States and Iran, and the ongoing anti-government protests in the Arab country.

"Iraq should not be turned into a field for regional and international conflicts," said a statement by the Kurdistan Region president's office.

"The importance of the continuation of international aid and support for Iraq and the Kurdistan Region in the fight against terrorism, threats of terror resurgence, and Daesh terrorist activities in Iraq, especially areas located between Peshmerga and Iraqi forces, were also discussed in the meeting," the statement added.

Abdul-Mahdi said there is "a good opportunity" to resolve issues between the Baghdad government and the KRG with "determination and serious will."

Late on Thursday, the Iraqi caretaker prime minister called on the United States to dispatch a delegation to Baghdad tasked

with formulating a mechanism for the withdrawal of US troops from the country.

According to a statement released by the Iraqi premier's office, Abdul-Mahdi "requested that delegates be sent to Iraq to set the mechanisms to implement the parliament's decision for the secure withdrawal of (foreign) forces from Iraq" in a phone call with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

The prime minister said Iraq rejects violation of its sovereignty, particularly the U.S. military's violation of Iraqi airspace in the airstrike that assassinated Soleimani last week.

Abdul-Mahdi asked Pompeo to "send delegates to Iraq to prepare a mechanism to carry out the parliament's resolution regarding the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq," the statement said.

"The prime minister said American forces had entered Iraq and drones are flying in its airspace without permission from Iraqi authorities and this was a violation of the bilateral agreements," the statement added.

The U.S. State Department bluntly rejected the request on Friday.

U.S. threatens to cut off Iraq's access to oil account in New York if troops expelled

Iraqi officials say the administration of US President Donald Trump has threatened to shut off Iraq's access to a key central banking account if Baghdad expels American troops from the Arab country.

Washington would shut down Baghdad's access to its main account at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, used to collect revenues from Iraq's overseas oil sales, The Wall Street Journal quoted the officials as saying.

According to the most recent financial statement from the Central Bank of Iraq, the bank held almost \$3 billion in overnight deposits at the close of 2018.

The report came a day after Trump implicitly threatened to seize \$35 billion of Iraqi money held in US banks if the country insists on having American forces withdrawn from Iraq.

Trump said he had told Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi that Iraq "should pay back the United States for its



investments in the country over the past several years or the American military will stay there," Fox News reported.

"I said, 'If we leave, you got to pay us,'" Trump told the news network in the White House. "If we leave ... you have to pay us for the money we put in."

Asked how he planned to collect money from Iraq, Trump said: "Well, we have a lot of their money right now. We have a lot of their money. We have \$35 billion of their money right now sitting in an account."

"And I think they'll agree to pay. I think they'll agree to pay. Otherwise, we'll stay there," he added.

(Source: agencies)

Iran volleyball qualify for Tokyo 2020

1-2 "Iran taught us a good lesson tonight," Jiang said.

"They showed us the quality of Asia's best team, we have a long way to go," he added.

Mousavi's powerful serve earned Iran a match point before the 29-year-old fired an ace to kill the match.

China got the only opportunity to win a set in the second when they were only 23-22 down and forced Iran to the only timeout in the match. But Mousavi's block stifled China's hope.

"We were not at our best, I take the responsibility," China coach Shen Fulin said.

"The players were under too much stress in such an important match," he added.

The 65-year-old, who took charge of the team only two months ago, hinted that his job was already finished after the event.

"My contract with the Chinese Volleyball Association is due at the end of the event," Shen said.

"The team needs to be polished in high-level matches. We should learn from Iran, most of their players are playing in the European leagues and they already get used to the physical and mental demand," he added.

In addition to hosts Japan, the teams of Iran, Argentina, Brazil, Italy, Poland, France, the U.S. and Tunisia have qualified so far for Tokyo 2020 through the intercontinental qualification tournaments.

Iran qualified for the Olympics for the second time in row, as the Persians came fifth in the previous edition held in Rio.



Korea defeat Iran at AFC U23 Championship



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Korea Republic defeated Iran 2-1 in their AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 Group C tie at the Tinsulanon Stadium on Sunday.

Korea forward Lee Dong-Jun played on the rebound and sent the ball into the net in the 22nd minute.

Cho Gue-Sung made it 2-0 for the Korean team in the 35th minute, firing a powerful shot from just outside the area on the left-hand side to beat Iran goalkeeper Habib Farabbasi.

Reza Shekari pulled a goal back for Iran in the 54th minute with a header from inside the six-yard box.

"We had two different halves. In the first 20 minutes, we had scoring chances but after that our players fell asleep and forgot their duties. We gave them to score twice and return to the match against a team such South Korea is very difficult," Iran coach Hamid

Estili said.

"In the second half we created some changes and put Korea under pressure and they embarked on counter attacks. We didn't deserve to lose and could have earned one points against Korea," he added.

"We know China very well and it's our last chance. We have no way but to defeat China. We have to prepare our team mentally and physically," Estili concluded.

Iran, who were held by a 1-1 draw against Uzbekistan on Thursday, will play China on Wednesday.

The competition is being held in Songkhla, Thailand from Jan. 8 to 26. The top three teams qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics in July, although should Japan emerge as one of them, the fourth-placed side will advance.

Iran have not been in the Olympics since the 1976 games in Munich.

Gabriel Calderon leaves Persepolis



Persepolis football club have parted ways with head coach Gabriel Caldron after just six months in charge.

The Iranian club have announced the departure of the Argentine coach.

The announcement came from Persepolis general manager Mohammadhassan Ansarifard as he confirmed the club are due to introduce the new coach in the upcoming days.

Speaking to the club's official website, Ansarifard said: "Mr. Calderon's return has been canceled. The board of directors and general manager of the club sent a letter to Caldron and asked him to submit his response to the club by the end of January 10th, but it didn't happen. That's why the return of Mr. Calderon is being ruled out completely. The club wanted to announce Calderon's departure at the same time as to introduce the new coach but we need some more time to agree on coaching options."

Gabriel Calderon replaced Branko Ivankovic in the Iranian popular football team. He had many problems with the Persepolis officials during his tenure.

According to Ansarifard, the reigning champions of Iran Professional League (IPL) will introduce their replacement for Gabriele Caldron by Monday. Ansarifard claimed that Calderon has made new financial and non-financial demands that some of them were "weird and unbelievable".

Last month, Italian coach Andrea Stramaccioni parted company with Esteghlal after the Iranian football club failed to transfer his salary over the U.S. sanctions. Now, it seems Calderon has followed in Stramaccioni's footsteps.

"We appreciate the efforts of Mr. Calderon and what he has done for the club during this season but there are some issues that we want our fans to know and we will announce some of them in next days," Ansarifard added.

Uzbekistan beat China at AFC U23 Championship

Defending champions Uzbekistan took a major step towards the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 quarter-finals, defeating China PR 2-0 at Tinsulanon Stadium on Sunday.

Captain Islom Kobilov scored one penalty kick and had another saved, before Nurillo Tukhtasinov came off the bench seal an important win for Ljubinko Drulovic's side with 10 minutes remaining.

China PR's second defeat in succession means they can no longer advance to the knockout stage, while Uzbekistan's relatively handsome tally of four points from two matches means they require only a draw from their final group stage match against already qualified Korea Republic to advance.

With their title defence in jeopardy after Thursday's draw against Islamic Republic of Iran, Uzbekistan came bursting out of the gates, keeping their opponents on the back foot in a dominant early period where the Chinese goal lived a charmed life.

Khusniddin Alikulov had the ball in the back of the net within six minutes, only for the goal to be chalked



off on account of the assistant referee's flag, and the chances kept coming, with Sanjar Kodirkulov and Jasurbek Yakshiboev both drawing saves from Chen Wei before Aziz Ganiev struck the bottom of the upright from distance after 21 minutes.

Uzbekistan's tally of 70 percent possession and seven

shots at goal to one in the opening half-hour told a compelling story about the state of affairs, but, for all their dominance, it took until the dying seconds of the first half for them to go ahead.

The goal came from an increasingly familiar source, with team captain Kobilov stepping up for the second time in four days to convert a penalty kick, this time in the third minute of first half stoppage time, after Oybek Bozorov was fouled by Wei Zhen.

Kobilov missed a chance to extend the lead when he had a second spot kick of the night saved by Chen after the Video Assistant Referee spotted a handling offence just after the hour mark, with China launching occasional attacking raids themselves in the aftermath.

Uzbekistan's frustration continued with further near misses to Abdixolikov and Kodirkulov, but they finally made the points safe when Wei blocked a shot directly into the path of Tukhtasinov, who finished unerringly from eight yards to put the holders within touching distance of the last eight.

(Source: AFC)

FIFA approves Baharvand as head of Iranian football federation

MNA — The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has confirmed the appointment of Heidar Baharvand as the acting president of Iran's Football Federation.

Resignation of Mehdi Taj, former of President of Iran Football Federation (IFF) on Dec. 30, prompted the Presiding Board of the Federation to hold an emergency meeting, in which, Heidar Baharvand was introduced as the acting president.



After reviewing the issue, FIFA has accepted the resignation of Mehdi Taj and appointment of the new head, putting the name of Heidar Baharvand as the current president of the Iranian federation on its website.

The interesting point is that the name of Ali Kafashian has still been mentioned on the website of FIFA as Vice President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Football Federation.

This is while that he had earlier announced his resignation due to the law of non-employment of state pensioners in the governmental posts and for this reason, he could not replace former President of IFF Mehdi Taji.

General assembly of the federation will convene in the coming months to officially elect a new president.

Anthony Stokes on Persepolis's radar

TASNIM — Iranian football team Persepolis have set their sight on signing ex-Tractor forward Anthony Stokes.

The 31-year-old hitman, who left Tractor in July to Join Turkey's Adana Demirspor on a two-year contract, has been linked with a move to the Iranian popular football team.

The former Arsenal forward joined Tractor in June 2018 and scored 15 goals in 23 matches for the Iranian top-flight football club.

Persepolis, who sit top of the Iran Professional League, are going to win title for the fourth year in a row.

The Reds also are favorites to win Hazfi Cup.

UWW president terms Iran as cradle of wrestling

IRNA — President of United World Wrestling (UWW) Nenad Lalovic described Iran as the cradle of wrestling, noting imagining the sport in the world without Iran is impossible.

The president made the remarks in Lausanne of Switzerland, adding Iran's position in wrestling should be preserved.

The UWW has always supported the sport in Iran and will do so in the future, he further underlined.

Expressing hope that wrestling in Iran would continue without any challenge, he said, adding the UWW will prevent taking place any unpleasant incident to Iran.

Djokovic leads Serbia to ATP Cup glory

SYDNEY (Reuters) — Novak Djokovic helped seal victory for Serbia in the inaugural ATP Cup team event after defeating his long-term Spanish rival Rafael Nadal in singles on Sunday before going on to play a pivotal role in the deciding doubles match.



With the final locked at 1-1 after the singles were shared, Djokovic partnered veteran Victor Troicki to beat Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta and Feliciano Lopez 6-3 6-4 and win the title.

The 16-times Grand Slam champion proved to be a calming influence throughout, especially after the Serbian pair fell behind early in the match.

He used his powerful serve and fleet-footed returns to haul his country back into the first set and create a momentum shift Serbia rode all the way to a victory completed in the early hours of Monday morning.

Djokovic earlier beat Nadal 6-2 7-6(4), extending his dominance over the Spaniard on hardcourts, a surface Nadal has not beaten him on since 2013.

Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut completed a flawless tournament by defeating Serbia's Dusan Lajovic 7-5 6-1.

Xavi rejects Barcelona offer to replace Valverde

Barcelona legend Xavi Hernandez has decided to turn down the opportunity to immediately replace Ernesto Valverde as the club's head coach, sources have told ESPN.

After two days of phone calls and meetings, the Al Sadd manager told Barca sporting director Eric Abidal and CEO Oscar Grau that he was open to the possibility of joining the club next season.

Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu will be busy Monday, with a long-over-

due meeting with the club's board in the afternoon, when he will discuss everything that took place over the past few days.

Sources told ESPN that Valverde's job was not in immediate danger after the Super Copa exit at the hands of Atletico Madrid, but Barca changed their minds and sent Abidal and Grau to Qatar, where they met with Xavi on three occasions and held a meeting with the injured Ousmane Dembele.

Xavi, who has been linked with the Barca job ever since he stopped playing for the club, prefers to start the new project from scratch and not go behind Valverde's back, sources said. On Saturday, Xavi said he respected Valverde a lot.

Valverde is expected to take training Monday morning with his squad in preparation for the team's La Liga match against Granada at Camp Nou next weekend.

(Source: ESPN)



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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Your messenger is an interpreter of your wisdom, and your written words are the most eloquent message that comes from you.

Imam Ali (AS)

Nine plans nominated for Vista Contemporary Art Prize

A R T TEHRAN — Nine plans are contending for the Vista Contemporary Art Prize during the third edition of the annual award established by Tehran's Vista Gallery to honor the best artistic idea from young Iranian artists.

One of the plans has been provided by Hamidreza Azad to organize an installation exhibition, in which a horn-shaped figure produces voices, causing visitors to refer to history in a reflective way.



Nominees for the Vista Contemporary Art Prize pose with curator Parisa Pahlavan (4th L) at Tehran's Vista Gallery on January 11, 2020. (Honaronline/Mahdieh Babai)

In another plan, Sanahin Babajanian will create solids representing geometrical motifs from Iranian architecture and paintings of Christian monuments.

In a plan for an installation, Iman Jesmi represents some perfect characters of the sounds being produced by objects and visitors' reactions to them.

Hufer Haqiqi displays some imaginary landscapes of Tehran in a delicate process in his plan.

In her plan, Ulduz Nabizadeh develops new concepts and functions of ceramics.

Shana Abdollahian and Ehsan Alizadeh are jointly competing with a single plan.

Plans by Kolsum Salehi, Aisa Rashid and Samira Rohbani have been selected to compete for the prize.

The winner will be honored with a check worth 300 million rials (about \$7,200) during a special ceremony at the gallery on Friday. The organizers also will help the winner accomplish his/her new project in an exhibition at the gallery.

Bruno Munari's "Drawing a Tree" selling like hot cakes in Iran

CULTURE TEHRAN — A Persian translation of Italian artist Bruno Munari's book "Drawing a Tree", which was first published in Iran in 1985, is now in its 15th edition, the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, which is the publisher of the book, announced on Sunday.



A copy of the Persian version of Italian artist Bruno Munari's book "Drawing a Tree". (IIDCYA)

Translated by Mohsen Ehsani, the illustrated book gives children some simple instructions to create beautiful trees, and at the same time, it teaches them how to look at things in the world, analyze them and draw them.

"When drawing a tree, always remember that every branch is more slender than the one that came before," Munari wrote in the book.

"Also note that the trunk splits into two branches, then those branches split in two, then those in two, and so on, and so on, until you have a full tree, be it straight, squiggly, curved up, curved down, or bent sideways by the wind," he added.

"Star Wars" actor Mark Hamill mocks Trump's inciting remarks on Iran

A R T TEHRAN — **d e s k** Mark Hamill, "Star Wars" actor and prominent Trump critic, has mocked President Donald Trump's remarks in support of some protests organized in Iran following the unintentional downing of a Ukrainian plane.

"Please ignore the fact that I created a travel ban for you and threatened to bomb your cultural sites," Hamill wrote in Persian on his Twitter on Sunday.

Earlier, Trump published two posts, both in English and Persian, on his Twitter expressing his support for Iranian protesters.

Hamill's post refers to an executive order Trump signed in 2017 to suspend refugee arrivals and ban entry to the United States from seven Muslim-majority countries, including Iran and Syria.

Hamill's remarks also mocked Trump's threat to target Iranian cultural sites in case Iran retaliated for the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.



Mark Hamill (WireImage/Barry King)

Iranian cultural figures, organizations condole death of Ukrainian jetliner passengers

few minutes after take-off from Imam Khomeini Airport in Tehran en route to Kiev on Wednesday.

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi apologized to the families of the victims and expressed his condolences.

"The families' grief deepened upon hearing the account of the event by the commander of the Aerospace Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)," Salehi wrote on his Twitter on Saturday.

"The information was good but not complete. For regaining trust, a transparent conversation between the IRGC commanders and the media is required," he added.

The Iranian House of Cinema, which is the official guild of Iranian cineastes, also sent a message of condolences to the families of the victims.

"The Iranian House of Cinema is grieved over the death of the dear passengers who lost their lives in the event and deeply wishes forbearance for their families," the organization wrote in the statement published on Saturday.

"We need sympathy and solidarity more than at any other time these days, which are overshadowed by the fear of disastrous incidents," the statement added.

In a statement published on Sunday, the Association of Iranian Documentary Filmmakers also expressed their sympathy over the death of the passengers.

"Over these gloomy days, the documentarians say that they are always alongside the people, and this is the venerable tradition of the association to reflect the pain of the Iranian land," they wrote.

The Documentary and Experimental Film Center, the Theater Forum and dozens of other Iranian cultural institutions also offered their condolences over the loss of the passengers.

In addition, a number of artists and cineastes, including Aidin Aghdahslu, Parviz Parastui, Mahaya Petrosian, Shabnam Moqaddami, Niki Karimi, Ali Rafiei, Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian and Tahmineh Milani, expressed their sympathy over the event in posts published on the social networks.

Iranian artists withdraw from festivals in sympathy for Ukrainian plane victims

A R T TEHRAN — A number of Iranian artists have withdrawn from the Fajr festivals to express their sympathy with the families of those people killed following the unintentional downing of a Ukrainian plane by Iran last week.

Ebrahim Haqiqi, the secretary of the 12th edition of the Fajr Festival of Visual Arts, and the jury members and organizers of the festival have all resigned.

The festival is scheduled to be held at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds from February 12 to 19.

Iranian veteran filmmaker Masud Kimiai

has pulled his film "There Was Blood" from the official competition of the 38th Fajr Film Festival.

"It's a hard time for my people and they hear bad news every day. Under these circumstances I don't want my film to be shown in the festival," Kimiai announced in a video message released by Persian media on Sunday.

Director Mitra Ebrahimi also has withdrawn her film "Kami" from the documentary section of the Fajr Film Festival.

The 38th edition of the Fajr Film Festival will be held in Tehran from February 1 to 11.

Different theater troupes and directors have also withdrawn from the Fajr

International Theater Festival.

Four theater groups led by directors Hossein Akbarpur, Puya Ghazi, Amin Rezaei and Arash Dadgar are among the troupes.

The 38th Fajr International Theater Festival will take place in Tehran from January 30 to February 9.

In addition, a number of theater troupes joined the chorus of mourners for the event by canceling their Sunday performances.

On Saturday morning, the Armed Forces General Staff released a statement noting that human error in an air defense mistakenly targeted the Ukrainian passenger plane near



A poster for the 12th Fajr Festival of Visual Arts.

Tehran's Imam Khomeini Airport. 176 people on board lost their lives.

The incident happened a few hours after Iran fired dozens of missiles at the U.S. airbase inside Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad.

Czech new wave director Ivan Passer dies aged 86

LONDON (The Guardian) — Ivan Passer, the filmmaker who was a key figure in the Czech new wave and who went on to direct the thriller Cutter's Way after emigrating to the US, has died aged 86. Variety reported that an associate of his family confirmed the news.

Passer, who was born in Prague in 1933, spent his career inextricably associated with, and to some extent overshadowed by, his friend and fellow Czech director Miloš Forman. The pair met as schoolboys and studied together at the Prague Film Academy; they both became part of a group of filmmakers who took advantage of a slight weakening of the communist government's iron grip in the late 50s and early 60s. "We were all united, one way or another, with desire to expose the regime on the screen," Passer told the LA Times. "And we got away with it because the regime was melting."

Passer's main contribution to the new wave was his directorial debut Intimate Lighting (1965), a gentle, funny, observational film about a famous musician visiting a smalltown friend; he also worked on Forman's two new wave classics, "A Blonde in Love" (1965) and "The Fireman's Ball" (1967).

However, the events of the Prague spring in 1968, which culminated in an invasion by Warsaw Pact forces in August



Ivan Passer in 2016. (CTK/Alamy)

that year, triggered a massive clampdown on creative activity. Passer and Forman planned an escape together, and managed to cross the border with Austria in January 1969.

Passer settled in New York and made a series of films with a counterculture flavor, including "Born to Win" (1971) with George Segal as a hairdresser turned junkie and which

provided an early role for Robert De Niro, and "Law and Disorder" (1974), with Carroll O'Connor and Ernest Borgnine as a pair of wannabe cops. However, Passer never achieved the same success as Forman, whose "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" won multiple Oscars in 1975.

The high point of Passer's Hollywood career was the 1981 thriller "Cutter's Way", starring Jeff Bridges and John Heard, long regarded as a cult classic. They play two damaged men, called Bone and Cutter, who witness a murder and, led by Cutter, attempt to hunt down the man they hold responsible. Its producers, United Artists, had little faith in the film, and effectively killed it commercially, but its reputation has remained high in the years since.

Passer, however, found it hard to get films off the ground in the ensuing decades, as his brand of bleakly bittersweet comedy found less fertile territory. Much of his best known subsequent work was for TV, including an award-winning HBO film about Stalin, starring Robert Duvall, and an adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's "Kidnapped", starring Armand Assante.

Passer's final film credit was as a co-director (with Sergei Bodrov and Talgat Temenov) on the Kazakh epic "Nomad: The Warrior", which was released in 2005.

Rapper Dave and singer Capaldi lead BRIT Award nominations

LONDON (Reuters) — Rapper Dave and Scottish singer-songwriter Lewis Capaldi lead the nominations for this year's BRIT Awards with four nods each, in a new, slimmed-down list of prizes at Britain's top pop music honors.

Both will contest the same categories at next month's ceremony: male solo artist, best new artist, song of the year and Mastercard album of the year.

Dave is in the running for his single "Location" and the album "Psychodrama", for which he won the Mercury Prize last year. Capaldi was nominated for his chart-topping track "Someone You Loved" and his album "Divinely Uninspired to

a Hellish Extent".

Organizers have previously said this year's show, the 40th in a series that began in 1977, will feature fewer categories, allowing for more music to be performed on the night.

They also said they would allow performing acts to "fully take the reins by encouraging them to create and curate performances unique to them".

Grime star Stormzy is nominated for best male solo artist as well as for his song "Vossi Bop" and album "Heavy Is the Head".

The nominees for male solo artist include Harry Styles, who first found fame in the boyband One Direction, and singer-songwriter Michael Kiwanuka. Both are

also nominated for their albums "Fine Line" and "Kiwanuka" respectively.

Mabel is nominated for her song "Don't Call Me Up", and also in the best female solo artist and best new artist categories.

The other nominees for best female solo artist include singers Freya Ridings, FKA Twigs, Charli XCX and Mahalia.

Coldplay, Foals, Bastille, D-Block Europe and Bring Me The Horizon will compete for group of the year.

The song of the year contenders also include Ed Sheeran and Justin Bieber's "I Don't Care", Calvin Harris and Rag'n'Bone Man's "Giant", "Nothing Breaks Like a Heart" by Mark Ronson and featuring Miley

Cyrus, AJ Tracey's "Ladbroke Grove", Tom Walker's "Just You and I" and "Dancing With A Stranger" by Sam Smith and Normani.

Competing to be best international male solo artist are Bruce Springsteen, Burna Boy, Post Malone, Dermot Kennedy and Tyler, the Creator.

Ariana Grande, Billie Eilish, Camila Cabello, Lana Del Rey and Lizzo are in the running for best international female solo artist.

Singer Celeste has already been announced as the winner of the BRIT Rising Star award.

The award ceremony takes place in London on Feb. 18.