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Iran's steel production hits record of 30% growth in 2019: WSA

TEHRAN — Iran's crude steel production increased by 30 percent in 2019 while the average global growth in this sector stood at 3.5 percent, according to a report released by World Steel Association (WSA). Based on the report, Iran produced 31.9 million tons of the mentioned commodity during 2019 compared to the last year's nearly 24 million tons. WSA says that crude steel production in the world has risen 3.5 percent to reach

1.848 billion tons in 2019. According to the WSA report, China was the world's top steel producer in 2019, with 996.3 million tons of production. In its previous report, WSA had put Iran's steel production at 23.648 million tons in the eleven-month period of 2019, rising 5.3 percent from 22.452 million tons in the same time span of the previous year. **→4**

Europe's security indebted to Soleimani's anti-Daesh efforts: vice president

TEHRAN — Current security in the European and the Middle-Eastern countries is as a result of martyr General Qassem Soleimani's anti-terrorism efforts, the vice president for parliamentary affairs said on Sunday. In an interview with Mehr, Hossein-Ali Amiri said, "Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Guards, fought against ter-

rorists to restore peace and security in the region." "The Middle Eastern countries and even European ones owe their lives to the efforts of Gen. Soleimani," he underlined. General Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on January 3. In a retaliatory move, Iran fired dozens of ballistic missiles at a major U.S. military base in Iraq on January 8. **→2**

Syrian forces capture towns in advance on rebel-held Idlib

Syrian government forces have taken control of several towns in northwestern Idlib province, a war monitor and Syrian state media reported. The Syrian Observatory, a war monitor, said Sunday that six towns in the Idlib countryside had fallen to Syrian government forces in the past 24 hours. The Observatory said the government

advance, backed by heavy Russian airstrikes, has brought Assad's forces to the outskirts of Maarat al-Numan, a strategic urban center about 33 km (20 miles) south of the city of Idlib on a highway that connects Damascus to Aleppo. Syria's al-Watan newspaper reported that army forces were "just around the corner" from the city, whose "doors are wide open". **→10**

EDITORIAL
Mohammad Ghaderi
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The U.S. thirst for oil

The Americans, including Trump, claim that they are standing next to the nations and defend human rights and the freedom of nations. Their claims of human rights are hypocritically shown in their unprecedented sanctions in history on the Iranian people. A look at some Americans' behavior reveals other facts.

1. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressed hope that the Libyan oil facilities be reopened due to the Berlin conference held to examine Libya's crisis.
2. The U.S. Embassy in Libya also called for the resumption of oil exports from Libya.
3. After the meeting with Jens Stoltenberg in London, at the beginning of the NATO summit, Trump said, "We have total control of the oil. And, frankly, we had a lot of support from a lot of different people. But, right now, the only soldiers we have, essentially, in that area, are the soldiers keeping the oil. So we have the oil, and we can do with the oil what we want".
4. Russian Defense Ministry released satellite images of some areas in Syria on October 26, 2019, showing oil was actively extracted and massively exported for processing outside Syria, under the reliable protection of U.S. troops. Despite U.S. sanctions against Syria, Washington make about \$30 million a month through international banditry.
5. "Iraq has the second largest oil fields in the world. \$15 trillion dollar worth of oil second Saudi Arabia. I said very simply that if it is me, we take the oil," Trump said in an interview with the American TV news channel Fox News.
6. Trump has also repeatedly stressed that the U.S. support for Arab countries is due to their oil resources.

This kind of stance shows that what has been carried out by the U.S. in Iraq, Libya and Syria was not for the sake of democracy and justice in these countries, but for their oil. Therefore, the U.S. current concern over the situation of these countries is not about violence against people but about oil reserves. Such a behavior can be regarded as Western democracy and human rights, which are based on oil interests. The behavior indicates that the only way of establishing peace and security in the world, especially in Africa and West Asia, is to end Western domination, which is pursuing its colonial interests. **→3**

Iranian docs enrich international understanding of Iran: DocPoint exec

By Samaneh Aboutaleb
TEHRAN — Kati Juurus, the artistic director of DocPoint — Helsinki Documentary Film Festival has said that the screening of Iranian documentaries in such international events can expand public understanding of Iranian society. "This year the festival will screen five Iranian documentaries, which can increase at least the Finnish audience's knowledge of Iranian documentary films," Juurus told the Tehran Times in an email interview on Friday. The DocPoint festival plans to hold a retrospective of Iranian documentarian Mehrdad Oskui by screening his award-winning documentaries "My Mother's Home, Lagoon", "Nose, Iranian Style", "Sunless Shadows" and "The

Other Side of Burkha". "Family Relations" by Iranian filmmaker Nasser Zamiri, about a father whose family members are against him, will also be screened at the official section of the festival. "I had seen 'Starless Dreams' and got curious about Oskui's career," said Juurus, who is also the curator of the international section of the festival. "He seems to be one of the directors who keep telling the same story with variations. So I decided to find out more about Oskui's work and to run a retrospective of his works as he's not well-known in Finland," she added. She also noted that the festival is choosing films based on their cinematic qualities, topics

and relevance. "A unique voice is always good," she stated. She also said that the Cinéma Vérité, Iran's major international documentary film festival and Iranian documentaries are not widely known in Finland. "Iranian drama films are more famous here," she said and added, "I'm a fan of Asghar Farhadi's films. And Abbas Kiarostami is very well-known here." "There's wonderful filmmaking and interesting filmmakers in Iran, so I hope that there will be cooperation [between Iran and Finland] in the future," she concluded. The DocPoint — Helsinki Documentary Film Festival will open in the Finnish capital on Monday and will continue until February 2.

When the judge and the accused have the same identity

By Tohid Raeisi
The year 2020 began with shocking news: Qassem Soleimani, a top Iranian military general, was assassinated by a direct order of the U.S. president. The news became the headline of the majority of news outlets in the shortest time. Consequently, the New Year has commenced with the highest level of tension between Iran and U.S. never seen since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. From that event till now, a significant number of top Iranian military and political officials have threatened a hard-revenge as a self-defensed action. On the contrary, Donald Trump uttered if Iran shows a military reaction, the U.S. will attack 52 locations, including the cultural targets. Nevertheless, apart from political considerations, under international treaties as well as the customary international law, attack against historical monuments is considered a serious

violation of law and customs applicable in armed conflicts and deemed as a war crime. However, will international organizations be capable of prosecuting a superpower? The International Criminal Court (ICC) was established in 1998 with the signature of many countries to end impunity. They stressed: "Most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole must not go unpunished." While 123 nations are party to Statute of the ICC, the status of the U.S. in this international document is confusing. On the one hand, because of disputes between the successive U.S. administrations, this country is not a party to the Statute. On the other, according to Article 13, (b) of Statute, the UN Security Council can refer a situation to the ICC via an exclusive power. Surprisingly, under Article 16, the Security Council can prevent referring a case to the ICC

as well. In other words, due to veto authority, an international prosecution of the U.S. will be impossible. For example, in September 2018, White House National Security Adviser John Bolton threatened to arrest and sanction judges and other officials of the ICC if it moves to charge any American who served in Afghanistan with war crimes. He said the U.S. was prepared to slap financial sanctions and criminal charges on officials of the court if they proceed against any Americans. In brief, the approach of the U.S. government to international prosecution is hypocritical. For example, the approach of the U.S. in the case of foreign situations like Darfur and Libya is quite different. In contrast, in the case of themselves, this trend is interpreted as a threat against the U.S. national security and consequently leads international criminals go unpunished.

ARTICLE
Damir Nazarov
Journalist from Russia

Sacral motive for the murder of the legendary General

Do you know the story of attempts by Mossad, MI6, and the Central Intelligence Agency to find traces of the presence of Imam Mahdi ("peace be upon him") in Iraq? You should read about it. January 3, 2020 in Baghdad, the Americans during an air strike killed the legendary General of the Islamic revolutionary guard Corps Qasim Soleimani. I believe that the search for the hidden Imam (a.s.) and the fight against the Islamic Republic of Iran are part of the unified policy of the "Big Satan". In the actions of imperialism, there is always a mystical-religious doctrine with the prefix "Satanism" and the service of "Antichrist". The Imperial forces will be led by the ideas of Satan and Dajjal under the cover of military and political aggression against independent sovereignty with a revolutionary ideology based on monotheism. Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies are the only representatives of Imam Mahdi (a.s.). The Islamic World was limited to a Republic with the ideology of Wilayat al-Faqih. Other various Islamic projects like the network structure of the Muslim Brotherhood or local parties with an Islamic background (for example, Saadet in Turkey, Jamaat and Islami in Pakistan, the Islamic salvation front in Algeria, and so on) failed to realize their political potential for the benefit of the Ummah. Some have discredited themselves by tying their fate to Washington's regional stooges. These reasons are the reason why these political associations cannot be called supporters of Mahdaviat. Also, because of the "marginal position" of these organizations within their countries, Washington does not apply to their efforts similar to the struggle of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies. The forces of evil are aware that the state ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the export of the Islamic Revolution. The word "export" should be understood as a spiritual and religious motive and familiarization with the Islamic teachings. The main idea of the export is to revive the "Islamic civilization" which becomes a source for creating "the ground for the arrival of Imam Mahdi (a.s.)". **→10**



Fajr festival to honor 4 theater elites with lifetime achievement awards

TEHRAN — Four Iranian theater elites will be honored with lifetime achievement awards at the 38th Fajr International Theater Festival. "Actor and translator Andranik Khechumyan, actor Mehdi Naziri as well as actors and directors Karim Akbari Mobarakeh and Hossien Atefi are the four veterans who will be honored," the festival director Nader Borhani Marand said in a press conference at Tehran's City Theater Complex on Sunday. **→12**

Europe's current security indebted to General Soleimani's anti-Daesh efforts: vice president

➔ "The US' act of international terrorism, targeting & assassinating General Soleimani—THE most effective force fighting Daesh (ISIS), Al Nusrat, Al Qaeda et al—is extremely dangerous & a foolish escalation," Zarif tweeted immediately after the U.S. attack on Soleimani.



Last week, Esmail Baghaei Hamaneh, Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the UN office in Geneva, said that the United States' assassination of General Soleimani was a hard blow to regional peace and security.

In a speech at the UN Conference on Disarmament, Baghaei Hamaneh said the U.S. ridiculed "principles of human civilization" by such act.

He said that Iran's response to the U.S. "criminal action" conformed to international law and was in line with the right to legitimate defense.

The ambassador said Iran is firm to defend its "sovereignty, territorial integrity and dignity".

Iran called the assassination of the top general by the U.S. military an "act of war" and an instance of "state terrorism".

Ambassador Baghaei Hamaneh warned about the consequences of the U.S. "terrorist crime" and urged the international community to react to this move.

Keeping silence towards assassination of a senior military official when he was on a trip to another independent country will just make the "criminals more insolent", the ambassador warned.

The U.S. claimed that Soleimani was assassinated because he was engineering "imminent attacks" on the U.S.

However, Soleimani was a high-ranking Iranian official who had arrived in Baghdad upon the invitation of the Iraqi government.

Interim Iraqi Prime Minister, Adel Abdul-Mahdi, made it clear that Soleimani arrived in Baghdad not to plan attacks on American targets, but to coordinate de-escalation with Saudi Arabia. "I was supposed to meet Soleimani at the morning the day he was killed; he came to deliver me a message from Iran responding to the message we delivered from Saudi to Iran," Abdul-Mahdi said.

According to CNSNews.com, Zarif said on January 16 that the only people who celebrated the death of Soleimani were President Trump and terrorist group ISIS.

Zarif said the war against ISIS had suffered a "major setback" with the assassination of Soleimani.

Zarif, who was speaking at a geopolitics forum in New Delhi, described Soleimani as "the most-effective anti-Daesh general."

"The two people celebrating the death of General Soleimani are ISIS and President Trump," he said, adding that the United States needed to make clear where it stands in the fight against ISIS.

Cuba rejects pretexts of putschist Bolivian authorities to suspend diplomatic relations

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Plurinational State of Bolivia announced the decision of the putschist Government to suspend diplomatic relations with the Republic of Cuba, claiming that the Cuban Government has systematically affected bilateral relations and has been hostile towards the Bolivian authorities.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cuba strongly rejects the unfounded allegations of Bolivia's de facto government.

Since its violent inrush in power on November 12, 2019, several members of the de facto government in that country have carried out systematic actions to deteriorate and hinder bilateral relations with Cuba.

The acting authorities deployed a ferocious campaign of lies and distortions against Cuba, particularly against Cuba's medical cooperation, and publicly encouraged the commission of violent acts against our health staff, which included brutal, illegal and unjustified raids and searches, false allegations and the detention of Cuban cooperation workers.

As early as November 14, 2019, Cuba was asked to recall its ambassador, who honorably returned to Havana for good on December 7, after having impeccably ensured and completed the safe return of each and every member of the medical staff, which presupposed a significant risk for the diplomatic personnel that organized and accompanied the Cuban cooperation workers in their transit through dangerous areas. From November 15 to 20, the acting Foreign Ministry of Bolivia unilaterally withdrew the entire diplomatic staff accredited to Cuba.

On the 14, the so called Minister of Communications published slanderous allegations against the Cuban diplomatic staff and their relatives, which included offensive remarks about the Cuban ambassador and the outlandish allegation claiming that his wife had organized demonstrations and the resistance against the coup, when in fact she had never visited that country.

As part of that campaign, on November 15, 2019, the Cooperation Workers' Clinic which is a property of the Republic of Cuba in La Paz, was violently raided by law enforcement authorities without any search warrant. As a result of that equipment, materials and other assets were stolen from that facility and so far the Cuban embassy personnel has been prevented access to that property of the Cuban State.

On November 18, a ridiculous denunciation of an alleged plan to attack the putschist authorities in Beni, made reference to the participation of nonexistent Cuban citizens, the purpose of which being to fuel hysteria.

On January 8, 2020, the designated Minister of Health accused our cooperation workers of not being health professionals and carrying out an indoctrination work. In that press conference he was accompanied by Colonel Gonzalo Medinaelli of the Bolivian Police Force, who is at the service of the US embassy in La Paz and has been the main instigator and key actor of the incidents perpetrated against our cooperation workers.

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

Bin Alawi and Zarif meet again in Tehran

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Yusef bin Alawi, the Omani foreign minister, held talks in Tehran on Sunday with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. Alawi was in Tehran on January 21 for talks with Zarif. Alawi arrived in Tehran on Sunday directly from Davos, where world leaders gathered to discuss global, regional and industry agendas.

The visits by Oman's chief diplomat comes as Iran and the U.S. came close to a full-fledged war in early January as the U.S. army assassinated top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and Iran retaliated by striking U.S. military bases in Iraq with dozens of ballistic missiles.

According to a report by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, the two chief diplomats discussed regional issues, especially Iran-U.S. cooperation in the Strait of Hormuz.

Zarif and Alawi said that the Iranian and Omani governments are determined to continue cooperation and consultations in line with guaranteeing safety of navigation and energy supply, the Foreign Ministry said.

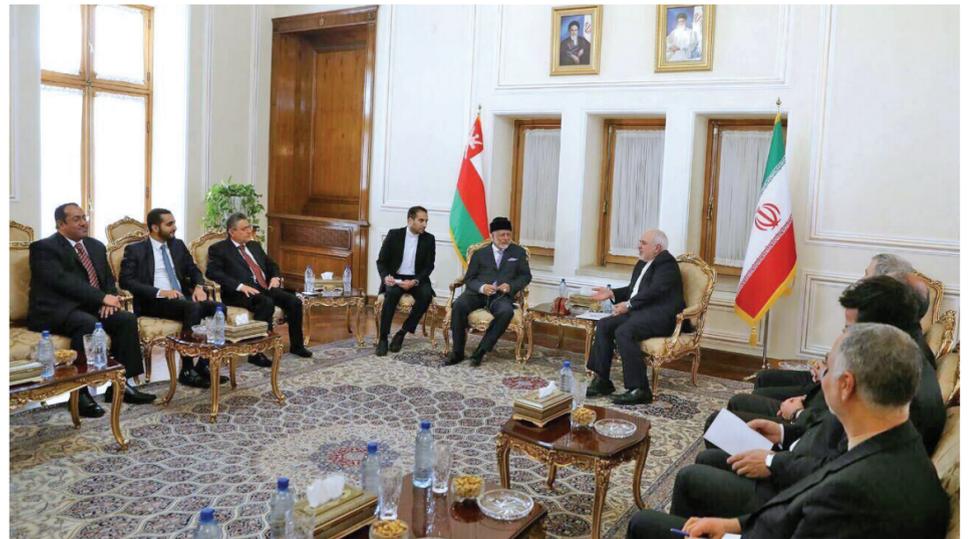
The Strait of Hormuz is a strategic artery linking Middle East crude producers to key markets in Asia Pacific, Europe, North America and beyond.

It is a waterway separating Iran and Oman, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. It is 21 miles wide at its narrowest point, but the shipping lane is only two miles wide in either direction.

In their meeting in Tehran in December, the Iranian and Omani foreign ministers discussed key international issues, bilateral ties and Tehran-initiated Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE).

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

"Based upon the historical responsibility of my country in maintaining security, peace, stability and



progress in the Persian Gulf region and Strait of Hormuz, I would like to invite all the countries directly affected by the developments in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz to the 'Coalition for Hope', meaning Hormuz Peace Endeavor," President Hassan Rouhani told the UN delegates.

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

the Strait of Hormuz.

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

In a post on his Twitter account on October 15, Zarif renewed Iran's call to all countries bordering the Persian Gulf to join Tehran to "forge a blueprint for peace, security, stability, and prosperity" in the region.

AEOI: Iran's stockpile of uranium enriched below %5 exceeds 1,200kg

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iran's stockpile of nuclear fuel enriched below 5 percent has surpassed 1,200 kilograms, the special assistant to the chief of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) announced on Saturday.

"After the fifth step of reduction of obligations under the JCPOA, our uranium stockpile enriched below 5 percent has surpassed 1,200 kilograms," Ali Asqar Zare'ani explained.

Zare'ani added that the AEOI is capable of enriching uranium with any desired percentage.

Zare'ani also announced that Iran is planning to unveil a new generation of centrifuge machines on April 8, the date marking the National Nuclear Technology Day in Iran.

He went on to say that Iran plans to inaugurate the Khandab reactor's cold tests on March 21.

Earlier this month, Zare'ani had said that the AEOI was set to unveil the 16th generation of domestically-manufactured centrifuge machines in early April 2020.

"We certainly will showcase more products both in terms of volume and quality on April 8," the nuclear official ex-



plained at the time.

"One of the newest achievements is the latest version of the centrifuge machine with SWU 50 (separate work unit), which is designed and manufactured by the Atomic Energy Organization's experts. The new centrifuge machine will be

unveiled on the national nuclear day in Tehran," he said.

"The new centrifuge machine is the 16th version of such machines."

He added, "We had five centrifuge machines for research and development purposes but now we have 15 generations of centrifuge machines."

Iran issued a statement on January 6, announcing suspension of all limits under the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. It was the fifth and final step in reducing commitments by Iran.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran no longer faces limitations on the capacity of enrichment, purity of enrichment, amount of enriched material and research and development," the statement said.

The statement added that Iran would continue cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

It was noted in the statement that Iran would reverse its decision once the sanctions were removed and the country could enjoy the benefits of the nuclear deal.

Zarif advises Trump to base his decisions on facts

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has urged the U.S. President Donald Trump to base his foreign policy decisions on facts, rather than Fox News headlines or his Farsi translators.

"@realdonaldtrump is better advised to base his foreign policy comments & decisions on facts, rather than @FoxNews headlines or his Farsi translators," Zarif tweeted on Saturday.

Trump said in a tweet on Saturday, "Iranian Foreign Minister says Iran wants to negotiate with the United States, but wants sanctions removed. @FoxNews @OANN No Thanks!"

The tweet by Trump came after Zarif said in an interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel that Tehran still does not reject talks

on the condition Washington "correct[ed] its past" and removed a series of tough economic measures.

Zarif said Trump has misunderstood his remarks, suggesting that Trump must read the entire interview to be better informed.

"To be better informed, he can read my entire interview (in English) [spiegel.de/international/...](http://spiegel.de/international/)," Zarif stated.

Zarif posted an excerpt from his interview, when he was asked about the possibility of negotiations following the U.S. assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, advising Trump, "Too many words? Then just read this."

Der Spiegel: Do you rule out the possibility of negotiations with the

U.S. following Soleimani's murder?

Zarif: I never rule out the possibility that people will change their approach and recognize the realities. For us, it doesn't matter who is sitting in the White House. What matters is how they behave. The Trump administration can correct its past, lift the sanctions and come back to the negotiating table. We're still at the negotiating table. They're the ones who left. The U.S. has inflicted great harm on the Iranian people. The day will come when they will have to compensate for that. We have a lot of patience," Zarif said in the interview.

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.

Tehran: U.S. border security officers harassing Iranians

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi on Saturday censured the United States as the country's border security officials are "harassing" Iranians.

Mousavi said such behaviors are instances of "sheer racism" and "violation of international human rights laws and norms".

"The US border security authorities are reportedly harassing Iranians due to their nationality. That's sheer racism in violation of intl human rights laws and norms and yet another testament to this Administration's evil obsession with IRAN and its deep animosity to IRANIANS!" Mousavi tweeted.

Reportedly, a growing number of Iranian students are being detained, interrogated and deported by authorities upon arrival at the U.S. airports.

In a report on Thursday, The New York Times said, "A growing number of Iranian students share this collective memory. Many had secured admission to some of the world's most prestigious universities. The State Department approved them for entry into the United States after a notoriously grueling, months long vetting process and issued them visas to come to the United States."

"But when the students reached American airports, Customs and Border Protection officers disagreed and sent them home, some with a five-year ban on reapplying to return to the United States," the report added.

According to the paper, since August, at least 16 Iranian students have been turned away at airports, losing their chances to study at prestigious universities, amid new tensions between the U.S. and Iran.

Shahab Dehghani, an Iranian student, who was planning to study economics at Northeastern University, arrived in



Boston on January 19 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.

Following is an excerpt of The New York Times' report: Amin, 34, entering a Ph.D. program at the University of Florida, was turned away Jan. 1 at Hartsfield-Jackson Airport in Atlanta.

A flight back to Iran was not available for a couple of days, so Amin said he was placed in a chilly holding cell for six hours, then transported in cuffs and chains to an immigration detention facility in Georgia. The officers there ordered him to strip naked in front of them.

Mohammad, 30, was studying at Northeastern University. He was turned away at Boston's Logan International Airport on Oct. 6.

After Mohammad was told that his visa was going to be revoked, the officers took a picture of him, for their records.

Then, he says, they laughed. "I looked as despondent in the photo as I felt and they found it very funny. I felt demeaned and humiliated," he said.

Hamid, 22, entering a combined master's and Ph.D. program in engineering at University of Notre Dame, was sent back Jan. 11 from Chicago's O'Hare International Airport.

Hamid, who had been accepted for a fully-funded graduate program, waited eight months for his visa. Then when he arrived in Chicago, he was placed in a holding cell for 19 hours.

Officers asked him for his opinion on political events in Iran and whether he thought Iran was doing "the right thing." He was asked what he thought about the Ukrainian jet that had been shot down three days earlier by two Iranian missiles. Hamid told the officer he had a friend who died on the plane.

Hamid said he and two other detained travelers were given foam mattresses and thin blankets, and he hardly slept.

"After 24 hours, I was transferred to the boarding gate in the company of two armed officers, as if I was some kind of terrorist. It was both humiliating and dehumanizing," he said.

Reihana Emami, 35, planned to attend Harvard Divinity School. She was turned away Sept. 18 at Logan airport.

The officers' questions were simple at first, Reihana said: "Where did you work?" "Who are your relatives?" But then the conversation turned to unfamiliar territory.

During the nine hours she was questioned, she said, she asked if she could rest, because she had been traveling for 18 hours. But the officer told her that lots of travelers had done the same, and a Harvard student "should be clever enough to handle" it.

"Now I am jobless," she said, adding that she and her family were still struggling to believe what happened. "It was like a shock and trauma for everybody."

Iranian students recall being humiliated at U.S. airports

POLITICAL TEHRAN — At least 16 Iranian students have been turned away at U.S. airports due to escalating tensions between Tehran and Washington in recent weeks.

The New York Times said many of the students had secured admission to some of the world's most prestigious universities. According to the paper, the U.S. State Department approved them for entry into the United States after a notoriously grueling, months-long vetting process and issued them visas to come to the United States.

But when the students reached American airports, Customs and Border Protection officers disagreed and sent them home, some with a five-year ban on reapplying to return to the United States.

Most of them said they were not told why they were deemed "inadmissible" — a broad label that customs officers have wide discretion to apply.

Mohammad, 30, was studying at Northeastern University. He was turned away at Boston's Logan International Airport on October 6.

After Mohammad was told that his visa was going to be revoked, the officers took a picture of him, for their records. Then, he says, they laughed. "I looked as despondent in the photo as I felt and they found it very funny. I felt demeaned and humiliated," he said.

Amin, 34, entering a Ph.D. program at the University of Florida, was turned away January 1 at Hartsfield-Jackson Airport in Atlanta.

When they told him he had been deemed inadmissible and would be returned to Iran, he collapsed onto a chair, crying.

A flight back to Iran was not available for a couple of days, so Amin said he was placed in a chilly holding cell for six hours, then transported in cuffs and chains to an immigration detention facility in Georgia. The officers there ordered him to strip naked in front of them.

"The moment I entered the cell, I lost my spirit," he said. Now back in Iran, he has lost \$6,000 — the equivalent of two years' work — on his travel and applications. The company he worked for has filled his old position. Having moved out of his apartment in Tehran, he is bouncing from one relative's home to another.

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and Ph.D. program in engineering at University of Notre Dame, was sent back January 11 from Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. When he arrived in Chicago, he was placed in a holding cell for 19 hours.

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Hamid said he and two other detained travelers were given foam mattresses and thin blankets, and he hardly slept.

"After 24 hours, I was transferred to the boarding gate in the company of two armed officers, as if I was some kind of terrorist. It was both humiliating and dehumanizing," he said.

He phoned his parents when he reached Istanbul, en route back to Tehran. "There were so much pain in my parents' voice," he said.

Reihana Emami, 35, planned to attend Harvard Divinity School. She was turned away on September 18 at Logan airport.

The officers' questions were simple at first,

Reihana said: "Where did you work?" "Who are your relatives?" But then the conversation turned to unfamiliar territory.

During the nine hours she was questioned, she said, she asked if she could rest, because she had been traveling for 18 hours. But the officer told her that lots of travelers had done the same, and a Harvard student "should be clever enough to handle" it.

"Now I am jobless," she said, adding that she and her family were still struggling to believe what happened. "It was like a shock and trauma for everybody."

Pegah, 28, was preparing to study for a master's degree in business administration at Southern New Hampshire University. She was returned home on August 1 from Logan airport.

After waiting 15 months for her visa to be issued, Pegah flew from Shiraz, Iran, to Boston. "When I entered the airport the bad treatment started," she said.

At one point, Pegah asked an officer if she could have a snack.

"He threw a candy at me with terrible manners, like I was a dog," Pegah said. "He shouted at me, 'Take it! I told you to take it!'" Mahla Shahkhajeh, 26, was accepted into

a Ph.D. program in industrial engineering at Iowa State University, but was turned away on December 22 at Logan airport.

She had already left her apartment and quit her job in Tehran. "All of my efforts and all the money I spent became nothing."

Behzad, 32, who planned to study material sciences at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts, was turned back August 19 at Logan Airport. "The room was an exact replica of what you see in Hollywood movies," he said. "It was very bright and small. I had to sit in a chair, with no table. A guy behind a computer started to interrogate me." Behzad said he went through multiple rounds of questioning for about eight hours, and had not slept in nearly two days. "I was in too much shock to even ask for water," he said.

Mohammad Elmi, 31, was to begin a Ph.D. program at University of California, Santa Barbara. He was denied entry on December 13 at Los Angeles International Airport.

Arash, 30, accepted into a Ph.D. program in electrical engineering at the University of Massachusetts, was sent back along with his wife, Saba, 30, on January 13 at Logan airport.

Black box of downed Ukrainian plane to remain in Iran: MP

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — An Iranian lawmaker says the country has decided to examine the flight recorders from a Ukrainian jetliner that was mistakenly shot down near Tehran on January 8 domestically.

Speaking to Tasnim on Sunday, Farajollah Rajabi, a member of the Majlis Development Committee, said the black box of the Ukraine International Airlines Boeing 737-800 plane will remain and be analyzed inside Iran.



The Ministry of Transport and Urban Development is going to read the data from the Ukrainian plane's black box in the country, Rajabi added.

"Our policy is that the Ukrainian plane's black box would remain in Iran and be read here," the lawmaker said.

The General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces said the country's air defense unintentionally shot down the Ukrainian passenger plane on January 8 amid the highest level of readiness because of a possible military attack by the U.S.

All 176 people on board the plane were killed.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei ordered the Iranian Armed Forces to hold an inquiry about the faults and shortcomings that resulted in the unintentional downing of the plane.

Expressing his deepest sympathy to the families of the victims of the incident, the Leader urged the relevant officials to take the necessary cautionary measures in order to prevent a recurrence of such incidents.

Last week, Canada asked Iran to hand over to France or Ukraine the black boxes from the Ukrainian airliner.

South Korea not to be involved in any military action against Iran: defense minister

Seoul has no plan to join any U.S.-led possible operation against Iran, the South Korean Minister of National Defense has announced.

Jeong Kyeong-doo was quoted by KBS World as saying that his country's Cheonghae Unit, whose operational boundary has been expanded to include the Strait of Hormuz, will not intervene in probable military clashes between the U.S. and Iran.

The minister also clarified terminology saying it's not a dispatch to the Strait of Hormuz but an expanded operating area.

Yonhap quoted a Cheong Wa Dae official as saying earlier this month that Seoul was consulting with Tehran on how to secure the Strait of Hormuz and the possibility of sending troops to the Middle East.

"As you know, we will have to make a decision in consideration of the people's life and security as well as oil supply," the official said, adding relevant options are "still being reviewed".

Consultations with Iran are under way as well, he added.

Speaking shortly after the National Security Council (NSC) meeting held at that time, Presidential Chief of Staff Noh Young-min told a local radio talk show that "there has been considerable progress, internally" in discussions on the sensitive issue of possible troop dispatch.



Last year in August, President Hassan Rouhani said that there was no need for foreign forces to maintain security in the Persian Gulf region.

"Major powers, especially America, seek nothing except causing division and emptying treasury of the Islamic countries. The Persian Gulf littoral states can maintain security and stability in the region," Rouhani said during a cabinet meeting at the time.

"The regional countries can maintain security through unity, solidarity and dialogue. Undoubtedly, the United States' claims and actions will bring them [regional countries] no benefits. The regional countries have always been and will be 'brothers' and division only serves the enemies' interests," Rouhani remarked.

In an interview Al-Jazeera on August 12, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said, "We believe that the best the U.S. can do for the protection of maritime navigation is to just leave people alone; don't interfere."

Zarif added, "What we have called for, and repeat, is that our neighbors - all of us - belong to this region, we cannot leave this region. Others will leave this region; others will not secure us; others will not provide us with the security umbrella that we need. We can provide each other with that security umbrella. We extend our hand, and our hand remains extended, to all our neighbors."

Zarif said on August 9 that the Persian Gulf is a "national security priority for Iran" and that Tehran will not "hesitate to safeguard its security" in this strategic waterway, which he described as a "vital lifeline" for the Islamic Republic.

The chief diplomat warned that military presence of extra-regional forces is absolutely a "source of insecurity".

"Mindful of this reality, any extra-regional presence is by definition source of insecurity - despite propaganda," Zarif wrote on his Twitter account.

Rouhani felicitates India on Republic Day

POLITICAL TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani has felicitated India on its Republic Day, calling for expansion of Tehran-New Delhi ties, Mehr reported.

In two separate messages to Indian President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Rouhani expressed hope that Tehran-New Delhi relations would enhance in all fields in the interests of both nations.

"Given the wide cultural, historical and long-standing common grounds, I hope we will see the growth

and development of relations across all fields of mutual interest," he said.

The president wished the Indian people prosperity and progress, stating that "the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of India, having ancient cultures and civilizations in Asia, have witnessed the golden age of bilateral relations."

India freed itself from centuries of colonial British rule in August of 1947. They began work on a new gov-

erning document for the sprawling nation, and it was adopted in November 1949.

But it wasn't until January 26, 1950, that its new constitution went into effect.

And on that day, with an estimated population of about 359 million people, India officially became the world's largest democracy.

And from that first January 26 onward, the country celebrates with Republic Day.

Protesters oppose U.S. economic warfare on Iran

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Demonstrators gathered outside the United States State Capitol Building on Saturday afternoon to oppose the U.S. economic warfare against Iran.

Hosted by several activist organizations in the Madison area, the rally was led by the Party for Socialism and Liberation.

Speakers at the event said, while relations between Iran and the U.S. have seemed to settle, the U.S. is still engaging in economic warfare with Iran.

"It's easy to see violence as being bombs and bullets but it's harder to see it as people being unable to get certain kinds of food or medicine they need and that's what the U.S. sanctions do," said PSL representative Sawyer Johnson, Channel 3000 reported.

Protester and member of the activist street band Forward Marching Band said these types of actions make the Iranian people collateral damage.



"It's always the poor in our country and in any country that suffer and have no justice," she added. "War doesn't produce justice it produces sorrow, and so that's why we are here for this."

About 50 people attended the rally, including Thomas Scheevel who said, "It just important to show that there's not passive acceptance of war."

This is the second "No War on Iran" protest held in Madison this month.

Earlier this month, a U.S. drone strike assassinated top general Qassem Soleimani, Iran's top anti-terror commander, and his comrades-in-arms in an airstrike in Baghdad.

The U.S. airstrike also martyred Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander

of the anti-terrorist Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

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

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

On January 8, Iran carried out the Shahid Soleimani Operation against an American airbase in Iraq with more than ten missiles.

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

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

Over 1,000kg of illicit drugs seized in southeaster Iran: police

POLITICAL TEHRAN — A sum of 1,090 kilograms of different types of narcotics were seized from drug traffickers in the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan, the provincial police chief said on Saturday.

Brigadier General Mohammad Qanbari said that the province's anti-narcotic police, tipped off by the intelligence, planned to stage an ambush operation against a gang of drug traffickers which was ended in armed clash with gang members in a spot on the Iranshahr-Nikshahr road.

He added that one of drug traffickers was killed and the remaining pocket of them fled the area using the darkness of the night.

The commander went on to say that a batch of weapons and ammunition were seized and 813 kg opium, 181 kg crystal, 41 kg hashish, 40 kg heroin and 12 kg of other illicit drugs

were seized in the operation.

Last year in June, the head of UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) emphasized financial and technical support for Iran's efforts in fighting drugs and crimes.

The UNODC Executive Director Yuri Fedotov in a meeting with Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Gholamhossein Dehqani acknowledged the role of Iran in fighting illegal drugs, adding that the efforts had been emphasized in the report of the UNODC 2019.

He also noted that the UNODC was determined to financially and technically support Iran with regard to fighting drugs and crimes.

Bordering Afghanistan as the main source of opium production in the world, Iran is on the frontline of the fight against drug trafficking.



The U.S. thirst for oil

1 -> The U.S. behavior represents American economic terrorism that merely seeks to plunder the wealth of other states.

The difference between Iran's view, which insists on the authority of nations over their

countries' fate and resources, with that of the U.S., which is seeking to plunder and colonize other countries, has led the nations in the world trust Iran and distrust the United States.

In fact, it is the result of the Iranian

sincere behavior and American dishonesty that caused the regional states to hold great funeral ceremonies for Major General Qassem Soleimani, while asking for the U.S. pullout from the region.

The behaviors by the U.S. reveal the legitimacy of Iran's stance on the need to expel aggressors from the region as the main solution for establishing peace and security that will be achieved by the nations' vigilance.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	418312.3
IFX	5340.55

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,310 rials
GBP	54,929 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$59.89/b
WTI	\$54.19/b
OPEC Basket	\$63.26/b
Gold	\$1,573.30/oz
Silver	\$18.17/oz
Platinum	\$1,010.40/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

'Six prioritized freeway projects to be completed in 2 years'

ECONOMY TEHRAN – Deputy Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Kheirollah Khademi says six prioritized freeways projects with a total length of 550 kilometers (KM) are planned to be inaugurated by the Iranian Calendar year of 1400 (starts in March 2021).

"With these new freeways going operational, the length of the country's freeways will increase by nearly 25 percent," IRNA quoted Khademi as saying on Saturday.



According to the official, the Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company (CDTIC) has it on the agenda to build 3500 km of new freeways and highways across the country, nearly 1200 of which is currently under construction.

Khademi further noted that of the country's total 38,000 kilometers of arterial roads, about 18,000 kilometers are highways and about 2400 kilometers are freeways.

According to the official, in the long run, the government plans to construct 18,000 kilometers of highways and freeways in the country.

"So, considering the 3500 km of new freeways which are being constructed, still 15,000 km of new freeways and highways are expected to be built across the country," Khademi added.

In mid-December 2019, Khademi announced that over 3,000 kilometers of railways and 1,200 kilometers of freeways are currently under construction in the country.

Khademi, who is also CDTIC's managing director, had also said in November 2019, that some 7,800 Km of highways, freeways and main roads were under construction throughout the country.

Roads account for 90 percent while railway accounts for 10 percent of transportation in Iran, according to the official.

Global uncertainty is dragging world economy, not India: Brazilian minister

It is not India but the global uncertainty, which is dragging the world economy towards a synchronized slowdown, said on Saturday Brazil's Deputy Economy Minister Marcos Troyjo, currently on a four-day visit to India along with President Jair Bolsonaro.

Responding to a question over the International Monetary Fund (IMF) blaming India for the global slowdown, Troyjo in an exclusive interview to said: "I don't think that India should be blamed for this. There are other factors responsible for driving the global GDP growth towards a slowdown. India's GDP is now two trillion US dollars. It is also true that for the past four years, India has outgrown China, for example, in terms of percentage growth."

"Last time, when I saw the numbers for India, it still looked rigorous, especially for a country like Brazil that has recently faced a very steep recession. I think the global uncertainty that has emerged from trade tensions and domestic policy uncertainties, is responsible for the slowdown in the world economy. Once these are eased, then the global forecast is going to pick up again," the minister added.

Speaking about trade relations between India and Brazil, Troyjo referred to the 15 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed between the two countries earlier today in the field of science, agriculture, trade and investments.

"India with its 1.2 billion people is a huge market for Brazilian products. There is a growing demand for more food, infrastructure and minerals. India is one of the top priorities of our foreign economic policy," the minister told ANI.

He said that Brazil wants to export poultry, sugar as well as ethanol and is looking forward to more foreign investments to his country.

"Indian investors will have a good investment opportunity in Brazil. Brazil emphasizes on privatization concessions in energy, railroads, seaports, airports to Indian investors," he said.

Talking about geopolitical situations, the minister noted that Brazil is "paying attention" to the current situation in the Asian region.

Troyjo further emphasized on the use of local currency among BRICS nations. He said that the New Development Bank is looking into organizing projects that can be financed in each member country.

(Source: auto.economicstimes.indiatimes.com)

Iran's steel production hits record of 30% growth in 2019: WSA

ECONOMY TEHRAN – Iran produced 2.13 million tons of crude steel in November 2019, which was 2.6 percent lower than 2.187 million tons of the product produced in November 2018, the same report confirmed.

According to World Steel Association, Iran became the world's tenth largest steel producer in 2018.

Iran which stood at the 13th place in 2017 could lag behind three major steel producers in the world, namely Italy, Taiwan, and Ukraine to stand at the 10th

place in 2018, despite the re-imposition of sanctions by the U.S.

In early May 2019, Washington imposed new sanctions on Iran's metals and minerals sectors in an attempt to [as the U.S. president Trump put it] "choke off the country's largest non-petroleum related sources of export revenue".

While at the first glance [considering Trump's comments], this might seem to be a heavy hit to Iran's economy in the near future but a close look into the country's



exports data could reveal Trump's great miscalculations. In fact, this could even be considered a "blessing in disguise" for the country's minerals and metal industry.

In a press conference in last June, Iranian Deputy Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Jafar Sarqini said the ministry

has taken necessary measures to maintain the country's metal exports despite U.S. sanctions.

According to the official, Iran's annual steel production is planned to reach 45 million tons by the Iranian calendar year 1400 (March 2021-March 2022).

TPO's package for supporting non-oil exports approved



ECONOMY TEHRAN – Iran's Resistance Economy Headquarters has approved a "Non-Oil Export Support Package" prepared by the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) for the rest of the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 19, 2020), the TPO portal reported on Sunday.

"The Resistance Economy Headquarters approved the TPO's non-oil export support package, in line with the implementation of the country's general resistance economy policies and in order to meet the goals of the current year's non-oil export development programs," TPO Head Hamid Zadboum said.

According to the official, the mentioned package has been developed by the Iranian Trade Promotion Organization, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, the National Planning and Budgeting Organization (PBO) and the National Development Fund (NDF).

He noted that in this package, various incentives have been considered for exporters, which will be provided for them based on the priorities determined in the package.

"The export incentives covered in the

non-petroleum export support package include National Development Fund resources in addition to the budget allocated by the Trade Promotion Organization for promoting exports," Zadboum explained.

Increasing non-oil exports to the neighboring countries is one of the major plans that Iranian government is pursuing in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21, 2019).

Deputy Industry Minister Hossein Modares Khiabani has said that his ministry is planning to increase the value of Iran's non-oil exports to its 15 neighbors up to \$50 billion.

"Our goal is to be able to meet five percent of our neighboring countries' needs, which would amount to more than \$50 billion a year considering the total imports of all the 15 countries which is at least \$1 trillion annually," he said in last August.

The official expressed hope that the mentioned goal would be realized before the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (which starts in March 2021), saying that the Institute for Trade Studies and Research and also Trade Promotion Organization are currently developing detailed plans to achieve this goal.

Non-oil trade at over \$72b in 10 months



ECONOMY TEHRAN – The value of Iran's non-oil trade hit \$72.3 billion during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019-January 20, 2020), the head of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced in a press conference on Sunday.

Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi put the value of non-oil exports at \$35.5 billion and that of the non-oil imports at \$36.8 billion during the ten-month period, IRNA reported.

He said the non-oil exports rose 20 percent in terms of weight while dropped three percent in terms of value, and non-oil imports increased eight percent in weight with no change in terms of value.

Last week, Finance and Economic Minister Farhad Dejjpasand said the decrease in the value of the non-oil export during the first ten months of this year has been mostly due to a 30-percent decrease which the government has applied on the value of the exported items, since the reported prices were believed to be more than the real value of the goods.

"The three-percent fall in terms of value is because exporters believed that the value assigned to the exported goods

were more than their real value considering their base prices," the minister said.

Iran's non-oil trade with other countries registered a \$100-million positive balance in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21 – December 21, 2019).

The country's non-oil exports reached \$31.9 billion in the first nine months of the current year, while the imports stood at \$31.8 billion.

The value of Iran's non-oil exports stood at \$44.3 billion in the previous Iranian calendar year while \$42.6 billion worth of commodities were shipped into the country.

An official with the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry announced last week that Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) of Iran is tasked to establish specialized export terminals in certain provinces to facilitate the exports of some commodities.

Deputy Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Hossein Modares Khiabani said Trade Promotion Organization is expected to pay particular attention to providing the necessary infrastructure for the expansion of the country's non-oil exports.

Self-sufficiency in auto parts manufacturing at 80%

ECONOMY TEHRAN – Iran has achieved 80 percent self-sufficiency in manufacturing of auto parts, Iranian Auto Parts Makers Association Maziar Beyglou said in a TV program on Saturday.

The official expressed hope that self-reliance in this sector reaches 90 percent through domestic production of required raw materials, Mehr news agency reported.

He also said that through setting up three desks on self-reliance the auto part industry has already managed to indigenize manufacturing of 99 auto parts.

Domestic parts manufacturers are able to play a key role in creating a boom in the country's manufacturing and employment sectors, in addition to playing their leading role as the auto industry's intermediates, Beyglou said two weeks ago, while announcing that 40,000 workers who were dismissed by the country's auto parts makers have been re-employed following a boom in the auto industry.

He noted that if the current production trend continues, "we will expect an increase in the automotive industry's production next year."

Mentioning the industry ministry's strategies for promoting domestic production, the official said: "Following the current policies, we will see the production of a number of new vehicles from domestic automakers in the coming years."



Last month, the Specialized Manufacturers of Auto Parts Association announced that Iranian carmakers have prepared some incentive packages to encourage investment making by the auto parts manufacturers.

Also during the TV program on Saturday regarding domestic production of auto parts, Mehdi Sadeqi Niaraki, the acting director of the industry department of Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade, said, "The policies of government and Industry Ministry are all in line with supporting domestic

production and all necessary laws and regulations including those on tariffs are to strengthen domestic production to achieve more self-sufficiency".

In last May, Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani issued a directive on "strengthening domestic manufacturing of imported auto parts".

Addressing two of his deputies, Farshad Moqimi, deputy for industrial affairs, and Mohammad-Baqer Ali, the board chairman of Iran's Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO), the minister put emphasis on using the highest potential of human resources for strengthening domestic manufacturing of auto parts which are currently imported to the country.

Highlighting the orders of the Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei on supporting production in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21, 2019), which is named the year of "Pickup in Production" by the supreme leader, Rahmani stressed that cooperation among all car makers, auto part manufacturers, knowledge-based companies and enterprises is vital for strengthening domestic manufacturing of imported auto parts.

This movement should be all-out promoted to combat sanctions and also prevent from exit of foreign currency from the country, the minister noted.

Global economy likely to continue in a Goldilocks scenario for 2020: QNB

The current 'Goldilocks scenario' for the global economy will continue for longer, QNB has said in an economic commentary.

"Like Goldilocks in the old British tale, most investors prefer an economy that resembles a good porridge, neither too hot nor too cold, but 'just right', QNB noted.

In macro terms, this translates into an ideal scenario of moderate growth with high employment and low inflation. In other words, an economy that is hot enough to propel or maintain earnings growth, but cool enough to keep monetary authorities from tightening policy.

This is relevant as policy responses to inflation pressures coming from overheated

economies have often caused both recessions and bear markets.

"Goldilocks is therefore a comfortable scenario of persistent growth prospects with low downside risks. There is little doubt that at some point in Q3 last year global recession/deflation fears were reversed by more aggressive monetary policy easing and positive developments in trade negotiations, QNB said.

Since then, the economic expansion cycle gained further support with almost all major asset classes rallying. This can be observed in the sharp rebound of the Sentix global aggregate economic index from a position that was negative and

deteriorating to one that is positive and improving.

The investor sentiment

The index tracks investor sentiment about economic activity. Downturn fears suddenly turned into a condition that is 'just right. But can the sweet spot continue for long?

In QNB view, the Goldilocks scenario is likely to continue well into 2020 and it has laid out four reasons that underpin its position.

Major central banks are unlikely to reverse recently implemented accommodative measures. Chances of a significant 'inflation scare are slim due

to the persistence of secular deflationary forces, including globalization and the structural gap in the bargaining power between labor and capital. This places a cap on wage growth and limits the prospects of inflation acceleration.

Moreover, the U.S. Federal Reserve (Fed) is currently changing its monetary policy reaction function, i.e., the responsiveness of nominal policy rates to changes in inflation and output. Fed officials moved towards a new approach that targets 'inflation symmetry within the business cycle, i.e., periods of above target inflation are expected to offset periods of below target inflation.

(Source: menafn.com)

Oil recovery from Azadegan oil field to increase by 3.5b barrels

ENERGY TEHRAN – Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said Tehran University is committed to increase Azadegan oil field's recovery factor up to 10 percent from its current six percent, which means an increase of up to 3.5 billion barrels of the field's recoverable reserves.

Speaking to the press after a meeting with the heads of the country's major universities on Saturday, Zanganeh mentioned some of research projects which his ministry has entrusted to the country's universities, saying: "The meeting was set up to address the problems and challenges facing these projects, so university heads were asked to underline their concerns in order to be resolved."

According to Zanganeh, increasing the recovery factor of the country's oil fields is the most important subject for research projects, since most of the fields which the ministry has awarded their study projects to universities are large fields with significant oil reserves, and therefore even a small increase in their recovery factor is significant.

Iranian Oil Ministry is following a program which it calls "technological development" of Iran's oil fields, under which the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has signed nine deals with the country's top universities and research centers to study major oil fields.



Under the mentioned contracts Petroleum Engineering Faculty of Tehran University is studying Azadegan field, Darkhovin oil field has been awarded to Amir Kabir University, Soroush oil field to Sahand University in Tabriz, while Ahvaz field has been assigned to the Research Institute of Petroleum Industry, Karanj field is

handed to Islamic Azad University, Koupal field to Sharif University of Technology, Mansouri field to Shiraz University, Gachsaran field to Oil Technology University and finally Bibi-Hakime field's research project is handed to the Research Institute of Petroleum Industry.

In late December 2019, deputy oil minister

for engineering, research and technology affairs said Oil Ministry is utilizing the high scientific capacities of the country for implementation of its projects.

"Oil Ministry is conducting 26 research projects through cooperation with 16 top universities and research institutes of the country, and given that these major universities benefit from the contribution of a network of universities, so research measures of Oil Ministry are in fact applying a vast scientific potential in the country", Saeed Mohammadzadeh said.

Azadegan is one of the major oilfields Iran shares with Iraq at the western part of Iran's southwestern region of Karoun, known as West Karoun fields.

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

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

Having an estimated 67 billion barrels of in-situ oil, West Karoun fields definitely deserve the spotlight which has been put on them recently.

Petropars becomes sole developer of South Pars phase 11

ENERGY TEHRAN – National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has put the domestic Petropars in charge of the development of phase 11 of the giant South Pars gas field (in the Persian Gulf), following the withdrawal of Total and CNPC, IRNA reported.

Although Petropars was supposed to be a member of the consortium which was going to develop the field, but since the French Total and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) have officially left the project, now the Iranian company is solely in charge of the field's development project, Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said on Saturday.

Zanganeh noted that Petropars is only able to develop the first unit of the mentioned phase (which focuses on gas production, as in the rest of the phases), adding: "Technologically speaking, Petropars is currently not able to develop the second unit of the said phase."

"Petropars has begun work on the project and has signed



contracts for "repairing the jackets" and "supplying basic goods for drilling wells," the oil minister added.

In mid-September 2019, Zanganeh had said that the phase

11 of South Pars gas field's development project will go on stream by the first half of the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (September 22, 2021).

National Iranian Oil Company signed a contract with Total in 2017 for developing the phase 11 of South Pars field with an initial investment of \$1 billion, marking the French company the first major Western energy investor in the country after sanctions were lifted in 2016.

The company was pressured to leave Iran after the United States threatened to impose sanctions on companies that do business in the country.

Later on, Iran awarded the project to CNPC which was part of the consortium that was first supposed to carry out the project.

The Chinese company however, did not go on with the project and left the contract like the French party.

The offshore South Pars field holds the world's largest natural gas reserves ever found in one place.

OPEC considering cuts ahead of March meeting

OPEC is considering extending its oil production cuts until the end of the year, as the markets are still looking downward, but discussions remain at an early stage. Russia's TASS news agency quoted a source within the organization on Friday. The source said the group, which includes two oil exporters, was due to meet in March, but it might also meet in June to decide on the policy.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is an intergovernmental organization of 14 nations, founded on 14 September 1960 in Baghdad by the first five members (Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela), and headquartered since 1965 in Vienna, Austria.

On Thursday evening, the news sources reported that Saudi Energy Minister, Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, said that all options are open at an OPEC meeting in early March, including additional cuts to oil production. He added that it was too early to make a decision

on the need for additional discounts. He said that when the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, led by Russia, meet at an emergency meeting in March, the group will study the market situation and "consider objectively" whether additional cuts are needed.

Increasing supply cuts

OPEC agreed in December to increase its supply cuts by 500,000 BPD to 1.7 million BPD until the end of March. Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said that the objective of OPEC is to reduce the number of excess stocks, which are due to seasonal reasons and occur in the first half of the year.

OPEC is scheduled to meet in Vienna on March 5th and 6th to define its policy. A ministerial monitoring committee for the agreement will meet in Vienna on March 4.

Meanwhile, the Belarusian news agency, BTA, quoted Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko as saying on Friday that his country

was searching for alternatives to Russian oil, and was in discussions with the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Oil supplies from Russia to Belarus stopped suddenly on January 1, as companies including Rosneft, Gazprom Oil, Lukoil, and Surgut suspended gas deliveries. Moscow and Minsk are discussing the terms of their contract regarding oil supply.

Alexander Lukashenko is a Belarusian politician serving as President of Belarus since the office was created on 20 July 1994. Western opponents of Lukashenko have described Belarus as 'Europe's last dictatorship.'

Oil prices fluctuated

In the markets, oil prices fluctuated on Friday, after rising in the morning due to the drop in U.S. crude stocks. However, it is heading for a significant decline in the week, in light of concerns about the possibility of a new coronavirus spread in China that has claimed 41 lives so far. This may curb travel and demand for fuel and

prospects.

By 13:14 GMT, Brent crude futures fell 22 cents, or 0.35 percent, to \$61.82 a barrel, after dropping 1.9 percent in the previous session. In the week, Brent declined about four percent.

"Oil is range-bound. If prices dip below \$50 a barrel OPEC will cut more; if it goes above \$55 the U.S. will produce more," said Jeffrey Haley, market analyst at Oanda. The "market is caught in this middle range. It's difficult to forecast the news that will eventually see a break-out."

Prices were slightly supported in the morning by the news of a drop in crude oil inventories and distillate products in the United States last week, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Although the decline in stocks did not match the expectations of analysts in a Reuters poll of a decrease of one million barrels, oil inventories fell by 405 thousand barrels in the week ending January 17, according to government data.

(Source: communalnews.com)

Global LNG Carrier Containment Market to drive amazing growth by 2025

A leading research firm, Zion Market Research added a latest industry report on "Global LNG Carrier Containment Market" consisting of 110+ pages during the forecast period and LNG Carrier Containment Market report has offered a comprehensive research updates and information related to market growth, demand, opportunities in the global LNG Carrier Containment Market.

The LNG Carrier Containment Market report provides in-depth analysis and insights into developments impacting businesses and enterprises on global and regional level.

The report covers the global LNG Carrier Containment Market performance in terms of revenue contribution from various segments and includes a detailed analysis of key trends, drivers, restraints, and opportunities influencing revenue growth of the global consumer electronics market.

This report studies the global LNG Carrier Containment Market size, industry status and forecast, competition landscape and growth opportunity. This research report categorizes the global LNG Carrier Containment Market by companies, region, type and end-use industry.

The LNG Carrier Containment Market report mainly includes the major company profiles with their annual sales & revenue, business strategies, company major products, profits, industry growth parameters, industry contribution on global and regional level.

Influencing the global LNG

This report covers the global LNG Carrier Containment Market performance in terms of value and volume contribution. This section also includes major company analysis of key trends, drivers, restraints, challenges, and opportunities, which are influencing the global LNG Carrier Containment Market.

Impact analysis of key growth drivers and restraints, based on the weighted average model, is included in



this report to better equip clients with crystal clear decision-making insights.

The LNG Carrier Containment Market research report mainly segmented into types, applications and regions. The market overview section highlights the LNG Carrier Containment Market definition, taxonomy, and an overview of the parent market across the globe and region wise.

To provide better understanding of the global LNG Carrier Containment Market, the report includes in-depth analysis of drivers, restraints, and trends in all major regions namely, Asia Pacific, North America, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East & Africa, which influence the current market scenario and future status of the global LNG Carrier Containment Market over the forecast period.

The LNG Carrier Containment Market report provides company market size, share analysis in order to give a broader overview of the key players in the market.

Additionally, the report also includes key strategic developments of the market including acquisitions & mergers, new product launch, agreements, partnerships, collaborations & joint ventures, research & development, product and regional expansion of major participants involved in the market on the global and regional basis.

Some of the major objectives of this report:

1. To provide detailed analysis of the market structure along with forecast of the various segments and sub-segments of the global LNG Carrier Containment Market.
2. To provide insights about factors affecting the market growth. To analyze the LNG Carrier Containment Market based on various factors- price analysis, supply chain analysis, porter five force analysis etc.
3. To provide historical and forecast revenue of the LNG Carrier Containment Market segments and sub-segments with respect to four main geographies and their countries- North America, Europe, Asia, and Rest of the World.
4. Country level analysis of the market with respect to the current market size and future prospective.
5. To provide country level analysis of the market for segment by application, product type and sub-segments.
6. To provide strategic profiling of key players in the market, comprehensively analyzing their core competencies, and drawing a competitive landscape for the market.
7. To track and analyze competitive developments such as joint ventures, strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions, new product developments, and research and developments in the global LNG Carrier Containment Market.

(Source: newsledger24.com)

Jordan making strides in renewable energy production

Jordan's investments in the renewable energy sector have reached more than \$5 billion, placing the desert kingdom among leading countries in providing a legislative environment and attracting investment in the sector.

With a semi-arid and mostly desert terrain and a 10-month period of consistent sunshine, Jordan focused efforts on solar energy to increase its energy resources.



Jordan's permanent representative to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and Jordanian Ambassador to Abu Dhabi Jumaa Abadi said Jordan has worked to benefit from the resources it has, attracting suitable investments in the field.

The "year 2014 witnessed the kingdom's serious development of the solar and wind energy projects supplying clean energy to the national grid with a total capacity of approximately 1,500 megawatts, which account for some 20% of total electricity generated," Abadi said at an IRENA meeting ahead of Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week and the World Future Energy Summit.

"Jordan succeeded in increasing its dependence on renewable energies, which enabled the sector to attract investments exceeding \$5 billion," Abadi said.

The sustainable development goals

The IRENA assembly represents a start to a decade in which the world must achieve the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations and adopt a climate-safe energy path.

The Jordanian Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources identified key actions to accelerate renewable energy deployment and facilitate renewable energy transition.

Fahed Oweidat, business development manager at Yellow Door Energy, a leading energy efficiency company, said investing in renewables is one of the most rewarding and secure investments in the country.

"We started with the aim of attracting investments in this field with 10 (megawatts) MW of solar project but ended up with 100 MW in Jordan only that enabled us to raise funds from big international players like the International Finance Corporation. The government tries to support the investments in this field and this is good. We had the support from the regulator and the utilities to make this happen," Oweidat said.

"Jordan still aims to attract more investments in this field as the vision is to expand the sources of renewable energy in the coming few years. Experts say that clean energy contribution of the Jordanian energy mix will rise to 20% of the total power output by 2021, compared with only 1% in 2014."

The company commissioned a 3.96-megawatt peak facility at Wadi Al-Aash Solar Park, east of Amman, to generate renewable energy for Specialty Hospital and Istiklal Mall.

The renewables sources

The "need for renewable sources is vital for the survival of the commercial and industrial sectors, especially at this time, which is characterized by a slowing economy. The trick nowadays is to save as much cost on operations as they can. Our business model allows this to happen as we provide our customers turnkey projects on the Build Operate Transfer basis," Oweidat said.

He said the sector has provided job opportunities in a country where the unemployment rate is nearly 20%.

"There are more than 600 companies working in the field of renewable energy in the kingdom and this has been instrumental in providing job opportunities to many experts in this field and also to fresh graduates," Oweidat said.

According to a report published by IRENA, jobs in renewables could total 40 million by 2050 under a climate-safe energy scenario.

However, many challenges face the sector in Jordan. "We are facing some issues, especially regarding limitations on the grid because it is not fully prepared to adopt new feed from renewable resources in many areas," said Oweidat. "Sometimes we need to locate land close to grids, which can be expensive, or need a lot of civil engineering to make them suitable to build the station."

(Source: thearabweekly.com)

What is holding back India's solar boom?

According to analytics company GlobalData, with 49 percent tenders announced and a 75.4 percent share, India was No. 1 among all other countries in the region, followed by the Philippines (with six tenders and a 9.2 percent share) and Pakistan (with five tenders and a 7.7 percent share), according to a Saur Energy International report.

Globally, though, the renewable scene was gloomy. Only 291 power plant tenders were announced during Q4 of calendar year 2019, which was a fall of 28 percent over the last four-quarter average of 404, according to the report. All top issuers of solar tenders for December 2019 in terms of power capacity involved in the APAC region were from India.

About 85 percent of this equipment has been imported from China, Vietnam and Malaysia, according to The Indian Express. India has installed 31 gigawatts (GW) of solar capacity, 17 GW is under construction while tenders for 35 GW have been floated. For manufacturing solar photovoltaic (PV) cells, India has an installed manufacturing capacity of 3 GW and 10 GW for modules. The nation has set itself a target of 175 GW of installed clean energy capacity by March 2022, of which 100 GW is expected to be solar.

Despite the Indian government's "Make in India" program, plus heavy duties slapped on imports of these kinds of goods, the industry continues to bring equipment from abroad.

According to the Indian Express report, the money on imports of PV cells & modules in the last five years was about three times the cumulative Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) of India at U.S. \$4.83 billion that flowed into the entire renewable energy sector.

The solar PV manufacturing

There's no commercial production for upstream stages of solar PV manufacturing, such as wafers, ingots and polysilicon because of it being energy and capital intensive, hence the reliance on imports, The Indian Express reports.

(Source: oilprice.com)

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Iran in talks with an 'advanced country' for sending scientist astronaut to space

TEHRAN, Dec. 31 (MNA) – Head of Iran Space Agency (ISA) Morteza Barari said Tue. that the ISA has commenced direct talks with an 'advanced country' to send scientist astronauts to space.



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Iran strike showed U.S. inability to protect troops against 'Massed Attacks': analyst

TEHRAN – An American political analyst based in Washington said Iran's retaliatory strike against a U.S. base earlier this month showed Washington's "inability to fully or even substantially protect its personnel from massed" ballistic missile attacks

"The response of the Guards (IRGC) was not asymmetric but did show another weakness of the American armed forces: the inability to fully or even substantially protect its personnel from massed ballistic missile attacks," Dr. Dennis M. Nilsen told Tasnim in an interview.

Following is the full text of the interview.

Question: On January 8, Iran's Armed Forces launched missile strikes on a U.S. base in western Iraq in retaliation for the U.S. assassination of the prominent Iranian commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani. What is your take on the attack?

Answer: Although President Trump postured before the American public that he had sufficient and immediate reason to order the assassination, it is clear that this act was contrary to all international law, which demands a formal declaration of war before commencing hostilities, and the United States Constitution (Article One Section Eight), which grants the authority to declare war to Congress and Congress only.

Despite the chasm separating our two countries, General Soleimani was an outstandingly effective adversary to Daesh and the other Salafi and Wahhabi groups which have been striving to overthrow -- with the covert backing of the (Persian) Gulf monarchies -- the governments of Iraq and Syria since 2011. President Trump, in ordering the death of the general, claimed that the action was preemptive and that by so doing he was avoiding the future deaths of American servicemen which would have occurred due to strikes currently being planned by General Soleimani.

However, did such a threat exist, our president should have first approached Iran with this grievance through diplomatic channels, and if left unsatisfied, should have approached Congress with the information he possessed with a request for a declaration of war. Thus, this attack was illegal from both an international and a domestic point of view. It was unilateral and likens President Trump to a mafioso boss more than to a head of state.

Why was it really done? There are two possibilities which I see: 1) President Trump acted in order to severely disrupt the fight against the Salafists and thereby weaken the Resistance against the Zionist State; 2) He wished to strike against an enemy he deemed to be of sufficient danger and skill and whose continued existence would threaten American military personnel -- and American foreign policy ambitions -- in the Middle East. The idea that he wished to provoke an outright war against the Islamic Republic in order to remove the only military threat to Israel in the area is not tenable, both because the American



economy cannot sustain it and because he would be inviting intense domestic political opposition: Americans are tired of overseas military adventures, despite the great love all have for the armed forces.

My guess is that the president wished to disrupt the ability of the Iranians to wage an asymmetric war against American forces, but with the unintended consequence of weakening -- albeit temporarily -- the Resistance against the Salafis and Wahhabis, and also of strengthening Iranian resolve against him. Possibly, very possibly, this effect was intended -- would the American president wish to strengthen Salafis? -- but only because it would serve the interest of his allies (Israel and the Sunni monarchies). An Orwellian mindset is not foreign the American strategic thinking.

As to a war, since both President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu know of Hezbollah's alliance with Iran and that any attack against Iran itself would have meant the launching of tens of thousands of missiles from southern Lebanon into Israel by the Resistance, an outright war was not an option. The Israeli Prime Minister can brag all he wants about the Iron Dome missile defense network, but in the end, if Hezbollah decided to attack, nine in ten missiles would get through and cause significant damage to the Zionist State. Thus war was not sought.

In seeking to obtain a short-range good -- albeit unverified to the American public -- President Trump openly committed an assassination of a general officer of foreign uniformed service, and thus further showed American contempt for the rules of war and diplomacy.

Question: Iran fired 16 ballistic missiles. U.S. forces failed to intercept them and could only watch and wait for impact, according to American websites and reports. The attack highlighted U.S. missile defense vulnerability. How could

this change equations in the future?

Answer: The attacks of the IRGC in Operation Martyr Soleimani against Ayn al-Asad Airbase (Al Anbar Governorate) did not cause any deaths but did result in several wounded servicemen and substantial material destruction. The fact that the airbase was defenseless against the missile attack is significant as it shows the great vulnerability of American forces to the strategic and tactical ballistic missiles of the IRGC. Iran could have fired substantially more missiles at the airbase without advanced warning and completely destroyed it, but chose to retaliate in a limited manner while giving advanced warning to the Iraqis in order to demonstrate the precarious position of American forces in the (Persian) Gulf. The way the attack was done shows clearly that Iran did not wish to initiate a war but rather wished to avenge General Soleimani, insofar as material damage could ever atone for the loss of a man's life.

The equation of supposed American predominance on the battlefield, accepted in the past, has now been shown to be overly simplistic and one-sided. While the Americans do possess an offensive capability greatly superior to Iran's -- and to all countries in the region -- their defensive capability against ballistic missile attacks has been shown to be substantially lower than accepted in the mind of much of the American public. This brings to the fore a vulnerability already recognized in American warships in the Persian Gulf: susceptibility to massed missile and fast boat attacks conducted by the IRGC.

Americans have gotten so used to the idea that their armed forces outweigh all others in all aspects that casualties are expected to be slight to non-existent. This strike showed how erroneous this thinking is.

Question: Later, U.S. officials confirmed that eleven American troops were injured in the strike despite prior claims

by Washington that no one was hurt. The scope of destruction was so extreme and is now becoming clear. Why did President Donald Trump attempt to downplay the attack and said, "All is well"? Why do you think the U.S. failed to respond?

Answer: President Trump did not respond to the missile attacks because he did not want a war to erupt, a war which, in light of the warning of Hassan Nasrallah, would have meant an attack by Hezbollah on the Zionist State, as well as massed missile attacks on American land, air and naval forces in the (Persian) Gulf region. Neither American nor Israeli missile defenses would have been able to stop most of the missiles getting through to their targets. Such a war would be mean political suicide and his defeat in November of this year, and thus Trump stood down; he could not sell it to the American public in any way, and it would easily be seen on which country's behalf this war would be fought -- Israel. Thus he said, "All is well."

Question: Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei said last Friday, "The day the missiles of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps crushed the U.S. base is one of the days of God. The Guards' response was a major blow to America's fearsome superpower image". What do you think? Do you believe that it was a historical turning point as it was the first and only direct attack on the U.S. since World War II?

Answer: I believe Ayatollah Khamenei said this with good reason, if by a "day of God" he meant a triumph of reason over unreason. The superpower image of America was severely damaged long ago in Vietnam and showed to the world and to the Americans themselves that asymmetric warfare is not something that can be successfully waged by an overpowering conventional armed force. However, this lesson was obviously lost on the current generation of American political and military leadership, who led the disastrous invasion of Iraq and met with the same response as the Viet Cong gave their forebears. The response of the Guards was not asymmetric but did show another weakness of the American armed forces: the inability to fully or even substantially protect its personnel from massed ballistic missile attacks.

In this respect it was a turning point, but not because American forces were directly attacked by Iran. The American public has so far bought the explanation that there were no casualties at the airbase because of a combination of the incompetence and backward equipment of the Iranians. However, since Iran gave advanced warning of the attack and that in fact the base was defenseless against such an attack, it is clear that a turning point has been reached strategically, from both a military and political perspective.

(Source: Tasnim News Agency)

Why peace initiatives in Libya are failing

And what can be done about it?

By Noha Aboueldahab

This month has seen several failed attempts by foreign powers to broker a ceasefire in Libya.

First, Fayez al-Sarraj, who heads Libya's UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA), refused to travel to Rome when he learned that his adversary, renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar, would be present at a meeting convened by Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.

A week later in Moscow, al-Sarraj signed a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement, but Haftar walked out without signing.

And then, the leaders of Germany, France, Russia, Turkey, Egypt and several other countries gathered in Berlin to jumpstart a peace process on Libya.

The final communique of the conference called on all parties to respect the nearly decade-old UN arms embargo on Libya - an embargo many of those powers have repeatedly violated - and reaffirmed the need for a political, rather than a military, solution to the conflict.

The renewed call to respect the arms embargo is sensible but it lacks a plan for sanctioning those countries that continue to violate it.

Meanwhile, the complex situation on the ground in Libya has worsened. Even while the Berlin meeting was in session, pro-Haftar protesters and militias blocked four key oil terminals.

Recently, Turkey announced the deployment of its troops to Libya to back the GNA. The country has already seen the presence of mercenaries from a number of countries including Chad, Sudan, Syria and Russia.

This has exacerbated an already complex situation on the ground, making it difficult for the UN and other peace-brokers to negotiate.

In this context, the failure of European and Middle Eastern actors to stabilise the situation in Libya comes as no surprise, particularly since many of the so-called peace-brokers have actually fed the violence through, for example, repeated violations of the arms embargo.

In their interventions in the Libyan conflict, some foreign actors have been pursuing opposing visions for the future of the region. Others, in particular the Europeans, have intervened, hoping to secure economic gains in Libya and its assistance in keeping migrants away from European borders.

None have had the best interest of the Libyans in mind. This is quite clear from the absence of representatives of Libyan civil society and grassroots organisations in many of these "peace" initiatives sponsored by foreign powers.

While the fate of Libya continues to be negotiated in various European and Arab cities, the aspirations of Libyans continue to be swept aside. But it does not have to be this way.

Libyans can still take the peace process into their own hands. An existing framework, known as the National Conference Process (NCP), is a good starting point.

The NCP was a consultative process launched in 2018 and led by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue with the support of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). The consultations were informed by the participation of 7,000 Libyans across the country. They resulted in a final report that outlined Libyan consensus on various policy areas that must be addressed to build the country.

It might seem futile to return to a process of national reconciliation while fighting is ongoing, but the outcomes outlined in the NCP's final report still provide a critical opportunity to build a Libya by Libyans for Libyans - even during protracted conflict.

Given the current fragmentation of Libya's political leadership, domestic civil society and business actors should shepherd this process, even if on the sidelines of the brutal theatre of war. These actors include local security and military figures, municipalities and community leaders - many of whom were involved in the NCP consultations themselves in 2018.

Much of the current fighting is over resource distribution and power - no doubt a central reason why several foreign governments in Europe and the Middle East are scrambling to retain influence and control in Libya. Distribution of power and resources is one of the five policy areas identified in the NCP report, alongside national and government priorities, security and defence, constitutional and electoral processes, and national reconciliation.

Haftar's offensive in April 2019 was an attempt to take control of Tripoli by force, and it put an abrupt stop to plans to hold the national conference that same month.

The national reconciliation process was meant to pave the way for presidential and parliamentary elections in Libya, after which the priorities outlined in the report would be among the issues addressed to build the country.

It is no wonder, then, that Haftar and his army timed their offensive to thwart any kind of meaningful dialogue, especially a Libyan-owned one, whereby his legitimacy would have certainly been undercut.

But the NCP is, as its name indicates, a process as opposed to a mere two-day conference. The work of Libyan community leaders, civil society and security sector figures that drove the national conference consultations need not stand still because of the persistent fighting.

It could, as Yemeni civil society leaders have done through initiatives such as the Yemen Peace Forum, be used to organise strategic workshops at the community level in more stable areas in Libya.

Of course, certain Libyan organisations have indeed been working together, but there needs to be a more coherent process that also aims to develop the policy areas identified in the NCP. If the military conflict makes this option difficult, there is a robust group of Libyan civil society leaders operating in the diaspora who could, together with local community leaders based in Libya, pursue such initiatives in other safe spaces.

It is difficult to envisage any follow-through on the implementation of the NCP policy areas in the absence of the participation of Libya's rival governments, or at least that of the GNA. It is even more difficult to envisage this without elections. But it is not impossible.

Libya's civil society both domestically and in the diaspora has been quietly, but actively, working to support the various policy areas outlined in the NCP. Those efforts must be supported - and not meddled with - by the international community. They form a crucial part of the groundwork needed to re-build Libya once the violence subsides.

Without support for such efforts, foreign military and political interference - the very problem that the NCP explicitly warns against - will continue to be afforded more space as the demands of Libyans continue to be ignored.

As the political squabbling continues in European cities, and as the fighting rages on in Tripoli and other parts of the country, the vision that Libyans put forward in the NCP should no longer be deferred.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

India-Brazil ties: Getting ready for the carnival

By Gopal Jain

With much in common, the door is wide open to forge a social, cultural, people to people and economic relationship to boost trade from an insignificant \$7 billion at present. This will send out a strong signal of South-South co-operation

Believe it or not, while India is spread over 1.26 million sq miles, just the Amazon is 2.12 million sq. miles! Brazil is the third largest hub for Unicorns in the world—a symbol of new age economy. But all we know of Brazil is Pele and football.

The India-Brazil bilateral summit will be an important occasion to consolidate relationship between the two countries. While there is considerable distance between India and Brazil, the former is 15,000 miles away, yet striking similarities can make the heart grow fonder.

Both countries are multi-cultural, with a commitment to democracy; where the leadership has a strong mandate and a compatible profile.

The bilateral summit, a first after nearly a decade, though timed with Republic day, is the right time to tap the full potential. Having cooperated on international issues, with BRICS as a cementing factor, the visit of Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro can be the starting point for a comprehensive strategic partnership, especially in areas of special interest such as energy (oil and renewables), food, etc.

The good news is both countries are united by democratic principles. They are, however, separated by distance, with no border issues and virtually no possibility of an immediate crisis or threat on the geopolitical front.

With much in common, the door is wide open to forge a social, cultural, people-to-people and economic relationship to boost trade from an insignificant \$7 billion at



Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro shakes hands with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his ceremonial reception at the forecourt of India's Rashtrapati Bhavan Presidential Palace in New Delhi, India, January 25, 2020. (Photo: REUTERS/Altaf Hussain)

present. This will send out a strong signal of South-South co-operation.

First, Brazil's number one export to India is crude oil, but, mind you, it is experiencing an oil production boom and will be amongst the top-5 oil producing countries in the world over the next decade.

Second, as a large producer of sugarcane, Brazil started a bioethanol program which is highly effective and is a means of bio-energy which can fire up thermal cogeneration plants. One resultant by-product are bio-pellets (a substitute for coal) and a means of clean energy, the urgent need of the hour in India.

In wind energy, Brazil is the cheapest source; a Brazilian company manufacturing

wind turbine generators WEG is already in India. This resource can be fully tapped.

An ideal energy partner is around the corner, almost a God sent, and India should clinch a deal, especially in the wake of recent global events which could result in an oil crisis.

Third, Brazil is not only self-sufficient in food production, but exports commodities including pulses to the Indian market. India consumes a variety of different foods, its growing and expanding population requires a perennial source, especially for proteins.

The ingredients for an all-encompassing relationship are, therefore, in place. Now, the two countries must repose trust in each

other—make it solid like BRICS (Bricks) to bind aspirations, goals, and objectives of two nations.

India can start with a clean slate, having opted out of trade agreements, to put in place a bilateral framework/ agreement. This will be a "First" as we look beyond our neighbourhood principle.

It will also facilitate the flow of investments, and strengthen and fortify India's strategic interests. Moving in this direction will be a practical litmus test for the ease of doing business. It will send out positive signals to foreign investors. A bilateral agreement between the two countries will secure this, which, in turn, will globally push India up in the 'World Bank Ease of doing' index.

We can go from a stage where the countries not only have a BRICS 'bank' in common, but can bank upon each other for ushering in the winds of change.

The time is right for deepening this relationship. In fact, the Brazilian ministry of mines and energy has said that "India and Brazil are key players in the international energy landscape, both as consumers and producers. We are joining hands to create an international biofuel market and supply our planet with renewable and clean energy."

This partnership will make the presidential visit a landmark win-win, setting the right 'pulse'.

My initiation to Brazil was via a film Blame it on Rio. I fell for Rio as it came across as a fun and happening place. I was drawn to it instantly.

Bollywood should take cue, and shoot a film in Brazil triggering people to visit the country, connecting the two nations in an enduring relationship.

The author is Senior advocate, Supreme Court of India. Views are personal. (Source: Financial Express)

Tehran's "Holland Alley" to be made a national heritage

HERITAGE TEHRAN – "Holland Alley" in Tehran, which is mostly populated by Iranian-Armenian citizens, is worth to be inscribed on the national list of cultural heritage, Tehran City Council member Ahmad Masjed-Jamei said on Friday.

The national registration of this historical alley could be regarded as a symbol of cooperation between Iran and the Netherlands, as well as Muslims and Christians, the official said, IRNA reported.



Situated in Tehran's District 8, the alley is of high cultural importance. Its history dates back to 1962 when a strong earthquake hit Buin Zahra county in Qazvin province.

Following the Buin Zahra earthquake, [all the lands limited to] this alley were purchased by the [then] queen of the Netherlands and given to Armenians [who were amongst the quake victims and their families] to reside," Masjed-Jamei explained.

At present, the alley requires some restoration in terms of urban landscape, he said, adding that once the restoration work is completed, the alley will be ready to be registered on the national heritage list.

Boeing's 777X jetliner takes off on maiden flight

SEATTLE (Reuters) — Boeing Co successfully staged the first flight of the world's largest twin-engine jetliner on Saturday in a respite from the crisis over its smallest model, the grounded 737 MAX.

The 777X, a larger version of the 777 mini-jumbo, touched down at the historic Boeing Field outside Seattle at 2 pm (2200 GMT) after a debut which began almost four hours earlier at Boeing's revamped wide-body assembly lines north of the city.

The decision to take advantage of a gap in clouds to start the months of testing needed before the jet can carry passengers came after two attempts had to be postponed due to high winds.

"It's a proud day for us," said the chief executive of Boeing's commercial airplane unit, Stan Deal.

As the 252-foot-long aircraft - the longest commercial jet by a whisker - drew to a halt before waiting VIPs, rows of undelivered 737 MAX stood idle nearby in a reminder of the crisis that has engulfed Boeing since it was grounded last year.

"It made all of our employees proud one more time of who we are and what we get to do, by flying a brand new airplane that is going to change the world one more time," Deal said.

The aircraft is the larger of two versions planned by Boeing and will officially be called 777-9, but is better known under its development codename, 777X.

Hallmarks include folding wingtips - designed to allow its carbon wings to fit the same parking bays as earlier models - and the world's largest commercial engines from General Electric, wide enough to swallow a 737 MAX fuselage.

Iran proposes visa-free travel among ECO member states

TOURISM TEHRAN – Iranian tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan on Saturday called for the Economic Cooperation Organization to consider granting visa-free travel for member states.

He put forward the proposal during a meeting with Tajik Ambassador to Tehran Nizam al-Din Zahedi, saying "My suggestion is that ECO members adopt a common visa policy because there is a great deal of cultural commonalities between these countries that brings them [closer] together."

Aiming for sustainable economic development of its member states and the region as a whole, ECO was established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey and was later joined by seven new members, namely Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

ECO region with an area of more than 8 million square kilometers stretching from central to south and south-west Asia and a population of around 450 million inhabitants is well-known for its natural beauties, as well as diversity of its historical-cultural heritage.

"[Together] with the efforts of the presidents of the two countries, the level of relations between Iran and Tajikistan is currently improving, and given the great cultural commonality between Iran and Tajikistan, tourism relations between the two sides should be promoted to the highest [possible] levels. I believe that visa requirements should be waived [mutually] to make travel conditions easier for tourists between the two countries," Mounesan said, CHTN reported.

"The first step towards canceling visas among Iran and Tajikistan or between the ECO countries could be visa-cancellation for group travelers."

He reminded that Iran currently issues airport visas to passport holders from 90 countries.

"We are ready to share our experiences with Tajikistan in the fields of [archaeological] excavations and restoration of



Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Ali-Asghar Mounesan meets with Tajik Ambassador Nizam al-Din Zahedi in Tehran on January 25, 2020.

[historical] monuments, developing joint dossiers for World Heritage registrations, and handicrafts," Mounesan stressed.

The Tajik envoy for his part welcomed deepening mutual ties in the aforementioned realms, noting that there are many grounds for enhancing tourism between the two countries, because Iran and Tajikistan share many cultural, historical and religious commonalities, and people of the two nations also enjoy common language and dialects."

During the meeting, the Iranian deputy tourism minister Vali Teymouri, noted that he will follow up on Mounesan's proposal at the [upcoming] ECO summit both for a visa-waiver between ECO member states and visa-free travel for group travelers to the ECO region.

In April 2018, during the 23rd meeting of ECO foreign ministers in Tajikistan, the rotating presidency of ECO was handed to the Islamic Republic of Iran for a three-year term.

German museums postpone Iran exhibits due to insurance

HERITAGE TEHRAN – Two German museums have postponed plans to hold separate exhibitions of Iranian cultural heritage relics as insurers have reportedly refused to cover transport of loans.

Badisches Landesmuseum in Karlsruhe and Frankfurt's Archaeological Museum have indefinitely postponed exhibitions planned in cooperation with Iran for later this year, after insurers refused to provide cover for artefacts on loan because of heightened political tensions between Iran and the West, the Art Newspaper reported on Friday.

"The reason for postponing is that we couldn't insure the objects given the political situation," says Eckart Kohne, the director of the Badisches Landesmuseum. "We have halted the project, but if conditions change and there is some stability in the region, we will renew our plans."

At the Badisches Landesmuseum, the show "The Persians" was scheduled to open on 10 October and run until April 2021, featuring 200 loans from Iranian museums, the report said.



This Achaemenid jewellery was due to go on show at the Badisches Landesmuseum © Badisches Landesmuseum, Photo: Gaul

"The Persians" was to focus on the Achaemenid Empire, an ancient Persian civilization which lasted from 550 to 330 BC, and life in the royal courts in cities such as Persepolis, Pasargadae and Susa. It was planned as an exchange, with the National Museum of Iran showing 150 Greek, Roman and Etruscan antiquities from the Karlsruhe museum over the same

period this autumn.

In Frankfurt, an exhibition called "Death in Salt", an archaeological investigation in Persia, was planned for the spring in concert with the National Museum of Iran, the Zanjan Saltmen museum and the German Mining Museum in Bochum.

For Frankfurt's Archaeological Museum, payment transfers also posed a problem,

says Wolfgang David, the museum's director. "We were wondering if we would have to send cash via courier," he says.

"We have been preparing this exhibition for two years," David says. "The conditions were already difficult last year. But at the beginning of this year, our German transport company cancelled and the insurance company withdrew its offer. Our Iranian colleagues are deeply disappointed."

The Frankfurt show was to focus on the archaeological site at an Iranian salt mine in Chehrabad, where the mummified victims of historic mine accidents were discovered. The finds, including mummies, textiles, leather items and tools, some as many as 2,500 years old and perfectly preserved in the salt, were to be among the exhibits.

The German Mining Museum in Bochum is still hoping to stage the show in the autumn, David says.

The Achaemenid [Persian] Empire was the largest and most durable empire of its time. The empire stretched from Ethiopia, through Egypt, to Greece, to Anatolia (modern Turkey), Central Asia and to India.

ROUND THE GLOBE

Alejandro de Humboldt National Park

Alejandro de Humboldt National Park (AHNP) is located in the Nipe-Sagua-Baracoa Mountains on the North Coast of Eastern Cuba.

The largest and best-conserved remnant of forested mountain ecosystems in the Caribbean, AHNP is widely considered to be Cuba's most important protected area for its extraordinary biodiversity values. In addition to the 66,700 ha of land AHNP includes a marine area of 2,641 ha, i.e. the total surface is of 69,341 ha with a terrestrial buffer zone of 34,330 ha.



The property is embedded into the much larger Cuchillas del Toa Biosphere Reserve, which exceeds 200,000 ha. The altitude ranges from 220 m below in the marine parts to 1,175 m above sea level at El Toldo Peak.

Due to the exposure to trade winds and the mountainous topography the North Coast of Western Cuba is the country's rainiest and coolest region. Important rivers, including the Toa River, Cuba's largest river, rise in the forested mountains, boasting remarkable freshwater biodiversity.

Next to various types of semi-deciduous broadleaf and pine forests there are xenomorphic shrub formations in drier areas and mangroves along the coast. It is assumed that the area was a Pleistocene Refuge where numerous species have survived past periods of climate change.

Jointly with the complex and varied geology and topography this helps explain the extraordinary biodiversity. Another particularity of the property is the toxicity of many of the underlying rocks to plants.

(Source: UNESCO)

New meat-eating dinosaur species found in Utah

More than two decades after a unique two-legged carnivore was unearthed in Utah's Dinosaur National Monument, scientists have given the massive carnivore a name. Scientists announced the newly named *Allosaurus jimmdseni* in the journal *PeerJ* on Friday.

The new species, which lived 155 million years ago in what's now Colorado, Utah and Wyoming, is a member of a group of dinosaurs called allosauroids.

Some allosauroids were small and some were extremely large, but they all walked on two legs and ate meat. The group thrived throughout the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods.

The skull and facial features of *Allosaurus jimmdseni* set the species apart from its relatives. Low facial crests extended from the dinosaur's horns, arcing just in front of the eyes stretching down the length of its nose. The back of the allosaur's head was relatively narrow and its skull was weaker. *Allosaurus jimmdseni* would have had less of an overlapping field of vision than closest relative *Allosaurus*

fragilis.

The diversity of allosauroids in North America is an oft debated topic among paleontologists. Some scientists content there were as many as 12 species. The latest study recognizes only the previously mentioned two.

"Previously, paleontologists thought there was only one species of *Allosaurus* in Jurassic North America, but this study shows there were two species -- the newly described *Allosaurus jimmdseni* evolved at least 5 million years earlier than its younger cousin, *Allosaurus fragilis*," study co-author Mark Loewen, research associate at the Natural History Museum of Utah and associate professor geology and geophysics at the University of Utah, said in a news release. "The skull of *Allosaurus jimmdseni* is more lightly built than its later relative *Allosaurus fragilis*, suggesting a different feeding behavior between the two."

Researchers continue to scour North America's Morrison Formation for additional evidence of allosaur diversity.

"Many more exciting fossils await discovery in the Jurassic rocks of the American West," said study co-author Daniel Chure, retired paleontologist at Dinosaur National Monument.

The *Allosaurus jimmdseni* specimen on display at the Natural History Museum of Utah was initially discovered in 1990. In 1991, paleontologists found a second specimen, dubbed Big Al, in Jurassic deposits in Wyoming. Big Al is currently housed at the Museum of The Rockies in Bozeman, Mont.

"This exciting new study illustrates the importance of continued paleontological investigations on public lands in the West. Discovery of this new taxon of dinosaur will provide important information about the life and times of Jurassic dinosaurs and represents another unique component of America's Heritage," said Brent Breithaupt, regional paleontologist with the Bureau of Land Management.

(Source: UPI)

Ancient African genomes offer glimpse into early human history

The ancient-genomics revolution is finally reaching the cradle of humanity: Africa. Researchers have sequenced the genomes of four children who lived in what is now Cameroon several thousand years ago.

Their genomes — the first to be collected from any ancient human in West Africa — raise questions about the origins of a migration that carried languages and agriculture across the continent, and hint at older events in human history, such as the emergence of *Homo sapiens* and its spread out of Africa.

But the findings underscore the yawning gap in scientists' understanding of African population history, relative to that of Eurasia, the Americas and even Oceania. Researchers have sequenced more than 1,000 ancient human genomes from these regions, versus fewer than 80 from Africa, few of which are older than 10,000 years.

"We don't have a clear picture right now," says David Reich, a population geneticist at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, who co-led the study. "Africa is the most diverse place on Earth. It's where our

particular sub-lineage of humans originated." It's no surprise, he adds, that even the relatively recent history of its populations is hard to decipher today.

Shared ancestry

Today, although people in sub-Saharan Africa are the most genetically diverse in the world, many of the region's inhabitants have similar ancestry because of a widespread migration that began around 3,000–5,000 years ago. Originating in West Africa, this migration — known as the Bantu expansion — spread agriculture and a family of common languages into eastern and southern Africa, where many residents still speak Bantu languages and have West African ancestry.

Linguists and archaeologists have theorized that an area called the Grasslands, near the border of modern Cameroon and Nigeria, was the origin of the Bantu expansion. Bantu languages spoken there are more diverse than anywhere else in Africa, and archaeological evidence suggests that humans in the region were in the early stages of domesticating crops

and transitioning to an agricultural lifestyle thousands of years ago.

Researchers led by Reich and Mary Prendergast, an archaeologist at Saint Louis University — Madrid Campus and Harvard Medical School, analyzed remains from a rock shelter in Cameroon called Shum Laka. The cave-like site holds human remains that are up to 30,000 years old, but Reich and Prendergast only managed to obtain sufficient quantities of DNA to generate full genomes for two young boys, who lived 8,000 and 3,000 years ago. They also collected more limited genome data from a boy and a girl from the same periods, respectively. A genetic analysis, published on 22 January in *Nature*, suggests that the boy and girl from 3,000 years ago were second-degree relatives, such as half-siblings or an uncle and niece. The 8,000-year-old pair were fourth-degree relatives, perhaps distant cousins.

Despite a gap of 5,000 years in some cases, all four of the children's genomes were remarkably similar to one another. But compared with the DNA of modern Africans, their genomes

were more closely related to those of the hunter-gatherer groups in west central Africa that are sometimes known as Pygmies than they were to those of contemporary Cameroonians or other Bantu-speaking populations.

The disconnect between remains from Shum Laka and contemporary Bantu speakers was surprising, says Reich, and it suggests that the population the ancient children belonged to was not among those that migrated out of the area during the Bantu expansion. It's possible that other groups from the area carried Bantu languages around Africa, but Reich says his team's data should encourage researchers to explore whether the migration began elsewhere — perhaps further west, in present-day Nigeria.

"We shouldn't jump to the conclusions that the Bantu expansion originated somewhere else," says Pontus Skoglund, a population geneticist at the Francis Crick Institute in London. The Shum Laka individuals might have been from one of many populations living in the region at the time, he adds.

(Source: Nature)

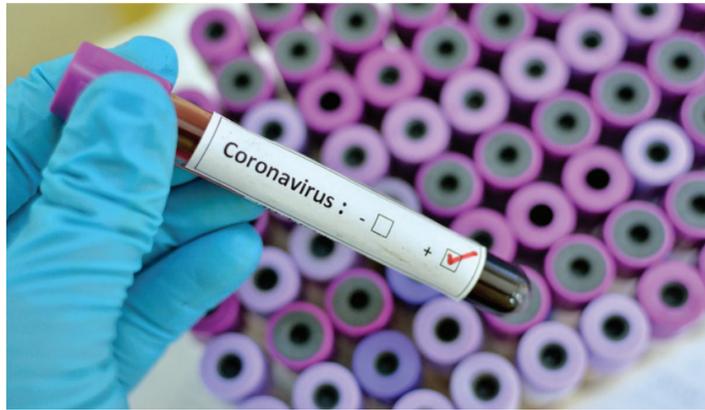
No cases of coronavirus reported in Iran: health official

SOCIETY TEHRAN — No cases of coronavirus infection or even suspected cases have so far been reported in the country, Hossein Erfani, head of contagious diseases care department at the Ministry of Health, has announced.

An outbreak of the disease is spreading around the world after originating at a seafood market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan; which killed 56 people and infected 1,975 people in China, while 2,057 cases so far reported in the world.

Reacting to claims saying that there are cases suspected to coronavirus in the country, Erfani highlighted that the claims are rumors and there have been no suspected cases of the virus so far, IRNA reported.

The ministry's screening team is stationed at Imam Khomeini Airport and all travelers coming from China are carefully monitored and diagnosed, he said, explaining, if anyone has a fever or has suspected symptoms will be referred to the hospital for more detailed examinations and tests.



Kianoush Jahanpour, head of the Ministry of Health's public relations department, also announced that any kind of food carried by passengers from China and Southeast Asian countries into Iran is prohibited.

According to the World Health Organization, coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory

Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people. Detailed investigations found that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans and MERS-CoV from dromedary camels to humans. Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans.

Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.

Standard recommendations to prevent infection spread include regular hand washing, covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, thoroughly cooking meat and eggs. Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.

20 foreign investment companies to attend TIM 2020

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Twenty foreign investment companies will attend the 2nd Technology Investment Meeting (TIM 2020) which will be held in Tehran's Pardis Technology Park on February 4-5.

Companies from Pakistan, Egypt, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Lebanon, India and Syria, as well as 100 domestic investment companies, will participate in the event, IRNA reported on Saturday.

So far, 100 projects have been submitted to the secretariat of the meeting, among which 15 projects were approved and introduced to the foreign companies, including three projects in the fields of medical equipment, medicine and new energy for investment, and two projects proposed from

foreign startups for joint venture in the fields of Fintech and internet services.

Three specialized panels on joint venture and investment insurance is also planned to be held during the event.

Moreover, technology investment opportunities in Turkey, Nigeria, Egypt and Iran will be discussed.

Investors from around the world will attend the meeting to evaluate Iranian technology-based projects and projects for potential investment.

Good opportunities, such as abundant manpower alongside cheap knowledge-based and technological products, have attracted foreign investors, despite unilateral sanctions, to consider the Iranian knowledge-based ecosystem.



Australia fires: Yearly greenhouse gas emissions nearly double due to historic blazes

The Australia bushfires, which are still burning and claimed an additional three lives this week, have released enough greenhouse gases to double the country's annual greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels, new scientific estimates show.

Guido van der Werf, who helps maintain the Global Fire Emissions Database, says the fires in New South Wales and Victoria in particular have emitted around 400 million tons of carbon dioxide so far, "pushing country-level estimates for all of 2019 to a new record in the satellite era" of about 900 million tons of carbon dioxide.

The smoke plumes from the fires have circled the globe, and have coated glaciers brown in New Zealand, led to reddish sunsets in South America, and may have reached Antarctica.

According to the Global Carbon Project, in 2018, Australia emitted 421 million tons of carbon dioxide, making it the 16th-largest emitter worldwide, ranking just above the UK. Typically, fire-related emissions are not included in annual estimates of a country's emissions, since such pollutants tend to be reabsorbed over time.

In a typical fire year in Australia, large amounts of grasslands burn in sparsely populated areas. The carbon emitted by these fires tends to be reabsorbed during the following wet season.

However, this year, vast forest ecosystems that serve as long-term carbon savings accounts, having taken in carbon and stored it in biomass, went up in flames, such as in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales. This carbon was released into the atmosphere during the fires, and it could take decades for the forests to recover to the point where they are net absorbers of such quantities of carbon dioxide once again.

In fact, full recovery may never happen, particularly if more fires burn in these forests in rapid succession, Mr van der Werf noted.

In another indication of the climate change implications of the bush fires, the UK Met Office said on Friday that the Australian fires could account for 1 to 2 percent of the acceleration in the growth of the global concentration of carbon dioxide in the planet's atmosphere in 2020.

Mr Van der Werf cautioned that the Australian fire emissions estimate comes with "substantial" uncertainties traced mainly to the unprecedented nature of these fires.

Niels Andela, a research scientist at NASA who also works on the fire emissions database, says two independent examinations of greenhouse gas emissions from the 2019-2020 bush fires both reached relatively similar conclusions, bolstering his confidence in the numbers.

In an interview, Mr Andela said the

emissions estimates are generated using instruments carried by different satellites that detect the heat signatures of wildfires. The emissions database utilises historical data to locate hot spots as well as the energy released by wildfires, both of which spiked to unprecedented heights in southeastern Australia in recent months.

The historical data and observations is fed into a computer model to determine the likely emissions.

However, more accurate measurements will require information about the ecosystems burnt as well as the precise burnt area, which takes time to generate.

Mr Andela said the uncertainty involved in near-real-time estimates could be as high as 50% due to questions about historic estimates of fire emissions. In the case of the Australia bush fires, he says, the uncertainty is high because no one has ever seen fires burn like this in these ecosystems under such historically hot and dry conditions.

This could throw off assumptions in the model about how much of the forests burned. Last year was the hottest and driest year on record in Australia, and December saw the country shatter its record for the hottest-ever day nationally.

With climate extremes becoming more severe and common worldwide as the global temperatures increase, real-time wildfire



emissions estimates are likely to take on added importance. In 2019, for example, there was a spate of fires throughout the boreal forest in the Arctic, and 2018 was the most damaging and deadly fire year in California's history.

Mr Andela says the carbon cycle implications of the Australian forest loss are hugely important, since it will take decades for these forests to become efficient absorbers of greenhouse gases again. And that will only happen if more bush fires do not disturb these regions during their recovery period and logging does not expand.

In Australia, a debate is taking place over whether to thin out forests to make them less fire-prone, although scientific evidence shows the biggest drivers of fire risk is heat and drought, not forest density. Climate change heightens both of these risk factors.

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION



81% of bus drivers responsible for fatal accidents in 2 months

The number of public transport fleet accidents has increased significantly over the last two months, and 81% of bus drivers were to blame for fatal road crashes, Traffic Police chief has announced.

Over 90 percent of the whole transfers across the country are done by ground transport system, while air, rail and sea transportation hold a small share, Mehr quoted Seyed Kamal Hadianfar as saying on Tuesday. Last year, 19 million rides have been delivered transferring over 290 million passengers, mostly through the bus transportation fleet under the Municipalities supervision, he stated.

He went on to say that bus drivers spend more time driving exceeding standard hour due to low income, which increases the risk of road crashes. Referring to the importance of technical inspection for the bus fleet, he noted that all the buses operation in the country's transportation system must undergo inspection and ensure the passengers' safety, as well as limiting the drivers to spend more time offering service.

۸۱ درصد رانندگان اتوبوس در تصادفات فوتی دو ماه گذشته مقصر بوده اند

رئیس پلیس راهور ناجا، گفت: در ۲ ماهه اخیر تعداد تصادفات ناوگان حمل مسافر افزایش قابل توجهی داشته و در تصادفات منجر به فوت و جرح ناوگان عمومی حمل مسافر، ۸۱ درصد رانندگان اتوبوس مقصر بوده اند.

سردار سیدکمال هادیانفر، افزود: بیش از ۹۰ درصد از جایابی ها در سطح کشور از طریق زمینی صورت می پذیرد و درصد کمی را حمل و نقل های هوایی، ریلی و دریایی تشکیل می دهد. در طول سال ۹۷، ۱۹ میلیون سفر با ۲۹۰ میلیون مسافر صورت پذیرفته است که عمده آن از طریق پایانه هایی صورت پذیرفته که مدیریت آن بر عهده شهرداری هاست.

رئیس پلیس راهور ناجا افزود: رانندگان به علت میزان درآمدشان بیش از ساعت مقرر رانندگی می کنند که ریسک تصادف را بالا می برد.

وی با اشاره به لزوم کنترل ناوگان حمل مسافر از میدا گفت: کنترل های فنی اتوبوس ها پیش از شروع سفر موضوع حساسی است. اتوبوس می بایست به صورت دقیق از لحاظ سلامت فنی، رعایت ساعت کاری استاندارد توسط راننده و... مورد بازبینی دقیق قرار گیرد.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“hol- or holo-”

■ **Meaning:** complete, whole
■ **For example:** we were interested in updating information on an uncommon migratory seabird with a **Holarctic** distribution

PHRASAL VERB

Play something up

■ **Meaning:** to emphasize something, sometimes making it seem more important than it really is.
■ **For example:** Play up your strongest arguments in the opening paragraph.

IDIOM

Day in the sun

■ **Explanation:** to get long-awaited attention or some form of well-deserved appreciation
■ **For example:** Dave finally got his day in the sun when an article was published about his research.

Race to exploit the world's seabed set to wreak havoc on marine life

New research warns that 'blue acceleration' – a global goldrush to claim the ocean floor – is already impacting on the environment.

The scaly-foot snail is one of Earth's strangest creatures. It lives more than 2,300 metres below the surface of the sea on a trio of deep-sea hydrothermal vents at the bottom of the Indian Ocean. Here it has evolved a remarkable form of protection against the crushing, grim conditions found at these Stygian depths. It grows a shell made of iron.

Discovered in 1999, the multi-layered iron sulphide armour of *Chrysomallon squamiferum* – which measures a few centimetres in diameter – has already attracted the interest of the US defence department, whose scientists are now studying its genes in a bid to discover how it grows its own metal armour.

The researchers will have to move quickly, however, for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature has just added the snail to its list of threatened species. German and Chinese industrial groups have revealed plans to explore the seabed around two of the three vents that provide homes for scaly-foot snails. Should they proceed, and mine the seabed's veins of metals and minerals, a large chunk of the snail's home base will be destroyed and the existence of this remarkable little creature will be threatened.

"On land, we are already exploiting mineral resources to the full," says Jean-Baptiste Jouffray, of Stockholm University. "At the same time, the need for rare elements and metals is becoming increasingly important to supply green technologies such as wind and solar power plants.

"And so industrialists are looking to the seabed where it is now technologically and economically feasible to mine for minerals. Hence the arrival of threats to creatures like the scaly-foot snail."

Jouffray is the lead author of an analysis, published last week in the journal *One Earth*, which involved synthesising 50 years of data from shipping, drilling, aquaculture, and other marine industries and which paints an alarming picture of the impact of future exploitation of the oceans.

This threat comes not just from seabed mining – which is set to expand dramatically in coming years – but from fish farming, desalination plant construction, shipping, submarine cable laying, cruise tourism and the building of offshore wind farms.

This is "blue acceleration", the term that is used by Jouffray and his co-authors to describe the recent rapid rise in marine industrialisation, a trend that has brought increasing ocean acidification, marine heating, coral reef destruction, and plastic pollution in its wake. As they state in their paper: "From the shoreline to the deep sea, the blue acceleration is already having major social and ecological consequences".

Another illustration of blue acceleration is provided by seabed grabbing, state the authors. Article 76 of the UN convention on the law of the sea (UNCLOS) allows countries to claim seabed that lies beyond the 200 miles of a nation's exclusive economic zone. Since the first claim under Article 76 was made in 2001, 83 countries have made submissions. Put together, these claims account for more than 37 million sq km of seabed, an area more than twice the size of Russia.

Many seabed grabbers include small island states that are trying to become large ocean states in the process. For example, the Cook Islands in the South Pacific has claimed an area of seabed that is 1,700 times its land surface. "The extension of the continental shelf is therefore not only transforming the geopolitical landscape, it is also substantially shrinking the area designated as the common heritage of humankind," states the report.

Examples of the conflicts that could ensue because of the blue acceleration include the disruption of key fish stocks by drilling for gas or oil offshore; pipelines that prevent trawl fishing; and offshore wind farms that disturb tourism.

(Source: The Guardian)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Al Gore and the Democrats

(December 16, 2002)

Former US Vice-President Al Gore has announced that he will not run for his Party's Presidential nomination in 2004. Gore was the obvious front-runner and in his absence both slots on the Democratic ticket - for the Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates - will be open. This report from Jonathan Marcus. Mr Gore's decision marks the start of the real race for the Democratic Party's nomination for 2004. At this stage **the battle is wide-open**. There's no shortage of potential candidates with some five **runners** already identified. Several others may also decide to **throw their hats into the ring**. The battle for the Democratic nomination will be intense. And with Mr Gore gone, it will be less about the Party's past failures and more about its future. President George W. Bush's victory was **like a cardiac shock** to the Democratic Party. Not just because of its manner - the long-running legal battle over the count - but also because Mr Gore was **widely expected to win**. The Democrats hoped to restore their fortunes at this year's Mid-term Congressional elections. But despite growing concerns about the economy and considerable unease at the deepening crisis over Iraq - the Democrats were unable to **make any headway**.

President Bush remains remarkably popular. He could emerge next year as the victor in a war against Iraq. But defeating Saddam Hussein is **no recipe for electoral success** at home - as President George Bush senior knows only too well. Democratic pollsters and experts stress that in political terms the United States is **divided down the middle**. A relatively minor shift in their favour could **reverse their political fortunes**. Who the Democrats choose as their **standard-bearer** for 2004 is critical. But the Party is as important as the personality. The Democrats need to re-define themselves and to develop a distinctive alternative voice to that offered by the Bush administration.

■ **Words**
the battle is wide-open: it is difficult to say who will win
runners: candidates
throw their hats into the ring: say they want to take part
like a cardiac shock: like an electric shock delivered to make the heart start beating
widely expected to win: a lot of people thought he would win
make any headway: improve their position in relation to the Republicans
no recipe for electoral success: no guarantee that they will win the election
divided down the middle: half the voters support the Republicans, half the Democrats
reverse their political fortunes: change their luck
standard-bearer: leader (a standard is a flag carried into battle)

(Source: BBC)

Sacral motive for the murder of the legendary General

→ 1 The liberation of the Ummah from the colonial era is aimed at creating a model based on the basic thesis of the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him). It does not imply the creation of an Empire or a closed society. First of all, the Revival of Islamic civilization contributes to the concentration of Muslims in order to implement political tasks. One of the main tasks is to train revolutionaries who are able to continue the path of creating "the ground for the arrival of Imam Mahdi (a. s.)."

The late Qasim Suleimani was such a revolutionary. The legendary General was a symbol of the Islamic struggle against the Kufra system. By his example, he demonstrated universalism in all the main directions of forming the strategy of the Islamic Republic. The hero Suleimani was a military man, ideologue, politician, adviser, and loyal friend to his fellow soldiers on the battlefield, who will always remain in our hearts.

P.S.: Enemies can endlessly gloat and threaten. Ali Khamenei assured that "the strategy of the al-Quds forces will be the same as in the time of the Martyr Suleimani." The path to liberating the Islamic World and preparing the arrival of Imam Mahdi (a.s.) will continue.

India marks Republic Day with grand show of military might & cultural diversity

India celebrated its 71st Republic Day with a grand parade, showcasing the nation's military might, history and cultural diversity, with visiting Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro as the guest of honor.

Before the parade kicked off down the iconic Rajpath boulevard in downtown Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid a wreath at the newly built National War Memorial for the first time instead of doing so at the Amar Jawan Jyoti memorial, dedicated to the heroes of the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.

The PM also met with Brazilian leader Jair Bolsonaro, who was the chief guest at the ceremony.

President Ram Nath Kovind, meanwhile, addressed the nation. "As India and Indians march forward, we remain committed to engaging the global community to build a secure and prosperous future for ourselves and for the entire humanity," he said.

The procession featured T-90 Bhishma main battle tanks, a Russian design that was tailored for the Indian Army and assembled locally. They were followed by Ballway Machine Pikate infantry combat vehicles.

The army showcased its Akash mobile anti-air missile systems, as well as a new anti-satellite weapon, which was tested under the codename Mission Shakti.

(Source: RT)

Afghan forces launch air, ground attacks on Taliban, killing 51

Afghan forces used ground attacks and air strikes in multiple operations against the Taliban during the last 24 hours, killing 51 fighters in an escalation that signaled renewed deadlock in peace talks.

Afghanistan's Defense Ministry said Sunday that government forces had conducted 13 ground offensives and 12 air strikes in nine provinces, adding that 51 "terrorists" had been killed, 13 wounded and six arrested.

Local officials in the northern province of Balkh said at least three women and four children were killed in the air strikes, prompting protests in front of the provincial governor's office.

The government pledged to send a fact-finding mission to investigate the reports of civilian deaths.

Meanwhile, the Taliban said it had staged two more attacks targeting security forces over the weekend, following sporadic assaults last week.

Afghan security forces' checkpoints in Kunduz were attacked Saturday night, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement, adding that 10 members of the security forces were killed and three wounded. Taliban fighters also captured a large weapons cache, he said.

In a separate statement, the Taliban said its fighters had ambushed an Afghan forces patrol in Balkh, killing eight security personnel. The spike in hostilities comes as U.S. and Taliban negotiators in Doha take a two-day break for consultations about how to overcome recent hurdles in the talks, a source close to the process told Reuters.

Negotiations between the two sides began last year in Doha but have been interrupted at least twice after Taliban attacks on U.S. military personnel in September and December.

Last week, another round of talks kicked off with U.S. Special Representative on Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad meeting repeatedly with the Taliban's chief negotiator Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. Multiple sources close to the talks said the Taliban had agreed internally to halt attacks against U.S. forces and "reduce" assaults against Afghan government interests.

Over the last week, however, reports of attacks by Taliban fighters on government installations, including police stations continued to filter in from different parts of Afghanistan.

(Source: Daily Star)

China scrambles to contain 'strengthening' virus

The ability of the new coronavirus to spread is strengthening and infections could continue to rise, China's National Health Commission said on Sunday, with nearly 2,000 people in China infected and 56 killed by the disease.

Health authorities around the world are racing to prevent a pandemic after a handful of cases of infection were reported outside China, including in Thailand, Australia, the United States and France.

The newly-identified coronavirus has created alarm because much about it is still unknown, such as how dangerous it is and how easily it spreads between people. It can cause pneumonia, which has been deadly in some cases.

China's National Health Commission Minister Ma Xiaowei said the incubation period for the virus can range from one to 14 days, during which infection can occur, which was not the case with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

SARS was a coronavirus that originated in China and killed nearly 800 people globally in 2002 and 2003.

(Source: Reuters)

Syrian forces capture towns in advance on rebel-held Idlib

→ 1 Idlib and nearby areas of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia provinces are threatened by the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) terrorist group, led by members of the former al-Qaeda franchise.

Idlib remains the only large area in the hands of terrorists after the Syrian military managed to undo militant gains across the country and bring back almost all of Syrian soil under government control.

In another report, SANA said the terror outfits occupying Idlib and Aleppo countryside use locals as human shields and prevent them from leaving to safe areas through Abu al-Dohour, al-Habit and al-Hader corridors.

Jabhat al-Nusra and affiliated terrorist groups have established a number of monitoring posts in the areas adjacent to the recently liberated areas in a bid to block the civilians' exodus, the report added.

On Saturday, Syria's Foreign Ministry wrote to the UN, stressing that the operation in Idlib and Aleppo against Takfiri elements "will not stop until the elimination of those terrorists, who threaten safety and security of Syrian civilians."

In two letters sent to the UN chief and the head of the Security Council, the ministry complained that armed terrorist groups, particularly Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra, continue to target civilians and facilities such as hospitals, schools and places of worship in Idlib and Aleppo.

The militants prevent locals from leaving the occupied towns to safe areas, according to the letters.

"The precise and well studied military



operations carried out by the Syrian Arab Army and its allies in Aleppo and Idlib come after the appeals from the Syrian citizens in these two governorates, and in response to the systematic crimes committed by the armed terrorist groups which continue to exploit the unwavering military and logistic support provided by Western countries and their tools in the region," the letters read.

U.S. soldier dies in Syria

Also on Saturday, the Pentagon announced that an American soldier had died in Syria, adding that the incident was under investigation.

According to a release by the department, Army Specialist Antonio I. Moore, 22, from

Wilmington, North Carolina, died in Syria's Dayr al-Zawr Province on Friday "during a rollover accident while conducting route clearing operations."

General Frank McKenzie, the US Middle East commander, made an unannounced tour of five military bases in Syria, during which he was asked about the future of American troops in the Arab country.

"This is an area where we made a commitment. I think we're going to be here for a while," he replied.

On Saturday morning, McKenzie met with Mazloum Abdi, the commander of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - a US-backed alliance of mainly Kurdish

militants. He said that Abdi wanted assurances that Washington would continue to help SDF militants.

The US commander said his answer was that the US would continue to partner with militants and control Syrian oil fields, but that he had not put a deadline on it.

"He knows, and I agree, that we're not going to be here for 100 years," McKenzie said during a stop at Green Village military outpost, east of Dayr al-Zawr.

"I frankly don't know how long we're going to be here and I have no instructions other than to continue to work with our partner here."

(Source: agencies)

Palestinians promise to abandon Oslo Accords over Trump peace plan

U.S.-crafted Israeli-Palestinian plan 'fraud of the century': Erekat

The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) reserves the right to withdraw from the Oslo agreements, which regulate relations between the Palestinian Authority and the state of Israel, if U.S. President Donald Trump releases his "deal of the century" peace plan, AFP reported, citing Saeb Erekat, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and former Palestinian representative in the talks on the Oslo Accords.

The former Palestinian chief negotiator stated that Trump's plan seeks to turn the "temporary occupation [of Palestinian territory by Israel] into a permanent" one, although there has so far been no reliable information about the political part of Trump's "deal".

The Oslo accords, signed in the 1990s, officially created the Palestinian Authority as a structure tasked with exercising self-governance over the territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, while also marking the start of the Oslo Peace Process, which was aimed at achieving peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

U.S.-crafted Israeli-Palestinian plan 'fraud of the century'

Saeb Erekat has roundly dismissed U.S. President Donald Trump's so-called deal of the century on the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict, saying any bid that ignores the Israeli regime's occupation of Palestinian land will go down in history as the "fraud of the century."

"Reminder to the International Community: Israel is



an Occupying Power of the State of Palestine on the 1967 borders (East al-Quds, West Bank, and Gaza strip). Any deal, attempt or dictation that ignores this fact will be recorded in history as the fraud of the century," Erekat wrote in a post published on his official Twitter page on Saturday.

He added that Trump's administration has fully cooperated with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, emphasizing that such partnership will be recorded in history as the fraud of the century against international law, UN resolutions, and the terms of the so-called peace process.

Hamas official: U.S. deal of century 'mere illusion'

Meanwhile, a member of the politburo of the Palestin-

ian Islamic resistance movement, Hamas, has described Trump's long-delayed "deal of the century" peace plan as delusional.

Addressing people at the Great Mosque of Gaza, Khalil al-Hayya termed the deal as "mere illusion" and "pipe dreams for Zionists and the U.S. administration."

"A popular uprising by all lovers of al-Quds worldwide would be enough to foil the plots of the Occupation (Israel) and force it to retreat," Hayya noted.

In a separate statement, Hamas vowed to thwart the U.S.'s "deal of the century," stressing that "any deal or project that disregards the Palestinian people's right to their land and holy sites would never pass."

DFLP calls for mass uprising to confront 'deal of the century'

Furthermore, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) has called for a popular Intifada (uprising) against Trump's plan.

The Palestinian political party said in a statement "the deal will give the Occupation (Israel) the green light to proceed with its colonial measures to annex the Jordan Valley, the northern Dead Sea in addition to all settlements across the West Bank, and press ahead with its plans to further Judaize al-Quds and obliterate its national features."

(Source: agencies)

House impeachment leader Schiff accuses Trump of threatening him on Twitter

Democratic U.S. House impeachment manager Adam Schiff said on Sunday he believes Republican President Donald Trump's comment that he has not yet "paid the price" was intended as a threat.

Trump launched another attack on Democrats including Schiff over the Senate impeachment trial earlier on Sunday, saying on Twitter "he has not paid the price, yet, for what he has done to our Country!"

Asked on NBC's "Meet the Press" if he viewed that as a threat, Schiff said, "I think it was intended to be."

(Source: AP)



Israel approves travel to Saudi under limited circumstances

Israel Sunday announced that it would permit Israeli citizens to travel to Saudi Arabia for the first time, under certain conditions.

Israeli Interior Minister Aryeh Deri, after consulting with the country's security establishment, issued a statement saying that Israelis would be allowed to travel to Saudi Arabia under two circumstances; for religious reasons on pilgrimage on the haj, or for up to nine days for business reasons such as investment or meetings.

Travelers would still need permission from the Saudi authorities, the statement said.

(Source: Reuters)



U.S. senators push Pentagon on Syria strategy after withdrawal uproar

A bipartisan pair of senators is pressing the Pentagon for "clarity" on the U.S. military mission in Syria.

In a letter to the top officials at the Pentagon, Sens. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.) and Mitt Romney (R-Utah) cited both the recent spike in U.S.-Iran tensions and last year's firestorm over President Trump's order to withdraw from Syria when seeking answers to a dozen questions on the U.S. strategy in Syria.

"We would appreciate further clarity about the mission of U.S. troops currently deployed to Syria," the senators wrote to Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley in a letter obtained by The Hill ahead of its release. "Until now, the administration has not articulated a coherent and consistent strategy to Congress."

In October, Trump ordered U.S. forces in northeast Syria to withdraw ahead of a Turkish offensive against Syrian Kurdish forces, who had been instrumental in the U.S. fight against ISIS.

Later, Trump said he would withdraw all U.S. forces from Syria, save for a couple hundred at a garrison in southern Syria.

The orders sparked a fierce bipartisan backlash, as lawmakers fumed about abandoning Kurdish allies and warned of leaving a vacuum in which ISIS could reemerge.

Amid the opposition, Trump backtracked on a full withdrawal and left about 800 U.S. troops in Syria. But



Trump sparked a new round of confusion when he said those troops were staying to "secure the oil," leading to questions about whether the United States had changed its objective in Syria from fighting ISIS.

Meanwhile, the United States and Iran were on the brink of war earlier this month after a U.S. drone strike killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani. Following the strike, which took place on Iraqi soil, U.S. operations against ISIS in Iraq have been paused.

Iranian and Iranian-backed forces operate in Syria to bolster Syrian President Bashar Assad, and U.S. officials have argued the U.S. military presence in Syria helps curb Iranian influence.

In their letter, dated Thursday, Cortez Masto and Rom-

ney asked for unclassified answers to several questions "given the confusion over the mission of U.S. troops in Syria, particularly amid heightened regional tensions and strain on counter-ISIS operations, as well as the lack of clarity over how the mission connects to the administration's articulated strategic aims."

The pair asked what the "primary" U.S. mission in northern Syria is, what the mission is at the al Tanf garrison in southern Syria and whether U.S. troops in Syria have any "secondary" missions.

The senators also asked whether there are enough forces on the ground to both protect oil fields and fight ISIS, and what the rules of engagement are for the troops at the oil fields when facing forces associated with the Syrian government, Russia or Iran.

They further asked whether threats to U.S. troops in Syria have changed since the Soleimani strike, what steps are being taken to protect troops in Syria from Iranian retaliation and whether anti-ISIS operations have paused as they have in Iraq.

Alluding to Iraqi calls for a U.S. troop withdrawal following the Soleimani strike, Cortez Masto and Romney also asked about the viability of the U.S. mission in Syria if troops leave Iraq.

The senators asked Milley and Esper to respond at their "earliest opportunity" but by Feb. 13 at the latest.

(Source: The Hill)

Less quantity but more quality, Iran's Paralympic policy in 2020: official

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran's **d e s k** chef de mission for the 2020 Paralympic Games Hadi Rezaei says that they will send the athletes who have more chance of winning medals in the Games.

Iran sent a record number of competitors to Rio 2016, being represented by 110 athletes in 12 sports. The Iranian athletes won eight gold, nine silver and seven bronze medals and finished in 15th place.

Iran's NPC has reduced the number of athletes to 72 at Tokyo 2020.

"The members of 14-man executive board have approved the policy because we can win the same number of medals that we won in the previous edition. More quality, less quantity is our policy in the Games," Rezaei said in a news conference held in Iran's National Paralympic Committee's headquarters on Sunday.

Iran football 5-a-side and wheelchair basketball teams, who have already secured their places at the Tokyo 2020, will be absent in the Games. Rezaei says it's an effective way to reduce the cost because they cannot meet the expectations.

"We know that there's a lot of emotions about that, but we have decided on what we can earn. It will help us for investment in grassroots sport since we have 2022 Asian Para Games in Hangzhou and 2024 Paralympic Games ahead of us," he added.



Iran's best performance at the Paralympic Games since they made their debut at Seoul in 1988 was at London 2012 when they finished 11th with a total of 24 medals, including 10 gold. The Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games are set to be the biggest and best yet with around 4,400 Para athletes from more than 160 countries taking part in 22 sports.

Iran earn third successive win at CAFA U19 Girl's Futsal Championship



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran **d e s k** defeated Turkmenistan 12-0 at the CAFA U19 Girl's Futsal Championship 2020 on Sunday.

Roghayeh Sume'eh scored six goals for Iran and Maral Torkman and Fahimeh Arzani each added two. Nasrin Ghomi and Negar Yaghoubi also scored once each.

Iran, who have defeated Tajikistan and Af-

ghanistan, will meet Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz Republic on Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively.

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

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

Persepolis down Tractor to move five points clear



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Persepolis **d e s k** defeated Tractor 2-0 to move five point clear at the top of Iran Professional league (IPL) on Sunday.

In the match held in Tehran's Azadi Stadium, Ali Alipour needed just eight minutes to open Tractor's goal.

Vahid Amiri extended the hosts' lead

in the 57th minute, firing past Tractor goalie Rashid Mazaheri to make it 2-0.

Naft Masjed Soleyman also defeated Sanat Naft 2-0 thanks to goals from Alireza Alizadeh and Omid Singh.

Persepolis sit top of the table with 37 points, five points ahead of Sepahan. Tractor remained third with 30 points.

Hamid Estili meets flood-stricken people of Sistan and Balouchestan



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran U23 football team **d e s k** head coach Hamid Estili went to see the flood-stricken people in Sistan and Balouchestan Province and talked to them about their problem.

He arrived in Chabahar city on Saturday night, and then went to Owraki Bozorg-e Olya Village on Sunday morning and met with flood-affected villagers.

The ex-player of the Iranian national football team, clad in the traditional dress of Sistan and Balouchestan, played football with young people of Owraki Village for a few minutes and tried to encourage aspiring children to follow their dreams during difficult times.

Unprecedented heavy rainfall which began on Jan.

10 has led to flash flooding in the southeastern province, as 145 stations have recorded rainfall, 95 of which have reported receiving more than 50 mm of rain and 17 stations received some 100-200 mm.

Estili has traveled to the flooded-stricken areas with non-cash donations for flood victims, including sports-wear, sneakers, and balls, and is going to visit other villages and areas of Sistan and Baluchistan Province which are damaged by flash flooding.

According to preliminary estimates, a loss of 6.5 trillion rials (nearly \$155 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) has been brought to the agricultural sector of the region.

Korea beat Saudi Arabia in extra time to take Asian U23 football crown

South Korea defeated Saudi Arabia 1-0 in extra time to capture their first Asian men's football title in the under-23 age group on Sunday.

Defender Jeong Tae-wook headed in the winner in the 113th minute in the final of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) U23 Championship at Rajamangala Stadium in Bangkok, breaking a deadlock after the two sides had fired blanks.

This was the fourth edition of the biennial tournament, and the first title won by South Korea, who had one runners-up finish sandwiched by a pair of fourth-place showings prior to this year.

Coached by Kim Hak-bum, South Korea won all six matches at this event — three in the group stage, followed by victories in the quarterfinals, semifinals and final — by a combined score of 10-3.

The final had an anticlimactic feel, for both contestants had already accomplished their main goal — qualifying for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

This tournament doubled as the Asian Olympic qualifying event, and the top three teams punched their tickets to Tokyo. South Korea and Saudi Arabia got their spots sealed by reaching the final, while Australia joined them by knocking off Uzbekistan 1-0 in Saturday's third-place match.



South Korea will be making a record ninth consecutive appearance in the Olympics. Their only medal came in the form of bronze at London 2012.

South Korea and Saudi Arabia traded few chances in the quiet, almost passive first half. In the 20th, South Korean winger Jeong Woo-yeong got deep into the left side of the box and rolled the ball through the legs of Saud Abdulhamid before tak-

ing a shot, only to have it kicked aside by goalkeeper Mohammed Al-Yami.

Saudi Arabia had their best opportunity about nine minutes later. Khalid Al-Ghannam stole a Jeong Tae-wook pass deep in the South Korean zone and fed the ball to Abdullah Al-Hamdan, whose shot went off defender Lee Sang-min and then hit the Saudi forward before going out of bounds.

With about four minutes before the break, Jeong had a wide open look at the net after a smart Kim Jin-ya cross, but the SC Freiburg midfielder sent the shot flying over the target.

Though it didn't seem possible, there was even less action in the second half. But substitute South Korean midfielder Lee Dong-jun fired a left-footed shot from the center of the box that was tipped out by the diving Al-Yami in the 57th.

After maintaining possession in and around the Korean box for what seemed like an eternity, Abdulrahman Ghareeb launched a hard shot from the top of the box in the 87th minute that went high and wide of the net.

Not much happened in the extra time until Lee Dong-geong rolled a left-footed shot that forced a diving stop by Al-Yami in the 110th minute.

In the next minute, Oh Se-hun drew a foul that set up the free kick from outside the left side of the box. Lee Dong-geong sent a floating cross toward the goalmouth, and Jeong, the tallest player on the pitch at 194 centimeters, jumped over defender Abdulbaset Al-Hindi and headed in the ball to provide the winning margin.

(Source: Yonhap)

Irishman Stokes joins Iran's Persepolis

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Irish forward Anthony Stokes **d e s k** has signed a six-month contract with Iranian football giants Persepolis.

This comes after he was released by Turkish second-tier outfit Adana Demispor.



Stokes can strengthen the attacking options of the Iran Professional league holders.

The Irishman, who had earlier spell with Tractor, has joined the Reds to help them win the league title for the fourth time in a row.

Stokes has capped nine times by Ireland between 2007 and 2014.

Stokes began his senior career with Arsenal, but established himself with a successful loan spell with Falkirk in 2006, scoring 14 goals in 16 SPL games.

Iran win two gold medals at Karate 1-Premier League Paris

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iranian karate fighters claimed **d e s k** two gold medals and one bronze at the Karate 1-Premier League Paris on Sunday.

Bahman Asgari seized a gold medal after beating Frenchman Logan Da Costa 4-0 in the final match of the Male Kumite -75 Kg.

He had defeated Azerbaijan's Rafaei Aghayev, Japan's Ken Nishimura, Luigi Busa from Italy and Ukraine's Stanislav Horuna en route to the final match.

Hamideh Abbasali also took a gold medal, beating her Turkish opponent Meltem Hocaoglu Akyol in the Female Kumite +68kg final 6-3.

She had earlier defeated Sofie Abild from Denmark, Slovakian Dominika Tatarova, France's Laure Anne Florentin and Bulgarian Aleksandra Stuleva.

Saleh Abazari also won a bronze medal in the Male Kumite +84kg after defeating Saudi Arabian fighter Tareg Hamed 3-0 in the bronze medal match.

More than 700 competitors from 92 countries competed at the event from Jan. 24 to 26 in Paris, France.

Drulovic proud of Uzbekistan despite Olympic disappointment

Uzbekistan head coach Ljubinko Drulovic has declared that he is proud of his players despite seeing the Central Asians lose 1-0 to Australia on Saturday to finish fourth at the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 and have their hopes of qualifying for this year's Olympic Games dashed.

Nicholas D'Agostino's superb 47th minute strike proved the difference on a night when Uzbekistan missed several opportunities to seal the win and their cause was hindered severely by the second-half dismissal of substitute Oybek Bozorov.

The result brought Uzbekistan's once promising campaign to a disappointing end, and left Drulovic to reflect on what could have been for the competition's 2018 champions.

"I am very proud of my players as they gave everything for Uzbekistan, for the people of the country and for the fans" declared the Serbian tactician.

"Of course, we don't like to lose, but sometimes things like this happen, this is football. We gave everything on the pitch but we can do nothing about that now.

"We gave our absolute best in every situation there was to qualify for the Olympics. It is, in truth, difficult to comment on the match as we lost a big chance to play in the Olympics which was our target when we came here."

Having been the better side during the first period, Uzbekistan's challenge faltered somewhat after the break as they ultimately failed to join tournament finalists Korea Republic and Saudi Arabia at Tokyo 2020.

However, after seeing his charges impress at times during the Continental get-together in the Thai capital, Drulovic was adamant that several positives had emerged during Uzbekistan's campaign.

"Overall, we played good football at this tournament," he said. "Of course, I am not happy because we had our dream of reaching the Olympics, but the Uzbekistan team has good players, good professionals and we worked very well at this AFC U23 Championship.

"Small differences decided our [semi-final] match against Saudi Arabia and then again against Australia — crucial games we lost 1-0. We tried to do everything we could, but we cannot control all that happens. Our players need to forget this [disappointment] and give their all next time."

(Source: the-afc)

Korea Republic's Song named Best Goalkeeper

Korea Republic's Song Bum-Keun was named the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 Best Goalkeeper following Sunday's final at the Rajamangala Stadium.

Song was an integral part of Korea Republic's campaign, which climaxed with the East Asians defeating Saudi Arabia in extra-time. The Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors custodian was the only player to have played in all six matches, conceding only three goals as Korea Republic registered a perfect record of six wins en route to the title.

Thailand's Jaroensak Wonggorn won the Top Scorer award, having netted three goals in a tournament which saw the host nation advance to the knockout stage of the AFC U23 Championship for the first time.

(Source: the-afc)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807
Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603
www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433
Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
Printed at: Jame Jam Bartar Borna - 44197737

Tehrantimes79 Tehrantimesdaily

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.o. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713



GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

If someone gives a loan and is not sure whether he will be repaid and the debtor pays it back in its proper time, then the creditor is liable to tithe.

Imam Ali (AS)

Art Bureau to make doc on Martyr Soleimani's affection for children

TEHRAN — The Art Bureau for Children and Young Adults plans to portray Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani's affection for children in a documentary film.

"Martyr Soleimani and his kind behavior toward children will be the main topic of the documentary," Art Bureau Deputy Director for Cultural Affairs Hamid Hosseinzadeh said in a press release on Sunday.



Commander Qassem Soleimani greets several children of Iranian soldiers martyred by the ISIS terrorists in Syria in an undated photo.

"His affection towards children especially the children of those Iranian soldiers who were martyred by ISIS terrorists in Syria was very special and was one of the lasting aspects of his character," he added.

"Any image that narrates specific aspects and bravery of the martyr needs to be recorded and preserved for future generations to show how this national and international hero achieved such a high position and won the hearts," he added.

He gave no information about the director and crew members of the documentary, which will be filmed on locations in Tehran and Kerman, Soleimani's hometown.

The documentary is scheduled to be screened during the Week of Islamic Revolution Arts in April. Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. air raid in Baghdad on January 3.

"No Place for Angels" crew to raise funds for Sistan-Baluchestan flood victims

TEHRAN — The crew members of the documentary "No Place for Angels" about the national Iranian women's hockey team announced on Sunday they will donate all the box office receipts during the Fajr Film Festival to the flood victims in Sistan-Baluchestan.

Directed by Sam Kalantari, the documentary will be competing in the 38th Fajr Film Festival. In a video released on social networks, the members of the hockey team called upon the Iranian people to watch the documentary during the festival.

The girls have mentioned that people, especially the people from Sistan-Baluchestan, have had a great role in their victories. "No Place for Angels" shared the special jury award with "Sheep Hero" by Dutch filmmaker Ton van Zantvoort at the 13th Cinéma VÉRITÉ, Iran's major documentary film festival, in December 2019.

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

Fajr festival to honor 4 theater elites with lifetime achievement awards

Six troupes from Poland, Armenia, Belgium, Switzerland and Greece will perform in the international section of the festival, which is non-competitive this year," he added.

Guests from 19 countries, including Finland, Georgia, France, Belgium, Russia, Italy, Azerbaijan and Denmark, have also been invited to the Iranian Theater Market that will be running from February 2 to 6.

The director of Iran's Dramatic Arts Center, Shahram Karami, also attending the conference, said that the organizers have faced three challenges to organize this year's festival.

"The first challenge is a lack of investors and we are obliged to run the festival with no sponsor again this year," Karami said. "Our second problem is the economic sanctions, which have influenced the festival, and the third one goes back to the troupes, which have withdrawn from the festival this year," Karami explained.

Iranian troupes will hold their performances in the different national competition and non-competition sections.

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

Iranian literati visit flood-stricken Sistan-Baluchestan

TEHRAN — A number of Iranian writers and poets paid a visit to some in Sistan-Baluchestan on Thursday and Friday to express their sympathy with the flood victims in the southeastern Iranian province.

Esmail Amini, Mohammadreza Bayrami, Reza Amirkhani, Shahrar Abbasi, Gholamreza Tariqi and Mehdi Qezeli visited several villages in the province and held talks with the residents, Iranian Fiction and Poetry Foundation, which was the organizer of the tour, announced in a press release on Sunday.

The group also discussed a plan to establish a library in the remote border village of Kalani, while they also presented children with books and stationery prepared by the foundation in Tehran.

In addition, they also donated all children's books submitted to the Fajr Poetry Festival to a library in the village of Ramin near the port city of Chabahar.

Submissions to the Jalal Literary Awards as well as the 14th Fajr International Poetry Festival are scheduled to be distributed in the region.

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



This photo shows the writers and a number of children in the flood-stricken region of Sistan-Baluchestan.

15 movies line up for Termeh Iranian Cultural Festival in Munich



"1 Kilo of Fly's Wing" by Reza Sobhani.

TEHRAN — Fifteen movies from Iranian filmmakers will be screened during the 4th Termeh Iranian Cultural Festival, which will take place in Munich, Germany from January 30 to February 12.

The films will compete in a three-day program, which will commence on February 5, the organizers have announced.

Short fiction movies "Rhino" by Armin Purmohammad, "Slow Death" by Amin Sahrai, "Tasouki" by Puria Pishvai, "Cover" by Vahid Alvandifar, "Reverence" by Sogol Rezvani and "A +" by Behrang Mirzai are among the films.

The lineup also includes the three documentaries "1 Kilo of Fly's Wing" by

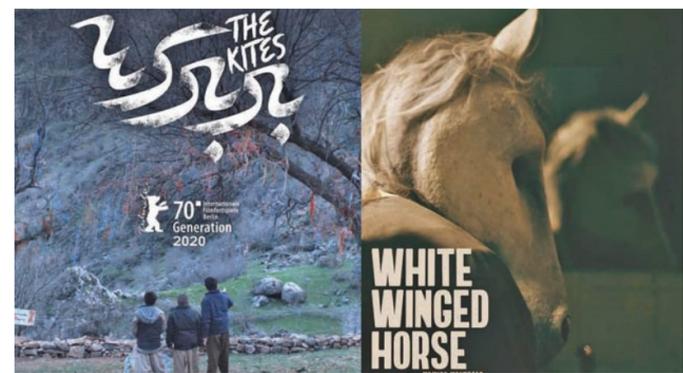
Reza Sobhani, "Darkened Water" by Alireza Dehqan and "Suzangerd" by Masumeh Nurmohammadi Qomi.

The animated film competition also features "Summer Snow" by Amin Chadegani, "Command" by Farshid Abdi, "A Nightmare Tale" by Farhad Gholami, "Loop" by Omid Safai, "S" by Hamed Aslani, and "This Side, Other Side" by Lida Fazli.

Critic Sahar Asrazad and filmmakers Omid Shams and Nima Qolizadegan are the members of the jury.

A great part of the festival is dedicated to music. Mojgan Shajarian, Azad Mirzapour, Farideh Sarsangi, Mohammad Azmand, and Vahid Salehi are among the musicians who will perform during the event.

More films from Iran join Berlinale lineup



This combination photo shows posters for the Iranian short films "The Kites" by Seyyed Payam Hosseini (L) and "White Winged Horse" by Mahyar Mandegar.

TEHRAN — The Iranian short films "The Kites" and "White Winged Horse" will be screened in the Generation section of the 70th edition of the Berlin International Film Festival.

Directed by Seyyed Payam Hosseini, "The Kites" is about a girl whose kite flies away along the Iraqi-Iranian border of Kurdistan. She calls three boys for help. However, the children are not only separated by a river, but also by the explosive legacies of past wars.

The film will go on screen in the Generation Kplus of the festival, which will be held from February 20 to March 1. "White Winged Horse" by Mahyar

Mandegar is about a man who returns to his Iranian hometown, which was destroyed in the war 20 years ago. He is searching for his childhood sweetheart who had promised him eternal love.

The film will have its world premiere in the Generation 14plus Section of the festival along with other Iranian feature film "Yalda, a Night for Forgiveness" by Masud Bakhshi.

The festival will also screen "The Alien" ("Name") by Nader Saeivar in the Forum section, while "Selfie with Democracy" by Ali Atshani will be showcased during the European Film Market (EFM), which will be held on the sidelines of the festival.

Pain and Glory wins big at Spain's Goya awards

MALAGA, Spain (Reuters) — Pedro Almodovar's Oscar-nominated "Pain and Glory" was the big winner at the 34th Goya Awards, Spain's top film honors, held in Malaga on Saturday night, going home with seven awards including best actor for Antonio Banderas, best director for Almodovar and best film.

Banderas, who first collaborated with Almodovar in 1982's "Labyrinth of Passion", thanked the director for their nearly 40 years of collaboration.

"I have learnt so much from you, not only about art but about life...I've done my best work with you," Banderas said while collecting the award, adding he hoped the pair would continue to work together in the future.

The win puts "Pain and Glory", about an aging film director, as a strong favorite for the best international feature film Oscar, while Banderas will go up against actors including Joaquin Phoenix and Leonardo DiCaprio in the best actor category at the ceremony held in Los Angeles on February 9.

Penelope Cruz, who also stars in Almodovar's film, lost out in the race for best actress, which went to Belen Cuesta for "The Endless Trench".

"Pain and Glory's" other wins included best supporting actress for Julieta Serrano and best original screenplay for Almodovar.

Alejandro Amenabar's Spanish Civil War drama "While at War" won five awards including best supporting actor for Eduard Fernandez.



Photo: Actor Antonio Banderas poses with his award for "Best Actor" for the film "Dolor y gloria" ("Pain and Glory") during a photocall at the Spanish Film Academy's Goya Awards ceremony in Malaga, Spain, January 25, 2020. (Reuters/Jon Nazca)

The ceremony was attended by Spanish political as well as acting royalty - Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez was in the audience and was singled out several times by presenters and winners - including Almodovar - who urged him to do more to protect culture and cinema in Spain.

The award for best European film went to France's "Les Misérables", while Argentina's "Heroic Losers" won best Latin American Film.

One of the surprises of the night was the award for best new actress, which went to 84-year-old Benedicta Sanchez for her first ever role in Oliver Laxe's Galician-language "Fire Will Come". Sanchez thanked her daughter for taking her to the audition.

Johnny Depp jams with Aerosmith as band celebrates 50-year career

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Actor Johnny Depp and musician Alice Cooper joined Aerosmith on Friday at a gala dinner and performance in Los Angeles to celebrate the band's 50-year career as one of the best-selling American hard rock bands of all times.

Cooper and Depp - who play with Aerosmith guitarist Joe Perry in rock supergroup Hollywood Vampires - were among more than a dozen artists including the Foo Fighters, Sammy Hagar and John Legend who sang the band's biggest hits as it was named the MusiCares person of the year.

Organized by the Recording Academy, the annual MusiCares event raised some \$6 million on Friday for health services to members of the music industry.

Hosted by British comedian Russell Brand, the night was marked by jokes about the band's drug-fueled past and the advancing age of frontman Steven Tyler, Perry, and guitarists Brad Whitford and Tom Hamilton.

"It's a miracle he's still alive!" Brand said of Tyler, 71.

Aerosmith, formed in 1970 in Boston, rose to fame when the band broke through as America's answer to the Rolling Stones with its fusion of hard rock and blues.

Tyler and Perry quickly earned the nickname "the Toxic Twins" due to their heavy use of drugs, a moniker cemented later in the band's career by their numerous feuds and multiple trips to rehab.

Internal conflicts boiled over in 2009 after Tyler fell off the stage and his band mates threatened to hire a new singer to replace him.

"Should I, which I won't, fall again, y'all might help me back up again, and I



Vocalist Steven Tyler (L) and guitarist Joe Perry of Aerosmith perform during their "Aerosmith: Let Rock Rule" tour at The Forum in Inglewood, California July 30, 2014. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

love you so much for that," Tyler told the audience on Friday, praising the work of MusiCares.

Feuding floored again this week when drummer Joey Kramer lost a legal bid to play at the dinner after a period out through injury last year.

Kramer did, however, join his band mates on stage as they accepted their MusiCares awards, which also recognized Tyler's Janie's Fund charity for abused and neglected girls.

On Friday, R&B singer Legend got a standing ovation for his version of power ballad "I Don't Want to Miss a Thing," while pop star Kesha gave an emotional rendition of the band's song about child abuse, "Janie's Got a Gun."

Country singer LeAnn Rimes showed off her inner rock star on "Livin' On the Edge," while boy band the Jonas Brothers took on "Crazy".