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Asian Football Confederation



ICCIMA unveils agribusiness training program

By Ebrahim Fallahi

TEHRAN — Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture hosted a ceremony on Saturday for unveiling the country's first agricultural business training program (called NABKA).

NABKA, which has been prepared by the Agricultural and Natural Resources Engineering Organization of Iran (ANREOI)

in collaboration with ICCIMA and some other private institutions, is going to offer agribusiness training courses to the companies, businessmen, farmers and those active in the country's agricultural sector.

The unveiling ceremony was attended by senior officials from different organizations and private institutions including Ali Salehabadi, **→ 4**

Pakistan FM says Iran wants de-escalation in region

By staff and agency

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said on Friday that Iran wants de-escalation in the region.

According to AFP, he said that the Iranians "did not want to escalate things."

He met with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday, five days after seeing Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

Qureshi said he understood that the Iranians "did not want to escalate things."

"They don't want war, they don't want further bloodshed," Qureshi told reporters in Washington.

The United States on January 3 assassinated Iran's top general, Qassem Soleimani, in a drone strike as he visited Baghdad. On January 8, Iran responded with missile strikes on U.S. forces in Iraq.

Qureshi also said that the Iranian officials also signaled a willingness to ease tensions with Arab neighbors. **→ 2**

Iraqi Army: U.S. troop withdrawal includes all territory

A spokesman for the commander-in-chief of the Iraqi Armed Forces stressed that the decision to withdraw U.S. troops was an independent decision and included all Iraqi territory, including semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

Last week, 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, Press TV reported.

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. **→ 10**

Lavrov lambastes 'aggressive' U.S. policies

Russia's foreign policy chief blamed what he described Friday as "aggressive" U.S. policies for growing global tensions, noting Washington's reluctance to extend a key nuclear arms pact. Sergey Lavrov, who serves as acting foreign minister in the wake of Wednesday's resignation of the Russian Cabinet, said this week's meeting of top U.S. and Russian diplomats on strategic stability didn't achieve any immediate results, adding that "dialogue is continuing."

Russia-U.S. relations have been at post-Cold War lows since Moscow's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea.

Speaking at an annual news conference, Lavrov said that the U.S. has stonewalled Russia's push for extending the New Start nuclear arms treaty

that expires in 2021. The agreement is the last U.S.-Russian arms control deal still in place, and Moscow has argued that its demise will remove the final barrier stemming an arms race.

"We will act strongly to avoid depriving the world of agreements that control and limit nuclear weapons," said Lavrov, who was appointed foreign minister in 2004.

"We stand for the extension of the New Start treaty without any preconditions," he said. "I hope that the Americans hear us, but we haven't received any coherent signals from them."

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has pushed for China to join nuclear arms cuts, but Lavrov described the idea as unrealistic. He pointed at Beijing's refusal to discuss reductions

in its nuclear arsenal, which is much smaller than that of the U.S. or Russia.

Lavrov emphasized that the U.S. push for Russia to encourage China to change its mind doesn't make sense. "We respect the Chinese position and we won't persuade China to change it," he said.

Turning to other issues, Lavrov criticized Britain, France and Germany for caving to pressure from the U.S. over a nuclear deal with Iran.

Earlier this week, the three countries reluctantly triggered the accord's dispute mechanism to force Iran into discussions over its violations, starting the clock on a process that could result in the "snapback" of UN and EU sanctions on Iran. **→ 10**

Taliban aim to sign deal with U.S. by end of month

The Taliban are aiming to reach a withdrawal agreement with the U.S. by the end of January and are prepared to "scale down" military operations ahead of signing the deal, according to their chief spokesman. The statement by Suhail Shaheen to the Pakistani daily Dawn comes as the group and the U.S. held discussions in Doha this week, after insurgent sources told AFP they had offered to initiate a brief ceasefire.

"We have agreed to scale down military operations in days leading up to the signing of the peace agreement with the United States," Shaheen told Dawn in a report published Saturday.

He added that the Taliban were "optimistic" a deal with Washington could be signed before the end of the month and that the reduction in fighting across the country would also include the targeting of Afghan forces.

"It's now a matter of days," said the spokesman.

Washington has for weeks been calling on the militants to reduce violence, making it a condition for resuming formal negotiations on an agreement that would see U.S. troops begin to leave the country in return for security guarantees, after a near two-decade fight.

The Taliban and the U.S. had been negotiating the deal for a year and were on the brink of an announcement in September 2019, when President Donald Trump abruptly declared the process "dead", citing Taliban violence.

Talks were later restarted between the two sides in December in Qatar, but were paused again following an attack near the Bagram military base in Afghanistan, which is run by the U.S.

Any agreement with the Taliban is expected to have two main pillars — a U.S. withdrawal

from Afghanistan, and a commitment by the insurgents not to offer sanctuary to jihadists — and would ultimately have to be given final approval by Trump.

The Taliban's relationship with Al-Qaeda was the main reason cited for the U.S. invasion more than 18 years ago. A deal would hopefully pave the way for intra-Afghan talks.

Many observers agree that the war can no longer be won militarily, and that the only route to a lasting peace in Afghanistan is for an agreement between the Taliban and the U.S.-backed government in Kabul. The Taliban have until now refused to negotiate with the Afghan government, which they consider an illegitimate regime, raising fears that fighting will continue, regardless of any deal ironed out with the Americans.

(Source: AP)

Rouhani visits flood-hit Sistan-Baluchestan

TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani visited the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan early Saturday to monitor rescue and relief operations to people affected by massive floods caused by heavy rains in the province.

Rouhani first arrived at Konarak airport and then moved towards the flood-hit regions aboard a helicopter.

Presidential Chief of Staff Mahmood Vaezi; Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli; Health Minister Saeed Namaki; Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian; Acting Agricultural Jihad Minister Abbas Keshavarz; and Information and Communications Technology Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi were accompanying the president in his one-day trip to Sistan-Baluchestan. **→ 2**



EDITORIAL

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How did Ayatollah Khamenei thwart the enemy's psychological operations?

Since the middle of last week when it was announced that, after an eight-year interval, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution would lead the Friday prayers in Tehran, opposition media outlets were trying to convey this illusion that Ayatollah Khamenei wants to suggest solutions to the current situation by claiming that Iran has reached a deadlock.

Relying on the same reasoning, in a widespread move through live programs, the media outlets claimed that the Leader was going to say special and important issues.

Some state media also fell into this psychological trap and unintentionally highlighted these news.

The enemy media scenario was based on two parallel plans:

a. If the Leader put forward a specific strategy that indicated Iran's sensitivity to the current situation, they would broadly criticize the strategy. In the next move, they would start a new phase and say that Iran, due to its inability to continue confrontation, has no choice but to change its strategy and step back.

b. If the Leader did not present a new strategy or point regarding the control over the situation, they would launch a media warfare stating that Iran has reached a stalemate because of its fear or inability and has no way out of crisis.

The point is that the results of both plans were mainly focused on public opinion inside Iran and the regional states, in order to portray Iran as an incapable country, while sowing despair and frustration.

A review of the remarks by the Leader during the Friday prayers sermons showed that not only he did not see the Islamic Republic of Iran in crisis, but firmly believed that what has foiled enemy's plots over the last 41 years is the strategy of strengthening the domestic capability and countering the foe's greed. All these pressures and hostilities have always been in past years, but the Iranian nation has become stronger than ever in spite of all pressures. **→ 2**



ARTICLE

Farrokh Hesabi
Tehran Times journalist

To ban Iranian teams calls AFC credibility into question

Asian Football Confederation (AFC)'s decision to ban the Iranian football teams from hosting the matches will call its credibility into question.

The decision to revoke Iran's right to host 2020 AFC Champions League matches elicited furious protests on the part of the Iranian officials, media and people.

Iran's Football Federation said on Friday that it has been banned from hosting international club matches inside the country. The "federation received a letter today from the Asian Football Confederation... announcing the decision to hold AFC Champions League matches hosted by Iranian teams in neutral countries," said a statement on the federation's website. The move comes amid heightened political tensions between Iran and the United States.

Four teams representing Iran in the AFC Champions League - Persepolis, Esteghlal, Sepahan and Shahrokh - say they will refuse to play at the different country if they cannot host home games.

To ban Iran from hosting 2020 AFC Champions League matches for security reasons is a blatant injustice. It is often said that football and politics must be kept away from each other and there is no place for politics in football but in practice, the highest ranked organizations of football in Asia mixes the beautiful game with political issues.

In reaction to AFC decision, Iran's parliament member Mohammad Reza Tabesh said: "Banning our country from hosting the matches, is a decision beyond the sports' perspectives and we must resolve this issue with the use of sports diplomacy. We have seats in the Asian Football Confederation and this problem should be resolved through negotiation."

"AFC's decision is not only the matter of banning Iran from hosting a sports competition but it is an insult to the great people of Iran," he added.

"Insult" is the keyword of the Iranian officials regarding the controversial decision made by AFC. **→ 11**

Russia backs Iran joining Moscow-Beijing bloc

By staff and agency

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has supported Iran's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Russia's backing for Iran's full membership came a few days after the Iranian military fired dozens of missiles at a U.S. airbase in Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad.

SCO is sometimes viewed as an aspiring counterweight to NATO and the West.

"Iran is an observer and we are supportive of the Iranian request for full membership," CNS News quoted him as saying on Friday during a speech at a geopolitics forum in New Delhi.

He added, "And most of the [SCO] countries support this request and I'm sure this would be satisfied."

The SCO is a Eurasian political and economic organization which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Russia and China held their first-ever joint military exercises with Iran in the Gulf of Oman and the northern part of the Indian Ocean at the end of last month.

IHRC: UN must hold US accountable for Soleimani execution

The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) has written to the United Nations demanding that it holds Washington accountable for its extra-judicial execution of Major General Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike in Iraq on 3 January.

Calling the action "a dangerous act of international piracy", the letter stresses to the UN secretary general that the crime cannot go unanswered by the international community.

IHRC shares the view expressed by Agnes Callamard, the United Nation's special rapporteur on extra-judicial executions, on Monday, 6 January, that "messages and bilateral exchanges are not enough." Callamard urged the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to activate Article 99 of the UN charter and "establish an impartial inquiry into [the] lawfulness of Soleimani's killing and events leading up to it."

Along with many international experts and observers, IHRC believes that the killing of Soleimani and five others travelling with him were evidently not carried out in accordance with any legally accepted international criteria.

In recent years, particularly since 2001, we have witnessed the increasing use by the U.S. of drone strikes to extra-judicially assassinate political opponents and justify them with an expedient understanding of the doctrine of pre-emptive self-defence. However, says the letter, if such a definition was allowed to prevail it would render the law meaningless because it would effectively give the green light to all states to execute political opponents. Put simply, it would lead to the law of the jungle.

(Source: ihrc.org.uk)

How did Ayatollah Khamenei thwart the enemy's psychological operations?

➔ The Leader's reference to Days of Allah was also made with the same logic, saying that what will determine the winner is not limited to worldly possessions, but it is God's help that emerges in crises and changes the game because of "sincerity" and "fear of God".

Regarding the same logic, the Leader pointed out to the presence of about 10 million people in Iran and hundreds of thousands in Iraq and some other countries in the burial ceremony of martyr Qassem Soleimani, as well as the strong response to the U.S. military action, which undermined the American dignity.

He further stated that the necessary condition for the continued enjoyment of God's grace is to be constantly grateful for divine blessings.

On this basis, through his powerful and serious statements, the Leader eased the concerns of the Islamic Ummah and heralded a bright future based on divine promises, and also foiled the psychological operations orchestrated by the enemy's think tanks.

Rouhani visits flood-hit Sistan-Baluchestan

➔ The president was slated to attend the province's crisis management headquarters.

Sistan-Balouchestan has been greatly affected due to record-breaking rainfall in years.

Heavy rainfall has caused seasonal rivers to flood into towns, causing extensive damage to infrastructure and people's homes.

The rainfalls, which began on January 10, also affected the neighboring provinces of Kerman and Hormozgan.

Preliminary estimates indicate the flooding has caused damage of up to 30 trillion rials (nearly \$715 million) to different sectors of Sistan-Baluchestan.

According to the latest assessments, 500 villages and 14 cities are grappling with flooding and some 20,000 residential units have been destructed partially or completely.

Currently, 3,500 people are working and providing relief and rescue operations in the flood-stricken areas of the border province.

Speaking at a gathering of flood-stricken people, Rouhani said, "Feel assured that the government and all of us are on your side, and we resolve the problems and will not forget you."

Pakistan FM says Iran wants de-escalation in region

➔ The Iranians "highlighted the issues, the differences, they have had with other important countries in the region," he said.

"They said they are willing to engage at any level and in any format," Qureshi said.

Imran Khan, the Pakistani prime minister, visited Riyadh in December 2019 as part of continued efforts to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

This was his fourth visit to Saudi Arabia since May 2019.

Khan visited Tehran on October 13, 2019 to "facilitate" possible dialogue between Iran and Saudi Arabia which have been at loggerheads over a number of issues including the Saudi war on Yemen and Riyadh's support for Trump's anti-Iran moves.

Khan met with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani.

Qureshi has said that Iran and Saudi Arabia should bridge differences.

In an interview with Aaj News in October, Qureshi said that Pakistan will continue efforts in line with reducing tension in Iran-Saudi relations.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric has said that Antonio Guterres, the UN secretary-general, welcomes Khan's initiative to de-escalate tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Politicization of Ukrainian plane crash must be rejected, Zarif says

POLITICAL DESK TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said that politicization of the Ukrainian passenger plane crash must be rejected.

"Politicization of this tragedy must be rejected," Zarif tweeted on Friday after a meeting with Canadian Foreign Minister François-Philippe Champagne in Muscat, Oman.

The Ukrainian passenger plane, with 176 people aboard, was mistakenly downed on January 8 near Tehran by air defense system.

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

Zarif said now all the countries affected by the plane incident should focus on the agonies of the bereaved families.

"Focus on victims' families," Zarif wrote.

A special working group has been established by the Foreign Ministry to facilitate consular affairs for the victims of the crash.

Zarif also said in his tweet, "In Oman today, met with Canadian FM @FP_Champagne to discuss consular, technical & legal cooperation



among nations impacted by #PS752 tragedy. Agreed on continued exchanges between respective experts."

The passenger plane was accidentally shot

down on January 8, nearly four hours after the Iranian military fired dozens of missiles at the U.S. airbase in Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of Lieutenant General Qa-

ssem Soleimani in Baghdad five days earlier.

The Iranian military announced on January 11 morning that the plane had been mistaken for a cruise missile.

President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday that the Judiciary should form a special court headed by a high-ranking judge and assisted by tens of senior experts to investigate the issue.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Friday, "The plane crash was a bitter incident. Losing Iranian youths and people is a bitter incident."

The Leader added, "To the same extent we grieved over the plane incident, the enemies cheered."

He also said, "There are ambiguities in the plane incident. We thank the commanders for explaining it to the people, but this issue must be pursued and reoccurrence of similar incidents must be prevented seriously."

Ayatollah Khamenei also expressed sympathies with the bereaved families and thanked them for standing up to the enemy's conspiracy and speaking out against the enemy's desire.

Moscow warns E3 of triggering dispute mechanism's consequences: envoy

POLITICAL DESK TEHRAN — Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, has said that Moscow has warned the European Union trio, known as E3, of the consequences of triggering the dispute mechanism in the nuclear deal.

"Kremlin has negative view on this action of the three European countries," he told IRNA in an interview published on Saturday.

He said, "We have warned Western partners of negative consequences of this mechanism and such step."

France, Germany and the United Kingdom issued a joint statement on Tuesday announcing they have formally triggered the dispute mechanism.

Russia's Foreign Ministry announced on Tuesday that Moscow sees no grounds to trigger the dispute mechanism, Reuters reported.

The activation of this mechanism may make it impossible to return to the implementation of the agreement, the ministry said.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Friday that the decision adopted by the European Union trio is "worrisome".

"The three European countries' decision on the JCPOA and start of the dispute mechanism are worrisome," IRNA quoted Lavrov as saying in a press conference.

He also noted that Iran's nuclear activities are "transparent", adding that Iran is being inspected more than any



other country.

According to UrduPoint News, Lavrov also suggested to hold a meeting on the JCPOA among its member countries in order to understand the future fate of the agreement.

"I think that it is necessary to hold some kind of meeting [on the JCPOA] in the near future in order to honestly understand the situation and understand who is thinking about what [on the deal]," he said.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Tuesday that the Europeans are making a "strategic mistake" by triggering the dispute mechanism.

"Europeans' action in using the dispute mechanism is baseless from legal point of view and a strategic mistake from political point of view," he said during a meeting with

Lavrov: There were F-35s in the air in the Iranian border when Iran downed airliner

By staff and agency

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Friday that Iran's accidental shooting down of a Ukrainian airliner on January 8 occurred at a time when Tehran was spooked by reports of advanced U.S. stealth fighters in the area.

"There were at least six (U.S.) F-35 fighters in the air in the Iranian border area (at the time). This information has yet to be verified, but I'd like to underline the edginess that always accompanies such situations," Lavrov said, according to the New York Times.

Lavrov, speaking at his annual news conference in Moscow, called the incident a human error and said he was not trying to excuse anyone for what happened.

But he said it was important to understand the context and that the incident had occurred hours after an Iranian missile

attack on U.S. bases in Iraq, when Iranian forces were braced for some kind of U.S. military retaliation.

"There is information that the Iranians were expecting another attack from the United States after the strike but did not know what form it might take," said Lavrov.

Zarif says Iran will never negotiate a new deal with U.S.

POLITICAL DESK TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Friday that Iran will never negotiate a new nuclear deal with the United States.

"We will never negotiate a new deal," Zarif said in a meeting with All India Association of Industries (AIAD) in Mumbai.

The 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, is endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Under the accord Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions. However, U.S. President Donald Trump ditched the deal in May 2018 and slapped the harshest ever sanctions in history against Iran in line with his administration's "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran.

"Resolution of the United Nations' Security Council on Iran's nuclear program is 159 pages which may be the longest resolution of the United Nations. However, India can play a role if the United States returns to the JCPOA," Zarif said when asked about possibility of India's mediation to reduce Iran-U.S. tension.

Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry told CBS News in an interview published on January 12 that the JCPOA is the "strongest" and "most transparent" agreement on the planet.

"Britain, China, Russia are all still trying to keep the agreement in place because they recognize it's the strongest, most transparent, most accountable nuclear agreement on the planet," he said.

In a high-profile speech on Friday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ruled out the possibility of talks with the U.S., saying dialogue with the enemy

is mixed with chicanery and deceit.

"We do not fear negotiations, however, not with the United States," the Leader said.

■ 'JCPOA is not Iran-U.S. deal'

On British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's remarks about replacing the nuclear deal with the "Trump deal", Zarif said that in this way in future there will be need to reach "[Elizabeth] Warren's deal" or "[Bernie] Sanders' deal".

"The JCPOA is an agreement between us, the United States and five other important countries and one country's withdrawal is not accepted," he noted.

■ 'Iran ready to hold talks with Saudi Arabia'

Zarif also said that Iran is ready to hold talks with Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf littoral states.

"We are ready to offer propositions about regional security, especially in the Strait of Hormuz, and we have presented propositions for maintaining peace in the Strait of Hormuz," he said.

At the United Nations summit in New York in late September, Iran officially unveiled the proposal for regional security.

"Based upon the historical responsibility of my country in maintaining security, peace, stability and progress in the Persian Gulf region and Strait of Hormuz, I would like to invite all the countries directly affected by the developments in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz to the 'Coalition for Hope', meaning Hormuz Peace Endeavor," President Hassan Rouhani told the UN delegates.

Foreign Minister Zarif has invited all regional states to join the peace plan for securing the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

In a tweet in September, Zarif said the initiative entails "dialogue, confidence-building, freedom of navigation, energy security, non-aggression, and non-intervention".

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SJSCO.SALES@gmail.com

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S No.	Description	End Time & Date
1	Submission of Financial Bid	09:00 AM, Local Time on January 22, 2020

Terms & Conditions:

- The tender documents will be sent to the bidders via E-mail.
- All bids should be sent in sealed envelopes.
- Conditional bids shall not be accepted.
- LOI should be prepared on company's heading, stamped and signed by the authorized signatories.
- No financial bid shall be accepted later than Wednesday, January 22, 2020 (09:00 AM Local Time (Tehran Time)).
- SJSCO reserves the right to reject any or all the proposals.

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Regional tensions result of U.S. arrogance: Zarif

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said the situation in the Middle East is a direct result of the United States' "arrogance" and their callous attitude of not trying to find out the details and implications of the provocation.

The situation in the region is quite dangerous after the U.S. assassination of top Iranian general, Qassem Soleimani, and the subsequent downing of a Ukrainian aircraft by accident, Times Now reported on Saturday.

"The U.S. should realize that there were protests all over the world after Soleimani's killing all across the world including 430 Indian cities," he said.

Meanwhile, entities like Daesh (ISIS) celebrated the killing of Soleimani, the foreign minister further said.

Zarif's remarks come weeks after U.S. President Donald Trump ordered the drone strikes that martyred Lieutenant General Soleimani, chief of the IRGC's Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), as well as eight other companions.



Millions of mourners took to the streets in Ahwaz, Mashhad, Tehran, Qom, and Kerman — Soleimani's hometown — to attend the top general's funeral procession.

The burial ceremony was held on January 7 in Kerman, but it was postponed until later that night due to overcrowding and a stampede that killed tens of people and injured many more.

In the early hours of January 8, the IRGC attacked the U.S. airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar province in western Iraq as part of its promised "tough revenge" for the assassination of General Soleimani.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Friday that Iran's revenge "was a blow to America."

"Of course, it was an effective military blow, but more importantly and higher than military blow, this was a blow to America's grandeur as a superpower," Ayatollah Khamenei said while addressing worshippers during the Tehran Friday Prayers.

"This blow cannot be repaired by anything," the Leader asserted.

He also said Soleimani's assassination was recorded as a scandal for the U.S. government. "They martyred a person who was the most powerful commander in the fight against terrorism in the region."

Araghchi to brief MPs on British envoy's presence in rally

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi is scheduled to attend a meeting of the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee to brief MPs on the illegal presence of the British ambassador in an anti-government rally in Tehran, committee spokesman Hossein Naqavi Hosseini said on Saturday.

Naqavi Hosseini said some representatives from the police will also participate in the parliamentary committee meeting, according to the Tasnim news agency.

Ambassador Rob Macaire was temporarily arrested for participating in the "illegal gathering" in Tehran on January 11.

The ambassador was summoned for his "unconventional behavior and presence" in the illegal gatherings, the Foreign Ministry said on January 12.

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.

Araghchi has said 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 January 12.

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.

According to Iranian media, Macaire left Tehran for London a few days after his brief detention.

Macaire's departure has taken place with prior notice and based on diplomatic protocol, Press TV reported.

The Iranian Judiciary has referred to Macaire as "persona non grata" and demanded that the ambassador be expelled over his unacceptable conduct, but noted that the final decision on the matter rested with the Foreign Ministry.

"The fact that the British ambassador to the Islamic Republic attends an illegal gathering, takes photos and videos of the event and plays a provocative role is totally unacceptable," Gholam-Hossein Esmaili, the Judiciary spokesman, said during a press briefing on Tuesday.

Europeans are subordinate to the U.S., says Motahari

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — MP Ali Motahari has criticized the European parties to the JCPOA, saying they are subordinate to the United States.

"The Europeans are subordinate to and are followers of the U.S. and their statements saying Iran is not implementing Barjam (JCPOA) is not important," Motahari said, Mehr reported on Saturday.

The Europeans cannot act independently, he said.

He said instead of issuing statements, the Europeans should resolve their problems with the U.S. and coerce the U.S. into lifting its Iran sanctions.

Under the 2015 nuclear agreement, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for termination of economic and financial action.

"The Europeans themselves know that they have not fulfilled their commitments under Barjam, and accordingly, the reduction of Barjam commitments by Iran is a natural matter," the MP added.

France, Germany and the United Kingdom issued a joint statement on Tuesday announcing they have formally triggered the dispute mechanism in the nuclear deal, but said they were not joining the United States campaign to exert maximum pressure on Tehran.

U.S. President Donald Trump quit the nuclear deal in May 2018 and imposed the harshest ever sanctions in history on Iran



as part of his administration's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran.

The three European parties to the deal promised to fulfill their commitments to the deal and secure Iran's economic benefits from it, but they have failed to do so.

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

Eventually, in its fifth and final step on January 5, Iran suspended all limits under the JCPOA.

Iran has been insisting that if the European sides honor their commitments under the JCPOA, Iran will immediately reverse its decision.

Russia's Foreign Ministry announced on Tuesday that Russia sees no grounds to trigger the dispute mechanism, Reuters reported.

The activation of this mechanism may make it impossible to return to implementation of the agreement, the ministry said.

MP: Attack on U.S. airbase gave Muslims courage

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Haddadbibollah Dehmardeh, an Iranian lawmaker, said on Saturday that the Islamic Republic's missile attack on a major U.S. airbase in Iraq gave courage to Muslims and freedom-seekers around the world.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' attack exposed the "fake grandeur" of the United States in the world, said Dehmardeh, Mehr reported.

Iran proved to the Islamic world that significant progress can be made if they unite and challenge the illegitimate interests of arrogant states, he added.

In drone strikes on January 3, the U.S. assassinated Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, chief of the IRGC Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU). The attack was ordered by Donald Trump, according to the Pentagon.

In the early hours of January 8, the IRGC attacked the U.S. airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar province in western Iraq as a revenge against the assassination.

The U.S. assassination of General Soleimani was met with widespread condemnation across the globe.

Benjamin B. Ferencz, a former lawyer and Nuremberg war crimes prosecutor, has said the assassination was an "immoral action" and



a "clear violation of national and international law."

"The administration recently announced that, on orders of the president, the United States had 'taken out' (which really means 'murdered') an important military leader of a country with which we were not at war. As a Harvard Law School graduate who has written extensively on the subject, I view such immoral acts as a clear violation of national and international law," Ferencz wrote in a letter to The New York Times on Wednesday.

Ferencz, 99, who was a lawyer who helped prosecute Nazi leaders at the post-World War II Nuremberg trials, said, "The public is entitled to know the truth. The United Nations Charter, the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice in The Hague are all being bypassed. In this cyberspace world, young people everywhere are in mortal danger unless we change the hearts and minds of those who seem to prefer war to law."

Iraqi FM: U.S. pullout from Iran nuclear deal destabilizes region

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammad Ali Al Hakim, in a news conference with his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Al Safadi in Baghdad, has said that Washington's unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has been the cause of recent tensions in the region.

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 Tehran.

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

"We must take steps in line with preventing alien forces' presence in the region," he added, the Azad University News Agency (ANA) reported on Saturday.

Al Hakim further said that any escalation of tensions in the region will pave the way for the terrorist groups to reequip and reemerge.

Al Safadi, for his part, said, "I have a message of Jordanian King Abdulla II for Baghdad. The message concentrates on



Iraq's independency and de-escalation of tensions."

Al Safadi went on to say that threats posed by the ISIL (Daesh) are still alive.

On January 8, the Aerospace Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) fired ballistic missiles at the U.S. Ain al-Assad airbase in southwestern Iraq in retaliation for the

assassination of IRGC Quds Force Commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

The missiles were launched at 1:45am to 2:15am at dawn. Ain Al-Assad, an airbase in al Anbar province, is the main and the largest U.S. airbase in Iraq.

General Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. air raid near the Baghdad international airport on January 3. It was an act of war against Iran.

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

The U.S. airstrike also martyred Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU) and some other forces of the PMU along with their guests.

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

A U.S. military sources said on Thursday that eleven American troops were treated for concussions after Iranian missiles struck two Iraqi bases where the service members were stationed.

Army assisting flood-stricken people in southeastern Iran

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The chief of the Army Ground Force said on Friday that certain units his command have flocked to the flood-hit regions in the southeastern part of the country to help those affected by the heavy rains.

Kiomars Heidari said that the brigades 188, 288 and 388, engineering-combat groups and military helicopters have been dispatched to the flood-hit regions.



The brigadier general further said that transferring food stuff, health and medical equipment, reopening roads between villages and towns are among the main missions of the units.

The commander said that the army's helicopters are carrying out 10 sorties daily to deliver aid packages to the flood-hit regions.

Heavy and torrential rains have affected almost all southern provinces of the country since January 10, causing severe damages to homes, agricultural lands, roads and infrastructure.

Iranian Red Crescent Society, Army and the IRGC are providing humanitarian aid and carrying out rescue operations.

Rouhani and a number of his cabinet team visited the province on Saturday to monitor rescue operations.

Iran's strikes on U.S. bases a 'very impressive' display of missile capability: analyst

TEHRAN (Press TV) — The Islamic Republic of Iran's defensive missile capability, as evident in the country's retaliatory strikes on American military bases in Iraq, was "very impressive," and proved that Tehran was prepped in every way to counter any possible attacks by the United States, says a political commentator in New York.

Daniel Lazare, an American journalist and author, made the remark during a Friday edition of Press TV's The Debate program while commenting on sermons delivered by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, as well as the missile attacks on the U.S. airbases and the blow that this dealt to the so-called U.S. grandeur.

The attacks were in retaliation for the U.S. assassination of Iran's top anti-terror commander Qassem Soleimani, with Washington having finally been pressed to disclose the extent of damage to its bases and troops after ten days.

"The [Iran's] display of missile capability was very impressive; the attack was very well calibrated, Iran was careful to destroy mainly equipment and to spare human casualties... Iran showed that it has very advance missiles which it could deploy to great effect in the event of a major U.S. attack," Lazare told Press TV on Friday.



The American political analyst also underlined the Europeans' subservience to the administration in Washington when asked whether the U.S. and the three European signatories to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal were depriving the country of its deterrence.

"The U.S. and Europe are in different positions; the U.S. is bent on regime change, it is on a collision course with Iran, the Europeans — Britain, Germany and France — are wringing their hands on the sidelines and try to somehow contain the damage but they have been mainly trying to appease the United States and sort of play a good cop-bad cop game with the Iranians," Lazare said.

James Jatras, a former Senate foreign policy adviser in Washington, was the other panelist invited to The Debate program, who reaffirmed the impressiveness of the Iranian retaliatory attacks on U.S. bases.

"I think anybody that has been really paying attention was impressed by the accuracy of the Iranian strikes in hitting targets that showed their capability to (reach) American bases in the region as well as our regional partners like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Israel and so forth," Jatras said.

Ayatollah Khamenei said on Friday that the assassination of the top Iranian commander disgraced the U.S. as it had to own up to the "terrorist" action and see a blow dealt to its global image by Iran's retaliation.

The United States military has said that 11 of its troops were wounded in an Iranian retaliatory missile attack last week despite Washington's initial claim denying casualties.

On January 8, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) fired volleys of ballistic missiles at Ain al-Assad, and another outpost in Erbil, the capital of the semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan.

The missile operation was in response to the January 3 assassination by U.S. terrorists of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and a group of their companions in Baghdad. The cowardly operation was conducted under U.S. President Donald Trump's direction. The U.S. Department of Defense took responsibility for the assassination.

Both commanders enjoyed deep reverence among Muslim nations over their endeavors in eliminating the U.S.-sponsored Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	409962.1
IFX	5110.91

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,564 rials
GBP	54,667 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$64.85/b
WTI	\$58.58/b
OPEC Basket	\$65.62/b
Gold	\$1,559.30/oz
Silver	\$18.11/oz
Platinum	\$1,026.65./oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Value of trades at IME hits \$690m in a week

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The value of trades at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) reached \$690 million during the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), IME Public Relations and International Affairs Department reported.



customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 460,031 tons of different commodities with the total value of \$424 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 175,302 tons of bitumen, 102,000 tons of VB feed stock, 69,827 tons of polymer products, 75,500 tons of lube cut oil, 27,918 tons of chemical products, 1,518 tons of base oil, 20 tons of argon, 1,235 tons of insulation, as well as 7,500 tons of sulfur were traded.

Furthermore, 3,318 tons of commodities were traded on the side market of IME.

As previously reported, the value of trades at IME rose 26 percent to reach 135 trillion rials (about \$3.2 billion) during the ninth Iranian calendar month of Azar (ends on December 21).

Some 2.851 million tons of commodities were reportedly traded at this market in the mentioned month to experience a growth of 16 percent.

IME is one of the four major stock markets of Iran, the other three markets are Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), and Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX).

India, Iran should work to expedite Chabahar Port development, connectivity to Afghanistan: Zarif

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Friday said India and Iran need to work together to expedite rail connectivity to Afghanistan and procurement of equipment for development of Chabahar Port.

The minister said that India has good relations with Iran as well as U.S. and can play a role in bringing both the countries to negotiating table.

Despite the U.S. exempting India from sanctions imposed on Iran for the development of the port in November 2018, the European and Chinese suppliers who had bagged contracts to supply equipment for the port have been reluctant to deliver, fearing adverse impact on their business with the U.S.

"Chabahar Port is essential for Afghanistan and Central Asia. There are several problems and we made several advances on them. One of them is that our parliament has recently approved the expansion of the free zone," he said.

Zarif noted that the problem in the progress of the project is that India has found difficulty in procuring the necessary equipment for the port despite the exemption.

"The other issue is connecting Chabahar to Afghanistan and to Central Asia through rail. We need to complete the Chabahar-Zahedan rail network. We have the infrastructure for that, but we need rails. We are in negotiation with India for providing rails. We produce our own rails but not at the scale we need. So, Iran and India need to work together on procurement of equipment for the port as well as finishing the rail link," he added.

The minister further said Iran was not interested in re-negotiations with the U.S. but if India wants to work in preventing the unrest and bringing the U.S. back to the negotiating table, it would be ready for dialogue.

"India is a dear friend of Iran and has good relations with the U.S., so it can get the latter to come back to the negotiations. But the most important priority for Iran is to have good relations with neighbors, stability in neighborhood and attract more investments in the country. We want to take a leading role in peace building," Zarif added.

The Chabahar Port complex, backed by India, on Iran's coast along the Gulf of Oman is being developed to provide an alternative trade route between India and Afghanistan.

(Source: outlookindia.com)

ICCIMA unveils agribusiness training program

1 → the managing director of Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI), Mohammad Khazaei, the secretary-general of Iranian committee of International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Shahrokh Ramezan-Nejad, the head of the Agricultural and Natural Resources Engineering Organization of Iran, and Ali Shariati Moqadam, the head of ICCIMA Agricultural Committee, as well as Alireza Kordlou, secretary of the national working group on commercial agriculture.

During the ceremony, several panels were held, in which numerous officials delivered their speeches on the issues pertaining to the mentioned program as well as agricultural-related subjects.

The agribusiness program (NABKA)

At the beginning of the program Alireza Kordlou, who is the executive secretary of the program, made a short introduction about the program and explained some of NABKA's key features.

According to the official in a transition through traditional systems to the modern mechanical and commercial systems, the agriculture sector requires an intermediary body, and NABKA is going to be this intermediary body which helps the companies, businessmen, farmers and related bodies to be equipped with the necessary knowledge for completion of the mentioned transition.

He noted that NABKA is aimed to offer agribusiness training in five different levels which would cover various aspects of international agribusiness and trade, including packing and printing, quality control, marketing, exports, promotion and etc.

The ICCIMA capacities

Elsewhere in the ceremony, Ali Shariati Moaqadam delivered his speech, in which



Mohammad Khazaei (4th R), the secretary-general of the Iranian committee of International Chamber of Commerce, and Ali Salehabadi (3rd R), the managing director of the Export Development Bank of Iran, attend a ceremony for unveiling Iran's 1st agricultural business training program (called NABKA) on Saturday in Tehran.

he called on the country's businessmen and entrepreneurs active in the field of agriculture to have more close communication with ICCIMA for developing the agriculture sector.

He mentioned the chamber's huge capacities and capabilities for supporting the country's agriculture sector and noted that such training courses could realize a great part of these capacities.

Shariati Moqadam further noted that NABKA is going to offer training courses in five different levels during which various specialized areas like international business,

commercial marketing and etc. will be covered.

A step toward institutional capacity building

Further in the event, the secretary-general of the Iranian committee at the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) underlined the great potentials of this program and stressed the necessity of such training courses in order for capacity building in the country's agricultural sector.

Khazaei expressed his committee's readiness for offering all-out support in the implementation of the mentioned program,

saying that "As the representative of the ICC, we will have the necessary cooperation with ICCIMA and other involved bodies to make sure that this program will be implemented at its best."

He also noted that using the communicative capacity of ICC, his representative office in Tehran could communicate with other ICC members and transfer their knowledge and experiences in the field of agriculture into the mentioned training courses.

EDBI to fully support NABKA

Finally, in another section of the ceremony, Ali Salehabadi, head of the country's Exports Development Bank, delivered his speech in which he expressed his bank's readiness to fully support the program and to offer insights over monetary, finance and banking-related issues in these courses.

Emphasizing the important role that such training courses could play in improving the country's non-oil exports, Salehabadi said: "In the current situation [the U.S. sanctions on the oil sector] the government should be mainly focused on the development of non-oil exports, and such programs could be of great help in this regard."

He mentioned the EDBI's financial supports for development of the non-oil exports and said in the past Iranian calendar year (March 2018-March 2019) EDBI allocated eight trillion rials (about \$190 million) for financing export-related projects and in the first nine months of the current year (March 21-December 21, 2019) more than nine trillion rials (about \$214 million) has been financed in this regard.

"Capacity building in the agriculture sector is going to lead to the development of sustainable non-oil exports, and we should take necessary measures to make that happen," he said.

TEDPIX hits record high of 400,000 points

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), posted a new record on Saturday, as it jumped 10,516 points to stand at 409,962, IRNA reported.

Some 9.266 billion securities worth 39.854 trillion rials (about \$948.9 million) were traded at TSE on Saturday, which is the first day of the Iranian calendar week.

The first market's index rose 7,391 points and the second market's index climbed 22,517 points at this market, the same report conformed.

TSE witnessed the highest ever weekly rise of its main

index, TEDPIX, in the past Iranian calendar week, which was the last week of Iran's tenth calendar month of Dey.

The index rose 45,638 points, or 12.9 percent, during the past week to stand at 399,445 points.

As reported, 27.689 billion securities valued at 149.793 trillion rials (about \$3.56 billion) were traded through 2.151 deals at TSE in the past week, experiencing growth of 12.9 percent and 33.7 percent in the number and value of traded securities, respectively, while 54.2 percent rise in the number of trades.

The first market's index rose 33,270 points, or 13.11 percent, to 286,972, and second market's index increased

92,359 points, or 12.57 percent, to 827,378, at TSE in the previous week, the same report confirmed.

As previously announced, TEDPIX rose 49,000 points, or 16.7 percent, to stand at 353,997 points at the end of the past Iranian calendar month of Azar (ends on December 21, 2019).

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

TPO to hold seminar on business in Turkey's market in late Jan.

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) plans to hold a seminar on doing business in the markets of Turkey on January 27, TPO website published.

The seminar is aimed at making Iranian businessmen and traders familiar with the potentials of the neighboring country's markets and the strategies to enter those markets.

Faraz Chamani, Iran's former commercial attaché to Turkey, will be the key speaker in the mentioned seminar.

According to the data previously released by Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA), trade balance between Iran and Turkey was \$1.1 billion positive in favor of Iran during the first 10 months of 2019.

Iran exported \$3.1 billion of commodities to Turkey and imported \$1.9 billion of goods from its neighbor during the 10-month period.

Turkey has been the major trade partner of Iran, after China and Iraq, in the current year.



During the 27th meeting of Iran-Turkey Joint Economic Committee, which was held in Ankara in mid-September last year, the two sides investigated different ways of reaching the targeted \$30-billion bilateral trade and reiterated that reaching this figure is possible despite the pressures of the U.S. sanctions.

During the meeting, the Iranian president's chief of staff, Mahmoud Vaezi, who is the Iranian chairman of the committee, mentioned expediting the process of implementing bilateral agreements on trade and economic issues as the most prioritized objective of the joint committee and said Iran has no limitation for expanding and deepening cooperation with Turkey.

'Iran's southern ports fully operational despite floods'

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The ports affairs director of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) said the recent floods in Sistan-Baluchestan and Hormozgan provinces in southern Iran hasn't caused any damages to the country's ports in the mentioned regions.

"Imports and exports through the southern ports are running as usual, and the recent floods have not harmed the ports in southern provinces," Ravanbakhsh Behzadani told ISNA.

Unprecedented heavy rainfall which began on January 10 has led to flash flooding in the southern provinces of Sistan-Baluchestan, Kerman, and Hormozgan.

According to Ravanbakhsh, no problem has also been reported regarding the road access to the southern ports, including the ports of Sistan-Baluchestan and Hormozgan provinces.

In this regard, also Managing Director of Ports and Maritime Department of Hormozgan Province Allah-Morad Afifpour said: "No harm has come to the province's infrastructure including the ports since we have had envisaged ways of tackling the flood and its



problems and consequences."

"During the past few days, the only issue we had was that due to the unstable weather and sea conditions, passenger cruises were canceled or delayed, but there was no problem in the cargo transportation," Afifpour added.

Behrouz Aghaei, the director general of Ports and Maritime Department of Sistan-Baluchestan Province, also told ISNA that roads leading to the port of Chabahar are open and freight traffic is flowing like.

"More than 100 trucks arrived at the port on Monday (January 13) and were loaded and left for their destination. We had no problems," Aghaei said.

Earlier this month, torrential rain triggered flooding in southern parts of Iran, leaving one dead and a few missing.

2nd Algorithmic Trading Competition in Iran's Capital Market kicks off

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The second Algorithmic Trading Competition in Iran's Capital Market started on Saturday and will wrap up at the end of the next Iranian calendar month of Bahman (February 19).

As reported by IRIB, 27 teams are competing in three categories of fixed income securities, stocks, and problem solving challenge in this round of the event.

The competition held by Securities Information Dissemination and Services Company (SIDSCO) is aimed at helping the country's capital market attain the global standards, more contribution of domestic elites in the information technology and financial fields to the capital market, elevating knowledge of those active in this market and introducing job opportunities in algorithmic trading.

Promotion of new concepts of the capital market in the society and introduction of software capabilities and modern instruments are the other objectives of the competition.

The algorithmic trading competitions are supervised by some experts assigned by Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) to determine which team has the best performance in applying algorithmic trading systems in Iranian capital market and collects more profits out of trading stocks within a specified period of time.

Addressing the opening ceremony of the competition on Saturday, Hassan Amiri, the deputy head of SEO for



Hassan Amiri, the deputy head of SEO for supervising stock markets and publications, speaks in the opening ceremony of the 2nd Algorithmic Trading Competition in Iran's Capital Market on Saturday.

supervising stock markets and publications, said through applying algorithmic trading the capital market has been transmitted from traditional patterns to the modern ones which are more knowledge-based, the Securities and Exchange News Agency (SENA) reported.

The managing director of Securities Information Dissemination and Services Company is of the opinion that

international economy and finance are highly relying on development of new digital technologies and capital market is no exception in this due, therefore, providing and applying new software programs is of great importance to catch up with the fast pace of technological advances.

Making the remarks on the occasion of the second Algorithmic Trading Competition in Iran's Capital Market, Yaser Fallah said information technology is advancing so fast and it is our duty to design and develop new software or applications in order to make the capital market compatible with technology of our time, SENA has previously reported.

"In order to do so, we in SIDSO are holding second round of algorithmic trading competition from January 18 to February 19 in Tehran. The main objective will be to encourage transmission from traditional trading system to more advanced and sophisticated trading methods via encouraging the application of algorithmic trading applications", Fallah asserted.

"Application of algorithmic trading software provides an environment devoid of human errors for trading financial instruments in which pricing is more transparent, rumors cannot affect the market and speculation is highly improbable to occur. Those characteristic are quite appealing for IT scholars and also those traders who prefer analytical analyses over trial and error approach", he further explained.

North Azadegan oilfield’s cumulative output hits 100m barrels

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Iran’s North Azadegan oil field, which the country shares with Iraq in the West Karoun region, has produced 100 million barrels of oil since it went operational, Shana reported on Saturday, quoting the director of the field’s development project.

According to Esmail Qolampour Ahangar, since the field’s officially started operation in the first month of the Iranian calendar year of 1395 (March-April 2016) up to the current date over 100 million barrels of heavy crude oil has been recovered from this field.

The Azadegan oil field is located 80 kilometers (50 miles) west of Ahvaz city in southwestern Iran, near the Iraqi border.

Back in November 2019, Qolampour said that the field’s daily production had reached 75,000 barrels.

According to the official, five new wells and an assessment well were planned to be drilled in the field in order to maintain



the field’s recovery factor after the fifth and sixth years of production. Regarding the plans for increasing the field’s output, Ahangar noted that in addition to drilling the mentioned six wells, plans have been made for overhauling the already

active wells in order to increase the field’s recovery factor.

He added that for the time being, the developers are using the “Gas Lift” procedure in the wells of North Azadegan field to improve the recovery factor and maintain the production level.

West Karoun oilfields, which Iran shares with Iraq at the western part of Iran’s southwestern region of Karoun, include five major fields namely North Azadegan, South Azadegan, North Yaran, South Yaran and Yadavaran.

West Karoun holds great importance for the country’s oil industry since according to the latest studies, its in-situ deposit is estimated to be 67 billion barrels containing both light and heavy crude oils, and therefore it could have a big impact on Iran’s oil output increases in the future.

With the fields fully operational, their output could add 1.2 million bpd to the country’s oil production capacity.

Offering LPG at IRENEX well underway, says NIGC managing director

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Managing director of National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said offering liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) at Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX), which started several months ago, is being conducted well and the required infrastructure is provided in this due.

Expressing satisfaction over the proper condition of offering LPG at IRENEX, Hassan Montazer Torbati said, “Offerings are done regularly at proper price and to the proper customers, so we invite the private sector to invest more in this field”, Mehr news agency reported.

IRENEX Managing Director Ali Hosseini had previously said that while the energy exchange and NIGC have reached some agreements on offering LPG for exports at IRENEX, they have also come to an agreement for offering natural



gas and some expert meetings have been held in this due.

Since the U.S. withdrew from Iran’s nuclear pact in May 2018, vowing to drive Iran’s oil exports down to zero, the Islamic Republic has been taking various measures to counter U.S. actions and to lessen its economy’s reliance on oil.

In the past few years, Iranian think-tanks and energy experts have been repeatedly stating that the country should increase its refining capacity in order to lessen the economy’s reliance on crude sales. In this regard, one of the main strategies of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) in recent years has been focusing on the country’s refineries.

NIOC has been offering various grades of crude oil and oil products at IRENEX almost every week, since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019).

How to hasten the energy transition in the developing world

Emerging economies are expected to experience the highest growth in energy demand in the coming decades, mostly because they are starting from a low or modest base. This means their future energy trajectories must be at an intersection of inclusive, affordable and sustainable growth.

However, for all the potential that advanced energy technologies (AET) offer for speeding up the energy transition, their application in developing countries will not be the same as in developed regions. This isn’t just about affordability; issues of political economy, the role of government, regulation and markets (or lack thereof) are all significant barriers to integrating and scaling AET. Aligning technology and its possible disruptions with more immediate needs that go beyond carbon – such as access, inclusivity, local air pollution and consumer choice – will make for faster adoption and improvement.

As an example, India’s per capita electricity consumption will likely double by 2030, but that would still be below today’s global average. In contrast, demand in many developed regions has plateaued or is falling.

Per capita incomes are much lower in developing regions. If new technologies are ‘expensive’, they will be unaffordable.



Current systems are heavily centralized: Traditional regulation hasn’t worked well. In a number of regions, basic access to energy is limited, and many suppliers are loss-making. In fact, counter-party risk is one of the biggest challenges for providers of AET as well as traditional suppliers. The flipside is that many consumers are subsidized – but subsidies aren’t always well-targeted, and can often lead to inefficient consumption patterns.

While the whole world is focusing on new energy technologies such as better solar panels, batteries and hydrogen systems, who is innovating for needs such as solar cooling for agricultural products, cleaning up wood-based cooking (with attendant indoor air pollution, which is much worse than outdoor pollution in places), or small electric and hybrid vehicles for local transportation? Riding the global innovation wave will only take developing regions so far.

■ Viewing advanced technologies

We should view advanced technologies on two levels. First, they can help us do what we did before much more efficiently. Second, they can help us transition to new frameworks that weren’t feasible before, such as peer-to-peer energy networks or real-time pricing. The latter is where the real value lies - but such changes will take time.

This means thinking societally, and looking for co-benefits like reduced air pollution, reliability or avoiding diesel back-up power. It’s better to price negative externalities than to pick technology winners.

For electricity this includes time-of-day pricing that recognizes that not all power is the same; location, time of day and predictability all matter. This also helps reduce tensions caused by disruption, such as consumer solar power squeezing traditional distribution companies who lose “paying customers” (also known as the utility death spiral).

A smart grid enables more flexible and nimble operations, both of which are key to renewable energy-heavy (RE) systems. A subtle need within this (and all AET) is the use of modular, open standards.

If much of local distribution companies’ (LDC) infrastructure is yet to be built, it should be state-of-the-art and ultra-energy-efficient. Appliances are the lowest hanging fruit for such a push.

LDCs often have high capital costs, which hinder take-up of the most energy-efficient but more capital-intensive technologies. Improving utility risk profiles can help unleash cheaper global capital. Governments should help consumers buying cutting edge “green” solutions or ultra-efficient appliances by making the lowest available interest rates accessible. While more energy-related staff may be required in general, it isn’t just traditional engineers that energy systems need, or even economists, but IT and security experts, systems-level planners, modelers and behavioral specialists.

■ Best instruments for redistribution

As we scale AET, we must be mindful not just of political economy, but also social welfare redistribution. All changes create winners and losers. Instead of ignoring these trade-offs, we should make them transparent so we can devise the best instruments for managing redistribution. Instead of giving free electricity in the name of the poor, we could give direct benefit transfers (DBT) solutions like India is doing (powered by an advanced biometric IT solution for fraud prevention). This is an example where segregated subsidies with properly priced energy – instead of traditionally subsidized electricity—gives consumers an incentive to save energy.

In developed regions, consumers take energy for granted. They don’t want to change their lifestyles much, especially when the potential savings are perhaps just a dollar or two a month. In contrast, many energy consumers in developing regions are deeply engaged with their energy supply due to its relatively high cost and often poor quality. If we tell people, for example, that a smart grid could not just save them a dollar or two, but prevent outages, they’d be very interested.

AETs are an ongoing process and will take learning and multiple iterations to scale. Maybe we’ll get the equivalent of ‘cold fusion’ - style breakthroughs, but we don’t need to wait for those – we aren’t even harnessing existing AET sufficiently. What we do need are policies that enable frameworks which incentivize, accelerate and scale innovation – because the innovation is already happening.

(Source: weforum.org)

Germany to speed up renewables build-up to shutter 16GW lignite

Germany said it will amend the country’s Renewable Energies Act (EEG) to accelerate the build-up of renewables in accordance with a 65% renewable power target by 2030, as the federal government presented a schedule to shutter some 16GW of lignite generation capacity by 2038.

The government also said it would improve support for combined cycle power plants, and has plans for the construction of two new gas power stations, as well as for setting up centers for hydrogen research.

No information was given on how the renewables expansion is supposed to be sped up. Germany’s wind power expansion has collapsed last year and the government so far has not presented measures that could effectively revive it.

Reiner Priggen, chairman of the renewable energy federation of North-Rhine Westphalia, a major lignite mining state, said the coal exit plan doesn’t live up to stipulations made in the so-called coal exit commission that last year had presented a consensus to end coal by 2038.

“We had agreed in the commission that the exit from coal must be linked to a strong expansion of renewable energies. But so far federal and state governments above all have passed or planned limits to wind power,” Priggen said.

“This blockade policy against the Energiewende must be abandoned for good!” Germany will miss its 2030 target to

reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% from 1990 levels unless it embarks on a more ambitious coal exit plan, Germany’s renewable energy federation BEE said, and demanded to re-negotiate the compromise.

To reach the 65% renewable power target by 2030, a reliable expansion path for onshore and offshore wind, solar, bio energy, hydro and geothermal must be laid down, the federation said.

Berlin presented the schedule after tense negotiations with four coal and lignite mining states (Brandenburg, North-Rhine Westphalia, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt), which have been promised €14b (\$15.6b) in aid from the federal government to smooth out the fallout of the coal exit.

A “break-through has been achieved during the talks yesterday in the Chancellery. The closure path is set and the framework for compensation payments stands,” economics and energy minister Peter Altmaier said.

“We will end the age of coal generation in a plausible and economically sound manner.”

■ The just transition mechanism

Further measures for lignite regions of up to €26b by 2038 are also planned, and Germany said it wants to receive funds from the EU under the ‘just transition mechanism’ that was announced this week but is meant for poorer regions of the economic bloc.

(Source: rechargenews.com)

OPEC secretary general says oil demand has ‘upside potential’

OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo said Friday to CNBC that worldwide oil demand could surprise to the upside over the course of 2020.

Worldwide oil demand forecasts may be lower than in previous years, but OPEC Secretary-General Mohammed Barkindo said Friday to CNBC that demand growth is still “robust” and could surprise to the upside over the course of 2020 as trade tensions subside.

“By and large what we see from our side is an upside potential of growth from the demand side of the equation, which will affect the total balance for the rest of the year,” he said. “We are hoping that some of the challenges that we’re facing in terms of international trade will be addressed.”

Oil finished 2019 with a nearly 35% gain, but prices remain well below their prior highs. Part of this is due to the shale production surge in the United States, which Barkindo said is a “major variable” in OPEC’s decisions.

In December OPEC+, which is the 14-member cartel as well as its allies, agreed to cut production by an additional 500,000 barrels per day for the first quarter of 2020. This lifted total production cuts to 1.7 million barrels per day, above the 1.2 million barrels per day cut agreed upon in December 2018.

Saudi Arabia, OPEC’s largest producer, also said that it would continue its voluntary cut of 400,000 barrels per day, effectively bringing the alliance’s total cut to 2.1 million barrels per day.

■ The supply side of the equation

“We remain focused on stability for the first and second quarter of 2020. The decision was to ensure that there’s no imbalance in these quarters,” Barkindo said. “But the total equation is looking at both supply and demand sides. We can only address the supply side of the equation. The demand side is something that we watch with very keen interest.”

Oil prices briefly spiked in early January as tensions between the U.S. and Iran mounted, and as traders digested what possible additional attacks in the oil-rich region could mean for production. Barkindo said that it has become of the “utmost importance” to ensure the safety of oil infrastructure in the region, and that the cartel members remain committed to being the “suppliers of last resort.”

He said that Saudi Arabia demonstrated this in Sept. 2019, when the sovereign nation quickly restored production following airstrikes on the country’s oil facilities in Abqaiq and Khurais, which took an estimated 5.7 million barrels of oil offline.

“We have seen the worst disruption in recent history in September of last year ... and we have seen the record time in which Aramco and their crisis management team rose to the occasion and restored supply in less than 2 weeks,” Barkindo said.

(Source: cnbc.com)

Egypt’s push to be east Mediterranean gas hub

Rapid growth in Egypt’s natural gas supplies, boosted by the discovery of the Mediterranean’s largest field, turned it from a net importer to exporter in late 2018.

Egypt’s Dolphin Holdings signed deals with partners in Israeli gas fields to buy an estimated \$19.5 billion of gas.

Partners in Israeli fields Leviathan and Tamar will supply Egypt with 85.3 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas over 15 years.

Texas-based Noble Energy, Israel’s Delek Drilling and Ratio Oil own Leviathan. Noble, Delek Drilling, Isramco and Tamar Petroleum are leading partners in the Tamar field.

It is unclear how much of the gas imported from Israel will be re-exported.

Egypt hopes its infrastructure and location will help it become a link for energy trading between the Middle East, Africa and Europe.

Crucially, Egypt has two liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants that have been idled or running at less than their potential capacity and can be used for exports.

The bulk of Egypt’s gas exports is liquefied natural gas (LNG) sent from its Idku liquefaction terminal, run by Egyptian LNG, a joint venture between the state-owned Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation and EGAS, as well as Royal Dutch Shell, Petronas and Engie.

It has two petronas LNG trains, each with a capacity of 3.6 million tons, according to Egyptian LNG’s website. The site has room for an additional four trains.

■ A second gas liquefaction plant

Egypt has a second gas liquefaction plant at Damietta that has been idle since February 2013 after gas production slipped and the government diverted gas exports to the domestic market.

It has also been at the center of a dispute between Egypt



and Italian-Spanish Company Union Fenosa Gas (UFG), which has a majority stake.

Damietta has an annual capacity of up to 5 million tons and can store 130,000 tons of LNG, government websites show.

Egypt exported the equivalent of 172.8 billion cubic feet (bcf) LNG in the 2018/19 fiscal year ending in June, according to EGAS’s annual report. Egypt also exported 53 bcf to Jordan by pipeline and imported 51.6 bcf of LNG in the same period.

Egypt also has a network of gas pipelines, the most significant of which is the Arab Gas Pipeline which extends across northern Sinai via Al-Arish to Jordan and on to Syria and Lebanon. Egypt currently only exports gas to Jordan through it.

The Arab Gas Pipeline connects to Israel via the underwater Arish-Ashkelon pipeline, which Egypt once used to export gas to Israel. Israeli gas from the 22 trillion cubic feet (tcf) offshore Leviathan and later the smaller Tamar field will flow to Egypt via that pipeline.

The Arish-Ashkelon pipeline is owned by the East Mediterranean Gas Company (EMG). Noble and Delek partnered with Egypt’s East Gas Company in a venture called EMED to buy a 39% stake in EMG to facilitate the export deal.

■ The Sumed pipeline of Egypt

Egypt also has the Sumed pipeline, which carries oil from a terminal at Ain Sokhna on the Red Sea to the Sidi Kerir terminal on the Mediterranean.

The 2015 discovery of the giant Zohr field by Italy’s Eni was a turning point, unlocking interest in Egypt’s energy market. Zohr, located in the Shorouk concession, holds an estimated 30 tcf of natural gas.

Egypt produced 2.52 tcf of gas in 2018/19, the Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS) said in its annual report.

The company made 15 gas discoveries in the year and seven gas development projects were came on stream at a cost of \$10.6 billion. Fifty-six wells came on stream during the year.

Some 58% of Egypt’s gas production comes from the Mediterranean, 20% from the Western Desert, 20% from the Nile Delta region and 2% from the Gulf of Suez and Sinai Peninsula, according to EGAS.

Cairo’s plans to become an energy hub faces some risks. In November Turkey, a political rival of Egypt’s, signed an agreement on maritime boundaries in the Mediterranean with Libya’s internationally recognized government. The accord is seen primarily as a move to control hydrocarbon drilling rights.

Greece said in December that it, Cyprus and Israel will go ahead with developing a pipeline channeling natural gas from the eastern Mediterranean directly to Europe, potentially undercutting Egypt’s hub goals.

(Source: hellenicshippingnews.com)

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Can Berlin conference solve Libyan crisis?

Main goal to solve Libyan crisis is to convince Gen. Khalifa Haftar war is not solution

By Nebahat Tanriverdi Yasar

ISTANBUL — Negotiations for a permanent cease-fire in Libya remained inconclusive in Moscow but now Germany is organizing a conference on Sunday to end the fight for Tripoli which has been carried out by Gen. Khalifa Haftar since April.

Germany's Foreign Ministry announced leaders and heads of states from 12 countries and four multinational organizations, including the UN, were invited to the Berlin conference.

On the other hand, acceleration of troop deployment in Tripoli sent by Haftar, who did not sign a cease-fire agreement in Moscow; resurgence of fulfillment by United Arab Emirates (UAE), an important ally of Haftar; and tough statements from Egypt, raise questions about the success of the conference.

The Berlin conference can only achieve success if a common will to end the external support deepening of the war in the country is ensured.

However, with the ongoing help of the UAE and Egypt, Haftar overturned the negotiation table in Moscow, which was established by Turkey and Russia, aiming for a permanent cease-fire. It proves that a political solution to the Libyan crisis would not be easy under these circumstances.

■ Ultimate goal of the UAE and Egypt

The reason why the war has been continuing since 2014 and turned into a deadlock is that Libya became a field for the fight of regional and global powers.

Haftar expanded his control on the territories by launching military operations in eastern Libya in 2014. Firstly, he expanded the area under his control to the western Fezzan region in eastern Libya and then to the western parts of the country. The military and financial support of regional allies who invested in Haftar during the process enabled the success for the Libyan commander.

The ultimate goal of the many foreign actors which invested in Haftar, especially Egypt and the UAE, is to ensure forces loyal to Haftar enter the city center of Tripoli and gain the control of the Libyan Oil Ministry -- which operates in Tripoli and manages the income earned from Libya's oil resources -- and the Central Bank of Libya.

Haftar's demands during cease-fire negotiations in Moscow indicated that he sat at the table to achieve this goal. Considering the table as a tool for achieving that, Haftar, who deployed more militias in Tarhunah and a group of his air forces in al-Qardabiya military air base in Sirte, still keeps the war option on the table.

On the other hand, the UN-backed Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) has been isolated in the war since France, Italy and the U.S. remain unresponsive to the Tripoli offensive and support Haftar.

However, the Libyan crisis sit at the top of the global agenda when Turkey, who inked a memorandum of understanding with Libya on Dec. 27, announced it would deploy troops to Libya to support the GNA.

Unlike the GNA, who has military support only of Turkey, Haftar gained backing from Russia, the UAE, Egypt and France. Haftar, who thinks himself powerful with the support of several international actors, has large room to maneuver, which enables him to refuse demands of countries supportive of him.

Although Russia was expected to give a harsh response to the latest move of Haftar, it was obvious that Russia could not easily give up on Haftar, as he has other alliances, and it has limited influence on the Libyan commander.

Haftar, who is preparing to attend the Berlin conference, goes through an intense preparation in fronts close to Tripoli at the same time. He bought new air defense systems from Russia despite unsuccessful negotiations in Moscow. It is also observed that flights between Aleppo and Benghazi have been intensified.

■ Haftar considers negotiation as tool

For Haftar, a negotiation table is a tool for achieving his goals which he could not realize by fighting. The reason that Russia, which has the influence to affect the field as of 2019, thanks to the support it has provided for Libya, has failed to convince Haftar that the UAE and Egypt also approached the table with the same attitude. The advisors from the UAE accompanied Haftar during negotiations in Moscow. This point to the important role that the UAE played and continues to play in this process.

The relationship between the UAE and Haftar is based on mutual interests. The military operations initiated by Haftar, which target the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Libya, are important for the UAE's political agenda in the region.



People gather at the Martyrs' Square to stage a protest against the attacks of Libya's renegade Gen. Khalifa Haftar's troops in Tripoli, Libya on January 17, 2020. (Hazem Turkia - Anadolu Agency)

Following the Arab Spring in 2012, the UAE launched operations against the al-Islah movement, which is the Muslim Brotherhood's branch in the UAE, citing the threat against the regime's security. The UAE accused it of "attempting to overthrow the regime," and carried out several arrests and trials.

In 2014, the UAE, along with the Saudi Arabia, recognized the Muslim Brotherhood as a "terrorist organization." Defining the movement as a national and international security threat, a war with an extensive front line against the Muslim Brotherhood has begun.

Egypt undoubtedly was one of the first fronts of this war and Abdel Fattah al-Sisi who came into power in Egypt opened the doors of Libya for the UAE. In 2014, the UAE took its part in the Libyan civil war by carrying out a range of air strikes in Tripoli from military bases which Egypt opened to the UAE. Thus, in the post-2014 period, Egypt and the UAE helped Haftar change the balance of power in his favor in the field with the air support they provided. Forces loyal to Haftar have owed their military advance and control of a significant part of the country to the air support provided by Egypt and the UAE.

On the other hand, Egypt and the UAE's presence in Libya has been ignored by international actors. On July 3, 53 people were killed and 130 were wounded in an air strike at a migrant detention center in Tajoura town, east of the capital Tripoli. A UN commission investigating the attack completed its work in November and submitted the report to the UN Security Council.

According to the report, the attack was carried out by "an unknown number of Mirage 2000-9". Those Mirage jets used air bases in al-Jufra and al-Khadim and the air strike was carried out by a fighter plane. The UN report concluded that "it is highly probable the air strike was carried out using precision-guided missiles by a fighter jet operated by a UN member state acting in direct support of Haftar armed forces," but it did not name the state.

Furthermore, the condemnation statement by the UN Refugee Agency, which gathered after the attack, was prevented by the U.S. Although the name of the country which carried out the air strike was not mentioned in the report, it is widely believed that the aforementioned warplane belongs to the UAE. The UAE has been operating the al-Khadim military base in Libya and has been carrying out its military operations from here since 2016. Strengthening its military presence with a base in Libya, the UAE aims to guarantee its gains in Libya by providing international legitimacy for Haftar and the House of Representatives in Tobruk.

The UAE, which has put great effort so far, has not achieved its goal. Therefore, it does not want to lose the advancement it gained with the fight for Tripoli. Due to the Libya crisis, the UAE's efforts in this regard came to the fore after UN's then-special envoy to Libya, Bernardino Leon, who brokered the 2015 Skhirat agreement, started to work for a UAE-financed think tank after his tenure expired. It was revealed that Leon communicated with the UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed via e-mail

regarding these talks during the political negotiations in Libya in December 2014.

However, the Skhirat agreement also failed to achieve the international legitimacy desired. At the beginning of 2015, the GNA was established under the leadership of Fayeaz as-Serraj with the support of the UN; but the House of Representatives in Tobruk did not recognize the new government. While the UN-backed GNA was trying to control the groups in Tripoli, Haftar was continuing to expand its operations to the west and south of the country. Thus, the military option was accepted as a fruitful tool by international actors who supported Haftar, especially by the UAE and Haftar himself.

All efforts for negotiation since then were interrupted by military operations of forces loyal to Haftar. There was a solution plan consisting of three phases -- UN's special envoy to Libya Gassam Salameh is to revise the Skhirat agreement between the House of Representatives in Tobruk and the Supreme State Court in Tripoli by the end of 2017, parties were to gather to negotiate in a national dialogue conference, and elections were to be held in the country. However, during the negotiations, Haftar continued his operations in the oil-rich regions of the country in eastern Libya.

Following this development, France and Italy sought to be the party that resolves the Libya crisis through separate summits throughout 2018 in order to be active in Libya's future. However, France and Italy's attempts aiming to exclude one another did not solve the crisis but disrupted the UN process as well and resulted in Haftar gaining support. This time, the UN talks in February 2019 were postponed due to the Fezzan Operations in which the important oil facilities and sites were taken under control in southern Libya. Following the Fezzan Operations, the UAE carried out a diplomacy tour, convinced the Libyan National Oil Company to remove the "force majeure" in the southern oil fields, which prevented the oil shipment and legitimized Haftar's presence in the oil field. In addition, as-Serraj and Haftar started negotiations in Abu Dhabi at the end of February, with the support of the UN and the UAE. The fight for Tripoli took place immediately after these negotiations and just before the Libyan National Congress, which was scheduled for April 14.

■ War in Libya difficult to end

A brief analysis of the past makes it clear that Haftar's allies, especially the UAE and Haftar himself, have been using the negotiation table as an extension of the war for a long time. For this reason, it seems difficult for the war in Libya to end as long as this external support continues. It will be possible to talk about a permanent solution in Libya only with the establishment of a political environment with a consensus on issues such as formation of a state, distribution of economic resources, governing the country, constitution, and election law. But the main goal today in the Libyan crisis is to convince Haftar that war is not a solution. It does not seem possible to achieve this goal without persuading allies who support Haftar.

(Source: Anadolu Agency)

The U.S. protects Saudi Arabia with Patriot missiles but not U.S. troops in Iraq

By Sebastien Roblin

Since 2003, the United States has spent billions of dollars developing a spectrum of defensive weapons to stop powerful ballistic missiles from striking U.S. bases and positions. But on Jan. 8, none of those defenses were present when volleys of Iranian ballistic missiles came plunging down on an Iraqi air base that housed U.S. service members.

The attack on Ain al-Asad air base was a predictable response by Iran to the U.S. drone strike that assassinated Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani days earlier. But the roughly 1,500 U.S. military personnel at the base could only pray that none of the nearly 4-ton missiles landed nearby.

The earthquake attack highlights how little forethought went into the consequences of assassination of Soleimani, and how that recklessness might easily have cost the lives of U.S. military personnel. At the very least, the Defense Department ought to have extended to its forces in Iraq the same protection it has provided Saudi Arabia -- by covering them with advanced Patriot missile defenses.

Indeed, U.S. troops in Iraq should have received the same consideration the moment the Trump administration committed to assassinating Soleimani and provoking Iran. It already had evidence that Iran was willing to use the weapons to strike foreign targets. And U.S. personnel in Iraq had already been frequent targets of smaller rocket attacks -- including one just a week earlier, when Iran allegedly orchestrated the storming of the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad.

The U.S. military has 60 batteries of Patriot surface-to-air missiles capable of intercepting short-range ballistic missiles and seven higher-end THAAD systems designed to intercept higher-flying missiles. Those batteries are in high demand around the globe, with about half already committed overseas.



The Iranian missiles scored six direct hits, but against evacuated aircraft hangars.

Some argue that the Army simply doesn't have enough air defense units to go around, and it's true that U.S. forces defending bases in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere across the Middle East were also within striking distance of Iran's many short-range ballistic missiles. They, too, merit the Patriots protecting them.

But in April 2019, the Pentagon rapidly deployed one of its few THAAD batteries to Israel for an exercise. Granted, there are additional complexities in deploying such a system and the troops that accompany it to Iraq, but are we supposed to believe the U.S. military couldn't rush air defense units in a crisis when it had already done so for an exercise?

And just last fall, following an attack by cruise missiles and drones that had briefly crippled Saudi oil production over the summer, the Pentagon deployed a Patriot battery and air defense radars to buttress Saudi defenses and to better protect troops and aircraft also being dispatched to Saudi Arabia.

That no U.S. personnel died in the Iranian onslaught came down to a combination of advance notice -- from early-warning satellites that alerted personnel at the base the moment the missiles arced into the sky and likely from sources in Iran -- as well as sheer luck. Contrary to analyses claiming Tehran intentionally sought to avoid major casualties and damage, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff assessed that the attack was "intended to cause structural damage -- destroy vehicles, equipment and aircraft -- and kill personnel."

As it happens, the Fateh missiles directed at Ain al-Asad landed multiple direct hits on structures across the base, incinerating personnel quarters and hangars alike. Although the warning thankfully allowed most personnel to evacuate to underground bunkers, a report by CNN makes it clear that not all of the Saddam Hussein-era bunkers were robust, and some personnel remained exposed as they staffed the perimeter to guard against a potential ground attack by pro-Iranian militias.

The threat from Iran's ballistic missiles was no secret. Since 2017, Tehran has launched ballistic missiles at least four times to retaliate against enemies in Iraq, Israel and Syria. A missile strike in Iraq in September 2018 demonstrated deadly accuracy as multiple Fateh missiles precisely hit a compound in which Kurdish militants were meeting, according to Iranian reports, reportedly killing 18 people.

American complacency about providing adequate missile defenses to personnel in Iraq is all the more outrageous given that the Trump administration cited Iran's ballistic missile development to justify exiting the nuclear deal with Tehran in 2018 -- which worsened tension with Iran in the lead-up to Soleimani's assassination.

To be sure, air defense missiles aren't perfect. During the 1991 Persian Gulf War, U.S. Patriot missiles intercepted dozens of Iraqi Scuds. But several evaded interception, and one of them killed 27 Pennsylvania National Guard members when it struck their barracks in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

More recently, Saudi Arabia has used Patriot missiles to intercept more than 100 missile attacks from Houthi rebels in Yemen, with good but by no means perfect results. Still, each missile that gets knocked out of the sky is one less that has a chance to cause mass casualties.

It's also true that each Patriot battery can defend only a relatively small bubble of airspace against ballistic missiles. So Iran might simply have shifted to a different target had Patriots defended Ain al-Asad. But compelling adversaries to attack less attractive targets is a form of success in itself.

Even if a perfect defense was impractical, it remains a stark failure that no attempt was made to provide the 5,000 U.S. military personnel in Iraq with an active ballistic missile defense under those circumstances -- although the Pentagon may be making belated "adjustments."

Because of the good fortune that no U.S. personnel were killed in the Iranian strike, the failure to deploy active defenses against ballistic missile attacks has not gotten the scrutiny it should have. But the United States might not be so lucky next time.

Sebastien Roblin writes on the technical and historical aspects of international security and conflict for The National Interest, War is Boring and other publications.

(Source: Euronews)

Living situation in Gaza hits bare minimum in all aspects

GAZA —Palestinian officials and observers warned on Friday that the living situation in the Gaza Strip has reached the bare minimum in all aspects of life.

Amid worsening humanitarian crises, the narrow impoverished coastal enclave, home for over 2 million Palestinians, needs a serious and immediate international intervention to end the people's sufferings.

The United Nations has repeatedly warned of a humanitarian deterioration in Gaza. In 2019, it issued a report warning that the Gaza Strip will not be suitable for living if Israel continues imposing blockade on the enclave.

Palestinian officials said it is essential and urgent to allow comprehensive relaxations based on economic development to achieve dramatic changes of the daily life in the Gaza Strip.

Jamal al-Khodari, chairman of the Popular Committee for Ending Gaza Siege, said the UN report was a real warning of the humanitarian deterioration in the Gaza Strip suffering the Israeli blockade.

"The situation in the Gaza Strip is expected to get worse during this year in all aspects



Zeitoun Preparatory Schools for Girls, an UNRWA school located in a southern district of Gaza City, opposite a government building destroyed in Operation 'Pillar of Defense', an eight-day bombardment of Gaza carried out in November 2012. | Photo: March 2013. Stephen McCloskey)

of life, where humanitarian sufferings will increase with rising rates of poverty and unemployment," he told Xinhua.

"Gaza might still be an area that fits for living, but at a bare minimum or below the

international or Arab criteria. This makes the Gaza Strip one of the poorest areas in the world," al-Khodari said.

About 85 percent of the Gazans live under the poverty line with the individual income of two U.S. dollars per day, and 300,000 are unemployed in the coastal enclave, according to the Palestinian official.

Besides poverty and unemployment, hospitals in the Gaza Strip face 50-percent shortage of medications and medical facilities, forcing many patients to seek medical treatment abroad.

Electricity shortage is another nightmare for the Gaza Strip. The majority of Gazan households have power cuts at least eight hours per day although Qatar has been providing fuels for the operation of the sole power station in the coastal enclave.

The Gaza Strip is also suffering a severe shortage of healthy water even with the inauguration of several desalination projects because not every family can afford to buy such water on a daily basis.

Israel has been imposing a tight blockade on the Gaza Strip since Hamas seized control

of the enclave in the summer of 2007 from the security forces of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Notably, Israel has waged three large-scale air and ground offensives against the militants in the Gaza Strip. The longest came in the summer of 2014 which lasted 50 days, causing devastation to housing and infrastructure in the coastal enclave.

Over more than a year and a half, Egypt, Qatar, and the United Nations have been mediating cease-fire understandings between Hamas and Israel in order to ease the humanitarian situation and prevent mass confrontations between the two sides.

"There might be some positive indications that the economic situation in the Gaza Strip would improve in 2020 in case Israel fulfils its promises to ease the blockade," said Ali el-Hayyek, chairman of the Gaza Businessmen Association.

Lifting the Israeli restrictions on export and import and speeding up the reconstruction projects "would certainly put an end to the hard living situation," he noted.

(Source: Xinhua)

Heritage museum inaugurated in ancient city of Izeh

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Iran’s deputy tourism minister on Friday inaugurated a cultural heritage museum in Izeh, southwestern Khuzestan province, with the aim of introducing the rich history and culture of the ancient city.



“This museum opens in Izeh because due to the cultural and historical richness of the area. However, little explorations have so far been carried out here considering the region’s importance,” Mohammad-Hassan Talebian said during the opening ceremony, CHTN reported on Friday.

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

“This area still have undiscovered golden pages [of history] that [when are known] can help us know Khuzestan and Iran better in the future,” Talebian noted.

“The museum showcases over 300 historical objects that date from various eras and it also features objects that are [on loan] from the National Museum of Iran.”

This place is identified as a scientific and cultural college which well introduces various historical periods, the official noted.

Lying at the head of the Persian Gulf and bordering Iraq on the west, Khuzestan was settled about 6000 BC by a people with affinities to the Sumerians, who came from the Zagros Mountains region. Urban centers appeared there nearly contemporaneously with the first cities in Mesopotamia in the 4th millennium. Khuzestan, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, came to constitute the heart of the Elamite kingdom, with Susa as its capital.

A new method for dating ancient earthquakes

Constraining the history of earthquakes produced by bedrock fracturing is important for predicting seismic activity and plate tectonic evolution. In a new study published in the Nature journal Scientific Reports Jan 17, 2020, a team of researchers presents a new microscale technique to determine the age of crystals grown during repeated activation of natural rock fractures over a time range of billions of years.

he dramatic energy release of an earthquake forms as bedrock segments move in relative opposite directions to each other due to the collision or spreading of the tectonic plates that makes up the Earth’s crust. The movement occurs along fault planes where new mineral crystals grow simultaneously.

The bedrock of Scandinavia, up to two billion years old, displays an extensive network of fractures formed at different episodes stretching from the early history of the Scandinavian crust to modern times. In rock samples retrieved from deep boreholes in Sweden, new microscale radioisotopic dating of individual fault crystals reveals the dominant fracturing episodes affecting Scandinavia.

(Source: phys.org)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic monuments zone of Tlacotalpan

Tlacotalpan, is an exceptionally well-preserved Spanish colonial river port close to the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

The original urban plan, a checkerboard or grid pattern, laid out by the Spanish in the mid-16th century, has been preserved to a remarkable degree.

Its wide streets are lined with colonnaded houses that reflect a vernacular Caribbean tradition with exuberant decoration and color.



Many mature trees can be found in the public parks, open spaces and private gardens. Initially settled by the Spanish around 1550, the settlement reached its major brilliance in the 19th century.

The surviving grid pattern consists of 153 blocks covering 75 hectares and divided into two distinct sectors, the larger “Spanish” quarter in the west and smaller “native quarter in the east. The larger quarter is created by seven wide streets or calles laid out east-west parallel to the Papaloapan River and connected by narrow lanes or callejones. The “public” sector, an irregularly-shaped area found at the intersection of the two quarters, has commercial and official buildings as well as public open spaces.

A UNESCO World Heritage, Tlacotalpan has retained an unusual density of high-quality historic buildings that provide architectural harmony and homogeneity. While the basic vernacular style is found elsewhere on the Mexican Gulf Coast, Tlacotalpan’s single-storey houses exhibit distinctive manifestations that include a profusion of brightly-colored exteriors and original features such as the roof coverings of curved terra cotta tiles and the layouts with interior courtyards.

(Source: UNESCO)

Tehran, Athens eye increased tourism ties

TOURISM

TEHRAN – Iranian ambassador to Athens Ahmad Naderi and Greek Tourism Minister Haris Theoharis discussed ways to broaden collaboration in tourism sector, IRNA reported.

In a meeting held in the Greece capital on Thursday, Theoharis welcomed the Iranian envoy’s proposal for boosting tourism relations between the two countries, citing the two nations have many cultural commonalities. “Athens welcomes the development of tourism co-operation with Iran whose rich civilization and culture go thousands of years in time.”

Greece is ready to deepen tourism cooperation with Iran within the framework of existing capacities, the minister noted.

He added the tourism is regarded as an interdisciplinary industry so that its promotion requires extensive cooperation between political, cultural and economic sectors.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Theoharis voiced hope that he would travel to Iran in the near future to pay a visit to the country’s cultural and historical monuments as well as handicrafts, the report said.

The Greek minister explained that his country’s officials are aware of the magnificence of Iran and its pivotal role in the world, adding both Iran and Greece are cradles of civilization.

The Iranian envoy for his part said the two nations should make the best use of such commonalities to expand mutual relations in various arenas, including tourism.

Naderi also emphasized the need to boost historical, traditional and friendly relations between the two nations.

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



Tehran’s ambassador to Athens Ahmad Naderi and Greek Tourism Minister Haris Theoharis pose for a photo during a meeting, which was held in the Greek capital on January 16, 2020.

46% came from the rest of the world.

The Islamic Republic expects to reap a bonanza from

its numerous tourist spots, including 22 ones that have been placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Intl. conference bears witness to Iran being a safe destination

HERITAGE

TEHRAN – Holding an international conference with the presence of leading figures in digital tourism marketing is an indicator that Iran is a safe destination to travel, deputy tourism minister Vali Teymouri said on Friday.

He made the remarks in the closing ceremony of the 6th Digital Marketing & Tourism Industry Conference, which was held at Tehran’s Espinas Palace Hotel, CHTN reported.

Amongst speakers of the conference were: Pawel Chrzan, who has been a Google business analyzer; Christian Farioli, a digital marketing strategist, consultant of companies such as Huawei, Burj Al Arab, Buyer, Armani; Massimo Burgio, founder of Truly Social Media, and Chief Strategist of Global Search Interactive; and

Orazio Spoto, founder of Instagrammers, professional Instagram teacher and Blogger.

The event was also attended by CEOs, chief business officers, government officials, public relations managers and sales experts who are active in various businesses.

Last Monday, Teymouri ruled out claims by the Association of Air Transport and Tourist Agencies of Iran over massive cancelation of flights after downing of a Ukrainian plane mistakenly hit by Iran’s air defense system on January 8 which killed all 176 people on board.

The 2019 Travel Risk Map, which shows the risk level around the world, put Iran among countries with “insignificant risk”, a category where the UK, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, and Finland were placed in.

How Brexit will affect travel to the UK and Europe



After three years of delay, Brexit day is approaching. What can visitors to London expect? Credit... Tom Jamieson for The New York Times

already undergo passport and ID checks before departing on the Eurostar train, and those will continue. Travelers who need visas should continue to make sure they have them.

What about airline passenger rights?

The European Union is known for its traveler-friendly approach to delayed and canceled flights. Flight Compensation Regulation 261/2004 offers all travelers to and from European Union countries, regardless of nationality, reimbursement in the event of a flight delay, denied boarding or cancellation. That is not expected to change with Brexit.

“We do not anticipate that Brexit will impact travelers’ protections under EC 261, even if they are flying on a UK airline,” said Christian Nielsen, Chief Legal Officer at AirHelp, a website that helps passengers file compensation claims. “Since the UK has previously acknowledged European air passenger rights laws like EC 261 — and then incorporated them into the UK Withdrawal Act of 2018 — passengers’ rights will remain protected.”

What about visas?

Americans traveling to Britain do not need visas and that is not expected to change after Brexit. They do need a passport that is valid for the duration of the trip. If they are going from Britain to a country in the Schengen area (a group of 26 European countries that allow free passage across their borders) they need a passport that is valid for six months after their trip.

After January 2021, as part of a new security system intended to screen visa-free travelers, Americans will be required to register with the European Travel Information and Authorization System. (Britons and people from other countries will also need to apply to E.T.I.A.S.) Getting the authorization involves registering online and paying a small fee. The E.T.I.A.S. requirement happens to coincide with Brexit but the two are not related.

Will airport lines be longer?

For Americans traveling to a European Union country, most

likely, simply because British citizens will now be standing in the passport control and customs lines with them.

Right now, when arriving in Barcelona, for example, non-European Union citizens stand in one line and European Union travelers stand in another. With Brexit, the British will move to the non-European Union line, which could slow things down.

“Say a flight to Berlin has 150 UK citizens, 50 German citizens and 20 citizens from the U.S., Canada, Japan or wherever, the non-European Economic Area line will normally have 20 people in it, but now it will probably have 170 people in it,” said Tom Jenkins, chief executive of the European Tourism Association.

But for travel to Britain, Mr. Chacko of Travel Leaders Group said things shouldn’t change. Earlier this year, ePassport kiosks were introduced in at least 16 air and rail terminals in Britain, including Heathrow. The kiosks allow travelers from Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and the United States to stand in the same line as European Union citizens, keeping the lines moving.

Will it be more or less expensive to travel to Britain?

The more than three year battle to implement Brexit has been bad for the British economy, but good for international travelers.

The value of the pound has fallen to about \$1.30 to the dollar, down from about \$1.50 to the dollar in 2016. That has made it cheaper for Americans to travel to Britain, and they’ve been taking advantage of that fact. In the first four months of 2019, bookings to Britain from the United States, China and Canada were up. In 2018, London welcomed 19.1 million international visitors, with record numbers from the United States and China, said Laura Citron, chief executive of London and Partners, the mayor’s official promotional agency for London.

“Looking closely at travel agent bookings from Forward Keys, a travel analytics firm, for October to December, we can see bookings from the U.S. and Canada are up by 5 percent,” Ms. Citron said.

Additionally, new nonstop flights from United States cities to Britain, like British Airways’ Charleston, S.C., to London flight and American Airlines’ Phoenix to London flight have also made Britain an appealing destination for American travelers.

What about hotels?

Although it will be cheaper for Americans to travel to Britain because of the weaker pound and strong dollar, there might be more domestic competition for hotels, raising prices for rooms.

“Outbound business from Britain is down — why is that important to Americans? Because a lot of British people are staying within Britain during their holidays, meaning they are competing for available hotel rooms, excursions and dining reservations,” said Gavin Tollman, chief executive of Trafalgar, a tour operator based in Britain.

(Source: The New York Times)

Health ministry plans to reduce premature NCD deaths by 30%

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Iranian health ministry plans to reduce premature deaths as a result of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) by up to 30 percent within the next 6 years, director of the health ministry's department for NCDs management has stated.

According to a 2015-2025 national plan, premature deaths related to NCDs should be reduced by 30 percent over the next 6 years.

"Under the plan, salt intake and tobacco use must be reduced by 30 percent, physical inactivity and mental illnesses each must be decreased by 20 percent, and the consumption of trans fatty acids should reach zero.

Moreover, access to physician must increase up to 90 percent and access to medicine also reach over 70 percent. On the other hand, the prevalence of obesity and diabetes should also should be stopped," Afshin Ostovar explained.

A number of measures have already been taken to achieve the objectives of the national plan, he stated, adding, when implemented, Iran is recognized as the leading country in the world in this manner.

"The plan consists of 13 goals, nine of which are global. Some of the goals can be easily achieved by changing the foods' ingredients, such as reducing salt in bread, increasing physical activity, and so on," he added.

He went on to say that most of this, of course, happens through education and public awareness which can increase physical activity, monitor blood pressure, or control blood sugar.

Non-communicable diseases are currently the most important threat to human health, as 82 percent of deaths in the country are due to these diseases, and the Ministry of Health's approach is more focused on prevention, he explained.

■ Some 300,000 Iranians die of NCDs annually

In February 2019, the health ministry announced that some 300,000 Iranians die of NCDs annually in Iran, which means that one-fourth of the country's population (standing at 80 million) are overweight or obese which also results in developing NCDs.

Diabetes, non-communicable diseases, is a serious threat to people's health and is the fifth leading cause of death in the country. Diabetes prevalence is 10 percent in Iran and is high among people aging 50 or more.

Cardiovascular diseases (mainly heart disease and stroke), which were the leading cause of death in 2012, diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders (especially oste-



oarthritis – a highly disabling degenerative disease of the joints), and some cancers (including endometrial, breast, ovarian, prostate, liver, gallbladder, kidney, and colon) are common health consequences of overweight and obesity, WHO warns.

Having too much sugar in the blood for long periods of time can contribute to serious health problems if it's not treated. Hyperglycemia can damage the vessels that supply blood to vital organs, which can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke, kidney disease, vision problems, and nerve problems.

Moreover, 30 percent of men and 36 percent of women aged 25 to 64 years also have high cholesterol due to overweight and obesity, consuming fast food, and insufficient physical activity.

■ NCDs, a global health threat

NCDs kill 41 million people each year, equivalent to 71% of all deaths globally. Each year, 15 million people die from a NCD between the ages of 30 and 69 years; over 85% of these «premature» deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries.

Cardiovascular diseases account for most NCD deaths, or 17.9 million people annually, followed by cancers (9.0 million), respiratory diseases (3.9million), and diabetes (1.6 million). These 4 groups of diseases account for over 80% of all premature NCD deaths.

Tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diets all increase the risk of dying from an NCD. Detection, screening, and treatment of NCDs, as well as palliative care, are key components of the response to NCDs.

80% of Blue Mountains and 50% of Gondwana rainforests burn in bushfires

At least 80% of the Blue Mountains world heritage area and more than 50% of the Gondwana world heritage rainforests have burned in Australia's ongoing bushfire crisis.

The scale of the disaster is such that it could affect the diversity of eucalypts for which the Blue Mountains world heritage area is recognised, said John Merson, the executive director of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute.

The data is based on a Guardian Australia analysis of areas burned in New South Wales and Queensland and was confirmed by the NSW government.

Guardian Australia reported in December that 20% of the Blue Mountains world heritage area had been affected by fire in the early months of the crisis.

Four times that amount has now burned in what Merson said were fires of a scale that "has never happened before".

"This is totally, totally unique. As everybody keeps saying, it's unprecedented," he said.

The Blue Mountains world heritage area covers one million hectares of national park and bushland and is dominated by temperate eucalypt forest.

The area is renowned for the diversity of its vegetation and is home to about a third

of the world's eucalypt species.

While most are fire-adapted and can regenerate, many of the species depend on long intervals between fires, Merson said.

"We had a very large fire in 2013. It's only six years after that," he said.

"The eucalypts can be very badly reduced in diversity if fires come through in too short and intense intervals. Their numbers will virtually collapse."

He said the full impact on tree species and wildlife would not be known until more assessments were done as fire grounds became accessible.

But there are concerns about the effect on breeding and feeding habitats for species including the spotted-tail quoll and the brush-tailed rock-wallaby.

The fires have also burnt swamp communities that release water slowly and are important water resources. They flow into streams that feed into Sydney's water supply and provide water for wildlife.

It was revealed this week that a rescue mission by NSW fire crews was able to save the only known natural grove of Wollemi pines, so-called "dinosaur trees" that fossil records show existed up to 200m years ago.

Merson said the fires had entered areas

that had not burnt previously and the need for the rescue mission was indicative of the intensity of the fires in the region.

"This is right in our face. We're living it."

Further north, the fires have devastated parts of the Gondwana rainforest world heritage area, a collection of reserves of subtropical rainforest that span 366,500 hectares across NSW and Queensland.

Guardian Australia used newly released data which combines all burned areas in NSW and Queensland since 1 July 2019, and calculated the area of overlap with world heritage areas.

This analysis shows 53% of the Gondwana rainforest area has burned.

Guardian Australia spoke to Mark Graham, an ecologist with the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, in December.

Graham is based in the Bellinger Valley near some of these fires.

He said since December there had been "significant, additional fire in areas that hadn't burned" in Barrington Tops, and that most of the Gondwana areas have taken a "massive hit".

"It's heart-wrenching. It's disturbing. It's frightening."

Graham said his area had experienced

some rain in recent weeks but there were now concerns that sediment washed into the Bellinger River has affected the food sources for the critically endangered Bellinger River snapping turtle.

A spokesman for the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment said understanding the impact of the fires on both world heritage areas was a priority.

"Analysis will improve as the forests becomes safe to enter and the smoke clears, enabling accurate satellite and aerial imagery to help guide our assessment and on work on ground," he said.

He said both regions contained a mixture of forest types, some of which was adapted for fire, but others that were more sensitive to fire, such as dense rainforest.

Jess Abrahams, the nature campaigner for the Australian Conservation Foundation, said climate change was hitting Australia's world heritage areas "very hard".

"We have witnessed consecutive years of devastating coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef, while global heating has been described as a catastrophic risk to the Wet Tropics and Shark Bay world heritage areas," he said.

(Source: The Independent)

Iranian Zoroastrians provide aid to flood-hit Sistan-Baluchestan

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Zoroastrian people residing in Yazd province sent their contributions to the flood-hit areas of Sistan-Baluchestan province, head of the association of Zoroastrians, has said.

A truck carrying essential items including mineral water, food, sanitary products and blankets have been dispatched to the region, IRNA quoted Sepanta Niknam as saying on Friday.



"Assisting compatriots is a humanitarian duty that has always been a concern for Zoroastrians," he stated.

The association is ready to receive cash and non-cash donations for flood victims, he noted.

Unprecedented heavy rainfall which began on January 10 has led to flash flooding in the southern provinces, including Sistan-Baluchestan. Some 95 stations have reported receiving more than 50 mm of rain and 17 stations received 100-200 mm of rain.

Huge 'blob' of warm water killed one million seabirds in unprecedented mass die-off, scientists say

Nearly one million seabirds died in one year during an "unprecedented" mass die-off caused by a huge area of unusually warm water known as "the blob", according to scientists.

More than 60,000 dead common murrelets, a fish-eating species, were found severely emaciated on beaches from central California north towards Alaska between May 2015 and April 2016.

Researchers from the University of Washington and the US Geological Survey have said they believe a long-lasting period of warmer water temperatures off the Pacific coast contributed to the deaths by unexpectedly reducing the food supply in the area.

Scientists have said the total number of deaths is likely to have been close to one million, because only a fraction of the dead birds would have washed up on shore and only a fraction of those would have been found in areas people could access.

The mass die-off is a "red-flag warning" for the damaging effect ocean warming can have on marine life, according to the author of a study on the deaths.

John Piatt, lead author of the study and a research biologist at the US Geological Survey's Alaska Science Centre, said the "magnitude and scale" of the die-off is without precedent.

"It was astonishing and alarming, and a red-flag warning about the tremendous impact sustained ocean warming can have on the marine ecosystem," Mr Piatt said.

The warming began towards the end of 2013 and intensified during the summer of 2015 with the arrival of a powerful example of a weather phenomenon known as El Niño.

This heatwave led to the creation of a 1,000-mile stretch of ocean, referred to as "the blob", where sea temperatures were warmed by 3 to 6C.

(Source: The Independent)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Weapons inspectors return to Iraq

(November 18, 2002)

An advance team of weapons inspectors has arrived in Baghdad for the first time in almost four years. Hans Blix, the chief weapons inspector and his counterpart at the International Atomic Energy Authority, Mohammed El-Baradei, are due to hold talks with Iraqi officials and prepare for full-scale searches later in the month. This report from Caroline Hawley.

Iraqi officials are **promising full cooperation** as the **inspectors** return with **unprecedented powers**. The terms of their new **mandate** were hard for Iraq to accept, but it had no choice to spare the country war. The main headlines in the Iraqi newspapers ignore the inspectors' return, but **editorials** urge the UN to be **independent and impartial**.

The inspections will be the most **intrusive** the UN has ever conducted, anywhere. Nowhere will be **off limits**, even Saddam Hussein's own palaces. But Iraq insists it has nothing to hide. The task of the inspectors now is to uncover the truth. They've spoken of hundreds of **sites** they want to visit. First they'll be making the **logistical preparations** to enable the searches to start in less than ten days' time.

■ Words

promising full cooperation: saying they will willingly do everything they are asked to do

inspectors: here, people who will examine places in which there may be weapons

unprecedented powers: they have never before had such wide legal rights

mandate: the authority to carry out a task

editorials: a newspaper article which gives the opinion of the editor or publisher

impartial: able to act fairly

intrusive: if something is intrusive it disturbs you in an unwelcome way

off limits: if a place is off limits, you are not allowed to go there

sites: somewhere which is used for a particular purpose

logistical preparations: preparations for transport, supplies and maintenance

(Source: BBC)

ENGLISH IN USE

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A ◀ ▶ ☞

Iran to implement food safety program

A food safety document will be approved and implemented in the future in the country, Vahid Mofid, an official with the Food and Drug Administration has stated.

The document is consisting of standards through which food safety is best ensured; the whole food production process from cultivation to markets will be under control, it also identifies and controls hazards in the production, manufacturing and handling of food rather than relying on end product standards alone, he explained.

The standards enable the country to oblige food businesses to meet the document principles, they will be subject to periodic observations by a suitably qualified food safety auditor, he added.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-ate”

■ **Meaning:** become

■ **For example:** the disease has been **eradicated** from the world.

PHRASAL VERB

Poke around

■ **Meaning:** to look for something, especially by moving a lot of things around

■ **For example:** James began poking about in the cupboard, looking for the sugar.

IDIOM

On the cusp

■ **Explanation:** a point in time that marks a transition or the beginning of a change

■ **For example:** Some people think the world is on the cusp of a new era.

اجرای سند ایمنی غذا در حال پیگیری است

مدیرکل فرآورده‌های غذایی و آشامیدنی سازمان غذا و دارو درباره وضعیت فعلی سند ایمنی غذا گفت: سند ایمنی غذا در حال تکمیل شدن است و تا پس از طی مراحل اداری اجرا شود.

وحید مفید روز جمعه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا افزود: با این سند، نظارت بر کل حلقه‌های تولید در زنجیره غذا از مزرعه تا سفره تحت کنترل بخش‌های مختلف درمی‌آید و میزان سموم مصرفی، انواع کودهای مصرف شده و چگونگی حمل مواد غذایی و توزیع آن، نوع آب و آبیاری زمین‌ها در سند ایمنی غذا تعریف شده است چراکه این عوامل در کیفیت محصول غذایی تاثیرگذار هستند.

مدیرکل فرآورده های غذایی و آشامیدنی سازمان غذا و دارو اظهار داشت: این استانداردها کشور را قادر می سازد که تولیدکنندگان غذایی به رعایت اصول سند مجاب کند، و شرکت های تولیدکننده مواد غذایی هر دوره توسط یک سازمان ایمنی مواد غذایی کنترل خواهند شد.

Lavrov lambastes ‘aggressive’ U.S. policies

→ 1 The three nations are being pressed on one side by Trump to abandon the agreement like he did unilaterally in 2018, and on the other side by Iran to provide enough economic incentives for it to continue honoring the deal.

Lavrov noted that the European Union boasted about creating a mechanism for trade with Iran bypassing U.S. sanctions, but never put it into action.

He described the move by Britain, France and Germany as a “dangerous turn,” arguing that the three nations used the moment of heightened tensions between the U.S. and Iran to “blame Iran for all what happened.”

Following the U.S. drone strike that killed Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qasem Soleimani, Iran announced what it said was its fifth and final step in dropping its commitments under the 2015 deal. Iran said it would no longer abide by any limitations to its enrichment activities.

Turning to Libya, Lavrov said he expects the warring parties in the North African nation to observe a lasting cease-fire after their talks in the Russian capital earlier this week.

He explained that the talks in Moscow between Libya’s rival leaders focused on a document spelling out conditions of a cease-fire that could serve as a basis for Sunday’s Libya talks hosted by Germany.

Lavrov said he plans to attend the talks in Berlin, which will be attended by both Fayez Sarraj, the head of Libya’s UN-recognized government in Tripoli, and his rival, Gen. Khalifa Haftar, Sarraj and Haftar attended Monday’s talks in Moscow, but didn’t meet directly.

“Their relations are tense, and they don’t want to be in one room together, let alone talk to each other,” Lavrov said.

He added even though Haftar refused to sign the cease-fire document that was signed by Sarraj, the most important outcome of the talks was that the truce was continuing to hold.

(Source: AP)

N. Korea foreign minister replaced

North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho has been replaced, Seoul-based NK News reported on Saturday.

Ri’s replacement has not been identified but Pyongyang is set to reveal his successor about next Thursday, the report said, citing unnamed sources.

South Korea’s unification ministry, which is in charge of North Korea affairs, has said that any change in Ri’s status should be assessed cautiously.

Born in 1956, Ri is the son of Ri Myong Je, former deputy director of the Organization and Guidance Department (OGD), a shadowy body within the ruling Workers’ Party that oversees the appointment of management positions within the state, according to the South Korean unification ministry.

His father was also an editor at the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the state media body that publishes Pyongyang’s propaganda statements.

A fluent English speaker who studied at Pyongyang’s prestigious University of Foreign Languages, Ri has for years held a number of high-level posts dealing with the West.

From 2003 to 2007, he was North Korea’s ambassador in London and served as vice foreign minister, representing North Korea at six-party talks on North Korea’s nuclear program.

Ri did not attend the annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations in September. He had attended the high-level meeting in New York for three years from 2016 to 2018.

(Source: Reuters)

Trump adds legal heavyweights to trial team

U.S. President Donald Trump turned to some legal heavyweights to help defend him in his Senate impeachment trial with the addition Friday of former independent counsel Ken Starr, who paved the way for former President Bill Clinton’s 1998 impeachment, and prominent lawyer Alan Dershowitz.

The team defending Trump will be led by White House counsel Pat Cipollone and the president’s private attorney Jay Sekulow, Trump’s legal team and a source said. Trump adviser Pam Bondi and former independent counsel Robert Ray will also be on the team, said a source familiar with the team’s composition.

The trial formally got underway Thursday, though it will start in earnest Tuesday with opening statements. The trial in the Republican-led Senate will determine whether Trump is removed from office.

The Democratic-led House of Representatives voted to impeach Trump on two charges arising from his dealings with Ukraine - abuse of power and obstruction of Congress - on Dec. 18 after an investigation that centered on his request that Ukraine investigate political rival Joe Biden, the president’s possible Democratic opponent in the Nov. 3 election.

The Senate is expected to acquit Trump, as none of its 53 Republicans has voiced support for removing him, a step that requires a two-thirds majority. Trump has denied wrongdoing and has called the impeachment process a sham. Starr is a former federal judge who held a senior Justice Department post under Republican President George H.W. Bush. Starr’s voluminous investigative report on Clinton’s sexual affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky served as the basis for his impeachment in the House on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice. The Senate in 1999 acquitted Clinton, a Democrat. Starr had recommended impeachment on 11 grounds.

In 2016, Starr was ousted as president of Baylor University, a private Baptist institution in Texas, after a probe by an outside law firm determined that university leaders had mishandled accusations of sexual assault by football players. Critics of Starr at the time accused him of turning a blind eye to sexual violence on his campus after pursuing Clinton for a sexual relationship.

Both Starr and Dershowitz also served as lawyers for financier and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, who was found dead in his New York jail cell last year where he was being held on new sex trafficking charges.

(Source: Reuters)

Iraqi Army: U.S. troop withdrawal includes all territory

The U.S. operation in Iraq could come to an embarrassing end

→ 1 Embarrassing end

Donald Trump hasn’t pulled his troops out of Iraq, despite his pledge to end America’s grinding wars. It turns out he may not have to. The U.S. is facing the possibility of being kicked out, CNN reported on Saturday.

Officials in Iraq’s parliament, where powerful blocs have unbreakable ties to Tehran, started a process to end the presence of foreign troops in the country, in a clear riposte to the U.S. after it killed top Iranian commander Qasm Soleimani in a drone strike in Baghdad two weeks ago.

In the wake of the strike, joint U.S.-Iraqi operations against ISIS were put on hold, and Iraq’s caretaker prime minister said a U.S. troop withdrawal was the only way to “protect all those on Iraqi soil,” though this week he said that decision would be up to the next government.

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), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, in an airstrike near Baghdad



International Airport.

Meanwhile, Iraqi officials have warned of economic “collapse” if the United States makes good on its threat to cut off its access

to a U.S.-based key bank account where oil revenues are kept.

President Donald Trump is angered by the Iraqi parliament voting on January

5 to oust all U.S. forces following Washington’s assassination of Iran’s General Qassem Soleimani and Iraq’s Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

Trump has said if U.S. troops were asked to leave, he would charge the Iraqis “sanctions like they’ve never seen before.” On Friday, he suggested blocking some \$35 billion of Iraqi money “right now sitting in an account” in the United States.

Agence France-Presse quoted two unnamed Iraqi officials as saying that Washington had delivered an extraordinary verbal message directly to the office of Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi.

The office “got a call threatening that if U.S. troops are kicked out, ‘we’ -- the U.S. -- will block your account at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York,” one official said.

Iraq is the second largest oil producer of OPEC and its oil revenues -- which are paid in dollars into the Fed account daily -- fund 90 percent of the national budget.

“We’re an oil-producing country. Those accounts are in dollars. Cutting off access means totally turning off the tap,” the first Iraqi official said.

(Source: agencies)

UN Libya mission “deeply concerned” over disruption in oil production

The United Nations mission in Libya said Saturday it was deeply concerned over efforts to disrupt oil production in the country and urged all sides to exercise restraint.

“This move would have devastating consequences first and foremost for the Libyan people who depend on the free flow of oil for their well-being,” the mission said.

He also said that he hoped but “could not predict” whether eastern oil ports shut ahead of a pending Berlin summit aimed at reaching a truce in Libya would be reopened soon.

Ghassan Salame said the Berlin summit scheduled for Sunday would likely discuss the closures to avoid them dragging on for weeks or months like previous seizures of facilities.

“If the thing is not solved between today and tomorrow I expect the issue to be raised, yes,” Salame told Reuters in Berlin, where Germany and the UN are expected to push for an extended truce.

Oil export terminals across eastern and central Libya were shut on Friday by tribesmen allied to commander Khalifa Haftar, whose Libya National Army (LNA) based in the east has been locked in a nine-month war with



government forces over control of the capital, Tripoli.

Diplomats see the closures as a power play by the LNA aimed at choking off oil revenue to the internationally recognized Tripoli government.

The National Oil Corp (NOC) on Saturday declared force majeure on oil exports from the eastern ports of Brega, Ras Lanuf, Hariga, Zueitina and Es Sider, saying the closures would result in the loss of 800,000 barrels (bpd) day in oil output.

Iraqi forces arrest obese Daesh mufti in Mosul



Iraqi forces have arrested an overweight ISIL (Daesh) ‘mufti’ in the city of Mosul who advocated enslaving, raping, torturing and ethnic cleansing.

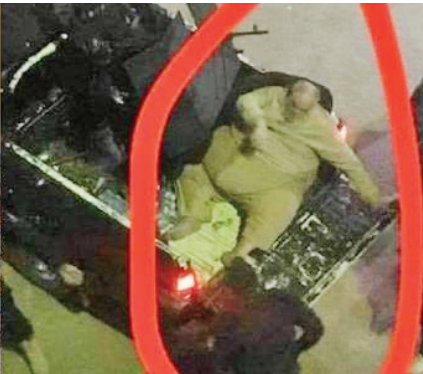
The 560-pound (254kgs) Abu Abdul Bari, also known as Shifa al-Nima, was taken into custody on the back of a pick-up truck because he was too heavy to be put in a police car, Iraqi security officials said in a statement on Thursday.

Bari, a preacher known for “provocative speeches against the security forces” is considered one of the top leaders of the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group.

He issued religious decrees — or fatwas — ordering the execution of scholars and clerics who refused to pledge allegiance to Daesh when the terror group occupied Mosul in 2014.

Bari also ordered the destruction of Mosul’s cultural heritage, specifically the ancient Mosque of Prophet Jonah, which sparked outrage and condemnation in the Islamic world

The mosque had been built over



the reputed burial site of the biblical prophet revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims who know him as Nabi Yunis.

Photos of the Daesh leader being captured and taken away in a truck have been widely circulated online.

Maajid Nawaz, founder of the London-based anti-extremism think tank Quilliam Foundation also shared images of Bari’s arrest.

“He was so overweight, maybe from remaining sedentary in his hiding place, that he had to be taken by police in the back of a pick-up truck,” he wrote on Facebook.

“Most religious justifications provided to ISIS (Daesh) for enslaving, raping, torturing, ethnic cleansing and massacring Iraqis, Syrians and others are from this paltry beast who can’t even stand on his own two legs,” he wrote, adding that the images of his arrest would strike the terror group a psychological blow.

(Source: Press TV)

Macron rushed out of Paris theatre after protesters try to confront him



French President Emmanuel Macron has been rushed out of a theatre in Paris after protesters tried to confront him.

Dozens of demonstrators had gathered outside the Les Bouffes du Nord theatre on Friday evening where Mr Macron was watching a play, reportedly with his wife Brigitte, Sky News reported.

Police tried to hold back the protesters but some managed to enter the building, amid chants of “Macron, resign!” and “We are here, even if Macron does not want us we are here”.

A black car reported to be carrying the French president then sped away under a hail of boos.

According to reports, he later returned to the theatre to watch the play - a modernist drama called The Fly.

The incident came on the 44th day of strikes aimed at overturning the French government’s plans to overhaul the country’s pension system.

On Friday, protesters blocked the entrance to the Louvre museum and forced the famous Paris landmark to close.

Macron was previously targeted by “yellow vest” protesters in their year-long movement against the cost of living, accused of being arrogant and out of touch.

The president has mostly stayed on the sidelines during protests against his planned overhaul of France’s retirement system, leaving Edouard Philippe, his prime minister, to face unions during a month and a half of transport stoppages.

But with participation in rail strikes waning, opponents of the pension reform have staged more direct action.

The headquarters of the moderate CFDT union, which the government has been trying to win over, was invaded on Friday by activists from other unions, while the Louvre Museum was blocked by striking staff.

Macron, who included changes to the pension system in his 2017 election campaign, wants to replace dozens of existing schemes with a universal, points-based system.

(Source: agencies)

EU warns of WTO challenge if U.S.-China deal harms businesses

The European Union (EU) has warned that if a trade agreement recently signed by the United States and China creates “distortions” in the market, it will challenge the deal at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Nicolas Chapuis, the EU’s ambassador to China, said on Friday that the EU would monitor the implementation of the U.S.-China trade agreement to ensure it did not harm the bloc’s companies.

“In our opinion, quantitative targets are not WTO-compatible if they lead to trade distortions,” Chapuis said. “If it were to be the case, we will go to the WTO to settle this matter.”

He also said that during a meeting at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, he had been given “formal assurances that in absolutely no way would European businesses be affected by the U.S.-China deal.”

On Wednesday, U.S. President Donald Trump signed the so-



called Phase One trade agreement with China’s Vice Premier Liu He.

The deal had been announced in December 2019, as part of a bid to end the months-long trade war between the

world’s two largest economies, which has roiled markets and hit global growth.

The agreement includes pledges from China to import an additional 200 billion dollars’ worth of U.S. products over two years, above the levels purchased in 2017, including an additional 32 billion dollars in agricultural goods. It also includes pledges to improve protections of U.S. intellectual property.

The U.S. has pledged to slash in half tariffs of 15 percent that were imposed on about 120 billion dollars’ worth of Chinese consumer goods, such as clothing, in September.

But tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars in goods remain in place, on two-thirds of the over 500 billion dollars in imports from China. Trump initiated the trade war on China last year. The two countries have since imposed billions of dollars’ worth of tariffs on each other’s goods.

(Source: Press TV)

Iranian football teams stand against AFC’s decision

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Four Iranian football clubs have announced that they will take a strong stand against the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) after it decided to ban them from hosting their rivals in Iran.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has sent a letter to the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) wanting them that they would not be hosting AFC Champions League matches for security reasons.

An extraordinary meeting was immediately held on Saturday at the FFIRI’s headquarters to address the situation and the managers of the four clubs representing Iran in the upcoming ACL emphasized that they will withdraw from the tournament if the AFC insists on its decision.

“We’ve sent a letter to AFC, acknowledging them we will withdraw from the competition if they want to ban our country from hosting the matches,” FFIRI acting president Heydar Baharvand said. “The four Iranian clubs will stand against the AFC’s unfair decision and the federation will support whatever decisions they make.”

“The majority of the Iranian people are not satisfied with the AFC’s decision and it’s an insult to our nation. To host the competition is our right and we will strongly defend our right,” he added.

“We will not accept the situation and our clubs will not budge an inch on their decision to withdraw from the competition and the federation as well as Iran’s Sports Ministry will support them. Iran is a safe country and



our league is the highest attended in Asia. There is no reason to play in neutral field,” Baharvand stated.

Iranian football teams Esteghlal and Shahr Khodro are scheduled to play Kuwait SC and Riffa in the 2020 AFC Champions

League Preliminary Stage Two. Persepolis and Sepahan have already learned their rivals in the ACL Group Stage.

To ban Iranian teams calls AFC credibility into question

1 → FFIRI acting president Heydar Baharvand also said. “The four Iranian clubs will stand against the AFC’s unfair decision and the federation will support whatever decisions they make.”

“The majority of the Iranian people are not satisfied with the AFC’s decision and it’s an

insult to our nation. To host the competition is our right and we will strongly defend our right,” he added.

Iran has the full readiness to host teams and has proven this repeatedly in the recent years. The cancellation of hosting of the games – the decision

yet to be confirmed- is unfair if not to say a “serious injustice”.

It seems that the Asian Football Confederation has been under pressure to make the decision.

AFC should change its stance on this matter to avoid inadmissible bias against Iran.

San Lorenzo reinforced by signing Aaron Geramipour

San Lorenzo is a club that always points to the top. And after a perfect first phase, with four wins, the first setback appeared, just at the key moment of the competition. The 75-59 defeat against Franca in Brazil made quick decisions to the Argentine team, which hired two inmates to play international competitions (the actual BCLA and the Copa Intercontinental, next month in Europe).

The two new faces for the second point

of the series of quarterfinals in Buenos Aires will be those of Ramón Clemente and Aaron Geramipour, two internal who fill the position that cost the «Ciclon» in San Pablo, only with Batista and Caffaro, before Justin Williams’s injury.

The Puerto Rican nationalized American is 34 years old played last season in San Lorenzo and after passing through Astros de Jalisco in Mexico, he was seduced by the possibility of returning to San Lorenzo, at

least for a few games. Clemente has a great trajectory with steps through Puerto Rico, Israel, Mexico, Italy and Argentina (Obras, Ferro, Olímpico and San Lorenzo). And he played the World Cup with Puerto Rico.

The Iranian nationalized British is 27 years old , and its height is 2.13m, is a center and will want to show that he can adapt to Argentina’s basketball and his experience at the Mundial in China, representing his team. In that tournament

he averaged 10.4 points and 6 rebounds, plus 69.7% of field shots. In his career he played in Spain, Mexico, the NCAA, in Iran and in Croatia, where he was before arrive in Argentina.

The team led by Nestor García Will face on Saturday when he receives Franca at Roberto Pando, seeking to match the series and reach a third game, which would be played on Monday, also in Buenos Aires. *(Source: FIBA)*

Saudi Arabia edge Thailand to seal semis spot at AFC U23 Championship



Bangkok: Abdullah Al Hamdan’s penalty 12 minutes from time took Saudi Arabia into the semi-finals of the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 as Saad Al Shehri’s side claimed a narrow 1-0 win over Thailand at Thammasat Stadium on Saturday.

Al Hamdan struck decisively from the spot after he had been pulled back on his way into the area, with referee Ahmed Al Kaf awarding the penalty after confirmation of the offence by the Video Assistant Referee.

The goal was a cruel blow for Akira Nishino’s team, who had matched the Saudis throughout the preceding 78 minutes in front of a sell-out crowd as both teams battled to keep their hopes of both the title and a trip to the Olympic Games alive.

Saudi Arabia made a jittery start, surrendering possession inside their own half with less than two minutes on the clock, and they were relieved when Supachai Jaided shot wide. Another scare came four minutes later as Suphanat Mueanta’s curling effort came back off Mohammed Al Yami’s left post.

With a vociferous, boisterous crowd behind them, the Thais were in the ascendancy during the opening quarter but, as time wore on, Al Shehri’s side established a foothold and should have taken the lead.

Thitawee Auksornsri had to be at his sharpest to snuff out the threat of Abdullah Al Hamdan in the 17th minute while Al Ghannam’s shot on the run called Thai goalkeeper Korraphat Nareechan into action.

With 12 minutes left in the half Al Hamdan squandered his side’s best opening of the first 45 minutes, sending the ball high over the bar after Sami Al Naji’s cross from the right had evaded the Thai defence.

The second half had been a scrappy affair, with only Sorawit Panthong’s speculative attempt from long range worthy of note, until Al Hamdan was pulled back by Sorawit and the referee eventually pointed to the spot.

The young Al Shabab forward made no mistake, powering his penalty home via the underside of the bar to leave Korraphat with no chance.

With Thailand needing to score to take the game into extra time, Nishino’s side were always open to the counterattack. Hussain Al Essa saw his attempt cleared off the line by Kritsada Kaman and Sami Al Naji hit the bar with his attempted follow up.

In the end, though, Al Hamdan’s penalty was enough to take the Saudis through and keep their hopes of a first Olympic appearance since 1996 intact.

(Source: AFC)

Watford stalemate hits Spurs Euro hopes



Watford held Tottenham to a goalless draw on Saturday to extend their unbeaten run in the Premier League and further damage Spurs’ Champions League ambitions.

When Nigel Pearson took over at Vicarage Road last month Watford looked doomed to relegation but he has put together a remarkable run of results to lift the club out of the relegation zone.

It is a different story for Jose Mourinho’s Spurs who, without the injured Harry Kane and with uncertainty over the future of Christian Eriksen, could be 11 points off fourth spot by the end of the day.

But Pearson will feel Watford should have wrapped up all three points after his side squandered some golden chances in the second half and captain Troy Deeney saw his penalty saved.

Before kick-off there was a warm tribute from the fans to former manager Graham Taylor, who died three years ago.

It was the visitors who settled first, finding their rhythm from the kick-off, dominating possession and probing for openings on the edge of the Watford box.

But the home side broke dangerously in the second minute, with Gerard Deulofeu shooting wide of Paulo Gazzaniga’s goal.

That was a rare foray forward in the opening stages for Watford, who struggled to get on top of Mourinho’s men.

Son Heung-min looked lively on the left of Tottenham’s attack and had the first shot on target but despite all their possession Watford goalkeeper Ben Foster rarely

looked troubled.

■ Watford threat

The home side gradually worked their way into the game and started to see much more of the ball.

They had a good chance to test Gazzaniga when Japhet Tanganga was booked after bringing down Ismaila Sarr in a dangerous position just outside the penalty box but Nathaniel Chalobah wasted the opportunity.

Shortly before the half-hour there was a delay of several minutes as referee Michael Oliver was forced to change his communication kit, accompanied by the crowd chanting: “It’s not football any more.”

Foster saved from Son in the 30th minute and was down smartly to keep out a sharp Lucas Moura shot after a delightful through ball from Dele Alli.

Watford flew out of the blocks in the second half and could have been 2-0 up but for some poor finishing.

First Abdoulaye Doucoure scuffed the ball just wide after good work down the right by the dangerous Sarr before Sarr himself failed to connect properly from close range.

Although Watford were now well on top, Spurs continued to look dangerous on the break.

Alli headed over while Son shot after being released through the middle.

The decisive moment appeared to come with about 20 minutes to go when Spurs captain Jan Vertonghen was booked for handling Deulofeu’s shot in the penalty area. *(Source: AFC)*

Bahrain edge Iran at 2020 Asian Handball Championship

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Bahrain edged past Iran 22-20 at the 2020 Asian Men’s Handball Championship on Saturday.

Asian giants Bahrain advanced to Group 1 as the winners and Iran are drawn in Group 2 as the third team.

Iran started the campaign with a 53-21 win over New Zealand at the Shaikh Saad Al-Abdullah Sports Hall Complex in Kuwait City on Saturday.

The 2020 Asian Men’s Handball Championship is the 19th edition of the championship held under the aegis of Asian Handball Federation at Kuwait City, Kuwait from Jan. 16 to 27.

It acts as the Asian qualifying tournament for the 2021 World Men’s Handball Championship in Egypt.

Mohammadian, Zare win medals at Matteo Pellicone

MNA — Iran’s freestyle wrestler of 97kg category Moham-madhossein Mohammadian gained commanding victories against all his rivals on Friday to win the gold medal of the Matteo Pellicone in Italy.

He started the campaign with an 11-0 win over Alisher Yergali of Kazakhstan who had earlier qualified his country for the 2020 Olympics. Mohammadian then proved his readiness by walloping the reigning U23 world champion, USA’s Bo Nickal, 10-0.

In the quarterfinals, he shut Olympics gold medalist USA’s Kyle Snyder out before the half time with an 8-0 win. He then continued the chain of victories, this time with an 11-0 one against 2018 world bronze-medal finisher Abraham de Jesus Conyedo Ruano of Italy. Eventually, he won Aliaksandr Hushryn of Belarus 9-0 in the final match to complete the seismic day and win his first career Rankings Series title.

Iran also won another gold medal on Friday. Amir Hossein Zare stunned the three-time world champion Bilial Makhov of Russia in the final of 125kg category.

The four-day tournament kicked off January 15 and will wrap up today in Ostia, a port city of ancient Rome located 30km away from the city center.

According to a report by the United World Wrestling, the stacked entry list includes seven reigning world champions, all three 2019 Wrestlers of the Year and over 30 world medal holders from the 2019 World Championships.

Iran’s Behnam Ehsanpoor (65kg) and Yones Aliakbar Emam-ichoghaei (74kg) will take on their rivals on Saturday.

Iranian boxers claim four bronzes at Ahmet Comert Tourney

TASNIM — Four Iranian boxers won bronze medals at the International Elite Ahmet Comert Boxing Tournament.

Danial Shahbakhsh seized a bronze medal in the 57kg. Hossein Daneshvar defeated his Mongolian rival in his first match but lost to an opponent from Turkey and won a bronze medal in the -81kh weight.

Ehsan Rouzbahani claimed a bronze medal in the 91kg. Ali Jamali was defeated against his Turkish rival and won a bronze medal at the +91kg.

The 32nd International Ahmet Comert Boxing Tournament in being held in Istanbul, Turkey.

Anthony Stokes signs six-month contract with Iranian side Persepolis

Former Celtic forward Anthony Stokes is signing for Iranian side Persepolis, based in Tehran.

The much travelled 31-year old Republic of Ireland striker is joining on a six month contract to play in Iran’s Pro League.

Stokes was released early from his contract with Turkish side Adana Demispor in November after scoring once in six games.

He has now found his fifth club since leaving Scotland in January 2018.

Stokes featured for Apollon Smyrnis in Greece and Iranian side Tractor Sazi since departing Easter Road.

The Dublin-born man began his career at Shelbourne in Ireland before joining Arsenal’s youth system in 2003.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Branko Ivankovic on verge of taking charge of Oman

PLDC — Oman national football team is going to hire former Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic.

The Croatian coach is now in Muscat to negotiate with the Oman Football Association.

Oman’s previous coach was Erwin Koeman, who failed to get the country beyond the group stages of the Gulf Cup in Qatar in December. Although they beat Kuwait 2-1, they lost 3-1 to Saudi Arabia and were held to a goalless draw by eventual winners Bahrain.

Oman is in Group E along with India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Qatar.

Branko Ivankovic left Persepolis in June after failed to reach an agreement with the Iranian team’s officials.

Ivankovic built the most decorated resume of any coach in Persepolis history. Under leadership of him, Persepolis won three successive Iran Professional League. The Reds, also won one Hazfi Cup and three Super Cups.



INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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» www.eshtarak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
» Printed at: Jame Jam Barta Borna - 44197737

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

When you turn to God for your need, begin it by greeting the Prophet and his household, and then express your need. God is more exalted than to be asked to meet two needs, to supply one and disregard the other.

Imam Ali (AS)

Two projects share Vista Contemporary Art Prize

A R T **TEHRAN** — Two projects by artists Kolsum Salehi and Hamidreza Azad shared the third edition of the Vista Contemporary Art Prize held at the Iranian Artists Forum on Friday.

The prize is a check worth 300 million rials (about \$7,200) for their artistic ideas.

Azad won the prize for an installation exhibition, in which a horn-shaped figure produces voices, causing visitors to refer to history in a reflective way.



Artist Hamidreza Azad (C) receives the Vista trophy at the 3rd Vista Contemporary Art Prize, which he shared with Kolsum Salehi (R), at the Iranian Artists Forum on January 17, 2020. (Honaronline/Leila Ebrahimi)

And Salehi was selected for her plan which indicates that time has a significant impact on everybody's life.

The director of the gallery, Parisa Pahlavan, called the prize an independent honor, calling on the private sector to support it.

Nine projects were 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.

The organizers will help the winners accomplish their projects in an exhibition at the gallery.

Director says in lawsuit Apple, Shyamalan stole her movie

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — A television series developed for Apple Inc by famed director M. Night Shyamalan blatantly copied a 2013 film, a copyright lawsuit filed on Wednesday claimed.

Italian-American director Francesca Gregorini sued Apple and Shyamalan in Los Angeles federal court, alleging the recently released horror series "Servant" plagiarized her 2013 film "The Truth About Emanuel."

Apple declined to comment and a publicist for Shyamalan did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"Having a very personal labor of love stolen, which is what this case is about, is soul-crushing," Gregorini said in a press release.

Gregorini's lawyer, David Erikson, said in a statement that the similarities between the two works "are so pervasive, and so grounded in my client's highly creative and uniquely personal artistic choices, that the idea they might have resulted from coincidence is preposterous."

Shyamalan, known for his film-ending twists, has directed films including "The Sixth Sense" and "Signs."

Tony Basgallo, the writer and creator of "Servant," was also named as a defendant in the lawsuit.

"Servant" and "The Truth About Emanuel" both tell the story of a mother who, grieving the death of her baby, forms an attachment to a realistic doll who she believes to be alive. In both works, a teenage nanny goes along with the grieving mother and cares for the doll as if it were alive.

Gregorini's lawsuit alleged that there are also striking similarities between scenes, themes, and settings in the two works.

Apple TV+, the iPhone maker's entry into the crowded streaming TV market, debuted on Nov. 1 with four TV series for adults, an episode of "Oprah's Book Club," a nature documentary, and three children's series. Additional programming is being added.

All of the programming is original because, unlike Netflix Inc and Disney+ from Walt Disney Co, Apple does not have rights to a back catalog of TV shows and movies.

Hossein Zendehehrudi's "Voute Azurée" tops Tehran Auction

A R T **TEHRAN** — Hossein Zendehehrudi's painting "Voute Azurée" was the most expensive work sold at the 12th Tehran Auction on Friday as it fetched 32 billion rials (over \$750,000).

A selection of 118 lots of modern and contemporary Iranian art was offered during the auction held at Tehran's Parsian Azadi Hotel.

The second most expensive work sold at the sale was an untitled painting from Manuchehr Yekta's still life series, which fetched 19 billion rials (over \$450,000).

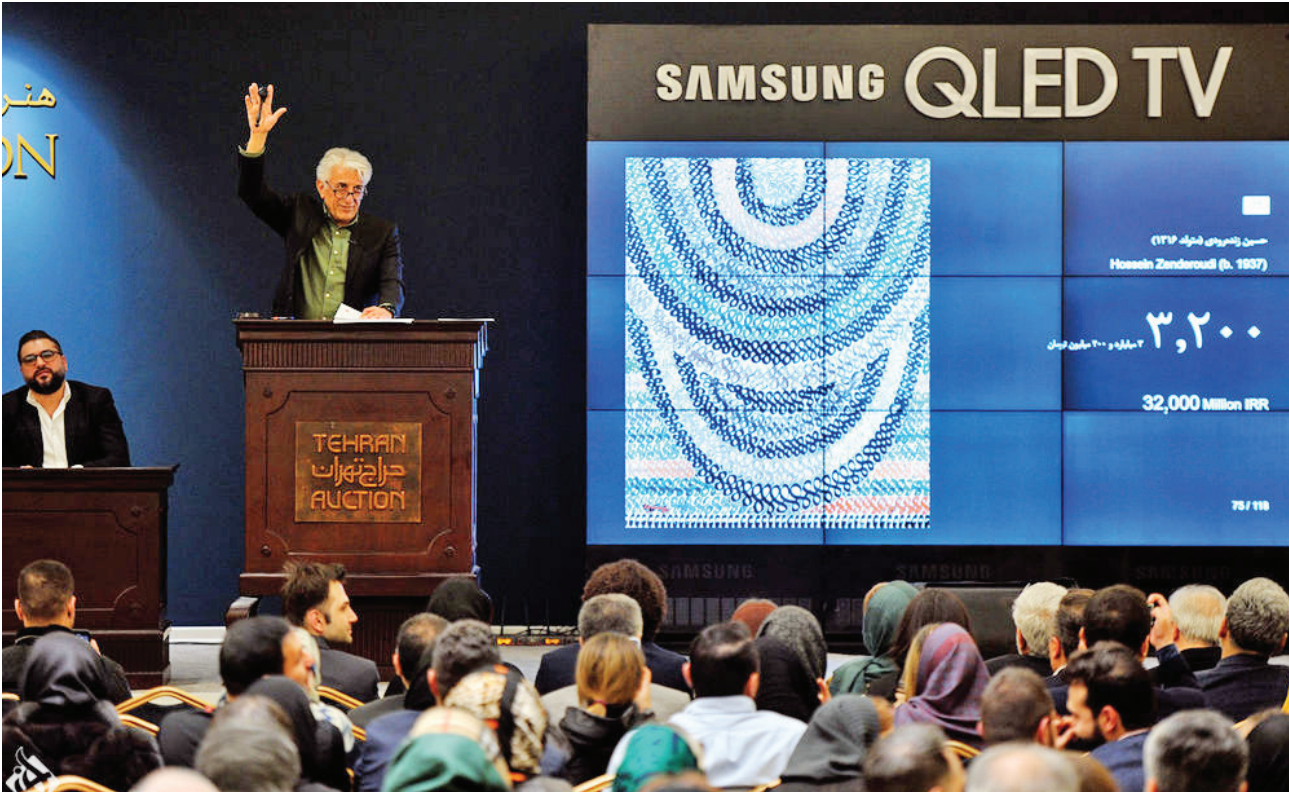
"Am I Dreaming or Am I Awake", a painting on canvas from Farhad Moshiri's jar series was the third most expensive work sold at the auction with 16 billion rials (over \$380,000).

There was a surprise in store for the art dealers at the auction as an untitled painting by young artist Hassan Ruholamin was sold at 2.8 billion rials (about \$67,000), seven times more than its estimated price.

A total of 115 items were sold during the 12th edition of the auction, which took in over 317 billion rials (over \$7.5 million).

Works by artists, including Parvaneh Etemadi, Parviz Kalantari, Abbas Kiarostami, Aidin Aghdashlu and Jazeh Tabatabai, were auctioned at the sale.

Art expert Alireza Sami-Azar, a former director of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, is the director of the auction, which organizes two sales every year. The first sale is dedicated to classic artworks and the second sale focuses on modern and contemporary artworks.



Auctioneer Reza Kianian takes a bid for the sale of "Voute Azurée" by Hossein Zendehehrudi during the 12th Tehran Auction at the Parsian Azadi Hotel in Tehran on January 17, 2020. The artwork was the top seller, fetching over \$750,000. (Honaronline/Mohammad Namazi)

7th Khayyam Intl. Exhibition of Photography opens in Tehran



Art aficionados visit the 7th Khayyam International Exhibition of Photography at the Niavaran Cultural Center in Tehran on January 17, 2020. (Tasnim/Mohammad Maleki)

A R T **TEHRAN** — The 7th Khayyam International Exhibition of Photography opened at the Niavaran Cultural Center in Tehran on Friday, honoring the top photographers.

The exhibition is displaying over 120 works by photographers from over 50 countries.

A large number of Iranian and foreign photographers and diplomats attended the opening ceremony of the exhibit.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, the director of the exhibit, Ali Samei, said that the Khayyam exhibition is held annually to promote the art of photography and provide an opportunity for interaction between Iranian and world photographers.

He also said that the overseas photographers have warmly welcomed the exhibit, indicating the fact that the event has earned significant status among

the photographers across the world.

The ceremony went on with honoring a number of top photographs in different sections.

A photo by Mehdi Saeidi-Rad grabbed the Khayyam gold medal, and Amin Dehqani was selected as Iran's Focus Photo Club photographer of the year.

A photo by Mohammad-Sadeq Hayati won the award in the astronomy photography category. In the Tehran photographic section, a photo by Saied Akbarbeiglu was honored.

The exhibit will be running until January 24.

The exhibit will later tour Iranian cities and overseas during the coming months.

Iran's Focus Photo Club organizes the exhibition annually with the help of the Photographic Society of America (PSA) and FIAP.

Iranian troupe to perform "Coriolanus" at Kerala theater festival



Members of Mostafa Kushki's troupe perform "Coriolanus" at the Tehran Independent Theater.

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Tehran Independent Theater Company will perform "Coriolanus" at the International Theater Festival of Kerala (ITFOK), which will be held in the Indian city of Thrissur from January 20 to 29.

Coriolanus is a tragedy by William Shakespeare, believed to have been written between 1605 and 1608. The play is based on the life of the legendary Roman leader Caius Marcius Coriolanus.

In the play, Roman General Coriolanus fails to win the support of his people and loses the position of Consul. He then allies with his enemy Tullus Aufidius and swears to take revenge on his city.

Two performances have been

arranged for the play, which will be directed by Mostafa Kushki, the organizers have announced.

He also staged the play at the Tehran Independent Theater last summer.

"Silver Epidemic" from Brazil, "An Evening with Immigrant" from the UK, "I Is Another Rimbaud in Africa" from Norway, "The Director" from Australia, "Told by the Wind" from the UK and Singapore and "Tree of Death" from Poland will be staged during the festival.

Iranian troupes have been frequent visitors to the ITFOK since the establishment of the festival in 2008.

Kushki staged "Midsummer Night's Dream" at the festival in 2019. A troupe led by director Abbas Abolhassani performed "The Well" at the event at the same time.

U.S. troops injured in Iran missile attack subject of Shojaei's cartoons

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian cartoonist Masud Shojaei-Tabatabai, who also presides over Iran's International Trumpism Cartoon and Caricature Contest, has created two cartoons on the U.S. service members who were injured in Iran's January 8 missile attack on the U.S. Ain Al-Asad airbase in Iraq.

The attack was carried out in retaliation for the assassination of Iran's Quds Force chief, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, however, the Pentagon initially said that no casualties were suffered.

"Finally, the Pentagon acknowledged that 11 U.S. troopers have suffered brain damage due to the missile attack on the

Ain Al-Asad airbase," Shojaei-Tabatabai told the Persian service of MNA on Saturday.

"It is quite remarkable that the American government, after ten days of prevarication, officially announced the casualties of the attack," added the cartoonist, who was a co-organizer of the International Holocaust Cartoon Contest in Iran.

One of the cartoons depicts a design of a U.S. one-dollar bill bearing the image of George Washington deformed as a result of an explosion.

The other one shows a U.S. trooper counting missiles, instead of sheep, to put himself to sleep.



A cartoon by Iranian artist Masud Shojaei-Tabatabai.

Weinstein jury seated after prosecutors accuse defense of excluding white women

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Lawyers in Harvey Weinstein's New York rape trial finished selecting 12 jurors on Friday to decide the former Hollywood producer's fate, as prosecutors renewed an accusation that the defense had unfairly tried to block white women from serving on the jury.

The jury, comprised of six white men, three black women, one black man and two white women, is set to hear opening arguments next week.

Weinstein, the 67-year-old producer of Hollywood hits such as "The English Patient" and "Shakespeare in Love", has pleaded not guilty to assaulting two women. He faces life

in prison if convicted.

Since 2017 more than 80 women have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct dating back decades. He denies the allegations, saying any sexual encounters were consensual.

The accusations against him helped fuel the #MeToo movement, in which women have publicly accused powerful men in several industries of sexual abuse.

Lawyers seated two white female jurors on Friday after Weinstein's defense team had exhausted their opportunity to eliminate potential jurors who did not exhibit explicit bias against the defendant or otherwise seem unfit to serve.

Three legal experts said the defense appeared to assume white women would be more likely to sympathize with Weinstein's accusers.

Weinstein is charged with assaulting two women, Mimi Holey, who is white, and an anonymous accuser whose race is unknown. At least one other white female accuser, U.S. actress Annabella Sciorra, is expected to testify.

"It looks like their thought process is that a white woman would have more of an affinity to the victims," said Michael Bachner, a defense lawyer who is not involved in the case.

As potential jurors were eliminated on Thursday and Friday, prosecutor Joan Illuzzi

accused Weinstein's lawyers of systematically striking "every white female" from the pool.

"They are systematically eliminating a class of people from this jury," Illuzzi said on Friday.

Weinstein's lawyers cited specific reasons for excluding each white woman. One had a father and brother in the FBI, and would be biased because she was "surrounded by law enforcement," said defense lawyer Arthur Aidala. One was a model, like some of Weinstein's 80 accusers. Another had a photo of a women's march posted prominently on her Facebook profile, and a "social media influencer" daughter, the defense said.