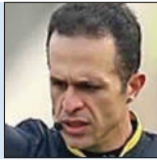




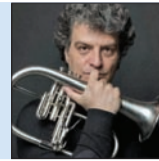
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PERSPECTIVE
Javad Heirannia
political analyst

The examination of the map that Trump released for Palestine

Look at the map released by U.S. President Donald Trump reveals that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are surrounded by the lands occupied by Israeli.

Following the unveiling of the Deal of the Century, a map was released by Trump that worsened the situation.

Below we will review the details of the map.

- The West Bank will have no border with the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. Only two bridges to Jordan than cross through the Israeli territories will connect the West Bank with the outside world.

- A 24-kilometer tunnel will connect the West Bank with Gaza.

- The Israeli army will be in charge of safeguarding the West Bank.

- The West Bank will be like an archipelago with the Israeli territories located in it. In fact, Israeli settlements have destroyed its entirety.

- A number of settlements will be inside the Palestinian Territory that are linked to the Israeli territories and the Zionist regime's army will be authorized to enter them. These settlements are apart from those in the West Bank and some other areas where Israel has annexed (since 1967).

- The West Bank will have no border with the Dead Sea and Palestinian residents of the West Bank can only use a part of the sea's coast, which is under the Israeli sovereignty. In fact, their tourist use is limited and no part of the coast belongs to Palestine.

- Palestinian residents of the West Bank will have no access to Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport, and only two bridges to Jordan through the Israeli occupied lands connect them to the outside world. The Amir Mohammad Bridge links Nablus to Jordan and the King Hussein Bridge connects the city of Jericho with Jordan.

- 70% of the West Bank (967) is actually given to Palestine and the remaining 30% is given to Israel. Instead, two (industrial and agricultural) areas added to the Gaza Strip, which is less than the 30% that Israel has annexed in the West Bank. →10

Iraqi president appoints new prime minister

Iraqi President Barham Salih has appointed Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi as the Arab country's new prime minister after political parties in the parliament failed to name a candidate in two months since former premier Adel Abdul Mahdi stepped down under pressure from anti-government protests.

On Saturday, 65-year-old Allawi, an ex-communications minister, said in a Twitter video message that the president had nominated him for the post to form a new government and that he would do so in line with demands sought by protesters during the past three months.

"After the president appointed me to form a new government a short while ago, I wanted to talk to you first," Allawi said, addressing the Iraqi nation. "I will ask you to keep up the protests, because if you are not with me, I won't be able to do anything," he added.

There was no formal announcement from Salih or other government bodies.

The development came after Iraq's divided parliament missed a February-1- deadline set by Salih to nominate someone for the post. The Iraqi president had earlier told the lawmakers that he would appoint his own candidate if they passed the deadline.

Since early October last year, Iraq has been the scene of growing protests, pressing the government to bring in reforms that would root out corruption and alleviate the Arab country's economic woes.

The rallies, however, soon turned violent – amid reports of foreign interference – with hundreds of people killed, including members of the security forces.

Amid the anti-government demonstrations, Abdul Mahdi stepped down in November and

the parliament approved his resignation in early December, but he had retained the position ever since as caretaker prime minister.

Under the Iraqi constitution, Allawi now has one month to form his cabinet, which would require a vote of confidence from the parliament. He was quoted by state television on Saturday as warning that he would "leave this nomination" if political blocs sought to impose candidates for different ministries.

Back on December 26, President Salih also submitted his resignation to the Iraqi parliament after refusing to designate the nominee for premiership, Assad al-Eidani.

He said at the time that since the constitution of the Arab country did not give him the right to reject a nomination, he would rather resign than pick a new PM rejected by demonstrators. →10

Sudanese promised jobs in UAE but taken to war in Libya, Yemen

Sudanese youths have revealed that the UAE pledged them jobs with high salaries in the Persian Gulf small country, but instead took them to Libya which is embroiled in a war between rival groups.

The United Arab Emirates is the key supporter of renegade general Khalifa Haftar which is leading a grueling military offensive against the government in the Libyan capital of Tripoli.

Several Sudanese youths have told the Middle East Eye that they were promised to work as security guards in the UAE on a salary of around \$2,175 per month, but were instead sent to hostile areas in Libya.

Abdul Rahman Alzaki, a 34-year-old IT engineer, went to visit the Amanda travel agency

in the center of the Sudanese capital that had placed the advertisement.

He was told the work was for the Emirati security firm Black Shields and would be located in Abu Dhabi or another UAE city.

Following several job interviews, Alzaki paid around 80,000 Sudanese pounds (\$950) to Amanda after he was told the salary had been confirmed and that the travel agency would transport him to the UAE.

He traveled to the Emirates, but his dream soon turned into a nightmare after he discovered that he would in fact be receiving three months of military training and then be sent to Libya or Yemen.

The UAE wanted him and other Sudanese

youths to protect oil refineries and strategic locations in the area held by Haftar, he told the MEE.

The UAE is among several countries supporting Haftar in his campaign to oust the UN-recognized government in Tripoli. The Arab country is also a key party to a Saudi-led coalition waging war on Yemen.

Around 3,000 Sudanese are believed to have been deceived by Black Shields, which subcontracted companies such as Amanda advertising for the Emirati company.

"When we reached the Emirates we realized that we had been cheated, as the company had taken our passports, mobile phones and everything, and sent us to a military training camp called Zayed Military City" in Abu Dhabi, Alzaki said. →10

Tehran hosting intl. building, property expo

TEHRAN — The first edition of Iran's international exhibition of building and property (Iran Build and Property Show 2020) kicked off at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Sunday, IRNA reported.

In this four-day exhibition, engineering, designing, industrial and manufacturing companies are presenting their latest designs, services, and products.

The event covers a variety of areas pertaining to the construction and property sectors, including building materials, construction machinery and equipment, elevators and lifts, prefabricated homes, drawing and design, water treatment systems, heating and cooling, tools, safety equipment, doors and windows, glass and related machinery. →4



© IRNA/ Nazanin Kazemi

India doubles budget for Chabahar development project

TEHRAN — India has doubled the allocated funding for the development of Iran's Chabahar port in its national budget bill for 2020, Times of India reported on Saturday.

As reported, the Indian government has allocated Rs100 crore (nearly \$14 million) for the Chabahar port project (in southern Iran) in the 2020 budget, while the allocation in the last Budget was Rs45 crore.

The increase in the allocation this year,

at a time when the situation in the region is delicate, suggests India's commitment to the Chabahar development.

Following several rounds of negotiations and discussions with New Delhi, the U.S. administration has exempted the Chabahar project from the new round of sanctions the country has imposed on Iran.

Iran has awarded the development project of this port to India, and the South Asian country committed \$500 million to build two new berths in this port. →4

New IRGC Quds Force chief reaffirms support for Palestinians

TEHRAN — Commander of the IRGC Quds Force has reaffirmed Iran's support for Palestinians and their cause in the face of U.S. declaration of a new pro-Israel plan days earlier.

Iran supports Palestinians to foil plots which have targeted their rights and backs their confrontation against Donald Trump's so-called "Deal of the Century", IRNA quoted Esmail Ghaani as saying on Sunday, citing Palestinians media.

Ghaani made the remarks in separate

phone conversations with leader of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Ziyad al-Nakhalah and Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau Ismail Haniyeh. Ghaani said nothing has changed in Iran's policy with regard to the Palestinian resistance forces, even after the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani, his predecessor.

The U.S. assassination of General Soleimani was a preparatory measure to orchestrate the so-called "Deal of the Century" plot, Ghaani said. →3

Iranian rural landscape wins prestigious TO DO Award 2020

TEHRAN — Esfahak village in Tabas, eastern Iran, has won TO DO Award 2020, a prestigious prize which is annually presented by the German Institute for Tourism and Development.

The award is aimed at taking into account the various interests and needs of the local population in the planning and implementation of tourism projects, measures, products and services. Involvement and co-determination ensure broad-based participation – e.g. through information, surveys and discussions among the population when finding ideas and making decisions, according to its website.

Esfahak was assessed last November by an expert from the German institute, IRNA reported. →8

Protesters outside U.S. embassy in Lebanon decry Trump plan

More than 200 Lebanese and Palestinians held a protest Sunday near the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon against a White House plan for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Protesters waving Palestinian flags gathered on a road leading to the embassy northeast of Beirut amid tight security by Lebanese troops and riot police.

"Death to America! Death to Israel! We will die and Palestine survive," some of the demonstrators chanted, AP reported.

The U.S. plan heavily favored Israel, granting the Palestinians limited self-rule in parts of the occupied West Bank while allowing Israel to annex all its settlements there and keep nearly all of east Jerusalem, which Palestinians claim as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

Around noon, the protesters removed the barbed wire and reached a metal fence set up by security forces. Police used what appeared to be pepper spray to hold back some of the demonstrators who were on the fence, with at least three protesters being carried away. Later in the day, the protesters dispersed from the area without any serious clashes, apart from some stone throwing at security forces.

On Saturday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas threatened to cut security ties with both Israel and the U.S. in a speech at an Arab League meeting in response to the U.S. plan. Arab foreign ministers there joined in criticizing the plan and calling it a setback to Mideast peace efforts.

Lebanon is home to tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees and their descendants. There have been protests in the country's 12 refugee camps since President Donald Trump unveiled the proposal in Washington.

■ Protesters against Trump's deal march in Tel Aviv

Meanwhile, protesters carrying Palestinian flags marched through Tel Aviv on Saturday, protesting against the so-called "Deal of the Century," presented by U.S. President Donald Trump, who claimed it would facilitate a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

People marched through the streets, holding a portrait of Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hugging, with banner, reading, "Don't make apartheid great again." "We came today to demonstrate against [an] annexation plan of Trump and Netanyahu. (Source: agencies)

Iran's special envoy meets Ashraf Ghani

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Mohammed Ibrahim Taherian Fard, the special envoy of Iran's Foreign Ministry, met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in Kabul on Sunday. The two sides highlighted the importance of fighting terrorism and extremism.



According to IRNA, Taherian Fard and President Ghani also said expansion of economic cooperation is essential.

Taherian Fard also met with Afghanistan's Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah on Sunday discussing relations, regional developments and Afghanistan's peace talks.

Iranian diplomat also met Afghan National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib and former Afghanistan president Hamid Karzai on Saturday.

Salehi calls Islamic Republic a 'turning point' in history

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Ali Akbar Salehi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said on Sunday that the Islamic Republic is a "turning point" in human history. "The Islamic Republic is a turning point in human history which will be shown with the passage of time," Salehi told reporters after visiting the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini, founder of the Islamic revolution, along with other members of the Rouhani cabinet.

He added, "International developments have been deep, comprehensive and fast after the revolution."

The visit to the shrine took place as Iran is celebrating the Ten-Day Dawn which reaches its climax on Feb. 11, the day marking the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Ten-Day Dawn started on Feb. 1, the day marking the anniversary of the arrival of Imam Khomeini to Iran after 15 years in exile.

Imam Khomeini, who led the Islamic revolution against the Pahlavi regime, passed away in June 1989.

Salehi, who is also the vice president, said what Imam Khomeini did made people see the truth as it is.

Talking on the sidelines of the visit to the Imam Khomeini shrine, First Vice President Es'hag Jahanfari also told reporters that "independence" and "freedom" are main ideals of the revolution.

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

Judiciary officials also visited the shrine on Sunday.

U.S. maximum pressure campaign against Iran to continue as before: official

(Press TV) — The United States' recent de-listing of a Chinese tanker company from the long catalogue of its sanctions against Iran does not signal any policy change on the part of Washington, says a senior U.S. administration official.

"Our maximum pressure campaign continues as before; we will sanction any sanctionable activity," the official told Reuters on Saturday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"This administrative de-listing should not be misinterpreted as a change in policy," the official added.

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration on September 25 blacklisted two units of giant Chinese tanker company Cosco, named after the northeastern Chinese port of Dalian.

On Friday, the U.S. Treasury Department waived the bans it had imposed on COSCO Shipping Tanker (Dalian) Co for transporting Iranian oil.

It, however, said it continues to blacklist the second unit -- COSCO Shipping Tanker (Dalian) Seaman & Ship Management Co Ltd.

Washington has taken its pressure against Iran to unprecedented levels under Trump.

As part of the policy, the U.S. left a historic nuclear accord with Iran and world powers in 2018, defying its multi-party nature and the fact that it has been ratified in the form of a United Nations Security Council resolution.

The U.S. then returned the sanctions that were lifted under the deal, which is officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). It has also been forcing other countries to follow suit.

Most recently, Washington sanctioned the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and its chief Ali Akbar Salehi.

AEOI Spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi, however, asserted on Thursday that the move bears no effect on the Islamic Republic's resolve to continue its nuclear energy program.

Tehran, for its own part, has begun a set of nuclear countermeasures in retaliation for the United States' departure from the JCPOA and restoration of its bans. The measures also seek to retaliate for failure by Britain, France, and Germany -- the three European signatories to the deal -- to retain their business interactions with Iran despite the sanctions.

As part of the retaliatory steps, Iran stopped recognizing the limits set by the deal on the level of its uranium enrichment activities and the volume of its heavy water reservoir.

On January 5, the country said it would no longer observe any operational limitations on its nuclear industry, whether concerning the capacity and level of uranium enrichment, the volume of stockpiled uranium or research and development.

The decision came two days after a set of U.S. drone strikes assassinated senior Iranian commander and the most revered anti-terror military figure in the Middle East, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, in Baghdad.

Tehran welcomes naming of new Iraq PM

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi issued a statement on Sunday saying Iran welcomes the appointment of Mohammed Allawi as the new prime minister of Iraq.

Allawi is replacing Adel Abdul Mahdi who resigned in late November due to anti-government protests but served as caretaker prime minister until the new replacement.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes the appointment of Mr. Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi as the new prime minister of Iraq in line with its continued support for independence, national sovereignty, territorial integrity and the consolidation of democracy in the country as well as the legitimate demand of the Iraqi government and nation that U.S. troops withdraw from its territory," Mousavi said in a statement, Tasnim reported.

The spokesman further wished Allawi success and expressed hope that by forming a new government, he would be able to fulfill the legitimate demands of the people and the religious leadership and help create a stable Iraq with an important regional status. "Iran is ready to help the Iraqi



Iraq's President Barham Salih instructs newly appointed Prime Minister Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi, in Baghdad, Iraq February 1, 2020.

government and people with all its capacity to overcome the problems and achieve their

ultimate goals in the critical situation facing the government and the friendly

Iranians to keep resisting enemies' pressure: Rouhani

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday that Iranians will strongly resist against arrogant countries' maximum pressure campaign to ultimately foil their plots.

Rouhani made the remarks while visiting the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic, along with his cabinet team.

Rouhani was openly referring to Donald Trump's economic war against Iran under his proclaimed "maximum pressure" policy.

The president and his cabinet team also pledged allegiance to the ideals of Imam Khomeini at his mausoleum. Rouhani paid tribute to Imam Khomeini by placing a bouquet of flowers on his grave.

The visit to the Imam Khomeini shrine took place on the second day of Ten-Day Dawn.

The Ten-Day Dawn refers to the date that Imam Khomeini returned to Iran from exile on Feb. 1, 1979, until Feb. 11, when the victory of the Islamic Revolution was officially declared.

Talking at the mausoleum, Rouhani said, "Imam Khomeini taught us that we can establish religious democracy with the help of people; he taught us that we can fight the [arrogant] powers and resist their pressures with the help of people."

"Our people are well aware that today, we do not have any choice but to resist against the oppressors," he stressed.

Stressing that Iran has never sought conflicts with any other country, he reiterated Tehran's strong resistance in the

face of challenges, saying, "Surrender and abjection are not in our policy."

On Saturday, Feb. 1, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei also visited the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini. The Leader also paid homage to martyrs laid to rest in Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery in southern Tehran, including the martyrs of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war and the 1981 bombing in Tehran in which 72 top figures, including chief justice Mohammad Hossein Beheshti, were martyred.

Every year, Iranians mark the anniversary of their Islamic Revolution from February 1 to 11. The final day is known as Bahman 22nd as Iranians take to the streets to mark the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

19 MPs sign letter to quit NPT

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has received a plan to study Iran's possible withdrawal from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The plan has so far been signed by 19 MPs, ISNA reported on Saturday.

The Iranian government is duty bound to immediately quit the NPT and stop all cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency if Iran's nuclear case is referred to the United Nations Security Council under the dispute mechanism of the JCPOA triggered by the European sides, the MPs said in their letter to the parliament speaker.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has warned that Iran will raise the issue of quitting the NPT if the Europeans refer Iran's nuclear case to the UN Security Council.

"If they (Europeans) take any action, the issue of quitting the NPT will be raised based on the letter of the President dating May 2018," Zarif told ICANA in an interview published on January 20.

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

The EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on January 24 that he had extended the time available to discuss ways to save the nuclear deal with Iran under the dispute



mechanism triggered by the three European Union trio, also referred to as E3.

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

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

The Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi announced on Sunday that Borrell plans to pay a visit to Tehran on Monday for talks with Iran's senior officials, including Javad Zarif.

U.S. President Donald Trump quit the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions in history on Iran as part of his administration's "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran.

Mojtaba Zonnour, chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, had warned earlier that Iran will null leaving the NPT if the Europeans failed to salvage the pact.

Deal of the century is example of bullying and is treacherous, party chief says

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Asadollah Badamchian, secretary-general of the Islamic Coalition Party, said on Sunday that the so-called United States' peace plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, titled "deal of the century", is a clear example of "bullying" and is "disconcerting".

"The Muslim people and the Palestinians, who are the main owner of their lands, will not accept the devil plan of the deal of the century," he said in a meeting of the Islamic Coalition Party.

He also described the plan as "treacherous".

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.

During an emergency meeting in Egypt's capital on Saturday, the Arab League completely rejected the plan, saying it would not lead to a just peace deal.

In a statement, the pan-Arab bloc said it "rejects the U.S.-Israeli 'deal of the century' considering that it does not meet the

minimum rights and aspirations of Palestinian people."

Sabah Zangeneh, former Iran's representative at the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC), has said that the so-called peace plan does not enjoy international support.

In an interview with IRNA published on Saturday, Zanganeh described the deal of century as "dangerous" which can throw international order 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."

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 "high-way 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."

Tehran to host EU's Borrell on Monday

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** - The Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi announced on Sunday that European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell is scheduled to pay a visit to Tehran on Monday for talks with Iran's senior officials, including Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

In late January, Borrell said that he had extended the time available to discuss ways to save the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran under a dispute mechanism triggered by France, Germany and Britain.

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

Borrell met with Zarif on the sidelines of a conference in India on January 16.

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

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

U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally quit the nuclear

deal in May 2018 and introduced the harshest ever sanctions in history on Iran as part of his administration's "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran.

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

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

Iran's moves are based on paragraph 36 of the JCPOA which "allows one side, under certain circumstances, to stop complying with the deal if the other side is out of compliance."

Despite taking the last step, Iran has reminded the Europeans to fulfill their commitments in order to keep the deal alive.

The JCPOA was reached in July 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 (permanent members of the United Nations Security Council -- the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, France and China, plus Germany) to find a long-term comprehensive solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. It was endorsed by the UN Security Council and supported by the EU.

U.S. Senator Chris Murphy said in January that Trump quit the JCPOA, just because it had President Barack Obama's name on it.

"The Iran deal was working, but Trump ripped it all up just because it had Obama's name on it," Murphy said in a tweet.

Ben Rhodes, former Obama's adviser, also said in July 2019 that Trump quit the JCPOA, because Obama negotiated it.

"Did anyone really need a leaked document from the UK Ambassador to know that Trump pulled out of the Iran Deal because Obama negotiated it?" Rhodes tweeted.

The Daily Mail reported in July 2019 that Kim Darroch, the former British ambassador to the U.S., had said Trump discarded the nuclear deal for "personality reasons," as the deal had been agreed to by Obama.

Darroch said the Trump administration was "set upon an act of diplomatic vandalism" in its decision to abandon the JCPOA.

Former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw also told IRNA in an interview in October 2019 that Trump quit the nuclear deal because Obama signed it.

He said that the U.S. must admit that it made a wrong decision, urging the White House to return to the pact.

Straw said that the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA had "no logic".

Iran says to advance nuclear program with more determination

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TEHRAN — The spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has said Iran will advance its nuclear program with more determination, describing as “worthless” and “ineffective” the recent U.S. sanctions on AEOI Chief Ali Akbar Salehi.

“The Americans attempt to create a psychological atmosphere, but in reality, they will not achieve any success,” Behrooz Kamalvandi said on Sunday, pointing to the recent sanctions which also target the AEOI itself.

“The Americans do not have a correct understanding of the conditions and atmosphere of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and basically, they not only lack a correct understanding of Iran, but also lack a correct understanding of major international issues,” Kamalvandi said.

He continued, “That’s why they take measures in the political sphere that are strange and also ineffective.”

The AEOI spokesman further pointed to the sanctions against Salehi, saying since the

AEOI chief does not have assets in the United States, the sanctions are futile in practice.

He also said Iran’s nuclear program will not be shaped according to other countries’ measures and policies. “We will do whatever is in the country’s interests.”

The U.S. Treasury Department announced on Thursday that Washington has imposed sanctions on the atomic organization and its chief, Salehi.

However, sources said the U.S. will once again waive its sanctions on Russian, Chinese and European firms that work at four Iranian nuclear facilities, Press TV reported, citing Reuters.

The U.S. Treasury will issue waivers to sanctions that bar non-U.S. firms from dealing with the AEOI, the sources told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

The waivers will allow those countries to continue working at the heavy water reactor in Arak, the Fordow enrichment facility, the Bushehr nuclear power plant and the Tehran research reactor.



Speaking to Fars on Thursday, Kamalvandi said the move only reflects Washington’s desperation.

Kamalvandi also reacted to remarks by Brian Hook, the U.S. special representative for Iran, who has claimed that Washington has sanctioned the AEOI and its chief because Iran had started new violations of its 2015 nuclear agreement with the remaining parties.

Given its withdrawal from the deal and its violation of its commitments, the U.S. “is in no position” to comment on the manner in which Iran adheres to its nuclear obligations, the spokesman pointed out.

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Despite taking the last step, Iran has reminded the Europeans to fulfill their commitments in order to keep the deal alive.

France, Germany and the United Kingdom, three parties to the nuclear deal, issued a joint statement on January 14, announcing they have formally triggered the dispute mechanism that may lead to the snapback of UN sanctions against Iran.

New IRGC Quds Force chief reaffirms support for Palestinians

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Meanwhile, Al-Nakhalah thanked Iran for its stance in supporting the Palestinians, saying the Palestinian people and resistance groups will foil the new U.S.-orchestrated conspiracy as well as all plots against the rights of the state of Palestine.

In his conversation with Ismail Haniyeh, Ghaani underscored the Islamic Republic’s opposition to the U.S. plot.

He also highlighted continuation of Iran’s support for the Palestinian people and resistance groups.

For his part, Haniyeh praised Iran’s support for the Palestinians and its opposition to U.S. President Donald Trump’s plan.

Trump unveiled his one-sided plan during an event at the White House alongside Israeli prime minister Netanyahu in Washington on Tuesday. The Palestinians



al-Nakhalah

Ghaani

Haniyeh

were absent at the ceremony given their vociferous opposition to the plot.

Under the plot, the U.S. would continue to recognize Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel’s “undivided capital,” Trump said, endorsing his 2017 move concerning the city.

He also said the deal featured an economic portion that earmarks \$50 billion in monetary allocations to Palestinians, Jordan, and Egypt, with Palestinians denouncing the move as a means of bribing them into selling their rights.

The U.S. president said the Israeli settlers, who have been housed in illegal apartment blocks since Israel’s occupation of the West Bank in 1967, would not be moved under the deal – something that amounts to annexation of the land on which the settlements have been built.

He also alleged that Israel would be freezing its settlement activities for four years “while Palestinian statehood is negotiated.”

Grand ayatollah urges Muslims to fight Washington’s anti-Palestin plot



POLITICAL

d e s k

TEHRAN — Top Iranian Grand Ayatollah Hossein Nouri Hamedani has condemned the United States’ so-called “Deal of the Century” plan, calling on the Muslim nations to stand up to Washington’s anti-Palestinian plot.

Ayatollah Nouri Hamedani emphasized that Muslims across the world should not keep silent on the enemies’ sedition, Tasnim reported.

He made the remarks while speaking at a meeting with a number of Indian Muslim scholars in the shrine city of Qom.

“The only way to foil the enemies’ hostilities is the unity of Muslims,” he said, adding, “Muslims have a serious duty regarding the Islamic world’s developments.”

He further said the Muslim community, especially the Islamic scholars, should confront the plot, which aims to destroy

the Palestinian cause.

U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled “a vision for peace” in the Middle East on Tuesday which permits Israel to annex much of the occupied West Bank immediately, offering the Palestinians only local control in isolated Bantustans surrounded by Israeli territory.

Observers argue the timing of the announcement, just hours after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was indicted on corruption charges in Jerusalem, looked like an effort to boost his bid to win reelection in March, his best hope for avoiding prison.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has cut all ties with the United States and Israel, including those relating to security, after rejecting the U.S. plan, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said on Saturday.

Tehran customs police seize 41 kg of opium destined for Germany



POLITICAL

d e s k

TEHRAN — Two consignments of drugs were seized by police in two separate operations, a spokesman for the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said on Saturday.

The spokesman said that the Tehran customs police discovered one consignment, which included 41 kilograms of opium. He said the drug was destined for Germany.

“In the meantime, the police seized 4,476 grams of crystal in the Special Economic Zone of Dogharoon in Khorasan Razavi province,” he went on to say.

The amount of methamphetamine trafficked from Afghanistan to Iran has reached 10 tons in the first 10 months of the current year (March 21, 2019- Jan. 21, 2020) which shows a ten-fold increase in comparison with the corresponding period

last year, the spokesman explained.

Iran is at the forefront of the fight against drug trafficking. The drugs are mainly destined to lucrative markets in Europe and Persian Gulf Arab states.

The drugs originate from neighboring Afghanistan.

John F. Sopko, U.S. special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, said at the Wilson Center in Washington, DC, in November 2019 that the counter-narcotics effort in Afghanistan “has just been a total failure”, the Business Insider said on December 5.

Opium cultivation covered 263,000 hectares in Afghanistan, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. That was down from 328,000 hectares in 2017 but still more than any other year since 1994.

total of 8,755 kilometers of common border with its neighbors, Rezaei said at the time.

Iran shares land and sea borders with 15 countries.

“Given the characteristics of countering the arrogant power (an indirect reference to the U.S.), no country is facing peripheral threats as much as the Islamic Republic of Iran,” he added

One of the main problems that Iran was facing over the past years was on the borders with Pakistan, he said, stating since the security situation in Pakistan’s Baluchistan region was in a bad shape terrorists and criminals used this weak point to infiltrate into the region.

The commander added that Iran has no concerns over common maritime and land borders with the neighboring countries despite the threats close to the borders.

Judiciary chief says Iranians elected resistance by huge turnout at Soleimani funeral

POLITICAL

d e s k

TEHRAN — Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi said on Sunday that the Iranian nation elected the path of resistance and perseverance by their huge turnout at the funeral processions of General Qassem Soleimani.

The Judiciary chief made the remarks while visiting the shrine of Imam Khomeini along with other top judicial officials.



The Islamic Revolution occurred as a result of a series of events in 1979 that involved the overthrow of the last monarch of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and the replacement of his government with an Islamic republic under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini.

“The message of perseverance and resistance is heard in this country and the message of resistance was conveyed to the world in a referendum which was people’s turnout,” Raisi said, according to ISNA.

On January 3, U.S. President Donald Trump ordered strikes that martyred General Soleimani, chief of the IRGC Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).

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

In the early hours of January 8, the IRGC attacked the U.S. airbase of Ain al-Assad in Anbar province in western Iraq as part of its promised “tough revenge” for the U.S. terror attack.

In his remarks, Raisi said since the victory of the Islamic Revolution 41 years ago, the enemies orchestrated many conspiracies and seditions, one of which was the eight years of war imposed on Iran by Iraq’s Saddam Hussein.

“Today, the determination of the nation, government and all authorities of the establishment is to counter the enemies,” the top judge remarked.

A team of MPs to visit nuclear sites in late February: Zonnour

TEHRAN (MNA) — Chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Mojtaba Zonnour announced on Sunday that a delegation of MPs will commence a new round of their visits to nuclear facilities in late February, after the parliamentary elections.

The visits are meant to get informed of the procedures of reducing Iran’s JCPOA commitments, he said.

According to him, the MPs will pay visits to nuclear sites in Natanz, Fordow, Arak and Bushehr and will prepare a report to be submitted to the Parliament’s presiding board.

“The U.S. supposed that by lack of its commitment to and unilateral withdrawal from Iran nuclear deal, it can impede our nuclear program but we are moving forward in this sector,” Zonnour said.

On November 18, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported said that Iran has accumulated more than 130 tons of heavy water in continuation of its cuts to JCPOA commitments.

“On 16 November 2019, Iran informed the Agency that its stock of heavy water had exceeded 130 metric tons,” the International Atomic Energy Agency said in a report to member states, Reuters reported.

“On 17 November 2019, the Agency verified that the Heavy Water Production Plant (HWPP) was in operation and that Iran’s stock of heavy water was 131.5 metric tonnes,” the report added.

Iran took the fourth step back from its commitments to the nuclear deal earlier this month at the end of a 60-day ultimatum to remaining parties to the nuclear deal to live up to their own commitments to the JCPOA ended while they did not take any practical steps to meet Iran’s demands.

Iran demands European countries make up for its losses after the U.S. withdrawal from the accord and help Iran with its oil sales and banking relations.



Tehran says its countermeasures are in accordance with the paragraphs 26 and 36 of the nuclear deal, and that it will reverse the steps once its demands are met.

As a first step, Iran increased its enriched uranium stockpile to a level above the 300 kilograms set by the JCPOA.

In the second step, Tehran began enriching uranium to purity rates beyond the JCPOA-limit of 3.76 percent.

Furthermore, Tehran lifted all restrictions on nuclear research and development and announced it would use advanced centrifuges as its third step.

In the 4th step, the Iranian nuclear agency resumed uranium enrichment to 4.5% at Fordow nuclear facility by injecting gas into advanced IR6 centrifuges, while Iran had agreed in the JCPOA not to conduct enrichment in the underground facility.

Each time Iran gives a 60-day deadline to the other parties before taking its next step.

Iran to utilize cutting-edge equipment in fight maritime smuggling: border guard chief

POLITICAL

d e s k

TEHRAN — The commander of Iran’s border guards said on Saturday that his forces will soon use state-of-the-art equipment to counter drug and fuel trafficking in the country’s southern waters.

Brigadier General Ghasem Rezaei pointed to Iran’s long coastal borders and the need to fight against fuel smuggling and said,

“Border guards have always adopted necessary measures to fight against maritime crimes and the process will be intensified using up-to-date equipment in the future,” Ghasem Rezaei stated as he pointed to Iran’s long coastal borders.

Since oil derivatives such as gasoline and diesel are heavily subsidized in Iran, they are very tempting targets for smugglers.

Brigadier General Rezaei said 14 million liters of fuel have been seized from smugglers in coastal and deep waters in the current Iranian year, which ends on March 21, 2020.

The figure shows a 2.5 increase in comparison to the corresponding time last year, he explained.

The commander went on to say that drug trafficking to Europe and the U.S. via Iran’s southern waters has also increased.

“Necessary precautions have been taken to identify illegal consignments in Iran’s southern waters”.

In May 2019, Rezaei said that Iran has increased coordination with border guards of Pakistan and Turkey to stem the flow of drug trade.

Iran is the third country, after China and Russia, in terms of the number of neighbors in the world, with a

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	428217.0
IFX	5415.00

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

India doubles budget for Chabahar development project

1 → In the recent meeting of the India-Iran joint economic commission, held between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif, the two sides have promised to expand cooperation.



The budget allocation is a message that India is serious about its commitment. As it comes at a time when alternative routes to Afghanistan will be essential, the question to fulfill the promise remains to be seen.

Tehran hosting intl. building, property expo

1 → architecture, decoration, facades, ceiling and wall coverings, flooring, pipes and fittings, ceramic tiles, electrical and electronic equipment, water and gas infrastructure, engineering and services, sound and thermal insulation, as well as landscaping and interior design.

Introducing investment opportunities in Iran's residential and construction projects, introducing the capacity and capabilities of the country's mass builders, introducing industrialization methods for enhancing quality, increasing speed and reducing costs, as well as creating a platform for the presence of knowledge-based companies and introducing new equipment and methods in the construction industry are reported to be the most important goals of the exhibition.

UK businesses expect strongest output growth since September 2018: CBI

British businesses predict the strongest rebound in output in more than a year over the next three months, after a weak end to 2019, adding to expectations of a post-election pick-up in the economy, a survey showed on Sunday.



The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) said its monthly output expectations gauge - based on responses to its surveys of manufacturers, retailers and the service sector - rose to +12 in January from +1 in December, its highest since September 2018. But the measure estimating output over the past three months remained very weak at -16, up only a bit from December's reading of -20, the weakest since the 2008-09 financial crisis. "It's great to see business confidence improve but it remains to be seen whether this will feed through to activity," Rain Newton-Smith, the CBI's chief economist, said. Last month the CBI predicted the economy would grow by 1.2% this year, slowing from 1.3% in 2019. Britain formally left the European Union at 2300 GMT on Friday, starting an 11-month transition period during which Prime Minister Boris Johnson wants to negotiate a trade deal. While Johnson aims to avoid tariffs on goods, businesses that are part of complex cross-European supply chains fear new border checks will make them uncompetitive. The "government must work quickly to establish a future relationship with the EU that can deliver prosperity across the whole economy, as well as refocusing its attention on important domestic priorities," Newton-Smith said.

(Source: in.reuters.com)

Iran to build over 30,000 housing units in Syria

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's desk Transport and Urban Development Ministry has signed an agreement with Syria's Ministry of Public Works and Housing based on which Iranian companies are going to construct over 30,000 housing units in the neighboring country.

According to Iran's Deputy Transport and Urban Development Minister Mahmoud Mahmoudzadeh, based on the mentioned agreement, three state-owned from the two countries will make the necessary arrangements for the presence of qualified Iranian companies in the fields of construction, infrastructure, transport, and roads, as well as consulting and engineering, in Syria.

Speaking in the opening ceremony of the Build and Property Show 2020 in Tehran, Mahmudzadeh noted that Iran is not going to make any investment in the mentioned projects and all the funding will be provided by the Syrian side.

Back in November 2019, Syrian



Minister of Public Works and Housing Suhail Mohammad Abdullatif had said that his country puts the top priority on Iranian companies for implementing

reconstruction projects in Syria.

Making the remarks during an Iran-Syria business forum held at the place of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries,

NIMA supplies over €25b for imports of goods, services since April 2018

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's desk domestic Forex Management Integrated System (locally known as NIMA) has supplied over €25 billion for imports of goods and services since it was launched in April 2018 up to February 1, 2020, IRNA reported.

NIMA, which seeks to boost transparency, create competitiveness among exchange shops and a secure environment for traders, is a new chance for importers to supply their required foreign currency without specific problems and for exporters to re-inject their earned foreign currency to the domestic forex market. It was inaugurated to allow exporters of non-oil commodities to sell their foreign currency earnings to importers of consumer products.

According to the Governor of Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnasser Hemmati, establishing direct communication between importers and exporters has significantly increased the volume of exchanges in the NIMA system during the past few months.

In late May 2019, CBI unveiled a directive package that provided the country's exporters with guidelines about how they should re-inject their foreign currency incomes into the country's economy.



Based on the directive, for the petrochemical sector, the exporters should present at least 60 percent of their foreign currency incomes into NIMA, and a maximum 10 percent could be injected into the financial system in the form of hard currency and the rest could be used for importing necessary goods.

As for other exporters, at least 50 percent of the total earnings should be presented at the NIMA system and a maximum of 20 percent could be distributed in form of hard currency and the rest can be used for imports.

The instructions aimed to lead the export revenues from the non-oil exports back into the country's economy through NIMA, mandate all the exporters of goods and services to guarantee to bring back to the country the foreign currency amount allocated to them by the government at lower prices than the free market.

Industrial producer inflation turns negative

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's industrial producer inflation has dropped to -2.3 percent in autumn (September 23-December 21, 2019) for the first time in four years, the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) reported.

According to the data released by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), among the various industrial sectors, the lowest seasonal inflation was attributed to the "Coal industry and oil refineries" (-10.7 percent), followed by "Paper and paper products" (-4.6 percent), and the petrochemicals (-2 percent).

The highest inflation rates were reported to be related to "office and computing appliances" (26.6 percent), "garment production, processing, and dyeing". (9.5 percent) and "transportation equipment production" (7.8 percent).

As reported, the Point-to-point inflation in the mentioned sector also reached 27 percent, to register a 33.6 percent decrease compared to the figure for the last year's same season.

In late January, SCI announced that Iran's overall inflation rate for the twelve-month period ended on January 20, which



marks the end of the tenth Iranian calendar month of Dey, stood at 38.6 percent.

The SCI said that the inflation rate fell 1.4 percent in the mentioned time span from the twelve-month period ended on the last day of the ninth Iranian month of Azar.

The center also announced that the point-to-point inflation rate dropped 1.5 percent to 26.3 percent in the tenth month of this year from the same month in the previous year, while it has risen from the figure of the last month.

As previously announced by SCI, the inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on December 21, 2019, which marks the end of the ninth Iranian calendar month of Azar, stood at 40 percent, falling 1.1 percent from the twelve-month period ended in the last day of the eighth Iranian month of Aban.

India announces measures to revive sputtering economy

By Anjana Pasricha

India will spend billions of dollars to revive the farm sector, increase spending on infrastructure to create jobs, and slash taxes — all in a bid to boost its sputtering economy, which has posted its worst growth in a decade.

This is a budget to boost incomes and enhance purchasing power," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said Saturday in parliament as the nation's 2020 budget was laid out. "We wanted to make sure money is in the hands of the people, particularly for the middle class and lower middle class."

Indians buy vegetables early morning at a whole sale market in Lucknow, India, Jan. 27, 2020. Rising food and vegetable prices have taken retail inflation for the month of December to its highest level in over 5 years, according to news reports.

Economists warned, however, that a quick turnaround is unlikely for Asia's third largest economy (after China and Japan). "I don't see this economy reviving for at least one year, not a chance, and that, too, is an optimistic assessment," said Santosh Mehrotra, an economics professor at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University. The "situation continues to be grim."

Political analysts say rebooting the economy is critical for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who swept to power six years ago promising to take India's economy to new heights and create millions of jobs, but is facing criticism for focusing on a Hindu nationalist agenda during his second term.

The world's fastest growing major economy until just



a year ago, India has witnessed a sharp slowdown as its growth plummets to less than five percent in recent months. A government survey however has forecast the economy will pick up the pace and expand next year to between six and six-and-a-half percent.

The country's GDP is at its lowest point in six years and growth across multiple key industrial sectors has shrunk. Growth in the 2019 financial year (April 2019 to March 2020 in India) is projected to be less than five percent. The last quarter for which figures are available was the July to September quarter in 2019 when growth was 4.5 percent.

■ Unemployment hurting the economy

A massive slowdown in spending by the country's 1.3

billion people who are coping with dwindling incomes and record unemployment is hurting the economy, which unlike most of Asia's export-driven economies, depends heavily on domestic consumption.

The government said it would spend about \$40 billion on various measures that could improve rural incomes. It will help farmers set up solar power generation units and establish cold storage facilities to transport perishable commodities, such as fruits and vegetables that farmers often are forced to sell at low prices.

Although the farm sector accounts for only 15 percent of India's gross domestic product, it sustains two-thirds of the country's population.

Tax cuts for individuals also are expected to persuade consumers to open their wallets and buy more cars and homes. The government also plans to push big infrastructure projects to create jobs — unemployment is at its highest in more than four decades.

A slowing economy has put more pressure on Modi as his government grapples with the biggest backlash it has faced since taking office.

Widespread protests have been sparked by a new citizenship law that critics have slammed as divisive because it excludes Muslims from immigrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, who will get citizenship. Political analysts warn the upheaval witnessed in the past six weeks risks taking the government's attention away from the economic slowdown.

(Source: voanews.com)

China to inject \$173b into economy as virus deaths top 300

China's Central Bank said Sunday it would pump 1.2 trillion yuan (\$173 billion) into the economy as it ramps up support for a nationwide fight against a deadly virus that is expected to hit growth.

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) said in a statement it would launch a 1.2 trillion yuan reverse repurchase operation on Monday to maintain "reasonable and abundant liquidity" in the banking system, as well as a stable currency market, during the epidemic.

It added that the overall liquidity of the banking system would be 900 billion yuan (\$129 billion) more than in the same period last year.

The move will kick in the day that China's financial markets reopen, following an extended Spring Festival break.

The virus has now infected over 14,000 people in China and claimed over 300 lives.

On Saturday, the PBOC also announced a range of measures to step up monetary and credit support to enterprises that are helping in its fight against the virus epidemic, such as medical companies.

China's Central Bank urged financial institutions to provide

"sufficient credit resources" to hospitals and other medical organizations, among other measures.

The move to inject liquidity into its financial system comes as the virus threatens to take a toll on an already slowing economy.

China saw economic growth of 6.1% last year, the slowest in around three decades. Analysts are warning this could weaken further if the spread of the SARS-like virus goes on for an extended period.

■ To take drastic measures

As of 1600 HK time, the coronavirus outbreak had killed 305 people and infected 14,591 in mainland China and beyond, forcing governments around the world to take drastic measures.

The only foreign nationals exempted from the ban are immediate family members of American citizens and permanent residents.

New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Mongolia have announced similar restrictions on people traveling from China.

Some nations have closed their borders with China in a bid to protect their territory from the outbreak.

Russia said Thursday it was closing its frontiers with China in the Far East, while Kazakhstan has halted cross-border bus and passenger train services to China.

Mongolia has closed its border with China to cars, while North Korea — an isolated nation that relies heavily on its links with China — banned foreign tourists.

Papua New Guinea went further than the others: it shut its air and seaports on Wednesday to all foreign travelers coming from Asia. The impoverished nation also shut its only land border with the Indonesia-controlled province of West Papua.

Singapore has stopped issuing all types of visas to Chinese travelers, while Vietnam — a popular destination for Chinese tourists — has halted tourist visas.

Russia, a close Beijing ally, announced Saturday it would halt visa-free tourism for Chinese nationals and also stop issuing them work visas. It had already stopped issuing electronic visas to Chinese nationals that allowed them to cross the border in parts of the Far East and western Russia.

(Source: asiatictimes.com)

China shipped in over 295,000 bpd of Iranian oil in 2019: customs

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — China imported 295,400 barrels per day (bpd) of Iranian crude oil on average during 2019, despite U.S. pressure to wipe out oil exports from Iran to the country, IRNA reported, citing Chinese customs data.

The Asian country imported around 405,000 tons of crude oil in December while annual volumes totaled 14.77 million tons, about half the imports of 2018, the data showed.

As reported by the South China Hong Kong newspaper, despite all the U.S. efforts, China is still one Iran's biggest trade partners.

China has remained Iran's top oil buyer despite sanctions Trump unilaterally re-imposed on Tehran's oil exports in 2018 after withdrawing the United States from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal between Tehran



and six world powers.

Since April 2019, when the United States announced that buyers of Iranian oil should stop purchases by May 1 or face sanctions, China has been constantly opposing Washington's policies toward Iran and Chinese officials have repeatedly announced that they will continue purchasing oil from Iran.

China imported about 494,000 barrels a day of Iranian crude in the first five months of this year, compared with more than 660,000 barrels a day in the same period in 2018.

The United States on Friday lifted sanctions on one of two units of the Chinese tanker company COSCO, the U.S. Treasury said, partially reversing its punishment on the company for transporting Iranian oil after China complained about the measure in trade talks with Washington.

133 major energy projects inaugurated across Iran

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said on Saturday that 133 major energy projects have been inaugurated across the country in recent months, IRNA reported, citing the portal of the Energy Ministry (Paven).

Speaking in a ceremony on the occasion of the Ten-Day dawn celebrations which marks the victory of the Islamic revolution in 1979, Ardakanian said more than 194.4 trillion rials (about \$4.6 billion) has been invested in the mentioned projects.

According to the official, 227 projects, with 300 trillion rials (about \$7.85 billion) of investment, are also planned to be inaugurated in the remaining two months of the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 19).

All the mentioned projects have gone on stream as part of a major program called A-B-Iran which the energy ministry

is pursuing seriously.

Under the A-B-Iran scheme [the acronyms A and B stand for water, electricity in Persian], during the current Iranian calendar year (March 2019-March 2020), 10 trillion rials (over \$238 million) of projects will be inaugurated in each of the country's provinces, on average.

Based on this program, Energy Ministry plans to inaugurate some water, electricity projects across the country every week.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ardakanian noted that every week 30 villages are getting connected to the country's national water supply network and this is a significant achievement for the government.

Back in August 2019, Ardakanian had announced that by the end of the current Iranian calendar year over 1,440 villages will be supplied with drinkable water through pipelines.



Turkish wind farm to triple capacity with \$37mn from EBRD

Turkey's renewable energy production will receive a boost with a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) loan of \$37m to finance the expansion of the Kiyikoy wind farm in the northwest of the country.

The bank's loan will be used for the development, construction and operation of a 72 MW extension to the 28 MW wind

farm located on the west coast of the Black Sea in the Kırklareli province, EBRD said in a statement.

In parallel, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) Turkey is providing a loan for the same amount. The funds will also refinance a leasing facility provided by a local leasing firm for the original wind farm.

The extension of the Kiyikoy wind farm is

a step towards the government's objective of installing 27 GW of renewable energy capacity other than hydropower by 2023, of which 20 GW is expected to be wind energy.

The Kiyikoy extension will also help save approximately 99,700 tons of CO2 emissions per year.

Supporting Turkey's sustainability goals is among the EBRD's priorities in the country.

The bank has previously financed, both directly and through local banks, 3 GW of installed capacity, or seven percent of the total installed renewable energy capacity in Turkey.

Aida Sitdikova, EBRD director, Energy Eurasia, said: "Renewables in Turkey represent not only a viable, but also a financially attractive investment opportunity."

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

World's first 'solar dome' desalination plant planned for Saudi's Neom megacity

Saudi Arabia plans to use new solar technology to desalinate seawater at Neom, a mega-city that it is developing along the country's northern Red Sea coast.

The city's developer has signed a deal with UK-based Solar Water Plc to build its first-ever 'solar dome' desalination plant.

It is claimed that the technology generates no carbon emissions, produces less brine than facilities using conventional reverse osmosis technology and will process drinking water more cheaply than traditional plants.

Neom's developer has signed a deal with UK-based Solar Water Plc to build its first-ever 'solar dome' desalination plant.

The technology involves a dome — a hydrological sphere — constructed from glass and steel into which sea water flows. The energy to heat the continuous inflow of water and to create a constant water cycle is produced by concentrating solar radiation, from a large number of parabolic mirrors (heliostats) surrounding the domes, onto the glass and superconductive steel frame structure.

Through this process, the sea water evaporates, condenses and is precipitated as fresh water.

The brine gathers at the bottom of the dome's basin, is extracted and sold commercially for industrial use in lithium batteries, grit for roads, fertilizer or detergents.

According to Solar Water, 90 percent of desalination plants dispose of brine through ocean discharge, causing damage to marine ecosystems.

Nadhi Al-Nasr, CEO of Neom, said: "Easy access to abundant seawater and fully renewable energy resources means Neom is perfectly placed to produce low-cost, sustainable fresh water through solar desalination."

This type of technology is a powerful reminder of our commitment to supporting innovation, championing environmental conservation and delivering exceptional livability.

Working together with the Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture we can expand the implementation of this technology beyond Neom."

Neom is the vision of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and is central to Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision plan to grow and diversify the Saudi economy.

The \$500 billion project has promised everything from robot workers and flying cars to beaches with glow-in-the-dark sand and an artificial moon. However, many have questioned whether the initiative is realistic politically or economically.

Solar Water Plc says it will start work on the first dome in February and the project is expected to be completed by the end of 2020.

(Source: [utilities.me.com](#))

Is Egypt's energy hub dream falling apart?

By Cyril Widdershoven

The discoveries offshore in the Nile Delta at the end of the 20th Century, that kick-started the LNG boom sparked hope, but regional and internal conflicts which led to the removal of president Hosni Mubarak and the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood have significantly slowed down the country's energy industry.

However, new discoveries made in the last couple of years, combined with strong results offshore Cyprus, Israel and possibly even the coming years in Lebanon have brought new hope. The so-called East Med Gas Forum, in which most littoral states are participating is seen as one of the main drivers of new energy developments.

Led by Egypt-Israel and the Greece-Cyprus quartet, a new start was made to reshape the region's energy market, with as crown jewel, Egypt's LNG liquefaction capacity in Idku and Damietta. The combined reserves of the participants, especially Egypt's elephant-sized fields Zohr and Noor, combined with Israel's offshore wealth, could supply the European market.

The EU and even the U.S. promote the so-called East Med Offshore Gas Pipeline project connecting the East Mediterranean with the Balkans and possibly Italy. The region is optimistic and strategies are being implemented at a remarkable speed. Even with Turkish military and political obstruction constraining or even threatening some of the projects, progress is made.

However, politicians and energy operators have maybe underestimated the environment they are working in. A global gas glut is emerging, threatening not only LNG exporters such as Australia, Qatar, Mozambique and others, but also the East Med Energy Hub dreams of the EMGF. Some of the region's projects are already facing headwinds.

In a remarkable move, Cairo has cancelled several tenders in 2019 as market prices offered were below expectations. Analysts stated that some bidders even offered prices which were below the break-even cost prices of production. Still, the members of the forum are not yet concerned at all it seems.

Egypt believes that operational costs as its LNG plants should be very low, regarding the fact that the plants are already paid off, and all capacity is installed. If global LNG landing prices fall below Cairo's production costs, the nation will have a real issue.

■ **The Egyptian Oil Ministry**



The position taken at present by the Egyptian oil ministry to sell LNG under term agreements with a target selling price of \$5/MMBtu, rather than on the spot market, is a risky one. With a market able to get all volumes needed on the spot market, where prices are much lower, the real question is, if there will be any bidders interested in the prices as announced in the tender.

Globally prices have plummeted. Large Asian buyers such as China, Japan and South Korea are enjoying much lower prices. The JKM benchmark for Asian LNG spot prices has fallen by 50% since the beginning of 2019 from around \$8/MMBtu to a little over \$4/MMBtu.

Long-term deals such as Egypt is offering are a risky proposition for any buyer. For example, selling an 18-month FOB deal at \$5/MMBtu is very challenging at present. East Mediterranean nations can count on stiff competition from Qatar, Australia and others. And by now, most analysts expect that global gas and LNG markets will see a "lower for longer" price environment.

The coming months will be decisive for Egypt's LNG industry. The only parties interested at present could be new entrants to the market, or parties looking for some structural deals. If these, however, are not available, Egypt and its East Med partners could be facing a scenario in which LNG exports will be low or maybe even non-existing.

In the meantime, Egypt's gas production increase is impressive, the country produces more from its Zohr field than it can physically export. LNG exports from Egypt more than doubled year on year in 2019 to 4.8 Bcm of gas equivalent. On top of that, Cairo has started to import Israeli gas.

Egypt's local market demand is still too low to absorb the current glut, and pipeline exports to Jordan are still very low. To counter the influx of Israeli gas (6 million cubic meter per year), Egypt is forced already to consider restarting its 2nd LNG plant in Damietta (5 million metric tons/year).

■ **A joint venture**

A restart is currently being discussed by the operator Union Fenosa Gas (UFG), a 50-50 joint venture between Eni and Spain's Naturgy.

The LNG global market glut situation needs to be addressed not only by Egypt but all EMGF parties the coming months. The immense volumes available now and need to be monetized soon.


Egypt would do well to focus Eastern European markets (including the Balkans). In this market, it will have to find a way to compete with, Russia, Norway and Qatar. Price levels could be plummeting even further in the short term, so Cairo must make sure to sell its existing LNG inventory soon.

The Forum's parties should take a realistic view on their offshore gas wealth, and dreaming about a major multibillion treasury trove like Qatar's is maybe not realistic.




A long-term vision is much needed, and Cairo needs to develop a clear understanding of its potential markets, which might not just be North or West, but possibly even in the East.

OPEC's main oil producer, and Egyptian ally Saudi Arabia is still in dire need for additional gas volumes. Redirecting the former Arab Gas Pipeline (AGP), which was meant to export Egyptian gas to Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, to Saudi Arabia could be hitting two birds with one stone. Integrating regional energy and security while monetizing reserves.

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




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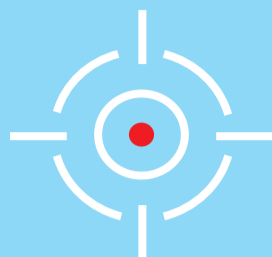


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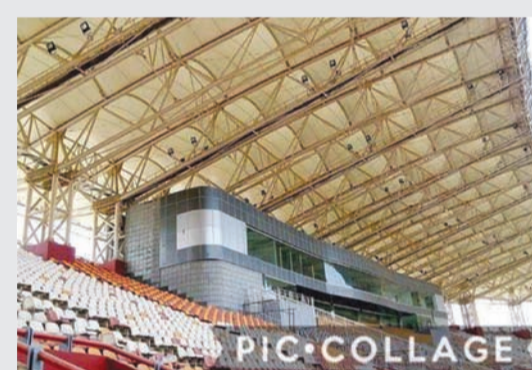
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Iran in talks with an 'advanced country' for sending scientist astronaut to space

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

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Making India more Hindu, one step at a time?

1.9m Muslims in limbo due to exclusion from citizenship list in Assam

By Salman Parviz

Citizenship is at risk for millions of Muslims, many born in India in northeast Assam state, bordering Myanmar and Bangladesh. All the 33 million residents of Assam had to provide, with documentary evidence, that their ancestors were Indian citizens before 1971, when Bangladesh was established after breakaway from Pakistan.

Many indigenous Assamese, who are mostly Hindu, have resented immigrants from Bangladesh, saying that the Bengalis are coming into their state and taking away their jobs and land. In 1983 Assamese villagers slaughtered 1,000 ethnic Bengalis, who were Muslims mostly. In 2012 another smaller wave of violence erupted.

In 2013, India's Supreme Court set in motion a process for a large scale registration of citizens, using documentary proof that their ancestors were Indian citizens.

Though this issue predate Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's taking reins in 2014, BJP has aggressive backed the process.

Last December, a day after Modi said there are no detention centers being made for illegal immigrants in Assam, India Today TV found out the construction of the biggest detention center at Matia in Assam's Goalpara district. At present, Assam has six detention centers, the TV report found out and added it was the then Congress government in 2009 that decided to organize these makeshift camps



People showing their acknowledgement receipts after checking their names in first draft for National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Guwahati on January 1. (Photo: Outlook Magazine)

inside jails so that people who were declared as immigrants do not go missing.

The preliminary Assam citizenship, published in 2018, effectively stripped off 1.9 million people of citizenship as their names were excluded from National Register of Citizens (NRC) on July 30, 2018.

Assam's Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said in January that he is awaiting for direction for next steps regarding NRC list from the Supreme Court. Once the people are given reasons for non-inclusion, they can move their tribunal to contest the exclusion. Bangladesh shares several hundred miles

of its border with Assam, the most populous of India's northeastern states. Because of all the uncertainties many Bangladeshis, who had sneaked into India in recent years, have opted to go back. The Indian Express reports that Inspector General of South Bengal Frontier, Y.B. Khurania said the force apprehended 268 illegal Bangladeshis trying to cross back. "There has been a substantial increase in outflow of illegal Bangladeshi nationals in past one month. In January alone, we have apprehended 268 illegal Bangladeshi migrants when they were trying to sneak into the neighboring country," said Khurania.

■ Assam – Tehran

No official of the Islamic Republic has so far made any comments regarding the citizenship crisis in Assam. The two countries enjoy cordial trade ties and Iran is the largest exporter of tea from India after CIS countries (led by Russia) and Assam is India's the largest producer of tea.

That is why the tea estate owners in Assam were closely watching the development in the Persian Gulf following the Iran-U.S tensions in the region because in April 2020 new contracts for fresh season are to be worked out.

Tea cultivation in Iran started by Haj Mohammed Mirza who smuggled 4000 tea plants from northern part of India to Iran in 1882. He started the cultivation of tea in region of Gilan, south of the Caspian Sea. The rest is history as Iranians today are one of the largest per capita tea drinkers in the world.

ASSAM (NRC) CHRONOLOGY:

- 1947: Partition of India into India and Pakistan;
- 1951: A register of citizens was set up in Assam;
- 1955: Citizenship Act of 1955 (amended many times; latest version emerged in 2019 winter session of parliament. It was announced the government would bring a nationwide NRC asking every resident to prove her Indian citizenship.
- March 24, 1971: Bangladesh formed after a brutal war, sending millions of refugees to Indian states of Assam and West Bengal;
- 1979-85 Assam Agitation: The six-year-long agitation against illegal Bangladeshis.
- In 1983 Assamese villagers slaughtered 1,000 ethnic

Bengalis, who were Muslims mostly. This culminated in Assam Accord of 1985, which stipulated March 24, 1971 as the cut-off date for entry of foreigners;

■ 2008: Assam-based NGO approached Supreme Court of India claiming 4.1 million illegal immigrants had been registered as voters. Also this year saw the first detention center in Assam under orders of the Gauhati High Court. Today Assam Detention Camp are a group of immigration detention centers for "foreigners";

■ 2011: According to 2011 census 10.67m Muslims in Assam, including immigrant Muslims;

■ 2012: Another wave of violence against Bengalis erupted in Assam;

■ In 2013, India's Supreme Court set in motion a process

for a large scale registration of citizens, using documentary proof that their ancestors were Indian citizens.

■ 2014: Supreme Court ordered federal government to update NRC. Update list defines as Indian citizens as those residents of Assam before March 25, 1971, and their residents. In keeping with this criterion, the NRC asked for certain legal documents to be submitted as proof of citizenship – including voter lists of all Indian citizens up to 1970.

■ July 30, 2018: 32.9m people screened at a cost of \$178m to ascertain which residents of Assam are citizens. Bureaucrats running NRC accepted 28.9m claims, rejecting some two million.

■ Jan. 2020: Assam waiting for Supreme Court direction on NRC

U.S. missile defense system a joke: American analyst

TEHRAN — An American geopolitical analyst said Iran's retaliatory missile attack against a U.S. base in Iraq on Jan. 8 proved that the U.S. missile defense system is a "joke".

"U.S. missile defense is a joke. A total fabrication. We have studies from as early as the first (Persian) Gulf war (the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait) where the majority of U.S. Patriot missile defense systems failed to intercept ancient Iraqi scud missiles. The U.S. continues to sell these systems to allies, however, with a guarantee that they can stop the majority of incoming threats...", James Carey told Tasnim.

James Carey is editor and co-founder of Geopolitics Alert and an activist based in Pontiac, Michigan.

Following is the full text of the interview.

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

A: I think it was an embarrassment for the U.S. but there's no way the Trump government didn't know that Iran would retaliate. I do think the U.S. got lucky that this was a limited operation because that's what they were hoping for. There was no way Iran wasn't going to retaliate for the assassination of Gen. Soleimani which had to be known when Trump's military advisers offered the option to strike the General's convoy at the airport.

What I don't think they predicted was the level of hostility they received from Iraqis after there had been such a recent round of (likely U.S.-backed) anti-Iranian protests. While the U.S. probably thought that made them safe, I don't think Trump accounted for the reverence of Soleimani, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, or the PMUs in Iraq for their role in defeating Daesh (which we also know the U.S. and it's regional allies fueled). Even the basically U.S.-allied Kurds suddenly rejected the U.S. presence in Iraq and threw an embarrassing wrench in U.S. designs to stay in Iraq to further antagonize Iran. Now we see the U.S. responding by trying to make excuses to stay in Iraq and sending more troops to the region as a whole by proposing ideas like a breakaway Sunni nation where allies like the Saudis and the UAE would come to us to fan sectarian flames. However, I highly doubt the possibility of something that extreme happening without causing a larger war again which I do think the U.S. is trying to avoid, which is why they covered up a lot of damage done to the U.S. base hit by the Iranian missiles.

■ Iran fired 16 ballistic missiles. U.S. forces failed to intercept them and could only watch and wait for impact, according to American websites and reports. The attack highlighted U.S. missile defense vulnerability. How could this change equations in the future?

A: U.S. missile defense is a joke. A total fabrication. We have studies from as early as the first (Persian) Gulf war (the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait) where the majority of U.S. Patriot missile defense systems failed to intercept ancient Iraqi scud missiles. The U.S. continues to sell these systems to allies, however, with a guarantee that they can stop the majority of incoming threats. Saudi Arabia already uses Patriots and has yet to stop any



significant missile attacks coming from Yemen. Israel also uses similar systems which also somehow always get fooled by Hamas rockets made with very basic technology. I think the idea that the Patriots or even the iron dome can protect anyone is starting to wear thin and you've seen even American allies like Turkey opt instead for the new Russian-made S-400 missile defense systems.

That said, I think the one country that could shatter the idea of U.S. technological superiority and missile defense is Iran. So far U.S. missile defenses are relied on heavily by allies but haven't been used by the U.S. itself in quite some time. Whether its radar, missile defense batteries or high powered ship-based automatic weapons, U.S. technology has not had to go up against a military as prepared for war as Iran's. While Saddam may have fired off a few scuds at U.S. troops, U.S. regional and naval defenses are not prepared for the sheer volume of advanced missiles (along with things like small speed boats in the Persian Gulf) Iran could throw at them simultaneously. U.S. defenses are still made for a ground war the Cold War military-industrial complex assumed would occur in Europe and haven't changed much since thanks to the corporate interests controlling and selling arms to Washington. This still relies on antiquated ideas like deterring soviet planes and fighting for air superiority in a world where the U.S. is the only real air power.

We've seen how U.S. missile defense can barely cope with 12 Iranian missiles or even inferior missiles in other countries where U.S. technology is deployed, now imagine hundreds of them from multiple locations across the region at the U.S. and allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia. The U.S. couldn't even take on the task of protecting one base in Iraq they had to know was a potential target from a dozen missiles, they're not going to be able to stop hundreds. If a full scale war with Iran were to start, people would quickly realize how easy it is to overwhelm U.S. defenses as long as you have the resources to just overwhelm them by simply having the number of offensive missiles to do so.

■ Later, U.S. officials confirmed that 50 American troops were injured in the strike despite prior claims by Washington that no one was hurt. The scope of destruction was so extreme and is now becoming clear. Why did President Donald Trump attempt to downplay

the attack and said, "All is well"? Why do you think the U.S. failed to respond?

A: I think it's simple, the idea of another large war in the Middle East is extremely unpopular to the point which Trump himself ran on ending U.S. involvement in the region. I definitely think Trump wants some big publicity victories as impeachment goes on (although most people don't care besides his supporters) and as he faces an election which may end up being against an actual left-wing candidate who could actually challenge his empty anti-war, anti-corporate, and anti-globalization promises. A lot of Americans consider Daesh and Iran basically the same so the killings of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Soleimani were meant to be portrayed as "victories" in the war on terror but since nobody really cares about Daesh anymore, and like I stated above, nobody wants a giant conflict like a potential war with Iran, these only resonate with the parts of Trump's voters that would've just voted Republican anyway, worship him personally, or the Christian and hard-right Zionists. The majority of average Americans oppose war with Iran, they may not be in the streets demonstrating but they're also not signing up to go to the Middle East so I think the idea of telling us "all is well" was meant to avoid any larger conflict after Trump had realized what he'd done and what popular anti-U.S. passion he'd stirred in Iraq and Iran could actually do to U.S. assets.

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

A: I think the reason that we don't want war is because we've already proven we aren't a superpower. The 2003 invasion of Iraq against the skeletal Baathist state and the subsequent regime changes and fight against Daesh have shown many Americans the incompetence of our military, intelligence, and civilian leaders. The strike by Iran is just another large checkmark on the list of why there's no massive outcry for war like there was in 2003, we simply can't handle it. With the regime changes in places like Libya, the attempts in Syria, and even those in Latin America in the last nine years under both Trump and Obama have spectacularly failed. What I think is historic about the Iran attack is it has shown how much this country has changed since 2003. Our government is still bloodthirsty but the more you actually expose Americans to what it means to be an empire, the more sick of it they become. A war with Iran would bring this to the front even more and could throw off the entire bipartisan Washington consensus that we must remain the sole superpower, which I think the government knows and is why they avoided more retaliation against Tehran following the missile strike. Most people here realize that almost all of our imperial endeavors since World War II have failed and I think the anti-war reaction to Trump's saber-rattling with Iran makes that very clear.

(Source: Tasnim News Agency)

Coronavirus: Can people recover? And other questions

There have now been almost 10,000 cases of coronavirus, which has been declared a global health emergency. The disease has spread to at least 17 countries.

What is the incubation period for the coronavirus?

The World Health Organization says the incubation period, which is the time before symptoms appear, ranges from two to 10 days.

These estimates will be narrowed down as more data becomes available.

Knowing and understanding the incubation period is very important. It allows doctors and health authorities to introduce more effective ways to control the spread of the virus.

It means, for instance, that they can introduce more effective quarantine systems, isolating those suspected of carrying the virus from others.

Do people who have contracted coronavirus return to full health?

Yes. Many of those who contract coronavirus will experience only mild symptoms. These include fever, coughing and respiratory problems. Most people are expected to make a full recovery.

But it can pose a particular risk for elderly people and those with pre-existing problems like diabetes or cancer, or weak immune systems.

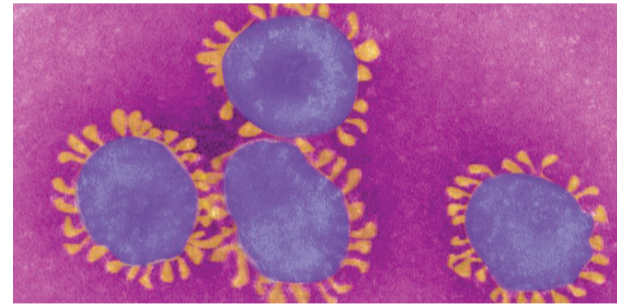
As of 31 January, Chinese health authorities said that 213 people had died from the virus. The number of confirmed cases stands at 9,962.

An expert at China's National Health Commission has said that it can take a week to recovery from mild coronavirus symptoms.

Can the coronavirus be transferred through items bought from Wuhan?

There is no evidence this is a risk. Some diseases - including the coronavirus that causes Sars - can spread through surfaces contaminated by people coughing or sneezing on them.

It has not been shown this new coronavirus can do that. Even if it could, there would still be questions about whether international shipping would be a major problem.



The novel virus belongs to a family called coronaviruses. (Photo: Gopal Murty Getty Images)

Cold viruses tend to survive less than 24 hours outside the human body although norovirus (a severe stomach bug) can last months outside the body.

The most reassuring fact so far is that cases seem to require close contact with another person - say, a family member or healthcare worker - in order to spread.

Is there any reason such viruses are emerging more from China?

Yes - large populations of people living in close proximity to animals.

This coronavirus almost certainly came from an animal source, with one suggestion being snakes. Sars, another coronavirus that originated in China, came from bats and the civet cat.

The early cases of this new infection were traced to the South China Seafood Wholesale Market. Live wild animals were also sold including chickens, bats and snakes.

How did Sars spread? How did it originate?

Sars, another form of coronavirus, started off in bats and then infected the civet cat, which in turn passed it on to humans.

Some people were infected by direct contact with civet cats.

But it was also able to spread from one person to another through coughs, sneezes and contaminated surfaces.

Is it possible to vaccinate in order to prevent this respiratory illness?

At the moment, there is no vaccine that can protect people against this type of coronavirus, but researchers are looking to develop one.

It is a new strain that hasn't been seen in humans before, which means doctors still have lots to learn about it.

(Source: BBC)

Australian lab first to grow new virus outside China

The team plans to share the virus to spur development of diagnostics and vaccines

MELBOURNE — Researchers in Melbourne, Australia, are the first outside China to announce that they've grown the new coronavirus in cell culture. The group at the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity says it isolated the virus from the first person diagnosed with the infection in Australia, on 25 January.

The team will now share the virus with research labs around the world recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) to help the development of more accurate diagnostic tests and vaccines, says Mike Catton, a deputy director of the institute. "There are some things that are much easier to do when you have the virus," says Catton.

Although scientists in China say they've been able to grow the virus in the lab, they have not yet shared samples with international researchers—they have shared only the virus's genetic sequence, says Julian Druce, head of the Virus Identification Laboratory at the Doherty Institute. He says he and his team had heard that labs outside China had struggled to grow the virus, but they found it quite easy. He thinks the success was due to the lab's combined expertise in diagnosing infections as well as isolating and growing viruses in culture. "We've got two parts of the puzzle together in one laboratory," he says.

Catton says having samples of the virus will enable scientists to create tests that can detect specific immune cells—antibodies—that indicate whether a person has been infected with the new virus. Such tests are especially useful for people with mild or no symptoms. Making a test for antibodies is difficult without samples of the virus, he says.

A study of a family in Shenzhen, China, identified a child who was infected with the virus but showed no symptoms. The WHO has also reported that three people with the infection outside China have been asymptomatic.

Ian Mackay, a virologist at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, says the Melbourne group's announcement is fantastic news. He says lab-grown samples are essential for research into the behavior of the virus in culture or in animal hosts. Although virus samples can also be used to validate molecular diagnostic tests, most labs have moved away from using whole viruses in favor of synthetically producing parts of the virus from partial genomes, says Mackay.

(Source: The Nature)

Tehran archaeology symposium to convene experts from around the globe

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – A number of international cultural heritage experts, historians and archaeologists have been invited to attend the 17th Annual Symposium on the Iranian Architecture, which will be held on February 18-19.

Several specialized meetings are scheduled to be held on the sidelines of the two-day event to review various archaeological projects conducted during the Iranian calendar year 1397 (March 2018 – March 2019), IRIB reported.

Experts from Denmark, Italy, Austria, China, Germany and Iran have so far announced readiness to take part in the event, the report said.

The National Museum of Iran will be hosting the symposium that is organized by the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism.

Amongst chief archaeological excavations of the year was dozens of tombs and catacombs discovered in Liar-Sang-Bon, an archaeological site in Amlash, northern Iran. Radiocarbon dating tests indicated that the tombs, which came in various shapes, date back to Parthian (247 BC–224 CE) and Sassanid (224 CE-651) eras.

Scientists develop new way to extract, analyze DNA from museum specimens

The answers to questions about the origins and evolutionary history of a variety of plant and animals, living and extinct, are hiding in the DNA strands of museum specimens.

Scientists in the United States and Australia have developed a new way to extract and analyze DNA from samples stored in formaldehyde, which can damage genetic material.



Flinders University researcher Jessica Phillips poses with the vortex fluidic device that helped scientists extract and process DNA strands from tissue samples stored in formaldehyde. Photo by Flinders University

For their proof of concept study, researchers extracted DNA from an American lobster preserved in formaldehyde. Their technique relied on a vortex fluidic device, which breaks apart proteins, freeing previously trapped DNA fragments.

“DNA extraction is achieved by processing the preserved tissue in an enzyme solution in the VFD,” Jessica Phillips, doctoral student at Flinders University in Australia, said in a news release. “This enzyme breaks apart the proteins, releasing the DNA which can be analyzed. By using the VFD we are able to accelerate this process from days to hours.”

“For 150 years these samples have been preserved in formaldehyde which can damage the DNA and also make

DNA difficult to recover,” Phillips said. “We used mechanical energy in a vortex fluidic device to accelerate the extraction by processing the preserved tissue in an enzyme solution in the VFD.”

Traditional methods for rescuing DNA from tissue samples stored in formaldehyde are quite slow and inefficient. The use of the mechanical energy of a vortex fluidic device boosts the catalytic activity that fuels reactions between the enzyme proteinase K and the proteins that have become tangled with DNA strands as result of exposure to formaldehyde.

“The results provide a roadmap for exploring DNA from millions of historical and even extinct species,” researchers wrote in their paper, published this week in the journal PLOS One. (Source: UPI)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Hwaseong Fortress

Hwaseong is a piled-stone and brick fortress of the Joseon Dynasty that surrounds the center of Suwon City, of Gyeonggi-do Province.

It was built in the late 18th century by King Jeongjo for defensive purposes, to form a new political basis and to house the remains of his father, Crown Prince Jangheon. The massive walls of the fortress, which are 5.74 km in length, enclose an area of 130 ha and follow the topography of the land. The Suwoncheon, the main stream in Suwon, flows through the center of the fortress.

The walls incorporate a number of defensive features, most of which are intact. These include floodgates, observation towers, command posts, multiple arrow launcher towers, firearm bastions, angle towers, secret gates, beacon towers, bastions and bunkers.



There are four main gates at the cardinal points. The Paldalmun Gate in the south and the Jangnamun Gate in the north are impressive two-storey wooden structures on stone bases, flanked by gated platforms and shielded by half-moon ravelins built of fired brick. They are linked to the main road running through the complex. The west (Hwaseomun) and east (Changnyongmun) gates are single-storey structures, also protected by ravelins.

The Hwaseong Fortress has had a great influence on the development of Korean architecture, urban planning, and landscaping and related arts. It differed from the fortresses in China and Japan in that it combined military, political and commercial functions.

(Source: UNESCO)

Trump is clear manifestation of cultural terrorism, Iranian envoy says

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Tehran’s ambassador to Rome Hamid Bayat has said that U.S. President Donald Trump’s threat to target cultural sites in Iran is “a clear manifestation of global cultural terrorism.”

“The United States president’s (recent) threat to destroy Iran’s cultural and historical sites is a clear manifestation of global cultural terrorism and is in continuation of the violation of law by the United States to break the Iranian people’s resistance.”

The envoy made the remarks in the Italian capital on Friday during a cultural meeting with a number of international historians, orientalist and cultural heritage experts, IRNA reported.

On the one hand, the U.S. administration is committing economic terrorism through explicitly targeting sources of food and medicine supply for the people of Iran and, on the other hand, it is launching military and cultural threats, Bayat added.

Paying respect to cultural sites is [in fact] paying respect to human dignity and, on the contrary, attacking historical and cultural sites is attacking humanity, history, and the spirit of mankind, he emphasized.

In another part of his remarks, the Iranian ambassador pointed to the time-soaked cultural relations between Iran and Italy, saying that the richness and deeply-rooted-in-time culture and civilizations of the two nations, has led in many cases to [a kind of] cultural diplomacy through promotion of mutual understanding aimed at strengthening peace and friendship between the two nations and their governments.

In January, Trump said on Twitter that his military would strike “very important” targets related to Iran if the Iranians attempted to take retaliatory action against the U.S. for the assassination of senior military commander Qassem Soleimani in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on January 3.

This is while the Geneva Convention Protocol I bans “any acts of hostility directed against the historic monuments, works of art or places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples.”

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, in reaction to the threat said such a move would be filed as a war crime and another breach of international law.

Trump’s threats also provoked criticism by some international celebrities and social media users that deliberately attacking cultural sites would be a war



Tehran’s ambassador to Rome Hamid Bayat in an undated photo

crime.

Ryan Goodman, a former special counsel at the U.S. Department of Defense emphasized that targeting “the clearly-recognized historic monuments, works of art or places of worship” was a war crime.

Colin Kahl, former deputy assistant to President Barack Obama and national security adviser to ex-vice president Joe Biden said that “the Pentagon would not provide Trump targeting options that include Iranian cultural sites.”

John G Hertzler, an actor, and an author, reacted by saying that the American people “are not” behind Trump in response to a Twitterer, who said he backed the president.

Eugene Gu, a politically active user on social media,

said “the President of the United States should never threaten on Twitter or anywhere else to target another country’s non-military cultural sites.”

Oscar-winning American actor and film narrator Morgan Freeman also lashed out at Trump for threatening to target Iranian cultural sites, stressing that Trump was not his president.

“Targeting cultural sites is a WAR CRIME and makes you no better than the terror you claim to be fighting,” Freeman wrote in a tweet.

Iran embraces hundreds of historical sites such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 22 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Iranian rural landscape wins prestigious TO DO Award 2020

➔ 1 The award will be presented to representatives of the village during a special ceremony, which will be held on the sidelines of the ITB Berlin 2020, March 4 to 8, as one of the world’s leading travel trade shows. CHTN reported on Saturday.

The original texture of Esfakak was completely brought down to earth in a 7.4 earthquake in 1978, according to local tourism officials.

A new village was built following the quake next to the rocked old one with the participation of people who have now refurbished it as a tourist destination with [abundant] eco-lodge units.

Esfakak is a village located about 38 km away from Tabas with hardworking and diligent people who are mostly engaged with agriculture and animal breeding. It



enjoys a mild climate that is perfect for growth of any crops so while visiting it almost everywhere looks magnificently lush.

Village houses are often built on a floor with domed roofs and small windows. Old houses were often built by the means of bricks and mud and are mostly one-story. Traditional bathrooms, locally called Khazinehs, are still standing tall in the corners of the village. Local music is particularly important for the people of the village. Performing local songs and playing Tar is inseparable in celebrations in the village.

Dates and saffron from Esfahak village are tasty make sure not to miss trying them. You can also test different types of local soup and potage while in Esfahak.

How to plan your first safari

By Steve Bailey

To get the food, shelter and safari experience you want, you need to research your trip. Here’s a thorough list of the details you should consider.

A safari vacation in Africa is probably the most organized vacation you’ll ever take. While it is possible to simply fly to a few places — Arusha, Tanzania, or Maun, Botswana — and rent a car to take off into the countryside, few people want to risk being alone on unmarked dirt roads patrolled by hyenas, cheetahs and lions.

No, you use professionals to help you choose an itinerary and arrange transportation. Your travel company will have a driver waiting for you, and from the time you land, you’re in the hands of people who will feed and shelter you and take you amazingly close to fearsome beasts. To get the food, shelter and safari experience you want, you need to research your trip.

■ Time

Plan on at least two weeks. That should allow for at least three different camps in different areas, for three nights each. Generally, you get an early morning game drive and a late afternoon game drive each day, so two full days in each camp almost guarantees that you’ll see a lot. My wife, Jane, and I went on safaris in January and February in Tanzania, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. It was the wet season in some places, but it wasn’t particularly rainy. Although the vegetation was lush, we saw elephants, hippos, giraffes and baboons beyond counting. In the drier Serengeti, Kalahari and Sabi Sands, we saw a lifetime’s worth of cheetahs, leopards and lions. We also got to see the Serengeti’s great migration of wildebeests and zebras.

■ Cost

A doctor friend who lived and worked in Malawi until recently says that the best thing you can have on a safari is a generous parent to pay for it. Daily costs per person range from \$200 to well over \$1,000, and typically include travel, including airplanes, between different camps. It would not include airfare from the United States. Tips are suggested and expected at each camp. A couple should figure on up to \$50 per day total for guides, drivers and food service. Tips should be in



the local currency and are given upon departure.

■ The travel company

My wife and I used African Portfolio, a Connecticut-based company, when we spent six weeks in Africa in 2016. We started planning our trip with a different company, but it ignored our budget concerns and other requests by giving us an itinerary of super-deluxe camps. You also could simply deal directly with a company that operates multiple camps, such as Asilia Africa or Wilderness Safaris. Cultural and educational organizations offer safari packages. African Portfolio got us to the Asilia and Wilderness camps that really intrigued us, as well as to camps operated by other companies. Whoever helps plan your trip will take care of getting you from one remote camp to another, often in small airplanes.

■ The animals

The Big Five — lions, elephants, leopards, rhinos and Cape buffalo — were the most challenging game animals for hunters on foot in another era. They’re still worthy targets for your camera, but so are zebras, giraffes, exotic

antelopes and almost countless kinds of birds. All of these are in Kenya, Tanzania and Botswana. Gorillas are in Rwanda and Uganda.

■ Accommodations

Lodges, from hostels to luxury hotels, are found near some game-rich areas like the Ngorongoro Crater in Tanzania and Kruger National Park and the Sabi Sands Game Reserve in South Africa. In the Kalahari Desert and the Serengeti you’ll find tented camps, which are clusters of individual cabinlike tents and one or two large tents for the dining room and staff operations. The individual tents usually have real beds and attached private bathrooms with heated showers and flush toilets. There are also mobile camps, which move to follow game, especially the migration in the Serengeti. All your meals will be at the camp. Most camps supply the usual toiletries as well as sunscreen and insect repellent.

■ Guides

Some safari agencies will hook you up with a guide who will go with you from camp to camp. We had the same guide for two camps and he relied on radio contact with other guides to find game. Elsewhere we had guides supplied by the camps. All knew their areas and the wildlife. With camp guides, you can pay extra to have your own vehicle, or you can share a vehicle with other guests. Do the latter. Your fellow riders are likely to enrich the experience with their knowledge and camaraderie. And listen when the guide in your open-air vehicle tells you not to stand or move. There’s nothing but air between you and that hyena.

■ Clothing

You will need fast-drying nylon clothes. Your luggage may be limited to a small duffel bag. Camps generally provide laundry service, usually washed by hand and dried in the sun. Guests may be expected to wash their own underwear. You don’t need an all-beige wardrobe. Most of the animals can hardly distinguish colors, but you should avoid white because it attracts attention. Black and other dark colors attract tsetse flies. Popular safari areas can be chilly mornings and late afternoons and very hot at midday, so dress in layers (and wear a hat).

(Source: The New York Times)

WHO sends novel coronavirus test kits to Iran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Novel coronavirus detection kits have been shipped to Iran in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), Kianoush Jahanpour, head of the Iranian health ministry's public relations department, has announced.

There are three stages to diagnose coronavirus, Jahanpour said, adding that the last stage is for the novel coronavirus, ISNA reported on Sunday.

Any person suspected to coronavirus infection initially undergoes a standard polymerase chain reaction (PCR), then if the test was positive, the novel coronavirus test will be conducted on the patient, he explained.

Plane dispatched to bring 80 Iranians from China

Jahanpour further stated that an aircraft with quarantine equipment was dispatched to return 80 Iranians from Wuhan, China.

After returning to the country, they are quarantined in a hotel in Tehran for a period of 14 days with the help of a medical team and full facilities, he added.



"Most of them are students studying in China," he concluded.

An outbreak of the disease is spread-

ing around the world after originating at a seafood market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan; which killed at least 304

people and infected 14,300 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, the 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.

Iran to carry out cloud seeding project within two weeks

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — A cloud seeding project will be carried out within the next two weeks in some northern, central and southern provinces of the country, Farid Golkar, head of Iran's National Cloud Seeding Research Center, has announced.

Cloud seeding, a form of weather modification, is a method to change the amount or even type of precipitation. Rainfall occurs when super cooled droplets of water — those that are still liquid but are at a temperature below the usual freezing point of zero centigrade — form ice crystals. Now too heavy to remain suspend in the air, these then fall, often melting on their way down to form rain.

Even in dry areas the air usually contains some water. This can be made to come together and form ice crystals by seeding the atmosphere with chemicals such as silver iodide or dry ice. They work to promote rainfall by inducing nucleation — what little water is in the air condenses around the newly introduced particles and



crystallizes to form ice. The 'seeds' can be delivered by plane or simply by spraying from the ground.

Golkar explained that the operation will be carried out on the Zagros and Alborz Mountains in the north,

Isfahan and Yazd provinces in the center, and Fars and Kerman provinces in the south.

The first cloud seeding project was launched in the Iranian calendar year 1395 (March 2016–March 2017), he stated, adding that, each operation can lead to a 10-15 percent increase in precipitation.

He went on to highlight that this year, a total budget of 70 billion rials (about \$1.6 million) has been earmarked in this regard.

The latest statistics released by the Meteorological Organization shows that the country received 136.9 millimeters of precipitations since the beginning of the current water year (September 23, 2019), which is 4.9 percent more than the same period a year before.

Moreover, the long term average rainfall was estimated at 109 mm, demonstrating a 25 percent raise in the rainfall this year. However, some provinces of the country are dealing with rainfall shortages and cloud seeding may be a way to ease precipitation scarcity.

Why were whales increasingly caught in crab lines? Because of the climate crisis

When humpback whales began to appear in large numbers off the California coast in 2015 and 2016, people celebrated the comeback of the whales after a near-miss with extinction.

However, the excitement was quickly met with new worries — the whales increasingly got caught up in fishermen's crab ropes. By 2016, there were more than 50 recorded entanglements that left whales injured or killed. Whales got ropes tangled around their mouths, making it difficult for them to eat. Crab lines cut through tissue and caused infections.

Although whales and fishing had coexisted for decades, this was a new problem. So what was driving it?

A new study published in the journal Nature Communications points at climate breakdown as a factor in the mass entanglements.

When the situation was unfolding in 2015 and 2016, it surprised most people, but not Jarrod Santora, an ecologist at the University of California, Santa Cruz and the lead author of the paper.

Santora was studying the ecosystem effects of the marine heat wave, known as "the blob", that was happening off the coast

of California at the time. Heat waves alter the ocean's upwelling — the process in which deep, cold, nutrient-rich water rises to the surface. The upwelling in 2015 and 2016 shrunk to just a narrow band along the coast, causing organisms to cluster there. Due to a heatwave-related decline in krill, whales switched to feeding on anchovies in shallower and shallower waters. In addition, the crab fishing season — an \$88m industry on the US west coast — had been delayed from November to April, and came to coincide with the whales' presence.

"It's like when only one restaurant is open in a town, and everyone ends up piling in around that restaurant," Santora explains. "And that can cause conflict. There were thousands of whales and thousands of crab pots going out, so was a perfect set of events to cause entanglements."

In September 2015, conservationists, wildlife managers and fishermen came together to form a working group to address the issue. Santora joined the group at a time when emotions were running high on both sides of the issue. "It was a great opportunity to bring in a scientific view of long cycles in the ocean," he said. He began to work as an



embedded scientific advisor, spending three years studying and listening to the concerns of the group's members.

Entanglements are down now, and the scientists are helping to build a data-driven website that can predict when and where the whales are likely to be feeding off the west coast. At the same time, crab fishermen are experimenting with new ways to log their movements using solar-powered vessel tracking information systems that record boat positions every few seconds. And there's the development of ropeless crab traps, which can be dropped and come up on their own. These technologies cost two to six times more than traditional crabbing gear, making them a hard sell in an industry with already razor-thin margins.

Crab lines are far from the only challenges humpback whales face in coastal waters. It's clear that climate breakdown driven by human activity is causing our oceans to get warmer — marine heat waves have doubled in frequency since 1982, Santora says. "Increasing climate variability means increased uncertainty. This is the new normal: not having any vision of what is ahead. And that's really scary."

But for now, the whale populations off the west coast are thriving. "We got here because of successful management and acts put in place in the 1960s and 1970s like the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act," says Santora. "The grey whales are the highest they've ever been, and humpback whales have remarkably rebounded." Seals and sea lions are also close to their maximum numbers, and all those bodies need to eat.

Armed with better data, Santora is optimistic the problem of whale entanglements can be solved — and that managers can be more proactive in anticipating potential issues that pop up between humans and marine creatures.

(Source: The Guardian)

Educational projects worth \$330m to be inaugurated

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — A total of 1,015 educational projects worth 14 trillion rials (nearly \$330 million) will be inaugurated across the country, Mehroллаh Rakhshanimehr, director of the organization for renovation, development, and equipment of schools, has announced.



The projects will be inaugurated by the next 10 days, on the occasion of the 41st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, he stated, ISNA reported on Sunday.

According to Rakhshanimehr, the projects include 4,168 classrooms, 11 swimming pools, and 32 gyms.

About 14,000 classrooms have been built so far this year (started March 21, 2019), compared with some 10,000 last year, he concluded.

In December 2018, Rakhshanimehr said that there are 530,000 classrooms nationwide, 160,000 of which are dilapidated, not meeting safety standards.

Cheetahs could return to India after being 'hunted to extinction' 70 years ago

India could see its first cheetahs return to the wild following seven decades of extinction, according to local media.

The Supreme Court has reportedly ruled that the animals — a vulnerable species whose population is declining — can be moved to the country from Namibia as part of an experiment.

Jairam Ramesh, the former environment minister, said he was "delighted" at the decision, after he initiated a push to reintroduce cheetahs a decade ago.

He said the animal is the "only mammal hunted to extinction in modern India".

The project will be monitored to see whether African cheetahs can adapt to the Indian habitat, according to local media.

The animals are considered a threatened species, with a population of less than 7,000 in the wild, according to conservationists.

The vast majority of cheetahs now live in Africa, while the Asiatic cheetah subspecies has a population of around 100 in Iran and is considered critically endangered, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has now won their challenge to reintroduce the species to India and has its sights set on the Kuno Palpur sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh, a central Indian state, for the cheetahs' potential new home, according to the Times of India.

(Source: The Independent)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Rescue efforts after Cyclone Zoe

(January 06, 2003) Diplomats in the Solomon Islands have said the resilience of South Pacific islanders, battered by Cyclone Zoe, has saved hundreds of lives. The islands of Tikopia and Anuta were hit by gale-force winds and waves up to eleven metres high. There's still been no contact with Anuta but rescue teams have reported no major injuries on neighbouring Tikopia. From Honiara, Phil Mercer reports:

This remote part of the South Pacific has found itself in the eye of some of the fiercest storms nature can generate. A diplomat at the New Zealand High Commission here, said the ability of the population of Tikopia to **withstand** Cyclone Zoe was the result of years of experience and a **resilience** built up over generations. It's almost certainly saved many lives.

The islanders **took shelter** in mountain caves to escape the onslaught. When the storm had passed they emerged to find most of their homes had disappeared, either buried under sand, or swept out into the ocean. Barely a tree was left standing, and crops were ripped from the ground. The fate of hundreds of people on the volcanic island of Anuta, however, is still unknown, most than eight days after the cyclone hit. A navy patrol boat is expected to set sail soon from Tikopia to **assess the damage** there. Despite their hardiness, these islanders will need much **outside help** to get back on their feet.

A second relief boat, the Isabella, has arrived on Tikopia, and with it the first major **shipment** of food, water and shelter. Aid agency workers on board have said all the supplies have been handed out to the fifteen hundred residents. A few **minor injuries** have been treated by Australian nurses, who've also made the long journey from Honiara.

The rescue teams are expected to stay in the region for at least another week. On their return, a **long-term strategy** to help these isolated communities get back to self-sufficiency will be considered. Officials from the country's **national disaster council** are to meet Australian, New Zealand and British diplomats to discuss a **rescue package**.

Words
withstand: if you withstand a great force you are not destroyed by it
resilience: the strength to recover quickly from a problem
took shelter: stayed there to be protected from bad weather
onslaught: a fierce or destructive attack
assess the damage: look at all the facts and work out what the main problems are
outside help: aid from other countries
shipment: the sending of cargo
minor injuries: damage done to people's bodies - here, not too serious
long-term strategy: a plan to decide what should be done over a long time
national disaster council: the organization responsible for planning what should happen if a disaster hits the country
rescue package: measures which will help the country to recover
(Source: BBC)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ج

Martyr Soleimani made efforts to bypass U.S. medicine sanctions: health minister

Over the past year, martyr Qassem Soleimani supported and made efforts to bypass the sanctions imposed by the U.S. so that people do not feel lack of medicine and medical equipment, Health Minister Saeed Namaki said on Monday.

After the U.S. government imposed new sanctions on Iran, despite their lies about not sanctioning medicine, food and medical equipment, they put the highest pressure on us to procure medicine and medical equipment, he lamented. "I wrote two letters to the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom to inform him of the American crime against humanity.

However, General Soleimani was the one who helped greatly to import medicine in different ways," he explained.

وزیر بهداشت: شهید سلیمانی برای شکستن تحریم‌های دارویی تلاش کرد

سعید نمکی وزیر بهداشت گفت: شهید قاسم سلیمانی در یک سال اخیر بسیار را همراهی و حمایت کرد تا توانستیم از مسیرهای مختلف حلقه تحریم‌ها را بشکنیم تا مردم در خصوص دارو و تجهیزات پزشکی با مشکل زیادی روبه‌رو نشوند. نمکی در گفت‌وگو با ایسنا، افزود: بعد از اینکه آمریکایی‌ها تحریم‌های جدیدی را به ما تحمیل کردند و علیرغم دروغشان مبنی بر تحریم نبودن دارو، غذا و تجهیزات پزشکی، اما بیشترین فشار را به ما در زمینه تهیه دارو و تجهیزات پزشکی آوردند.

"در همین زمینه نیز من دو نامه به آقای تدرس - دبیرکل سازمان جهانی بهداشت نوشتم که این کار آمریکایی‌ها جنایت علیه بشریت است. شهید قاسم سلیمانی یکی از افرادی بود که به شدت کمک می‌کرد که این حلقه تحریم را بشکنیم و از هر راهی که می‌توانیم برای مردم دارو تهیه کنیم."

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"hol- or holo-"

■ **Meaning:** complete, whole

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

PHRASAL VERB

Play something up

■ **Meaning:** to emphasize something, sometimes making it seem more important than it really is.

■ **For example:** Play up your strongest arguments in the opening paragraph.

IDIOM

Day in the sun

■ **Explanation:** to get long-awaited attention or some form of well-deserved appreciation

■ **For example:** Dave finally got his day in the sun when an article was published about his research.

Pompeo, in Kazakhstan, warns of China's growing reach

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is in Kazakhstan pressing authorities to be wary of Russian and Chinese investment and influence.

Bringing a message similar to one he has delivered repeatedly to other countries, Pompeo was telling senior Kazakh officials on Sunday that the attractiveness of such investment comes with a cost to sovereignty and may hurt, instead of help, long-term development.

Pompeo began a brief visit to the country by meeting with ethnic Kazakhs whose families have gone missing or been detained in China's crackdown on Muslims and other ethnic and religious minorities in western Xinjiang Province.

Pompeo was also congratulating Kazakhstan on its repatriation of Islamic State fighters from Iraq and Syria. Kazakhstan has taken back nearly 600 fighters and family members detained in areas formerly controlled by the group. (Source: AP)

Sudanese promised jobs in UAE but taken to war in Libya, Yemen

→ 1 The MEE said it visited the Amanda travel agency in downtown Khartoum on Wednesday, but the agency was closed and phone calls to the manager and other employees of the agency went unanswered.

Dozens of job seekers were waiting outside the agency in order to try to get their money back, the online website said. Boraey Mohamed Ahmed said he and other Sudanese youths had been subjected to extensive cheating by mafia companies working between the UAE and Sudan.

Circulation of the story on social media has ignited protests against the UAE and its policies in Sudan and in the region.

Thousands of Sudanese protesters have waged a wide campaign on social media against UAE policies, calling on the government to maintain the dignity of the Sudanese.

On Tuesday, hundreds of protesters demonstrated outside the UAE embassy and the Sudanese Foreign Ministry in Khartoum, demanding the return of the Sudanese youths.

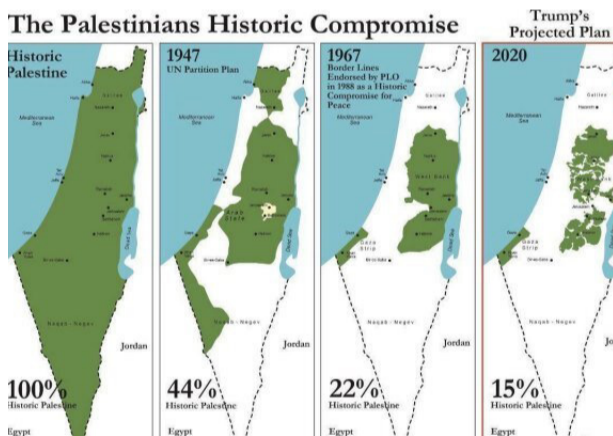
Chanted anti-Emirate slogans, the protesters also called for the return of Sudanese soldiers from the war in Yemen.

Protester Marwa Hassan criticized the policies of the UAE on Sudan and the region as whole.

"Why do they want to use our people as mercenaries in Yemen and Libya, we have nothing to do with their interests in these countries, why are they exploiting the poverty of our youth to use them badly like this," she shouted. (Source: Press TV)

The examination of the map that Trump released for Palestine

→ 1 These two areas will have no border with Egypt. The new areas in the Gaza Strip are agricultural and industrial settlements, likely to be secured by Israel. The first area is in fact the current Gaza Strip that borders Egypt for 12 kilometers by the Rafah border crossing.



The two agricultural and industrial zones annexed to Gaza have no border with Egypt and are linked by a narrow strip. The annexation of these areas, which are to be handed over to the Palestinian state is vague.

The Palestinians will not be allowed to establish a port on the Gaza border along the Mediterranean Sea.

Palestinian resistance groups in Gaza must be disarmed.

Al-Quds (Jerusalem) will be the capital of Israel, and a small area of East al-Quds will be considered as Palestine's capital.



The West Bank will be completely surrounded by the Israeli occupied territories and will be controlled by the Israeli military. The only area of Palestine that will have border with the outside world is the Gaza Strip that stretches 12 kilometers along the Mediterranean Sea and Palestinians are unlikely to be allowed to establish a port there. The Rafah border crossing has already been under Egypt's control.

Protesters outside U.S. embassy in Lebanon decry Trump Plan

More than 200 Lebanese and Palestinians held a protest Sunday near the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon against a White House plan for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Protesters waving Palestinian flags gathered on a road leading to the embassy northeast of Beirut amid tight security by Lebanese troops and riot police.

"Death to America! Death to Israel! We will die and Palestine survive," some of the demonstrators chanted, AP reported.

The U.S. plan heavily favored Israel, granting the Palestinians limited self-rule in parts of the occupied West Bank while allowing Israel to annex all its settlements there and keep nearly all of east Jerusalem, which Palestinians claim as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

Around noon, the protesters removed the barbed wire and reached a metal fence set up by security forces. Police used what appeared to be pepper spray to hold back some of the demonstrators who were on the fence, with at least three protesters being carried away.

Later in the day, the protesters dispersed from the area without any serious clashes, apart from some stone throwing at security forces.

On Saturday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas threatened to cut security ties with both Israel and the U.S. in a speech at an Arab League meeting in response to the U.S. plan. Arab foreign ministers there joined in criticizing the plan and calling it a setback to Mideast peace efforts.

Lebanon is home to tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees and their descendants. There have been protests in the country's 12 refugee camps since President Donald Trump unveiled the proposal in Washington.

■ **Protesters against Trump's deal march in Tel Aviv**

Meanwhile, protesters carrying Palestinian flags marched through Tel Aviv on Saturday, protesting against the so-called 'Deal of the Century,' presented by U.S. President Donald Trump, who claimed it would facilitate a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

People marched through the streets, holding a portrait of Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hugging, with banner, reading, "Don't make apartheid great again." "We came today to demonstrate against [an] annexation plan of Trump and Netanyahu.

This plan is very bad for both Israelis and Palestinian and one of the worst things about it is that it enables deporting



Arab citizens and taking away their citizenship," said Hila Aloni Ochaion, one of the protesters.

Trump recently unveiled his much-hyped plan, a set of proposals to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, alongside Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in Washington DC.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas rejected the plan with "a thousand no's," as being one-sided in favor of Israel.

■ **Arab envoys present at U.S. Mideast plan unveiling were misled: Diplomat**

An Arab diplomat says ambassadors from the UAE, Bahrain and Oman who attended the unveiling ceremony of a contentious U.S.-devised Middle East proposal were not briefed on the details of the scheme.

The unnamed diplomat told Israel's Haaretz newspaper on Saturday that Washington did not disclose the full details of its so-called peace plan to the three Persian Gulf Arab states ahead of its release, but only presented them with a vague outline of the initiative.

Trump unveiled his self-proclaimed "deal of the centu-

ry" during an event at the White House alongside Israeli prime minister Netanyahu in Washington on Tuesday.

The only Arab ambassadors present were from the UAE, Bahrain and Oman —all members of the Arab League that are also among Washington's closest allies in the region.

The diplomat said the White House had urged those Arab countries to attend the event, sending them a document of general statements about "a Palestinian state and a capital" in East Jerusalem al-Quds.

However, he added, "when they got into the minute details of the plan, we understood that there is no Palestinian state in practice and there is no capital in East al-Quds, and more importantly, that there is an attempt to divide al-Aqsa Mosque."

The Arab diplomat said the disappointment with the details of the U.S. plan led the three Persian Gulf countries to join the other Arab League member states in voting to reject the U.S. scheme.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. envoy briefs Afghan president on peace talks with Taliban

The United States' special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has told Afghan President Ashraf Ghani that there has not been any significant progress in his peace talks with the Taliban.

However, Khalilzad said he was hopeful of reaching an understanding with the group on reduction of hostilities, but did not offer any timeframe, according to a statement issued by the presidential palace on Saturday.

After concluding talks in Doha, Brussels and Islamabad, Khalilzad arrived in Kabul on Saturday where he separately held discussions with Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah on U.S.-Taliban talks

According to Ghani's office, Khalilzad hoped the peace talks to end the 18-year war will reach a conclusion.

"We are waiting for a clear response from the Taliban about a ceasefire or a significant and lasting reduction in violence based on a practical mechanism which is acceptable to the people of Afghanistan and the U.S. government," the palace quoted Khalilzad as saying.

Afghan government leaders remain split on the issue of a brief "reduction in violence" or a comprehensive ceasefire before a final agreement is reached between the U.S. and Taliban.

Last week, Abdullah said no preconditions should be set for peace talks, while Ghani continued calling for a ceasefire.

Earlier on Saturday, the U.S. embassy in Islamabad said Khalilzad was in Pakistan on Friday to rally support for getting an agreement with the Taliban to reduce their attacks as the first step towards peace.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said it supported a quick peace deal with the Taliban and repeated Washington's call for a reduction in violence.

But attacks by the Afghan government forces and its U.S. allies have also raised concerns.

■ **Spike in violence and deaths**

Meanwhile, violent attacks in Afghanistan jumped to record levels in the last



quarter of 2019 compared with previous years, according to a report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) released on Friday.

There were 8,204 attacks between October and December last year, up from 6,974 in the same period in 2018 and the highest in the same quarter of any year since SIGAR recording began in 2010.

Stepped up bombings by the U.S. and operations by CIA-trained Afghan special forces - several of which resulted in civilian casualties - have also been criticized by rights groups and some Afghan officials.

Last year, the U.S. air force dropped 7,423 bombs on Afghanistan, up from 7,362 in 2018, according to the data provided by the U.S. Central Command Combined Air Operations Center.

In comparison, 4,361 bombs were dropped in 2017, while 2016 saw 1,337 such attacks, according to the data.

The United Nations blames the increased U.S. bombings as one of the reasons for the rise in civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

For the first time since the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, the UN said Afghan government forces and its U.S. allies killed more civilians in the first three months of last year than the armed groups.

According to Abdullah's office, Khalilzad told him the U.S. is committed to reduction in violence "with a specific and acceptable definition and mechanism" as a precondition for signing a deal with the Taliban.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan denounce Trump's expanded U.S. travel ban

Eritrea and Kyrgyzstan have denounced U.S. President Donald Trump's controversial travel ban which targets prospective immigrants from six additional countries.

Eritrean Foreign Minister Osman Saleh Mohammed said on Saturday that the government saw the ban as a political move that would hurt the country's relations with the U.S.

"We find this move unacceptable," he told Reuters news agency by telephone. "We will, however, not expel the U.S. ambassador," Mohammed said.

Kyrgyzstan hit out on Saturday at the immigration restrictions that will apply to its nationals, stating that they had been applied selectively and had damaged relations.

The two countries were among six that were added to an expanded version of the U.S. visa ban, announced on Friday in a presidential proclamation.

Under the proclamation, which will take effect on February 21, the U.S. will suspend the issuance of visas that can lead to permanent residency for nationals of the affected countries.

Immigrants from Nigeria and Myanmar will no longer be eligible for visas allowing them to live in the U.S. permanently, while citizens from Sudan and Tanzania will not be eligible to enter a lottery to apply for immigrant visas.

■ **'We don't have official communication'**

Nigeria's government said it had created a committee to address the issues that prompted the ban, while Tanzania said it had not been officially notified by the U.S. about the travel ban.

"Nigeria remains committed to maintaining productive relations with the United States and other international allies especially on matters of global security," a Nigerian presidential statement said.

Nigeria's information minister Lai Mohammed told Reuters they had no warn-



ing of their inclusion on the list before it appeared in the media.

Emmanuel Buohela, spokesman for the Tanzanian ministry of foreign affairs said: "We don't have official communication from the U.S. government. We haven't received a formal diplomatic communication, which is the official way of communicating between governments."

Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf told journalists the visas affected are distinct from non-immigrant visitor visas, which will not be impacted by the ban.

Immigrant advocates and rights groups have also slammed the expansion of the controversial travel ban, saying it weaponries "immigration law to advance [the administration's] xenophobic agenda".

The original travel ban - issued during Trump's first week in office in January 2017 - barred nearly all immigrants and travelers from seven Muslim-majority nations. It caused widespread outrage and chaos at airports across the U.S.

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 travelers.

(source: agencies)

Iraqi president appoints new prime minister Sadr endorses naew PM designate Allawi

→ 1 Salih also stressed that the protest movement made it imperative that politicians look at the interests of the public over personal or political considerations.

■ **Sadr endorses Allawi**

Iraq's Shia cleric Muqtada Sadr, the most influential in the Arab country's political system, has endorsed the designation of a technocrat as prime minister, saying it is a good step after months of political turmoil.

Sadr said in a tweet on Saturday that President Barham Salih's appointment of Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi as Iraq's new prime minister could draw the support of people who have been demanding change in the way the country is governed.

"I hope the president's appointment of Mohammad Allawi is acceptable to the people and that they have patience," read part of Sadr's Arabic statement on Twitter, adding, "This is a good step".

Allawi's appointment came two months after former



prime minister Adel Abdul Mahdi resigned in the face of mounting unrest and protest against corruption in Iraq.

The Iraqi parliament, where Sadr's bloc is the largest, had been supposed to name a new premier but the deadline

expired on Saturday, prompting Salih to appoint Allawi.

However, a group of Iraqi protesters took to the streets in Baghdad to reject Allawi, accusing the former communications minister of being a member of Iraq's corrupt elite.

Allawi, the son of a wealthy Iraqi industrialist who educated at the American university of Beirut, is a cousin of pro-Western Shia politician Ayad Allawi, a figure who has been at the heart of many political disputes in Iraq for the past years.

Mohammad Allawi has a reputation of repeatedly clashing with Nouri Maliki, a key political figure known for his anti-American positions who led two governments in Iraq after the U.S. invasion of 2003.

However, the new PM designate said on Saturday that he would try to maintain his political independence as a head of government and would oppose any external pressure for appointment of ministers in his new cabinet.

(Source: agencies)

Bijan Heydari to officiate Tehran derby

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Bijan Heydari has been chosen to officiate Tehran derby between Persepolis and Esteghlal.

The match has been scheduled for Thursday in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Tehran derby is widely considered the major crosstown derby in the Persian Gulf Pro League. This match was declared as the most important derby in Asia and 22nd most important derby in the world in June 2008 by World Soccer magazine.

This battle between two teams that share an 80,000-capacity stadium is considered the biggest derby in all of Asia.

It is considered as one of the world's most intense derbies. Despite being a derby between two teams from Tehran, the match has been played in other Iranian cities as well. Taking place at least twice during the year via the league fixtures, this cross-town rivalry has extended to the Hazfi Cup, Super Cups as well as in minor tournaments and friendlies. The largest victory belongs to Persepolis with winning 6-0.

Esteghlal and Persepolis have played against each other 91 times, with Esteghlal winning 26 games, Persepolis taking 24 victories, and 41 matches ending in a draw.

Persepolis, who are looking for the fourth consecutive title, sit top of the table with 40 points.

Esteghlal are fourth with 32 points and



a loss in the match could cost them the title. Esteghlal football team striker Cheick Diabate will likely miss Tehran derby after

suffering a foot injury in the match against Naft Masjed Soleyman.

Persepolis iconic defender Shoja Kheliliza-

deh will also miss the match due to one-game suspension handed after the 1-0 win against Sanat Naft on Saturday.

Carlos Queiroz sends message to Iranian fans



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Former d e s k Team Melli coach Carlos Queiroz has sent a message to the Iranian fans one year after his departure.

Queiroz was named as Colombia coach in last year's February after parting company with Iran national football team.

The Portuguese coach failed to bring an end to Team Melli's 43-year title drought

in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup in January.

"One year after leaving Iran I want to express a message of gratitude to all players, staff, fans and Iran Football Federation. It was a great honor and privilege to serve Iranian Football. I will keep forever in my heart all the memories and wonderful moments shared with Team Melli and Iranian Fans," Queiroz posted on his Instagram account.

Iran B futsal team beat Tajikistan at Thailand tourney



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran B d e s k futsal team defeated Tajikistan 3-2 at the SAT International Futsal Championship Hat Yai Thailand 2020.

The Iranian team will meet Malaysia on Monday.

SAT International Futsal Championship Thailand 2020 is being held in Hat Yai, Songkhla from Feb. 2 to 8.

The tournament was supposed to be played with six nations into two groups of three. Then, due to the Coronavirus concern both Turkmenistan and Kuwait withdrew from the event, being replaced by Myanmar and Thailand "B".

Finally, also Myanmar withdrew and the challenge was reorganized in a unique group of five teams.

Kylian Mbappe scolded by Thomas Tuchel

PSG superstar Kylian Mbappe has been warned by coach Thomas Tuchel that he needs to recognize that he is part of a team after the France international was visibly upset to be substituted during the 5-0 Ligue 1 win over Montpellier on Saturday.

Mbappe, 21, was substituted after 68 minutes after scoring PSG's fourth of five goals just 10 minutes earlier.

The former Monaco man and Tuchel were locked in conversation as the change was made as part of a double substitution that saw opening scorer Pablo Sarabia also withdrawn and Mauro Icardi, as well as Edinson Cavani, sent on.

Speaking after the match with Canal+, Tuchel urged Mbappe to recognize that he is part of a team.

"Handling dressing room egos is demanding," said the German. "Not difficult but demanding. It is not good, nor was it going too far. We are a team and that must be respected. "I am coach. Somebody has to decide who comes off

and goes on. These are not good images as they negatively affect the state of mind. We are playing football -- not tennis. Kylian is intelligent and has a good mentality, so we do not need this sort of situation.

"It is not good as it opens discussion and distracting subjects that affect our spirit. Together, with Kylian, we have shown a very professional and concentrated spirit. This topic always gives the impression that it is not like that, which is a shame. I am not angry, just sad as it was unnecessary."

Also quizzed about Neymar's early birthday celebrations planned for Sunday, Tuchel admitted that he was not thrilled about the idea two days ahead of their match with Nantes.

"Sunday is not good [for Neymar's birthday party]," he said. "However, I am neither his father, nor handler, nor agent -- I am just his coach.

"I will not say if I am going [to Neymar's party] or not. You can wait until Sunday. It is off-topic. Neymar's night is

a distraction, obviously, and I always protect my players. I love them lots and prefer to talk internally. If there are hard truths to be said, I prefer to do it internally."

Neymar, who teed up Mbappe's goal and was booked by the referee late in the first half as tempers flared because of the Brazil international's use of skill, revealed via Instagram post-match that he and Leandro Paredes had signed a PSG shirt for Andy Delort.

The Montpellier attacker was vocal in his criticism of both players in the build-up to the match after a heated meeting towards the end of 2019, declaring that "at least Zlatan [Ibrahimovic] was very respectful" during their clashes.

Angel Di Maria and Layvin Kurzawa joined Mbappe and Sarabia on the score sheet, while Daniel Congre added an unfortunate own goal and Cavani had a late sixth ruled out for offside.

(Source: ESPN)

Djokovic edges Thiem in thriller to clinch eighth Australian Open

MELBOURNE (Reuters) — Novak Djokovic endured a fierce challenge to his Melbourne Park reign before overhauling Dominic Thiem 6-4 4-6 2-6 6-3 6-4 on Sunday to clinch an eighth Australian Open crown and reclaim the world number one ranking.

While Rafa Nadal rules Roland Garros with 12 titles, Djokovic holds sway in the title match at Rod Laver Arena having never lost a final in Melbourne Park. Yet on Sunday the Serb was under siege for much of the thriller.

For the first time in eight Melbourne finals, Djokovic was forced to come back when trailing after three sets, rocked by the power and determination of Thiem.

But as he so often does, the Serb found a way.

He captured the decisive break in the third game of the final set, then held firm as Thiem made desperate assaults on his serve.

Going for broke in a nerve-shredding final game, the fifth seeded Austrian went for the lines but missed on the first championship point to hand Djokovic one of his most hard-earned triumphs.

"This is definitely my favorite court, my favorite stadium in the world and I am blessed



to hold this trophy again," said Djokovic after being presented with the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup by 2005 winner Marat Safin.

Four months after Nadal stopped Russian Daniil Medvedev in the U.S. Open final, the Serb's 17th Grand Slam title continued the 'Big Three's' reign over the majors.

Djokovic, Nadal and Roger Federer have now won 13 Grand Slam titles in succession, dating back to Federer's 2017 win at Melbourne Park.

Thiem, seen as one of the greatest hopes

to end the Big Three domination, was consigned to his third defeat in a major final following losses in the last two French Open deciders to Nadal.

"Unreal what you are doing through all these years. You and two other guys have brought men's tennis to a completely new level," the 26-year-old told Djokovic at the trophy ceremony.

"Well I fell a little bit short but I hope I can get revenge soon."

While Thiem started heavy-legged after spending a total of eight hours beating Alexander Zverev and Nadal in his previous two matches, Djokovic charged out of the blocks to take the first set.

But the match turned on its head at 4-4 in the second when Djokovic became flustered after being called twice for breaching the service clock.

He returned to his chair fuming and paused to sarcastically pat chair umpire Damien Dumusois's sneaker, telling the Frenchman: "Great job man, you made yourself famous in this match, especially for the second one. Well done."

Conceding the set with a terrible backhand,

a shellshocked Djokovic lost six games in a row as Thiem, blasting winners virtually at will, roared to a 4-0 lead in the third.

Something was amiss with the Serb and he called for the trainer after holding serve. But he underwent no treatment and resumed after an exchange of words.

He made a fist of digging in, saving three set points but a wayward forehand on the fourth gave Thiem the lead.

It looked gloomy for Djokovic, who had destroyed Nadal in three sets in the 2019 final.

But the match turned again when Thiem gave up a double-fault to concede two break points, then blasted a forehand long to fall 5-3 behind in the fourth set.

In a flash, Djokovic had served out the set to love, sealing it with an ace.

Having spent about six hours more time on court than Djokovic through the tournament, the strain of a long campaign began to tell on Thiem but he refused to crumble in the fifth.

He had two chances to break back in the fourth game but Djokovic nervelessly canceled the threat before holding firm in the nerve-jangling finish.

Iran's Akrami to officiate at AFC Cup

IRNA — Iran's Hassan Akrami has been appointed to referee a match at the 2020 AFC Cup.

He will whistle a match between MUST CPK of Macau and Taiwanese Tatung in Group I.

Akrami will be assisted by his countrymen Saeid Alinejadian and Ali Mirzabeigi.

The match will be held at the Estádio Campo Desportivo in Macau on March 11.

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

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.

Saudi Arabia's Al Taawon to host Persepolis in Kuwait

TASNIM — Al Taawon of Saudi Arabia have chosen Al Kuwait Sports Club Stadium to host Iran's Persepolis.

Al Taawon have been scheduled to meet Persepolis on April 7 in Group C.

Persepolis have already announced that they will host the Saudi Arabian club in Dubai, the UAE on March 2.

The 2020 AFC Champions League group stage will be played from 10 February to 6 May 2020.

A total of 32 teams will compete in the group stage to decide the 16 places in the knockout stage of the 2020 AFC Champions League.

Iranian athletes to participate at Istanbul Cup

IRNA — Following the World Indoor Championships' cancellation, Iran will send athletes to Istanbul Athletic Cup.

World Athletics has decided to postpone the World Championships in Nanjing, China, because of the rapid spread of the coronavirus.

The championships were originally scheduled to take place on March 13-15 but will be postponed for March 2021.

Istanbul Athletic Cup will be held from February 16 to 20 in Istanbul, capital of Turkey.

Iran is going to send 11 athletes to the event.

Esteghlal forward Diabate doubt for Tehran derby

TASNIM — Esteghlal football team striker Cheick Diabate will likely miss Tehran derby.

Esteghlal will meet Persepolis on Thursday and a loss against their archrivals could cost them the title.

In the match against Naft Masjed Soleyman, the Malian striker was forced to leave the field after 15 minutes due to a foot injury.

"The MRI showed that he has suffered a minor quadriceps strain," Esteghlal's doctor Kaveh Sotoudeh announced.

Persepolis sit top of Iran Professional League with 40 points after 18 weeks.

Esteghlal are fourth with 32 points.

Cavani representatives 'shameful' in transfer dealings - Atletico chief

Atletico Madrid president Enrique Cerezo has spoken out after the club failed to land Edinson Cavani during the January transfer window.

"I think it's shameful the situation of some players with their agents and relatives" he said, speaking after Atletico's 1-0 defeat to Real Madrid in the Madrid derby on Saturday. "We're not here to be robbed."



Sources have told ESPN that Atletico were unwilling to meet Paris Saint-Germain's €20 million asking price for the Uruguayan center-forward, who is out of contract this summer.

PSG would have let Cavani, 32, go in January if Atletico could have gone a little further, but the Ligue 1 club's sporting director Leonardo was unwilling to compromise, and the Uruguay international's brother ultimately left Madrid with no deal complete.

Later in the day, Cavani's brother and agent Walter Guglielmoni responded to the accusations of the the Atleti president. "The most important is what Edi did to leave," Guglielmoni said. "Do you think he went one month without playing so that I could capsize the whole thing over a commission and stop his dream from coming to fruition?"

"What about all the fuss we made with PSG? If it was a question of money, Edi would have gone to England -- Chelsea or Manchester. Atletico could not support the economic cost of the operation and PSG would not budge from their demands. Neither party could reach an agreement."

When that deal broke down, Atletico turned to former player Yannick Carrasco as a short-term solution to their goalscoring crisis, bringing the Belgium international in on loan until the end of the season.

Cavani came on as a substitute in PSG's 5-0 win over Montpellier on Saturday and thought he had netted his 199th goal for the club in a rare appearance this season, but it was ruled out for offside.

(Source: ESPN)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

God never opens the door of benediction without opening the door of fulfillment.

Imam Ali (AS)

Overseas musicians to perform at Fajr Music Festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Celebrated musicians from seven countries will be performing at the 35th Fajr Music Festival in Tehran, the organizers announced on Sunday.

Tunisian composer, singer and oud player Dhafer Youssef, Belgian pianist Florian Noack and Italian jazz trumpeter Luca Aquino are among the musicians.



Italian jazz trumpeter Luca Aquino in an undated photo.

Sketchbook Quartet from Austria, featuring Andi Tausch on guitar, Leonhard Skorpura on saxophone, Daniel Moser on bass clarinet and Konstantin Kräutler on drums, will give several performances during the festival

Violinists Daniel and Barbara Auner, members of Auner Quartet from Austria, will also perform at the event.

Turkmen dotar player Palvan Hamidov, Azerbaijani singer Zabiti Nabizadeh, accordionist Vincent Peirani and his fellow French saxophonist Emile Parisien will give concerts.

The ensembles and musicians will give their performances at Tehran's various halls, including Vahdat Hall, Rudaki Hall and Niavaran Cultural Center.

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

14th Fajr Poetry Festival honors winners

C U L T U R E d e s k **TEHRAN** — Winners of the 14th Fajr Poetry Festival were honored Saturday during a ceremony at Helal Cinema in the southeastern Iranian city of Zahedan, Sistan-Baluchestan Province.

The honoring ceremony was attended by the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi.



Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi makes a speech during the closing ceremony of the 14th Fajr Poetry Festival at the Helal Cinema in Zahedan on February 1, 2020.

In the Adults' Poetry section, the books "In the Color of Danube" by Vaheh Armen and "Ra Ra" by Pantea Safai shared the top award. "Four Line Book" by Ali Mirfazli was named the best in the About Poetry section.

No winner was picked in the Children's Poetry section. However, the books "Your Heart Won the Bet" by Fatemeh Salarvand and "Do Lips Have Zipper" by Gholamreza Baktash received honorable mentions.

A large number of Persian poets attended the festival, which opened in Isfahan on January 2.

The organizers of the festival launched a campaign to collect books to donate to the flood-stricken people in Sistan-Baluchestan.

“Puff, Puff, Pass” pictures plight of family trapped in drug trade

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Director Saman Salur has said that his new film “Puff, Puff, Pass” shows how a family could collapse when one engages in the drug trade.

Speaking during a press conference during the 38th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran's Mellat Cineplex on Saturday, he added, “This film can be considered as a warning to a society trapped in drug addiction, which is increasingly expanding.”

The film is about a man who enters into drug trafficking to strike it rich. However, all his dreams go wrong and his family collapses.

“The film's target audience is ordinary people, and I hope officials and decision-makers consider the film's message, because our society is exhausted by unhappy news,” Salur noted.

He said that he began making the movie three years ago, before any of the other films on drug addiction, which have since been produced in the Iranian cinema.

He noted that his film examines addiction from a different point of view.

In this movie Mohsen Tanabandeh co-stars with Parinaz Izadyar, who played a leading role in “Life+1 Day”, director Saeid Rustai's movie on drug addiction and poverty in the slums of Tehran.

She also made a cameo appearance in Rustai's latest acclaimed drama “Just 6.5”, which centers on a true story on the drug trade in Tehran.



Director Saman Salur and “Puff, Puff, Pass” cast members Mohsen Tanabandeh and Parinaz Izadyar attend a press conference during the 38th Fajr Film Festival at Mellat Cineplex in Tehran on February 1, 2020. (Honaronline/Mohammad Namazi)

Hamoon launches theater festival



Hamoon Theater director Hadi Hejazifar attends a press conference in Tehran on February 2, 2020 to brief the media about the Hamoon Theater Festival.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Hamoon Theater, a private hall in Tehran under the auspices of Hadi Hejazifar, the star of the acclaimed Iranian movies “Standing in the Dust” and “The Midday Event”, has launched a private theater festival.

Twenty-two troupes will be competing in the first edition of the Hamoon Theater Festival.

“The festival aims to introduce talented theatrical figures,” Hejazifar said in a press conference in Tehran on Sunday.

“We are actually looking to find and support those who cannot easily rent a hall to perform since they are not well-known,” he noted.

“The Fajr theater festival used to do its task the best way possible introducing several new talents every year over the past editions, however, it has recently been

non-competitive, killing the motivations and hopes of the youth,” he added.

Hejazifar said that he was surprised to see some of the plays attending the Hamoon festival and added, “One of our main goals is to establish a friendly atmosphere where the participating troupes help one another.”

The festival will select and honor five plays in five categories of best directing, best play, best actor, best actress and best performance.

“Theatrical figures Farhad Mohandespur, Ali Sarabi, Jaleh Sameti, Payam Larian and I will be judging the plays,” he remarked.

Hejazifar hopes to hold the next editions of the festival with international troupes in attendance.

The festival will be held from February 4 to 15.

Iran's “Yalda” wins grand prize at Sundance Film Festival



A scene from Iranian director Masud Bakhshi's movie “Yalda, a Night for Forgiveness”.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Masud Bakhshi's movie “Yalda, a Night for Forgiveness” received the Grand Jury Prize of the World Cinema Dramatic section of the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah on Saturday.

The film is about a young woman, Maryam, who has been sentenced to death for murdering her husband, Nasser. Iranian law allows for the victim's family to forgive her and spare her life, so Maryam's fate will be decided by Nasser's daughter, Mona, on the country's most popular televised reality show.

In front of millions of viewers during Yalda, the winter solstice celebration, Maryam and Mona discover that forgiveness can be difficult as they relive the past.

The grand jury prizes in other sections were presented to “Minari” by Lee Isaac Chung and “Boys State” co-directed by

Jesse Moss and Amanda McBaine, both from the U.S., and “The Reason I Jump” by Jerry Rothwell from England.

Earlier in January, Bakhshi announced that he had withdrawn his movie from the festival in protest against the hostile U.S. actions against Iran.

In a letter published by the Persian service of ISNA at that time, Bakhshi said that he wouldn't attend the festival and he would stay with his people who have been suffering from sanctions, pressures, discrimination, deprivations and prohibitions imposed by the crazy warmongers for years.

The withdrawal was announced following the assassination of Quds Force commander Lieutenant General Martyr Qassem Soleimani in a U.S. military attack in Baghdad by Trump's order in early January.

Iran's UNESCO to organize art exhibition to promote humane values

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Iranian National Commission for UNESCO announced on Sunday that it plans to organize an exhibition of art named “Art for Humanity” to promote humane values.

Interested artists are asked to submit their artworks of digital paintings and new media with the central themes of peace, children, natural sources and the environment to the organization.

The works will be selected from among the submissions by a group of artists composed of sculptor Taha Behbahani, graphic designer Qobad Shiva and cartoonist Kambiz Derambakhs.

The exhibit tries to create a beautiful dream for the future of the earth and also to create motivation and hope among people in order to think of a beautiful future for the world.

The showcase also intends to assist visitors in buying high quality artworks.

The exhibit will open at the Economic Cooperation Organization Cultural Institute in Tehran on February 28. The top selected works will later go on view in a UNESCO gallery in France.

Amir Roshani and Hoda Yusefi are members of the policymaking council of the exhibit, which will be running until March 5.

Sundance Film Festival names Tabitha Jackson new director

NEW YORK (AP) — The Sundance Film Festival has found its new leader from within, promoting Sundance Institute documentary program director Tabitha Jackson to festival director.

Jackson's appointment was announced Saturday night during the festival's awards ceremony.

Jackson takes the reins of the premier American film festival whose previous director, John Cooper, last summer said he would step down following the 2020 edition of Sundance, which wrapped Sunday. Jackson becomes the first woman, the first black person and the first Brit to

head the annual Park City, Utah, showcase for independent film.

“All of these things make up part of my fabric,” Jackson said in an interview ahead of the announcement. “I suspect that the symbolism of it, in so far as it is inspiring to others who may feel they have permission to go for these big jobs, is helpful. But I hope the appointment was made on the basis of substance rather than symbolism. But at times like these, in this political climate, it is worth noting.”

Jackson's appointment means that the top three positions at Sundance are all filled by

women. Keri Putnam is the chief executive and executive director of Sundance Institute, the nonprofit organization founded in 1981 by Robert Redford that puts on the festival. Since 2018, Kim Yutani has been the festival's programming director.

“It's powerful and also about time,” said Jackson.

Putnam oversaw the search process, along with a selection committee that included Jason Blum, founder of Blumhouse Productions and a member of the Sundance board. She said the festival received 700 applications and considered many outside candidates before

choosing Jackson for her close connection to independent artists.

“From my perspective, putting Tabitha and Kim at the helm is the future,” said Putnam. “And I'm really excited for where they go.”

The completed leadership team, along with Cooper who transitions into an emeritus director role, will be tasked with steering Sundance into one of the festival's most challenging new chapters. Redford, the face and founder of Sundance, is stepping back. Now 83, Redford is mostly retired. This year, Redford did away with his usual opening-day press conference.