



Arab League holds emergency meeting over Trump plan

Palestine 'cutting all ties' with U.S. and Israel over Trump's 'deal of the century: Abbas



See page 10

Nearly 800 industrial, transport projects to come on stream in 10 days

TEHRAN — Iranian government is planning to inaugurate numerous industrial, mining, and transport projects during the Ten-Day Dawn which marks the 41st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, IRNA reported on Saturday.

As reported, the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry is scheduled to inaugurate 439 industrial and mining projects in the said ten-day period, while more than 360 transportation projects are also expected to be inaugurated by the Ministry

of Transport and Urban Development.

According to Saied Zarendi, the deputy minister of industry, mining and trade, about 500 trillion rials (about \$11.9 billion) has been invested in the mentioned industry ministry's projects which are going to create jobs for over 22,400 people all over the country.

According to the official, 10 major projects are also going to be commenced in the mentioned time span for which over 85 trillion rials (about \$2 billion) of investment is required. ➔4

Nearly 2000 more candidates eligible to run for parliament

TEHRAN — Guardian Council spokesman Abbas Ali Kadhodaei said on Saturday that number of candidates eligible to contest the parliamentary elections may increase, announcing that the competence of nearly 2000 more candidates have been confirmed by the council.

Kadhodaei said the Guardian Council has started studying the qualification of those rejected in the first screening stage.

"Today, we entered the second phase of studying qualification of the candidates.

Those who were announced to be disqualified can file a complaint," he told a press conference.

The elections for the 290-seat parliament will be held on February 21.

"The Guardian Council will do its duty and we are sensitive toward studying qualifications," Kadhodaei pointed out.

The spokesman added the duty of the Guardian Council is to properly monitor the election rather than creating an atmosphere for an "enthusiastic election".

Army has the fifth most powerful ground force in the world: commander

TEHRAN — According to military experts the Iranian army has the fifth most powerful ground force in the world, Chief of the Army Ground Force said on Saturday.

Iran's Ground Force is the 5th most powerful ground force in the world," Brigadier General Kiomars Heidari said as he visited a military training center in Tehran.

Iran has conducted major military drills

in recent years to enhance the defense capabilities of its armed forces, testing modern military tactics and state-of-the-art equipment.

In November 2019, the ground force staged large-scale military drills, codenamed "Zolfaghar-e Velayat", in northwest Iran to boost the combat readiness of its units. It covered a vast strategic area in the region. ➔3



EDITORIAL
Mohammad Ghaderi
 Tehran Times editor-in-chief
 @ghaderi62

Only as a record in history: Read with open eyes to know more!

Following unprecedented pressure against the Iranian nation in recent decades, the West is trying to illustrate Iran as a peace-threatening abnormal country and the U.S. as a pro-peace and security government to deceive the public opinion via their propagandistic media empire.

This article has listed only a few examples via which the audience can find out a series of realities to be immune against ill-wishers' intention of dodging him or her.

Iran has not waged war against any country in the last two centuries, while in the mentioned period of time the country has been one of the largest victims of foreign aggressions, terrorism, chemical weapons, severe economic sanctions and continuous military threats.

The U.S., as the main country which has always been accusing Iran of being an abnormal nation, only has 241 years of independent history. The U.S. has been involved in different wars during 93 percent of its history (222 years). A sum of 20 million people were killed in 37 wars by the U.S. troops after the World War II.

The U.S., which along with Saudi Arabia played key role in preliminary formation of the al Qaeda terrorist network in Afghanistan, managed to wage a series of wars under the pretext of combat against terrorism, particularly after the September 11 attacks. The U.S. military operations have caused irreparable damages on the people of Iraq, Afghanistan and partly Pakistan. Its military raids have left at least half a million of innocent civilians killed and millions more injured.

The U.S. has the record of 81 cases of open and official interference in the other nations' elections in years between 1946 till 2000.

The U.S. has set up more than 600 military bases overseas, including in the Middle East, which is 11,000 km away from the United States.

The U.S. has violated or abandoned numerous international deals, agreements and regulations to which it had been a signatory over the past decades. ➔10

Europe and the JCPOA: inactivity and errors

By Lupicinio Rodriguez and J. L. Iriarte

On 14 January, France, Britain, and Germany launched the dispute settlement mechanism provided for in paragraphs 36 and 37 of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which in July 2015 lifted the sanctions that were imposed on Iran due to its nuclear program.

It is worth recalling briefly how we have come to this situation. Until May 2018, the JCPOA worked reasonably well: sanctions on Iran were lifted, and Iran, for its part, scrupulously fulfilled its obligations.

It is true that during this phase the U.S. placed constant obstacles to financial transactions and the EU financial authorities and institutions pandered to U.S. pressures. However, there was a reasonable flow of business transactions and some investments emerged, some of which were substantial.

However, in May 2018 there was a disruptive overturn. The United States unilaterally reintroduced its sanctions, which also had a strong component of Secondary Sanctions, as they severely affected people and operations not linked to North America. In the face of this worrying behavior, the European Union merely updated its blocking status to better protect EU operators from the extraterritorial effects of U.S. sanctions, but it really did nothing else and, in this way, passed the opportunity to have acted more directly and effectively. It should have raised a determined opposition to the Trump Administration, making it clear that the initial breach of the IAC had been on the part of the United States and it should have revealed a position of clear support for Iran. The EU didn't, and let the situation deteriorate completely.

In this regard, we cannot forget that paragraph

37 of the JCPA ends by saying: "Iran has declared that, if sanctions are re-established in whole or in part, it will consider this as a reason to fail to fulfill its commitments under the IPAP in its entirety or partly." And that was precisely what it did; in May 2019, a year after the reintroduction of U.S. sanctions, Iran began to gradually reduce compliance with its obligations under the JCPA, so that every two months it took a step in this direction until 5 January 2020 when Iran has suspended its JCPA commitments. This means that European countries have had two years to make it clear that the United States was the one who had begun to disregard and consequently managed to reverse the situation through all the mechanisms at their disposal (sanctions, threats, pressures and military action, etc.). Of course, the U.S.A. and partly the EU, has constantly disregarded the social calamity caused by its action. ➔4

"Deal of Century" is neo-imperial attempt: Adib-Moghaddam

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute believes that "Trump and Netanyahu have to be analyzed as a part of a global right-wing coterie that shares a highly divisive and hegemonic world-view, and is tied into a corrupt and equally transnational, aggressive capitalist dynamic."

Professor in Global Thought and Comparative Philosophies also adds that "This capitulation plan for the Palestinians is a neo-imperial attempt to push for a final settlement that will make a Palestinian state impossible."

He adds that "There is no common 'Arab' position on Palestine. There is the Saudi axis,

that departed from a pro-Palestinian stance a long time ago, opting to cow tail to Israel instead, against what is perceived to be their bigger threat, i.e. Iran."

Here is the full text of the interview.

■ Trump and Netanyahu unveiled the deal of the century at the same time as Senate is impeaching Trump and Netanyahu is Israel's first prime minister to received three indictments against him. Did the timing of this unveiling have anything to do with this issue?

A: Trump and Netanyahu have to be analyzed as a part of a global right-wing coterie that shares a highly divisive and hegemonic world-view, and is tied into a corrupt and equally transnational, aggressive capitalist dynamic.

As such their actions are affected by those factors, rather than a real concern for national interest or the citizenry that voted them into power. Their personal travails, and the legal repercussions are good examples, and as you rightly indicate, they are quiet willing to subdue everything else for their personal agenda. So, yes, this capitulation plan for the Palestinians is also meant to distract from the legal cases against them, and to make them appear as "normal" statesmen, which they are not.

■ The deal of the century was designed without the Palestinian side's consultation and was not accepted or rejected by the Palestinian side, even by the PA. To what extent can this project be operational? ➔7

Leader visits Imam Khomeini mausoleum

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei on Saturday visited the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini in southern Tehran to pay tribute to the founder of the Islamic Republic.

The visit took place on the anniversary of the date Imam Khomeini arrived home from exile on Feb. 1, 1979. From Feb. 1 until Feb. 11, which is called ten-day dawn, Iran holds festivities marking the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

On Saturday, the Leader also visited the tombs of chief justice Mohammad Hossein Beheshti who was martyred along with 71 others in a terrorist attack on the office of the Islamic Republic Party in central Tehran on June 28, 1981. Ayatollah Khamenei also visited the graves of Mohammad Ali Rajaei and Mohammad Javad Bahonar, respectively president and prime minister who were assassinated in a bomb attack in 1981.

The Leader also visited the graves of other martyrs.



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ARTICLE
Ebrahim Fallahi
 Tehran Times Journalist

Coronavirus spreading pessimism across oil markets

Fears over the spread of the Coronavirus continue to overshadow the oil market as the number of people sickened by the virus has exceeded 10,000 globally and the death toll in China has passed over 200.

Oil prices have plunged more than 21 percent from their highest in early January, to mark the worst start of the year in almost three decades.

Following the fast spread of the virus, the World Health Organization has declared the virus a public health emergency and that too has added fuel to the fire of worrisome in the markets all around the world.

Although uncertainty about the severity and duration of the virus outbreak makes it impossible to estimate its real impact on the global economy in long term, however, the psychological impacts combined with the short-term hit to the transportation and tourism sectors which are directly linked to the demand for refined products like jet fuel are already felt in the oil markets.

The fact, at the moment, is that the oil markets are unlikely to get back on solid ground in the near future unless signs of coronavirus being tethered emerge soon.

■ **Coronavirus, the Chinese economy, and the world effect**

China has been through similar scenarios in the past and has survived them. In 2003, the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak resulted in a nearly two percent plunge in the country's economic growth in that year's first quarter, however after the virus was contained China recovered once again in the year's last quarter.

This time, however, the situation is different. In 2003, SARS killed almost 800 people and spread over nearly 8000 worldwide, coronavirus contamination, on the other hand, has already exceeded 10,000 people worldwide. ➔5

IRGC: Deal of the century doomed to failure

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps issued a statement on Saturday saying that the United States' so-called peace plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, titled "deal of the century", is doomed to failure and to be thrown into the "dustbin of history".

The IRGC strongly condemned the plan and called it a "big plot". The statement said that the "deal of the century" ignores the Palestinian people's rights and is "one of the biggest crimes and treacheries in temporary history".

It is also noted in the statement that al- Quds and Palestine are red lines of the Islamic ummah.

U.S. President Donald Trump announced the general provisions of the plan at the White House with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at his side on Tuesday.

Iranians called the plan "highway to hell", "most despicable plan of the century", "Deveal (devil+deal)", and "shameful, deceptive plan of the century".

U.S. brain injury numbers cover-up for dead U.S. troops in Iranian missile strike: IRGC

TEHRAN — The spokesman for the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps said that Washington's alleged numbers of "brain injuries" in its troops following the Iranian retaliatory missile strike on the Ein al-Assad airbase represent the number of dead troops.

"We conclude that what the United States announces to be related to brain injuries from the attack on Ain al-Assad to be a metaphor for dead US troops," Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif wrote for Iran's Vatan-e-Emrooz daily on Saturday, Press TV reported.

"I believe that the term 'brain trauma', whether mild, moderate or severe, reflects the number of dead, which they hesitate to formally announce," he said.

The spokesman added that "brain injuries" is an unusual and vague expression in common military terminology wherein all injured troops, even mild ones, are classified as being "injured".



Sharif noted that his assessment regarding U.S. casualty numbers was based on obtained information regardless of the fact that 13 large missile impacts from the Iranian attack are expected to cause "considerable casualties" among U.S. troops.

On January 8, Iran retaliated to the assassination of top General Qassem Soleimani by launching a volley of ballistic missiles at the U.S.-occupied Ein Al Assad base in Iraq and another outpost in Erbil, the capital of the semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan.

Despite initially claiming that the attack resulting in no casualties, the Trump administration has since gradually announced casualties from the Iranian attack, most recently claiming that 64 U.S. troops have suffered from "traumatic brain injuries".

The spokesman added that based on common death-to-injury ratios resulting from explosive blasts in military conflicts, the number of injured from such attacks is usually "three to four times" larger than the number of dead.

Shaif said that Washington is seeking to censor the true casualty count from the American public in order to cover its vulnerability towards probable future retaliatory strikes after the Ein al-Assad attack, which was considered as only a "first slap".

"Surely as we approach the U.S. Presidential election, more numbers and names related to the dead will be leaked along with the competition among the parties," he added.

Speaking on Friday, senior spokesman for Iranian Armed Forces Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi said that Washington had to anticipate harder responses from Iran if it continued with its policy of "maximum pressure" against Iran.

The newly-appointed head of the IRGC's Quds Force says Iran deal the U.S. "a first slap" by striking two American bases in Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of Lieutenant General Soleimani.

Underlining the significance of the Ein al-Assad attack, Shekarchi said that the missile strikes marked Iran's first ever formally announced operation against the U.S.

The spokesman added that Iran's approach in countering foreign provocations has shifted to offensive measures and is no longer limited to defensive actions.

Foreign Ministry: Iran's power dependent on people

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi offered his congratulations to the Iranian people on the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, describing it as "the most popular revolution in history".



"The most popular revolution in history came to fruition 41 years ago, and so far it has had no capital and support other than the people," Mousavi said on his Twitter account on Saturday as the ten-day dawn festivities began to mark the victory of the 1979 revolution.

"Today and in the second phase of the revolution, it has nothing but people as Iran's power is due to the people..." the spokesman added in his tweet, Tasnim reported.

The Iranian nation toppled the U.S.-backed Pahlavi regime on February 11, 1979, ending 2,500 years of monarchical system in the country.

The Islamic Revolution, led by Imam Khomeini, established a new political system based on Islamic values and democracy.

Every year, Iranians mark the anniversary of their Islamic Revolution from February 1 to 11, known as the ten-day dawn.

February 1, 1979, was the date that Ayatollah Khomeini returned home after 15 years in exile.

U.S. maximum pressure has become 'ineffective': Hatami

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Saturday that the United States' "maximum pressure" against Iran has become "ineffective", calling it a "failed policy".

During a speech at a school in Chabahar, Hatami said the Iranian people will never give in to excessive demands by the arrogant powers.

He added that Iran will pass this difficult time and solve problems with help of people. U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally quit the nuclear deal in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions in history on Iran as part of his administration's "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran.

Many analysts and think tanks believe that the maximum pressure policy has failed.

President Hassan Rouhani said in December 2019 that the White House has no way other than putting an end to its policy of "maximum pressure" on the



Islamic Republic.

Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani also said

in December that maximum pressure is a

"wrong policy" and the U.S. must stop it.

Advisor calls Gen. Soleimani 'hero of resistance'

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian Parliament speaker, said on Saturday that Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani is "hero of resistance".

During a meeting with Khaled al-Qadumi, the Hamas representative in Tehran, Amir Abdollahian said that Soleimani's path will continue until the complete defeat of arrogant countries.

For his part, Qaddumi said assassination of Soleimani was an instance of "state terrorism", showing fear and frustration at the White House.

General Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. airstrike in the Baghdad international airport on January 3. The assassination took place upon direct order by Donald Trump.

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

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

In new revelations, the Pentagon has confirmed that in Iran's retaliatory missile attack 64 American soldiers have been wounded.

Pentagon chief Mark Esper and chairman



of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley said Thursday the military took these types of injuries "very seriously" after criticism that the authorities sought to whitewash them.

"The number is growing," Milley added, explaining that it takes time to diagnose and screen soldiers present in the area at the time of the attack.

The New York Times cited a Pentagon statement, which put the total number of injured troops at 68.

The report said eight troops were currently being treated in the United States, 21 in Landstuhl, Germany and that another 39 injured troops have returned to military operations in Iraq.

The new tally marks at least the fourth instance where U.S. officials have raised the number of U.S. troops injured following the missile attack.

The Trump administration at first claimed that no Americans had been injured in the

Khanzadi says Navy is firm supporter of Iran's defense policy

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Navy will remain a firm supporter of Iran's defense policy, Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi said on Saturday.

In his message on the occasion of the 41st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution's victory, the commander said Navy will keep its role as a strong force to protect national interests.

Speaking in a meeting with military attaches of different countries in Tehran in December, Khanzadi also said Iran's waters

were safe thanks to its naval forces.

Referring to the U.S.-led maritime coalition in the Persian Gulf, Khanzadi said it was time for foreign powers to withdraw their forces from the region.

The Navy chief further said that vigilant nations would not agree to join the coalition of arrogant countries.

Khanzadi went on to say that Iran dispatched as many as 64 fleets over the past 10 years to the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and all other international waters to secure Iran's maritime trade and fight piracy.

Pointing to the achievements in the field of building various kinds of naval equipment such as destroyers and submarines, including Jamaran, Damavand, Sahand, Ghadir, Fateh, torpedoes, UAVs, he said the Iranian naval forces were able to have a constant presence in international waters.

Khanzadi also described the Iranian Navy as a "strategic force".

He noted that unlike many other countries, Iran's security in the sea was not dependent on foreigners, saying that all of the Navy's capabilities were indigenous.



'Deal of century does not enjoy international support'

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Sabah Zangeneh, former Iran's representative at the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), has said that the so-called United States' peace plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, titled "deal of the century", does not enjoy international support.

In an interview with IRNA published on Saturday, Zangeneh described the deal of century as "dangerous" which can throw international equations into disarray.

Expressing concerns over the consequences of the plan, he said, "Apparently, this plan is supposed to boost economy in the region. However, in fact, it will cause challenges to regional economy."

U.S. President Donald Trump announced the general provisions of the plan at the White House with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at his side on Tuesday.

The White House claimed that the plan is the most serious, realistic, and detailed plan ever presented, one that could make Israelis, Palestinians, and the region safer and more prosperous.

"This Vision is just the first step and provides the basis for historic progress toward peace. The United States hopes this Vision will lead to direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians," it added.

Palestinians took to streets in Gaza and the West Bank to protest the plan.

Ambassadors, international law experts, and politicians believe that the plan is designed to legitimize the stealing of the Palestinian lands.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said the plan would not serve peace because it ignores Palestinians' rights and attempts to legitimize Israel's occupation.

"Jerusalem is sacred for Muslims and Trump's so-called peace plan proposing to leave Jerusalem to Israel is never acceptable," he said on Wednesday, Anadolu news agency reported.

In a joint declaration, Turkey's parliament on Wednesday condemned the plan.

Describing the so-called "deal of the century," as a "plan of instability and conflict," Turkish lawmakers underlined



that it excluded Palestinians, "one of the two parts" of the dispute between Israel and Palestine.

"[The plan] is against UN decisions and the perspective of the two-state solution," the declaration said, accusing it of seeking to turn the occupation of Palestine into its annexation.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Tuesday, "We say a thousand times: No, no and no to the deal of the century," vowing that the U.S. plan "will not come to pass" and that "our people will send it to the dustbins of history."

During a meeting with Abbas on Friday, Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul-Gheit affirmed that Arab nations and the Palestinians will succeed in responding to the U.S. plan.

He described the plan as a "call to surrender".

In a series of tweets, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif castigated the plan.

"The so-called 'Vision for Peace' is simply the dream project of a bankruptcy-ridden real estate developer," Zarif said.

The foreign minister added the plan was a "nightmare for the region and the world and, hopefully, a wake-up call for all the Muslims who have been barking up the wrong tree."

Zarif also said the plan is "sleepwalking into a catastrophe"

and likened it to "highway to hell".

The foreign minister also said Muslims must "wake up" to this plot as the United States has proven that it has never been an "honest broker" in mediation between the Palestinians and the Zionist regime of Israel.

"We Muslims need to wake up: The U.S. never was—and can never be—anything resembling an honest broker."

Also, U.S. Democratic presidential candidates on Tuesday condemned the Trump administration's plan.

Former vice president Joe Biden called the outline counterproductive and warned against settlement annexations.

"A peace plan requires two sides to come together. This is a political stunt that could spark unilateral moves to annex territory and set back peace even more," Biden said.

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders said any agreement "must end the Israeli occupation and enable Palestinian self-determination in an independent state of their own alongside a secure Israel. Trump's so-called 'peace deal' doesn't come close, and will only perpetuate the conflict. It is unacceptable."

"The United States can bring unequaled leadership to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but we must use that leadership to promote a just and durable agreement. Any acceptable peace deal must be consistent with international law and multiple UN resolutions," Sanders said.

Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren said, "Trump's 'peace plan' is a rubber stamp for annexation and offers no chance for a real Palestinian state. Releasing a plan without negotiating with Palestinians isn't diplomacy, it's a sham. I will oppose unilateral annexation in any form—and reverse any policy that supports it."

Former South Bend, Indiana mayor Pete Buttigieg lashed Trump for his handling of foreign affairs and censured the plan as undermining a workable solution to the conflict.

"This president's Mideast 'deal of the century,' like so much else he's done in foreign policy, makes complex situations worse," Buttigieg said. "Peace requires both parties at the table. Not a political green light to the leader of one for unilateral annexation."

Iranian Army has the fifth most powerful ground force in the world: commander

1→ Various divisions of the ground force participated in the drill, which was focused on practicing the transfer of rapid reaction units via ground and air from across the country to operation zones. The enlisted units also displayed their efficacy to enhance their readiness in responding

to operational requirements and threats through day and night.

In his Saturday remarks, General Heidari also pointed to his forces' role in the war on the Daesh terrorists, saying, "We went to the Iraqi Kurdistan region to counter Daesh terrorists' growing threats.



We set up a headquarters there to confront Daesh 40 kilometers away from Iran's borders."

Back in March 2016, Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Pourdastan, who was army ground force commander at the time, said his forces smashed two teams affiliated with

the Daesh (ISIL) group before entering Iran from western borders.

According to Pourdastan, now chairman of the Army's Center for Strategic Research Studies, a large number of suicide vests and explosive devices were confiscated from the terrorists in the operation at the time.

Number of Iranian students turned back at U.S. airports rising: reports

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Reports are on the rise of American authorities detaining and deporting Iranian students at U.S. airports.

According to CNN, a 27-year-old engineer who'd planned to get a doctorate at Michigan State University was deported from Detroit Metro Airport on Monday.

A week earlier, a 24-year-old Northeastern University student was escorted onto a plane in Boston as protesters at the airport pushed for his release.

The reports come as tensions run high between the U.S. and Iran, especially after the U.S. assassination of Iran's top anti-terror general Qassem Soleimani.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection says its inspections take additional factors into account and can uncover details that didn't come up in previous visa screenings.

There's no guarantee, the agency says, that someone with a visa will be allowed to enter the United States. And every day, hundreds of people are denied entry at U.S. ports.

"Something's different now," says Ali Rahnama, legislative counsel for the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans. "Deportation of this number of students is not normal."

At least 17 Iranian students have been deported from the U.S. since August, according to Rahnama, who's spoken with most of them as he tries to get a handle on what's happening.

It's a notable increase from previous years, Rahnama says, when one or two cases would come up annually.

"We don't know whether this is a decision by the Boston CBP office, or whether this is a decision coming from the

Trump administration, because it's all being done in secret," says Carol Rose, the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts.

"Maybe it's because we have a lot of students coming, because we're a center of higher education. Or it may well be there's just a decision by some rogue agents here who have a personal dislike for people from Iran. We just simply don't know."

Protesters packed the Boston airport's arrivals lounge last week, holding signs that said, "Protect Iranian Students" and "Stop Discrimination Against Iranians."

They'd heard a Northeastern University undergraduate had been held for questioning after arriving at Logan and was on the verge of being deported. They cheered when they learned a federal judge had issued an order temporarily blocking any efforts to remove him.

But the next day, the case surged into the national spotlight. Mohammad Shahab Delghani Hossein had been deported despite the judge's order.

Last September, Reihana Emami Arandi boarded a flight from Tehran and made her way to Boston, eager to study theology at an Ivy League university.

After nearly 100 days of vetting and background checks by the U.S. government, the 35-year-old was bound for a graduate program at Harvard Divinity School with a student visa in hand.

According to the Los Angeles Times, when she arrived at Boston Logan International Airport, she was promptly pulled aside by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers

for additional questioning.

They led her to a separate area of the airport, where an officer inquired about her travels, her work experience, her family, her studies and what her cellphone number was in Iran, she said. The officer searched her luggage, pulled out her Quran and asked what it was.

"He then asked me what Iranian people think about the explosion in Saudi Arabia," she said, referring to the Sept. 14 drone strike on a Saudi Arabian oil facility for which the Houthis movement in Yemen claimed responsibility.

"I explained I didn't know much and that people generally hoped the situation would get better."

Amin, 34, landed in Georgia on January 1 with hopes of earning his Ph.D. at the University of Florida. But when he reached the airport in Atlanta, officers questioned why he had not disclosed an old school email address or one of the research papers he'd written on his visa application.

Amin, 34, began to shake and cry when he learned he had been found "inadmissible." That's when his "three-day nightmare" began, he said.

An officer told him he had to return to Iran on the same flight he arrived on. That flight would not be available for two days, he recalled the officer saying — and he couldn't be held at the airport for more than 24 hours. Amin said officers put him in a holding cell for six hours before cuffing him and moving him in chains to a detention facility in Georgia.

"They are playing with people's futures," Amin said. "Aside from being Iranian and a student, what did I do?"

Iran, Ukraine jointly analyzing downed plane's black box

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Transportation Minister Mohammad Eslami has said that Iran and Ukraine are jointly investigating the black box of the downed Ukrainian plane in Iran.

In remarks on Saturday, Eslami said the Aircraft Accident Investigating Board is investigating the incident according to standards of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Mehr reported.



On January 22, Eslami said the black box of the downed plane would not be transferred abroad.

"If the examination team cannot decipher the data, another decision will be made," Eslami told reporters after a cabinet session.

Eslami, who had traveled to Ukraine earlier as President Rouhani's special representative, also said he conveyed the condolences of the president to the Ukrainian government and nation during his trip.

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

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

The Iranian military announced on January 11 morning that the plane had been mistaken for a cruise missile. The incident took place on January 8, nearly four hours after Iran fired missiles at a major U.S. airbase in retaliation for the assassination of top Iranian General Qassem Soleimani. The military had been put on high alert due to the situation.

In a statement last month, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Abbas Mousavi said Iran "has invited both Ukraine and the Boeing company to participate in the investigations."

MEK paid salaries for two leaders of Spain's Vox Party: report

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The anti-Iran terrorist group of Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) has bankrolled the foundation of the Spanish far-right Vox Party and paid salaries to some of its top members, according to a report.

The leading Spanish newspaper El Pais reported on Tuesday that two lawmakers for the Vox Party received party salaries from the MEK.

"Two lawmakers for Spain's far-right Vox, Santiago Abascal and Ivan Espinosa de los Monteros, received party salaries for eight months that drew on funds from donations by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)," El Pais quoted sources as saying, referring to the MEK by its other name.

According to the paper, both leaders received around €65,000 in total. The MEK was on the United States' list of terrorist organizations until 2012, a year before the group funded Spain's ultra-nationalist party.



"Vox, which is now the third-largest force inside the Spanish parliament with 52 lawmakers, was created in 2013 with around €1 million donated by the NCRI," the paper said.

"On December 17 of that year, the day that it was registered as a new party on the Interior Ministry's records, Vox received its first transfer from abroad by sympathizers of the Iranian exiles. The transfer was in the amount of €1,156.22," it said.

The report added that a month after that, then-secretary general Santiago Abascal and senior official Ivan Espinosa de los Monteros began earning salaries paid for by the opponents of the Islamic Republic.

"The money reached Vox thanks to the mediation of Alejo Vidal-Quadras, the party's original founder and first president. Abascal's monthly salary was fixed at net €3,570 (€5,000 before taxes), which he received between February and October 2014, for a total of €40,000."

"Espinosa de los Monteros received a monthly net amount of €2,300 (around €3,083 before taxes), according to two former party officials. Espinosa de los Monteros, who is now the spokesperson for Vox in Congress, earned this salary during the same period of time as Abascal, but invoiced the payments through a company," it added.

The MEK was established in the 1960s to express a mixture of Marxism and Islamism. It launched bombing campaigns against the Shah, continuing after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, against the Islamic Republic. Iran accuses the group of being responsible for 17,000 deaths.

Based in Iraq at the time, MEK members were armed by Saddam Hussein to fight against Iran during a war which lasted for 8 years.

In 2012, the U.S. State Department removed the MEK from its list of designated terrorist organizations under intense lobbying by groups associated to Saudi Arabia and other regimes opposed to Iran.

A few years ago, MEK members were relocated from their Camp Ashraf in Iraq's Diyala Province to Camp Hurriyet (Camp Liberty), a former U.S. military base in Baghdad, and were later sent to Albania.

Reaffirming the Revolution: The Islamic Republic of Iran at 41

"Iran's Islamic Revolution remains as bell-wether, even though attempts to emulate it have not yet succeeded."

Journalist Eric Walberg

In number theory, 41 is a prime number meaning it is not divisible by any number except itself and one. Similarly, the Islamic Revolution in Iran so far has been unique in its success and indivisible unity of purpose, despite numerous attempts at sabotage by external and internal actors. At this prime age of 41, Iran is fully capable of charting an assertive leadership path to recapture the spirit and reaffirm the original goals of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, among which is the propagation of Islam to bring about social change for the welfare of all humanity.

It is no minor accomplishment for the Islamic Republic of Iran to have maintained an independent geopolitical course for a period of forty one years in spite of the overwhelming diplomatic, economic and military pressure employed by the United States to force Tehran to cave in to the diktats of the Washington regime. Even before the erst-while shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, had fled the country on January 17, 1979, U.S. air force general Robert E. "Dutch" Huyser had arrived on January 3rd on a mission to test the waters for a rerun of the August 1953 coup, which had originally placed the U.S.-backed dictator in power in the first place.

With the victory of the Islamic Revolution on February 11, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini (r) went on to found an Islamic Republic, whose constitution (Article 154) explicitly states that Iran "is concerned with the welfare of humanity as a whole and takes independence, liberty and sovereignty of justice and righteousness as the right of people in the world over." Imam Khomeini was very clear in his view that "Islam is revealed for mankind," and, therefore, the revolution must be exported. This concept, which raised fears of popular uprisings toppling the U.S.-abetted tyrants in the region and beyond, put the nascent Islamic Republic on a collision course with the Washington regime. Among the despotic leaders shaken by Iran's Islamic Revolution was the U.S.-supported Iraqi dictator, Saddam, who denounced Imam Khomeini and called upon Iranian Arabs to revolt.

If external threats to the newly-established Islamic Republic weren't enough, others arose internally. Massoumeh Ebtekar, who witnessed the revolution firsthand and is currently Vice President of Iran for Women and Family Affairs, recalled that "we were sure that foreign elements were actively involved in attempts to weaken and undermine the young republic." To avert the suspected foreign plot to overthrow the Iranian government, a group of students, including now Vice President Ebtekar, decided to act, and on November 4, 1979 occupied the U.S. embassy

in Tehran and detained the staff. U.S. president Jimmy Carter responded ten days later by freezing US \$12 billion's worth of Iran's assets in the U.S., and later banned all trade with and travel to Iran. Also affected were Iranian assets in U.S. banks in Britain, much of which were in Bank of America's London branch. The following year on April 7, the U.S. cut diplomatic relations with Iran, and has never reinstated them. If Carter had not allowed the deposed shah entry to the U.S., the embassy takeover most likely would not have occurred.

Another internal threat, the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MeK), was openly unhappy over the constitution, which, according to them, did not address their demands. After a humiliating defeat in the March and May 1980 parliamentary elections (no MeK candidates were elected), the MeK became increasingly belligerent over their lack of position in the new government, directing their frustration ever more violently towards members of the Islamic Republic Party (IRP), which had won a decisive victory in the elections. Despite the electoral defeat, the MeK openly backed Iran's first president, Abolhassan Bani Sadr, however, following his removal from office for incompetency in June 1981, the MeK declared an armed struggle against the standing government. On June 28, 1981 and again on August 30, the MeK carried out terror bombing attacks against the IRP and government leaders. In 1986, the MeK moved its operations to Iraq and aligned itself with Saddam, who backed the terrorist group until being ousted by the U.S. invasion in 2003. To date, the Washington regime views the MeK as a viable means by which to overthrow the legitimate government of Iran.

Following the student takeover of the U.S. embassy, which was later shown to be a nerve center for CIA espionage in the region, U.S. president Carter ordered a desperate mission on April 24, 1980 to invade Iran and free the hostages despite negotiations for their release still being in progress. The so-called hostage crisis and the U.S. president's failed interventionist response provided a perpetual pretext for Washington's vehemently vindictive view against reestablishing any level of diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. The 444-day crisis, according to sworn testimony by Israeli intelligence agent Ari Ben-Menashe, was a joint effort by the CIA and Mossad to delay the release of the 52 hostages and thereby ensure an electoral victory for Ronald Reagan in the 1980 U.S. presidential race.

In the midst of the post-revolutionary struggle to establish a fully functioning Islamic government, Iraqi dictator Saddam, with U.S. blessing, attacked the fledgling Islamic Republic on September 22, 1980, imposing a costly 8-year-long war that consumed some 60 to 70 percent of Iran's national budget,

not to mention the suffering of the Iranian people and their sacrifices in defense of Iran and Islam. The economic impact of the war on Iran itself was enormous with estimated direct costs in the range of US \$600 billion and total cost of US \$1 trillion. In the course of this U.S.-supported war, chemical agents were used extensively for the first time since the First World War, resulting in the deaths of some 4,700 Iranians in a single attack. The U.S. also provided Saddam with biological agents such as anthrax and E. coli.

Howard Teicher, director of political-military affairs for the U.S. National Security Council from 1982 to 1987, in an affidavit stated, "CIA Director [William] Casey personally spearheaded the effort to ensure that Iraq had sufficient military weapons, ammunition and vehicles to avoid losing the Iran-Iraq war." Teicher also testified that U.S. president Reagan had sent a secret message to Saddam advising him that "Iraq should step up its air war and bombing of Iran." Teicher's sworn testimony provides strong evidence that the U.S. intent was for Saddam to bomb Iranian cities, thereby unavoidably targeting civilians.

Saddam followed Reagan's advice to the letter by launching eleven SCUD B missiles at Tehran on February 29, 1988. Over the next two weeks, more than 100 of Saddam's missiles rained down upon the cities of Tehran, Qom and Isfahan along with bombing raids conducted against a total of 37 Iranian cities. Earlier in October 1987 and again in April 1988, the U.S. as part of its overt but undeclared war against the Islamic Republic, attacked Iranian ships and oil platforms under expanded rules of engagement. As a result of Washington's designation of the Persian Gulf as essentially a free-fire zone for Iranian targets, the commander of the USS Vincennes, William C. Rogers, fired two missiles (after twenty-three failed attempts) at what he claimed was a military target but in fact was Iran Air Flight 655 carrying 290 civilian passengers from Bandar Abbas to Dubai. For downing the civilian airliner and killing all on board, Rogers was awarded the Legion of Merit "for exceptionally meritorious service" for this appalling atrocity.

Yet in spite of the near universal support given by the U.S. and its western minions to Saddam, the people of Iran rose up to defend their newly liberated land in what were termed "human wave attacks" in the western press. Giving their lives selflessly in the cause of defending Islam and Iran, these martyrs, whose numbers reached to half a million, struck fear in the black heart of Saddam and presented a conundrum to the materialistic west. Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Rahbar explains that martyrdom, while clearly understood in the Islamic world, "is incomprehensible and even pointless in

materialist and atheistic cultures."

The incomprehensibility to most westerners of the spiritual basis of Iran's Islamic Revolution leads to some interesting "anti-explanations." Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina Charles Kurzman wrote, "After the Iranian Revolution, those who had considered the upheaval unthinkable became preoccupied with understanding how they could have been so mistaken." After pointing out the shortcomings of the various political, economic, cultural and other explanations, Kurzman notes, "The more I learned about the Iranian Revolution, the more theoretical anomalies I discovered." Yet this author acknowledges that 55 percent of educated, middle-class Iranians and 71 percent of others he interviewed spoke of Islam as being involved in their decision to participate in the revolution.

Apparently, for secular-leaning western scholars, Islam cannot be accepted as the basis for an explanation of a successful revolution. For example, even Iranian expatriate scholar Ervand Abrahamian blames the Islamic Revolution on "overwhelming pressures" in Iranian society due to the shah, who "was sitting on such a volcano, having alienated almost every sector of society." Downplaying the role of Islam in Iran's revolution, Iranian expatriate scholar Asef Bayat insists that there was a "strong secular tendency," which peaked in the 1970s. Bayat incredulously claims, "In Iran, an Islamic movement was in the making when it was interrupted by the Islamic revolution." Other scholars date the origin of the Islamic movement in Iran to the tobacco crisis of 1890-1891, while Farhang Rejaee, a professor at the Carleton Centre for the Study of Islam in Ottawa, Canada, points to the assassination of Nasr al-Din Shah in 1896.

The current Islamic movement in Iran had begun on the 15th of Khordad, 1342 (June 5, 1963), predating the Islamic Revolution by some 15 years. In a June 1979 speech marking the anniversary of the 15th of Khordad uprising, Imam Khomeini specifically referred to the Islamic movement and its creation in the mosque network. "Who are they that wish to divert our Islamic movement from Islam?" asked the Imam. "It was the mosques that created this revolution," he emphasized, adding, "It was the mosques that brought this [Islamic] movement into being." Likewise refuting the theories of the western and westernized scholars, Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Rahbar explains, "The secret of success of the Islamic Revolution of Iran also is naught but this: valuing the high ideals of Islam and of the Islamic humanities." As to the failure of other revolutions, he blames "want of a sufficient depth in its spiritual dimension." Finally, he affirms, "The revolutionary experience of Iran should indeed become a model for others to emulate."

(See full text at tehrantimes.com)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	426184.9
IFX	5414.99

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,600 rials
GBP	55,463 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$56.62/b
WTI	\$51.56/b
OPEC Basket	\$47.50/b
Gold	\$1,591.40/oz
Silver	\$18.11/oz
Platinum	\$964.25/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Nearly 800 industrial, transport projects to come on stream in 10 days

1 → The said projects are expected to create nearly 2000 direct job opportunities when they are operational, Zarandi said.



Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami, on the other hand, announced that 368 transportation projects worth 23.34 trillion rials (about \$555.7 million) are going to be inaugurated across the country in the mentioned period.

Every year, to celebrate the occasion, thousands of infrastructure projects are inaugurated in various areas during the Ten-Day Dawn period.

The Ten-Day Dawn celebrations started on Saturday and will be wrapped up on February 11, which is the day of the Islamic revelation's victory.

Japanese firms preparing for prolonged economic hit from coronavirus outbreak

Japanese companies that do business in China are starting to consider measures to cope with the possibility of a prolonged coronavirus outbreak.

The spread of the new strain of coronavirus, originating in the Chinese city of Wuhan, has limited the movement of goods and people in the country while forcing plants there to remain closed.

Many Japanese manufacturers have decided to extend the closures of their plants in China by about a week until Feb. 9, beyond the end of the Lunar New Year holiday on Sunday, following instructions from Chinese authorities.

The extended suspensions of operations are unlikely to severely impact the companies if they can reopen their plants by the new date, as many of the plants have certain levels of parts inventories. However, the spread of the new coronavirus seems to be intensifying, casting doubt on whether the plants can be restarted soon.

In light of potential supply chain issues from prolonged suspensions, officials of auto parts makers Aisin Seiki Co. and Toyota Boshoku Corp. said Friday that they are considering the possibility of temporarily relocating their production in China to Japan, Thailand and other areas. The Toyota Motor Corp. affiliates produce parts including automatic transmissions and car seats in China.

Change in the business environment

Airlines operating routes connecting Japan and China are also responding to the change in the business environment caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

All Nippon Airways President Yuji Hirako said Friday that the company has no choice but to consider suspending some of its China flights as the number of reservations for flights from the country in February has halved from the year before. The airline has already suspended its route between Wuhan and Narita International Airport near Tokyo.

Hideki Kikuyama, Japan Airlines senior managing executive officer, said the same day that "we need to consider suspending or reducing our flight services to and from China" if demand falls.

Retailers are facing difficulties from the coronavirus outbreak as well.

On Friday, department store operator Isetan Mitsukoshi Holdings Ltd. revised down its consolidated sales forecast for the fiscal year ending in March by ¥35 billion to ¥1.155 trillion.

The bleaker estimate reflects shortened opening hours at outlets in China and sluggish sales to Chinese tourists at stores in Japan, in addition to slow demand at home following the consumption tax hike last October.

"We can't predict how things will be from March," Isetan Mitsukoshi Executive Officer Akira Kinbara said.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Thursday declared that the new coronavirus outbreak is a global public health emergency. (Source: japantimes.co.jp)

Iran Build and Property Show 2020 to kick off today

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds will host Iran Build and Property Show 2020 from Sunday until Wednesday.

As reported by the Public Relations Department of Iran International Exhibitions Company, the companies implementing housing projects will present their construction, pre-sale and selling plans during the event.

Designing and building administrative,

commercial, industrial, sport and cultural complexes and offering new methods of selling housing complexes are covered in the four-day exhibit.

It is the first edition of this international exhibition in which the most recent achievements and technology as well as the most modern products, equipment and machinery in the field of construction will be showcased.



Construction is a major industry playing some key role in the economy and this exhibition lays a proper ground to introduce this industry and the opportunities for investment making in

it, Saleh Sepasadr, the head of the exhibition organizing headquarters, stated.

As reported, some specialized sessions will be also held on the sidelines of the exhibition.

Commodities worth nearly \$3.4b traded at IME during January



ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — According to a report released by the International Affairs and Public Relations Department of Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), some 2.874 million tons of commodities valued at \$3.397 billion were traded at this exchange market in January.

During the last month, the oil and petrochemical trading floor of IME hosted trading of 1,697,033 tons of commodities worth \$1.65 million, the same report confirmed.

On this trading floor, more than 543,118 tons of bitumen, 280,982 tons of polymer products and 149,505 tons of chemical products, 483,850 tons of VB feed stock, 170,240 tons of lube cut oil, 55,685 tons of sulfur, 5,595 tons of insulation, 2,000 tons of slaps waxes, 6,018 tons of base oil and paraffin waxes, and 40 tons of argon were traded by customers.

The IME report said that metal and mineral trading floor witnessed trading over 1.169 million tons of commodities worth more than \$1,737 million in the past month.

On this trading floor 1.09 million tons of steel, 17,750 tons of copper, 640 tons of molybdenum concentrates, 60 tons of precious metals concentrates, 39,960

tons of zinc, 20,940 tons of aluminum, 10 tons of lead ingot, as well as 87 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

Meanwhile, the side market of the IME experienced trading of 2,778 tons of polyester threads, a total number of 16,850 of empty barrel as well as 4,900 tons of phosphate concentrates during January.

As previously reported by Tasnim news agency, over 2.851 million tons of commodities worth 133 trillion rials (about \$3.1 billion) were traded at IME during the past Iranian calendar month of Dey (December 22, 2019-January 20, 2020).

Over 1.868 million tons of commodities valued at 71.858 trillion rials (about \$1.7 billion) were traded at the oil and petrochemical products floor of IME in the past month.

The IME's floor of industrial products and minerals witnessed trading of 974,477 tons of commodities worth 60.823 trillion rials (about \$1.4 billion) in the last month, the same report confirmed.

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

TEDPIX down 954 points on Saturday

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**— TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), fell 954 points to 426,184 on Saturday, IRNA reported.

Over 8.869 billion securities worth 39.053 trillion rials (about \$929.8 million) were traded at TSE on Saturday.

The first market's index fell 368 points and the second market's index dropped 3,696 points.

TEDPIX rose 15,928 points, or four percent, to 427,139

during the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

Also, the value of trades climbed 16 percent to 16.418 trillion rials (about \$390.9 million) at TSE in the past week.

As previously reported, TSE witnessed the highest ever weekly rise of its main index, TEDPIX, in the Iranian calendar week ended on January 17, which was the last week of Iran's tenth calendar month of Dey.

Europe and the JCPOA: inactivity and errors

1 → The positions of France, Britain, and Germany have been harshly criticized by Russia and China, also signatories to the JCPA, who have shown that the conduct of the United States is contrary to international law, in the sense that it has unilaterally violated an internationally binding agreement and pointing out that on the path taken by the European powers can reach a point of no return.

Certainly, the operation of the dispute settlement mechanism provided for in the JCPA may lead to the ultimate consequence of the re-application of the sanctions that the Security Council once imposed on Iran. However, it mU.S.t be borne in mind that the various phases laid down in that mechanism may be prolonged at

the will of the interveners and the possibility of achieving a result other than the reactivation of sanctions is always open. Because the first step in the procedure laid down in paragraphs 36 and 37 is to refer the matter to the Joint Commission, which will resolve the matter within 15 days, which can be extended by consensus. Following the consideration of the Joint Commission, either party may refer the matter to the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, who in turn will have a 15-day deadline to resolve it, but this time-lapse may also be extended by consensus. The examination may then be requested by a three-member Advisory Board, which mU.S.t issue a non-binding opinion within 15 days. If the issue remains unresolved after this pro-

cess, the Joint Commission will consider the opinion of the Advisory Board for 5 days and if a solution is not reached, the interested party may consider that there are grounds for ceasing to fulfill its JCPA obligations or communicate the situation to the Security Council. It will put to the vote a resolution to continue the lifting of sanctions; if the resolution is not adopted in 30 days, the sanctioning provisions will be reappplied unless the Security Council decides otherwise. The latter is very important, because depending on the composition of the Council and the position taken by Russia and China, as permanent members, the reactivation of restrictions against Iran could, in theory, be avoided. In reality, if it is referred to the Security

Council, then the sanctions will return.

However, we cannot belittle the importance of the step taken by the European powers, which- in the adoption of the dispute settlement mechanism provided for in paragraphs 36 and 37 of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, have acted against Iran with remarkable diligence that contrasts with the astonishing passivity with which they have behaved, for two years, in the face of United States' illegal actions.

Note: Lupicinio Rodriguez is the founder and CEO of Lupicinio International Law Firm, which is specialized in international sanctions and J. L. Iriarte is a professor of international law at Navarra University in Spain and also a senior counsel at Lupicinio ILF.

IMF says SA has no fiscal space, must push reforms



programs and make education and health delivery more efficient, the IMF said. It also backed Finance Minister Tito Mboweni's

proposal to reduce the public-sector wage bill, which comprises 35.4% of national spending and said the government should reduce the contingent liabilities from state-owned companies.

Power utility Eskom Holdings SOC Ltd., which is seen as the biggest threat to the South African economy and fiscus, is the biggest recipient of government guarantees. The company, with 450 billion rand (\$31 billion) of debt, resumed controlled blackouts on Thursday.

The IMF said tackling Eskom's challenges would not only reduce fiscal deficits and debt, but would also boost business confidence, encourage private investment, including in green energy, improve macroeconomic policy credibility, and convey a genuine ambition by the authorities to address the legacy of corruption that allegedly happened under the previous president.

(Source: iol.co.za)

Last platform of SP phase 14 installed

E N E R G Y TEHRAN — Platform 14D, which is the fourth (and last) platform of the phase 14 of South Pars gas field (in the Persian Gulf) development project, was installed on its designated offshore jacket on Saturday, IRNA reported.

The 2400-ton platform which was shipped from Sadra yard toward its offshore spot last week, is going to add 500 million cubic feet (14.2 million cubic meters) of gas to the field's output, according to Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), which is in charge of developing the giant gas field.

The operator of the phase 14 development project Mohammad Mehdi Tavasoli-Pour said, on Saturday, that by the installation of the mentioned platform, the offshore section of this phase will be completed and production of 56 mcm/d of rich gas would be achieved in the project.

Platform 14B, was installed on its designated offshore spot in mid-July, 2019.



The platform was built in a 115-month period. The first platform of phase 14 started

operation in summer 2018 and the second platform namely 14C was shipped

in September 2018 and the installation operation of this platform was completed in October 2018.

South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar, is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate. The field is divided into 24 standard phases.

Back in October, 2019, Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh announced that phase 14 of the South Pars gas field will be fully operational in the upcoming Iranian calendar year of 1399 (starts on March 20, 2020).

Speaking to the press after a meeting with the representatives of the parliament's planning, budget and accounting committee, the minister emphasized that the oil ministry's plans for the next Iranian calendar year are mostly focused on the development of joint oil and gas fields.

Coronavirus spreading pessimism across oil markets

1 → We should not also forget that back in 2003, China's GDP accounted only for 4 percent of the total global GDP, now the Asian country accounts for 17 percent of the world's total gross domestic product, which means the impact would be much bigger.

Coronavirus and the black gold

After the United States and China signed an economic deal agreement in mid-January, world markets were moved on the expectations of an improving global economy this year, but once again the coronavirus has changed all the equations.

According to Reuters, analysts and traders believe that the coronavirus outbreak in China could cut oil demand in the country by over 250,000 barrels per day (bpd) in the first quarter of this year.

S&P Global Platts Analytics, on the other hand, believes that the virus outbreak is going to cut the global oil demand by at least 900,000 bpd in February and 650,000 bpd in March, which would be a much greater impact.

The virus, however, has already impacted the performance of the refineries in China and some Asian countries. As reported by Reuters, Chinese refinery activity fell by 15 percent last week.

The decline in refinery activity will inevitably lead to lower demand for crude oil, at least in the short term. Morgan Stanley analysts said in a note that the coronavirus "major blow will be to the refinery's oil demand."

The plunge in transportation and consequently the demand for refined fuels has led to a decline in the profit

margins of the refineries, so it can be expected that, in the long run, the demand for crude oil will also be affected as a secondary effect.

Oil demand and OPEC cuts

The expectation regarding the impact of the coronavirus on the global oil demand has also startled the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies like Russia which have been trying to keep the market stable in the face of the already low demand and high supply.

Some reports have been released in recent days which indicate that OPEC and allies are considering a sooner-than-schedule meeting to discuss the impacts of the virus outbreak and explore ways for mitigating such impacts.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said on Friday that OPEC+ could discuss moving its upcoming meeting forward.

Novak, however, indicated that the group is still cautious and does not intend to act on impulse, saying they needed to wait a few more days to monitor the situation.

"We can meet earlier, it's not a problem. We can meet very quickly if necessary. We can even reschedule the meeting. We have discussed it; we are ready to move it. But regarding timeframes and dates, we are in the discussion stage, based on an assessment of the situation," Novak told reporters in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

It should, however, be borne in mind that even if OPEC+ decides to further curb production in order to relieve the impact of the virus outbreak, the effects of such a decision are not going to be felt in the market immediately and any



OPEC+ decision will be seen upon April shipments.

Last thoughts

Although oil experts and analysts' estimations of the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the global oil market are not similar, they are all in accord regarding the negative impact of the incident on the markets.

The recent fall in the oil prices could be attributed to the psychological aspects of the news and the worrisome which was spread over the markets along with the news of the virus.

From now on, however, any improvement or deterioration in the situation on the global scale could be a determining factor for the magnitude of the real impact which the coronavirus could be leaving behind on the global economy.

Kinder Morgan CEO says Persian Gulf LNG on backburner, but growth opportunities abound



By Andrew Baker

Kinder Morgan Inc. (KMI) has placed the Persian Gulf LNG (liquefied natural gas) export project on the backburner in favor of other growth opportunities, CEO Steve Kean indicated Wednesday during the firm's analyst day.

KMI received FERC approval in July 2019 for the Persian Gulf project, which entails two liquefaction trains, each with a capacity of 5 million metric tons/year (mmty).

"With respect to Persian Gulf LNG, I wouldn't expect anything anytime soon there, just in light of the situation right now for U.S. LNG," Kean said. "So I think that's just not a likely thing to develop in the near future, in the medium-term."

Developers of greenfield liquefaction projects in the United States have reported difficulties securing long-term customer contracts for the so-called second wave of proposed export terminals, which total more than 20.

LNG exports will, however, be the main driver of U.S. natural gas demand growth and of KMI's capital deployment over the coming years, executives said.

A joint venture

Elba Liquefaction Co. LLC, KMI's joint-venture with EIG Global Energy Partners, sent a request on January 13 to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for permission to bring a fourth liquefaction train online at the Elba Island Liquefaction facility in Georgia, where the first cargo was sent out in December.

"We are happy to have the Elba opportunity," Kean said, adding that KMI "would look at" expanding Elba Island's capability "if our customer was interested and the economics worked for our shareholders."

Kinder has about 3.5 Bcf/d of contracted, long-term pipeline transport capacity to LNG export facilities online, with another roughly 2.5 Bcf/d set to enter service by mid-2023, said Tom Martin, president of natural gas. Total contracted LNG sendout capacity stands at about 6 Bcf/d, translating to \$1 billion of capital deployed, Martin said.

"We will see ancillary services, storage opportunities, (and) balancing services sort of evolve off of that initial 6 Bcf/d, and then on top of that we've got over 4 Bcf/d of incremental opportunities with the second wave" of LNG projects, Martin said.

These opportunities are in varying stages of development and not yet in Kinder's backlog, Martin said, although "some may be soon."

Kean highlighted, "We don't feel pressure to refill the backlog. We feel pressure to deploy our investors' capital wisely. We expect we're going to have those opportunities, but we're not going to force it."

Kean said that Kinder has "significant market shares" in the LNG export and Mexico export markets, which are forecast to account for 15.9 Bcf/d and 2.7 Bcf/d of demand growth, respectively, through 2030, Kean said, citing projections from Wood Mackenzie.

(Source: [naturalgasintel.com](#))

OPEC January oil output plunges on new cuts, Libyan unrest



OPEC oil output plunged in January to a multi-year low as top exporter Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf members overdelivered on a new production-limiting accord and Libyan supply dropped due to a blockade of ports and oilfields, a Reuters survey found.

On average, the 13-member Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) pumped 28.35 million barrels per day (bpd) this month, according to the survey. That is down 640,000 bpd from December's revised figure.

Despite the drop in supply, crude prices have slipped to below \$60 a barrel on concern that the coronavirus outbreak could cut China's oil demand. This has prompted OPEC and its allies to discuss holding an early meeting and taking further steps to support the market.

OPEC, Russia and other allies, known as OPEC+, agreed to deepen an existing supply cut by 500,000 bpd from Jan. 1 2020. OPEC's share of the new reduction is about 1.17 million bpd, to be made by 10 members, all except Iran, Libya and Venezuela.

The 10 OPEC members bound by the agreement easily exceeded the pledged cuts in January thanks to Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies cutting more than called for to support the market.

OPEC complied with 133% of the pledged cuts in January, the survey found. In December, the group implemented 158% of the promised curbs.

January's output was the lowest by OPEC since 2009, the year in which the

group implemented its biggest-ever supply cut due to the financial crisis, excluding membership changes that have taken place since then, according to Reuters surveys.

Oil output in Libya plunged

Oil output in Libya has plunged since Jan. 18 due to a blockade of ports and fields by groups loyal to eastern-based commander Khalifa Haftar.

Production in Libya averaged 760,000 bpd during the month, the survey found, down from 1.15 million bpd in December.

Saudi Arabia trimmed supply from December's rate, voluntarily going beyond the reduction it is required to make under the OPEC+ accord. Persian Gulf ally the United Arab Emirates also overdelivered, sources in the survey said.

The January survey suggests Nigeria and Iraq, both laggards in making cuts in 2019, achieved some progress. Both countries reduced output although they have more to do in later months.

Among countries pumping more, Venezuela, which is contending with U.S. sanctions imposed on state oil firm PDVSA and a long-term decline in output, managed a small boost to supply with exports increasing in January.

Production from the other exempt producer Iran, under U.S. sanctions, was steady.

Ecuador left OPEC at the end of 2019, lowering OPEC production by about 500,000 bpd. The country has been removed from December's total to compare more easily production by remaining members.

(Source: [hellenicshippingnews.com](#))

A clean energy future with hydrogen could be closer than we think

Could 2020 mark a major turning point for the global clean energy transition – with hydrogen at its core? Is this the beginning of a new decade in which governments, industry and investors shift gears together and move more rapidly towards scaling up hydrogen-based solutions for cleaner transport, heating, and industry? On the third anniversary of the Hydrogen Council's launch at Davos in January 2017, the stars seem to be aligning to make this happen.

According to new data from three global agencies, NASA, NOAA and the UK Met Office, the 10 years to 2019 were the warmest on record, and this comes after the IPCC's warning of the expected impacts of 1.5°C of global warming.

In the future, we may look back at this past decade as being the one that fully recognized the climate challenge - while the next decade, starting now, offers an opportunity to address it. So while these global organizations have been working to gather data, we – the hydrogen industry – have been working hard to identify solutions to help tackle the issue.

Today, we have the opportunity to tap into the enormous potential of hydrogen for a range of applications, from fuelling passenger cars and heavy-duty trucks to heating buildings and powering industry.

It can help us decarbonize hard-to-abate sectors such as heavy transport, steel and aviation; and, most importantly, it generates zero emissions at the point of use, can be produced from renewables such as solar and wind, and provides a solution in instances of excess electricity production, as it allows for long-term energy storage.

In fact, if we focus on scaling up in the next decade, hydrogen could meet 18% of the world's final energy demands by 2050 and provide roughly 20% of the CO2 abatement required to limit global warming.

The biggest challenge

Until now, the biggest challenge for hydrogen energy has been its price tag. The costs associated with hydrogen for everyday use has put it out of reach compared to other options, but this is about to change.

A new report entitled Path to Hydrogen Competitiveness: A Cost Perspective, launched by the Hydrogen Council – a CEO-led coalition of now more than 80 companies working to bring the benefits of hydrogen to the world – shows that by massively scaling up hydrogen production, distribution, equipment and component manufacturing, the cost of hydrogen solutions is projected to decrease by up to 50% by 2030 in a wide range of applications, making hydrogen competitive with other low-carbon alternatives and, in some cases, even conventional options.

Significant cost reductions are expected across different hydrogen solutions. For more than 20 of them, such as long-distance and heavy-duty transportation, industrial heating, and heavy-industry feedstock, which together comprise roughly 15% of global energy consumption, the hydrogen route appears the decarbonization option of choice – a material opportunity.

To deliver on this opportunity, policy-makers need to help create the right market conditions. Governments in key geographies will need to put in place supporting policies, and investment support of around \$70 billion will be needed from various sources over the next decade in order to scale up and achieve hydrogen cost-competitiveness.

While this figure is sizeable, it accounts for less than 5% of annual global spending on energy. For comparison, global yearly spending on energy amounts to \$1.85 trillion, while subsidies provided to renewables in Germany totaled roughly \$30 billion in 2019 alone.

Some high-potential projects

The momentum in the hydrogen sector is strong. Deployments, strategies, alliances and technology developments are progressing in wider geographies and sectors. Still, some key high-potential projects are yet to take off.

Similarly, while some measures and supporting financing tools are in place, many of them are lacking in terms of scope and impact to firmly bring the sector to scale. In the last year, the industry has been establishing partnerships with a clear commitment to scale up.

Through the Hydrogen Council, we have – for example – partnered with the European Investment Bank to identify the right innovative financing schemes, hosted industry leaders and members of the investment community at an Investor Day at the G20 Summit in Japan, and brought investors onboard with a new Investor Group – all steps in defining and implementing how to accelerate major investment in large-scale commercialisation of hydrogen solutions across industries worldwide.

(Source: [weforum.org](#))

Wind energy in Italy, Enel Green Power awarded 80 MW wind farm

Enel Green Power (EGP) was awarded 80 MW in the first renewable tender held by the Italian state-owned energy service company GSE (Gestore Servizi Energetici). Specifically, EGP was awarded 60 MW of new renewable capacity for three wind projects, and 20 MW from the repowering of already-operational wind and hydro projects.

The company participated in the 500 MW tender for new wind and solar projects and the 60 MW tender for renovations of hydro and wind plants with a capacity exceeding 1 MW.

Regarding the new capacity, the three wind farms are located in Sicily, Molise, and Campania and construction will start in 2020, with entry into service expected for 2021.

As for the upgrading and useful life extension of the four plants already in operation, the refurbishment works will be carried out between 2020 and 2021 in Molise, Sardinia, Piedmont, and Tuscany.

"With this award we confirm our dedication to the growth of renewables in Italy, a key country for our business and for our commitment in the energy transition towards a more sustainable electricity generation model," said Antonio Cammiseca, CEO of Enel Green Power and director of Global Power Generation.

The "investments in the development of new renewable capacity will contribute to the decarbonization objectives of the Group and the country, supporting the progressive replacement of fossil sources with those with zero emissions."

Building new capacity and upgrading existing plants in Italy are part of the Enel Group's broader commitment to the growth of renewables and decarbonization, which will involve, over the 2020-2022 period, the development in the country of 700 MW of new renewable capacity and for which EGP has developed a pipeline of around 1.3 GW that can enter into service in the same period.

Enel Green Power, within the Enel Group, is dedicated to the development and operation of renewable energy plants worldwide and is present in Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Oceania.

In Italy, EGP manages an overall renewable capacity of more than 14 GW, equal to approximately half of the Group's managed capacity in the country. In 2019, Enel produced in the country around 24 TWh from renewable sources, equal to 52% of its overall energy production in Italy.

(Source: [evwind.es](#))

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“Deal of Century” is neo-imperial attempt: Adib-Moghaddam

1 → A: This capitulation plan for the Palestinians is a neo-imperial attempt to push for a final settlement that will make a Palestinian state impossible. The late Edward Said, once compared the Oslo Treaty to the Versailles treaty, which subdued Germany after World War I. Be that as it may, the plan is impracticable, exactly because it is unjust, and an extension of the neo-colonial dictum that has characterized the approach of the global right-wing towards Palestine and other global issues. The bargain of the century really would turn into a neo-nakbah, if it would not be resisted by the Palestinians themselves and regional actors.

■ Given previous Arab positions, including Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Oman and Egypt on the deal of the century, it appears that Trump will use them as a pressure against the head of PA to accept the deal of the century win. Trump, on the other hand, has also pledged \$ 50 billion in aid to the Palestinian Authority depending on the performance of their leaders. What do you think the Arab countries' position will be on this plan?

A: There is no common “Arab” position on Palestine. There is the Saudi axis, that has departed from a pro-Palestinian stance a long time ago, opting to cow tail to Israel instead, against what is perceived to be their bigger threat, i.e. Iran. Iran has failed to galvanize further support for Palestine, because it is perceived to be an authoritarian state, that stands against democratization, certainly in Iran itself. It is this perception, that seriously constraints anything Iran attempts to resolve: From the JCPOA to regional security. The Arab Spring quite vividly displayed the sentiments of the mainstream in the region which are geared to social equality, human



security and individual rights, rather than religious doctrines. On Palestine, Iranian leaders, too, largely failed the revolution of 1979, and its immense support for a just solution to the question of Palestine.

■ In announcing the deal of the century, Trump announced that his plan is based on the creation of two Palestinian and Israeli states. It specifically stated that Quds would be Israel's unified and indivisible capital. But he immediately said that the capital of Palestine is also Eastern Quds, and that he is establishing an embassy there. How can this ambiguity be explained?

A: Someone like Trump cannot be trusted

with anything, really. In the end, he would always support what Netanyahu wants. The East-Jerusalem ploy, is just a bait, nothing else. The tactics of decision-makers such as Trump and Netanyahu are easy to decipher: They bully their counterpart into the weakest bargaining position possible, in order to make them entirely dependent on the decisions that they determine.

■ Jordan's role in the “deal of century” seems to have faded, and it will not play a role in the future development of Palestine, while part of the Jordan River Valley will also be under Israeli rule and Jordan's regulatory oversight over the holy sites of

Jerusalem will likely end. Why has Jordan been removed by the U.S. from the Palestinian equation?

A: Jordan is the weakest link in the question of Palestine, because it does not have any independent bargaining power that could challenge the status quo. The policies of the country continue to be determined by the colonial dictate that created its state and the idea of “Transjordan” in the first place. There is, then, a clear post-colonial dilemma in this equation, as the lines in the sand by Sykes-Picot have created these semi-dependent entities that are largely devoid of a real position in the international system, a position that could be carved out independent of external interests.

■ The deal of the century means the end of the two-state UN solution and the Saudi peace plan known as the King Abdullah Plan, which in effect ignores the capital of the Eastern Quds and 1967 borders. Why did the Arab countries agree to such a plan?

A: Not all Arab states are on board, neither will they be. Palestinians are the victims of a region that is beset by insecurity, wars, authoritarianism and state brutality. Don't forget that Israeli soft power is also due to the fact, that the country's leaders can be held accountable, certainly in terms of the legal structures supervising the state. This is not the case in many other settings. The direct consequence of this is that calling for Palestinian rights can be easily deemed hypocritical. How can you call for the rights of an oppressed people, when your own citizens do not have the freedom to express themselves? In this tension, between a just cause and hypocrisy, lies the tragedy and betrayal of the region towards the Palestinian cause.

Trump's deal reminiscent of apartheid South Africa

By Niall Ó Brolcháin

Donald Trump's 'Deal of the Century' got the endorsement of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson in the Houses of Parliament Thursday. Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn, quite rightly, warned that it 'would lock-in illegal colonization' and deny the Palestinian people their fundamental rights.

Not only does this 'deal' – concocted by the impeached President of the United States (with a little help from, among others, his Zionist son-in-law, Jared Kushner) and the indicted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – 'lock-in illegal colonization' of the West Bank, it also annexes the Jordan Valley, the Golan Heights, gives Israel full control over the entire Old City of Jerusalem and all borders from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

There would be no 'right of return' for Palestinian refugees to their homeland in what became Israel in 1948, and the Palestinians who are currently living there would be scattered around what is left of the West Bank and Gaza.

The new 'state' of Palestine would have no sovereignty, control of its borders, airspace or maritime territories or any chance of its capital being Jerusalem. Gazans would still have to endure the inhumane conditions under which they are now imprisoned, hemmed in on all sides by Israel, Egypt, and the Sea.

The Trump-Kushner Plan is a continuation of the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people from their homeland since before the Nakba catastrophe of 1948. The Zionist project has gradually been trying to obliterate Palestine from the map since, denying the Palestinian people their legitimate rights, in contravention of numerous United Nations Resolutions, the Geneva Conventions, and international law.

Gideon Levy, of the Israeli daily Haaretz said it was the “final nail in the coffin of the walking corpse known as the two-state solution, and created a reality in which international law, the resolutions of the international community and especially international institutions are meaningless”. And he was right!

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said in 2010 that Israel was becoming an “apartheid” state. In 2017, the current President of Israel, Reuven Rivlin, spoke out against



the law that uproots Palestinians to accommodate the arrival of new settlers, saying that the law “will cause Israel to be seen as an apartheid state”.

Israel already is an apartheid state. Just like the black indigenous majority population of South Africa, the Palestinian people are physically, emotionally and politically separated into non-contiguous enclaves in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

The Trump-Netanyahu plan further thrusts this apartheid regime onto the Palestinians. Just like the blacks of South Africa, the Palestinians would be 'given' autonomy in civil matters such as healthcare and education but critical areas such as security and external affairs would all be under Israeli control.

Just like the South African apartheid model, the Trump-backed Israeli plan defines Israel as a Jewish state, a state which rules and occupies more Palestinians than Israeli Jews.

Meanwhile, the almost daily killing and maiming, harassment, demolition, dispossession and displacement continues and the international community, it seems, is oblivious to the facts. Very little airtime is given in Western mainstream media circles to the atrocities which are occurring regularly.

The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, B'Tselem, has reported that in 2019 alone, the Israeli Occupation Forces killed 133 Palestinians, 28 of whom were children.

B'Tselem's investigations found that almost all casualties

resulted from the reckless open-fire policy Israel applies in the Occupied Territories: bombing densely populated areas, unlawfully shooting unarmed demonstrators near the fence between Gaza and Israel, and opening fire in incidents of assault or stone-throwing when there is no threat to anyone's life.

On this day 48 years ago, 30 January 1972, British soldiers shot dead 13 unarmed civil rights protestors in the town where I am writing this article from, Derry City in the North of Ireland. Another man would die later from injuries he sustained on that fateful day and many more were injured.

After an initial cover-up and whitewash by the British Widgery Report, and years of campaigning by the victims' families, a second inquiry was launched and the 5,000-page Saville Report found that the first shot in the vicinity of the march had been fired by the British army and that there was no justification for the shooting of the civilian casualties. It also found that none of the soldiers had fired in response to attacks by those throwing projectiles and that none of those who were shot were armed or had posed any threat to the soldiers.

Upon the issuing of the report in 2010, British Prime Minister David Cameron went before Parliament to apologize for the shootings. The following year, the British government announced that it would offer financial compensation to relatives of the victims.

Only one of the paratroopers involved in the murders on that day will face charges relating to the atrocity. ‘Soldier F’ is soon to stand trial for the murders of James Wray and William McKinney and the attempted murders of Joseph Friel, Michael Quinn, Joe Mahon and Patrick O'Donnell.

Thankfully, that would never be allowed to happen here again. Nor should it be allowed to continue happening to the Palestinian people whose only demands are legitimate human and civil rights.

The idea of a two-state solution is buried. The only solution is a democratically-elected, one-state, brought about by international pressure like that which led to the downfall of the apartheid South African regime. The only way to achieve this is through BDS – Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions!!

(Source: International Middle East Center)

As prominent Israelis dedicated to peace, we oppose Trump's apartheid plan

As Israelis dedicated to a peaceful future for our country and for our Palestinian neighbors, we state our principled opposition to the Trump administration's plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This plan will not solve but deepen the conflict, engendering a degree of inequality not seen since South African apartheid. This is a Bantustan plan, caging the Palestinians into pockets of land controlled by Israel. Trump and Netanyahu are acting as two wolves negotiating how to eat a sheep. Spurred on by Trump, Netanyahu has already declared his intention to formally launch annexation of the Jordan Valley and the settlements in the West Bank. All of this is diametrically opposed to international law and relevant UN Security Council resolutions, including 2334 (which states that Israel's settlement activity constitutes a “flagrant violation” of international law and has “no legal validity”).

We are deeply alarmed by the EU's weak response so far, framing the Trump plan as “an occasion” to relaunch peace negotiations. The plan is no such occasion, but a roadmap to apartheid 2.0. It won't bring peace, nor a viable two-state solution. The Palestinian leadership can only reject it.

We call on Europe to reject Trump's plan, too, and start taking serious measures against Israel's annexation of Palestine – before it is too late.

Ilan Baruch, former Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe

Professor Eli Bar Navi, former Israeli ambassador to France



Palestinian protests against President Trump's Middle East peace plan.

Professor Michael Ben-Yair, former attorney general of Israel and former acting Supreme Court judge

Avraham Burg, former speaker of kneset and head of the Jewish Agency

Zehava Galon, former member of kneset and former chair of Meretz Party

Professor David Harel, vice president of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Israel Prize recipient (2004), EMET Prize recipient (2010)

Professor Moty Heiblum, EMET Prize recipient (2014), member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities

Miki Kratsman, EMET Prize recipient (2011)

Alex Levac, Israel Prize recipient (2005)

Dr Alon Liel, former director general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, former ambassador to South Africa and Turkey

Mossi Raz, former member of kneset

Michal Rozin, former member of kneset

Professor David Shulman, Israel Prize recipient (2016) and EMET Prize recipient (2010)

Professor Zeev Sternhell, Israel Prize recipient (2008)

■ **Time's up for the NHS**

Last month it was revealed that accident and emergency waiting times are now the worst on record, with one in five patients waiting more than four hours and the number of 12-hour waits at an all-time high.

Behind these shocking statistics are real people: people like RAF veteran Stan Solomons, who was left waiting on a trolley at Leicester Royal Infirmary for over 12 hours last month; or like the four-year-old who made headlines in December when he was photographed lying on a pile of coats while waiting for a bed in Leeds General Infirmary, an image Boris Johnson made a shameful effort to avoid acknowledging.

These shocking revelations presented an opportunity for humility and reflection. Instead, we were told that winter is “always challenging” – an insult to patients and to staff who have endured year after year of underfunding and understaffing. This response was followed soon after by the announcement of plans to scrap the four-hour A&E target, an action the Royal College of Emergency Medicine has rightly warned will have “a near-catastrophic impact on patient safety”.

These are not isolated incidents. They are an everyday experience for people up and down the country.

We have become numb to the word “crisis”. But make no mistake: the situation is getting worse and without major action, there will be a breaking point.

The Conservatives have promised “record” funding for our health service, but this is simply not true; they have promised 40 “new hospitals”, yet 34 of these have simply been given small amounts of money to develop “plans” for future work, and no funding to implement them.

We want to provide the best for our patients, but it is becoming harder and harder to do so. We will make every effort to hold this government to account, for their sake. We implore you to be honest about the problems our NHS is facing, and take urgent action to restore it to good health. It is not too late to make amends.?

Tom Gardiner, doctor

John Puntis, consultant paediatrician

Peter Barton, clinical nurse specialist

Marie Louise Irvine, general practitioner

Joy Inns, doctor

Hannah Golden, trainee psychologist

Lopa Banerjee, medical student

Nick Mann, general practitioner

Margaret O'Connor, health visitor

Richard Hall, trainee clinical psychologist

(Source: The Independent)

By Irfan Hussain

On the Chinese horoscope, this is the Year of the Rat. Traditionally, the New Year begins with celebrations and feasts, but the lethal coronavirus has dampened all such festivities.

Many scientists trying to pinpoint the origin of this virus have concluded that it was caused by bats from a certain cave in Hubei province. From them it appears to have jumped to civet cats kept in small cages in the seafood market at Wuhan by way of urine or faeces. Some biologists conjecture that the outbreak was caused by snakes.

Whatever the cause, it is certain that China's food preferences have triggered this plague.

Don't get me wrong: as a foodie, I like to experiment and have been known to slurp down all manner of exotic dainties. Once in Hanoi, I was happily scoffing stir-fried locusts until my wife stopped me in mid-bite by saying: “That one looks like a cockroach.” To this day, I don't know if she was joking.

But bats? Civet cats? No way. However, not everyone is restrained in their tastes. Most faiths practiced in China do not offer dietary guidelines, so people will eat whatever catches their fancy. In fact, the rich will buy the most expensive beast or bug on the menu. Thus, entire

nations are being stripped of their wildlife to satisfy the Chinese desire to impress and try novel dishes.

Donkeys in Africa are being shipped to China where their skins are turned into gelatine for traditional medicine. There have also been proposals to export donkey hides from Pakistan to China. The meat, of course, is eaten.

Pangolins, too, have been pushed to the edge by China's dietary habits. These helpless, scaly beasts are being scooped up from East Africa to Pakistan and trafficked to China where they are sold for \$470 per kilo (as against \$11 per kilo in the 1990s). The scales cost another \$3,000 per kilo in Vietnam and China, and are used in spurious cures, including as a cure for impotence.

In fact, more endangered animals and birds have been slaughtered in search of an elusive virility than in any other cause. Our own houbara bustards have fallen victim to Arab royalty's compulsion to overcome impotence. But the killing of rare species like the Indian tiger, the rhinoceros for its horn, and elephants for their tusks has pushed them to the edge of extinction.

Fortunately, the giant panda and many types of whales are staging a slow comeback. Partly, this is due to their appeal to animal lovers: it has never hurt to have good PR. But if you are a bat in a cave in Hubei province, you don't stand a chance. Other bears don't fare as well: some are locked up in cages to make them secrete bile which again is used in Chinese medicine.

Fortunately, China has shut down the animal food markets, but how long this ban will last — and whether it will be rigorously implemented — is an open question. If the SARS epidemic of 2003 is any guide, we can conclude that the authorities in China have learned little from the past.

However, China has a lot to lose from the current outbreak: tourists and investors will be reluctant to visit a country that poses such a serious health hazard. Millions of overseas Chinese are being seen as potential carriers of coronavirus.

At a time when President Xi is trying to position China at the top table, the last thing he needs is for his country to be dragged into pariah territory.

Bats bite back

Tehran intl. exhibit seeks to boost synergy among tourism, handicrafts

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran is to hold the 13th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition along with the 33rd National Handicrafts Exhibition simultaneously in an initiative to boost synergy among the two sectors.

A total of 12 exhibition halls have been dedicated to the event, which will be running at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground from February 12 to 15, organizers announced on Monday, ISNA reported.



So far, exhibitors and representatives from Turkey, Malaysia, Switzerland, Azerbaijan and Indonesia have announced readiness to take part in the tourism exhibit while fellows from Dubai, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, England and Cambodia have been invited, the report said.

The Islamic Republic expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots, including 22 ones that have been placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Some 6.7 million foreign nationals have visited the country since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year, Mojtaba Karimi, who presides over Foreign Ministry's visa and passport department, was quoted by IRNA as saying on December 4.

Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, Iran is expecting to increase the number of tourism arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million by 2025.

The 33rd National Handicrafts Exhibition, which brings together craftspeople and artisans from all over Iran, will showcase arrays of personal ornamentation, woodwork, illuminated manuscript, miniature, textile printing, enamel, leatherwork, handwoven textile, calligraphy, traditional musical instrument, metalwork, and marquetry to name a few. Nomadic culinary arts, live workshops and performances are among other themes for the event.

Handicraft exports from Iran reached \$146 million since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2019), tourism ministry announced last month.

Taranto is the first Italian city to offer \$1 homes

It's an alluring trend that's captivated the world: the promise of a place of your own, nestled deep in the Italian countryside -- for the astonishingly cheap price of just one euro, or a little over a dollar.

From the picturesque mountain village of Ollali on the island of Sardinia to the Sicilian community of Cammarata, there are several savvy Italian destinations you've got in on the action.

Taranto's heritage councillor, Francesca Viggiano, tells CNN Travel that the city will start offering up council-owned buildings in the city's Old Town for the tempting price of just one euro.

As with previous offers, buyers must commit to renovating the properties, a process likely to cost thousands more dollars.

The hope is to save dilapidated buildings and build up the population. There are currently 15 buildings ready to be snapped up -- with the listings due to go live in a couple of weeks. There's the potential for more buildings to be put on the market.

(Source: MSN)

ROUND THE GLOBE

Ogasawara Islands

The Ogasawara Islands are located in the North-Western Pacific Ocean roughly 1,000 km south of the main Japanese Archipelago.

The serial property is comprised of five components within an extension of about 400 km from north to south and includes more than 30 islands, clustered within three island groups of the Ogasawara Archipelago: Mukojima, Chichijima and Hahajima, plus an additional three individual islands: Kita-iwoto and Minami-iwoto of the Kazan group and the isolated Nishinoshima Island.

These islands rest along the Izu-Ogasawara Arc Trench System. The property totals 7,939 ha comprising a terrestrial area of 6,358 ha and a marine area of 1,581 ha. Today only two of the islands within the property are inhabited, Chichijima and Hahajima.



The landscape is dominated by subtropical forest types and sclerophyllous shrublands surrounded by steep cliffs. There are more than 440 species of native vascular plants with exceptionally concentrated rates of endemism as high as 70% in woody plants.

The islands are the habitat for more than 100 recorded native land snail species, over 90% of which are endemic to the islands.

The islands serve as an outstanding example of the ongoing evolutionary processes in oceanic island ecosystems, as evidenced by the high levels of endemism; speciation through adaptive radiation; evolution of marine species into terrestrial species; and their importance for the scientific study of such processes.

(Source: UNESCO)

Sarab-e Qandil: what ambiguous bas-relief hint at Sassanid monarchy?

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Reliefs bear significant testimony to fragments of the history of mankind as well as the art history, itself. Reliefs can be found more or less in each corner of Iran, and even the globe. Who knows, maybe some of them are still having untold stories.

Sarab-e Qandil (literary meaning "ice cold spring"), which dates back to Sassanid-era (224-651 CE), is among Iran's puzzling bas-reliefs, locating near modern Kazerun in southern Fars province.

Like almost Iranian rock reliefs, this one is located near a source of water. The relief is contained in a quadrangular frame, carved on an isolated rock beside the bed of a river, without having been much eroded or damaged by the water. Its isolation from frequented roads might explain its excellent state of conservation: it was not accessible for vandals.

It depicts a queen offering a lotus flower to her husband [widely believed to be the Iranian king Bahram II (r.276-293)]. The two characters look at each other, while a prince (probably their son, the future king Bahram III) holds a ring of power.

The carving is well-executed. Special attention has been paid to the clothes, which show beautiful and fine details, giving an impression of lightness, of aerial movement. The king appears to wear his winged crown and jewels. His left hand is on the top of his sword. His right hand is open, waiting for the gift. The composition shows the royal figure at the center of the panel, the queen being on his right, the prince being on his left/back.

Both attitudes of the king and the queen express love and respect, according to livius.org, which is a website on ancient history written and maintained since 1996 by the Dutch historian Jona Lendering.

"Such representations of love are very rare in Sasanian iconography, which generally consists of audience, victory, or inauguration scenes. An equivalent image of love was carved at Barm-e Dilak, where it is the king who offers the flower to the queen."

Although this relief is generally attributed to Bahram II, the lack of an inscription makes that experts couldn't be completely certain. The main arguments for an identification with Bahram II lay in the fact that he is the only Sasanian king who showed his queen on coins, and that the female figure might appear to be dressed more like a queen and not a goddess. Scholars like Vanden Bergh



A view of Sarab-e Qandil (literary meaning "ice cold spring"), a royal bas-relief dating back to Sassanid-era (224-651 CE), near modern Kazerun, Fars province, southern Iran. It depicts a queen offering a lotus flower to her husband [widely believed to be the Iranian king Bahram II (r.276-293)].

and Aerinck, therefore, think that the relief can be attributed to Bahram II. However, Lewitt-Tawill maintains that the relief represents Ardashir I and the goddess, the prince being Shapur I.

Soon after Bahram II, the son and successor of Bahram I, was enthroned, he was forced to defend his position against a brother, Hormizd, viceroy of the eastern provinces.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, in 283, exploiting Bahram's preoccupations,

The Sassanid era is of very high importance in the history of Iran. Under Sassanids, Persian art and architecture experienced a general renaissance. Architecture often took grandiose proportions such as palaces at Ctesiphon, Firuzabad, and Sarvestan that are amongst highlights of the ensemble.

the Roman emperor Carus invaded Mesopotamia unopposed and entered Ctesiphon, the Sasanian capital. Carus' sudden death, however, forced the Romans to withdraw, and soon thereafter the overthrow of Hormizd made Bahram secure. Numerous southern Persian rock sculptures depict Bahram wearing his winged crown, and several include his queen. Because female portraits are rare in Sasanian art, she is thought to have been a major dynastic personage.

The Sassanid era is of very high importance in the history of Iran. Under Sassanids, Persian art and architecture experienced a general renaissance. Architecture often took grandiose proportions such as palaces at Ctesiphon, Firuzabad, and Sarvestan that are amongst highlights of the ensemble.

Crafts such as metalwork and gem-engraving grew highly sophisticated, yet scholarship was encouraged by the state. In those years, works from both the East and West were translated into Pahlavi, the language of the Sassanians. Rock-carved sculptures and bas-reliefs on abrupt limestone cliffs are widely deemed as characteristics and striking relics of the Sasanian art, top examples of which can be traced at Bishapur, Naqsh-e Rostam and Naqsh-e Rostam in southern Iran.

In 2018, UNESCO added an ensemble of Sasanian historical cities in southern Iran -- titled "Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of Fars Region" -- to its World Heritage list.

Pir-e Shaliar: ancient Iranian festival celebrating abundance, good fortune



HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — Pir-e Shaliar is an ancient annual ceremony, celebrating abundance and good fortune since centuries ago in Uraman Takht rural district, Kordestan province, western Iran.

Pir-e Shaliar, a legendary folk figure for Iranian Kurds, is warmly remembered for his allegedly magical healing

qualities and mojo that locals believe could populate the land with livestock and crops in times of trouble. The figure is associated with the pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian times.

This year, the festival was held on January 29 and 30 with hundreds of people from neighboring towns and villages in attendance.

The festival usually starts before dawn with children distributing walnuts as gifts, knocking on the villagers' doors and getting sweets from them in return.

Sheep and goats are slaughtered as the day breaks. Then several hours are spent for cooking a special soup called 'Veloshin'; meanwhile people celebrate the event by blessings and prayers. The soup will be ultimately distributed amongst all villagers.

People come out from their terraced houses, which roof of one is courtyard of another, to witness the ritual. Daf, a local drum, is played and the dervishes of the region gather to chant and dance, while swaying their long hair through the air.

Prior to the night, men meet in the house of Pir-e Shaliar and continue their ritual of chanting prayers and playing the dafs to pay their ultimate tribute to the legendary figure of the region.

The legend says that Pir-e Shaliar magically cured 'Shah-Bahar Khatoun' the beloved daughter of king of Bukhara so that he was rewarded with getting married with the girl.

Uraman region is considered a cradle of Kurdish art and culture from the days of yore. Stretched on a steep slope of Sarvabad county, the village is home to dense and step-like rows of houses in a way that roof of each house forms the yard of the upper one, a feature that adds to its charm and attractiveness.

The name Kordestan refers to the region's principal inhabitants. After the Turkish invasion of Iran in the 11th century CE (Seljuq period), the name Kurdistan was ap-



plied to the region comprising the northwestern Zagros Mountains. It was during the reign of Abbas I the Great of Iran's Safavid dynasty (1501–1736) that the Kurds rose to prominence, having been enlisted by Abbas I to help stem the attacks of the marauding Uzbeks from the east in the early 17th century.

Trump administration restricts entry into U.S. from China

The travel disruption sent shocks through the stock market and rattled industries that depend on the flow of goods and people between the world's two largest economies.

Moving to counter the spreading coronavirus outbreak, the Trump administration said Friday that it would bar entry by most foreign nationals who had recently visited China and put some American travelers under a quarantine as it declared a rare public health emergency.

The temporary restrictions followed announcements by American Airlines, Delta Air Lines and United Airlines that they would suspend air service between the United States and China for several months.

The travel disruption sent shocks through the stock market and rattled industries that depend on the flow of goods and people between the

world's two largest economies. Planning was upended for companies across a vast global supply chain, from Apple to John Deere, the tractor company.

The S&P 500 suffered its worst loss since October, falling 1.8 percent, as the spread of the virus — and the increasingly urgent efforts by companies and governments to contain it — fanned fears of an economic slowdown.

The government travel restrictions, which will take effect on Sunday evening, were announced by Alex Azar, the secretary of health and human services, who declared that the coronavirus posed "a public health emergency in the United States."

The administration's action will restrict all foreign nationals who have been to China in the past 14 days from entering the United States. The restriction does not include immediate family

members of American citizens and permanent residents. Nearly three million Chinese residents traveled to the United States in 2018, according to federal data based on travel records.

The travel restrictions and the airline's announcements showed how rapidly concerns about the virus have escalated into a grave test of the global economy, for which there is no recent precedent. Three weeks after the first virus-related death was reported, China has found itself increasingly cut off from its biggest trading partner, the United States, and many other nations.

Chinese officials said on Saturday that there had been an additional 46 deaths in the country, the most so far in a 24-hour period, raising the death toll to 259. It said confirmed infections had grown to nearly 12,000, from

1,300 a week earlier.

About 100 cases have been confirmed across 21 other countries, including seven reported cases in the United States. Russia, Italy and Britain each reported their first infections on Friday, two from each country. The four patients in Italy and Russia were Chinese citizens, the authorities there said; Britain did not release any details.

To address the outbreak, China has extended the Lunar New Year holiday, which was to have ended Thursday, into next week. In cities across the country, including those far from the center of the outbreak, there were eerie scenes Friday of all-but-empty streets and highways, closed shops, trains without passengers and nearly deserted public spaces that are normally packed.

(Source: The New York Times)

World Wetlands Day: 25 Wetlands of International Importance in Iran

By Faranak Bakhtiari

TEHRAN — Iran currently has 25 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), covering a surface area of 1,488,624 hectares.

The Ramsar Convention for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands, recognizes the fundamental ecological functions of wetlands and their economic, cultural, scientific, and recreational value.

The Convention on Wetlands is the oldest of the modern global intergovernmental environmental agreements. The treaty was negotiated through the 1960s by countries and non-governmental organizations concerned about the increasing loss and degradation of wetland habitat for migratory waterbirds. It was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975.

World Wetlands Day is observed annually on February 22, emphasizing on the importance of the wetlands and sustainable use of these valuable ecosystems.

According to the Ramsar Convention, wetlands remove water pollutants, control storms, curb climate impacts absorbing 30 percent of land-based carbon, share a great biodiversity helping human life, store and supply water, and help 1 billion people to make a living worldwide.

Moreover, wetlands are home to 40 percent of all species, and provide a great part of food supply, while being an important source of flourishing tourism in the countries.

Iran also has a great share of wetlands, as 105 wetlands are in Iran stretching 3 million hectares of lands. Here, we take a glimpse at some of them:

■ Alagol, Ullmagol and Ajigol Lakes

Alagol, Ullmagol and Ajigol Lakes are located in northern Mazandaran province with an area of 1,400 hectares; added to the Montreux Record, in 1993. Ullmagol and Ajigol are seasonally-filled freshwater lakes, fed by autumn and winter rains, which become desiccated in drought periods. Alagol is slightly saline and fringed by extensive reed and grass marshes.

Ullmagol is sparsely vegetated. There are several human settlements. The site supports Anatidae (ducks, geese, swans, etc.), flamingos, and nesting White-tailed Plover. Placed on the Montreux Record in 1993 due to high levels of disturbance from wildfowl hunters and the extraction of water for irrigation purposes, which has lowered lake levels considerably, especially during summer.

■ Amirkelayeh Lake

Located in Gilan province, Amirkelayeh Lake is a deep, freshwater lake supporting extensive reed beds and a rich floating and submerged vegetation. The lake is fed by springs and runoff, and at times of high water level drains into the Caspian Sea. The area is important for several species of wintering water birds, mostly Anatidae (ducks, geese, swans, etc.). Past human activities have included intensive duck hunting, which is now banned.

■ Anzali Wetland

Anzali wetland in Gilan province stretches to 15,000 hectares; added to the Montreux Record, in June 1993.

A large, freshwater lagoon fed by several rivers and separated from the sea by a dune system; supports extensive reed beds and abundant submerged and floating vegetation. The permanent wetland is surrounded by seasonally flooded marshes and ab-bandas (water impoundments) fringed by reedbeds and damp grassland.

The site is of international importance for breeding, staging and wintering water birds. The massive spread of the exotic floating water fern Azola is suppressing native flora which is important food for waterbirds. This site was placed on the Montreux Record in 1993 due to change in water levels and increased nutrient-enrichment, leading to the rapid spread of the reed Phragmites australis.



■ Bujagh National Park

Bujagh National Park of Gilan province has covered 3,177 hectares of the lands; which is a broad, shallow embayment of the Caspian Sea and associated deltaic wetlands at the mouth of the Sefid Rud River.

With a variety of marine, coastal and inland freshwater and brackish wetland types, the site is important as a spawning and nursery ground for fish, and as breeding, staging and wintering area for waterfowl, including Dalmatian Pelican Pelecanus crispus.

It supports more than 1% of the Caspian populations of Greater White-fronted Goose Anser albifrons and Whooper Swan Cygnus Cygnus. The site also supports the globally Endangered Caspian Seal Pusa caspica.

Bujagh National Park is floristically diverse and has 24 endemic species together with many traditionally-used medicinal plant species. The site is used for recreational and commercial fishing including aquaculture, livestock grazing, reedcutting, hunting, rice farming and recreation/tourism.

It is impacted by waterfowl hunting, transport pressure from commercial fisheries, recreation, uncontrolled summer grazing and illegal fishing; a decrease in wintering waterfowl has been attributed to fishing and hunting disturbance.

A management plan is under development. Bujagh National Park is an Important Bird Area and is considered a potential site for the reintroduction of the Siberian Crane. The original Ramsar site (1975) was significantly enlarged as of September 2009.

■ Choghakhor Wetland

Located in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province, Choghakhor Wetland is flowing on 1687 hectares; designated as a hunting restricted area. Choghakhor Wetland supports more than 47 bird species, with breeding populations of migratory birds such as the Northern Pintail (Anas acuta).

It supports more than 1% of the population of Gadwall (Anas strepera) and harbours threatened species such as the endangered White-headed Duck (Oxyura leucocephala) and the vulnerable Eastern Imperial Eagle (Aquila heliaca).

Choghakhor Wetland is considered to be one of the most important sites in Iran for the endemic Zagros pupfish (Aphanius vladikovi). It is important for flood control, ground water replenishment, and is generally considered a reservoir for biodiversity. Plants with important medicinal (e.g. Achillea mille folium) properties can be harvested, and locals engage in livelihood activities such as fishing and agriculture.

Threats to the site include the collection of bird eggs and poaching. Dam construction in 1991 has caused increasing water levels in the wetland which in turn, has affected the availability of bird habitats. The Department of Environment is responsible for the management of this site.

■ Deltas of Rud-e-Shur, Rud-e-Shirin and Rud-e-Minab

Deltas of Rud-e-Shur, Rud-e-Shirin and

Rud-e-Mindab in Bandar Abbas also is covering an area of 45,000 hectares; coastal mudflats, mangroves and saltmarshes around the deltas of three rivers, subject to spring flooding.

A shallow, inshore zone includes mud and sand flats, bars and spits. Arid plains and steppe occur inland. The area is also of great importance for wintering water birds.

■ Fereydoon Kenar, Ezbaran and Sorkh Ruds Ab-Bandans

All located in Mazandaran province, cover an area of 5,427 hectares; an artificially maintained wetland in the South Caspian lowlands. Comprises four "damgahs", i.e. shallow freshwater impoundments based on rice paddies developed as duck-trapping areas, surrounded by forest strips and reedbeds, and including a Wildlife Refuge (48ha).

The area is of outstanding importance as wintering grounds for the entire western population of the Siberian Crane (Grus leucogeranus), listed as 'critically endangered' in the IUCN Red Book. Having reappeared at the site in 1978 after 60 years' absence, the number of Siberian Cranes now fluctuates between 7-14.

Other endangered species using the site include Red-breasted Goose Branta ruficollis, Lesser White-fronted Goose Anser erythropus, Dalmatian Pelican Pelecanus crispus and occasionally Pygmy Cormorant Phalacrocorax pygmaeus, and wintering raptors such as Falco sp. and Haliaeetus albicilla.

The site's agricultural lands are flooded during summer, thus supporting groundwater recharge and water supply for irrigation during the dry months. Apart from rice farming the land is used for forestry and fishery.

In the past at the end of each trapping season the area was opened up for gun hunting in a massive "shoot-out", creating a potential threat for Siberian Cranes to be shot accidentally, but in 2001 the Department of Environment designated the whole site as a Non-Shooting Area.

■ Gavkhouni Lake and marshes of the lower Zaindeh Rud

Gavkhouni Lake and marshes of the lower Zaindeh Rud in central province of Isfahan stretches to 43,000 hectares.

Gavkhouni is a brackish lake with limited reed vegetation, and both it and the marshes of the lower Zaindeh Rud River are subject to wide seasonal flood fluctuations. Much of the original marshland has been converted to agricultural use to take advantage of the rich alluvial soil. The site is important for staging and wintering for several species of migratory waterbirds.

The site is impressive in its desert situation.

■ Gomishan Lagoon

Golestan province's Gomishan wetland is around 17,700 hectares, which supports three IUCN Red List vulnerable species of waterbirds, i.e., Pelecanus crispus, Aythya nyroca, and Vanellus gregarius, as well as the vulnerable mammal Phoca (Pusa) caspica; it is also an important staging area for the fish subspecies Rutilus rutilus caspica.

More than 20,000 waterbirds have been

observed in the most recent 13 years of censuses, and more than 20 species of waterbirds surpass the 1% threshold (Criteria 5 and 6), and 15 fish species depend upon the site as an important source of food (Criterion 8).

■ Hamun-e-Puzak, south end

Hamun-e-Puzak, south end is located in Sistan and Baluchestan province with an area of 10,000 hectares; the Iranian portion of the vast Hamun-e-Puzak wetland, is an important area for wintering waterbirds.

Substantial declines in bird numbers may have occurred due to widespread drought and vegetation degradation in the Sistan Basin by the construction of a dam on the Helmand River in Afghanistan.

■ Hamun-e-Saberi and Hamun-e-Helmand

Hamun-e-Saberi and Hamun-e-Helmand are placing on 50,000 hectares of Sistan and Baluchestan; forming a single wetland complex with Hamun-e-Puzak, consists of two shallow, predominantly freshwater lakes and associated wetlands.

Bird populations may have declined due to drought and river control structures (dams). There is increasing pressure from urbanization and agricultural irrigation.

■ Kanibarazan Wetland

Kanibarazan Wetland is located in West Azarbaijan province; stretching to 927 hectares; consists of a freshwater lake surrounded by diverse plant communities and seasonal wetlands which become dry during summer and autumn.

Kanibarazan Wetland is one of the most important habitats for waterbirds in the region, supporting more than twenty thousand birds with more than one hundred and forty-four bird species recorded at this site, including a number of important species such as the endangered White-headed Duck.

This site is important for water purification and water storage; it also prevents salt water from intruding into upstream areas.

■ Lake Parishan and Dasht-e-Arjan

Lake Parishan and Dasht-e-Arjan, located in Fars province with 6,200 hectares, both are permanent freshwater lakes subject to seasonal fluctuations in level, fed by springs and seasonal streams.

Parishan is subject to fluctuating salinity depending on precipitation. Both lakes are fringed by marshes dominated by reeds, and are important staging and wintering areas for numerous species of migratory waterbirds. The area also supports a variety of nesting waterbirds including pelicans, Ardeidae (herons, bitterns, etc.), and ibises.

■ Zarivar

Located at the foot of the Zagros mountains in north-western Iran, Zarivar is a freshwater wetland featuring a lake fed mainly by springs from the lake floor, which is recently designated as a Ramsar Site.

The Site provides a suitable breeding and resting place for birds and other wetland animals, and due to the relatively extensive reed beds, it is an important overwintering site for northern migratory birds.

Some 29 plant species, 74 birds, nine fish, two mammals, three reptiles and three amphibians have been identified in the wetland.

These include some globally vulnerable species such as the lesser white-fronted goose, red-breasted goose, Amur carp and common tortoise, in addition to endemic species such as the Namak scraper and the Mesopotamian spiny eel.

Lake Urmia, Miankaleh Peninsula, Gorgan Bay and Lapoo-Zaghmarz Ab-bandan, Neiriz Lakes & Kamjan Marshes, Shadegan Marshes and mudflats of Khor-al Amaya and Khor Musa, Sheedvar Island, Shurgol, Yadegarlu and Dorgeh Sangi Lakes, Deltas of Rud-e-Gaz and Rud-e-Hara, Govater Bay and Hur-e-Bahu, Lake Kobi, Khuran Straits and Lake Gori are also the other Ramsar Sites of the country.

Iran suspends China flights due to coronavirus

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iran has restricted all flights and recreational travels to and from China due to coronavirus outbreak, IRIB news agency reported on Saturday.

Health Minister Saeed Namaki said that screening and surveillance is underway across all the country's air and sea borders, and no cases of coronavirus have been reported so far.



Meanwhile, Mohammad Mehdi Gooya, head of the health ministry's center for infectious diseases, told IRNA that rumors that the novel coronavirus has reached Iran's neighborhood are untrue, according to reports by the World Health Organization.

Gooya went on to say that the novel coronavirus has not been reported in Iraq, Kurdistan of Iraq, Pakistan or any of the neighboring countries and the only country in the region which has confirmed the virus, is the UAE.

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 at least 259 people and infected 11,791 in China, and about 100 cases have been confirmed in 21 other countries.

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.

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.

8-year-old boy battling cancer achieves dream of becoming a fireman

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Arian, an eight-year-old boy suffering from cancer, got to fulfill his wish of becoming a firefighter.

Arian celebrated his eighth birthday on Friday with Ahvaz city's officials, citizens and firefighters in attendance. He was appointed as a commander of operations for one day, IRNA news agency reported on Saturday.

At a symbolic ceremony, a fire alarm was sounded and the young commander while dressed in full firefighters' uniform, was dispatched to the scene along with firefighters and eight fire engines.

Arian's firefighting operations were well done and the little boy's wish of becoming a fireman finally came true thanks to Ahvaz fire department.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

New president for Kenya

(December 30, 2002)

The newly elected president of Kenya, Mwai Kibaki, has been receiving praise and congratulations from around the world for his landslide election victory. Mr Kibaki's National Rainbow Coalition defeated Daniel arap Moi's KANU party which had run the country since independence in 1963. This report from Daniel Schweimler:

Mwai Kibaki is still celebrating an **overwhelming** victory, with congratulations from around the world **ringing in his ears**. South Africa praised the outcome of the election as another indication of Africa's growing commitment to **multi-party** democracy. The American Secretary of State, Colin Powell, noted the promise by the new leadership to fight **corruption** in Kenya. Britain, the former **colonial power**, said it looked forward to working with the new government.

Most Kenyans have never known any leader other than Daniel arap Moi, who governed the country for 24 years, and his KANU party, which has held power since **independence** from Britain in 1963. Mr Kibaki seemed to be forever in opposition, losing elections in 1992 and 1997. However, incomplete returns show that this time, promising to **revive** the country's **ailing** economy and tackle **rampant** corruption, he won well over sixty percent of the vote.

A special ramp has been **erected** in Nairobi's Uhuru Park, for the **inauguration** of the 71-year old, who is still using a wheelchair after a car accident in which he broke his arm and injured his neck. But that will be of little concern as all eyes in the country watch the symbolic **hand over** of the Kenyan flag and the beginning of a new **era**.

■ **Words**
overwhelming: very great in amount; overpowering
ringing in his ears: the residual high pitched noise after hearing a very loud noise

multi-party: many political organizations
corruption: dishonesty, illegal behavior
colonial power: an authority in a country that is answerable to another country, another country's rule
independence: not relying on others
revive: give new strength or energy to
ailing: very poor
rampant: the uncontrolled spread of something
erected: put together and set upright (a building, wall, or other structure)
inauguration: the ceremony that establishes someone in an official capacity or job
hand over: giving
era: period of time that is considered as a single unit because it has a particular feature

(Source: BBC)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ↔ B

‘Pharmaceutical industry unfazed by U.S. withdrawal of nuclear deal’

Given Iran's low volume of imports in pharmaceutical and medical equipment industry, the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal won't affect the industry, the Ministry of Health spokesman said on Wednesday. “Due to the technical know-how we possess we do not depend on import and we are capable of manufacturing many pharmaceutical products domestically,” ISNA quoted Harirchi as saying.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“fore-”

- **Meaning:** before or in front
- **For example:** Can dreams *foretell* the future?

PHRASAL VERB

Go about something

- **Meaning:** to start to do something;
- **For example:** I want to learn German but I don't know the best way to go about it.

IDIOM

Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed

- **Explanation:** a person who is very enthusiastic and full of energy
- **For example:** Gary was fantastic. He arrived bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at 7am and worked with us all day.

سخنگوی وزارت بهداشت: خروج آمریکا از برجام تأثیری در دارو ندارد

سخنگوی وزارت بهداشت تأکید کرد: خروج آمریکا از برجام تأثیری بر بازار دارو و تجهیزات پزشکی نخواهد گذاشت؛ چراکه وابستگی‌مان به دارو و تجهیزات وارداتی بسیار اندک است.

دکتر ایرج حریرچی در گفت‌وگو با ایسنا گفت: با تکیه بر توان دانشمندان خودمان و تولیدات‌مان، وابستگی دارویی‌مان به محصولات خارجی بسیار اندک است و میزان قابل توجهی از داروها را خودمان تولید می‌کنیم.

Only as a record in history: Read with open eyes to know more!

➔1 Only over the last three years, the United States has pulled out from several important international agreement or conventions, including the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA or nuclear deal with Iran), the Paris Agreement or the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the UN Human Rights Council and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The U.S. military has also been involved in hundreds of drone raids in other countries, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Syria that killed thousands of innocent children, women and men.

In the 20th century, the U.S. was a main orchestrator or supporter of tens of military coups or color revolutions in independent countries. In the last 70 years, the U.S. has been the most important supporter of the Israeli regime's occupation of Palestine, systematic violation of the Palestinians' basic rights and massacre of the Palestinian civilians by the Zionist army. Washington has been the number one supporter of fascism, human trafficking, arms smuggling, drug trafficking and terrorism in at least 35 world nations in the past seven decades.

The U.S. owns a sum of 6,800 atomic warheads. It is the only country that has used atomic bomb in a war against another nation. Washington along with Riyadh are the most important suppliers of terrorist groups in both forms of providing financial assistance and sending arms and ammunitions. The U.S. has been the main ground-paver for formation and promotion of Taliban, al Qaeda and Daesh terrorists.

The United States has the highest record in military expenditure and is the largest producer and exporter of arms and ammunitions across the world with a record of \$649 billion which is higher than the investment by seven countries of China, Saudi Arabia, India, France, Russia, Britain and Germany.

This is really surprising that the U.S. government with the abovementioned dirty records is considered as a normal pro-peace country while Iran which has not staged even one single military aggression against any nation in the past two centuries is referred to as an abnormal peace-threatening country.

Houthis say targeted Saudi airports, Aramco in retaliation for Riyadh air strikes

The spokesman for Yemeni Armed Forces says they targeted airports in southern Saudi Arabia and facilities belonging to Aramco oil giant over the past week in reprisal for the Riyadh regime's air raids on the impoverished country.

Speaking at a press conference in Sana'a on Wednesday, Brigadier General Yahya Saree said Yemeni fighters launched 26 rocket attacks on airports in Saudi Arabia's Jizan, Abha and Najran regions as well as Khamis Mushait base, Aramco company and sensitive sites inside the kingdom on January 25-30.

The airports hit in the Yemeni operation are used by the enemy for military purposes, he added.

"The command's instructions were clear to strike Saudi facilities and military bases in response to the airstrikes," Saree said, noting that the operation inflicted a major defeat on the enemy and caused hundreds of the Saudi-led mercenaries to flee.

The retaliatory attacks are the first of their kind since late September, when the popular Houthi Ansarullah movement said it would halt its retaliatory missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia if the Riyadh-led military coalition ended its aerial assaults on Yemen.

The announcement came after the Houthis claimed responsibility for the September 14, 2019 air raids on Aramco installations, which disrupted about half of Saudi Arabia's oil capacity or 5 percent of the daily global oil supply.

Saudi Arabia and the U.S. rushed to blame the attacks on Iran without providing any evidence.

Last December, however, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said that the world body's investigators were "unable to independently corroborate" claims that the Islamic Republic was behind the Aramco raids.

Recently, the Houthis have engaged in clashes with militants loyal to former Saudi-backed President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi in the Nihm district of Sana'a Province.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Saree said that the Yemeni forces had managed to fend off the militant attack on Nihm and were advancing to Sana'a's neighboring provinces of al-Jawf and Ma'rib.

"With the defeat of the enemy forces, the Yemeni Armed Forces continued to advance beyond Nihm," he pointed out.

In another press conference earlier this week, Saree estimated that the Ma'rib operation, dubbed al-Bunyan al-Marsoos, has liberated 2,500 kilometers of territory and caused the enemy to lose thousands of its elements.

(Source: Press TV)

Alleged leader of Iraqi al Qaeda group arrested in Arizona

A man accused of killing two police officers while acting as the leader of an al Qaeda group in the Iraqi city of Fallujah was arrested in Phoenix, Arizona, federal officials said on Friday.

Ali Yousif Ahmed Al-Nouri, 42, is wanted in Iraq on charges of premeditated murder of the Iraqi police officers in 2006, according to a statement by the U.S. Attorney's Office District of Arizona.

An Iraqi judge issued a warrant for Al-Nouri's arrest and the government there issued an extradition request to the U.S. Justice Department, the statement said.

The Justice Department sought an arrest warrant for Al-Nouri and he was taken into custody on Thursday in Phoenix.

He appeared before a federal magistrate judge in Phoenix on Friday in connection with proceedings to extradite him to Iraq, the statement said. According to the Iraqi government, al-Nouri was the leader of an al Qaeda group in Fallujah which planned operations targeting Iraqi police.

The statement noted the details in the Iraqi complaint were allegations that had yet to be proven in court.

Al-Nouri's extradition would have to be certified by the U.S. court and the U.S. Secretary of State would then decide whether to surrender him to Iraq, the statement said.

It was not immediately possible to contact Al-Nouri for comment or determine whether he had hired a lawyer.

(Source: Reuters)

Arab League holds emergency meeting over Trump plan

Palestine 'cutting all ties' with U.S. and Israel over Trump's 'deal of the century': Abbas

The Arab League held an emergency meeting in Egypt's capital, Cairo, to discuss U.S. President Donald Trump's plan for the Middle East that was unveiled last week.

The meeting on Saturday was requested by Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), who asked Arab nations to take a clear stance against Trump's so-called «deal of the century».

The plan presented on Tuesday was negotiated with Israel and had no input from Palestinians, who had cut off all ties with the Trump administration after its 2017 decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. It envisions the Israeli annexation of large swathes of the occupied West Bank, including illegal settlements and the Jordan Valley, giving Israel a permanent eastern border along the Jordan River.

«They told me Trump wants to send me the deal of the century to read, I said I would not,» Abbas told the meeting of Arab League foreign ministers on Saturday.

«Trump asked that I speak to him over the phone, so I said «no», and that he wants to send me a letter, so I refused to receive it.»

«Clear declaration»

Abbas has said the Palestinians remain committed to ending the Israeli occupation and establishing a state with its capital in East Jerusalem.

Trump's plan also proposes making Abu Dis, just outside Jerusalem, the capital of a future Palestinian state, which was also instantly rejected by Palestinians.

The Arab League's head, Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, said on Wednesday that an initial



study of the plan's political framework showed that it «ignored legitimate Palestinian rights in the territories».

He said the Palestinian response would be key in shaping a «collective Arab position» on the plan, which he noted was a «non-binding U.S. vision».

Majdi al-Khalidi, a diplomatic adviser to Abbas, said the meeting in Cairo aims at issuing a «clear declaration» rejecting Trump's plan.

Al-Khalidi, who accompanies Abbas on his trips to world capitals, said the Palestinian leader would meet Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to discuss measures to

«protect the Palestinian people's rights».

In a tacit sign of support for the U.S. initiative, ambassadors from the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Oman attended the unveiling of the plan in Washington, where Trump made the announcement alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Arab states that are close U.S. allies, said they appreciated Trump's efforts and called for renewed negotiations without commenting on the plan's content.

Egypt urged in a statement Israelis and Palestinians to «carefully study» the plan. It said it favors a solution that restores all

UK officially leaves the European Union

The flags outside embassies have been lowered, the countdown clocks have stopped. The United Kingdom is no longer a member of the European Union.

The country's 47 years of membership officially ceased at the stroke of 23:00 GMT (midnight Brussels time), more than three and half years after an in/out referendum exposed deep rifts across British society.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson marked the historic moment with his team at his Downing Street office, celebrating with English sparkling wine and an array of British culinary treats.

As the clock ticked down the final seconds, thousands of Brexiters celebrated outside Parliament and groups burned EU flags on the streets of London.

Anti-Brexit campaigners mounted several protests along the Irish border.

Under the terms of the withdrawal agreement between the UK and the EU, Britain now enters a transition period until the end of 2020, meaning London will abide by most EU laws while their future relationship is hashed out.

Johnson must now achieve a trade deal with the EU - the world's largest trading bloc - within 11 months, a task most experts have described as ambitious at best, but his wider mission over the next five years will be to find a way to repair the country's divisions.

The years since the referendum have seen ugly scenes at protests and clashes between pro- and anti-Europe demonstrators, as well as bitter rhetoric dominating newspapers and appearing in Parliament, and fears of a return of Northern Irish paramilitary violence.



■ It is not over yet

But those who think Friday's official departure date marks an end to the chaos may yet be disappointed.

«We are not even at the halfway point in this process,» said Scott Lucas, a professor of international politics at the University of Birmingham.

«We are only going into the tough negotiations with the European Union - on the economic relationship; on the status of Northern Ireland; on industry, agriculture, banking and finance,» he told Al Jazeera. «Even on basics such as will Britons have health insurance in Europe? What are the rights of EU citizens living here and of UK citizens living in Europe?»

Trade expert David Henig, the UK director of the European Centre for International Political Economy think-tank, agreed Johnson has a difficult task ahead of him.

«The UK government, having spent nearly four years deciding what it doesn't want - to be members of the EU, have now given themselves less than a year to decide what they do want - in the shape of EU and US trade deals,» he told Al Jazeera. «It is a huge challenge, particularly in such a short time.»

(Source: al Jazeera)

‘Muslim ban should end, not expand’: Groups slam Trump travel ban

Immigrant advocates and rights groups on Friday slammed the expansion of US President Donald Trump's controversial travel ban, saying it weaponises «immigration law to advance [the administration's] xenophobic agenda».

The expanded version of the travel ban targets prospective immigrants from six additional countries: Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan and Tanzania.

Under the proclamation, which will take effect on February 21, the United States will suspend the issuance of visas that can lead to permanent residency for nationals of Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar and Nigeria, acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf said during a call with reporters on Friday. The visas affected are distinct from non-immigrant visitor visas, which will not be impacted by the ban, Wolf said.

The US government will stop issuing «diversity visas» to nationals of Sudan and Tanzania, Wolf said. The visas - which Trump has criticised in the past - are available by lottery for applicants from countries with low rates of immigration to the US.

Rights groups decried Friday's announcement, saying the «Trump administration continues to push white supremacy and exclusionary policies that discriminate on the basis of faith, national origin, and immigration status».

«From scapegoating Muslims with the Muslim Ban to now expanding the same restrictions to other immigrant communities of colour, the Trump administration continues to weaponize immigration law in order to advance its xenophobic agenda,» said Javeria Jamil, a state lawyer at the National Security & Civil Rights of Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus.



The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) said the «Muslim ban should be ended, not expanded».

«President Trump is doubling down on his signature anti-Muslim policy - and using the ban as a way to put even more of his prejudices into practice by excluding more communities of colour,» Omar Jadwat, director of the ACLU's Immigrants' Rights Project, said in a statement. «Families, universities, and businesses in the United States are paying an ever-higher price for President Trump's ignorance and racism.»

■ 'White nationalist agenda'

The original travel ban - issued during Trump's first week in office in January 2017 - barred nearly all immigrants and travellers from seven Muslim-majority nations. It caused widespread outrage and chaos at airports across the US. The policy was revised amid court challenges, but the US Supreme Court ultimately upheld it in June 2018.

The existing version of the ban includes the Muslim-majority nations of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

North Korea and Venezuela also face visa restrictions, but those measures affect relatively few travellers.

Restrictions under the current travel ban will remain in place.

Wolf added the six new countries failed to meet US security and information-sharing standards, which necessitated the new restrictions. The problems Wolf cited ranged from subpar passport technology to a failure to sufficiently exchange information on «terrorism» suspects and criminals.

«These countries, for the most part, want to be helpful,» Wolf said, «but for a variety of different reasons simply failed to meet those minimum requirements that we laid out.»

But rights advocates and community leaders said the administration is «fulfilling a white nationalist agenda».

«We continue to be outraged by this Administration's actions to ban immigrants seeking a better life in the United States,» said Linda Sarsour, executive director of MPower Change. «Trump is fulfilling a white nationalist agenda on the backs of Muslim and African communities and we will not stand for it. All of our families deserve to be together.»

Patrice Lawrence, a co-director of UndocuBlack Network, said the ban shows the US «has a real problem with Blackness and any proximity to it».

«The reasons keep changing about why it is that the Trump administration wants to keep Black and brown people out. And that's because there is no honest reason, except for racism and xenophobia. Behind these bans and visa sanctions are real people with real families - facing the pain and uncertainty that family separation brings,» Lawrence said in a statement.

(Source: al Jazeera)



Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his country may launch a military operation in Idlib if the ongoing counter-terrorism operation by Syrian government forces continues there.

«Turkey with complete sincerity wants Syria's stability and security, and to this end, we will not shy away from doing whatever is necessary, including using military force,» he said.

Erdogan further accused Russia of violating agreements to reduce the fighting in Idlib. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia was fully compliant with its obligations in Idlib, which was a haven for militants targeting Syrian troops and a Russian airbase in Syria.

Turkey has intervened militarily in Syria three times to date in cross-border operations with the declared aim of eradicating Kurdish militants and Daesh terrorists near borders.

Damascus has strongly condemned Turkish military operations against Kurdish forces in northeastern Syria, saying the offensive is a violation of the United Nations Charter and Security Council resolutions.

Syria has vowed to confront «brutal» Turkish aggression by all legal means.

(Source: agencies)

Iran confirmed in Tokyo volleyball Pool A

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — The pool composition for the men's and women's volleyball tournaments at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games has been confirmed, where Team Melli have been placed in Pool A.

In new World Ranking system, the best Asian team Iran, sit eighth, while Brazil remain in top place. Poland, the U.S., Russia, Argentina, France and Italy sit above Iran in the ranking.

The 12 qualified teams per gender have been split into two single round robin pools of six, with the top four in the standings of each pool to advance to the quarterfinals.

The teams were assigned to pools in line with the serpentine method, with hosts Japan placed in the first position in Pool A and the remaining squads ordered by their positions in the FIVB World Ranking.

The men's national team of Japan, 1972 Olympic champions, are set to go up against the champions of the world in Pool A of their tournament. In addition to 1976 gold medalists Poland, the hosts will face 2016 Olympic silver medalists Italy, as well as Canada, Iran and Venezuela.

In Pool B, three-time Olympic champs Brazil will defend their Rio gold playing against three-time podium toppers the U.S., four-time gold medalists and reigning VNL champions Russia and the teams of Argentina, France and Tunisia.

In the quarterfinals, each pool winner will meet the fourth-placed team from the other pool, while a draw will determine the



opponents of the second-placed and the third-placed teams which will be from the other pool as well, fivb.org reported.

In the women's tournament, reigning world and European champions and 2016 Olympic silver medalists Serbia, two-time

Olympic champions Brazil, as well as the teams of Korea, Dominican Republic and Kenya will be in the company of hosts Japan, two-time Olympic gold medalists themselves, in Pool A.

Three-time Olympic champions China will

start the defense of their 2016 title in Pool B, where they will compete against back-to-back VNL gold medalists the U.S., the most decorated team in Olympic history – Russia, 2018 World Championship runners-up Italy, as well as Argentina and Turkey.

Persepolis cement place in top with win over Sanat Naft



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team received a boost ahead of Tehran derby with an away win against Sanat Naft on Saturday.

Iran professional League (IPL) leaders Persepolis edged past Sanat Naft 1-0 thanks to a first-half goal from Ahmad Noorollahi.

Noorollahi found the back of the net from a set piece in the 32nd minute in Abadan.

Shahr Khodro also defeated visiting team Machine Sazi 3-1 in Mashhad to keep their title hopes alive.

Saeid Sadeghi gave the hosts the lead from the penalty spot in the 42nd minute but Babak Moradi equalized the match before the half time.

Mohammadali Faramarzi and Roohollah Seifollahi scored each in 56th and 85th minutes to seal a 3-1 win for Shahr Khodro.

Esteghlal also cemented their place in top four with a 2-1 win over Naft Masjed Soleyman in Tehran.

Arman Ghasemi scored for Naft in 20th minute but Arsalan Motahari leveled the score in the 35th minute.

Mehdi Ghaedi extended Esteghlal's lead six minutes into the second half.

Persepolis lead the IPL table with 40 points, five points ahead of Sepahan.

Tractor are third with 33 points, while Esteghlal and Shahr Khodro sit fourth and fifth, respectively with 32 points.

Shahr Khodro showed great determination to go through: coach

Head coach Stephane Henri hailed his players' determination as Shahr Khodro FC sealed a place in the 2020 AFC Champions League group stage for the first time on Tuesday.

The Islamic Republic of Iran club prevailed 5-4 on penalties against Qatar's Al Sailiya FC after 120 minutes saw the play-off tie end in a 0-0 draw at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium.

Goalkeeper Mahdi Rahmati was the hero for Shahr Khodro, producing a brilliant shootout save to deny countryman Karim Ansarifard before Saeid Sadeghi struck the decisive blow to take his team through.

"The match saw a strong performance from both teams," said Italian Henri. "We tried our best to end the match in regular time.

"We are happy to qualify to the group stage. The players put in a lot of effort despite



the fact that they were tired after playing on Saturday and arriving to Doha on Monday."

The win places Shahr Khodro in Group B alongside reigning champions Al Hilal SFC, Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor and Shabab Al Ahli Dubai of UAE and Henri believes

his side have a chance to advance to the knockout stage.

"There is no doubt that the group is strong but this should not affect us," he said. "We should play with all our strength in order to qualify from the group and continue in

the competition."

Disappointed Al Sailiya SC head coach Sami Trabelsi said he couldn't fault his players for their effort.

"We tried our best to qualify to the group stage and I can't blame the players because they did their best," said Trabelsi.

"The match was very physical and the players needed to put a lot of effort into the match. We had some chances but failed to convert."

The Tunisian coach said scoring has been a problem for Al Sailiya domestically as well.

"The lack of scoring is a dilemma for us. Even in the local league, we have only scored 14 goals and must fix this problem.

"Still, playing in the AFC Champions League is a good experience for the players and they must build on this."

(Source: the-afc)

Djokovic to defend Melbourne Park fortress against Thiem

MELBOURNE (Reuters) — An Australian Open that has seen the men's establishment shaken by young talent comes to a fitting close on Sunday when defending champion Novak Djokovic takes on Dominic Thiem in an intergenerational decider.

The raging pre-tournament favorite, Djokovic will bid for a record-extending eighth title at Melbourne Park, having surprised no-one with his business-like march through the draw.

What has raised eyebrows is the profile of his opponent, a quite different proposition from the men Djokovic has faced before in the title match.

In seven unbeaten finals, the Serb has met only three men, defeating Rafael Nadal (2012, 2019) twice, Andrew Murray four times (2011, 2013, 2015-16) and a lone victory over Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in 2008, his maiden Grand Slam title.

In fifth seed Thiem, Djokovic meets an opponent he has never faced at Melbourne Park and suffered recent defeats to - on hardcourt at the season-ending ATP Tour Finals and on clay during the French Open semi-finals.

Compared to Nadal and Murray, who have racked up years of beatdowns by Djokovic at the hardcourt Grand Slams, Thiem comes into the match relatively free of scar tissue.

The 26-year-old Austrian is also playing the tennis of his life.

Once dismissed as merely a threat on clay, he torpedoed

any remaining doubts about his hardcourt bona fides with a quite brilliant four-set defeat of Nadal in the quarter-finals.

It was a match that not only showcased his extraordinary power and endurance but also his composure under pressure and courage to convert his chances when they came.

Runnerup to Nadal at the last two French Opens, Thiem may lack the major trophies and aura of Djokovic's 'Big Three' rivals Nadal and Federer.

But what he does have is a ferocious one-handed backhand and the blue collar grit of three-times Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka, one of the very few men capable of giving 16-times Grand Slam champion Djokovic sleepless nights.

Wawrinka, who toppled Djokovic on the way to his 2014 Australian Open triumph and twice more in the French and U.S. Open finals, put his backhand to devastating use against the Serb.

The backhand down the line may be the most exhilarating shot in tennis but few players have the courage or control to use it on clutch points.

Thiem let it rip against Nadal and young gun Alex Zverev in the semi-finals.

He may need to be similarly fearless to beat the Serb, whose peerless court speed and defense tend to repel the shots that would be winners against other players.

While there are few doubts about Thiem's stamina, he will head into the match after eight hours of slog against



Nadal and Zverev.

Djokovic will be fresh, having had an extra day's rest after a three-set stroll in the semi-final against an injury-hampered Roger Federer on Thursday.

The last of the old guard standing in Melbourne, the 32-year-old Serb will look to extend the Big Three's Grand Slam stranglehold to a 13th major title in succession.

It would be a remarkable feat from any perspective, but ultimately might only buy a few months' relief from the eventual revolution from Thiem's generation.

Kish Island to host Asia Beach Rugby Championship

TASNIM — Iran's Kish Island in the Persian Gulf has been chosen to host the inaugural edition of Asia Beach Rugby Championship.

The exact date of the competition is yet to be announced.

Asia Rugby president Qais Abdulla Al Dhalai has praised the Iranian federation for the development of sporting infrastructure in the country.

Rugby returned to the Olympic program at Rio 2016, when the sevens format provided a captivating showcase for this energetic and thrilling team sport.

Rugby's roots can be traced back to the sport of football as it was played in English public schools during the 19th century.

Iran became a fully fledged member of the International Rugby Board in November 2010.

Iran's Heydari chosen to officiate at AFC Cup

IRNA — Iranian referee Bijan Heydari has been chosen to officiate at the 2020 AFC Cup in March.

He will whistle a match between Singapore's Tampines Rovers and Shan United of Myanmar in Group H.

The match has been scheduled for March 10 at the Bishan Stadium in Singapore.

The 2020 AFC Cup group stage will be played from 10 February to 17 June 2020.

A total of 36 teams will compete in the group stage to decide the 11 places in the knockout stage of the 2020 AFC Cup.

Kobe Bryant helicopter firm was not allowed to fly in fog

The company that owns the helicopter that was carrying basketball great Kobe Bryant, his daughter and seven others when it crashed was not licensed to fly in foggy conditions, officials say.

Island Express Helicopters was limited to operating when the pilot was able to see clearly when flying.

The pilot reportedly had the federal certification to fly the helicopter relying only on cockpit instruments.

However he is likely to have had little experience in doing so, experts say.

This was due to him being restricted by the company's licensing.

The cause of the crash in foggy weather west of Los Angeles is still being investigated. Bryant was on his way to coach his daughter's basketball team in a local youth tournament at the Mamba Sports Academy.

Meanwhile, on Friday the Lakers played their first game since Bryant's death, going up against the Portland Trail Blazers at the Staples Center in LA.

The team paid tribute to Bryant by warming up wearing his numbers - 8 and 24 - while thousands of fans chanted, "Kobe, Kobe!"



Singer Usher then began a formal tribute by singing Amazing Grace, flanked by bouquets in the shape of the numbers 8 and 24.

Paying tribute to the icon, Lakers star LeBron James told the crowd: "The fact that I'm here now means so much to me.

"I'm going to continue with my teammates to continue his legacy not only for this year but as long as we can continue to play the game of basketball that we love, because that's what Kobe Bryant would want."

(Source: BBC)

Emre Can joins Borussia Dortmund from Juventus

Borussia Dortmund have signed Emre Can on loan from Juventus with the deal set to be made permanent in the summer.

Can, 26, joined Juve from Liverpool on a free transfer in 2018 but did not feature during the Champions League group stages this term. When hearing about his omission from the squad while with the German national team in late August, Can said he was "extremely shocked."

He explained he only opted to remain at Juve "under the condition that I am part of the Champions League squad."

Although Can was regularly called up to the matchday squad in Serie A, he only made eight appearances for Juventus this season, with two as a starter. Looking for crucial playing time ahead of the 2020 European Championships, the versatile defensive player is now hoping that he can become a regular for Dortmund.

Dortmund waited until the departure of Julian Weigl to Benfica and Paco Alcacer to Villarreal had been completed before signing Can.

Can is set to replace Weigl, with the 24-year-old having mostly featured as a center-back during the first half of the season.

Dortmund coach Lucien Favre changed his formation from 4-2-3-1 to a 3-4-1-2 in late 2019. Can, who also played as a right-back at Liverpool, could play alongside Mats Hummels and one of Manuel Akanji and Dan-Axel Zagadou in a three-man defense or replace Akanji should Favre return to a four-man defense.

It is less likely that Can will be played in midfield where Belgium international Axel Witsel and Germany's Julian Brandt have slowly grown into a force to be reckoned with.

Can returns to the Bundesliga for the first time since leaving Bayer Leverkusen in 2014.

(Source: ESPN)

Wheelchair Basketball could lose Tokyo 2020 spot

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has warned the International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (IWBF) that the removal of wheelchair basketball from the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games is one of the options it could pursue unless the federation implements an IPC approved action plan to improve athlete classification

by 29 May 2020.

At the same time, due to the IWBF's continued failure to comply with the IPC Athlete Classification Code, wheelchair basketball has been removed with immediate effect from the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games sport program. Such exclusion may, however, be lifted if the IWBF takes measures to fully

comply with the IPC Athlete Classification Code by 31 August 2021.

The unanimous decision taken by the IPC Governing Board at its meeting in Bonn, Germany (23-25 January) follows protracted discussions with the IWBF, which, as an International Federation, currently defines eligible impairments differently to the man-

datory list of Eligible Impairments agreed on by the IPC General Assembly and reflected in the IPC Athlete Classification Code. The Eligible Impairments in the Paralympic Movement reflect the activities of the IOSDs that founded the IPC, and any changes must be approved by the IPC General Assembly.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

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■ Managing Director: Mohammad Shojaeian
■ Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450
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No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.O. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713



GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Shunning a person who is attracted by you is a sign of your misfortune, and your inclination towards another who ignores you is a sign of your abjectness.

Imam Ali (AS)

Villain actor Valiollah Shirandami dies at 88

A R T **TEHRAN** — Actor Valiollah Shirandami, who played villains in most of his movies, died of diabetes at a Tehran hospital on Friday evening. He was 88.

Eight troupes dedicated their Saturday performances during the 38th Fajr International Theater Festival in Tehran to Shirandami, who had directed numerous plays across the country.

Shirandami began his career in acting with the Anahita Theater Group established by the theatrical couple Mostafa and Mahin Oskui during the 1950s.

In 1967, he made his acting debut in cinema with "The Vampire Woman", which was directed by Mostafa Oskui. Although the film received no acclaim, it caused Shirandami to shift his focus onto the cinema.

He played roles in over 20 movies, including "Prince Ehtejab", "The Stine Lion", "The Punishment", "Honeymoon", "A House Built on Water" and "Smell of Camphor, Scent of Jasmine".

Collaborating in over ten TV series, including "The Tenth Night" and "Mokhtarnam", Shirandami was also prolific in television.

In October 2013, he made his last effort in theater by directing Italian writer Eduardo De Filippo's 1964 play "The Art of Comedy" at Tehran's Nazerzadeh Theater.

Shirandami also wrote the book "An Analysis of Directing Death of a Salesman" published in 2017. In his book, he reviewed some outstanding performances of Arthur Miller's acclaimed play "Death of a Salesman" in Iran.

Adaptation of Shakespeare's "Othello" competing in Fajr festival

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Titowak Theater Group led by Iranian director Ebrahim Poshtkuhi is competing in the 38th Fajr International Theater Festival with a loose adaptation of English playwright William Shakespeare's "Othello".

Poshtkuhi has renamed the play "Hey Othello, Only Pet Crabs Nest in Bed Sheets" for performance in Iran.

"Othello" is about a Moorish general in the Venetian army, Othello and his treacherous ensign, Iago. Iago is furious about being overlooked for promotion and plots to take revenge against Othello. He manipulates Othello into believing his wife Desdemona is unfaithful, stirring Othello's jealousy. Othello allows jealousy to consume him, murders Desdemona and then kills himself.

The story of "Hey Othello, Only Pet Crabs Nest in Bed Sheets" is set in a magic realism style in the southern Iranian city of Bandar Abbas.

Poshtkuhi's troupe is also planning to resume performing the play at the Qashqai Hall of Tehran's City Theater Complex after the festival in late February.

Asghar Hemmat, Nahid Moslemi, Gholamreza Farajzadeh, Iman Eshraqi and Masih Kazemi are the main members of the cast for the play, which was also staged in Tehran last September.

Poshtkuhi's previous adaptation of Shakespeare's works "Hey Macbeth, Only the First Dog Knows Why It Is Barking", which went on stage in 2009, was acclaimed in Iranian and international events.

The 38th Fajr International Theater Festival will run until February 9.

Fajr festival play reveals impacts of war on veterans' families

A R T **TEHRAN** — The 38th Fajr International Theater Festival will present a play titled "Life with the Taste of Mustard", which illustrates the repercussions of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war on the families of the veterans.

Written by Mohammad Ghadirzadeh, the play will go on stage in the non-competitive section of the festival at Tehran's Sarv Theater today, the organizers have announced.

"Soldiers and veterans are not the protagonists of the play, but their children and wives and the destructive effects of the vicious chemical attacks on the next generations and their victims are the central themes of the play," director Saeid Najafian has said.

"I really wanted to stage a play to show the patience of the wives and children of soldiers, war veterans and the prisoners of war, and what has become of them through all these years," he added.

He also said that he did not want to produce a play to attract the organizers of the festival but wanted the general audience to watch and enjoy the play.

Yaqub Salehi, Ali Yaqubzadeh, Bahar Karimzadeh, Salar Najafian, Melika Aslafi and Helma Yaqubzadeh are the members of the cast.

Abbas Kermaninejad directed "Life with the Taste of Mustard," in Tehran in 2011.

The 38th Fajr International Theater Festival, which opened in Tehran on January 30, will be running until February 9.



Members of director Saeid Najafian's troupe perform "Life with the Taste of Mustard" at Tehran's Sarve Theater. (Tiwali/Zia Safavian)

The Hague exhibit displays calligraphic paintings by Hossein Fadaei



Guests visit an exhibition of calligraphic paintings by Iranian artist Hossein Fadaei at the House of Iranians in The Hague, January 31, 2020. (Embassy of Iran in the Netherlands).

A R T **TEHRAN** — The House of Iranians in The Hague is playing host an exhibition of calligraphic paintings by Iranian artist Hossein Fadaei, the Embassy of Iran in the Netherlands has announced.

The opening ceremony of the exhibition named "Delight of Letters" was attended by Iran's Ambassador Alireza Kazemi-Abadi and a number of foreign diplomats.

The exhibit has been organized to provide an opportunity for cultural dialogues between the nations and put

a spotlight on the high position of art among Iranians, Kazemi-Abadi said.

Iranian musicians Arezu Rezvani and Farid Sheikhbahai also gave a performance during the opening ceremony.

Calligrapher Fadaei has also held a workshop to make the visitors more familiar with the beauty and delicacy of Persian calligraphy.

The exhibit opened on Friday and will be running for four days. It will next move to the Dutch city of Maastricht and then to the German city of Munich.



A scene from "Among the Hills" by Mohammadreza Keivanfar.

Culture ministry to unveil plays on war heroes Monday



A poster for the unveiling ceremony of a collection of plays on Iranian war heroes.

A R T **TEHRAN** — The General Office for Dramatic Arts at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance is scheduled to unveil a collection of plays on Iranian veterans martyred during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war on Monday.

The collection titled "The Bright Pen" contains four books, each carries two plays, the office announced on Saturday.

Book one contains "Or Not Being" by Kamran Shahlai and "All My Brothers" by Reza Goshtasb. The second book carries "Heliborne" by Mohsen Azimi and "Season

of Red Sapphire" by Neda Sabeti.

"From Behind His Shoulders" by Mehdi Nasiri and "Borunesi" by Morteza Shahkaram are the plays in the third book of the collection. Book four includes "A Drum That Trembled Underfoot" by Maryam Mansuri and "Scar" by Ladan Shirmard.

The unveiling ceremony will be held at Tehran's City Theater Complex. Shahlai, who is also the manager of the project, the playwrights and a number of cultural officials and artists will attend the ceremony.

The collection has been published by Iran's General Office for Dramatic Arts.

Movies from Iran line up for Vesoul film festival

A R T **TEHRAN** — A lineup of eight Iranian films will go on screen in various sections of the 26th Vesoul International Film Festival of Asian Cinema in France.

"Among the Hills" by Mohammadreza Keivanfar, "The Unseen" by Behzad Nalbandi, "Taxi" by Jafar Panahi and "Hava, Maryam, Ayesha", a co-production between Iran and Afghanistan by

Afghan director Sahra Karimi, are among the films.

Also included are "Pig" by Mani Haqiqi, "A Man of Integrity" by Mohammad Rasulof, "My Moon, Our Moon" by Mohammad Nasser and "There Was the Moon and a Fox" by Babak Nazari.

The Vesoul International Film Festival of Asian Cinema will be held from February 11 to 18.

Thieves steal Dali works in Stockholm smash and grab raid

STOCKHOLM (Reuters) — Thieves stole bronze sculptures and etchings by surrealist artist Salvador Dali from a gallery in Stockholm in a smash and grab raid in the early hours of Thursday.

The Couleur gallery, in Stockholm's upmarket Ostermalm district, was holding an exhibition of work by Dali containing around 10 pieces by the Spanish artist, news agency TT said.

"They were worth 200,000 to 500,000 crowns (\$21,000 to \$52,000) each. So it's quite a lot of money. It's terrible," gallery owner Peder Enstrom told TT.

The works by Dali were on loan from Switzerland, he said.

Police said the thieves smashed the glass entry doors of gallery and had made off with a number of pieces.

"The scene has been cordoned off so that forensics can carry out an examination," Stockholm police said in a statement.

The police declined to give any further information.



A police car is parked in front of an art gallery where Salvador Dali works have been stolen, in Stockholm, Sweden, January 30, 2020. (TT News Agency/Ali Lorestani via Reuters)

Adam Sandler to make four new movies for Netflix

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Actor and comedian Adam Sandler has reached a deal with Netflix Inc to make four new movies for the global streaming service, the company said on Friday.

Sandler, a former "Saturday Night Live" cast member who built a career on movies such as "Grownups" and "The Water Boy," has become one of the biggest draws on Netflix, according to the company.

Sandler's "Murder Mystery", co-starring Jennifer Aniston, was ranked the streaming service's most popular title in the United States in 2019. It is one of six movies and a comedy special he has made for Netflix with his company, Happy Madison Productions, since 2015.

His upcoming projects for Netflix include "Hubie Halloween" co-starring Kevin James and Julie Bowen and an animated feature film that Sandler will write and star in as a voice actor.

Netflix is counting on original movies such as Sandler's to help it compete with



Adam Sandler arrives for the National Board of Review Awards in Manhattan, New York City, U.S., January 8, 2020. (Reuters/Andrew Kelly)

new rivals, particularly Walt Disney Co, which has been removing its films from Netflix and taking them to its own Disney+ streaming service.