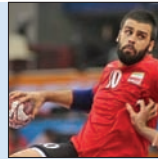




**IRGC destroyed U.S. grandeur** **3**



**Shamkhani hails Iraqi people's historic anti-U.S. rally** **3**



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**Culture minister praises Fajr music festival for good discipline** **12**

# The second slap: Go out

Iraqis march in 'millions' to call for expulsion of U.S. troops

See page 10



GAAP



**EDITORIAL**  
**Mohammad Ghaderi**  
Tehran Times editor-in-chief  
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## Assassination threat against Ghaani originates from fear

U.S. Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook on Thursday threatened assassination against Esmail Ghaani, the new commander of the IRGC Quds Force, and impudently said, "This isn't a new threat".

In an interview with the Arabic-language daily Asharq al-Awsat in Davos, Switzerland, Hook repeated baseless claims about the assassination of Major General Qassem Soleimani and threatened that if Commander Ghaani kills U.S. troops he will be assassinated too.

It is clear that this threat is logically driven by fear, as the U.S. has received Iran's message to "strongly continue the path of resistance" especially as Brigadier General Ghaani was named the new chief of the Quds Force on the same day that General Soleimani was assassinated.

The White House, which sees itself as the loser of Trump's gambling over the assassination of the resistance movement's commander, is terrified by the Islamic Revolution Leader's emphasis on expanding the influence of "the warriors without borders (the Quds Force)". Washington is trying to hide its concern and fear by such threats and disrupt the continuation of "hard revenge by the axis of resistance".

The U.S., which is trying to conceal the severity of the blow dealt by Iran to American troops in the Ein al-Assad airbase through shameful secrecy, knows that any new mischief will face further humiliation and harsher response.

The consequences of this disgraceful secrecy were so intense that even prominent U.S. senators such as Chris Murphy reacted to the Pentagon statement that said 11 troops were sent to Germany by sarcastically saying that «you don't get sent to Germany for headaches».

Another reason for Hook's threats is U.S. fear of the response by resistance groups, which are prompted to take revenge due to their emotional relationship with martyr Soleimani. ➔3

## Palestinians warn Israel, U.S. as Trump discusses new 'peace plan'

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has warned Israel and the United States against "crossing red lines" promising not to recognize any Middle East peace plan it had previously rejected as U.S. President Donald Trump prepares to present the plan in the coming days.

Trump said on Thursday he will likely release the long-awaited plan before Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits Washington, DC next week.

"Probably we'll release it a little bit prior to that," the U.S. leader told reporters travelling with him to Florida on board Air Force One, referring to the White House meeting on Tuesday.

"It's a great plan. It's a plan that really would work," he added.

The Palestinians, who were not invited to the White House meeting with Netanyahu, immediately rejected the U.S.-hosted talks, as they reject the peace plan itself, which has been in the works since 2017. Its release has been delayed repeatedly.

The economic part of the plan was shared in June and calls for \$50bn in international investment in the Palestinian territories and neighboring Arab countries over 10 years.

The Palestinians rejected Trump's peace efforts after he recognized disputed Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moved the U.S. embassy there in May 2018.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesman of the Palestinian presidency, said in a statement the Palestinian leadership will reject any steps by the U.S. that would breach international law, the official Palestinian Wafa news agency reported.

"If this deal is announced with these rejected

formulas, the leadership will announce a series of measures in which we safeguard our legitimate rights, and we will demand Israel assume its full responsibilities as an occupying power," Abu Rudeineh said.

He appeared to be referring to oft-repeated threats to dissolve the PA, which has limited autonomy in parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. That would force Israel to resume responsibility for providing basic services to millions of Palestinians.

"We warn Israel and the U.S. administration from crossing the red lines," Abu Rudeineh said.

He reiterated the call for ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and said an independent Palestinian state should be established with occupied East Jerusalem recognized as its capital. ➔10

## Iraq will be turned into new Vietnam for U.S. troops if they don't withdraw: senior journalist

By Mohammad Jafari

**TEHRAN** — Millions of Iraqi people, who gathered in Baghdad on Friday, urged the U.S. troops to leave their homeland otherwise they will face another Vietnam war, the managing director of Al Nakhil News Agency says.

"Over 2 and a half millions of Iraqis from all walks of the life, including Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, Christians, who have gathered in Al Tahrir square in Baghdad, have unitedly urged the U.S. troops to leave their land," Mohammad Ali al-Hakim told Tehran Times on Friday afternoon.

He further said, "This is not an ordinary gathering. The entire popular forces, within the framework of the Resistance Front, including Hashd al-Shaabi, Kataeb

Al Hezbollah, Saraya Al Islam, Al Fatah Coalition, Sadr Movement, Bebelion Christian Movement, Al Nojaba Movement, the Parliamentary Al Saeroun Coalition and so many other political factions along with Grand Religious Leaders (Marja'iyat) have participated in the demonstration against the U.S. presence in Iraq."

Al Hakim went on to say, "The gathering is a real referendum which has nothing to demand but expulsion of U.S. troops and closure of the U.S. bases in Iraq."

"The Iraqi parliament drafted a resolution on expulsion of U.S. troops from the country a couple of weeks ago. People here are shouting their expulsion, so, they must leave our country

otherwise we will make Iraq into a new Vietnam for them," Al Hakim underscored.

"Since 1920 popular demonstration against the British occupiers, Iraq has not witnessed such a great gathering," al-Hakim said, advising the U.S. to take the demonstration serious.

### Assassination of General Soleimani awakens Iraq

The Al Nakhil manager added U.S. President Donald Trump made a "childish mistake" by ordering assassination of General Soleimani, the commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Quds Force, and Mahdi Al Muhandes, the deputy commander of Hashd al-Shaabi, in an air raid in Baghdad on January 3. ➔3



© IRNA/ Nazanin Kazemi

## Tehran Symphony Orchestra performs in Vahdat Hall

**TEHRAN** — The Tehran Symphony Orchestra under the baton of guest conductor Manuchehr Sahbai gave a performance at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on Thursday.

The orchestra first performed "Adagio" by Johann Sebastian Bach in honor of the victims of the unintentional downing of a Ukrainian plane by Iran. The performance was followed by a minute of silence observed by the audience.

Iranian-Austrian pianist Mitra Kotte collaborated as a guest soloist at the concert. She performed works by famous world musicians, including Beethoven and Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff.

Kotte was born in Vienna, Austria in 1995. She studied at the Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Wien with Martin Hughes.

## Foreign investment in Iran up 23% in 9 months

**TEHRAN** — Foreign investment in Iran has risen 23 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2019) from the same period of time in the past year, Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Farhad Dejjasand announced.

The minister said the country has witnessed this rise in the investment while there has been the tough condition

of the sanctions, IRIB reported.

The official also noted that the country's non-oil exports during the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019-January 20, 2020) has experienced a 20-percent rise in terms of weight.

The value of the country's foreign trade hasn't changed in the mentioned period compared to the figure for last year's nine-months, according to Dejjasand. ➔4

## U.S. unveils state terrorism by threatening to kill Ghaani

**TEHRAN** — The United States officially unveils "targeted and state terrorism" by threatening to assassinate the new commander of the IRGC Quds Force, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Thursday.

Mousavi's remarks came as Brian Hook, the U.S. special representative for Iran, told the Arabic-language daily

Asharq al-Awsat that Esmail Ghaani, who is successor of Lieutenant General Soleimani, could be assassinated, Reuters reported on Thursday.

Mousavi said, "Now, after the Zionist regime, the United States is the second regime which has officially announced using its government possibilities and armed forces to take terrorist action." ➔2

## 'Normal' countries don't attack neighbors, Zarif tells S. Arabia

**TEHRAN** — In an open reference to Saudi Arabia which has been striking neighboring Yemen since March 2015, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote on his Twitter account on Friday that "normal countries don't attack their neighbors, cause a humanitarian crisis, and refuse to talk."

The tweet by Zarif came after Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told Reuters on Wednesday that his

kingdom was "open to the idea of holding a dialogue" with the Islamic Republic.

Speaking at the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the royal said "that dialogue would have to start with the acceptance by Iran that they have to change their behavior."

Specifically, he said, Tehran would have to agree that it "cannot further its regional agenda through violence." ➔2



**PERSPECTIVE**  
**M.A. Saki**  
Deputy editor-in-chief

## Netanyahu cunningly confuses opposition to occupation with anti-Semitism

During a Holocaust memorial speech on Thursday in Jerusalem (Beit-ul-Moqaddas), Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that Iran is "the most anti-Semitic regime on the planet", al Jazeera reported.

He made such a remark in a speech in front of certain state leaders gathered at the Yad Vashem memorial institute to mark 75 years since the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp by Soviet troops.

The reasons why Netanyahu intentionally and deceitfully has been seeking to confuse opposition to more than 70 years of occupation and crimes against the Palestinians to anti-Semitism is not a secret to anybody.

If Iran is really anti-Semitic but why it is host to the largest population of Jews in the West Asia region. Even Jews in Iran are fiercely opposed to Israel's continuous stealing of Palestinian lands.

Contrary to claims by Netanyahu and some other fanatics like U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, who was present at the institute, anti-Semitism exists in Europe and the U.S. and not in Iran.

Actually, it is a shameful that Netanyahu pretends to be a Jew. He is truly a land thief, liar, criminal, racist, etc.

In his speech to the delegates, Netanyahu added, "There will not be another Holocaust".

Netanyahu repeatedly claims of another Holocaust and directly points the finger at Iran. In fact, it is the Israeli leaders who have been committing Holocaust against the Palestinians after the Second World War.

According to the realities on the ground, it is predicted that this crime against the Palestinians will continue for the foreseeable future as the Tel Aviv regime continues to annex the remaining Palestinian lands.

If Jews were subjected to the most heinous crimes during the Second World War, it is for 72 years that Palestinians are being subjected to different forms of violence including imprisonment, displacement, discrimination, humiliation, bombardment, home destruction, psychological torture, war crimes, etc. ➔2



## EU's Borrell extends timeline for dispute mechanism on Iran deal

**BRUSSELS (Reuters)** — The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Friday he had extended the time available to discuss ways to save the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran under a dispute mechanism triggered by France, Germany and Britain.



“There is agreement that more time is needed due to the complexity of the issues involved. The timeline is therefore extended,” Borrell said in a statement.

On Jan. 14 Borrell was notified by Paris, London and Berlin that they had triggered the dispute mechanism, in theory starting a 15-day process to resolve issues with Iran. However, in practice it is not clear when the 15-day period should start because Iran has not formally recognised the consultation process, officials have said.

Borrell said the joint commission that regulates the Iran nuclear deal will meet in February but did not give a date.

## U.S. CBP accused of acting ‘above law’ after expulsion of Iranian student

*By staff and agency*

The United States' Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency is facing backlash after it was revealed the agency had refused entry to an Iranian student with a valid visa and forced him on a flight back home, despite a judge issuing an emergency stay of removal, Newsweek reported on Wednesday.

Shahab Dehghani, 24, who was planning to study economics at Northeastern University, arrived in Boston on Sunday night with a valid student visa but was held at the airport overnight for questioning and put back on a plane to Iran the next evening.

Susan Church, an attorney assisting Dehghani, said he had been granted an emergency stay of removal from Massachusetts District Court Judge Allison D. Burroughs while Dehghani was still at the Boston airport.

The order demanded that Dehghani's removal be stayed for 48 hours or until further order of the court, while a hearing for the 24-year-old was arranged for Tuesday morning.



In video published online, protesters who had raced to the airport to demand that the student be allowed to enter the country could be seen cheering after they heard the stay of removal had been granted.

However, they were later dismayed to learn that Dehghani had been put on a plane back home without their knowledge, despite the judge's emergency order.

In a statement sent to CNN, CBP said it was “unaware of the issuance of any court order barring the removal of the subject from the United States” when Dehghani had boarded the flight.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Massachusetts has claimed that since August 2019, at least 10 students have been sent back to Iran upon arriving at U.S. airports. Seven of those students, the ACLU branch said, had flown into Logan airport. Newsweek has contacted CBP for more information.

In a statement shared with Newsweek, Carol Rose, the executive director at the ACLU of Massachusetts, said: “In America, nobody is above the law—including Customs and Border Protection officials.”

“Given the Trump administration's xenophobic policies and CBP's troubling practice at Logan Airport of sending students with valid visas back to Iran, it is shameful that the government defied a federal court order and deported Shahab without due process,” Rose said, adding: “We are looking at all options to hold CBP accountable for wrongfully deporting Iranians and other students who hold valid visas.”

In a statement shared with Newsweek, Cornell University Law School professor Stephen Yale-Loehr said he was disturbed to hear not only about Dehghani's story, but also of reports of dozens of Iranian Americans claiming to have been detained and questioned at a border crossing in Washington state recently.

Yale-Loehr said he had heard of multiple cases of Iranian students being turned away at airports since August, amid tensions between the U.S. and Iran. “And earlier this month, many U.S. citizens of Iranian descent were questioned for hours trying to return to the United States from Canada,” the professor said.

It is still unclear why Dehghani was turned away at Boston airport.

If the 24-year-old did have a visa, Yale-Loehr suggested Americans should be asking questions as to why he was denied entry into the U.S.

“The U.S. State Department already thoroughly vets all applicants before issuing visas,” the professor said. “There is no need for immigration inspectors to deny entry to people with proper visas simply because they are from Iran. These actions needlessly increase tensions with Iran.”

While there is no evidence that CBP denied Dehghani entry because he is Iranian, the recent incidents at U.S. ports of entry come at a time of heightened tensions with Iran following the U.S. assassination of General Qassem Soleimani and Iran's missile attack on bases in Iraq in response to the killing.

# U.S. unveils state terrorism by threatening to kill Ghaani

**1 →** The U.S. resort to terrorist actions shows Washington's “weakness and frustration” and also “confusion” among its officials, the ministry spokesman said.

He also urged the international community to condemn state terrorism, because “the continuation of this trend would sooner or later befall everyone.”

General Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on January 3.

**■ Russia condemns U.S. threats to assassinate Ghaani**

On Thursday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also condemned the U.S. threats to assassinate Ghaani as “unacceptable.”

“I state once again that such statements are unacceptable for us. Such remarks have been made beyond rights and law, and representatives of world states are not entitled to utter them,” the Arabic service of Russia's Sputnik news agency quoted Zakharova as saying at a news briefing in the capital Moscow, according to Press TV.

Immediately after the Soleimani assassination, Leader of the Islamic Revolution



Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appointed Ghaani as the new commander of the IRGC Quds Force.

In a retaliatory move, Iran fired dozens of ballistic missiles at a major U.S. military base in Iraq on January 8, shattering the myth

that the United States is a superpower that no country can militarily counter it.

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

## ‘Normal’ countries don’t attack neighbors, Zarif tells S. Arabia

*Zarif voices Iran's interest to push region towards durable stability, prosperity*

**1 →** Zarif, while welcoming possible dialogue with the Saudi kingdom, said, “We don't set preconditions for dialog.”

Iran has been a vocal critic of the Saudi-led war on Yemen and been insisting on dialogue to the end the conflict.

The United Nations has said the suffering caused by the war on Yemen is the “biggest humanitarian disaster” in today's world.

In remarks on Thursday, Zarif also voiced Tehran's readiness to do its best to participate in any plan which will result in guaranteeing interests of regional nations.

“Iran is still interested in continuing dialogue with its neighbors. We announced our preparedness to partake in any synergistic measure to secure the region's interests,” Zarif wrote in his official Twitter account in Arabic language.

“We welcome any step that can return hope to people and can grant (the people) stability and prosperity,” the top diplomat added.

In relevant remarks on Tuesday, an Iranian lawmaker said that the Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE) proposed by President Hassan Rouhani was capable of leading the region towards durable peace and security based on dialogue.

Ali Sari made the remarks during a speech at a conference in the Qatari University of Doha with the subject of moving towards new security system in the Persian Gulf.

“The Hormuz peace plan, offered by Iran, is an initiative in line with restoration of peace and security based on dialogue,” Sari told the conference.

“We will bring development and progress to the regional nations via dialogue and cooperation. The regional countries will enjoy stronger and friendlier ties by relying on the Hormuz Peace Endeavor,” Sari added.

He further pointed to the Zionist regime of Israel's negative role in the region and said, “Israel is pursuing a policy based on which Tel Aviv tries to portray Iran as a threat to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. This policy is in line with arms trade.”

“Israel is providing billions of dollars for arms manufacturing companies via destabilizing the region and creating tensions,” he added.

Addressing the UN General Assembly late in September 2019, President Rouhani unveiled Iran's new initiative for the establishment of peace and security in the Persian Gulf and

the Strait of Hormuz.

“The goal of the Coalition for Hope is to promote peace, stability, progress and welfare for all the residents of the Strait of Hormuz region, and to enhance mutual understanding and peaceful and friendly relations amongst them,” Rouhani told the delegates at the UN.

“This initiative includes various venues for cooperation, such as the collective supply of energy security, freedom of navigation and free transfer of oil and other resources to and from the Strait of Hormuz and beyond,” he added.

“The Coalition for Hope is based on important principles such as compliance with the goals and principles of the United Nations, mutual respect, equal footing, dialog and understanding, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, inviolability of international borders, the peaceful settlement of all disputes, and more importantly, the two fundamental principles of non-aggression and non-interference in the domestic affairs of each other. The presence of the United Nations is necessary for the creation of an international umbrella in support of the Coalition for Hope,” Rouhani underlined.

## Denmark urges all JCPOA signatories to honor their obligations

**POLITICAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — Christina Markus Lassen, political director at the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on Wednesday voiced her country's concern over the activation of the dispute mechanism in the nuclear deal by the European sides, urging all signatories to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to adhere to their commitments.

In a meeting with senior advisor to the Iranian Parliament Speaker Hossein Amir Abdollahian in Tehran, the Danish diplomat said, “Denmark calls on all sides to return to their obligations and adhere to their undertakings.”

She further said that utilizing diplomacy is the only way out of the current critical situation to protect the region against the existing threat of war.

Lassen later highlighted Iran's key role and standing in the region, saying, “Continuation of talks and friendly relations with Iran is of great importance in Denmark's foreign policy.”

Amir Abdollahian, for his part, said that the U.S. unilateral measures have led the world towards severe widespread insecurity.

On Monday, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif warned that Iran would consider quitting the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

(NPT) if the Europeans refer Iran's nuclear case to the UN Security Council.

“If they (Europeans) take any action, the issue of quitting the NPT will be raised based on the letter of the President dating May 2018,” Zarif said.

France, Germany and the United Kingdom, the three European states signatory to the JCPOA, issued a joint statement on January 14, announcing they formally triggered the dispute mechanism which could bring the issue before the UN Security Council.

“Steps in reducing the [JCPOA] commitments have already been taken. However, Iran will quit the NPT if the Europeans continue their behavior or send Iran's case to the Security Council,” Zarif stated.

Zarif went on to say that the Foreign Ministry is legally pursuing the triggering of dispute mechanism by the European trio.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran officially started the dispute mechanism in May 2018 after the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA. Three letters were sent to Mrs. Mogherini [then European Union foreign policy chief] on May 10, 2018, August 26, 2018 and November 2018 in which it was announced officially that Iran has started the dispute mechanism.”

## Netanyahu cunningly confuses opposition to occupation with anti-Semitism

**1 →** The psychological trauma of destroying Palestinian homes in front of family members, burning their olive farms, grabbing their land, and displacing them may not be less than the memories of the Holocaust survivors.

In the gathering on Thursday, Pence, who spoke shortly after Netanyahu, also vented his anger against Iran by making false claims. He said, “In that same spirit, we must also stand strong against the leading state purveyor of anti-Semitism, against the one government in the world that denies the Holocaust as a matter of state policy and threatens to wipe Israel off the map.”

The remarks by former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was ill-advised about the Holocaust, and sensationally but not literally called for wiping Israel off the map is being repeatedly misused and misinterpreted by extremists in Israel and the U.S. to advance vicious goals against Iran.

If anybody was familiar with the context

and the culture of the language it was easily understood that Ahmadinejad did not really mean annihilating Israel.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, in interview with the ABC in September 2013, had described the Holocaust as a “heinous crime” and a “genocide” that “must never be allowed to be repeated”.

At that interview Zarif insisted that “Netanyahu shamelessly raises a hue and cry that Iran is denying the Holocaust and says that Holocaust-denying Iran is after creating another Holocaust by producing an atomic bomb.”

Except Pence, none of those officials present in Jerusalem approve of Israeli policies against Palestinians although they are not courageous enough to punish Israel for such inhumane behaviors.

Auschwitz lasted for few years but there seems to be no end for gradual and continuous Auschwitzization of the entire Palestinian nation.

## Holocaust is a heinous crime but continuous crimes against Palestinians is also another form of Auschwitz.

### INTERNATIONAL TENDER NOTICE NO. 98007



Hereby Sirjan Jahan Steel Complex (SJSCO) invites reputable firms and companies to the international tender No. 98007, in respect of selling and exporting 30.000 Mt of 5SP Steel Billets (Size: 150 × 150 mm) on the basis of FOB shipping point, therefore interested bidders are invited to obtain the tender documents by sending a formal letter of interest to the E-mail addresses below:

**SJSCO.SALES@gmail.com**

**DKMSJSCO@gmail.com**

S No.	Description	End Time & Date
1	Submission of Financial Bid	09:00 AM, Local Time on January 28, 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 Tuesday, January 28, 2020 (09:00 AM Local Time (Tehran Time)).
- SJSCO reserves the right to reject any or all the proposals.

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# Shamkhani hails Iraqi people's historic anti-U.S. rally

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), has said the historic demonstration in neighboring Iraq shows the Iraqi nation's move toward expelling the U.S. from the region.

"The fact that millions of Iraqi people attended the rally showed that the U.S. threat to impose sanctions against that country is a rotten tool that cannot impact the determination of governments and nations that are after their independence and national sovereignty," Shamkhani said on Friday, ISNA reported.

A huge throng of protesters attended a rally to demand that American troops leave the country amid heightened anti-U.S. sentiment after a drone strike ordered by Donald Trump earlier this month killed a top Iranian general in the Iraqi capital.

According to the New York Times, since mid-morning on the Muslim day of prayers, loudspeakers blasted "No, no America!" at a central square in the Iraqi capital. A child held up a poster reading, "Death to America. Death to Israel."

Roads and bridges leading to the heavily



fortified Green Zone, the seat of Iraq's government and home to several foreign embassies, including the U.S. Embassy, were blocked off by concrete barriers. Iraqi security forces stood guard, blocking access

to the gates to the zone.

There was a heavy security presence as the protesters, mostly hailing from the capital but also Iraq's southern provinces, walked on foot to an assembly point in Bagh-

dad's Jadriya neighborhood, waving Iraqi flags and wearing symbolic white shrouds.

Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, whose party won the most number of seats in the May 2018 parliament elections, had called for a "million-man" demonstration to demand the withdrawal of American troops following the U.S. drone strike near Baghdad's airport that killed top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and senior Iraqi PMU commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, sparking the ire of Iraqi officials from across the political spectrum.

In a statement Friday, al-Sadr — whose followers fought U.S. troops after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion to oust dictator Saddam Hussein — issued a list of conditions for American military presence in Iraq. The list includes cancelling existing security agreements, closing U.S. military bases, ending the work of American security companies and closing off access to Iraqi airspace.

If the conditions were met, the statement said, "the resistance will temporarily stop until the last soldier leaves Iraq," al-Sadr said, referring to American troops.

## Diplomat says maximum pressure will spread unilateralism

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Bahram Qassemi, Iran's ambassador to France, said on Thursday that intensification of the United States' maximum pressure against Iran will just spread unilateralism.

"Those who help the United States intensify maximum pressure against Iran are moving on the path of spreading unilateralism and destabilizing the region," IRNA quoted him as saying in a tweet.

He said in another tweet, "Europe which claimed of supporting the JCPOA [the 2015 nuclear deal] never fulfilled its economic commitments."

He described the INSTEX - the Instrument in support of Trade Exchanges — as an "empty box" and "leverage of propaganda".

"Now, they are talking about an action which will lead to collapse of the JCPOA. This is the same result which the United States wants," he said.

He was pointing to Europe's triggering the dispute mechanism.



France, Germany and the United Kingdom, three parties to the nuclear deal, issued a joint statement on January 14 announcing they have formally triggered the dispute

mechanism that may lead to the snapback of UN sanctions against Iran.

U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally 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" strategy against Iran.

In response to this move, on May 8, 2019, Iran announced that its "strategic patience" is over and started to gradually reduce its commitments to the JCPOA at bi-monthly intervals. At the time Iran announced if the European parties to the deal take concrete steps to shield Iran's economy from the U.S. sanctions it will reverse its decision.

However, seeing no action by the Europeans, on January 5 Iran took the last and final step by removing all limits on its nuclear activities.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif warned on Monday that Iran may quit the NPT if the Europeans refer the Iran case to the UN Security Council.

## IRGC destroyed U.S. grandeur: cleric

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Mohammad-Hassan Aboutorabi Fard, an interim Friday prayer preacher, has said the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has destroyed the grandeur of the United States in the region.

The IRGC's glorious operation destroyed the grandeur of the U.S. in the region and marked a beginning to the end of the U.S. illegitimate presence in the Islamic world, Aboutorabi Fard told worshippers in Tehran on Friday.

He was referring to the IRGC's attack on January 8 against the U.S. airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar province in western Iraq, which came as part of its retaliation for an earlier U.S. aggression that killed Iran's top general, Qassem Soleimani, in Baghdad.

U.S. President Donald Trump had ordered strikes that martyred Lieutenant General Soleimani, chief of the IRGC Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).

In similar remarks, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said last 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.



In his sermon, Aboutorabi Fard said he believes the Americans wouldn't have carried out the assassination if they were aware of the ramifications.

He said Iran's achievements are due to two precious characteristics of the Iranian people, namely patience and gratefulness. "Without resistance, perseverance, patience and gratefulness, this success could not have been achieved," the cleric said.

He also said the role of General Soleimani in making Europe and Asia secure has not been covert from the experts.

Last week, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the current 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 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.

## Hatami: Effects of Iran's military response to U.S. 'will remain in history'

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iran is powerful enough to respond to any aggression and threat by the enemies, says Defense Minister Amir Hatami.

"Thank God, today the Islamic Republic has all the necessary components of power and determination to respond to any aggressor and will respond to any threat at any level with high quality defensive weapons," Hatami said on Thursday, according to Mehr.

He said Iran's military equipment have been designed and produced according to required domestic standards.

The defense chief also pointed to Iran's recent missile attack against a U.S. military base in Iraq as a measure meant to meet public demands.

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

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 U.S. terror attack.

"The hard slap in the face from the armed forces in targeting the Americans' base was given at the highest level of standards in terms of the timing,



quality and accuracy of the missiles in pin-point targeting," Hatami said.

He added that the effect of this slap "will remain in history."

"National cohesion, unity and might in the international stage was an achievement of Hajj Qassem Soleimani's existence for the Islamic establishment," he stated.

In remarks on Tuesday, the defense minister announced that enhancing deterrence power was a religious necessity for the Iranian armed forces.

Touching upon the statements of the Leader in the Friday Prayers sermons, Hatami said Ayatollah Khamenei, as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, underscored the strategy of "being strong and trying to be stronger" as a key to overcome problems.

"Iran has proved that, based on its own might and power, it will respond to any threat at any level," the minister said, adding that his forces consider the Leader's strategy as a religious obligation.

## Iraq will be turned into new Vietnam for U.S. troops if they don't withdraw: senior journalist

**1→** "Now martyrs Soleimani and Al Muhandes are more dangerous for the U.S. troops than prior to their assassination."

**■ U.S. violates Iraq's sovereignty by assassinating official guest of Baghdad**

Al-Hakim blasted the U.S. for staging military operation inside Iraq to assassinate General Soleimani who was on an official visit to Baghdad, adding that the move was in violation of the country's sovereignty as well as international law.

The U.S. troops assassinated two military commanders, who had fought and rooted out Daesh terrorists, he said, adding it caused Iraqis to realize that Washington is the enemy of those who did not allow Daesh to rule over their country.

**■ Trump's policy in Iraq serves only Israel's interests in region**

Al-Hakim pointed to the outcomes of Trump's military operations in Iraq and Syria and said, "Undoubtedly, the U.S. tries to stay in the region, including in Iraq, because they have to protect their allies in Tel Aviv. The U.S. operation against the Resistance Front is completely to the benefit of the Zionist regime of Israel."

**■ Iraq is not afraid of U.S. sanctions**

"These people that have gathered in Baghdad and are chanting slogans against the U.S. troops, are not afraid of Washington's threats of imposing sanctions. We are a country with very good international relations. Our economy is not restricted to deal with the U.S. We have very powerful

trade partners across the world which can be replaced by the U.S.," Al Hakim added.

**■ U.S. will understand only language of force**

Al Hakim further said, "In my idea, the U.S. will not withdraw its forces from Iraq via dialogue. If you come and see their embassy in Iraq covering an area 80 times bigger than a football stadium with more than 26 towers and around 21,000 of staff, you will realize that they have not brought this huge number of people and facilities to leave them simply. They have long term plans in the region. They want to control all the regional nations from their largest embassy worldwide in Baghdad. They have 11 bases in Iraq. They want to remain in the nearest possible distance to Iran."

He added that dialogue is not sufficient to force Washington forces to leave Iraq.

"Within the next few months, we will see new developments in Iraq which will accelerate pullout of U.S. forces," he predicted.

**■ Iran saves Iraq from Daesh, U.S. denies to dispatch arms**

Al Hakim added, "Based on an agreement between Washington and Baghdad over military cooperation inked in 2007, Iraq called on the U.S. to fulfill its undertakings under the agreement to arm the Iraqi army to counter Daesh which had occupied the city of Mosul in 2014 but the Pentagon replied

that they can send the requested arms in 2020. Shortly after, the Resistance Front in Iraq called on General Soleimani and told the whole story. In the shortest time possible, may be 4-5 hours, several Iranian military planes carrying arms and ammunitions landed in Baghdad airport. The weapons were enough to repel attacks from Daesh terrorists. If there was not Soleimani there was no Iraq now."

**■ Iran missile attack on U.S. forces a historic turning point**

Al Hakim also pointed to Iran's missile attack on Ein Al Assad military base in western Iraq, used by the U.S. forces, on January 8, saying, "The missile attack was a destructive blow on the hegemonic power. It was a crushing response to the occupiers' operation in assassination of anti-terrorist commanders in Iraq. The White House found out that they can't do whatever they want without any reaction. The missile attack ruined the U.S. undefeatable image in front of regional people."

**■ Nothing will appease us but expulsion of U.S. troops from region**

The senior journalist reiterated that the Resistance Front in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, Palestine, Yemen and wherever people are angry about presence and meddling of the U.S. military in the region will continue the path of resistance until they manage to force the U.S. air, ground and naval forces to go back home.

## Tehran slams so-called 'Trump Deal' as American hubris

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has slammed the unveiling of the so-called "Trump Deal", saying it showed the Americans' deeply embedded hubris.

"Unveiling of so-called 'Trump Deal' by B. Hook only transpired the US' long fixated delusions dictated by their deeply embedded hubris and entitlement," Mousavi said in a tweet on Thursday.

U.S. special representative for Iran Brian Hook unveiled the Trump deal's provisos in an interview with the Saudi-owned Asharq al-Awsat newspaper, which was published on Thursday.

Hook told the London-based newspaper that an alternative accord to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal would "ensure that Iran has no path to a nuclear weapon," reduce its uranium enrichment to zero, and prohibit the Islamic Republic from testing ballistic missiles.

Iran has repeatedly said it stands by its inalienable right to enrich uranium as part of its peaceful nuclear energy program.

On numerous occasions, Tehran has also distanced itself from any ambition to develop nuclear weapons as mandated by a religious decree issued by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has verified non-diversion of Iran's nuclear activities on all occasions.

According to Press TV, a so-called case investigating "possible military dimensions" of Iran's nuclear work was also closed in 2015 following conclusion of the nuclear deal.

According to the deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the Islamic Republic accepted some limits on its nuclear program in exchange for sanction relief.

The U.S., however, has been relentlessly attacking the JCPOA under President Donald Trump. Trump has called the accord "the worst deal ever," although, it has been ratified in the form of a UN Security Council resolution and hailed by its remaining signatories, the world body, and the European Union as a pillar of regional and international peace and security.

In May 2018, Trump withdrew the U.S. from the deal, restored the sanctions, and began forcing others to follow suit.

Following the U.S. move, Tehran began a set of nuclear countermeasures in response to the U.S. betrayal as well as refusal by the EU3 — the UK, France, and Germany — to keep honoring the deal by resisting the American sanctions.

The European trio recently triggered a dispute mechanism featured in the deal and accused Iran of violating it, although, Tehran's reprisal fits within the JCPOA's Paragraph 36, and is reversible as soon as the rest of the deal partners go back to their commitments.

## Pakistan welcomes Tehran, Riyadh readiness for dialogue

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has welcomed a readiness by Tehran and Riyadh to hold dialogue to reduce tensions.

"We call for clearing up misunderstanding between two brotherly countries of Iran and Saudi Arabia," IRNA quoted him as saying on Friday on the sidelines of a press conference in Islamabad.

He added, "Pakistan does not want hatred between Tehran and Riyadh and visited Iran and Saudi Arabia with the aim of conveying message of peace."

In a tweet, written in Arabic, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said, "Iran is still interested in holding talks with its neighbors. We announce our readiness to participate in any collaborative action to serve the regional interests."

"We welcome any step which restore hope to the regional people and brings stability and prosperity," he added.

Saudi Foreign Minister Farhan Al Saud told Reuters on Wednesday that Riyadh was open to talks with Tehran.

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.

Foreign Minister 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 UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres welcomes Khan's initiative to de-escalate tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Last October the Iranian Foreign Ministry said Tehran is ready for talks with Saudi Arabia with or without a mediator.

During a joint press conference with Khan in Tehran in October 2019, Rouhani, without mentioning Saudi Arabia, suggested that Iran will give a positive response to "good intention".

Rouhani said Iran "welcomes efforts by the Pakistani prime minister to settle tensions in the region" and "restore peace and stability".

## Assassination threat against Ghaani originates from fear

**1→** With the heavy blows inflicted by Iran's strong slap and the presence of millions of mourners in Iran and other countries at the funeral processions for General Soleimani, the U.S. has realized very well that "martyr Soleimani" is far more dangerous to them than "commander Soleimani". Therefore, The U.S. has resorted to threats to block the luminous path taken by the martyrs of the resistance movement.

The U.S. strategic error, which was caused by miscalculation and ill advice from the Zionist regime, will tighten the noose around the country in political, security and social areas. Brian Hook made the threat a day before massive rallies by the Iraqi people against the U.S. to probably downplay the strong slap by Baghdad.

History has shown that defying those who are not afraid of death will increase the desire of the Quds Force (warriors without borders) to confront aggression and domination of criminals.



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	411,211
IFX	5287.76

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,549 rials
GBP	55,121 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$60.98/b
WTI	\$55.37/b
OPEC Basket	\$64.66/b
Gold	\$1,561.25/oz
Silver	\$17.87/oz
Platinum	\$1,008.95/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Foreign investment in Iran up 23% in 9 months

**1 →** He further mentioned the significant role of banks in the expansion of the country's economy, saying that by diversifying banking services, revenue can be increased by 30 to 50 percent, while using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in banks can increase revenues by 17 percent and reduce costs by 25 percent.



In early December 2019, Dejpasand had announced that foreign direct investment (FDI) in Iran has risen 20 percent during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-October 21, 2019) year on year.

As previously announced by the official, the foreign investment attracted into the country during the current year's summer period (June 22-September 21, 2019) increased by 20 percent compared to the last year's same period.

Dejpasand also elaborated on his ministry's programs to nullify the sanctions through measures such as strengthening trade and exports and providing required funds for infrastructure and production projects especially through allocation of banking facilities.

He further mentioned reforming the banking system as one of his major programs since taking his post as the minister.

Slowing contraction in Japan factory activity eases fears of recession

Japan's factory activity contracted for a ninth straight month in January but at the slowest pace in five months, possibly reflecting easing U.S.-China trade tensions and alleviating fears of a recession.

The Jibun Bank Flash Japan Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) edged up to a seasonally adjusted 49.3 from a final 48.4 in December.

The index stayed below the 50.0 threshold that separates contraction from expansion for a ninth month - the longest stretch since a nine-month run to February 2013.



Output and new orders remained in contraction for the 13th month, but the pace of declines in these indicators also eased, especially in production.

That suggests factory activity may have bottomed out, with new export orders expanding for the first time in 14 months in another sign of a pickup in global demand.

Weak exports and factory activity have been a source of concern for Japanese policymakers. They are counting on solid domestic

demand to pick up the slack, although the October sales tax hike may weigh on private consumption which accounts for some 60 per cent of the economy.

Separate data showed activity in Japan's services sector expanded at the quickest pace in four months, likely keeping alive policymakers' hope for a domestic demand-led recovery.

"Positive signs have emerged for Japan's economy at the start of 2020, with flash PMI data pointing to a domestic-led economic recovery," said Joe Hayes, economist at IHS Markit, which compiles the survey.

"The January flash numbers will certainly allay fears for now of a technical recession in Japan," Mr. Hayes said. "Consumer-driven growth will once again be a vital force in 2020 as PMI suggest industrial sector weakness still lingers."

The Jibun Bank Flash Japan Services PMI index came in at a seasonally adjusted 52.1 from the previous month's 49.4, edging closer to a nearly two-year high of 53.3 in August.

The Jibun Bank Flash Japan Composite PMI turned 51.1 in January from the previous month's final of 48.6, marking the fastest expansion in four months.

Many economists expect the world's third-largest economy to have contracted in the October-December quarter, hurt by the fallout of the U.S.-China trade war and the tax hike impact. It is seen recovering albeit moderately at the start of this year.

(Source: straitstimes.com)

Iran a major producer of glass in world

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The secretary of Iran's glass union says through producing 2.2 million tons of glass per year Iran is a leading producer of the product in the world.

Making the remarks on the sidelines of the country's 3rd International Exhibition of Glass, Equipment and Related Machinery, Hossein Zojjaji also said that glass export brings in \$200 million for the country per annum, IRIB reported.

Zojjaji named Iraq, Armenia, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Persian Gulf littoral states, and some European countries as the main importers of Iranian glass.

Iran's major glass production plants are producing 550,000 square meters of building glass per day, of which 60 percent is supplied to the domestic market and the rest is exported, the official announced.

The required raw materials are all domestically supplied and the good production and export condition have laid a proper ground for the Iranian companies



and plants active in this sector, he further underlined.

Iran's 3rd International Exhibition of Glass, Equipment and Related Machinery

Value of trades at TSE rises 30% in a week



**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The value of trades at Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) rose 30 percent in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), according to a report published on the official website of TSE.

The report also said that TEDPIX, the main index of TSE, climbed 11,766 points to 411,211 in the past week.

As reported, 33.75 billion securities worth 195.821 trillion rials (about \$4.6 billion) were traded through 3.496 million deals at this market, experiencing growth of 21 percent in the number of securities and 62 percent in the number of trades.

The first market's index rose 7,667 points, or 2.6 percent, to 294,639 and the second market's index climbed 27,892

points, or 3.3 percent, to 855,270 in the previous week, the same report confirmed.

As previously reported, TSE witnessed the highest ever weekly rise of its main index, TEDPIX, in the Iranian calendar week ended on January 17, 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 mentioned 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 that 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.

Rice imports at nearly 1.3m tons in 10 months



**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran has imported 1.298 million tons of rice during the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019-January 20, 2020), the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

According to Rouhollah Latifi, so far, 1.053 million tons of the mentioned amount has been fully cleared, while clearance licensing process is underway for another 51,000 tons.

Imports of foreign rice are prohibited every year during the harvest season of domestic rice, which is from late July to late November, Latifi said, adding that since the bans on imports were lifted, the imports have been underway smoothly.

The country's rice cultivation and production have grown this year due to favorable

weather conditions and imports have also been higher than the previous years, the official said.

Back in October 2019, Deputy Agriculture Minister Abdolmehdi Bakhshandeh announced that Iran has become completely self-sufficient in rice production as it plans to cut up to two million tons of imports a year.

The Statistical Center of Iran estimates that Iranians consume approximately 35 kilograms of rice per person each year. That would mean a domestic demand of nearly three million tons for a country of 83 million people.

Bakhshandeh said rice self-sufficiency would save Iran more than \$1.1 billion in imports, adding that it would also be a major success amid efforts to minimize the impacts of the American sanctions on food security in the country.

9% VAT applied for goods produced in free zones

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The government is applying nine percent of value added tax (VAT) for all commodity items which are produced in Iran's free trade zones (FTZs), a manager with Iran's Free Zones High Council said.

Speaking in a TV program on Friday, Naser Khormali said the free zones tax exemption act, which was introduced in 2008, is not completely applied in any of the country's free zones.

Noting that 945,000 people are currently living in free and special zones, which make up about four percent of the country's total area, the official said producers in the free zones prefer to supply their goods from overseas when they have to pay nine percent of VAT for the import of domestic goods into free zones and vice versa.

"The country's free zones are no longer attractive for investment, as it was provisioned for these areas to be," Khormali regretted.

According to the official, over 81 trillion rials (about \$1.9 billion) plus \$22 billion was invested by domestic investors in the country's free and special economic zones in the past six years, while \$5.2 billion was invested by foreign investors.

These areas have exported \$129 billion of non-oil products in the last six years, Khormali stressed.

Development of existing free trade zones and establishment of new FTZs is currently one of the major economic approaches of Iran and in a bid to attract more investments to these zones Iranian government offers various incentives to the investors.

Tax exemption is one of those incentives which has been offered for more than a decade to the investors in the free zones.

This incentive has been recently criticized by some officials and economists, while there are still many supporters of this exemption.

For instance, in line with Khormali, Abazar Azarboun,



who is an expert with Iran's Free Zones High Council, also believes that if the 20-year tax exemption in the country's free trade zones (FTZs) is removed, the investment making will be limited in this areas.

EU, China join forces to dial down trade tensions: Davos 2020

The rich and powerful are in Davos, Switzerland, for the World Economic Forum's 50th annual meeting, and the gathering is being closely watched to see how the global elite aims to tackle world problems.

The economy was in focus on the final day, and many delegates signaled optimism on the outlook for this year. The European Central Bank (ECB) President Christine Lagarde told Bloomberg TV that investors shouldn't assume current monetary policy is locked in just because officials are reviewing their strategy.

Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, who called a climate strike for Friday near the forum, slammed delegates for failing to treat global warming as a crisis.

Top financial officials from the major global economies used the forum's final day to tout the benefits of government spending as a way to lift growth and reduce reliance on overloaded central banks.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin labeled the U.S. a "bright spot" and attributed that to President Donald Trump's tax cuts -- along with his rollback of regulations and his trade deals. Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda said his nation, where fiscal and monetary policies are aligned, is seeing "very strong" business investment.

The International Monetary Fund's Chief, Kristalina Georgieva, said the global economy is "in a better place" than last year for three reasons -- an easing of trade tensions, synchronized



The President of ECB Christine Lagarde

interest-rate cuts, and a bottoming out in industrial production. "We have to see fiscal policy being more aggressive," she added.

Bain Capital Co-Chair Stephen Pagliuca joined other Davos delegates in expressing optimism about the economy, saying "things are going pretty well."

"It's kind of chugging along," Pagliuca told Bloomberg TV. "Our businesses are doing well, record low unemployment in the U.S., we've had kind of an oil dividend for six or seven years now, oil's very cheap, energy's very cheap. And so restaurants are full, planes are full and things are going pretty well."

Financing a budget deficit

Mnuchin sees the U.S.'s new 20-year bond extending

"slightly" the average maturity on government debt as his department prepares to launch that security and limit the cost of financing a budget deficit set to reach \$1 trillion this year.

Issuing ultra-long bonds, those due in more than 30 years, is "no longer on the near term -- our focus for the moment is issuing the 20-year," Mnuchin said in an interview.

"If you look at the number of 20-year bonds that we'll raise, this will slightly extend" the average maturity, he said, declining to predict by how much. "This isn't going to be a massive extension."

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz expects his German conservative peers to follow his lead and team up with the Greens after the next election.

Kurz said that he hopes the era of "grand coalitions" between conservative and center-left mainstream parties is over in Europe.

"I'm almost ready to bet that there can be a similar government in Germany after the next election," he said in an interview. "I'm skeptical of those 'grand coalitions,' which had their justification after World War II but became just mutual blockade in recent years."

U.S. Treasury Secretary Mnuchin said technological developments would make carbon tax redundant, going against the grain of other participants.

(Source: swissinfo.ch)



# IFCC calls for optimizing gas consumption as cold weather persists

**E N E R G Y** **TEHRAN** — Iran Fuel Conservation Company (IFCC) has called for optimization of the consumption of energy carriers considering the country's natural gas consumption has reached a record high in recent weeks, IRNA reported on Thursday.

According to the IFCC's Manager of Buildings Energy Optimization Department, Kourosh Hashemi, low prices of energy carriers in Iran are preventing the people from using equipment and appliances with optimized energy consumption.

"These low prices do not encourage the consumer to improve their consumption patterns and use new technologies and high-efficiency appliances," Hashemi said.

Referring to the unprecedented record of daily consumption of natural gas in the domestic sector in January (about 600 million cubic meters per day), the official emphasized the need for energy optimization in buildings.

Iran's daily natural gas consumption hit a record high of 592 million cubic meters (mcm) a day in early January due to the heavy



snowfall and cold weather which blanketed the country.

In mid-January, the spokesman of the

National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) had also emphasized the need to pay more attention to the optimization of gas

consumption, saying: "Although the domestic gas sector is fully supplied considering the increase in gas production in South Pars field as well as the development of the country's gas network, however, the increase in domestic consumption could interrupt the gas supply to the country's industrial sector, power plants, and petrochemical plants."

As reported, currently, about 30,000 villages with 4.6 million households as well as 1,148 cities with over 18 million households are connected to the national gas network; this is while the development of the gas network for the industrial sector and power plants continues.

In August 2019, NIGC Dispatching Director Mehdi Jamshidi Dana said the country's daily gas production had reached 810 mcm.

According to Jamshidi, with over 39,000 kilometers of high-pressure gas pipelines, 82 gas pressure boosting stations, 296 turbo-compressors and other gas facilities, the Iranian gas network is Asia's biggest and the world's fourth-largest network in terms of facilities.

## Oil rises, but potential impact of China virus on fuel demand haunts market

Oil prices climbed on Friday, following a drawdown in U.S. crude stocks, but were set to fall heavily for the week amid worries that a new coronavirus in China that has killed 25 so far may spread, curbing travel, fuel demand and economic prospects.

Brent crude futures LCOc1 were up 31 cents, or 0.5%, at \$62.35 a barrel by 0741 GMT after falling 1.9% the previous session. For the week, Brent is down about 4%.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate futures CLc1 were up 27 cents, or 0.5% higher at \$55.86 a barrel. The contract fell 2% on Thursday and is 4.6% lower for the week.

"Oil's sell-off (for the week) continued at pace as fears continued about the effects on global demand from a virus-induced economic slowdown in Asia," said Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst, OANDA. "We would expect the fragility in oil prices to continue."

Offering support for prices was news that U.S. crude oil and distillate inventories fell last week, the Energy Information Administration said on Thursday.

Though they failed to match analysts' expectations in a Reuters poll of a 1 million barrel drop, crude inventories did decline by 405,000 barrels in the week to Jan. 17, government data showed.

The "sell-off on the ... flu scare was mollified by a timely decline in U.S. crude



inventories," said Stephen Innes, market strategist at AxiTrader.

The virus has infected more than 800 so far in China, with 25 dead as of Thursday, according to China's National Health Commission. The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the situation an emergency, but stopped short of declaring the epidemic of international concern.

Most of the cases are in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the virus is believed to have originated late last year, though cases have now been found in at least seven other countries.

"Oil prices could remain on a slippery slope as traders remain incredibly twitchy about the effects the coronavirus outbreak could have on Chinese GDP and air travel more broadly," said AxiTrader's Innes.

(Source: reuters.com)

## Brazil puts higher output ahead of OPEC membership

Brazil, which became a net oil exporter in 2019, wants to expand its footprint in global energy markets without joining the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

The South American nation expects to be among the top-five energy exporters by 2030, and is tapping private investment to boost output, according to energy and mines minister Bento Albuquerque. It is also working on making rules more favorable for investors in upcoming auctions for oil and natural gas licenses.

The "idea is just to increase our production and to participate more in the international oil and gas market," he said in an interview in New Delhi. "But this is not a plan for Brazil to join OPEC or any other association or group of oil and gas producers. We don't want restrictions, we want to increase our production."

With Brazil's output set to significantly expand in the next few years as more of its offshore reserves are drilled, speculation has swirled over whether it will become part of OPEC. While President Jair Bolsonaro last year welcomed an informal invitation to join the group, the head of the country's state-controlled energy company dismissed the idea.

Brazil is open to having discussions



with members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries on energy-related issues, Albuquerque said. He expects to visit Saudi Arabia, OPEC'S biggest producer, later this year.

The Latin American country is seeking feedback from global oil majors to improve participation in upcoming auctions. It wants to increase the share of output from companies other than state-controlled Petroleo Brasileiro, known as Petrobras.

"Petrobras has a lot of oil and lot of areas to exploit, but it doesn't have enough funds to prospect all these areas," Albuquerque said. "There's a limit for Petrobras. For that reason, we want to make it attractive for others to come and do the investment."

(Source: businesslive.co.za)

## Following record year for LNG, more (albeit slower) growth said ahead

By Leticia Gonzales

Liquefied natural gas (LNG) marked a banner year in 2019, with new investments and liquefaction project start-ups among the slew of records set for the growing industry, according to analytics firm IHS Markit.

Final investment decisions (FIDs) for liquefaction projects were made at an "extraordinary level" of 70.4 million metric tons/year (mmt) last year, which was 40% higher than the previous all-time high of 50.4 mmt reached in 2005, the firm said. The United States, Russia and Mozambique each set individual highs for levels of annual FIDs.

In the United States, LNG pioneer Cheniere Energy Inc. sanctioned the sixth 4.5 mmt train at its Sabine Pass facility, while Venture Global pulled the trigger on the 10 mmt Calcasieu Pass terminal. The 16 mmt Golden Pass LNG project was sanctioned by sponsors ExxonMobil Corp. and state-owned Qatar Petroleum in February.

Want access to the trading data behind our news coverage?

The "ongoing pace of new investment is especially noteworthy considering a market context of weak global prices," said IHS Markit's Michael Stoppard, chief strategist, global gas. "Not only did LNG grow at an unprecedented rate in 2019, but the industry also laid the foundations for continued strong growth into the middle of the decade."

Some liquefaction FIDs were made either without long-term contracts or were underpinned by sales to affiliates. Such "affiliate marketing" reached a record 43 mmt, IHS said. These projects included an expansion of Nigeria LNG's Bonny plant that would add a seventh train and boost capacity by 35%. It was sanctioned in December. Russia's largest private natural gas producer Novatek and its partners pulled the trigger on the \$21 billion Arctic LNG-2 project in September.

"Affiliate marketing at this scale has not been common in the LNG industry," the firm said. "Historically, most projects have instead secured long-term offtake contracts prior to committing to investment. By choosing to proceed without third-party contracts, projects can be developed more rapidly."

### ■ New liquefaction startups

In 2019, new liquefaction startups amounted to 38.8 mmt of capacity, narrowly surpassing the previous high set in 2009, according to IHS. The United States dominated this growth, bringing online 23.4 mmt of capacity last year, including new production units at Cameron LNG, Freeport LNG, Sabine Pass and its sister facility, Corpus Christi LNG. Kinder Morgan Inc.'s much-smaller Elba LNG project also started operations, while projects in Australia and Russia also were included in the figure.

Although the pace of project starts is expected to slow in 2020 to 28.6 mmt, the United States is projected to continue commanding this area as it completes its so-called first wave of projects. Semptra has targeted the first half of 2020 for bringing



into service the third train at the Cameron terminal. Freeport began commercial operations at the second production unit at its facility last week, with a third train expected online in May.

Meanwhile, Australia surpassed Qatar as the top LNG exporter for 2019, reaching 80.2 mmt relative to 72.5 mmt in 2018, according to IHS. The firm sees Australia extending its lead in 2020 and retaining its position as top exporter until 2023, when the United States is projected to become the largest LNG producer.

Australian consultant EnergyQuest, whose in-house data indicated that Australia's record 77.51 mmt send-out edged out Qatar's projected 75 mmt, said Australia could increase its exports even further in 2020.

"Australia's 10 LNG projects have a combined capacity of 87.8 mmt. However, with only 88% of total nameplate capacity used over 2019, there remains opportunity going forward to lift the current production milestone even higher," CEO Graeme Bethune said.

### ■ The actual production numbers

For example, the Royal Dutch Shell plc-operated Prelude floating LNG project offshore Western Australia is only expected to reach full capacity this year. The 3.6 mmt project achieved initial start-up at the end of 2018. Qatar does not appear to release actual production numbers, but capacity is 77 mmt, Bethune said.

Rystad Energy also noted Australia's move into the driver's seat last summer, but opined that Qatar would reclaim its position in 2024.

China overtook Japan as the world largest LNG importer in December, with volumes for the month reaching 7.3 mmt, compared to Japan's 6.9 mmt, according to IHS. Although Japan is expected to continue to be the world's largest LNG importer on a total annual basis through 2022, 2019 marked the second year in a row of declining imports for the country. Its imports posted the largest year/year decrease across the globe, continuing an overall downward trend since 2015.

China maintained its No. 2 import position for all of 2019 and entered its fourth year in a row of record LNG imports, increasing 13.4% year/year. South Korea rounded out the top three, importing 41.0 mmt in 2019 but posting the second

largest decline year/year behind Japan.

Europe also set a record for imports each single month as well as for 2019 as a whole, the IHS Markit team said. Annual net imports totaled 87.2 mmt, which exceeded the previous record of 65.5 mmt set in 2011.

Imports into Europe are expected to remain strong in 2020 due to additional new liquefaction supply coming to market and new supply expected to outpace Asian demand growth. However, LNG inventory levels in Europe have scarcely budged this winter, standing at 55% of capacity on Monday, according to Aggregated LNG Storage Inventory. That compares to the five-year average of about 52% for this time of year. Some European benchmarks have hit their lowest levels in years as a result, while spot prices have also suffered as inventories are high in other parts of the world.

(Source: naturalgasintel.com)

## Tehran hosting intl. bitumen, asphalt exhibition

**E N E R G Y** **TEHRAN** — The 11th edition of International Bitumen, Asphalt, Insulation and Related

Machinery Exhibition of Iran (BAIEX 2020) opened at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Thursday, IRIB reported.

Over 130 companies are participating in this year's exhibition to showcase their latest products and achievements.

According to the organizers, the Iranian exhibitions in this event are aiming to showcase the country's capacities and capabilities in the bitumen and asphalt sectors.

The event is also aimed to provide a platform for the domestic companies to exchange knowledge and experience.

The exhibition will wrap up on Sunday.



## Solar PV capacity additions in China fell by 32% in 2019

Annual capacity additions for solar PV in China in 2019 were significantly lower at 30.1GW compared with 44GW in 2018.

Installations for solar PV in the first three quarters of 2019 were approximately 16GW. Over 14GW was added in the last quarter, of which 10GW was installed in December alone. Solar PV capacity additions declined for the second year in a row due to delays in China's policymaking to transition towards the subsidy-free market.

PV additions declined mainly in the first half of the year due to the lack of clarity on subsidy policy. Delayed policy introduction, comprehensive bidding policy, lack of bidding understanding and insufficient project preliminary preparation resulted in many projects still remaining in the early stages of development. These are some of the main reasons for low capacity additions in 2019.

In 2018, the government was forced to suspend all new subsidized solar capacity approvals after a record 53GW capacity increase in 2017, which left it with a backlog of at least CNY120 billion (\$18 billion) in subsidy payments.

Power from wind and solar projects was wasted due to grid issues related to low network capacity, which caused transmission and distribution problems. In 2017, 12% of wind generation and 6% of solar power were wasted due for the same reason.

The 531 policy introduced in 2018 imposed caps on market scale, accelerated subsidy cuts and lowered on-grid tariffs to reduce the financial burden and solve curtailment difficulties. The policy aims to phase out outdated and subsidy-dependent enterprises by imposing different regulations on solar power projects.

### ■ New solar and wind policy

In January 2019, China revealed new solar and wind policy for subsidy-free projects. The policy was introduced to take advantage of a rapid fall in construction costs and to resolve a payment backlog issues and grid logjam.

Solar PV curtailment fell to 3% in 2018. In May 2019, the grid parity projects with a total capacity of 20.76GW were approved, of which 14.78GW were for solar PV. In July 2019, the country released results for its first nation auction for solar PV projects that were looking for subsidies. NEA approved 22.78GW of solar capacity with the lowest bid at CNY0.2795/kWh (\$0.041).

China's solar PV industry reached an important milestone in 2019 as its cumulative installed capacity exceeded 200GW and ended the year at approximately 204.8GW. The key reason for the success of the solar PV industry in China can be attributed to the introduction of the feed-in tariff (FIT) mechanism in 2012.

The launch of the new mechanism resulted in China becoming the largest PV market in terms of annual additions in 2013 and further placed China as the largest PV market in terms of cumulative PV capacity from 2015. China not only maintained its lead in terms of annual installations in the last eight years but also established itself as the largest manufacturing hub for PV equipment.

There is no doubt that 2019-2020 are the years of transition for the solar PV sector in China from a subsidy-driven market. During the transition phase, the country is home to both subsidy-free and FIT-supported projects. China will become a subsidy-free market from 2021 by eliminating FITs for wind and solar PV. Chinese PV market aims to stop its decline in annual additions in 2020. China's annual additions in 2020 for solar PV are expected to remain flat.

(Source: power-technology.com)

### Second Announcement



N.I.S.O.C

**NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY AHVAZ-IRAN**

**TENDER NO. : 01-31-9250047**

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

items	Material Description	Quantity
50	PARTS FOR "ATLAS COPCO "SCREW AIR COMPRESSOR MODEL ZT 145	129

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention to participate" letter via Fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: WWW.nisoc.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the .tender will be disregarded

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 1,655 EURO or 236,577,500 RIAL, in favor of NISOC

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

NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

### FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

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# Hiding in the grass: Fear and confusion as fighters overran a U.S. Airfield

The brazen Shabab assault at Manda Bay, Kenya, a sleepy seaside base near the Somali border, on Jan. 5 left three Americans dead, raising complex questions about the military’s mission in Africa.

**WASHINGTON** — Armed with rifles and explosives, about a dozen Shabab fighters destroyed an American surveillance plane as it was taking off and ignited an hours long gunfight earlier this month on a sprawling military base in Kenya that houses United States troops. By the time the Shabab were done, portions of the airfield were burning and three Americans were dead.

Surprised by the attack, American commandos took around an hour to respond. Many of the local Kenyan forces, assigned to defend the base, hid in the grass while other American troops and support staff were corralled into tents, with little protection, to wait out the battle. It would require hours to evacuate one of the wounded to a military hospital in Djibouti, roughly 1,500 miles away.

The brazen assault at Manda Bay, a sleepy seaside base near the Somali border, on Jan. 5, was largely overshadowed by the crisis with Iran after the killing of that country’s most important general two days earlier, and is only now drawing closer scrutiny from Congress and Pentagon officials.

But the storming of an airfield used by the American military so alarmed the Pentagon that it immediately sent about 100 troops from the 101st Airborne Division to establish security at the base. Army Green Berets from Germany also were shuttled to Djibouti, the Pentagon’s major hub in Africa, in case the entire base was in danger of being taken by the Shabab, an East African terrorist group affiliated with Al Qaeda.

“The assault represented a serious security lapse given how much of a target the base was and its location near the border with Somalia,” said Murithi Mutiga, the International Crisis Group’s Horn of Africa project director, based in Nairobi, Kenya.

Many details of the attack remain murky, and the military’s Africa Command has released only scant particulars pending an investigation. But the deaths of the three Americans — one Army soldier and two Pentagon contractors — marked the largest number of United States military-related fatalities in Africa since four soldiers were killed in an ambush in Niger in October 2017. The Kenya attack underscores the American military’s limits on the continent, where a lack of intelligence, along with Manda Bay’s reputation as a quiet and unchallenged locale, allowed a lethal attack.

The deaths also signify a grim expansion of the campaign waged by the United States against the Shabab — often confined to Somalia, but in this case spilling over into Kenya despite an escalating American air campaign in the region. Kenya is a new addition to the list of countries where Americans have been killed in combat since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, joining Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Niger, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

The attack is raising new and complex questions about the enduring American military mission on the continent, where more than 5,000 troops now serve, especially as the Pentagon weighs the potential withdrawal of hundreds of forces from West Africa to better counter threats from Russia and China. A Pentagon proposal to reduce the American military footprint in Africa drew sharp criticism last week from senior lawmakers of both parties, including Senator Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican who is a close adviser to President Trump.

This article is based on interviews with a dozen American military officials or other people who have been briefed on the attack. Several spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss aspects of a security failure that is now under investigation.

Early on the morning of Jan. 5, Dustin Harrison, 47, and Bruce Triplett, 64, two experienced pilots and contractors with L3 Technologies, a Pentagon contractor that helps conduct surveillance and reconnaissance missions around the world, were taxiing their Beechcraft King Air 350 on Manda Bay’s tarmac. They throttled down their engines, according to one person familiar with the attack. The two men reported that they saw animals darting across the runway.

They were wrong. The animals were in fact Shabab fighters, who had infiltrated the base’s outer perimeter — a poorly defended fence line — before heading to the base’s airstrip. As the twin-propeller Beechcraft, loaded with sensors and video equipment for surveillance, began to taxi, the Shabab fighters fired a rocket-propelled grenade into the plane, killing Mr. Harrison and Mr. Triplett. With the plane on fire, a third contractor, badly burned in the rear of the aircraft, crawled out to safety.

The Shabab fighters were not done. In the ensuing chaos, they made quick work of a significant portion of the American



In recent months, missions against the Shabab along the Kenya-Somalia border have dwindled, and military officials have sought to end the American Special Operations presence at Manda Bay, Kenya. (Photo: Farah Abdi Warsameh/Associated Press)

fleet of aircraft — a mix of six surveillance aircraft and medical evacuation helicopters on the ground at the time. The Shabab fighters also destroyed a fuel storage area, rendering the airfield next to useless. The attack most likely cost the Pentagon millions of dollars in damages.

Specialist Henry Mayfield Jr., 23, of the Army was in a nearby truck acting as an air traffic controller when he was killed in the gunfight, according to a person familiar with the incident. His colleague inside the truck, another American, escaped and hid in the grass to avoid the insurgents. He was found hours later.

Manda Bay is at the southern edge of an archipelago of American outposts used in the fight against the Shabab in East Africa. It took about eight hours to fly the burned contractor to Djibouti for hospital-level care, according to the person familiar with the attack, underscoring a recurring vulnerability for American personnel spread across the continent. Two American service members were also wounded in the attack.

While parts of the airfield burned and some Americans who were there returned fire, roughly a dozen members of a Marine Special Operations team from Third Marine Raider Battalion based at Camp Lejeune, N.C., led the American counterattack, alongside several of the Kenyan Rangers they had been training and accompanying during their deployment. But since the team was at Camp Simba, an American enclave roughly a mile from the airfield, the insurgents had ample time to disperse.

At the center of the hours long gun battle is the risky dependence of American forces on their local counterparts, especially when it comes to base security. The battle bore striking similarity to an attack in Afghanistan in March 2019 when Taliban fighters managed to slip onto a sprawling base in southern Helmand Province with help from Afghan troops, and quickly threatened a small American Marine base inside the perimeter of the larger Afghan facility.

At Manda Bay, where American forces have a smaller presence, the troops rely largely on the Kenyans to protect the airfield. “Those forces are typically not as capable as U.S. forces, and are easier for terrorist groups to infiltrate,” said Representative Michael Waltz, a Florida Republican who served in Africa while an Army Green Beret.

The performance of the Kenyan security forces during and after the battle frustrated American officials. At one point, the Kenyans announced that they had captured six of the attackers, but they all turned out to be bystanders and were released.

There are about 200 American soldiers, airmen, sailors and Marines, as well as about 100 Pentagon civilian employees and contractors, in Kenya helping train and assist local forces.

A large majority of them work at Manda Bay, according to military officials. But there were not enough Americans to stand perimeter security on the airfield, one Defense Department official said.

American forces have used Manda Bay for years. Special Operations units — including Green Berets, Navy SEALs and more recently, Marine commandos — have helped train and advise Kenyan Rangers there.

The Kenyan Rangers, alongside their American commando counterparts, often operate in the border region pursuing Shabab fighters. Surveillance aircraft, flying from the airstrip at Manda Bay, watch the border between Somalia and Kenya, a region of unforgiving terrain that has hindered ground operations. In recent months, the border missions against the Shabab have dwindled, and military officials have sought to end the American Special Operations presence at Manda Bay.

Why the base was not better protected is unclear. Surveillance aircraft, much like those destroyed in the attack, are valuable assets, especially in Africa, where extremist groups seek to exploit the vast expanses and porous borders to avoid detection. Even to shuttle a single aircraft from one part of the continent to another often requires approval from a four-star general, and losing a surveillance aircraft, one Defense Department official said, means the loss of hundreds of hours of reconnaissance flights until it is replaced.

The Shabab have typically avoided American outposts and the technological superiority of the American military, instead attacking more exposed Kenyan and Somali troops in the hinterlands.

But that may be changing. On Sept. 30, a suicide bomber detonated a car packed with explosives at the gate of a military airfield in Bale Dogle, Somalia, injuring one American service member.

On Nov. 5, the Shabab released a 52-minute video narrated by the group’s leader, Abu Ubaidah, in which he called for attacks against Americans wherever they are, saying the American public is a legitimate target.

“The recent threats and attacks are likely in part a reaction to the U.S. air campaign against the group,” said Tricia Bacon, a Somali specialist at American University in Washington and a former State Department counterterrorism analyst.

The Pentagon carried out 63 drone strikes in Somalia last year — almost all against Shabab militants, with a few against a branch of the Islamic State. That compares with 47 strikes against the Shabab in 2018. There have already been three strikes in Somalia this year. The air campaign has been shrouded in secrecy, and an investigation by Amnesty International last year reported on evidence that these airstrikes had killed or wounded more than two dozen civilians since 2017.

Since March 2017, the Shabab have launched close to 900 attacks on civilians and hundreds more against United States, Somali and Kenyan troops, the Soufan Center, a research organization for global security issues in New York, said in an analysis last week. An Army Special Forces soldier, Staff Sgt. Alex Conrad, died from wounds he received during a firefight with Shabab fighters in June 2018 in Somalia.

The attack in Kenya came about a week after an explosives-laden truck blew up at a busy intersection in Mogadishu, the Somali capital, killing 82 people. The Shabab also claimed responsibility for that attack.

The group’s strength has ebbed and flowed over the past 15 years, weathering a string of territorial losses, defections and the killing of several high-profile leaders. Even so, the Shabab has proved remarkably resilient, even in the face of an intensified campaign of United States airstrikes against its fighters and facilities, the Soufan analysis said.

It remains unclear how the Shabab fighters made their way onto the Manda Bay base, whether by surprise or a vehicle packed with explosives. According to one American official, the group likely had patiently watched the base and had selected their attack based on the Americans’ well-established patterns. Investigators are looking at the possibility the attackers had help from Kenyan staff on the base, said one person briefed on the inquiry.

American officials said five Shabab fighters were killed. Several others fled, most likely slipping back across the border into Somalia, the officials said.

“This was designed for propaganda, to show they could strike American bases,” said Matt Bryden, the director of Sahan Research, a Nairobi-based think tank. “Their capability to strike in East Africa is growing.”

(Source: New York Times)

## Oman strives for neutrality in the Middle East

By Austin Bodetti

Like many of the lesser-known countries in the Global South, Oman rarely commands the attention of the international community. For the opaque politics of this Arab sultanate, though, the obscurity appears intentional. Omani officials have relied on their country’s relative anonymity to exercise considerable influence behind the scenes, maintaining contacts with competing regional powers such as Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia in addition to the world powers battling for control of the Middle East, among them China, Russia and the United States. As tensions between Iran and the United States rise over the American-orchestrated assassination of General Qasem Soleimani, Oman’s longtime role as a regional mediator may become more important than ever.

Iran wages a cold war against the Western world while Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates prosecute an all but endless war in Yemen. Oman shares land borders and maritime boundaries with Iran, the UAE and Saudi Arabia and has managed to distinguish itself as an island of stability in the region. In fact, the sultanate’s oft-cited reputation as “the Switzerland of the Middle East “ has allowed Omani officials to serve as mediators in these conflicts.

Former U.S. President Barack Obama often references the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action — the international agreement limiting the Iranian nuclear program — as among his major accomplishments. But he might not have realized this achievement without Omani assistance. Oman, a close ally of the United States in the Middle East and perhaps Iran’s only reliable partner in the Persian Gulf, facilitated a backchannel between the U.S. and Iranian diplomats that laid the groundwork for the talks that ended with the JCPOA in 2015.

In the case of Yemen, Oman has hosted peace talks between the Emirati- and Saudi-led coalition backing a frail Yemeni government and the motley alliance’s tenacious opponents, the Houthis. Whereas most other member states of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council joined the Emirati and Saudi war effort at one point or another, Oman’s respected history of neutrality in Yemen and the region as a whole underpins its role as an intermediary.

After the United States targeted General Soleimani’s vehicle in Baghdad, Oman immediately urged Iran and the United States to pursue dialogue to deescalate tensions.

In many ways, neutrality and obscurity go hand in hand in this country of 4.9 million people. The sultanate has more or less refrained from taking sides in the ever-expanding roster of Middle Eastern conflicts since Omani Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said ascended the throne in 1970. Therefore, Oman has had little reason to engage in the kind of headline-grabbing interventions that have often characterized American, Emirati, Iranian and Saudi foreign policy. In turn, the few outsiders who do think about Oman know it as a neutral country and a tourist destination, not as a source of conflict.

As Middle Eastern and Western pundits alike have lambasted regional and world powers for their part in proxy wars on the Arabian Peninsula, in the Levant and in the Maghreb, Omani officials have earned goodwill by bankrolling cultural diplomacy and sustainable development.

Oman invites Western students to the country to study Arabic and sponsors a prize for environmental scientists in cooperation with the United Nations.

In addition to Qaboos’ recent contributions to Omani foreign policy, the sultanate has adopted an isolationist, non-interventionist approach to the world because of its demographic and historical characteristics. Unlike their Shia and Sunni neighbors, most Omanis practice Ibadism, a conservative, secretive offshoot of Islam that emphasizes moderation and tolerance. In keeping with their traditions, Ibadism’s adherents tend to keep to themselves. The downfall of the Omani Empire, which once extended from Balochistan to Zanzibar, also taught Omani leaders the dangers of the expansionist ambitions.

Oman’s lack of interest in pursuing the rivalries that have riven the Persian Gulf as well as the rest of the Middle East explains the depth of its friendships across the region and the world in general. The sultanate has hosted delegations from Israel and Saudi Arabia, cut trade pacts with China, Iran and Russia, and received military aid from Britain and the United States. Few other small powers could balance relationships with so many competitors at once.

Beyond growing Oman’s list of allies and keeping the sultanate out of the spotlight, the country’s foreign policy has shielded its internal affairs from outside scrutiny. Like its neighbors, Oman has limited human rights and freedom of expression in particular — even imprisoning critics occasionally — yet Omani officials have encountered much less criticism than their Emirati and Saudi counterparts.

Despite the many ways in which Oman has gained from its foreign policy, contemporary history signals that this Omani renaissance may be coming to an end. Oman’s most powerful neighbors, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have proved frustrated with the sultanate’s opaque decision-making. In 2011 and again in 2019, Oman claimed to have discovered Emirati spy rings operating on its territory. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, has pressured Oman to move away from Iran. The kingdom’s leadership has long wanted Oman to halt trade with Iran, and some analysts have speculated that Saudi Arabia could withdraw its investments from the sultanate to compel Omani compliance.

Two longer-term challenges indicate that Oman may struggle to afford the luxury of neutrality in the coming years. Many analysts question what will happen to the sultanate’s foreign policy once Qaboos, a 78-year-old monarch, dies or relinquishes power. Qaboos has yet to pick a successor. Oman’s dwindling oil reserves, which could be depleted as soon as 2032, have heightened the lack of clarity over the sultanate’s future. Observers expected revenues from fossil fuels to fund more than 70 percent of the 2019 budget, predicated on a price of \$58 per barrel. If either problem leads to a constitutional crisis, this little-known neutral country may find that, in fact, it has few permanent allies.

In the face of these looming challenges, Oman can try to capitalize on its immediate relevance to geopolitics by building on its diplomatic and economic partnerships to cement permanent alliances. Neither the principals of the American-Iranian contest for dominance of the Middle East nor the combatants in the Yemeni Civil War have access to a better intermediary than Oman. Omani officials could leverage their diplomatic skill in courting financial assistance or trade guarantees from other powers in need of such intercession. Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the U.S. may also need the sultanate’s assistance to determine the future of the Strait of Hormuz as tensions remain heated. Oman still has the diplomatic capital to extract these actors from the region’s persistent conflicts.

Whether Oman can sustain a foreign policy built on neutrality and obscurity well into the future remains a question for the few analysts who reflect on the sultanate’s trajectory. So far, Oman has fared better than the Persian Gulf’s regional powers, from Iran and Qatar to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in dodging ceaseless conflicts that have entangled so many other Middle Eastern players.

The North African and Western Asian countries that have made a point of distancing themselves from the region’s conflicts, such as Kuwait and Morocco, tend to succeed where so many others have failed. For its part, Oman has continued to offer the best example of a neutral country in a region bereft of them.

*NOTE: This article is dated January 8, 2020, before the death of Sultan Qaboos on January 10.*

(Source: Euroasia)

### Second Announcement



1398.6534

N.I.S.O.C

**NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY AHVAZ-IRAN**

**TENDER NO. : 01-31-9680032**

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

items	Material Description	Quantity
13	PARTS FOR “BROWN BROVERI- SULZER” GAS TURBINE TYPE NS70	286 NOS

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their “ Intention to participate” letter via Fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: WWW.nisoc.ir , not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the .tender will be disregarded

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit .a bid bond of 6,283 EURO or 898 ,144,500 RIAL, in favor of NISOC

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

NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

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## Iran issues travel warning for China amid coronavirus outbreak

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – Tehran’s embassy in Beijing has issued a travel advisory over deadly coronavirus outbreak in China, raising the threat level both for potential travelers and residents, ILNA reported on Friday.



“Dear compatriots residing in China are respectfully urged to avoid as much traffic as possible and pay attention to health-related warnings due to the outbreak of the new coronavirus. Based on arrangements made by the Chinese government, unnecessary entry and exit to quarantined cities are currently not possible,” the embassy announced.

“Dear Iranian citizens who are planning to travel to China should notice the latest outbreak of the virus at the destination before departure and avoid places suspect of contamination. If you feel symptoms of the virus, refer to a health center and contact the Iranian embassy or consulate to receive consular services.”

China has widened its travel restrictions in Hubei province - the center of the coronavirus outbreak - as the death toll climbed to 26, sources said on Friday.

The restrictions will affect at least 20 million people across 10 cities, including the capital, Wuhan, where the virus emerged.

On Thursday, a coronavirus patient died in northern Hebei province - making it the first death outside Hubei. Another death was later confirmed in north-east Heilongjiang province.

## Tooth plaque suggests first settlers of Vanuatu brought bananas

Ancient tooth plaque suggests the first settlers of Vanuatu brought bananas with them when they colonized the Pacific island some 3,000 years ago.

The tiny food particles trapped in the ancient plaque, or dental calculus, are the earliest pieces of evidence of humans transporting and cultivating banana.

Scientists described the breakthrough discovery this week in the journal Nature Human Behavior.

Roughly three millennia ago, a group of people associated with the Lapita cultural complex in Southeast Asia set out across the Pacific on canoes. They arrived at one of the last uninhabited places on Earth, Vanuatu, an archipelago in the South Pacific.

Until now, scientists weren’t certain as to how these early settlers survived on the islands once they arrived. Some researchers estimated that the migrants brought domesticated plants and animals with them.

To figure out what the first settlers of Vanuatu were eating, scientists scraped plaque from teeth recovered from human remains in Teouma cemetery, the oldest archaeological cemetery in Oceania.

“One of the big advantages of studying calcified plaque or dental calculus is that you can find out a lot about otherwise invisible parts of people’s lives,” Monica Tromp, senior laboratory analyst at the University of Otago in New Zealand, said in a news release. “Plaque calcifies very quickly and can trap just about anything you put inside of your mouth -- much like the infamous Jurassic Park mosquito in amber -- but they are incredibly small things that you can only see with a microscope.”

(Source: UPI)



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Historic City of Vigan

Established in the 16th century, Vigan is the best-preserved example of a planned Spanish colonial town in Asia.

Its architecture reflects the coming together of cultural elements from elsewhere in the Philippines and from China with those of Europe and Mexico to create a unique culture and townscape without parallels anywhere in East and South-East Asia.

An important trading post before the colonial era, Vigan is located at the river delta of Abra River, along the northwestern coastline of the main island of Luzon, in the Province of Ilocos Sur, Philippine Archipelago. The total area of the inscribed property is 17.25 hectares.



There is, however, a noticeable difference between Vigan and contemporary Spanish colonial towns in Latin America in the Historic Core (known as the Mestizo district), where the Latin tradition is tempered by strong Chinese, Ilocano, and Filipino influences. As its name implies, this district was settled by affluent families of mixed Chinese-Ilocano origin. The area contains the historic footprint of the entire town and consists of a total of 233 historic buildings tightly strung along a grid of 25 streets.

The two-storey structures are built of brick and wood, with a steeply pitched roof reminiscent of traditional Chinese architecture.

Vigan is unique for having preserved much of its Hispanic colonial character, particularly its grid street pattern and historic urban lay out.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Iran formulates action plan to get tourism back on track

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** – Iran’s Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts has developed an action plan in order to get the country’s tourism sector back on track as it has suffered losses in the wake of recent political tensions in the region.

Inbound tours started to severely drop following a Ukrainian plane, with 176 people aboard, was mistakenly downed on January 8 by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) air defense system. The tragic crash was happened a few hours after Iran fired dozens of missiles at the U.S. airbase inside Iraq in retaliation to the assassination of Iranian Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3.

Tourism Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan said earlier this month that the country’s tourism sector has suffered a major setback but it will certainly return to “normal”.

On Thursday, Mounesan said that the action plan will start on Saturday (January 25), aiming to increase and improve [international] interactions for introducing Iran and clarifying its safety conditions to the target countries, CHTN reported.

Referring to the plan, Mounesan said, “We have discussed with the foreign minister the need for our embassies to be more dynamic. Moreover, cooperation with foreign ambassadors [in Tehran] is to be enhanced and strengthened through holding meetings with them.”

Inviting [foreign influencers and] celebrities to travel to Iran is one of other pillars of the plan in order to convey the message that the country is well safe, he explained.

“By the means of photos, videos and comments they post on their social networks, these people convey the message to the world that they are safe and there is no problem for foreign tourists to travel to Iran.”

Mounesan also pointed to holding international tourism fairs and exhibits that Iran is scheduled to take part, saying, “We have several international fairs



A sightseer revels in the picturesque atmosphere of the UNESCO-registered Imam Square in Isfahan, central Iran. (Shutterstock)

ahead. At these exhibitions, we should introduce Iran well to tourists and clarify the country’s safe conditions.”

Some 6.7 million foreign nationals have visited Iran during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year, according to data announced by Foreign Ministry’s visa and passport department. Iran welcomed some 7.8 million foreign nationals last year, achieving a 52.5 percent increase year on year.

## Iranian winter festival highlights “Chinese New Year”

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** – A winter tourism festival opened in the Iranian city of Hamedan on Friday, concurrent with the start of the Chinese New Year, which has been selected as one of the main themes for the event.

A number of Chinese nationals and travelers have also been invited to the event, which will be running through February 9, ISNA reported.

Winter games, making snow-sculptures, storytelling sessions, ski trips, puppets shows, and gastronomy events are amongst programs planned for the festival, a local tourism official noted.

Known in classical times as Ecbatana, Hamedan was one of the ancient world’s greatest cities. Pitifully little remains from antiquity, but significant parts of the city center are



given over to excavations, and there’s a scattering of historical curiosities.

Sprawling on a high plain, Hamedan is graciously cool in August but snow prone and freezing from December to March. In summer the air is often hazy, but on a rare, clear spring day there are impressive glimpses of snow-capped Alvand Kuh (3580m), sitting aloof above the ragged neo-colonial cupolas of Imam Khomeini Sq.

It never falls short of offering cultural heritage sites to its visitors. Scenic natural landscapes, traditional restaurants, public gardens and colorful outdoor markets and more importantly, its hospitable people make for an unexpected slice of the city.

Last June, Iran officially waived visa requirements for Chinese nationals.

## Seljuk-era relics found during illegal excavation

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** – Iranian police have recently confiscated historical relics related to Seljuk era (1037–1194) from an illegal excavation in a house located in the city of Abhar, west-central Zanjan province.

“An earthenware jar and several clay caps have been seized from a house in Abhar where an unauthorized excavation was underway,” CHTN quoted Zanjan’s tourism chief Amir Arjmand as saying on

Wednesday.

“According to the cultural heritage’s set of laws and regulations, any excavation intended to obtain buried relics and monuments is prohibited and is subject to penalty,” Arjmand said.

Abhar is a historical town surrounding a castle of the same name, he said, adding that archaeological evidence suggest its origin dates from some six millennia ago.

The official, however, did not provide

more detail about the exact time of the confiscation and probable culprits detained in that regard.

Seljuk, also spelled, Seljuq, was a ruling military family of the Oguz (Ghuzz) Turkic tribes that invaded southwestern Asia in the 11th century and eventually founded an empire that included Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and most of Iran. Their advance marked the beginning of Turkish power in the Middle East.



## Copper Age Italy hosted large, complex networks of metal exchange

During the 4th and 3rd millennia BC, the Late Neolithic, Italy was home to complex metalwork exchange networks, according to new isotopic analysis of Copper Age artifacts.

Recent studies have revealed Neolithic populations in Italy were using surprisingly complex technologies to extract copper much earlier than previously thought. Until now, little was known about the movement of copper across the region.

For the newest study, published this week in the journal PLOS One, scientists wanted to determine how copper was traded across ancient Italy and whether or not copper from more distant locals was imported.

Researchers analyzed 20 copper artifacts, including axe-heads, halberds and daggers, collected from important prehistoric sites in central Italy dated to between 3600 and 2200 BC. By measuring the chemical signatures in each artifact, as well as analyzing the archaeological context, scientists were able to trace their origins.

Most of the artifacts were made using copper extracted from mines in the Tuscany region. However, some of the artifacts were cast using copper mined from Tyrol, a historical region in the Alps, and also possibly from French Midi, a historical area in southern France.

“The first systematic application of lead isotope analysis -- a geological sourcing technique -- to Copper Age metal objects from central Italy, 3600 to 2200 BC, has shed new light on the provenance of the copper used to cast



A recent study confirmed the importance of Tuscan mining to early copper trading, as well as revealing the presence of complex metalwork exchanges that allowed Late Neolithic populations in the region to access non-Tuscan ores. Photo by monica\_valladares/Pixabay

them,” Andrea Dolfini, senior lecturer in later prehistory at Newcastle University in Britain, said in a news release.

The study both confirmed the importance of Tuscan mining to early copper trading, and also revealed the presence of complex metalwork exchanges that allowed Late Neolithic populations in the region to access non-Tuscan ores.

“The research has revealed that, while some of the copper was sourced from the rich ore deposits of Tuscany, as was expected, some is from further afield,” Dolfini said. “This unforeseen discovery demonstrates that far-reaching metal exchange networks were in operation in prehistoric Europe over a thousand years before the Bronze Age.”

(Source: UPI)

## Researchers resurrect the voice of an ancient Egyptian priest

Some 3,000 years after he died, Nesyamun, an ancient Egyptian priest, is uttering vowels. The sounds aren’t coming from the mummified priest himself, but from a computerized voice box.

To best understand what Nesyamun would have sounded like, researchers in Britain used CT scans to image and measure the dimensions of his voice tract. Scientists then used the images to build a 3D-printed model called the Vocal Tract Organ.

Scientists combined the 3D voice box with an artificial larynx, commonly used for artificial speech, to produce a vowel-like sound similar to the baa of a sheep.

“I was demonstrating the Vocal Tract Organ in June 2013 to colleagues, with implications for providing authentic vocal sounds back to those who have lost the normal speech function of their vocal tract or larynx following an accident or surgery for laryngeal cancer,” David Howard, professor at Royal Holloway, University of London, said in a news release.

Howard was approached by John Schofield, professor of archaeology and cultural heritage at the University of York, about using the technology to investigate the voices of the past.

The researchers settled on Nesyamun as their first subject. The mummified priest’s vocal box was surprisingly well preserved.

Howard and Schofield described their effort to bring Nesyamun’s voice back to life in a new paper, published Thursday in the journal Scientific Reports.

“It has been such an interesting project that has opened a novel window onto the



Scientists used a CT scanner to image, measure and model the voice tract of a 3,000-year-old Egyptian mummy. Photo by Leeds Museums and Galleries

past and we’re very excited to be able to share the sound with people for the first time in 3,000 years,” Howard said.

Nesyamun served at a state temple of Karnak in Thebes during the reign of pharaoh Ramses XI, who ruled from 1099 to 1069 BC. Nesyamun and his vocal tract would have been required to sing as part of his daily duties as a state priest.

“The voice is such a significant part of being human, and every voice is distinctive,” Schofield said. “As an archaeologist, the opportunity of recreating a voice from the past with greater accuracy than has even been done before was an exciting and unexpected prospect.”

In addition to exciting scientists, the new technology could offer a fresh way to engage with and excite visitors to museums. Visitors to the Leeds Museum where Nesyamun is on display will not only get to see the ancient Egyptian, but also hear what he sounded like.

(Source: UPI)



# Lake Urmia water level keeps rising

**ENVIRONMENT** **TEHRAN** — The level of water at Lake Urmia is on the rise, as increased by a 1.7 billion cubic meters compared to the previous year, according to the studies conducted by the Lake Urmia restoration program committee.

Shared between West Azarbaijan and East Azarbaijan provinces in northwestern Iran, Lake Urmia, was once the largest salt-water lake in the Middle East.

However, decades of long-standing drought spells and elevated hot summer temperatures that speed up evaporation as well as increased water demands in the agriculture sector shrunk the lake drastically. In 1999 the volume of water which was at 30 billion cubic meters drastically decreased to half a billion cubic meters in 2013. Moreover, the lake's surface area of 5,000 square kilometers in 1997 shrunk to one-tenth of that to 500 square kilometers in 2013.

The lake is expected to reach its ecological level (1,274 meters) within 10 years by completing the restoration plans which started four years ago.

Farhad Sarkhosh, head of the Lake Urmia restoration program's office in West Azarbaijan province, said the lake's level has reached 1,271 meters, adding the figure has increased by 68 centimeters compared



to last year, according to the latest survey. He said that the lake surface area has reached 2,828 square kilometers, adding that the figure is increased by 689 square kilometers compared to the same period last year.

By the end of last year (March 20, 2019), more than 35 trillion rials (nearly \$833 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) spent to revive the lake, he highlighted, concluding, this year 7.2 trillion rials (about \$172 million) is earmarked in this manner.

Alireza Shari'at, head of monitoring and supervision department of the Lake Urmia restoration program said in September 2018, that in order to maintain the Lake Urmia ecological balance of 14 billion cubic meters over the next 10 years, an annual amount of 3.3 billion cubic meters of water is required.

The sharp rise in precipitations rates over the past crop year since now has raised hopes for total restoration of the once glorious Lake Urmia.

This is a while, deputy environment chief Masoud Tajrishi told Khabaronline in July 2019 that rainfall is not the only the reason behind Lake Urmia coming back to life. Thus, restoration measures turned out to be effective, unlike the previous years of high rainfall poured over the lake but did not raise the lake level.

The effort put into properly dredging and clearing of weed and vegetation in river beds as a way came efficient in the lake conservation, he added.

## E-motorbikes come to curb air pollution in metropolises

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The first phase of electric motorcycles development project will be implemented aiming at reducing air pollution in Tehran and other metropolises, IRNA news agency reported.

Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said on Tuesday that electric motorcycles will be promoted in big cities in collaboration with the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade.

Through the first phase of the project, electric motorcycles will replace the regular ones used by the Ministry of Energy and state-run companies, he explained.

Ardakanian went on to say that, in addition to electric motorcycles being manufactured and marketed from now on, existing motorcycles will also change to use electricity sources.

Of all 32.9 million vehicles in the country, motorcycles amount to 11.6 million, accounting for 35 percent of the total vehicles moving in the country, 56 percent of motorcycles are plying the roads in only 5 provinces of Tehran, Khorasan



Razavi, Isfahan, Fars and Khuzestan, Ali Mohammadi, a senior traffic police official told IRNA in July 2019.

According to a report by the World Bank, motorcycles are the second largest contributor to particulate matter (PM) in Tehran, even before cars which greatly outnumber them.

One of the main reasons behind their high contribution to emissions is that a large part of the fuel consumed in motorcycles burns incompletely. The Tehran motorcycle fleet consists mostly of carburetor-equipped motorcycles which are typically less fuel efficient and emit more emissions compared to newer, fuel injection technology.

Carburetors on motorcycles produce 15.5 grams of emissions per kilometer, which is six times higher than a Euro 2 car, he regretted.

According to studies, 5 carburetor equipped motorcycles generates particulate matter as much as an extremely old diesel bus, while replacing carburetors with fuel injection can reduce particulate matter by 90 percent.

## Climate emergency: Duck-billed platypus could face extinction due to droughts

The climate catastrophe unfolding in Australia is taking a severe toll on wildlife as record-breaking heatwaves and uncontrollable wildfires are edging many threatened species closer to extinction.

The duck-billed platypus is the latest rare creature over which there is now serious concern, scientists have said.

The animal, which is found in eastern Australia's river systems, has already disappeared from 40 per cent of its range, due to droughts, pollution, land clearances and the building of dams.

Scientists from the University of New South Wales' Centre for Ecosystem Science said that if the current threats to the animal from climate change remain, platypus numbers will collapse by up to 66 per cent in the next 50 years, and by 73 per cent by 2070.

The duck-billed platypus is already listed as "near threatened" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Recent damage to river systems due to consecutive years of little rainfall and high

temperatures have worsened prospects for the animal.

"These dangers further expose the platypus to even worse local extinctions, with no capacity to repopulate areas," Gilad Bino, lead author of the study, said, according to AFP.

The study says there is now an "urgent need" for a national risk assessment to determine whether the animal should be downgraded to "vulnerable" status and to then lay out conservation steps "to minimise any risk of extinction".

The survey estimates the world's total duck-billed platypus population has fallen by 50 per cent since European settlement of Australasia just two centuries ago, and the outlook remains very poor.

"Under predicted climate change, the losses forecast were far greater because of increases in extreme drought frequencies and duration, such as the current dry spell," Dr Bino said of the latest report.

The study calls for "increasing surveys, tracking trends, mitigating threats and



improving management of platypus habitat in rivers."

Due to its very unusual combination of physical features, when sketches of the duck-billed platypus were first seen by western scientists in 1798, and a pelt was sent to the

UK, it was believed to be a hoax, and that a duck's bill had been sewn onto the body of a beaver-like creature.

The species was subsequently hunted for its fur until the 20th century.

(Source: The Independent)

## Online campaign grows to save sick and starving lions in Sudan park

Online calls to help save five "malnourished and sick" African lions at a park in Sudan's capital grew on Sunday.

The lions are in cages at Khartoum's Al-Qureshi park, which is in an upmarket area of the city, and have not had enough food and medicine for weeks.

Many people have demanded they be moved. Osman Salih launched a Facebook campaign, Sudananimal-rescue, and wrote: "I was shaken when I saw these lions at the park ... Their bones are protruding from the skin."

"I urge interested people and institutions to help them." Park officials and vets said the lions' conditions had deteriorated over the past few weeks. Some had lost almost two-thirds of their body weight.

"Food is not always available so often we buy it from our own money to feed them," said Essameldine Hajjar, a manager at the park, which is managed by the Khartoum municipality but is partly funded by private donors. Sudan is in the middle of an economic crisis led by soaring food prices and a shortage of foreign currency.

On Sunday residents, volunteers and journalists visited the park to see the lions after their photographs went viral on social media networks. One of the five cats was tied with a rope and was fed fluids through a drip as it recovered from dehydration, an AFP reporter who toured the park wrote.

Chunks of rotten meat covered in flies lay scattered near the cages. The condition of the park was also affecting the animals' health, another official at the park said.

"They are suffering from severe illnesses," a caretaker, Moataz Mahmoud, said. "They are sick and appear to be malnourished."

It is unclear how many lions are in Sudan but several are at the Dinder park along the border with Ethiopia. African lions are classified as a "vulnerable" species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Their population dropped 43% between 1993 and 2014, with only about 20,000 alive today.

(Source: The Guardian)

## Study finds shock rise in levels of potent greenhouse gas

Efforts to reduce levels of one potent greenhouse gas appear to be failing, according to a study.

Scientists had expected to find a dramatic reduction in levels of the hydrofluorocarbon HFC-23 in the atmosphere after India and China, two of the main sources, reported in 2017 that they had almost completely eliminated emissions.

But a paper published in the journal Nature Communications says that by 2018 concentrations of the gas – used in fridges, inhalers and air conditioners – had not fallen but were increasing at a record rate.

Matt Rigby, from Bristol University, who co-authored the study and is a member of the Advanced Global Atmospheric Gases Experiment, said academics had hoped to see a big reduction following the reports from India and China.

"This potent greenhouse gas has been growing rapidly in the atmosphere for decades now, and these reports suggested that the rise should have almost completely stopped in the space of two or three years. This would have been a big win for climate."

Scientists say the fact they found emissions had risen is a puzzle and could have implications for the Montreal protocol, an international treaty that was designed to protect the stratospheric ozone layer.

Kieran Stanley, the lead author of the study, said that although China and India were not yet bound by the agreement, their reported reduction would have put them on course to be consistent with it.

"Our study finds that it is very likely that China has not been as successful in reducing HFC-23 emissions as reported," he said. "However, without additional measurements, we can't be sure whether India has been able to implement its abatement programme."

(Source: The Guardian)

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### Tanker blacklist from Brussels

(December 04, 2002) The European Commission has agreed to ban certain oil-carrying ships from its waters.

There are **time bombs** circulating off our coastlines. That, according to the European transport commissioner, is what ageing, **non-seaworthy** ships are when they're carrying **noxious** cargo and they venture close to shore.

The European Commission is often the place for **dry, technocratic** announcements, but the Spanish commissioner, Loyola de Palacio, was angry. If European Union member states had listened to the Commission after the last oil **spill** three years ago, she said, the Prestige disaster would not have happened.

And so the Commission has today published a list of sixty-six ships which it says should be banned from European waters. Further, it wants an end to tankers with a **single hull** carrying heavy fuel oil. The problem, as the Commission accepts, is that heavy fuel oil is cheap and low-grade and that means there's **reluctance** to transport it in more expensive ships. There's also the old difficulty of **persuading** all European Union countries to act **in unison**.

■ **Words**  
**time bombs**: things that will have a major effect on a situation at a later date, and cause a lot of damage  
**non-seaworthy**: not fit for a sea voyage  
**noxious**: harmful or poisonous  
**dry**: dull and uninteresting  
**technocratic**: overly technical  
**spill**: leakage  
**single-hull**: only one layer between the oil and the sea  
**reluctance**: unwillingness  
**persuade**: (of a situation or event) provide a sound reason for someone to do something  
**in unison**: in complete agreement

(Source: BBC)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ◀ ▶ ج

### Philanthropists support 28,000 orphans, deprived children

Iranian benefactors have made cash and kind contributions from the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan (starting on May 6) to help 28,000 children who are either orphaned or whose parents are financially struggling, deputy director of Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation has announced.

There are currently 600,000 philanthropists who support orphaned children as well as children living in families in financial distress, IRNA quoted Alireza Asgarian as saying on Wednesday.

The foundation also intends to build housing units for families who cannot afford to rent houses, he added.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “para-”

- **Meaning**: on the side of, beside
- **For example**: **Paranoia** is an instinct or thought process which is believed to be heavily influenced by anxiety.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Perk something/ someone up

- **Meaning**: to make something or someone more active, cheerful or interesting
- **For example**: She seemed kind of tired, but she perked up when Helen came over.

### IDIOM

#### Cut to the quick

- **Explanation**: If you cut someone to the quick, you hurt their feelings or offend them deeply
- **For example**: Alan was cut to the quick when Joe expressed doubt about his sincerity.

### مردم ۲۸ هزار کودک بی سرپرست را تحت حمایت قرار دادند

معاون توسعه مشارکتهای مردمی کمیته امداد امام خمینی (ره) گفت: خیرین و نیکوکاران کشور از ابتدای ماه مبارک رمضان تاکنون ۲۸ هزار کودک بی سرپرست را تحت حمایت های مالی و غیرمالی خود قرار دادند.

علیرضا عسگریان روز چهارشنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار اجتماعی ایرنا افزود: ۶۰۰ هزار حامی در سطح کشور در یاری رسانی به ایتام و فرزندان محسنین با کمیته امداد همکاری دارند.

عسگریان اظهار داشت: ساخت مسکن برای خانواده های تحت پوشش کمیته امداد از دیگر برنامه های اجرایی و دارای اولویت کاری این نهاد در سال جاری است.



## Several Palestinians injured as Israeli forces storm Al-Aqsa Mosque

Israeli forces have injured a number of Palestinians in an attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied Jerusalem al-Quds aimed at preventing worshippers from performing Friday prayers.

Palestinian media say the Israelis stormed the mosque in order to keep Palestinian worshippers from performing Friday prayers.

The Israeli troops fired rubber bullets, injuring a number of Palestinians, according to Palestinian media. Several others were also detained.

Earlier Friday, another mosque in Beit Safafa neighborhood of the occupied Jerusalem al-Quds was set ablaze by Israeli arsonists. The blaze was brought under control and there was no serious damage to the mosque, Israeli media reports said.

There was also a graffiti on a nearby wall attacking Arabs. A photo from the scene showed graffiti in Hebrew that reads: "Destroying Jews? Kumi Ori is destroying enemies!"

Kumi Ori is a flash point and illegal outpost neighborhood of the Yitzhar settlement in the West Bank, accommodating seven Israeli families along with roughly a dozen extremists known as hilltop youth.

Israeli forces have on various occasions stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque which is holy to Muslims. The Palestinian people consider the Israeli attacks an act of aggression.

The fresh attacks come as US President Donald Trump is to unveil his so-called "Deal of the Century" initiative. Palestinians say they will reject the US president's plan.

Spokesman for the Palestinian president, Nabil Abu Rudaineh, said the initiative is aimed at liquidating the Palestinian cause.

US President Donald Trump is reportedly set to release the plan by Tuesday.

(source: Press TV)

## N. Korea confirms Ri Son Gwon as new foreign minister

North Korea has named as its new foreign minister a former senior army officer with little experience in dealings with the United States, in a possible indication it will take a harder line with Washington in stalled nuclear negotiations.

The new post for Ri Son Gwon was disclosed Friday in a Korean Central News Agency dispatch that said he attended a reception for foreign diplomats in Pyongyang on Thursday.

South Korean and other outside media previously reported North Korea had recently informed foreign diplomats in Pyongyang of Ri's job.

In his speech at the banquet, "Comrade Ri Son Gwon said the Korean people have turned out in the general offensive to break through head-on the barriers to the advance of socialist construction by dint of self-reliance... and made public the foreign policy stand of the (North Korean) government," KCNA said.

Ri, an outspoken retired army colonel who recently headed a government body responsible for relations with South Korea, has taken part in numerous inter-Korean talks over the past 15 years. But he lacks experience in negotiations with the U.S.

In South Korea, he is most known for what was seen as rude remarks to South Korean businessmen visiting Pyongyang in September 2018.

While they were eating "naengmyeon", Korean traditional cold noodles, Ri asked them: "Are naengmyeon going down your throats?" in apparent dissatisfaction with a lack of progress in efforts to promote inter-Korean economic projects. Many conservatives in South Korea strongly criticized him.

**■ Former foreign minister's whereabouts unknown**  
Ri replaced Ri Yong Ho, a career diplomat with broad experiences in dealings with the US and South Korea who had taken part in nuclear negotiations with Washington since early 2018.

It was not immediately known what happened to Ri Yong Ho, whose name was last mentioned in KCNA last August.

Analyst Cheong Seong-Chang at South Korea's private Sejong Institute said Ri Son Gwon's appointment signalled North Korea would further harden its stance on the US and bolster its push to cement its position as a nuclear state.

(Source: al Jazeera)

## China rushes to build new hospital for virus within 10 days

China is rushing to build a new hospital in a staggering 10 days to treat patients at the epicentre of a deadly virus outbreak that has stricken hundreds of people, state media reported Friday.

The facility in the central city of Wuhan is expected to be in use by February 3 to serve a rising number of patients infected by a coronavirus that has left at least 26 people dead and millions on lockdown in an effort to curb the spread.

Dozens of excavators and trucks were filmed working on the site by state broadcaster CCTV.

It will have a capacity of 1,000 beds spread over 25,000 square metres, the official Xinhua news agency said.

Construction began as reports surfaced of bed shortages in hospitals designated as dealing with the outbreak, which has now infected 830 people across China.

Xinhua said the new facility is aimed at "alleviating the shortage of medical treatment resources and improving the ability to care for patients".

In 2003 China erected a hospital on Beijing's rural outskirts in barely a week to cater to a rapidly rising number of patients suffering from SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which killed 349 people in mainland China and 299 in Hong Kong in 2002-2003.

Xiaotangshan Hospital consisted of prefabricated structures and Xinhua reported Friday that Wuhan was building the new facility based on the same model.

The city of over 11 million people has been centralising its treatment of the new virus by isolating patients in 61 clinics and designated hospitals.

Chinese officials have said the virus likely originated from wild animals at a seafood market in the city but it has since spread to several countries around Asia and beyond.

The outbreak has prompted authorities in at least eight Chinese cities to impose travel restrictions and cancel public events to curb the spread.

(Source: AFP)

# The second slap: Go out

### Iraqis march in 'millions' to call for expulsion of U.S. troops

Iraqis have rallied in Baghdad in massive numbers to call for an end to U.S. military presence in the country following high-profile assassinations and airstrikes targeting anti-terror forces.

Sayed Sadiq al-Hashemi, the director of the Iraqi Center for Studies, said more than 2.5 million took part in the demonstrations on Friday.

According to Press TV, since the early hours on Friday, huge crowds of men, women and children of all ages converged on the Jadriyah neighborhood near Baghdad University.

The protesters were seen carrying banners and chanting slogans calling for the expulsion of U.S. forces.

"Get out, get out, occupier!" some shouted, while others chanted, "Yes to sovereignty!"

Iraq's al-Ahd news network reported that Iraqis from all of the country's provinces had gathered in the city.

On January 5, the Iraqi parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution calling for the expulsion of all foreign forces after the U.S. assassination of Iran's General Qassem Soleimani and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The massive rally came after influential cleric Muqtada al-Sadr called on Iraqis to stage "a million-strong, peaceful, unified demonstration to condemn the American presence and its violations".

Sadr issued a statement on Friday calling for U.S. bases to be shut down and Iraqi airspace closed to U.S. warplanes and surveillance aircraft.



He warned that U.S. presence in the country will be dealt with as an occupying force if Washington does not agree with Iraqi demands to withdraw for the country.

In a message delivered through a representative at Friday prayer in the holy city of Karbala, top cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani also urged Iraqi political groups to do what is needed to the safeguard the country's sovereignty.

He called on Iraqi groups to stand united, far from any foreign influence in counter-

ing the dangers which threaten the country.

On Thursday ahead of the planned rallies, Sadr called on Iraqis to mobilize and defend the country's independence and sovereignty.

"Oh women, men and youth of the country, the time is now upon us to defend the country, its sovereignty and dependence," Sadr said in a tweet.

"Spread the word of an independent future Iraq that will be ruled by the righteous; an Iraq which will not know of corruption nor aggression" he added, calling on Iraqis to

expel the "tyrants".

Various Iraqi resistance groups affiliated with the country's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) have also backed the anti-American rally.

**■ 'Zero hour in face-off with U.S.'**

Speaking to the Lebanese al-Mayadeen television channel, Jaafar al-Husseini, a spokesman for the PMU-affiliated Kata'ib Hezbollah resistance group, said "other means" will be used against the Americans if they do not leave Iraq.

The American presence, he said, has led to corruption and instability in the country.

In an interview with Iran's Tasnim news agency, Firas al-Yasser, a member of the political bureau of Iraq's Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, said Friday's rallies marked "a new chapter" in the Arab country's relations with the U.S.

He said Iraqi resistance groups support the stance of the country's clerical leadership, which does not tolerate Washington's "theory of dependence and humiliation" of Iraq.

"We believe we have reached the zero hour in facing off with the U.S.," he said.

Yasser added that Iran's missile attack on the Ain al-Assad base in the western Iraqi province of Anbar earlier this month was a "prelude" to the expulsion of U.S. forces from the country.

Qais al-Khazali, leader of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, which is part of the PMU, described Friday's rallies as a "second revolution" a century after the Great Iraqi Revolution of 1920 against British forces.

(Source: agencies)

## Palestinians warn Israel, U.S. as Trump discusses new 'peace plan'

➔ 1 'It's all about Israel'

On the plane on Thursday, Trump said he was pleased that Netanyahu and his main electoral rival Benny Gantz, the head of the centrist Blue and White party, would visit the White House in the middle of the campaign for Israeli elections on March 2.

"We have both candidates coming - unheard of," Trump said.

Asked if he had contacted the Palestinians, Trump said: "We've spoken to them briefly. But we will speak to them in a period of time.

"And they have a lot of incentive to do it. I'm sure they maybe will react negatively at first but it's actually very positive for them."

Husam Zomlot, the head of the Palestinian mission to the UK, told AFP news agency that Trump hosting two Israeli leaders and no Palestinians showed the meeting was about influencing domestic Israeli politics, rather than a genuine attempt at peace.

"This is confirmation of their policy from the beginning - it is all about and for Israel."

The plan is expected to strongly favour Israel and offer it control over large parts of the West Bank.

The Palestinians seek the entire territory, which was also captured by Israel in 1967, as the heartland of a future independent state, as part of the two-state solution which most of the international community supports.

Netanyahu has said he plans to annex the occupied Jordan Valley as well as illegal Jewish settlements across the



West Bank, which would all but extinguish any possibility of creating a viable Palestinian state.

Netanyahu has tried to make that pledge the cornerstone of his campaign for re-election following unprecedented back-to-back elections last year that left him in a virtual tie with Gantz, with neither able to cobble together a ruling coalition.

**■ Trump's 'ultimate deal'**

Trump, whose team has long been working on the outlines of a secretive peace plan, has repeatedly boasted that he is the most pro-Israeli U.S. president in history.

Abbas cut off all ties with the U.S. in December 2017 after Trump broke with decades of international consensus and recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The Palestinians see the eastern part of the city as the capital of their future state and world powers have long agreed

that Jerusalem's fate should be settled via negotiations.

Trump came to power in 2017 promising to broker Israeli-Palestinian peace, which he labelled the "ultimate deal".

But he has since taken a series of decisions that outraged the Palestinians, including cutting hundreds of millions of dollars in aid and declaring that the US no longer considered Israel's West Bank settlements illegal.

His plan for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is believed to revolve around encouraging huge economic investment.

After many postponements, the peace initiative was expected several months ago.

But it was delayed after September elections in Israel proved inconclusive, and it was not expected to be released until after the March 2 polls.

Israeli media discussed what it said were leaked outlines of the deal on Thursday, saying the US had acquiesced to many key Israeli demands.

The meeting in Washington, DC will come about a month before new Israeli elections, with polls showing Netanyahu's right-wing Likud and Gantz's Blue and White neck-and-neck.

The meeting on Tuesday coincides with an expected session in the Israeli parliament to discuss Netanyahu's potential immunity from prosecution over a series of corruption charges.

Israeli media speculated that Trump had chosen to announce the event in support of Netanyahu's election bid - the third in a year.

(Source: al Jazeera)

## EU officials sign Brexit deal in closed door ceremony



The leaders of two of the European Union's main institutions Friday signed the divorce agreement governing Britain's departure from the bloc next week, sealing the penultimate step in Brexit at a ceremony held without media access.

European Council President Charles Michel tweeted photos of the overnight signing with the president of the EU's powerful executive commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in the presence of their Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier.

Both institutions rejected repeated media demands for access to what is a small but legally significant step marking the first time a member state has ever left the world's biggest trading bloc. Time stamps on the official photos show that the ceremony took place at around 2 a.m. local time.

"Charles Michel and I have just signed the Agreement on the Withdrawal of the U.K. from the EU, opening the

way for its ratification by the European Parliament," Von der Leyen tweeted about six hours after the signing.

"Things will inevitably change but our friendship will remain. We start a new chapter as partners and allies," Michel tweeted in reference to ties with Britain, also hours after the signing ceremony, adding: "I can't wait to write this new page together."

Britain's delayed and disputed Brexit bill became law in the country Thursday, removing the last U.K. obstacle for it to leave on Jan. 31, more than three and a half years after voters narrowly opted to do so in a June 2016 referendum.

The EU Parliament is expected to ratify the Brexit divorce deal next Wednesday just days before the deadline. It appears a formality after the assembly's influential constitutional affairs committee voted in favor by a large margin on Thursday.

(Source: AP)

## Philippine leader threatens to end U.S. pact over ally's visa



The Philippine president has renewed a threat to terminate an accord that allows American forces to train in the country unless Washington restored a visa of a political ally linked to human rights violations.

President Rodrigo Duterte said in an expletives-laced speech Thursday night that he would give notice to the U.S. terminating the Visiting Forces Agreement, known by its acronym VFA, if the reported cancellation of the entry visa of Sen. Ronald dela Rosa was not corrected within a month.

"I'm warning you ... if you won't do the correction on this, I will terminate the ... Visiting Forces Agreement. I'll end that son of a bitch," Duterte said in televised remarks in central Leyte province.

Duterte also rejected an invitation by President Donald Trump to join a special meeting the U.S. leader will host for leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in March in Las Vegas, presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said. The Philippines is a founding member of the

10-nation regional bloc.

Duterte's rejection was partly sparked by the U.S. cancellation of dela Rosa's visa, Panelo said.

The security accord, which took effect in 1999, provides the legal cover for American troops to enter the Philippines for joint training with Filipino troops.

A separate defense pact subsequently signed by the treaty allies in 2014, the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, allowed the extended stay of U.S. forces and authorized them to build and maintain barracks and other facilities in designated Philippine military camps.

There was no immediate reaction from U.S. officials. Philippine Justice Secretary said Friday his department would study how the agreement's abrogation could be done.

Despite Duterte's critical stance, U.S.-Philippine defense ties have remained robust and joint military exercises even increased in numbers last year.

(Source: AP)



# Iranian teams accept to face rivals at ACL Preliminary Stage 2 in UAE

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iranian football teams Esteghlal and Shahr Khodro have accepted to meet their opponents at the AFC Champions League Preliminary Stage 2 in the UAE.

Iranian clubs' general managers met with AFC General Secretary Dato' Windsor John in Asian Football Confederation's headquarters on Thursday to address the situation.

According to the agreement, the Iranian football teams can host their opponents at home in the competition's group stage.

The AFC said that home group-stage matches on matchday one, two and three involving Iranian clubs would be switched to away fixtures "to allow time to reassess the security concerns in the country".

Esteghlal and Shahr Khodro should play their rivals in the UAE in the Preliminary Stage 2.

"To help facilitate the switch to neutral venues, which has been approved by the relevant AFC committees, the AFC will now reschedule the games to January 25, 2020 in the United Arab Emirates," the AFC said



in a statement on Wednesday.

Esteghlal and Kuwait SC match was originally scheduled for Tuesday in Tehran but according to the new fixture, the Iranian team should meet the Kuwaiti side at the Alawir Stadium in Dubai on Saturday.

Shahr Khodro must also face Bahraini football club Riffa at the Sharjah Stadium on Saturday.

A few days ago, AFC sent a letter to the Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) telling them that they would not be hosting AFC Champions League matches for the foreseeable future.

In response to the AFC's decision, four Iranian clubs – Persepolis, Sepahan, Esteghlal and Shahr Khodro - announced that they will withdraw from the tournament if the AFC insists on its decision.

Persepolis have been drawn to meet Al Duhail from Qatar, Saudi Arabia's Al Taawon and UAE champions Sharjah in the group phase of this year's competition.

Sepahan are slated to meet Saudi champions Al Nassr, Qatar's Al Sadd and a qualifier from the play-offs.

## Sepahan sign Omani striker Muhsen Al-Ghassani



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Sepahan football club from Iran completed the signing of Omani international player Muhsen Al-Ghassani.

The 22-year-old forward has joined Sepahan as a free agent.

The striker has signed a one-and-a-half-year contract with Sepahan. The Omani has been in Isfahan since Tuesday and completed his medicals before putting his signature on a deal.

Al-Ghassani began his career with Omani club Al-Suwaig in 2015 and since three years ago he started his professional career with

the club and scored 23 goals in 76 games for them in Oman Professional League, top division of Oman Football Association.

Al-Ghassani was included in Oman's squad for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup in the United Arab Emirates and also in the Asian section of the 2022 World Cup qualification and has scored two goals for Oman national team in 2022 World Cup qualifier Group E games.

Sepahan sit second in the Iran Professional League table, four points behind Persepolis. They will face Machine Sazi in an away match in Tabriz on Saturday.

## Handball captain Esteki retires from Iran duty



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran national handball team captain Allakhkaram Esteki has retired from international duty, bringing to an end a 15-year career with Team Melli.

The 31-year-old player is a member of Iran national team in the 2020 Asian Men's Handball Championship, where the Persians failed to book a place at the competition's semis.

At the end of the match against Korea Republic, Esteki announced his retirement.

He won a bronze medal with Iran handball team in the 2006 Asian Games

in Doha.

Esteki helped Iran win a silver medal in the event four years later in Guangzhou.

With years of experience under his belt, Esteki assisted Iran claim a bronze at the 2014 Asian Men's Handball Championship behind Qatar and Bahrain.

He currently plays for Puente Genil. He joined the Spanish handball team from Dinamo București of Romania.

Esteki started his playing career in Sepahan of Iran in 2005 and joined French team Montpellier after 10 years

## Iran down Tajikistan at CAFA U19 Girl's Futsal Championship

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran defeated Tajikistan 15-0 in the opening match of the CAFA U19 Girl's Futsal Championship 2020 on Friday.

The Iranian team will play Afghanistan on Saturday.

The round-robin tournament has brought Tajikistan, Iran, Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan together in Dushanbe from Jan. 24 to 29.

"The CAFA futsal competition is being held for the first

time and the participating teams compete in the event with a mix of football and futsal players," Iran coach Niloofar Ardalan said before traveling to Dushanbe.

"I think we have to vie with Uzbekistan to win the title. The CAFA tournament can be a good preparatory tournament and we can identify what our strengths and weaknesses are," she added.

The Central Asian Football Association (CAFA) is an association of the football playing nations in Central Asia.



## IPL action resumes: The key talking points

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran Professional League (IPL) is set to resume this weekend after month long break. Iran league will kick off with four matches on the first day of 17th week of the league and two other games on Sunday.

Esteghlal and Shahr Khodro are scheduled to play Kuwait SC and Riffa respectively in the 2020 AFC Champions League Preliminary Stage Two and the teams' matches have been postponed.

Tehran Times Sports Desk looks at talking points ahead of this week's action:

### Machine Sazi vs. Sepahan

Sepahan are three points behind leaders Persepolis and sit second on the table of

IPL. It is the same order as the last season's winners and runners-up of the league. Amir Ghalenoei's side suffered their first defeat of the season against Sanat Naft just before the break. They've strengthened their squad by signing new players including Soroush Rafiei from Shahr Khodro and Omani forward Muhsen Al-Ghassani. Machine Sazi, 9th in the table, parted ways with their former head coach Rasoul Khatibi and replaced him by Ahad Sheikhlari.

### Paykan vs. Nassaji Mazandaran

Paykan did not win in their last seven IPL matches and this can somehow be the game of the season for the carmaker team from

Tehran. It is why Hossein Faraki's team are only one step away from the relegation zone. Nassaji, on the other hand, are six points above the relegation, but they aren't safe too. The big problem for Paykan in the first half of the season was the poor performance of their goalkeeper, and for that reason they have added a new goalkeeper to their squad.

### Gol Gohar vs. Saipa

Gol Gohar will host Saipa in Sirjan. Nothing less than a victory would be acceptable for Gol Gohar as more dropped points could see them for an immediate return to the lower division. They are currently rank 15th in the table. Saipa also struggled in the start of the

season, but they finished the first half of the season with an inspiring 3-1 win against Zob Ahan which snapped their losing streak.

### Zob Ahan vs. Pars Jonoubi Jam

Zob Ahan are nine points above the relegation zone in Iran Professional League after a run of just three wins in their last 16 matches. They appointed Montenegrin coach Miodrag Radulovic as their new coach after parting company with Alireza Mansourian, hoping for the better results in the second part of the 2019-20 season. On the other side, Pars Jonoubi are also starting new era with Hooman Afazeli as their new head coach. They are the third team above the drop zone and place 12th in the table.

## Tokyo 2020: Uniforms for technical officials unveiled

Tokyo 2020 has unveiled the uniforms that will be worn by technical officials at the Olympic and Paralympic Games later this year.

Technical officials will ensure that the rules and regulations of each sport are observed and will make judgments on rule infringements, performances, times and rankings.

The uniforms have been designed in line with Tokyo 2020's guiding principles of "Sustainability and Diversity" with some plant materials used in the composition of the uniforms' fibers.

Both the formal and casual uniforms incorporate features to protect against heat with their material having superior breathability, excellent moisture-absorbing properties and is quick-drying, making them more comfortable to wear and easy to move around in during the Japanese summer.

The formal wear, which was designed by AOKI Holdings, is gender-neutral with unisex jackets and slacks.



Officials will also be able to select either ties or scarves as accessories. Jacket linings, ties and scarves feature

the color kurenai, a traditional Japanese tone while elements of the Tokyo 2020 emblem also feature throughout the uniforms, expressing the Games' value of unity and diversity, feature throughout the uniforms.

While featuring a different color, the design of the technical officials' casual wear is the same as that of the Field Cast volunteers' uniform, emphasizing the unity of purpose between them.

The jackets can easily be removed, and different lengths of trousers worn, allowing wearers to quickly adjust their attire in accordance with the weather and temperature. The casual uniform was created by ASICS Corporation, who have extensive experience in providing uniforms for athletes and teams.

Both formal and casual uniforms will be provided with individual sport federations set to decide when their respective technical officials should use each.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

## Iran fail to book place at World Handball Championship

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iran were held to a 24-24 draw against Korea Republic in the 2020 Asian Men's Handball Championship on Thursday.

Team Melli were the winners until the last seconds of the match but they conceded a goal and the match ended in a 24-24 draw. Superior goal difference helped the Koreans advance to the semis.

Japan and Qatar had already qualified for the semis.

The top four teams qualified for the 2021 World Men's Handball Championship in Egypt.

Iran will play the UAE on Saturday in the fifth-place match.

## Mehrdad Mohammadi linked with Celtic

Celtic have expressed an interest in signing Desportivo Aves attacker Mehrdad Mohammadi.

It's claimed that the Bhoys have identified Mohammadi as a potential target, with Neil Lennon still seemingly interested in reinforcing his attacking options.

The 26-year-old Iran international can play up front or out wide.



Mohammadi has hit seven goals and seven assists for Aves this season, thriving in Portugal since making a summer move from Sepahan in Iran.

A speedy attacker, Mohammadi also has one goal in two caps for Iran, and Celtic moving for him is intriguing given recent links to his twin brother.

The Scottish Sun claimed over the summer that Celtic wanted left back Milad Mohammadi, before he ended up leaving Akhmat Grozny for Gent instead.

Aves may not be too keen to sell having only signed Mohammadi over the summer, but they will now be interesting to see whether Celtic try and tempt them.

(Source: hitc.com)

## Alireza Beiranvand reaches agreement with Gent

**IRNA** — Persepolis goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand has reportedly reached an agreement with Belgian football team Gent.

The 27-year-old goalie has a \$700,000 release clause in his contract, allowing him to leave the team in the January transfer window.

He will join his countryman Milad Mohammadi in the Belgian top-flight football team.

Beiranvand has been a key player for Persepolis in the last three years, helping the Reds win Iran Professional League three times.

Koninklijke Atletiek Associatie Gent, often simply known as Ghent or by its nickname De Buffalo's, are a Belgian sports club, based in the city of Ghent, East Flanders.

The team play in the Belgian Pro League since the 1989-90 season.

## ACL: Malaysian referee to officiate Esteghlal v Kuwait SC

**TASNIM** — Muhammad Nazmi bin Nasaruddin has been appointed to officiate Esteghlal and Kuwait SC match on Saturday.

The Iranian football team will meet Kuwait at the AFC Champions League Preliminary Stage 2 at the Alawir Stadium in Dubai, the UAE.

The 29-year-old official will be assisted by his two countrymen.

Nazmi has refereed in the Malaysia Premier League and Super League since 2011, being promoted to the FIFA international referee list in 2016. He officiated numerous matches in the AFC Champions League and the AFC Cup, as a fourth official.

## Iran chess player Idani refuses to face Israeli opponent

**TASNIM** — Pouya Idani from Iran refused to face an opponent from Israel in the second round of the Gibraltar International Chess Festival 2020.

The competition runs over nine rounds through January 30.

The 18th edition of the tournament is taking place, as usual, at the Caleta Hotel in Gibraltar, with 240 players are in the Masters tournament, including nearly 100 grandmasters.

Iran has participated in the completion with four chess players.



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GUIDE TO  
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Many a sinner is forgiven by God, and many a misled one is there whose depravity is covered up by God.

Imam Ali (AS)

## WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES



**Photo-collage**  
■ An exhibition of photo-collages by Mehdi Mirbaqeri is currently underway at Atbin Gallery. The exhibit named "Poke Side" will run until February 4 at the gallery located at 42 Khakzad Alley, Vali-e Asr Ave. near the Parkway Intersection.



**Painting**  
■ Tehran's CAMA — Contemporary and Modern Art Gallery is hosting to an exhibition of paintings by Mina Sabzi. The exhibition will be running until January 29 at the gallery that can be found at No. 44, 10th Golestan, Pasdaran St.



■ Paintings by Mehdi Ahmadi are on display in an exhibition at Hoor Gallery. The exhibit will run until February 4 at the gallery located at 12 Naeimi Alley, North Mirza Shirazi St., off Motahhari Ave.  
■ A collection of paintings by Sara Kianian is currently on view in an exhibition at Sheis Gallery. The exhibit entitled "Iran" runs until January 29 at the gallery located at Shirzad Alley, near Daneshju Park.



■ Shahpari Behzadi is showcasing her latest paintings in an exhibition at Asar Gallery. The exhibit named "The Highest" will be running until February 14 at the gallery located at No. 16 Barforushan St., Iranshahr St.



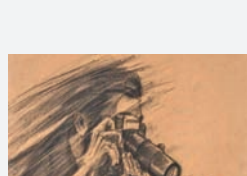
■ An exhibition of paintings by Zohreh Hassani is underway at Haft Samar Gallery. The exhibition will continue until January 29 at the gallery, which can be found at No. 8, Fifth Alley, Kuh-e Nur St., Motahhari Ave.



■ Paintings by Mahmud Mohkami are on view in an exhibition at Baroque Gallery. Entitled "Kings", the exhibition runs until January 29 at the gallery located at No. 1736, Shariati St.



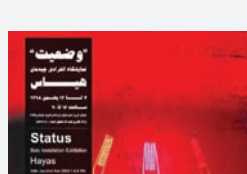
■ Sculpture  
■ Seyhun Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of sculptures by Amir Khoshnudi, Jafar Najibi, Ata Sahrai, Farnak Yusefi and two other artists. The exhibit titled "5+1" runs until January 29 at the gallery located at No. 11, 4th St., Vozara Ave.



**Photo**  
■ Photos by Bahman Jalali are on display in an exhibition at Silk Road Gallery. The exhibition will run until February 16 at the gallery that can be found at No. 210, Vesal St., Keshavarz Blvd.



■ A collection of photos by Masud Niku is on display in an exhibition at Theme Gallery. The exhibit entitled "Borderless Childhood" will be running until January 28 at the gallery located at 10 Zebarjad Alley, North Villa St., off Karimkhan Ave.



**Installation**  
■ Sets of installation by Hayas are currently on display in an exhibit at Jaleh Gallery. The exhibition titled "Status" runs until February 2 at the gallery located at No. 3, Noshahr Alley, Iranshahr St., Karim Khan Ave.

# International calligraphers join Iranians to select Yase Yasin winners

**A R T TEHRAN** — Davut Bektas **d e s k** from Turkey, Obeida Mohammed Saleh Al Banki from Syria and Abdulridha Behiye al-Farjawi from Iraq have joined Iranian calligraphers Abodolsamad Haj Samadi and Mohammad Hosseini to select the best works in naskh and thulth styles of calligraphy in the Yase Yasin International Calligraphy Awards, the organizers have announced.

Iranian calligraphers Mohammad Ehsai, Abbas Akhavein, Keikhosro Khorush, Jalil Rasuli and Ali Shirazi will also be judging the works competing in the nastaliq style of calligraphy. The Mirase Yase Yasin Cultural Institute has established awards to honor the best Persian and Arabic calligraphy works from across the world on Hazrat Fatima (SA), daughter of Prophet Muhammad (S).

The secretariat of the awards has received over 560 submissions from 16 countries including India, Palestine, Lebanon, Malaysia, Algeria and England.

The first edition of the awards will be held in nastaliq, naskh and thulth in Mashhad, home to the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS) on February 15, which is the birthday of Hazrat Fatima (SA).

The organizers also plan to award 18 calligraphy works with honorable mentions.

The winning works will be retained by the Mirase Yase Yasin Cultural Institute in order to showcase them in a museum that the institute plans to establish in a few years.

The Yase Yasin International Calligraphy Awards will be held biennially.



Judges are selecting the best works competing in the Yase Yasin International Calligraphy Awards on January 21, 2020. (Honaronline)

## Culture minister praises Fajr music festival for good discipline

**CULTURE TEHRAN** — Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi has praised organizers of the 35th Fajr International Music Festival for their good planning and discipline.

He made the remarks in his recent visit to the festival's Headquarter on Thursday, the culture ministry announced on Friday.

"Good and precise planning is a form of respect to the guests of the festival, and this year the team of organizers have shown good discipline and that they can be good hosts as in previous years," he added.

Pointing to the recent events in the country, the minister said that the organizers have made worthy efforts to finalize the last program, which is an indication of good programming.

He also emphasized that the recent floods in Sistan-Baluchestan Province, which have caused damage in the region, need to be taken into consideration as a national topic.

An unprecedented heavy rainfall, which began on January 10, has led to flash flooding in the southern provinces, including Sistan-Baluchestan.

The minister also noted that fine foreign musicians and ensembles have been invited to the festival with several foreign musicians in attendance, something which indicates that Iran is still a safe country.

"Iran has been through many sad events in the past month, and the festival needs to bring back the feeling of a normal life to the country," he concluded.

The 35th Fajr International Music Festival will be running from February 13 to 19 in Tehran.

## Troupes from 5 countries to attend Fajr theater festival



A poster for the 38th Fajr International Theater Festival.

**A R T TEHRAN** — Troupes from five countries will be performing in the international competition of the 38th Fajr International Theater Festival, the organizers announced on Thursday.

Six troupes from Poland, Armenia, Belgium, Switzerland and Greece will go on stage during the festival while 25 guests from 19 countries including Finland, Georgia, France, Belgium,

Russia, Italy, Azerbaijan and Denmark have been invited to the Iranian Theater Market.

The theater market will be running from February 2 to 6.

Iranian troupes will also have their performance in different national competition and non-competition sections.

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

## Fajr Film Festival announces jury



This combination photo shows the jury members for the documentary, short film and New Look sections at the 38th Fajr Film Festival.

**A R T TEHRAN** — The organizers of the 38th Fajr Film Festival announced the jury for the documentary, short film and New Look sections on Friday.

The jury includes filmmakers Mehdi Jafari and Ruhollah Hejazi and documentarian Mostafa Razzaq-Karimi.

Film producer Fereshteh Taerpur and screenwriter Hadi Moqadamdoost are the other members of the jury. Ten directorial debut

feature-films including "Butterfly Stroke" by Mohammad Kart, "Reset" by Mohammad Lotfi, "Enemies" by Ali Derakhshandeh and "Fathers" by Salem Salavati will premiere in the New Look section of the festival.

A lineup of 10 movies will also go on screen in the documentary section, while 10 films have been selected to go on screen at the short film section of the festival.

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

## Pan-African exhibition seeks to herald continent's art scene

**DAKAR (Reuters)** — Five towering wooden figures dwarf visitors to the "Lend Me Your Dream" exhibition at Dakar's Museum of Black Civilizations. The sculptures of fire-darkened cedar stand in a circle, as if deep in conversation.

The imposing work by Ivorian artist Koko Bi is meant to show the strength of Africans outside their homelands. It also echoes a central goal of the ambitious traveling show: to forge stronger cultural understanding between Africans within Africa.

To this end, organizers amassed what they say is an unprecedented number of works by around 30 prominent contemporary African artists for the first pan-African art exhibition to tour the continent.

"Too often, the trajectories of artists from Africa have been built through exhibitions in Paris, Berlin, London, New York ...," senior curator Yacouba Konate says in the introduction to the show.

In contrast, this project launched in the Moroccan city of Casablanca last June and will end in Marrakech later in 2020, after touring south via Dakar, Abidjan, Lagos, Addis Ababa and Cape Town.



Visitors walk past a sculpture of a Moroccan artist Mahi Benezine exhibited at "Prete-moi ton reve" (Lend Me Your Dream), an itinerant exhibition of 33 African artists currently displayed at the Museum of Black Civilizations (MCN) in Dakar, Senegal January 10, 2020. Picture taken January 10, 2020. (Reuters/Zohrta Bensemra)

The drive to redraw the map of contemporary African art comes as African governments step up pressure on Western museums to return artifacts seized during the colonial era. Around 90% of Africa's cultural heritage is believed to be held outside the continent.

The more than 100 artworks in "Lend Me Your Dream" are in a range of media, from photography and collage to painting and sculptures of wood, metal or salvaged materials.

Some tackle issues including migration and the legacy of colonialism. Burkina Faso artist Ky Siriki's sculpture "Africa facing its destiny" shows a white couple offering briefcases of loans to a group of black people in exchange for raw commodities.

Other pieces are more abstract, such as Algerian Yazid Oulab's untitled paintings of tendril-like black, white and gray lines or the works by Senegal's Viye Diba that incorporate vivid scraps of traditional wax cloth.

The artists' countries of origin are not mentioned in the descriptions next to their work, as if encouraging the viewer to see the art in a continental rather than national context.