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Iran must become powerful to prevent war

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Steel products output rises 97% in 10 months on year

TEHRAN — Iran's major steel companies produced over 11.27 million tons of steel products during the 10-month period from March 21, 2019 to January 20, 2020, registering a 97-percent growth from the figure for the same period in the previous year, IRNA reported on Saturday.

The country's steel products output hit 1.146 million tons in the tenth Iranian calendar month of Dey (December 22, 2019-January 20, 2020).

Also as reported, with 6.84 million tons of output, Mobarakeh Steel Company, the largest steel producer in Iran, accounted for the biggest share of the country's steel production in the mentioned 10-month period, followed by Iran National Steel Industrial Group.

Iran's major steel producers produced over 17.08 million tons of steel ingots in the said 10 months, five-percent more than the figure for the same period last year. ➔ **4**

Families lost members in terror fight to sue U.S. leaders

TEHRAN — A number of Iranian families who have lost loved ones in the fight against terrorists in Iraq and Syria have lodged complaints against the current and former U.S. officials for creating the ISIL terrorist group, a lawyer representing the General Soleimani case announced on Saturday.

Maryam Sakhaei said a 400-page litigation has been handed over to the Judiciary in this regard. "We have point-

ed to America's role in establishing and training terrorists and providing them with weapons," Sakhaei told a press conference, the Mehr news agency reported.

"We have litigated against all the U.S. presidents who have had a role in terrorism, and against arms manufacturers. We will first follow the case in a domestic court before bringing it before an international one," she explained. ➔ **2**

Syrian army clears mines, explosives in strategic northwestern city of Saraqib

Syrian government forces have completed clearing mines and explosives in the strategic crossroads city of Saraqib in the country's embattled northwestern province of Idlib, as they continue to tighten the noose around foreign-backed Takfiri terrorists in their last major stronghold.

Syria's official news agency SANA reported on Saturday that army troops and allied fighters from popular defense groups

defused mines and improvised explosive devices in the city, situated 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) east of Idlib city, and efforts are underway to return it to normal life.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in a report, corroborated by witnesses, on Thursday that Syrian troops had marched through Saraqib following intense battles with militants. ➔ **10**

Living standards in Iran 60 percent higher than pre-Revolution era, says economist

By Mohammad Homaeefar

TEHRAN — Living standards in Iran are now about 60 percent higher than in the 1970s, says a professor of economics at Virginia Tech.

"As I have shown in my blog and in other writings, if properly measured, living standards in Iran are now about 60 percent higher than in the 1970s," Djavad Salehi-Isfahani said in an interview with the Tehran Times as Iran is marking the 41st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Salehi-Isfahani has every now and then criticized the way Iran's economic development is underestimated by ordinary people, the media, and even economists.

He says by using the wrong metrics it has been claimed in a BBC Persian article that living standards are now 30 percent lower.

"There is no place that I know where data is

more important for clearing things up than in Iran, where many people make comparisons based on hearsay," says Salehi-Isfahani, who is also a Nonresident Senior Fellow at Global Economy and Development at the Brookings Institution.

The professor says before the revolution the government mainly focused on urban areas.

"Before the Revolution, public policy was urban biased. Rural areas grew but public investment was mainly diverted toward urban areas. As a result, the main source of poverty and income inequality, which was the rural-urban gap, remained unchanged."

However, he says, after the Revolution "poverty reduction became a focus of state policy" and the ruling system shifted its focus on rural development.

The transcript of the interview is presented below.

■ Dr. Salehi-Isfahani, as we approach the 41st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, a very important question still remains hotly disputed, which is whether Iranians are poorer or wealthier today compared to the pre-Revolution era. What tools – statistics, formulas, etc. – should we use so as to find a correct answer to this question?

A: The most important comparison is in living standards. There is no place that I know where data is more important for clearing things up than in Iran, where many people make comparisons based on hearsay. I often hear very educated Iranians in the U.S. speak of how good things were before the Revolution. One person put it in these words: "Before the Revolution people had their home, a car, and one trip abroad every year. Who can do that today?" These erroneous statements are easy to refute. ➔ **3**

Prof: Iran does not consider Saudi Arabia as enemy

By Salman Parviz

Dr. Foad Izadi is an associate professor of American Studies for a doctorate program at the University of Tehran, Faculty of World Studies. Having studied in the U.S., he has a PhD in Mass Communication from Louisiana State University. After his studies in U.S. he returned to Iran in 2009 and started a teaching profession. During an exclusive interview with the Tehran Times in Qom he talked about regional geopolitical situation and Iran's ties with neighboring countries.

The following is the excerpt of the interview:

■ How do you see Iran's ties with countries of the Persian Gulf? Do you see thawing of relations with Saudi Arabia?

A: Iran does not consider Saudi Arabia to be an enemy. For Iran the U.S.

and Israel are enemies. Saudi Arabia is a neighbor and Iran has been trying to improve relations with Saudis, especially since President Rouhani came to power. Rouhani has also tried to reduce tensions with the U.S. government.

The problem is that the Saudis are not interested, especially after (Saudi Crown Prince) MBS came to power and started a confrontational policy. The Saudi policy against Yemen and Qatar has also failed with the MBS leadership. In order to mend ties, Iran's foreign minister has several times proposed to visit Saudi Arabia.

Iran has no intention for a confrontation with Saudi Arabia. The U.S. tried to follow a divide and rule policy, creating tensions between neighboring countries, using its propaganda tools. The idea here is to replace Iran as the main power in the

region with Israel.

They have been successful to certain extent. For example when Iran helped the Syrian government to fight ISIS there was a huge propaganda campaign to try to portray Iran as an occupation force.

Saudis play with the price of oil to put pressure on Iran by over-exporting and the end result would be for Iran to suffer.

■ What about Iranian crude exports?

A: Iran is presently exporting crude to some Chinese companies unofficially. Officially the export is zero.

■ The UN has described the war in Yemen as the biggest humanitarian crisis since WWII. With the UAE giving signals for withdrawing from the conflict do you see a compromise in the near future? ➔ **7**



ARTICLE

Ramin Hossein Abadian
Mehr News Agency
journalist

Najaf bloody riot instigated by infiltrators

Late last week, the city of Najaf witnessed the emergence of a bloody riot. The Americans used their utmost efforts to exploit the incident to undermine the Iraqi government and nation.

The incident began when unidentified elements opened fire on people in Najaf's streets at night. Due to this brutal act, more than 115 people were killed and wounded. This incident has prompted many reactions in Iraq. Iraq's religious authority also reacted to the move. In this regard, Ahmad al-Safi, representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, read out a statement.

"In the past days, we have witnessed painful and unfortunate incidents, which have shed the blood of innocent people. It is necessary for the security forces to identify the abusers and the infiltrators in order to protect the interests of citizens. The current responsibility of the security forces is to secure protesters," read the statement that represented the positions of Iraq's religious authority.

The representative also emphasized, "Security forces must prevent further acts of sabotage in order to maintain the security of the demonstrators. The forces should stop any damage to public property".

On the other hand, Iraqi caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi reacted to the events in Najaf, ordering the formation of a fact-finding committee for conducting investigation.

New Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi also condemned the killing and wounding of protesters by a group of unidentified intruders and infiltrators. In the meantime, the U.S. exploitation of incidents and riot in Najaf is considerable.

In this connection, the U.S. embassy in Iraq reacted to Najaf's incidents by issuing an interventionist statement. "We strongly denounce the brutal assault in the holy city of Najaf on February 5 that led to the killing and wounding of peaceful demonstrators," stated the embassy, without mentioning seditious and infiltrating elements. ➔ **3**



ARTICLE

Samaneh Aboutalebi
Tehran Times journalist

Hatamikia's "Exodus", a political statement

Prominent director Ebrahim Hatamikia's latest movie "Exodus" is not only a film but also a political statement about President Hassan Rouhani's government.

The film tells the story of Rahmat Bakhshi, a war veteran and his fellow hard-working cotton farmers that lose all their crops after their farms are inadvertently inundated with salt water from a local dam.

They file a complaint with the relevant officials, but they ignore the issue. Consequently, Rahmat decides to take their complaint to the president in the capital. All the other farmers accompany him on a long tractor trip towards the capital.

"Exodus" is a road movie reminding the audience of the classic western movies. Long shots of the cotton and corn farms and close-ups of the main character with his very believable, well-done makeup are eye-catching. The scenes created using computer graphic technology are also acceptable.

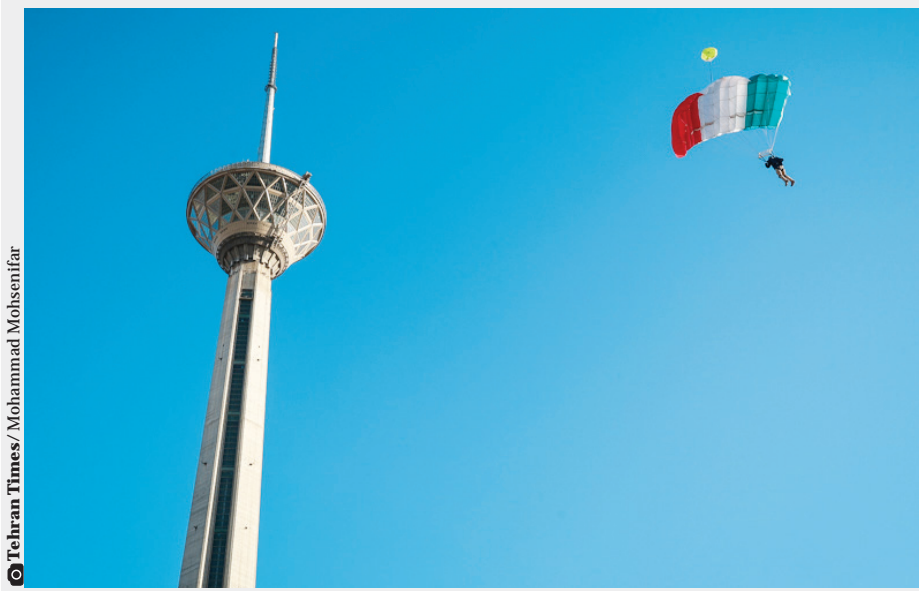
Everything seems fine, but the problem starts when Hatamikia, also the writer of the film script, tries to turn the film into a tribute to express his political views.

The story of some older people who set out on a trip to do something big is really entertaining and interesting, but when they start expressing political views, the plot gets twisted.

Some of the dialogue, which refers to political challenges the Iranian government is facing these days, does not seem to fit with the characters. As a result, it comes to mind that the film is pointing an accusing finger at the current Iranian government.

Although the film focuses on a courageous protest about people's rights, its ending seems conservative.

Veteran actor Faramarz Qaribian portrays Rahmat gracefully, making the audience believe the character's miserable life, which fuels his deep anger, is only visible in his eyes. ➔ **12**



© Tehran Times/ Mohammad Mohsenifar

Parachutists jump from Milad Tower

TEHRAN — A group of parachutists jumped from the Tehran's 435-meter Milad Tower on Friday to mark the 41st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

They displayed their skills and readiness by parachuting from the iconic tower.

Milad Tower is the sixth-tallest tower and the 24th-tallest freestanding structure in the world.

Structural reform of budget feature at Rouhani-Larijani-Raeisi meeting

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** – The Supreme Council of Economic Coordination held a meeting on Saturday at the presence of President Hassan Rouhani, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani and Judiciary Chief Hojjatoleslam Ebrahim Raeisi. A structural reform of the budget was the main subject of the session. Decisions were also made for coordinating the three branches to optimize monitoring executive bodies in a way that lead to more efficiency.



The top officials also called on the people to attend the Bahman 22 rallies (Feb. 11) marking anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. They said participation in the rallies is symbol of “national unity and integrity” against the United States’ economic war.

Zarif meets UN special envoy for Syria

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** – Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif met on Saturday with UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen in Tehran. Zarif said that the Syrian crisis can only be solved politically. The foreign minister reiterated Tehran’s long-held policy and continuous efforts to settle the Syrian conflict in accordance with Syria’s sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. Pedersen shared his views about the political processes in Syria. The officials discussed the latest developments in Syria.

Iran, Hungary vow to expand mutual cooperation

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran’s newly-appointed ambassador to Hungary Hamid Reza Nafez Arefi on Friday submitted his credentials to Hungarian President Janos Ader.

Arefi and Ader also exchanged views over mutual cooperation in various fields, including diplomatic, scientific, academic and cultural relations.

Arefi had served as the director general of the Foreign Ministry media department.

Iran and Hungary enjoy a very long record of good relations and the two countries have had good political, economic, cultural and scientific ties after the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

U.S. senators urge Twitter to ban Iran’s Leader, FM

A group of U.S. Republican senators have called on Twitter to suspend the accounts of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, Press TV reported.

In a letter sent to Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, senators Ted Cruz of Texas, Marco Rubio of Florida, Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee threatened that the company would be subject to U.S. sanctions law if it did not end its service to Iranian officials.

They argued that allowing Iran’s Leader, and top diplomat to hold Twitter accounts violates an executive order by U.S. President Donald Trump that prohibits Americans from providing goods and services to the Iranian statesmen.

“It is a sanctionable offense for ‘any person’ to have provided ... technological support for, or goods or services to persons designated pursuant to that EO (executive order),” the senators wrote.

Twitter, they added, is aware of the accounts held by Ayatollah Khamenei and Zarif, and of their links to the Iranian government, but “continues to provide internet-based communications services.”

On June 24, 2019, Trump signed the executive order imposing sanctions on Iran’s Leader and top commanders of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), saying the measure denies them “access to key financial resources and support.”

One week later, the U.S. Treasury Department blacklisted Zarif — which it described as Iran’s “primary spokesperson around the world”.

“While the First Amendment protects the free speech rights of Americans ... the Ayatollah [Khamenei] enjoys zero protection from the United States Bill of Rights,” the senators wrote. “The Ayatollah and any American companies providing him assistance are entirely subject to U.S. sanctions laws.”

They claimed that an exception for internet-based communications services created in 2014 by the administration of then U.S. president Barack Obama would not apply when the person receiving the service has been designated to a special list kept by the Treasury, as is the case for Ayatollah Khamenei and Zarif.

The letter was also shared with Trump, U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Attorney General William Barr and David Anderson, the attorney for the Northern District of California, where Twitter’s headquarters are located.

After Trump took office in 2017, Washington ramped up its efforts to target the Islamic Republic.

The so-called “maximum pressure” campaign has seen the U.S. leaving a multi-party nuclear agreement with Iran in May 2018 and reinstating the nuclear-related sanctions that the deal had lifted.

As part of the campaign, the U.S. State Department has called on social media companies to block the accounts of Iranian government leaders.

In July 2019, Twitter suspended the accounts of several Iranian state media outlets.

Back in 2018, the American microblogging and social networking service had said it would not remove accounts of the world leaders.

“Blocking a world leader from Twitter or removing their controversial Tweets would hide important information people should be able to see and debate,” Twitter had written in a blog post.

“It would also not silence that leader, but it would certainly hamper necessary discussion around their words and actions.”

Iran, UN hold talks over crisis in northwestern Syria

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — A senior official at the Iranian Foreign Ministry and the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria conferred on Saturday over the latest developments in the war-hit Syria, especially on the crisis in Idlib and Aleppo provinces.

In the meeting, Ali Asghar Khaji, the senior aide of the Iranian foreign minister for special political affairs, and Geir O. Pedersen conferred on the most important events in the war-torn country, including recent bloody conflict in Idlib, constitution committee, the working group for exchange of detainees and kidnapped people, the issue of displaced people and other humanitarian issue.

Possibility of expansion of cooperation between Iran and the UN to settle the Syria crisis was also discussed in the meeting.

Khaji also pointed to the importance of campaign against terrorism and the necessity of implementing the Sochi agreement, saying, “Iran is well prepared to settle conflict between Syria and Turkey and prevent use of civilians as the human shield by any warring sides.”

Both officials said resorting to Syrian-Syrian dialogue and diplomatic path are the best ways to put an immediate end to the long-running conflict in the country.

Pedersen, who has traveled to Iran within the framework of consultation with the re-



gional countries, appreciated Iran’s efforts to keep the Syrian constitution committee’s activities.

On Thursday, Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations said that his country, which is one of the guarantors of the Astana group, is ready to do its best to settle the conflicts between Turkey and Syria in Idlib province.

“Iran is ready to do its best to settle differences between Damascus and Ankara over developments in Idlib province,” Majid Takht-Ravanchi said as he pointed to Iran’s unwavering determination in campaign against terrorism.

Iran must become powerful to prevent war: Leader

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** – To prevent war against itself, Iran must increase its military power, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution suggested on Saturday, noting that being militarily vulnerable will prompt the enemy to take action against the country.

“In order to prevent war and in order to put an end to threats we must become powerful,” Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told a number of Air Force officers on the occasion of Air Force Day.

The Leader went on to say, “We are not seeking to threaten any country or nation, rather we are after protecting the country’s security and preventing threats.”

February 8 is known as the Air Force Day in Iran. It dates back to Feb. 8, 1979 when a large number of the Air Force’s staff managed

to stage a unified parade in front of the founder of the Islamic Republic Imam Khomeini to voice their support for the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Khamenei also said reliance on domestic capacities and turning threats into opportunities are the chief reasons for the successes of the Air Force.

“In addition to repairing and maintenance of aircrafts, the Air Force has successfully planned and manufactured fighter jets in spite of the U.S. sanctions,” the Leader stated.

■ **‘Reliance on oil revenues is main cause of Iran’s problems’**

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei said, “If the officials act wisely, we can utilize the sanctions (imposed on the country as an opportunity) to rid the country’s economy from reliance on oil revenues which are the root cause of many problems.”

Borrell says Europe must ensure Iran benefits from nuclear deal

By staff and agency

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has said that Europe must ensure Iran’s benefits from the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, if it wants the deal to survive.

“If we want the Iran nuclear deal to survive, we need to ensure that Iran benefits if it returns to full compliance,” he wrote in an article in the Project Syndicate published on Saturday.

Borrell visited Iran on Monday, Feb. 3. He held talks with Foreign Minister Zarif, President Rouhani and Parliament speaker Ali Larijani.

Presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi said on Wednesday that European Union knows that there is no deal better than the nuclear agreement.

Vaezi also predicted that the EU will not refer Iran’s case to the United Nations Security Council.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting, he also called Borrell’s visit to Iran “very good”.

“The first point that Mr. Borrell raised was that he admitted that the Europeans failed to remain committed to their obligations after the United States’ withdrawal from the JCPOA,” Vaezi said.

The presidential chief of staff added, “The second point he raised was that Europe seeks to have good relations with Iran in various areas. He said efforts will be made to keep the JCPOA and there is no deal better than it.”

Borrell was notified in January by Paris, London and



Berlin that they had triggered the dispute mechanism.

“All these remarks mean what they (Europeans) have said about the dispute mechanism will not be practical,”

“If we want the Iran nuclear deal to survive, we need to ensure that Iran benefits if it returns to full compliance.”

Iraqi officials say ISIS, not Iran, behind rocket attack that Trump used to justify Soleimani assassination

By staff and agency

In a “bombshell” revelation that calls into question one of the Trump administration’s stated justifications for assassinating Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani—a move that nearly sparked a region-wide military conflict—Iraqi intelligence officials told the New York Times that they believe ISIS, not an Iran-linked popular forces, was likely responsible for the Dec. 27 rocket attack that killed an American contractor at an air base near Kirkuk, Iraq, Common Dreams reported on Friday.

The Times reported Thursday that “Iraqi military and intelligence officials have raised doubts about who fired the rockets.”

“All the indications are that it was Daesh,” Brigadier General Ahmed Adnan, the Iraqi

chief of intelligence for the federal police at the K-1 air base, told the Times, using the Arabic acronym for ISIS. “We know Daesh’s movements.”

The U.S. responded to the rocket attack days later with deadly airstrikes on Khataib Hezbollah targets in Iraq and Syria, setting off a dangerous escalatory spiral that brought Iran and the U.S. to the brink of war.

The U.S. assassinated Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani on January 3 with a drone strike in Baghdad ordered by President Donald Trump.

Following the assassination, which was widely condemned as an act of war, the U.S. Department of Defense issued a statement claiming without evidence that Soleimani

“orchestrated attacks on coalition bases in Iraq over the last several months—including the attack on December 27th—culminating in the death and wounding of additional American and Iraqi personnel.”

But Iraqi officials told the Times that “based on circumstantial evidence and long experience in the area where the attack took place,” there is good reason to be skeptical about U.S. claims that Khataib Hezbollah was behind it.

In response to the Times report, Jamal Abdi, president of the National Iranian American Council, tweeted: “Al-Qaeda attacked the U.S. on 9/11 and we went to war with Iraq. If this report is true, ISIS attacked the U.S. and we nearly went to

Aviv regime.

“Turkish forces, in a close collaboration and exposed concurrence and under the cover of the Israeli aggression, infringing upon Syrian borders and were deployed in areas stretching between the towns of Binnish, Ma’arrat Misrin and Taftanaz. Such a step affirms the common interests of Turkish and Israeli regimes regarding the protection of terrorists, particularly Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly known as al-Nusra Front), and to impede the advancement of the Syrian army in Idlib and Aleppo, and to prevent the complete defeat of their proxies in Syria,” an unnamed source at the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates said in a statement carried by Syria’s official news agency SANA.

The ministry official added that both the Turkish military deployment and the Israeli airstrikes in the early hours of Thursday were a blatant violation of the Syrian sovereignty and international law, and clearly prove to the entire world the parties that support, sponsor and protect terrorism in Syria.

The development took place shortly after Syrian air defense forces intercepted several missiles launched from the occupied Golan Heights and southern Lebanon targeting the al-Kiswa area, Marj al-Sultan, Baghdad Bridge and South of Izra’ around the capital, Damascus.

the 41st anniversary of the February 8 event and presented a report on the activities and programs considered by the force under his command in various sectors.

“We are ready, through strong determination and trust in God” to take any necessary step in every field to “defend the interests of the great Iranian nation in the face of arrogant enemies,” the Air Force commander stated.

Nasirzdeh went on to say that reinvigoration of the Air Force’s combat power, manufacturing spare parts, upgrading the staff’s capabilities, planning and manufacturing drones, producing smart ammunition, repairing the aircrafts’ engines, conducting relief and rescue operation in the flood-hit regions and operationalizing aerial ambulance are among the activities and achievements of the Air Force.

Vaezi noted.

Borrell has said that the EU will extend indefinitely the time limit to resolve disputes in the nuclear deal to avoid having to go to the UN Security Council or triggering new sanctions.

“We are in agreement not to go directly to a strict time limit which would oblige (us) to go to the Security Council,” Reuters quoted him as saying during a visit to Tehran.

In his remarks, broadcast on Tuesday, he said, “The willingness is not to start a process that goes to the end of JCPOA, but to keep it alive.”

Borrell said on January 24 that he had extended the time available to discuss ways to save the nuclear deal.

“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.

In the meeting with Borrell in Tehran, President Rouhani criticized the EU for failing to honor its commitments after the U.S. quit the deal and reinstituted sanctions on Iran.

However, Rouhani said, “The Islamic Republic of Iran is still ready to cooperate with the European Union for resolving issues, and at any time that the other side (EU) fully observes its commitments Iran will also return to its commitments.”

In May 2019 Iran started to reduce its commitments to the JCPOA at bi-monthly intervals in response to the abrogation of the pact by the U.S. coupled with the European Union’s inaction to shield Iran’s economy from sanctions.

war with Iran.”

U.S. officials insisted to the Times that they have “solid evidence” showing that Khataib Hezbollah carried out the attack, but they have not released any of this evidence to the public or to Iraqi officials.

“We have requested the American side to share with us any information, any evidence, but they have not sent us any information,” Lt. Gen. Muhammad al-Bayati, chief of staff for former Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, told the Times.

Ilan Goldenberg, Middle East security director at the Center for a New American Security think tank, tweeted that the U.S. Congress “must ask questions about this and get the intel.”

Iranian families lost members in terror fight to sue U.S. leaders

1 → Mohammadreza Mousavifard, head of the Novin Edalat law firm, told the same press conference that his firm has received numerous requests from families to file complaint against some U.S. officials because of their role in the establishing the ISIL terrorist group.

After the assassination of General Soleimani by the U.S. in Baghdad on Jan. 3, these requests have increased, he said, adding that right now, 48 families have lodged complaints.

“According to international law, we couldn’t litigate against the U.S. administration, so we decided to file a lawsuit against American officials and Donald Trump on top,” he said.

The U.S. army assassinated General Soleimani as he was visiting Baghdad to meet former Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi.

Mousavifard said international regulations clearly state that no one is allowed to harm an individual who is an official

guest of another country, pointing to viewpoints of various lawyers across the world who have condemned the U.S. act as a violation of international law, including remarks by Benjamin B. Ferencz, a former lawyer and Nuremberg war crimes prosecutor.

“We will try to bring U.S. officials to trial in a competent court and hope that head of the Judiciary would facilitate the process,” Mousavifard added.

Living standards in Iran 60 percent higher than pre-Revolution era, says economist

1→ We know from survey data that in 1972 only 6 percent of Iranian families owned a car, compared to 48% today. And with more than half the population living in rural areas before the Revolution, the idea of everyone travelling abroad once a year seems very silly.

But more systematic comparisons are available. To do this, we need to add up all the value of all the goods and services that the average Iranian consumes. This is what GDP accounting does. However, this accounting is complicated by the fact that prices and qualities of goods and services change over time. So, it is critical to correct for inflation, which is done routinely, and to adjust for improvement in quality, which is done less often. For a country like Iran, it is also important to adjust for differences in the cost of living. Vast subsidies in Iran, especially to energy, after the Revolution do not get counted properly in the accounting of GDP. Subsidies cause Iranian prices to be much lower than in other countries. Most services, such as housing and health, also cost less in Iran than in, say the U.S., because they are not tradable.

For these reasons, the value added generated by sectors whose products are priced lower than in the U.S. underestimate the level of consumption, and therefore the standard of living, in Iran relative to the U.S. This is why economists do not use the market exchange rate to compare total value added (the GDP) in different countries. Instead, they use exchange rates that equalize the cost of a standard basket of goods. This is called the Purchasing Power Parity exchange rate, which several international organizations compute for all countries, including Iran. Unfortunately, many researchers who work on living standards and poverty in Iran do not use PPP rates and obtain very negative pictures of economic growth in post-Revolution Iran. As I have shown in my blog and in other writings (read “The Islamic Revolution at 40” and “Iran’s economy 40 years after the Islamic Revolution”), living standards in Iran are now about 60 percent higher than in the 1970s. Using the wrong metrics, it has been claimed in a BBC Persian article to be 30 percent lower!

■ You mentioned how some Iranians living abroad compare the living standards between pre- and post-Revolution eras. The question is how one’s socio-economic class affects the way he/she judges this issue.

A: Not easy to answer. Many educated people can overcome their class background and look at the world more objectively.

■ Now, what are the wrong tools usually used, either intentionally or unknowingly, to figure out whether Iranians are now poorer or wealthier?

A: Using constant price series without accounting for the fact that subsidies have grown over time is one source of errors people make in GDP comparisons. There are also more intentional use of indicators, like a BBC Persian report that showed how much gold a teacher can buy before and after the Revolution (read my analysis of this claim: “The gold standard to measure change in household welfare in Iran”), and another one claiming that the minimum wage before the Revolution could buy 7 times as much meat as today (read my comment: “Fact checking the meat consumption of Iranians”). These comparisons like to claim that they offer more accurate measures of individual welfare than GDP per capita, but they fail to keep the standard of accuracy in such comparisons. For example, in the gold comparison of wages, they ignore the fact that gold prices have increased globally, and a similar comparison would suggest, incorrectly, that U.S. teacher wages are also much lower than they were in the 1970s.

■ How would you evaluate the impact of economic and financial sanctions on Iran’s economy and the population’s living standards?

A: It is clear in my view from the GDP per capita series in PPP, which show Iran’s living standard rising until 2011 and then it is stagnant, as shown in the graph in the piece referenced earlier. I do not know of a better explanation for the sudden change in performance of Iran’s economy than sanctions. All other issues that people raise – mismanagement, corruption, etc. – existed before and after. I am not denying that these other problems exist, but sanctions is the most obvious explanation.

■ Now, let’s move on to the economic policy. What policies were adopted during the Shah’s era and how did they impact poverty?

A: There was very little in terms of policy or indeed public attention to poverty before the Revolution. Talk of poverty was the exclusive domain of the opposition to the Shah. The



“There was very little in terms of policy or indeed public attention to poverty before the Revolution ... Despite rapid economic growth in the 1960s, by 1971 the poverty rate was quite high, estimated at 54% according to an unpublished study by Ginneken (1980),” said Salehi-Isfahani.

focus was on economic growth, which almost always reduces poverty. Poverty must have fallen significantly in the 15 years before the Revolution, because economic growth was robust. Since poverty reduction was not the target of policy, there was very little written about it. There were one or two papers that had published results on income inequality but none on poverty. Despite rapid economic growth in the 1960s, by 1971 the poverty rate was quite high, estimated at 54% according to an unpublished study by Ginneken (1980). The oil price increase reduced this rate further to 28% in 1975. You can see the trend in poverty before and after the Revolution in my article “Iran’s economy 40 years after the Islamic Revolution”.

Before the Revolution, public policy was urban biased. Rural areas grew but public investment was mainly directed toward urban areas. As a result, the main source of poverty and income inequality, which was the rural-urban gap, remained unchanged. **■** What about the policies adopted after the Revolution?

A: After the Revolution, poverty reduction became a focus of state policy. Chief

among the policies was the shift in public investment toward rural areas, mainly under the leadership of the Jihad-e Sazandegi (Construction Jihad). Extension of roads and the electricity network, followed by schools and health clinics, narrowed the rural-urban gap in income and contributed to improved poverty and inequality.

Later on, in the 2010, the introduction of cash transfers further reduced poverty, but this reduction was pure redistribution and was in contrast to the policy of rural investment which reduced poverty through economic growth and without much redistribution.

Later on, after 2013, inflation sharply reduced the real value of cash transfers and poverty climbed back on, from less than 10 percent (with \$5.5 PPP) to about 15% today. The new policy of increased cash transfers will for a while reduce poverty, but without economic growth and more employment it is hard to be very optimistic about long term improvement in the welfare of the lower income families.

■ What does the Human Development Index (HDI) tell us about how things have changed for the Iranian people in the past forty years?

A: It shows that Iran has done well in terms of health and education. Iran’s HDI was slightly above that of Turkey until a few years ago, despite the fact that Iran’s per capita income is 20% lower. Unfortunately, in 2019, with sanctions taking their toll, we fell a few places below Turkey.

The professor says Iran’s Human Development Index was slightly above that of Turkey despite the fact that Iran’s per capita income is 20% lower, until U.S. sanctions kicked in a few years ago.

Regional situation entails Iran-Russia cooperation: diplomat

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran’s new ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali, said on Saturday that regional situation necessitates continuation of Iran-Russia cooperation.

During a meeting with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin, Jalali said that Iran is determined to expand relations with Russia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that Iran and Russia are two important and powerful players in the fight against international terrorism.

Putin also said Tehran-Moscow cooperation will continue.

Putin made the remarks while receiving Ambassador Jalali’s credentials.

■ ‘Russia firm to continue cooperation within format of Astana talks’

For his part, Vershinin said that Russia is firm to continue cooperation with Iran and Turkey within the format of the Astana talks.



In line with their security cooperation, Iran, Turkey and Russia - three power brokers in Syria - launched the Astana peace talks on the Syrian crisis. The talks were launched in January 2017 with the aim of putting an end

to the Syrian conflict.

Kazakhstan has hosted multiple rounds of talks on Syria since January 2017 most of which involved delegations from the Syrian government and opposition.

Putin said in August that Iran-Turkey-Russia talks have been “most effective” in tackling crisis in Syria.

■ ‘Assassination of Gen. Soleimani was a violation of international law’

Vershinin also said that the assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani was a “heinous action” and violation of international law.

“We have strongly condemned this action in our contacts and meetings,” he said.

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

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a phone conversation in January that Soleimani’s assassination violates international law.

Basij to unveil strategic plan in coming days: commander

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Iran’s Basij (mobilization) Force Commander Brigadier General Gholam Reza Soleimani said it plans to unveil a strategic plan in the coming days.

Speaking to Tasnim in the central city of Kashan on Saturday, Brigadier General Soleimani said the Basij Force has prepared “a strategic document” that has envisaged future plans for the next 10 years of the

organization.

The document is based on Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei’s statement on “the second phase of the revolution”, he said.

The commander went on to say that the strategic plan will be unveiled on Wednesday.

In February 2019, Ayatollah Khamenei issued a statement to explicate the achieve-

ments of the Islamic Revolution in the past four decades and outline the “second phase of the revolution” and its necessities.

In the major and strategic statement released on February 13 on the occasion of the beginning of the fifth decade of the Islamic Revolution, the Leader thanked the Iranian nation for magnificent presence in the countrywide demonstrations in celebration of the

40th anniversary of victory of the revolution.

In the statement, addressing the younger generation, the Leader explicated the glorious achievements of the Islamic Republic over the past forty years, highlighted the realistic hope for the future and the role of the youth in making great strides towards the aspirations, and outlined the necessary elements for such a great move in 7 chapters.

1→ By blaming Iraqi security forces for the incidents in Najaf, the Americans are trying to divert public opinion from the activities of infiltrators in Iraq. These are the same elements that the religious authority asked for their identification and punishment.

The abuse of the bloody riot by the U.S. did not go unanswered. The First Deputy Speaker of the Council of Representatives Hassan Karim al-Kaabi decisively responded, “Leave Iraq’s affairs on Iraqis and take full measures to withdraw your troops from the country as soon as possible.”

Al-Kaabi also said, “We told you earlier not to interfere in Iraqi affairs because the Iraqi people are well aware of the extent of your plots and plans and know that you do not want their good”. He called for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and said, “The U.S. must make serious and practical moves to pull out its troops from Iraq’s territory”.

In any case, the infiltrators have obviously stepped up their efforts to create insecurity and chaos in Iraq, while enjoying the full support of American terrorist leaders. In the meantime, the formation of a new Iraqi government

as fast as possible could be a prelude to the gradual return of peace to various parts of the country, as the religious authority has emphasized.

Undoubtedly, the religious authority’s emphasis on the need for formation of a new cabinet is not for no reason, as it considers the establishment of political stability in the country as a prerequisite for security and stability.

Carrying out this important job will have a significant impact on foiling U.S. plots against the Iraqi government and nation, especially as the Americans are clinging to anything to remain illegally in the country.

Ruhollah Zam to be tried in coming days: Judiciary

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN**— The spokesman for Iran’s Judiciary says the trial of Ruhollah Zam, the operator behind Amad News website and Telegram channel, will be held in the coming days.

Gholam-Hossein Esmaili said on Saturday that Zam’s trial will be held within the framework of the country’s laws and regulations, Tasnim reported, citing IIRB news.



“In addition to the main defendant in the case, five other people have been arrested and some others have been summoned to the court and their cases are under investigation,” he said.

Esmaili said the case of Zam will be dealt with separately from the other defendants.

In October 2019, the IRGC announced that Zam had been arrested during a complicated intelligence operation.

Zam launched Amad News in 2015. The channel frequently posted fake news stories and called for violence with the aim of overthrowing the Islamic Republic system.

During the protest rallies in December 2018, he urged the people to take arms against the government.

In its statement, the IRGC said it lured Zam into Iran using “clever, multidimensional and innovative tricks”, which even deceived foreign intelligence agencies.

The IRGC also said the French intelligence service was behind Zam’s activities, which were also backed by the U.S. and the Zionist regime’s spy services.

The Guards posted the news of his arrest on Zam’s Telegram channel with a following of over a million users, effectively taking over the administration of the popular channel.

It also posted a photo of Zam in custody, under which it was written: “This is just the beginning”.

Back in December 2017, Telegram blocked the channel of Amad News for encouraging people to violence after a request by Iranian Minister of Communications and Information Technology Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi.

However, Zam resumed his activities by launching a new channel called Seday-e Mardom, which is translated as “voice of the people”.

Iran, Pakistan confer on broadening defense ties

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN**— Iranian ambassador to Islamabad Mohammad Ali Hosseini and Pakistani Minister for Defense Production Zubaida Jalal Khan exchanged views on Saturday over promoting defense-related ties between the two “friendly” nations.



Expansion of border cooperation, exchanging high-ranking delegations and reinvigoration of bilateral economic relations were among issues discussed by Hosseini and Jalal Khan.

The two officials, exclusively, held talks over promotion of defense relations during the meeting.

Jalal Khan, in the meeting, laid emphasis on his country’s adherence to commonalities between Iran and Pakistan and Islamabad’s commitment to promote all-ties with Iran.

Hosseini, over the recent days, has held different meetings with Pakistani officials including the country’s interior minister and chief of Armed Forces Staff to cement relations between the two nations.

In early January, the 23rd border meeting of Iran and Pakistan kicked off in Quetta, the capital of Pakistani province of Baluchistan.

Mohammad Hadi Marashi, the deputy governor of Iran’s Sistan-Baluchestan province for security affairs, led the Iranian delegation. The Pakistani delegation was also chaired by Feizl Asqar, Baluchistan province’s secretary general.

The Iranian and Pakistan officials, who had attended the three-day meeting, exchanged views over various issues, including expansion of trade ties, restoration of sustainable security to the common borders, joint campaign against terrorism, countering illegal crossing at borders, and anti-drug trafficking cooperation.

The 20th version of the meeting was held in the port city of Chabahar, the 21st in the Pakistani port city of Gwadar, and the 22nd one in Zahedan in southeastern Iran.

Also in January, in a meeting in Islamabad, Iran’s Navy chief and his Pakistani counterpart discussed new avenues to expand naval cooperation.

The report was released by Rear Admiral Mohammad Arshid Javed, the spokesman for the Pakistani Navy.

It said Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi and Vice Admiral Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abbasi, who is currently serving as the chief of the Naval Staff of Pakistan’s Navy, vowed to bolster cooperation between their forces.

“The Iranian and Pakistani Navy commanders reviewed mutual existing cooperation and exchanged views over other intended issues,” the report added.

Najaf bloody riot instigated by infiltrators

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	452842.3
IFX	5747.00

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	45,972 rials
GBP	54,150 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$54.47/b
WTI	\$50.32/b
OPEC Basket	\$55.72/b
Gold	\$1,572.35/oz
Silver	\$17.77/oz
Platinum	\$971.25/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Steel products output rises 97% in 10 months on year

1 → The country exported 5,884 million tons of steel during the mentioned time span, which was 25 percent higher than the figure of the same period of time in the past year, IRNA reported on Friday. Exports made by the major producers rose 93 percent to hit 674,873 tons during the calendar month of Dey. Iran has defined 16 development projects in the steel sector which are aimed to boost the country's output of steel products by 17.3 million tons in a course of five years.



These projects are for constructing production units each with the capacity of 600,000 tons, while some other projects have been also defined to set up some units with under 500,000-ton capacity that together with the 600,000-ton capacity units will add 19.1 million tons to the country's annual steel products output. Iran's annual steel production is planned to reach 45 million tons by the Iranian calendar year 1400 (March 2021-March 2022).

The country's annual crude steel production is planned to rise to 30 million tons in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 19, 2020) from 25 million tons in the past year. Last month, the World Steel Association (WSA) announced that Iran's crude steel production increased by 30 percent in 2019 while the average global growth in this sector stood at 3.5 percent. Based on the WSA report, Iran produced 31.9 million tons of the mentioned commodity during 2019 compared to the last year's nearly 24 million tons.

Value of trades at IME reaches \$800m in a week

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — During the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) witnessed the trade of 622,349 tons of commodities valued at \$880 million, the Public Relations and International Affairs Department of IME reported.

The report said that the volume of trade at this market rose 31 percent on a weekly basis.

Last week, on the domestic and export metal and mineral trading floor of IME, 307,655 tons of various products worth \$540 million were traded, the same report conformed.

On this trading floor, 297,993 tons of steel, 5,600 tons of copper, 3,930 tons of aluminum, 120 tons of molybdenum concentrates, 12 tons of precious metal concentrates as well as 10 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

The report declares that on domestic and export oil and petrochemical trading floors of IME, 314,694 tons of different commodities with the total value of \$355 million were traded.

On this trading floor, 87,122 tons of bitumen, 103,000 tons of VB feed stock, 67,048 tons of polymer products, 27,000 tons of lube cut oil, 25,809 tons of chemical products, 506 tons of base oil, 2,000 tons of slaps waxes, 1,450 tons of insulation, as well as 1,635 tons of sulfur were traded.

As previously announced by IME's International Affairs and Public Relations Department, 2.874 million tons of commodities valued at \$3.397 billion were traded at this exchange market in January.

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

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

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

On this trading floor 1.09 million tons of steel, 17,750 tons of copper, 640 tons of molybdenum concentrates, 60 tons of precious metals concentrates, 39,960 tons of zinc, 20,940 tons of aluminum, 10 tons of lead ingot, as well as 87 kg of gold bullion were traded by customers.

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

Institutionalization seriously pursued in Iran's stock market

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN — Stock market in Iran has been developing more and more in recent years and the space of its expansion has been outstandingly huge over the past months as it's been attracting many investors luring them away from the parallel markets of gold, forex, and real estate.

Different factors have contributed to the recent advances in the stock market, some initiated by the market itself and some triggered by the external elements.

Of the internal improving factors, it could be referred to applying new financial instruments in the four major stock markets of the country including Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), and Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX).

And among the external factors, instability in the previously mentioned parallel markets can be named as the most important one.

While those factors have played significant role in the recent expansion and high performance of the stock market in Iran, promoting the culture of investment making in this market has been vigorously provoking the investors.

And while the stock market is maturing rapidly in the country, Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) is seriously pursuing institutionalization of investment making in this market.

It is in fact a prioritized program of the organization, as several times emphasized by its officials.

Stressing the significance of institutionalization in the stock market, SEO Head Shapour Mohammadi says the organization is considering itself committed to make more and more strides in this field.

"We have various programs in this due, among them holding different exhibitions and competitions can be mentioned", the official has recently stated while underscoring the organization's fruitful relation with the media to materialize this target.

Also, Ali Sahraei, the head of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), says that this exchange market has managed to attract a huge number of investors over the past ten years through creating necessary infrastructure while proper institutionalization.

"As the major stock market in the country, TSE has a national and regional approach toward promoting the financial knowledge of the people for leading the liquidity toward economic development of the country and in



this due it considers institutionalization in the stock market one of its social responsibilities", the official said on Thursday.

"Promoting the culture of investment making in the stock market is seriously followed up and evaluated at TSE, and we are now witnessing the prominent results of institutionalization and offering various trainings to the investors at this market since the four past years", Sahraei further highlighted.

So, institutionalization, now a principal strategy in the Iranian stock market, is on the agenda and several events are contributing to this objective, some of them have been previously initiated and some initiatives are new. Three major contributing events in this due come as follows.

FINEX

While Iran's International Exhibition of Exchange, Bank and Insurance (known as FINEX) plays an important role in elevating the financial status of the country, holding this exhibition is also one of the major measures to promote culture of investment making in the stock market.

During the last edition of the exhibition (FINEX 2019), which was held in April, 2019, SEO head said this exhibition's performance is unique in terms of institutionalization in the stock market.

"We hold FINEX every year as an important event playing some great part in institutionalization, and in this year's edition of the exhibit we are specifically following up the issue of training and transferring knowledge to the investors," Shapour Mohammadi

reiterated.

"Through this financial exhibition the people can also indirectly learn how to trade stock with making lower risks", he further noted.

League of Stock Market Stars

Aiming at promotion of stock science and development of entrepreneurship in the country, Securities and Exchange Organization held the first round of League of Stock Market Stars (a one-month competition between 10 teams from renowned universities of Tehran) in 2017.

The second round of the league was participated by 34 teams from 34 universities of the country competing in a two-month contest in 2018.

And the third round, held in 2019, was attended by 60 teams from Iranian universities and five teams from the universities of some other countries.

This competition is targeted at familiarizing the society with the stock market and to test the practical knowledge of business and finance students, in a bid to elevate the financial knowledge in the society.

It is a great help to institutionalize investment making in the stock market, according to the SEO head.

Algorithmic Trading Competition

Algorithmic Trading Competition is another event helping promotion of investment making culture in the Iranian stock market.

Securities Information Dissemination and Services Company (SIDSCO) has so far held two rounds of the competition which is aimed at helping the country's stock market attain

the global standards, more contribution of domestic elites in the information technology and financial sectors to this market, and elevating knowledge of those active in the stock market.

In the second round of the competition, which kicked off in mid-January and will wrap up at the end of the current Iranian calendar month of Bahman (February 19), 27 teams are competing in three categories of fixed income securities, stocks, and problem solving challenge.

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

Institutionalization a necessity to preserve current development

It seems that stock market is now lagging the parallel markets of foreign currency, gold, and real estate behind in the country.

TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange, closed at an all-time high of 302,103 points at the end of the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (September 22, 2019), and it has been experiencing more record highs in the second half as well.

The index also witnessed its highest ever weekly rise in the Iranian calendar week ended on January 17, as it rose 45,638 points to 399,445.

The other stock markets of the country are also seeing major advances while attracting more investors.

According to the TSE head, as there is downturn in the other markets of the country the stock market is being highly welcomed by the investors during the present Iranian year.

Sahraei also believes that as some markets like real estate market requires large amount of investment that many people cannot afford, stock market is a good option for the micro investors or for those who want to make short-term investment making.

So, from many aspects, it could be said that the stock market has come to the fore, spurring more and more investors.

Obviously, to preserve its development trend, and even accelerate it, this market is required to take necessary steps, among them "Institutionalization" comes under the spotlight. Promoting culture and knowledge of investment making is in fact a driving factor in this market.

And as the capital market experts opine, now that many investors are being attracted to the stock market, through laying the necessary ground for more training and institutionalizing, a bright future can be expected for this market.

TPO hosts specialized desk on promoting cable, wire industry

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Director General of Industrial and Mining Products Office at Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) of Iran said the organization hosted a specialized desk for promotion of cable and wire industry, TPO portal reported.

According to Mir-Aboutaleb Badri, the meeting was aimed to assess the industry's overall condition that is the production, exports, imports and other issues related to the wire and cable industry.

Problems regarding the supply of raw materials, high production costs compared to competitors, high customs fees, lack of export insurance coverage and export guarantee fund in some countries (Syria and Iraq), high shipping prices and lack of transfers by shipping companies under the U.S. sanctions, were some of the issues discussed at the meeting, the official said.

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

Back in August 2019, Deputy Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Hossein



Modares Khiabani said the industry ministry has it on the agenda to increase the value of non-oil exports to Iran's 15 neighbors up to \$50 billion.

In late January, the official announced that TPO is tasked to establish specialized export terminals in certain provinces to facilitate the exports of some commodities.

Iran shares border with fifteen countries, namely the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, Oman, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kuwait, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.

Based on the data published by TPO, the value of trade with the neighboring countries stood at over \$36.5 billion in the past Iranian calendar year.

Annual trade between Iran, U.S. down 85% in 2019

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The value of trade between Iran and the U.S. fell to \$74.5 million in 2019, 85 percent less than the figure for the previous year, Tasnim news agency reported on Saturday citing the latest statistics released by the American Statistical Association (ASA).

The trade between the two nations had reached \$495.7 million in 2018, rising from \$199 million in 2017.

The figure stood at \$258 million in 2016. In 2019, Iran imported \$73.1 million worth of commodities from the U.S., a decrease of 83 percent from \$425.8 million in 2018.

The country exported \$1.4 million of goods to the U.S. in the past year, with a 98-percent fall from \$69.9 million in its preceding year.



Iran was ranked 165th among U.S. export destinations in 2019 and 212th among the country's top import sources.

In 2018, the value of trade between the two countries increased by 155 percent compared to 2017, since the re-imposition of the U.S. sanctions on Iran, however, it has been falling drastically.

TEDPIX surpasses 452,000 points on Saturday

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), rose 6,948 points to 452,482 on Saturday, IRNA reported.

Over 9.968 billion securities worth 48.193 trillion rials (about \$1.14 billion) were traded at TSE in the first day of the current Iranian calendar week.

The first market's index climbed 5,242 points and the second market's index jumped 13,266 points on Saturday, the same report confirmed.

TEDPIX rose four percent in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

The index ended 18,775 points higher at 445,894 on Wednesday (the last working day of the week).

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

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

Tehran Stock Exchange has been ranked as the second best performer among the members of the World Federation of Exchanges (WFE) in terms of the main index



growth during the 12-month period of December 2018-December 2019.

According to the TSE's office of public relations, TEDPIX registered a growth of 133 percent in the mentioned time span to become the second-best performer after Jamaica Stock Exchange.

Based on the WFE latest report, the TSE was the top performer in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

A total of about \$66 billion worth of stocks were traded in TSE during 2019, registering a growth of more than 300 percent compared to the value of trades in the previous year.

According to the WFE report, the total value of trades at TSE reached \$320 billion at the end of 2019, while the total market value of WFE members amounted to more than \$74 trillion.

Sponge iron export rises 91 percent

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran exported over 823,000 tons of sponge iron during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2019), which was 91 percent higher than the figure of the same period of time in the past year, IRNA reported.

The country had exported 432,000 tons of the product during the first nine months of the previous year.

Also as reported, production of sponge iron in the country experienced an eight-percent growth to stand at 21.433 million tons during the nine-month period of this year from that of the past year.

Iranian mining sector witnessed some prominent growth both in production and export during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2019).

According to the data released by Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), the value of Iran's minerals and mining industries' exports stood at \$9.226 billion in the past year.

IMIDRO Managing Director Khodadad Gharibpour has previously announced that projects worth \$2.17 billion have been put into operation in this sector during the past year.

NIOC awards development of 2 major oilfields to MAPNA

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** – Iran's top engineering and energy enterprise MAPNA Group signed a deal with National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) on Saturday for development of Parsi and Paranj oil fields in the southwestern province of Khuzestan.

Based on the deal, MAPNA Group is in charge of the maintenance, and improving the fields' recovery factor and boosting their production levels, Shana reported.

The document was signed by Ahmad Mohammadi, the managing director of National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC), which is a subsidiary of NIOC, and Managing Director of MAPNA Group Abbas Aliabadi in the presence of the Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh.

The duration of the contract, which is valued at about \$1.38 billion, is 10 years and it is aimed for increasing the daily production of Parsi and Parang fields from the current 52,000 barrels to 85,000 barrels.

Speaking in the signing ceremony, Zanganeh stressed the importance of such projects in generating revenue for



Ahmad Mohammadi (R), the managing director of National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC), exchanging signed deal documents with Managing Director of MAPNA Group Abbas Aliabadi (L) in the presence of Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh (2ndL), in Tehran on Saturday.

the country, saying that fulfilling this contract is going to add a total of 121 million barrels of oil to the country's oil production and brings the country over \$6 billion of revenues.

In addition to creating wealth for the country, this project will be an opportunity for stronger presence of the private sector in oil and gas development projects, in order to benefit from their potentials and capabilities, Zanganeh said.

Parsi oil field, located 130 kilometers northeast of Ahvaz (the capital city of southwestern Khuzestan province), holds more than 10 billion barrels of crude oil in place, while Paranj, nearby Parsi, holds 1.6 billion barrels of in-place reserves.

MAPNA is involved in a range of projects, including oil and gas fields development, onshore and offshore drilling services, construction of downstream processing units, auxiliary facilities, utility and storage tanks, as well as the design and manufacture of equipment such as turbo-compressors for pipelines, refineries and processing units.

Putting Mozambique on the global LNG map

Mozambique is an emerging leader in LNG: the country is expected to become the largest producer in sub-Saharan Africa (and the fourth-largest in the world) by the mid-2020s when over 30 mmtpa of LNG comes on stream. Mozambique's NOC ENH had a unique opportunity to develop its business and become an active player in the global LNG market, which is forecast to more than double in size by 2040.

But with various commercial options available, the company needed an objective advisor with the right connections, knowledge and expertise to help it chart the best way forward.

ENH approached Wood Mackenzie in May 2018 to help it design a strategy to maximize the value of its LNG resources. It aimed to play a more active role in the global gas market and in the development of Mozambique's gas future.

Our first step was to meet with the board and executive management team to fully understand the company's objectives, goals and vision. We carefully assessed ENH's existing capabilities in LNG and the various commercial options that were available.

As ENH had the option to buy its equity LNG from the Rovuma LNG project, this presented a significant opportunity to establish a marketing and trading business that would help expand its global presence.

Gas is quickly becoming a fuel of choice as the energy transition gathers pace. But



the rules of the game are changing: as competition intensifies, rising supply and a more active spot market have prompted an increase in the number of shorter and more flexible contracts.

ENH needed a partner with the right expertise and knowledge to help it navigate the rapidly changing market.

ENH relied on Wood Mackenzie's knowledge of the global gas market and our network of contacts to help identify, evaluate and screen potential partners.

■ Interactive screening process

After running a thorough and interactive screening process, energy and commodity trading company Vitol was selected as a joint venture partner. As the joint venture took shape, we worked closely with ENH and its legal partners to refine all the details of the commercial arrangements.

In September 2019, ENH announced the formation of a joint venture company, ENH Energy Trading, in partnership with Vitol.

(Source: hellenicshippingnews.com)

Europe's new record for offshore wind power installations

Europe installed 3.6 GW of new offshore wind capacity in 2019, according to statistics released by WindEurope. This is a new record in annual installations.

10 new offshore wind farms came online across 5 countries. The UK accounted for nearly half of the new capacity with 1.7 GW. Then came Germany (1.1 GW), Denmark (374 MW) and Belgium (370 MW). And Portugal installed 8 MW of floating offshore wind. Europe now has 22 GW of offshore wind. The UK and Germany account for three-quarters of it. Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands share nearly all of the rest.

The average size of the offshore turbines installed last year was 7.8 MW. A 12 MW offshore wind turbine was installed in Rotterdam. Offshore wind farms are also getting bigger. The average size doubled – it was 300 MW in 2010. Now it is over 600 MW.

The launch of the new Portuguese floating project – WindFloat Atlantic, funded by the EU's NER300 program, means Europe now has 45 MW of floating offshore wind. France, the UK, Norway and Portugal are all developing new floating projects. France plans to auction a large-scale floating wind farm in 2021.

Offshore wind costs continue to fall significantly. Last year's auctions – in the UK, France and the Netherlands – delivered prices for consumers in the range of EUR 40-50/MWh. This is cheaper than building new gas, coal or nuclear.

2019 also saw investment decisions in 4

new offshore wind farms, representing 1.4 GW in capacity and EUR 6bn in investments.

The European Commission says Europe needs between 230 and 450 GW of offshore wind by 2050 to decarbonise the energy system and deliver the Green Deal. This requires Europe to build 7 GW of new offshore wind a year by 2030 and ramp up to 18 GW a year by 2050. But the current level of new installations and investments is a long way behind that.

"Europe really embraced offshore wind in 2019. Auction prices showed it's now cheaper to build offshore wind than new gas or coal plants. Several Governments raised the amount they want to build. This time last year we were looking at 76 GW by 2030. Now it's 100 GW," WindEurope CEO Giles Dickson said.

"But we're not currently building enough to deliver on that, let alone the more ambitious volumes needed to deliver the Green Deal. The EU Commission says we need up to 450 GW of offshore by 2050. That means 7 GW new offshore wind every year by 2030 and 18 GW by 2050. Last year we built a record amount, but only 3 GW."

The "bigger numbers are doable and affordable. The new EU Offshore Wind Strategy in the Green Deal should map out clearly how to mobilise the investments needed for 450 GW. Crucially it should provide a master plan (a) to develop the offshore and onshore grid connections and (b) to get the maritime spatial planning right.

(Source: evwind.es)

Saudi-Russian alliance is strained as coronavirus saps demand for oil

An alliance between Saudi Arabia and Russia has helped prop up oil prices for the last three years. But the two big oil producers were not in perfect harmony this week, as they have tried to recalibrate production targets to cope with reduced demand from China, whose economy has been crippled by the coronavirus epidemic.

Saudi Arabia's Oil Minister, Abdulaziz bin Salman, wanted to move ahead quickly with a meeting to consider new production cuts, but he has struggled to persuade Moscow, even after his father, King Salman, made a call to President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia on Monday.

Instead, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) this week convened three long days of meetings of a technical group that produced a recommendation to cut output by 600,000 barrels, an almost 30 percent addition to curbs agreed upon in December but probably less than the Saudis wanted, according to some analysts.

Still, Russia's representatives told the group that while they found the recommendations reasonable they needed more time to consider them, according to a person briefed on the matter.

The "real question is whether the Russians and the Saudis are on the same page on the necessity for collective action," said Helima Croft, head of global commodity strategy at RBC Capital Markets, an investment bank, who monitored the meeting in the OPEC press room.

Still, the fact that meetings did occur, and the prospect that further cuts might be on the way, was enough to at least temporarily halt what had been a steep fall in oil prices since the outbreak of the coronavirus, which has now killed more than 600 people in China. Brent crude, the international benchmark which exceeded \$70 a barrel in early January, was trading at about \$55 a barrel on Friday.

■ A quite reasonable number

In an interview, Bjornar Tonhaugen,



head of oil market research at Rystad Energy, a research firm, said the 600,000-barrel-a-day cut being discussed was "quite a reasonable number."

As OPEC ponders what to do, it faces a difficult calculation. The degree of impact that the coronavirus outbreak will have on demand for oil is not yet known, though it is expected to be substantial.

Several Chinese cities have been seemingly shut down, with some factories idled and flights canceled.

The curtailment of economic activity will result in a major reduction of energy consumption – a huge concern for OPEC because China is the world's largest energy importer and a key customer.

Wood Mackenzie, a market research firm, figures that oil demand for the first three months of this year will be slashed by about 900,000 barrels a day, or nearly 1 percent of global consumption.

The effects of reduced energy use are already being seen in the market for liquefied natural gas, a chilled fuel used in industry and power generation.

Rystad Energy estimates that Chinese imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) fell 10 percent in January from a year earlier.

Analysts say that with customers not needing as much fuel as they thought, Chinese buyers are trying to stop or re-schedule shipments with some of them going to the extreme option of declaring force majeure – a legal term for unforeseen circumstances that invalidate a contract.

Total, the French oil company, said it had recently rejected a force majeure claim by a Chinese buyer of liquefied natural gas.

■ The LNG market amply supplied

Analysts say the situation is likely to worsen, as vessels laden with gas are forced to go elsewhere – all while the liquefied natural gas (LNG) market is already amply supplied and prices are at rock bottom.

"There is clearly a major issue in China with its ability to take LNG," said Frank Harris, head of liquefied natural gas con-

sulting at Wood Mackenzie.

In the oil market, there are offsetting factors. The output of the Libyan oil industry is down by about one million barrels a day, or about 1 percent of world demand, because of political turmoil.

While it is widely assumed that Libyan oil will come back on the market soon, no one is certain when that will be.

With the oil industry just beginning to come to terms with the implications of the coronavirus, there is an argument for waiting until the next OPEC meeting, scheduled for early March, to make decisions.

"I don't know why the urgency," said Bill Farren-Price, director of intelligence at RS Energy group, a market research firm. "It looks slightly panicky to me."

Whether the split between Russia and the Saudis will widen will become clear only over time, but some analysts say Russia has good reason to continue to coordinate policy with OPEC.

Analysts say Mr. Putin benefits from playing along with the Saudis. Working with OPEC gives Russia a seat at the table at which many of the world's largest oil producers negotiate output decisions that have an impact on prices.

Ties to the Saudis also fit with Mr. Putin's efforts to expand Russia's influence in the Middle East, in countries like Syria and Iraq, as well as in Libya.

A web of business relationships is forming between Russian companies and Riyadh and its allies like Abu Dhabi, where Lukoil recently became the first Russian firm to gain participation in natural gas production.

The Russians "seem to be content to be part of this coalition and maintain this political role even if their implementation of cuts is very limited," Mr. Farren-Price said.

(Source: nytimes.com)

Dominican Republic launches renewable energy generation forecasting service

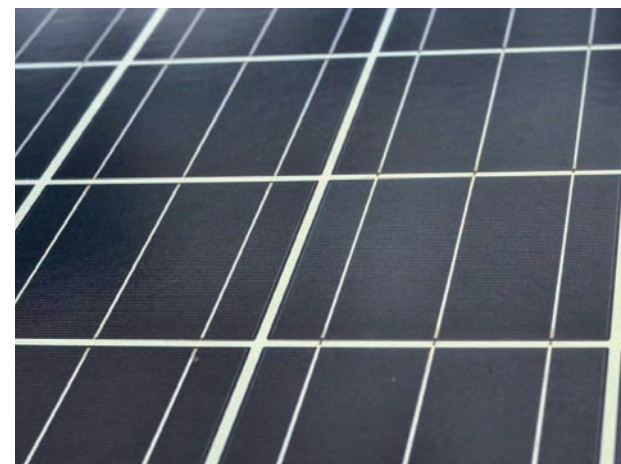
By Matthew Farmer

The Coordinating Body of the Interconnected Electric System (OC-SENI) launched its Solar and Wind Power Generation Forecasting Service on Thursday, which will ensure the massive integration of renewable energies in a safe, efficient and sustainable manner over time.

The initiative, which has the support of the Ministry of Energy and Mines of the Dominican Republic, the Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Nuclear Safety of Germany and the GIZ under, will be developed under the framework of the Energy Transition Project.

The project development, in charge of the German company Energy & Meteo Systems, will have a positive impact for more than 13 generation plants, nine wind farms and four solar, which represent more than 600 megawatts in the Dominican system.

The Minister of Energy and Mines, Antonio Isa Conde, considered that this service strengthens and gives root to the most decisive axes in the electricity market, which are planning, trust and certainty, while correcting the dispersion of information in this matter



"With adequate forecasts, based on the latest generation technologies, control of what would happen in the short, medium and long term with the supply of wind and solar energy is assumed, not only to take better advantage of them but also to meet market demand with strategic and timely answers," argued Isa Conde.

The head of the governing body of the electrical system valued the German cooperation to make feasible the system of generation forecasts with renewables and stressed that it will allow the OC-SENI to establish the "Know How" for the future management of renewable energies.

At the launch, the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Dominican Republic, Volker Pellet, said that "as the capacity of renewables increases, the challenges that the system operators must balance increase. The importance of a forecasting service lies in establishing how much renewable generation will enter the electrical system and thus know how much conventional generation is needed to complement the rest of the demand."

Meanwhile, the General Manager OC-SENI, Manuel López San Pablo, explained that "one day in advance we receive the estimate of the next 72 hours of renewable energy production, which are used for daily programming."

In the activity, Daniel Almaraz, Principal Advisor of the Energy Transition Project, presented the details of the Generation Forecasting Service and Angelica Lam, Project Engineer for Energy & Meteo Systems, showed the results and conclusions of the first month of operation.

The introduction of the Forecast Service to the Short-Term Programming Process at the OC-SENI was carried out by Wanderson Feliz, Operation Programming Analyst; Daniel Martich, Operation Programming Analyst; and Carlos Perez, Real-Time Applications Analyst at OC-SENI.

(Source: mining.com)

Wholesale energy prices fell 10% in January amid coronavirus fears

The coronavirus outbreak in China contributed to a 10 percent fall in the Bord Gáis Energy Index in January, with the threat of the virus adding to bearish sentiment in wholesale energy markets.

Oil prices fell 11 percent on concerns that the growing threat from the virus could dampen global oil demand, while gas prices also fell 11 percent in January as a result of soft demand and robust supply. Electricity prices fell 7 percent and coal dropped 4 percent.

The price of oil fluctuated during the month as tensions between the U.S. and Iran spiraled following the U.S. assassination of the high-profile Iranian commander Qasem Soleimani, leading to a spike in price to \$72.

U.S. sanctions and an easing in tensions led to oil prices retreating to pre-attack levels, meaning oil prices closed January at \$58.16 a barrel, a drop of 11 percent in euro terms and the lowest monthly close in over a year.

Oil prices have remained under pressure in the first week of February amid fears about the impact of the coronavirus.

BP has estimated that economic and travel restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of the virus could dampen oil demand by as much as 500,000 barrels.

Oil prices have fallen by more than a fifth since the outbreak of the virus in the city of Wuhan in China.

"There is still plenty of uncertainty around the global balance, with it unknown how demand will evolve in coming months as a result of the coronavirus," ING Economics said in a note.

(Source: irishtimes.com)



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Modern Stadium of
Martyrs of Khuzestan
Football Club (KSC)A Brief Report on Activities of Iranian Mines and
Mining Industries Development and Renovation
Organization (IMIDRO) in One YearIRANIAN MINES AND MINING INDUSTRIES DEVELOPMENT
AND RENOVATION ORGANIZATION

سازمان توسعه و نوسازی معادن و منابع معدنی ایران

From inauguration of \$3.5 billion worth of project and generation of 7,600 employment opportunities to twofold growth of exploration to linking between industry and university

IMIDRO has designed and implemented the development of mining and mineral sector since the second half of the last Iranian calendar year in 1397 [from Sept. 2018] up to the present time in a broader sense. IMIDRO does not concentrate merely on steel, rather, this prestigious organization has focused on managing profit of economic enterprises, increasing relevant activities with social responsibility, fulfilling consecutive dialogues with various organizations, establishing very close cooperation and interaction with the scientific and research centers in order to remove requirements of the aforementioned units, total of which have been put atop agenda of the organization.

● Operationalization of Roadmap

The roadmap of mining and industrial sector includes 72 strategies in a way that IMIDRO is responsible for implementing 33 strategies.

To implement this important roadmap, IMIDRO has defined 145 objectives in a way that IMIDRO has managed to realize 85 percent of these objectives since the beginning of the current up to the end of Iranian month of Dey i.e. from March 21 to Jan. 20.

● Launching Projects:

IMIDRO has implemented \$3.5 billion worth of mining and mineral projects since the beginning of the current year [started March 21, 2019] up to the present time [Jan. 20, 2020].

In other words, IMIDRO has implemented \$3.5 billion worth of mining and mineral projects during 10 months [from March 21, 2019 to Jan. 20, 2020].

Given the above issue, about \$1.2 billion worth of mining and mineral projects has been inaugurated since the beginning of the current year [started March 21, 2019] up to the half of winter Jan. 20, 2020. It should be noted that considerable number of other projects have been either com-

missioned or launched as pilot.

South Aluminum Company (SALCO) is presently considered as the largest aluminum production company with the technology of 430-k/ampere. This company is the most modern aluminum production plant in the country.

Moreover, Tose'e Melli [National Development] Pelletizing projects, located in Sangam, is ready for operational with investing \$190 million worth of money on this project.

In addition, more than \$1 billion worth of mining and mineral projects will be put into operation by the yearend [to end March 20, 2020] which includes iron ore concentrate, four copper industry projects, Gol-e-Gohar Iron Ore Crushing unit, first phase of Parsian Port and a number of infrastructural project. If total investment made in mining and mineral project bears fruition, more than 7,600 direct jobs and 29,000 indirect jobs will be generated.

● Production Performance of Export of Large Projects

Production performance of large companies in mining and mineral sector in 10 months of the current year indicate that all mineral companies have registered a considerable growth in a way that iron ore concentrate production increased three percent, sponge iron ore increased 8 percent, steel ingot increased 5 percent.

On the other hand, statistics of export performance of large mining and mineral units of the country show that various types of products of these companies have registered a 25 percent growth during 10 months of the current year [from March 21, 2019 to Jan. 20, 2020].

● Increasing Capital of Mine Insurance Fund, Support for Private Sector

Mining Investment Insurance Fund has issued 1,742 counts of investment insurance policy, costing 1,028 billion tomans, since its establishment about 14 years ago. Capital increase is one of the supports of this fund in a way that capital of the organization hit from 140 billion tomans to 350 billion tomans. According to the IMIDRO's programs, this organi-



zation has supported private sector. It is predicted that capital of the organization will hit 500 billion tomans in next year [to start March 21, 2020].

Moreover, Mining Investment Insurance Fund has supported the plan of activation of small-scale mines.

● Outlook of Development of Special Zones of Energy-Consuming Industries

In the recent years, IMIDRO, in addition to Persian Gulf Special Energy-Consuming Zone, has focused on the development of special zones of Lamard [southern Fars province] and Parsian [western Hormozgan province] as well as Kashan. Now, Lamard Special Zone is the largest and most modern Iran Aluminum Production Plan [SALCO] and Parsian Zone also is attracting investors in the mineral and petrochemical fields.

Iranian Petroleum Ministry has put Parsian Energy-Consuming Special Zone as the third hub for the implementation of petrochemical projects.

Presently, construction operation of the first private quay in Parsian Zone is at the final stage of operation and will be put into operation by the yearend [to end March 20, 2020].

Persian Gulf Mining Special Zone holds 18 development plans in a way that the plan for assigning parcel of land to 11 investors has been put atop agenda.

● INNOMINE 2 Festival

IMIDRO held value-creation ideas festival entitled "INNOMINE 2" in Feb. 2020 in cooperation with the Vice-Presidency for Science and Technology [Innovation and Development Fund] and Tehran University. In this festival, 380 companies showed their tendency to take part in the festival, showing a considerable growth as compared to a year earlier.

Consequently, 15 top ideas were introduced at the end of this event. IMIDRO also follows up the 'value creation' in cooperation with scientific and research centers.

● Pilot Launching of Rare Soil Elements

The pilot production of rare soil elements was inaugurated in the Feb. 2020 in the presence of Vice-President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari and Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Reza Rahmani.

This pilot has been launched and com-

missioned using technical knowhow and knowledge of expert domestic engineers which enjoys high flexibility in extraction of strategic elements with very low purities.

● Inking Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Universities and Scientific Center

In line with meeting the demand of mining and mineral industries, IMIDRO embarked on implementing a plan entitled 'focusing on requirements as top priority' for research and development projects over the past year [ended March 20, 2019].

For this purpose, IMIDRO inked a MoU with universities and scientific centers in order to meet the demand in relevant field.

According to the MoUs inked, IMIDRO is cooperating and interacting with 11 universities and academic centers. Also, IMIDRO has supported 194 theses in mining and mineral sector. In the same direction, IMIDRO has attained 50 percent growth in research field and also 100 percent growth in the training field.

● Supporting Stones' Industry and Decorative Stones

In addition to supporting large and mega-sized industries, IMIDRO has compiled a comprehensive plan [special of valuable and semi-valuable stones] as well as decorative stones. Presently, various committees are busy active in this sector. This plan will be put into operation with the removal of existing barriers. It has been supposed that Stone's Market will be set up in Isfahan with the cooperation of provincial officials and private sector activists.

As the sole responsible body for development of mining and mineral sector, IMIDRO supports activists in this field.

This Organization undertakes the role of policy setting and facilitating terms and conditions of activity in mining and mineral sector.

● Plan for Transferring Water from Oman Sea

Benefited from the most experienced manpower and also using its experience in implementation of water conveyance project from Persian Gulf to the Central Fields, IMIDRO will make huge investment in cooperation with the private sector for conveying and transferring water from Oman Sea to the three eastern provinces of Sistan and Baluchestan, South Khorasan and Khorasan Razavi provinces.

After the desalination of water of Oman Sea, the pipeline will enter into the three provinces of Sistan and Baluchestan, South Khorasan and Khorasan Razavi.

● Persian Gulf Special Zone and 10 Million-Ton Steel Project

Attaining production capacity of 10 million tons of steel is of the salient outlook of Persian Gulf Mining and Mineral Industries Special Zone, affiliated to IMIDRO. This plan is underway with the investment of current investors of the region and its consortia has been set up.

● Creating Production Capacity of 10 Million Tons of Steel in MOKRAN Coastal Areas

In line with its macro policies in increasing production capacity of steel, IMIDRO has implemented the plan for creating 10 million tons of steel production capacity in MOKRAN coastal areas, located in Chabahar in Sistan and Baluchestan province, so that this comprehensive program will be done with the cooperation and partnership of the private sector.

By: A.Saeidi



Ahead of Iran's 41st anniversary of Islamic Revolution: Fundamental appraisal

By Yusuf Abdullah

NIGERIA/ KATSINA — In the name of Allah Who states "... verily, never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves with their own souls" Q13:11

May His everlasting peace and blessings be upon His noble servant, our master Muhammad and his purified progeny.

This piece is on the fundamentals of the Imam Khomeini-led unique Islamic revolution which shortly clocks four decades despite apparent hatred and persistent conspiracies of its enemies. The glance is neither a comparative analysis with sister events in France, Russia, China, Cuba and Nicaragua nor expositions on the multidimensional achievements of the Islamic republic especially on economy, security, education, science and technology and general societal reforms, but more on the rudiments of the revolution and basics of a typical Islamic government as stressed by the Imam (QS), its founder and guardian for Muslim world.

Like the Arab world, we could evidently remember how Iran was completely subservient to America in the days of the deposed Shah killing all its socioeconomic sectors especially farming through the treacherous what they called white revolution. With the success of Islamic revolution, the West is scared of the procedure, indefatigability and ever-developing trend of the Islamic republic.

It is worth noting that Allah the Most High has elucidated the goal for governance "Those who, should We establish them in the land, will keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and enjoin what is good and forbid evil; and Allah's is the end of affairs" Q22:41.

Based on this guidance, the Imam stressed the concept of Wilayat al-faqih -governance of the jurist- in place of the Shah's tyrannical monarchy. He defined government as a small group of people serving the nation. Such rulers (some, with dismay) do not understand that government must serve the people, not rule over them. People's awareness, their participation, cooperation and supervision of the government chosen by them are by themselves a major guarantee for protection of the society". The Imam proceeded "If they call me a servant, it is better than being called a leader. Leadership is not what matters; what matters is service; Islam has made it necessary for us to serve. I am a brother to the Iranian people and regard myself as their servant and soldier. In Islam, one thing rules and that is the law. Law also ruled during the time of the Prophet (PBUH), the prophet was the implementer".

The Imam based the creation and service of the government on the fundamental goal for which man was created and sent a divine message. That is to be the vicegerent of Allah on earth. Highlighting the rationale of the prophets' mission, he said "the prophets were assigned by Allah with the aim of purifying the human souls, providing them with suitable training, educating them the real teachings from divine scriptures and decorating the humanity with wisdom and teaching them expertise to tame the nature" In line with that, he added "the objectives of Qur'an and Hadith are purification of intellect and souls which can also be helpful in achieving the real cause of monotheism" where he drew the attention of the Ummah on the ideal way to seek knowledge "the most high value objective which should become the focus of an all-out effort is to learn and teach the Islamic spiritual sciences such as ethics



and the genuine spiritual teachings and paving the way towards Allah". While establishing the link between knowledge gained over time and morals the Imam stated "all signs of innovation and civilization are legal except those which end up in corruption of ethics or corruption of chastity. Islam has banned all those practices which were in clash with the nation's interests"

A very significant point he also buttressed was "Islam is not the religion for a particular nation; it recognizes no difference between Turks, Iranians, Arabs and non-Arabs. Islam belongs to all regardless of race, tribe, language or color which do not count in this religion. All are brothers and equal. Honor is in virtue, chastity, superior character and good conduct" Thus, knowledge acquisition and spirituality are inseparable "the harm of knowledge gained without spiritual motives and purification would be worse even than sole ignorance" He also said "you must undertake serious efforts to gain knowledge and tame the lower desires, enhancement of spiritual practices, decoration of soul with the best ethics, norms and for an all-out spiritual development and piety. In some historic words to a son, the Imam said "O my son, you must struggle hard in order to improve your character and ethics and make efforts to abandon your material world's attachments".

The Imam repeatedly use to remind the Ummah "if someone who engages in purifying soul and decorating itself with ethical virtues, he would automatically abandon the dominion of the devil and Satan. It is the most important obligation that can lead to real divine wisdom. In the peak of eloquence, in a blessed memory and broader perspective, two quotes of Imam Ali (AS) are relevant "hate no one, no matter how much they have wronged you. Live humbly, no matter how wealthy you become. Think positively, no matter how hard life is. Give much, even if you have been given little. Keep in touch with the ones who have forgotten you. Forgive who has wronged you, and pray for the best for those you love" and "awaken your heart to kindness, mercy for the people, love and tenderness for them, because people fall into two categories; they are either your brothers/sisters in faith or your equals in humanity". Even in his farewell message to the Iranian nation and

the world in general, the issue was very clear. "...with a heart that is calm and confident; with a joyous soul and a conscience hopeful of Allah's graces, I take my leave from brothers and sisters, and journey to the eternal abode, and I very much need your good prayers. I ask Allah, the Benevolent to accept my excuses for inadequate services, and I ask the nation to accept my excuses for my shortages and inadequacies and to move forward with force, determination and will".

Two significant institutions were parts of the Imam's famous legacies. He identified most disturbing problem disturbing the Ummah as disunity promoted by the enemies which allow them to oppress the weak and dominate the world. The Imam would always relate the invasion of Palestine and creation of Israel in its place subjecting its defenseless and rightful citizens especially women and children to severe persecution. He was also known against Takfiri movement, another disheartening challenge of the Ummah where the Wahhabis fight against their Muslim brethren ignoring the atrocities of the world arrogant! The Takfirists apparently work in the interest of the enemies. With the help of Allah, the Imam has adopted practical approach morally and educationally on which he built the Iranian nation in particular and significantly impacted the Muslim world. Undoubtedly, all his measures have yielded great result.

To know the extent of the late Imam Khomeini's works and result, no doubt, one must study Iran before and after the success of Islamic revolution. In other words, when it was completely subservient to Western powers and as free and absolutely independent in the post-revolution era. We may attempt a comparative analysis in a multifaceted dimension covering the direct and indirect impact of the Islamic revolutionary ideology to global community.

While congratulating the leader of the Islamic revolution, the government and brave Iranian nation on the sacrifices made in the revolutionary process, I emphasize the lessons in the most significant aspects of the Islamic revolution; the mission of man on earth; the ideals of governance and reawakening the Ummah. I also reiterate the need for the unconditional release of Sheikh Ibraheem el-Zakzaky (H) and his disciples.

Prof: Iran does not consider Saudi Arabia as enemy

1 → A: It is not a decision for Iran. It is a decision the two sides have to make. Iran has four-step proposal:

1. Seize hostilities; 2. Humanitarian aid; 3. Establishing Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue without external interference; and 4. Reaching a political solution in regards to the Yemen war.

The basic idea is to make sure that the war ends. The problem with the Saudis is that they know they have lost the war but they don't know how to save face.

■ What was the effect of the Houthi Aramco missile attacks on the Yemen conflict?

A: Since last year the Yemenis are using more sophisticated weapons. The Yemeni side has asked for a long time to stop the war but the UN was unable to stop hostilities because of American UNSC veto power. So Yemenis started to use force, which is the only language that the Saudis understand.

The sooner the Saudis start understanding that the sooner the war will end.



■ What is the role of Majlis in foreign affairs and do you think there is any chance for the survival of the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA)?

A: JCPOA is almost dead. The only country that is following JCPOA is Iran. Sooner or later Iran will have to abandon the nuclear deal. Even the Rouhani government is getting tired.

Majlis has passed a law after the murder of Soleimani. Now they want to confront the U.S. After the U.S. pulled out from the JCPOA and the murder of Gen. Soleimani, even the most optimistic MPs are anti-American.

■ What about independent candidates. How many in the present Majlis and what do you predict for independent candidates for the next Majlis?

A: Generally during every Majlis election 1/3rd of the votes are for independent candidates, 1/3 reformist and 1/3 principlist. I don't think this year will be any different.

■ What do you think will be the turnout for the 11th Majlis election and which faction will fare well in the upcoming parliamentary election?

A: Turn out generally for Majlis is about 55-65 percent. I expect that these elections will follow that norm. The fact is that the Rouhani government's policies have not paid off, including the nuclear agreement. Domestically, they are facing difficulties due to sanctions and mismanagement and currency fluctuations. So support for reformist camp won't be as before which will give a chance to the principlists.

■ What do you predict for the future now that E3 (European Union trio of Britain, France and Germany) has triggered the dispute mechanism?

A: According to article 36 of the nuclear agreement starting dispute mechanism doesn't mean that they will finish it. They can take several steps. The last step would be to re-impose previous UNSC sanctions in which case Iran will exit NPT as well.

No one can veto this mechanism.

UK ought to find stable trade partners, avoid reliance on Trump, journalist Says

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A Lebanese journalist and deputy editor of UNews Agency said the UK government should look for more stable trading partners after withdrawal from the European Union and not pin its hopes on the Trump administration that creates uncertainty in the global economy.

"The UK should move towards a more stable trading partner to support its uncertain economic future, especially that there's a big possibility that the Trump administration will get reelected to govern the US, which means more uncertainty and instability in the global economy in favor of the internal US one," Mohammad Kleit told Tasnim.

Following is the full text of the interview: ■ After 1,316 days of political turmoil, the UK now stands alone as the first nation to have ever left the European Union. What is your take on this?

A: The UK has always dealt with the European Union as an economic opportunity to its post-WWII status, since its economy wasn't thriving as other nations that participated in the war, especially Germany, France, and Italy. During the Thatcher reign in the UK (1979 – 1990), the UK economy showed a big spike after the kingdom had joined 6 years before she was appointed prime minister. This was primarily due to the vast market the EU had opened for the UK, yet it was problematic during those years due to the influx of immigrant workers coming from less economically stable countries in the EU, especially in the East of the continent. This has created the controversy between upholding a strong economy, a vast open market, and free trade; and keeping the UK within its borders while preserving its "sovereignty".

Now considering the fact that you have a right-wing conservative government, which promoted xenophobia and pro-British sentiment on the expense of hate against immigrants and "the other", as well as spreading false claims that remaining in the EU is damaging the UK economy as a whole, then it is only logical that the Tories (UK conservative party) would push towards leaving the European bloc.

Regardless of the many facts surrounding this issue, as well as its implications on the UK socio-economic, geopolitical, and security spectrum, it might create a bigger problem for the EU as an entity considering there are several nominees for departing the bloc, especially Hungary, Poland, and Italy, with the strong rise of ultra-right-wing

parties in their political strata.

■ Brexit has ended the careers of two Prime Ministers and left the very future of the United Kingdom in question. Scotland's case for independence is becoming harder to ignore while Britain's perceived selling out of Northern Ireland has played into the hands of those wishing to see Irish unification. What do you think?

A: On the first note, Scotland, under the rule of the Scottish National Party, will look more eager to leave the UK and remain in the EU since it's more profitable economically and socially for the Scots. First of all, their trade profits will go directly to their pockets rather than a percentage of it going to Westminster. Secondly, they'll preserve the opportunities opened by the freedom of movement in the EU bloc, something that they'll be denied from when the UK leaves the EU totally after the transition period ends.

On the second note concerning the island of Ireland, it's a complex matter that interconnects the issues of freedom of movement, trade, and political rule (pro-UK Unionists vs anti-UK Republicans, whom are also divided based on sects: Protestants vs Catholics which caused "The Troubles" war). There was always the fear of placing hard borders between both parts of the island which could return the ethno-nationalist "The Troubles" war that lasted for 40 years and ended with the infamous "Good Friday Agreement", after it has caused the death and injury of over 50,000 persons. To make things short, a unification of Ireland would be a harder process than Brexit, due to the aforementioned complexities, yet it's not impossible since the greater interests of both Northern Ireland and Ireland are more important than Westminster's current political goals.

On a third note, both the Irish and the Scots' aims, if reached unification and independence respectively, would render the name "United Kingdom" a sarcastic joke by itself.

■ Britain's economic future and place in the world have not been this uncertain since the end of World War II. How do you see its economic future?

A: According to economic experts, there's an uncertainty concerning the future of businesses in the UK, yet there will be a slight thrive after the relief of Brexit, which affected the local economy for the past 2 years, in wait for the future deal to



be signed with the EU – the UK's still biggest trade partner – to create a sustainable economic growth in the coming decade. Nevertheless, the departure from the EU would leave the UK focusing on its domestic economy and issues, but it will still remain a hard phase for the kingdom to pass due to the barriers that the EU and other countries would place for trade deals.

■ One person unlikely to be happy about this is US President Donald Trump. In his economic war with China, Trump is looking for friends. And as the UK leaves the EU, desperate to sign trade deals -- especially with the US -- he sees an opportunity to pull the UK into his orbit. Trump seemed distracted as the news broke on Tuesday and it's possible that London's assurances were enough for the US president. How much do you think Trump helped with this? How would the move affect US-UK ties in the future?

A: Trump was constantly criticizing the EU like when he said that "nobody treats us much worse than the EU (Oct 15th 2018), warning it "you won't have a better ally" than the US (July 10th 2018). In addition to that, Trump has repeatedly commented on Brexit saying that the "UK should walk away" if the EU doesn't agree to a Brexit deal (June 2nd 2019), and many other incidents...

Trump is known to be a businessman, and he has always stressed the fact that the UK should be the US's biggest trading partner, both during his visit to the UK to meet Boris Johnson and when the former UK PM Theresa May visited Washington. Yet, considering the kingdom's unstable and uncertain future, a trade deal that would put them in the pocket on the US, where recent events have shown that the Trump administration isn't a party that separates economy from personal, political and military interests, the Iran deal and trade war with China are obvious examples, not to mention that it would do the same with its allies such as Canada, the EU, Mexico, Japan, and some of the Arab states in the Persian Gulf.

In conclusion, the UK should move towards a more stable trading partner to support its uncertain economic future, especially that there's a big possibility that the Trump administration will get reelected to govern the US, which means more uncertainty and instability in the global economy in favor of the internal US one.

Second Announcement			
Call for public tender (First/Second publish)			
Two-Stages (semi compressed) tender			
Subject of Tender: Casing Pipe 7"			
<div>  <div> N.I.O.C 1398.6976 </div> </div> <div>  <div> National Iranian Drilling Company </div> </div>			
Tender descriptions:			
The Tender holder	Registration No. through national electronic tendering system	Tender No. /Indent No.	Estimated value (Rial/Euro)
National Iranian Drilling Company	3227929	PPP/AZD/98/003 48-22-9822016	78,103,000,000
Qualitative evaluation of tenderers			
Method Based on minimum scoring (50) made in award criterion reflected in the tenderers pre-qualification forms.			
Purchasing & Submitting			
Tender Document Distribution by Company	The distribution of the documents will be started one day after the publishing of second advertisement and ended on the followi (seventh days thereof) Distribution Place A) Hall No. 316, 316th floor, Foreign Procurement Dept. (DRILLING PROJECTS), National Iranian Drilling Company, After Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel: 061341468222 B) Jomhuri street , yaghma alley nic 8th building floor no : 04 room no 428 –Ahwaz -Iran . Tel: 02166700249 Submitting Method <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt in the amount of 190000 Iranian Rials under account number 400114004020491 (Shaba No. IR35010000400114004020491) in name of "NIDC Incomes Centralized Fund" issued by I.R. Of Iran Central Bank. Submitting format Request for the purpose of receiving Tender Documents. 		
Documents Receiving Method	Closing date <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 Days after the last time of Purchasing. 		
Address	H Hall NO.107,1st floor.Tender committee, Operation building, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel: +98-61-34148880 +98-61-34148569		
Tender Guarantee			
Value of guarantee	3,530,000,000 Rial/ 74,976 Euro		
Type of guarantee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that obtain activity licenses from the central bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt under account number 400114006376636 (Shaba No. IR35010000400114006376636) in name of "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran. 		
Duration of credit & quotation	"NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran Tender Guarantee and quotation should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum for one time in initial validity duration.		
(Name of department) More of this & other tenders are accessible by click on: www.nidc.ir http://sapp.ir/nidc_pr تهران تایمز نوبت اول ۹/۱۱/۱۹ نوبت دوم ۹/۱۱/۲۰			

Iran second most popular destination for Azeri tourists

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Iran was named the second most popular destination for Azerbaijani tourists in 2019, according to data collected from travel agencies. Georgia, Iran, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine were the top five travel destinations for Azeri citizens in 2019, Azere news reported.

Azerbaijani citizens spent most money in Russia (\$343.6 million), followed by Iran (\$308.4 million), Georgia (\$286.5 million), Turkey (\$278.3 million) and the UAE (\$38.1 mil-



lion), according to the report.

The Islamic Republic abolished visa requirements for Azerbaijani nationals some three years ago, while Iranians still have to obtain visas to visit the country.

About eight million foreign nationals have visited Iran since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019), according to Iran's ministry of tourism.

Iceberg risk to tourists: Experts fear Titanic moment

Tourism to the Antarctic is booming, but experts fear that the larger ships carrying passengers south are risking the lives of everyone on board.

Around 50,000 people visited Antarctica last austral summer - that is, summer for the southern hemisphere - about the same number as visit Disneyland each day, according to Camilla Nichol.

Ms Nichol, a geologist by training and the chief executive of the United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust (UKAHT), told Sky News: "Most tourism is concentrated on the Peninsula region, in an area about the size of the UK."

She said that the majority visit the Antarctic Peninsula via a small cruise ship or a special expedition vessel, and although tourism is regulated and scrutinized it is also growing.

"While activity in Antarctica is tightly regulated, there are no numerical limits under the treaty," she explained.

The professor said he had been to the Antarctic "a number of times" but had "traveled on very small Soviet-era oceanographic vessels" with only around 30 passengers.

"We landed regularly and we went, you know, beneath the Antarctic Circle, so we went quite far south down the peninsula.

"You can't do that with larger vessels. And of course, the other big difference is if you have a disaster in Antarctica, it has every, every, potential to become a disaster of unedifying proportions.

"If we hit an iceberg that was in total, 30 passengers and 30 crew, max, probably - let's say 50 of us to worry about," Professor Dodds said. "I wouldn't want it being one of those [cruise ships with 1,000 passengers] if it strikes an iceberg."

(Source: MSN)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic Centre of Siena

The Historic Centre of Siena in Italy is the embodiment of a medieval city. Historically, its inhabitants pursued their competition with the neighboring cities of Florence and Pisa right into the area of urban planning.

Throughout the centuries, the city has preserved its Gothic appearance acquired between the 12th and 15th centuries. During this period, the work of Duccio, the Lorenzetti brothers and Simone Martini influenced the course of Italian and, more broadly, European art.

The whole city of Siena was devised as a work of art that blends into the surrounding landscape.



This Tuscan city developed on three hills connected by three major streets forming a Y-shape and intersecting in a valley that became the Piazza del Campo. The seven-kilometer long fortified wall still surrounds the 170-hectare site.

Protected gates were doubled at strategic points, such as the Porta Camollia on the road to Florence. To the west, the walls embrace the Fort of Santa Barbara that was rebuilt by the Medici in 1560 and finished in 1580. Inside the walls to warehouses, palaces, churches and other religious structures survive. Also of note are the city's fountains that continue to be fed by an extensive system of original tunnels.

Siena's distinctive Gothic style is illustrated by the quintessential Sienese arch, introduced to the city from the East during the Crusades.

The arch dominated later building styles including the Renaissance era. Even when buildings underwent major renovations in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries (such as the Town Hall, the Chigi-Saracini Palace, and the Marsili Palace respectively), Gothic elements had preference.

(Source: UNESCO)

Tricky waterproof repairs cast doubt over fate of Iranian architecture masterpiece

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Many visitors to the 17th-century Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, a top masterpiece of Iranian architecture that stands tall in Isfahan, witnessed last month that its picturesque creamy dome was emerged split-face from a snowfall.

Since then, the event has severely cast doubt over fate of the mosque, which punctuates the middle of the two-story arcades that are encircling the enormous Imam Square, a hectic UNESCO World Heritage site in central Iran.

So that social media rumors have been around as some take the blame on "flawed" restoration work that has partly carried out on the dome of the mosque, this time by the use of [modern] waterproof materials.

Media reports suggested then that repair work at the dome had damaged its integrity as pictures taken on a snowy day in Isfahan showed all parts of the dome but one covered in snow, press TV reported.

"Restoration and preservation experts rushed to social media to criticize local authorities for not caring enough for the architectural masterpiece which was built 400 years ago during the Safavid Empire," the report said.

Authorities at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts initially dismissed the pictures as tampered with but later admitted that there should have been a fault with the restoration. They, however, are pursuing a best way using the expertise of top traditional restorers and academic achievements in order to salvage the monument without any damage to its glory.

Experts said the repair workers could have used hydrated construction materials that contained polymer substances. Others said cracks on the dome that have been caused by previous restoration work could be to blame.



A view of the 17th-century Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan, central Iran

The story of hydrophobicity on the tiled portion of the dome has been repeated from

person to person over the past three weeks that now it has turned to larger fear, casting

Iran to host four ECO events on tourism this year

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Iran will be hosting dozens conferences and meetings within the frame of the "Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Calendar of Events 2020", however, four of which will be in tourism sphere.

"Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts will be hosting four tourism-related forums in the recently-announced ECO calendar of events," ILNA quoted Mohammad-Ebrahim Larjani, the ministry's director of advertising and marketing office, as saying on Monday.

The 6th International ECO/ Silk Road Food Festival will be held concurrent with a Meeting on Culinary Tourism from May 27 to 29 in the city of Zanjan, the

official said.

Forum of ECO Head of Tourism Associations, Unions and other Tourism Stakeholders will be held June 29 to July 1. The Islamic Republic will also be hosting the 3rd Confobition (conference + exhibition) on Health Tourism, Larjani noted.

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

Iranian tourism minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan in late January called for the Economic Cooperation Organization to consider granting visa-free travel for member states.

ECO is an intergovernmental regional organization established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for the purpose of promoting economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the member states.

In 1992, the organization was expanded to include seven new members, namely Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan.

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



File photo shows a poster for the 4th International ECO-Silk Road Food Festival

Coronavirus disrupts travel plans across Asia

we cannot waive the fee for the Philippines or the other Southeast Asian countries, they still want to cancel."

Similarly, Jordan, a Philippines-based customer service agent for Singapore Airlines who did not provide his last name because of company policy, confirmed an uptick in cancellations, despite the fact that the airline has offered to reroute passengers to bypass mainland China and Hong Kong without charge.

The continent of Asia has become an increasingly popular tourist destination in recent years. In 2018, more than 343 million international tourists traveled to Asia and the Pacific, according to the World Tourism Organization, an increase of 6 percent from the prior year.

The coronavirus, with its initial cases reported in Wuhan, China, has sickened more than 31,000 people with more than 600 deaths reported as of Friday — all but two deaths in mainland China.

More than 20 international carriers have suspended or restricted routes that ended in Wuhan and other major Chinese cities, including Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai.

A number of airlines including China Eastern Airlines, Cathay Pacific and Air China route passengers through those cities on their way to other destinations. For some travelers, even a brief layover in China is not worth the risk.

The newlyweds Jessica Salina and her husband, Anthony, planned to honeymoon in Japan in March — their first time traveling to Asia. But their Air China flight between Los Angeles and Tokyo included a layover in Beijing, and they decided to cancel on Jan. 30.

"My biggest fear was not Japan, but that layover in Beijing," Ms. Salina said in an email. "Between the large airport and additional screenings, I was starting to full-blown panic."

Luckily for her, the travel agency she booked through, Affordable World, provided penalty-free refunds for cancellation of flights passing through China.

But other travelers whose itineraries never touched China are choosing to cancel as well, concerned about assuming unnecessary risk for a trip that can be taken another time.

Japan, now in the heat of preparations for the summer Olympics and trying to avoid an outbreak there, has focused attention on the Diamond Princess, a cruise ship that has been docked in its port city of Yokohama since last week. More than 2,000 passengers are under a two-week quarantine, as cases onboard have escalated rapidly. Up to 61 people had tested positive for coronavirus by Friday, from the 20 cases confirmed Thursday.

Thursday morning the Holland America Line updated its website, saying that it had been notified that the Japanese government would not allow the estimated 2,000 passengers aboard its MS Westerdam to dock in Japanese ports.

The company issued a statement: "We are quickly working to develop alternate plans for guests currently on board and will keep them updated as information becomes available."

The cruise line has canceled a sailing on the Westerdam, scheduled to embark in Yokohama Feb. 15, but has announced no changes to the ship's itinerary after that time.

Other cruise companies that operate in Asia declined to specify changes to their planned sailings or how many people had canceled. "All itineraries that call in mainland China for the next six months are currently under review and we will communicate any itinerary revisions as soon as possible," Norwegian Cruise Line said in a statement. "As always, we will closely monitor the situation and take appropriate action as necessary."

Kay Cuellar, deputy manager of the Los Angeles office of the Japan National Tourism Organization, noted earlier in the week that in Japan, "all the necessary precautions are being taken" and cautioned visitors not to overreact. "I don't think it necessarily warrants the great concern that it's getting in the media," Ms. Cuellar said. "There's no cause for that level of alarm."

In addition to the infected passengers aboard the Diamond Princess, Japan has another at least 25 cases.

Stephen England-Hall, the chief executive of Tourism New Zealand, said in an email that his country had not seen a significant impact on arrivals yet, but that even though New Zealand is more than 6,000 miles away from Wuhan: "We expect that there will be a general softening in consumers preference to travel globally as a result."

Jason Schreier, the chief executive of APRIL Travel Protection, said the company's call center had been lit up with travelers calling to purchase policies and to better understand their current coverage.

Mr. Schreier said the company had received a plethora of calls from travel agents and tourists trying to determine if they would be reimbursed for canceling based on growing concern about coronavirus.

The answer in most cases was no: "Fear of going to someplace is not unfortunately something that people can cancel for unless they have 'cancel for any reason' coverage," he said. That coverage is far more expensive than the standard policy.

(Source: The New York Times)

Iran to cooperate with India, Pakistan and Oman to study tsunami off Makran coast

ENVIRONMENT d e s k TEHRAN — Iran is conducting a research on tsunami off the southern Makran coast in collaboration with, India, Pakistan and Oman, aiming to identify high-risk areas, a faculty member of the National Institute of Oceanography and Atmospheric Sciences has announced.

Makran is a semi-desert coastal strip in Baluchistan, Pakistan and Iran, along the coast of the Gulf of Oman. The narrow coastal plain rises rapidly into several mountain ranges. Of the 1,000 kilometers coastline, around 750 kilometers is in Pakistan. Makran is very sparsely inhabited, with much of the population concentrated in a string of small ports including Chabahar, Gwatar, Jiwani, Jask, Sirik, Gwadar, Pasni, Ormara and many smaller fishing villages.

Considering the importance of the Makran coast development issue, a project on the tsunami in the region has been defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which has been launched for about a year in collaboration with four countries, Mahmoud Reza Akbarpour said.

Previous studies have shown that the region is prone to tsunami, so UNESCO took the lead and provided funding

for the project, he stated, adding, Iran has cooperated in several UNESCO tsunami studies that examined the Makran fault and its effect on the Iranian coast of Makran.

"We have started research on the tsunami since past 4 years, but given the importance of the subject, we are also implementing this joint project to map the area in terms of earthquakes and tsunamis."

Of course, each country has already done this separately, but now they are going to work together, he added.

Since the earthquake magnitude for the region is not clear, it is very important to be prepared if it is to occur and that the project will help taking effective action in this regard, he stated.

"We predict an earthquake ranging from 8 to 9 on Richter scale and what impacts each of these Richter earthquakes will have."

Referring to two parts to the project, he noted that a rapid alert system aimed at identifying high-risk areas and which system should be used if such an earthquake happens and how the institutions would work together to give the first warning and evacuate the area; the second part is related to how to deal with a tsunami.



"We have so far performed several maneuvers; and the organizations' tasks have also been specified," he said.

He went on to highlight that as the first wave of tsunami reaches land after 15 minutes, training on how to evacuate the area at this time is crucial.

"Moreover, we have held 7 to 8 workshops in India and Oman, and some workshops will be held in Oman in March, and in June we will have two workshops in Iran.

These issues also need to be taught in schools, so we published the tsunami book and distributed to all schools in coastal provinces."

It is a book that teaches children images and stories about what to do in the event of an earthquake and tsunami, he noted.

"In deprived areas, people have the most important role to play in maintaining their health, of course, we have good alert systems, but we also need to upgrade the technology, which requires fund, and none of which are in place," Akbarpour lamented.

Pointing to the tsunami in the Caspian Sea, he said that the Caspian Sea might experience an earthquake but does not have enough power to cause a tsunami.

Trump named 'worst president for our environment in history' by nine green groups

Donald Trump has been the worst president for our environment in history, nine conservation groups wrote in a statement released Tuesday.

The statement was written by Alaska Wilderness League Action, Clean Water Action, Defenders of Wildlife, Earthjustice, EDF Action, Friends of the Earth, League of Conservation Voters, Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society.

The groups wrote: "Donald Trump's administration has unleashed an unprecedented assault on our environment and the health of our communities. His policies threaten our climate, air, water, public lands, wildlife, and oceans; no amount of his greenwashing can change the simple fact: Donald Trump has been the worst president for our environment in history. Unfortunately, our children will pay the costs of this president's recklessness. Our organizations have repeatedly fought back against these attacks and we will continue to fight to ensure that our kids don't bear the brunt of the Trump administration's anti-environmental agenda."

As of Dec. 21 of 2019, the Trump administration had attempted to roll back more than 90 environmental rules and regulations, The New York Times reported. Those included:

1. Replacing the Obama-era Clean Power Plan that limited carbon dioxide emissions from coal and natural gas plants. The new rule would let states make their own rules and could lead to as many as 1,400 additional air pollution deaths a year by 2030.

2. Revoking California's waiver to set its own vehicle emissions standards under the Clean Air Act



3. Changing how the Endangered Species Act is applied to make it harder to protect animals and plants from the climate crisis

4. Stripping protections from streams and wetlands that had been protected by the Obama administration.

In his speech to a joint session of Congress Tuesday, which came a day before the Senate is set to vote on whether or not to remove him from office following an impeachment trial, Trump talked up his deregulatory efforts as a boon to the U.S. economy.

Trump's only other mention of environmental policy came when he spoke of his decision to join the One Trillion Trees Initiative, a plan launched by the World Economic Forum to plant, conserve and restore one trillion trees.

The plan is intended to help fight the climate crisis and restore biodiversity. Capturing carbon in forests, grasslands and wetlands can achieve as much as one third of the emissions reductions needed to meet Paris agreement goals by 2030, the initiative pointed out, but such so-called "natural solutions" need to go along with reducing emissions in the energy, heavy industry and finance sectors.

(Source: ecowatch.com)

Families with multiple births to receive monthly allowances

SOCIETY d e s k TEHRAN — In line with population growth policies, families with triplets or more will receive monthly allowances of up to 5 million rials (nearly \$120 at the official rate of 42,000 rials), head of Welfare Organization has announced.

The allowances would be paid when the children are born till the age of 6, IRNA quoted Vahid Ghobadi Dana as saying on Saturday.

Some 17,000 households with three or above births will receive the government support across the country, he stated.

He went on to say that since the Iranian calendar year 1393 (March 2014-March 2015) till 1397 (March 2018-March 2019), nearly 1.5 million births were registered in the country per year, 3 percent of which have been twins and 0.5 percent triplets or more.

According to the data released by the National Organization for Civil Registration, comparing past three years, some 1,366,509 infants were born in the country, whose births were registered last year, while 1,487,913 births occurred a year before it, and 1,528,053 births have been recorded in the Iranian calendar year 1395 (March 2016-March 2017), a difference of roughly 100,000 per year.

Several socioeconomic factors led to fertility rate decrease and reproductive behavior in the country, including urbanization, education, financial issues, first marriage age, as well as increased access to family planning services along with increased time gap between the first born and marriage.

In August 2019, in a letter to the heads of medical science universities and colleges across the country, Health Minister Saeed



Namaki ordered the formation of a special committee aimed to prevent the country's population from declining.

"To prevent population decline, it is necessary to intensify and expand prenatal care in less developed areas, as well as to provide postpartum care in deprived areas, so it is imperative to quickly review and announce the facilities required in the deprived areas.

Prioritize the development of infertility treatment centers to serve couples who need treatment due to physiological problems, so that all medical universities should establish an infertility treatment center and inform the residents about the establishment. Whole services at these centers should be free of charge. Required resources will be provided by the Ministry's headquarters.

It is essential to form an expert team to encourage and educate couples who refuse childbearing years after marriage, in addition to informing them of the possibility of infertility in the years ahead.

Highlighting the benefits and positive effects of having a second child in single-child families, using the capacity of psychologists and experienced health professionals, especially in the field of mental health, is necessary.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

20% of areas in Iran at high risk of flood

Twenty percent of areas across Iran are highly prone to flooding, Khosro Shahbazi, head of the Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization (FRWMO), has said.

"Precipitation in Iran is one-third of the world's average, as the country is located in a dry and fragile region where we experience 11 millimeters decrease in precipitation each 10 years and an increase in evaporation of more than 50 millimeters every year," he explained, ISNA reported. Rainfall fluctuations usually lead to flood and devastation, so a comprehensive planning for watershed management and flood control is required, he noted.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"sens- or sent-"

■ **Meaning:** feel, be aware

■ **For example:** Moving house seemed like the *sensible* thing to do.

PHRASAL VERB

Pop up

■ **Meaning:** to appear, sometimes unexpectedly

■ **For example:** Her name keeps popping up in the newspapers.

IDIOM

Dead as a doornail

■ **Explanation:** This expression is used to stress that something or someone is very definitely dead

■ **For example:** They've started fighting again, so the peace agreement is now as dead as a doornail.

بیست درصد ایران جزو مناطق با خطر سیل خیزی بالا است

سرپرست سازمان جنگلها، مراتع و آبخیزداری می گوید ۲۰ درصد ایران جزو مناطق با خطر سیل خیزی بالا است.

به گزارش روز جمعه ایسنا، خسرو شهبازی افزود: میزان بارش در کشور ما یک سوم متوسط آن در دنیا است و از نظر جغرافیایی در منطقه ای خشک و شکننده واقع شده‌ایم که هر ۱۰ سال با ۱۱ میلیمتر کاهش بارش و بیش از ۵۰ میلیمتر افزایش تبخیر و تعرق مواجه هستیم که همه منجر به این شده که بارش‌ها در منطقه ما سیلابی و ویرانگر باشد، به همین خاطر نیازمند برنامه ریزی جامع برای مدیریت حوضه‌های آبخیز و کنترل سیلاب‌ها هستیم.

Rouhani declares new events on next year's calendar

SOCIETY d e s k TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani declared on Saturday nine new events on the next year's calendar (starting on March 21), IRNA news agency reported.

According to the report, the 15th day of the holy month of Ramadan which falls on May 9, is marked a day to pay tribute to benefactors.

March 25 is marked as Zoroaster's birth, an ancient Iranian spiritual leader who founded what is now known as Zoroastrianism.

April 25 is marked as the anniversary of the martyrdom of Major General Mohammad-Vali Gharani, and also Architecture Day. June 27 is declared as the anniversary of the chemical bombing of Sardasht.

Moreover, July 25 is marked the commemoration day of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili. August 8 is set as commemoration day of Martyred Defenders of the Holy Shrine.

September 26 is also declared World Tourism Day. And March 4 is marked as the charity day.



FAO Food Price Index rises for the fourth consecutive month

World food prices rose for the fourth consecutive month in January.

The FAO Food Price Index averaged 182.5 points during the month, up 0.7 percent from December and 11.3 percent higher than the same month a year earlier.

Vegetable oils, sugar, and wheat were the chief drivers of the index, which tracks monthly changes in the international prices of commonly-traded food commodities.

The FAO Vegetable Oil Price Index increased 7.0 percent for the month, hitting a three-year high as prices for palm, soy, sunflower and rapeseed oils all rose.

The FAO Sugar Price Index rose 5.5 percent, propelled by expectations of much lower sugar output in several major producing countries.

The FAO Cereal Price Index rose 2.9 percent from December, led by higher wheat prices, followed by maize and rice.

The FAO Dairy Price Index rose 0.9 percent, buoyed by strong import demand for butter, cheese and skim milk powder.

The FAO Meat Price Index, meanwhile, reversed an 11-month upward streak and declined 4.0 percent during the month because of reduced purchases from China and the Far East as well as large export availabilities of pig and bovine meats.

■ 2019 likely to register record cereal output

FAO also issued a new forecast for world cereal production in 2019, anticipating a record high of 2 715 million tonnes, a 2.3 percent increase from the previous year.

FAO raised its forecast for world cereal utilization in 2019/20 to 2 714 million tonnes, up 1.2 percent from the previous year.

World cereal stocks by the close of seasons in 2020 are expected to amount to 863.3 million tonnes, marginally lower than their opening levels. The resulting global cereal stock-to-use ratio is now projected at 30.9 percent, a comfortable level by historical standards.

World trade in cereals in 2019/20 is anticipated to rise 2.3 percent to 420.2 million tonnes, the second highest on record, led by increasing shipments of wheat from the European Union and Ukraine to Asia.

(Source: FAO)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Ancient caves get clean up

(January 27, 2003)

The spectacular city of Petra in Jordan is being cleaned up. Petra was carved into the rock 2000 years ago by a people called the Nabateans. It's a popular tourist site, but it's not humans causing the mess this time. This report from Caroline Hawley Many of Petra's caves **used to be** inhabited by local **Bedouin**, until the government moved them out in the 1980s, when Petra became a **World Heritage site**. But **antiquities officials** say that **dung** left by the Bedouin sheep and goats is damaging the caves, many of which are also **tombs**, or ancient prayer rooms. The job of cleaning out the caves is now underway. The workers are Bedouin who used to make their living selling souvenirs or giving donkey rides, but who are now struggling because of a drastic decline in tourism. The official in charge of Petra, Suleiman Farajat, said the aim of the clean-up was **two-fold**: to protect antiquity and to give work to people who've lost their **livelihoods** because of regional troubles. He told the BBC that some new **inscriptions** had already been found, as well as ancient pottery and broken **shards** of Nabataean sculptures.

■ **Words used to be:** were in the past

Bedouin: nomadic people living in the Middle East and North Africa

World Heritage site: a historic place of international importance, according to the United Nations.

antiquities officials: government workers in charge of ancient objects

dung: animal droppings

tombs: stone structures holding the dead

two-fold: if something is two-fold, it has two parts

livelihood: source of income

inscriptions: writing carved into stone

shards: pieces of broken pottery or stone

(Source: BBC)



Without water, everything withers

Iraq, Russia discuss strengthening military ties amid U.S. tensions

Iraq and Russia have discussed furthering military ties amid souring relations between Baghdad and Washington in the wake of U.S. assassination of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi anti-terror commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.



In a statement released on Thursday, Iraq's Defense Ministry announced a meeting between the army chief of staff, Lieutenant General Othman al-Ghanimi, and Russian Ambassador Maksim Maksimov, along with Moscow's newly arrived defense attaché in Baghdad.

During the meeting, the statement said, the two sides discussed prospects for "cooperation and coordination" and emphasized the importance of exchanging information and coordination to prevent the resurgence of the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group.

Ghanimi praised Russia for providing Iraqi "armed forces with advanced and effective equipment and weapons that had a major role in resolving many battles."

Maksimov, for his part, invited Ghanimi to Moscow and meet with his Russian counterpart "within the framework of strengthening cooperation between the two sides."

Meanwhile, a senior Iraqi military intelligence official, who was speaking on condition of anonymity, told The Associated Press that Russia was among the countries that offered military support in the wake of fraught Washington-Baghdad ties.

"Iraq still needs aerial reconnaissance planes. There are countries that have given signals to Iraq to support us or equip us with reconnaissance planes such as Russia and Iran," he said.

On January 5, the Iraqi parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution calling for the expulsion of all foreign forces, including some 5,200 American forces, after the U.S. assassination of general Soleimani and his Iraqi trenchmate al-Muhandis two days earlier.

General Soleimani was in Baghdad at the invitation of the Iraqi government.

(Source: TASS)

Mahathir Says Trump's Middle East plan unacceptable

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said the proposed Israel-Palestine peace deal that was announced by U.S. President Donald Trump is "utterly unacceptable" and "grossly unjust."

The plan, dubbed the "Deal of the Century" by Trump, hands the holy city of Jerusalem on a silver platter to Israel in absolute disregard for the feelings of millions of Muslims and Christians worldwide, Mahathir said in a speech in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday.

"This deal will only bring more conflict to the region, and will antagonize billions of people around the world," Mahathir said at the third conference of The League of Parliamentarians for Al-Quds.

Trump unveiled his proposal at a White House event last month alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Palestinian officials weren't consulted on the proposal. The White House approach leading to the plan has long been criticized internationally for providing Israel with quick wins while making concessions to the Palestinians contingent on a list of milestones.

(Source: Bloomberg)

American dies of coronavirus in China

A 60-year-old American has died of the new coronavirus, the first confirmed non-Chinese death of the illness, U.S. officials said, as millions of Chinese began returning home after a Lunar New Year break that was extended to try to contain the outbreak.

While the vast majority of cases have been in China, the virus has spread to some two dozen countries abroad, including five British nationals infected in a French ski resort.

The American man died Thursday in Wuhan, epicenter of the virus outbreak in the central Chinese province of Hubei, a U.S. embassy spokesman said Saturday in Beijing.

"We offer our sincerest condolences to the family on their loss," he told Reuters. "Out of the respect for the family's privacy, we have no further comment."

A Japanese man in his sixties and hospitalized with pneumonia in Wuhan, capital of Hubei, also died after suffering symptoms consistent with the new coronavirus, Japan's foreign ministry said.

China's Communist Party rulers have sealed off cities, cancelled flights and closed factories, a response that has dented the world's second-biggest economy and had ripple effects globally for financial markets and businesses dependent on China.

The death toll in mainland China rose Saturday to 722, according to authorities, and is expected to pass the 774 deaths recorded globally during the 2002-2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Most of the deaths in China have occurred in and around Wuhan. Across mainland China, the number of cases stood at 31,774 as of Saturday.

The virus has spread to 27 countries and regions, according to a Reuters count based on official reports, infecting more than 330 people. Two deaths have been reported outside mainland China - in Hong Kong and the Philippines. Both victims were Chinese nationals.

The latest patients include five British nationals staying in the same chalet at a ski resort in Haute-Savoie in the Alps, health officials said, raising fears of further infections at a busy period in the ski season.

The five had stayed in the same ski chalet with a person who had been in Singapore. They were not in a serious condition, the officials said.

(Source: Reuters)

Berri calls for Arab unity against Trump plan

Over 100 U.S. Democrats reject Trump's 'deal of the century'

Lebanon Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri Saturday denounced the U.S. Middle East peace plan, during the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union conference held in Amman.

"We stand before a war plan, not a peace plan," said Berri, during the 30th emergency conference of the AIU, Daily Star reported.

Berri expressed disapproval of the re-settlement of Palestinian refugees, which was included in President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan that was unveiled on Jan. 28.

"The deal obliges Palestinians and, through them, Arabs to recognize Palestine as a Jewish country, and eliminates the right of return," said the Parliament speaker.

The conference was held to discuss what the Trump administration calls the "deal of the century," and ways to support the Palestinian cause.

The Parliament speaker also called for "unity" and "resistance" of the Arab world in the face of these developments.

■ Democrats

Meanwhile, more than a hundred Democratic members of the US House of Representatives have expressed strong disapproval at President Donald Trump's so-called deal of the century.

In a letter on Friday, the lawmakers blamed the team behind the plan for not



consulting the Palestinians, saying it would "hurt Israelis and Palestinians alike, pushing them toward further conflict."

They also criticized the release of the deal, just ahead of the next month's general elections in Israel, arguing that the timing suggests an effort to boost Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's re-election bid.

"It does not have our support, and the Israeli [regime] must not take it as a license to violate international law by annexing all or portions of the West Bank," according to

the letter, initiated by Representatives Andy Levin and Alan Lowenthal, who happen to be Jewish.

"In addition to the highly problematic nature of your proposal, the timing of its release suggests motives unrelated to helping solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," the letter read.

On January 28, Trump unveiled his so-called deal of the century, negotiated with Israel but without the Palestinians.

Palestinian leaders, who severed all ties

Syrian army begin to chip away at Idlib

Army clears mines, explosives in strategic northwestern city of Saraqib

→ 1 The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in a report, corroborated by witnesses, on Thursday that Syrian troops had marched through Saraqib following intense battles with militants.

■ Syrian army liberates two villages in eastern countryside of Idlib

Also on Saturday, Syrian army soldiers and their allies managed to assert control over two villages in the eastern countryside of Idlib province.

SANA reported that Syrian forces managed to capture the villages of Maharem and Tell Karatine following clashes with Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly known as Nusra Front) terrorists and their affiliates.

The report added that Syrian government troops inflicted heavy losses on the militants' lines of defense and forced them to retreat from their positions in the region.

■ Turkey threatens to strike back if outposts in Idlib hit

Meanwhile, Turkey threatened on Saturday to strike back if its military outposts in Syria's Idlib province come under attack.

"Our observation posts in Idlib continue their duties and are capable of protecting themselves with the weapons and equipment they possess," the Turkish Defense Ministry said in a post published on its official Twitter page.

It added, "In the event of a new attack, a proper response will be given in the strongest manner."



Fahrettin Altun, Turkey's presidential communications director, also said Ankara will never tolerate attacks on its forces in Idlib.

"Let me state clearly that it is never possible for us to tolerate the things that have happened in Idlib. Turkey held the terrorists, who pointed guns at our heroic soldiers responsible, and now it will also hold those murderers responsible for martyring [its soldiers in Idlib]," Altun said at an event in Istanbul.

The senior Turkish official went on to assert Turkey does not only want to safeguard its own national security, but also to thwart plots against the region.

"If the process [of a refugee influx], which started just

beyond our borders, cannot be stopped immediately, a new and larger influx of refugees will start, [eventually] reaching European capitals," Altun added.

Over the past four years, Turkey's military has staged at least two unauthorized invasions into northern Syria to push back Kurdish militants, who Ankara accuses of harboring subversive intentions against the Turkish administration.

Syria has denounced the offensives, saying it would respond in kind if the need arises.

Damascus has even been approached by the Kurdish-majority population of the assaulted areas for military support in the face of the Turkish military.

Citing witnesses and a war monitor, Reuters reported earlier this week that Syrian government forces had been hit by Turkish artillery barrages as they tried to seize Saraqib.

On Wednesday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Syrian government forces in Idlib must pull back behind a line of Turkish observation posts by the end of this month, warning that if they did not do so, Ankara would drive them back.

Turkey's official state news agency Anadolu reported on Friday that Ankara had sent nearly 150 vehicles with commandos and ammunition to reinforce its observation posts in Syria's Idlib.

(Source: Press TV)

Trump launches revenge, fires impeachment witnesses



U.S. President Donald Trump has fired two government officials who provided the most damaging testimony during his impeachment investigation over the Ukraine scandal, sparking accusations that he is on a campaign of revenge.

U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman and U.S. Ambassador Gordon Sondland were ousted Friday just two days after Trump was acquitted by the Republican-controlled Senate on charges of trying to pressure Ukraine to investigate a political rival.

Vindman, the top Ukraine expert at the National Security Council, was escorted out of the White House, according to his lawyer.

"Vindman was asked to leave for telling the truth," said his lawyer, David Pressman.

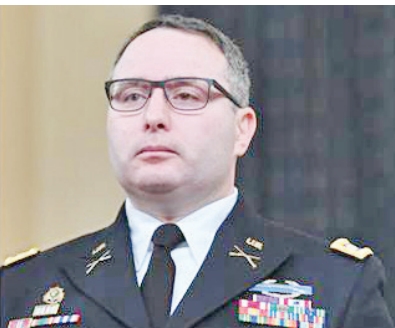
Vindman's twin brother Yevgeny, who worked as a lawyer at the NSC, was also fired and escorted out of the White House. Both brothers were born in Ukraine and immigrated to the U.S. as toddlers.

Hours later, Sondland said he had been fired from his post as U.S. ambassador to the European Union.

The two officials served as key witnesses during the impeachment investigation by the Democratic-controlled U.S. House of Representatives.

Trump told reporters at the White House on Friday that he is still upset with Democrats in Congress and government officials involved in the impeachment inquiry, even after he was acquitted on Wednesday.

"I'm not happy with him. You think I'm



supposed to be happy with him?" Trump said of Vindman.

Vindman testified in November that he "couldn't believe what I was hearing" when he listened in on a July 25 phone call between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodimir Zelenskii that became the focus of the inquiry.

Trump asked Zelenskii to launch investigations into Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden and his son Hunter, who worked at a Ukrainian gas company when his father was U.S. vice president during the Obama administration.

Sondland, a wealthy Republican donor and Oregon hotelier who served as U.S. Ambassador to the EU, testified that he was following Trump's orders when he pushed Ukrainian officials to carry out investigations sought by the president.

Trump has repeatedly condemned the impeachment probe as a hoax, denying he did anything wrong for pressuring Ukraine to open a politically embarrassing investigation into Biden's family.

Senior Democrats in both chambers of Congress slammed Trump's decision to fire the officials.

House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a statement that Vindman's ouster was "a clear and brazen act of retaliation that showcases the President's fear of the truth. The President's vindictiveness is precisely what led Republican Senators to be accomplices to his cover-up."

(Source: agencies)

Yemen's Houthis gain more ground against Saudi-led militants in Ma'rib



Fighters from Yemen's popular Houthi Ansarullah movement have gained more ground against Saudi-led militants in the oil-rich Ma'rib Province.

Yemen's al-Masirah TV channel reported on Friday that the Houthis, which have been defending war-ravaged Yemen against the Saudi aggression, advanced west of the city of Ma'rib, retaking several sites from the Saudi-led militants loyal to former Riyadh-backed President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

The Yemeni fighters, it added, are currently on the western outskirts of Ma'rib, their first presence in the area since the start of the Saudi war in 2015.

The Houthis' latest advance comes at a time that pro-Hadi militants attempt to capture areas they had lost in Ma'rib's neighboring al-Jawf Province.

The Yemeni forces launched an operation, dubbed al-Bunyan al-Marsoos, late last month in a bid to liberate the militant-held areas in Ma'rib and adjacent regions. The operation came after the Houthis managed to fend off an attack by the Hadi loyalists in the Nehm district of Sana'a province.

Saudi Arabia and a coalition of its vassal states launched the war on Yemen in March 2015 in an attempt to reinstall the Hadi regime and eliminate the Houthis.

The military aggression, coupled with a naval blockade, has killed and injured

with Washington in late 2017 after Trump controversially recognized Jerusalem al-Quds as the "capital" of the Israeli regime, immediately rejected the plan, with President Mahmoud Abbas saying it "belongs to the dustbin of history."

Trump's Middle East scheme largely meets Israel's demands in the decades-old conflict while creating a Palestinian state with limited control over its own security and borders.

It also enshrines Jerusalem al-Quds as "Israel's undivided capital" and allows the regime to annex settlements in the occupied West Bank and the Jordan Valley.

The proposal further denies the right of return of Palestinian refugees into their homeland, among other controversial terms.

Thousands of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and besieged Gaza Strip took to the streets in immediate condemnation of the plan.

Muslims all across the world have also expressed solidarity with the Palestinian cause and denounced Trump's proposed plan.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, has also said Trump's pro-occupation plan is doomed to die even before the U.S. president's own death, adding that Washington's push "will definitely end in failure."

(Source: agencies)

The report further emphasized that bin Salman has now become "a victim of his own assumptions, considering the Houthis a mere ragtag force and hoping the Saudi intervention would be a walk in the park."

(Source: Press TV)

Zadaliasghari not happy with Iran NPC's decision

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran blind football team forward Behzad Zadaliasghari is discontented with Iran's National Paralympic Committee (NPC)'s decision over reducing the number of teams in Tokyo 2020.

Iran NPC has decided to send the athletes and teams who have more chance of winning medals in the Games.

Iran football 5-a-side and wheelchair basketball teams, who have already secured their places at the Tokyo 2020, will be absent in the Games.

"It's not fair because we are Rio 2016 silver medalists. We are determined to qualify for the final match once again but I don't know why the NPC official has decided not to send us to the games," Zadaliasghari told in an interview with Tehran Times.

Team Melli claimed a silver medal at the 2019 IBSA Blind Football Asian Championships in Pattaya, Thailand in October, losing to China 1-0 in a tight final.

"We did our best in the Asian championship to book a place in the 2020 Paralympic Games. I think it's not a good decision because it has made us feel discouraged," the blind Messi added.

"Nobody thought we would advance to the final in Rio and it shows that how strong we are. Iran are among the top four teams at the moment and have potential to win a medal once again. I hope the NPC officials change their decision and send Iran football 5-a-side to Paralympics," Zadaliasghari stated.



Iran defeated Morocco and Argentina in Rio and lost to Brazil 1-0 in the final match. Zadaliasghari scored an astonishing

goal against Morocco in the group stage that had people talking for many days. The Iranian received the ball in his own

half and dribbled past the entire African team before shooting past goalkeeper Samir Bara.

Saeid Mollaei held hostage by IJF: Salehi Amiri



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian National Olympic Committee President Reza Salehi Amiri says that Saeid Mollaei has been taken hostage by the In-

ternational Judo Federation (IJF).

The Iran Judo Federation has been suspended of the from all competitions, administrative and social activities organized or authorized by the International Judo Federation and its Unions.

The IJF says that during the last 2019 World Championships in Tokyo, Mollaei has been instructed by the Iranian authorities and the Iran Judo Federation to withdraw from competing to avoid a potential contest against an Israeli athlete. It's while the Iranian top official considers it as part of a project to suspend Iran's sports.

"We have filed a lawsuit against IJF and the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) will hear the appeal case on April 8. We believe that IJF President Marius Vizer has convinced Mollaei to compete under a refugee flag at Tokyo 2020. Our athlete has been taken hostage by them. Vizer

then sent Mollai to Germany from Tokyo according to a prearranged plan," Salehi Amiri said.

"Mollaei can go back to Iran without any problems and we welcome him with open arms," the NOCIR president added. Iran has earned 41 quota places for the 2020 Olympic Games so far and Salehi Amiri says that the Iranian athletes will win more places for the prestigious event.

"We can book more quota places in athletic and martial arts for Olympics," he stated.

The Iranian delegation finished in 25th place in the previous edition held in Rio, winning three gold, one silver and four bronze medals and Salehi Amiri says they will try to improve their position in the upcoming Games.

"We received an overall good evaluation from our delegation in Tokyo, however we should not put our athletes under pressure for winning medals," he concluded.

Youngster's huge total and Moradi's return boost Iran's Tokyo 2020 weightlifting hopes

A remarkable performance by the 20-year-old super-heavyweight Ali Davoudi has brightened Iran's prospects of making the weightlifting podium at Tokyo 2020.

There was more good news for Iran with an encouraging update on the fitness of Sohrab Moradi, one of the nation's two weightlifting champions at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games.

Not so good was another bomb-out by the other gold medalist four years ago, Ki-anoush Rostami.

Davoudi, who has only just left the junior ranks, made 441kg at the Fajr Cup in Rasht, near the Iranian capital Tehran — a silver qualifier for Tokyo.

His career-best effort, which would have been good enough for bronze at last year's International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) World Championships, puts Davoudi in pole position for one of Iran's two places in Tokyo.

Apart from the apparently unbeatable gold medal favorite Lasha Talakhadze of Georgia, only one man has made a bigger total in Olympic qualifying and he is expected to miss Tokyo.

Gor Minasyan of Armenia had a career best 460kg in finishing second to Talakhadze at last year's IWF World Championships, but he will likely give way to Simon Martirosyan, the phenomenal 109kg lifter who went up in weight in the Fajr Cup and finished second to Davoudi.

Armenia can send only one male lifter to Tokyo because of multiple doping violations, and Martirosyan will surely take it if fit as he is favorite for gold at 109kg.

With Rostami, the 85kg champion in Rio,



failing with all three snatch attempts, Iran's hopes for the second slot in Japan may yet rest on Moradi, who won gold at 94kg in Rio but has suffered two serious injuries during qualifying.

Moradi badly injured his spine a year ago then dislocated a shoulder last July.

He looked out of contention but he will return to action in the West Asian Championships in Dubai in three weeks time, and is hopeful of a good performance at the Asian Championships in Kazakhstan in April.

Moradi is way down in 78th place in the current rankings and would probably need to

lift close to world-record levels in both those competitions to make it — but he is the world record holder in snatch and total at 96kg, both set when he won the 2018 world title.

"We cannot speak about his presence at the Olympics right now," said Mohsen Beiranvand, the 2004 Olympic Games lifter and former national team coach who is now general secretary of the Iran Weightlifting Federation.

But Beiranvand said Moradi had made very encouraging progress in "medical and training programs under doctors and coaches" and would definitely compete in Dubai.

Rostami is all but out of contention, having bombed out at the 2019 IWF World Championships and registered no points in the second phase of qualifying.

After training alone under his own supervision for years he was brought into the team and had responded well, said Beiranvand. "Some see the problem as coaching," he said.

"After the World Championships in Thailand the Federation insisted he should no longer practice individually, but should be coached.

"We saw him lift his best weight in the past few years at the Qatar Cup (403kg, in December) with the Federation's select coach. "I don't know what happened (in the Fajr Cup).

"Everybody in the competition saw Ki-anoush easily lift 170kg in the warm-up hall but he dropped the weights three times."

Rostami failed at 175kg twice, then again at 177kg.

The other Iranian in the field, Reza Dehdar, also bombed out, leaving Kyrgyzstan's Bekdoolot Rasulbekov to claim victory with a modest 371kg.

Another Iranian contender for Tokyo, Ali Hashemi, won the 109kg with 388kg. Three Indonesian lifters won medals in Rasht.

The most impressive was 30-year-old Eko Yuli Irawan, a silver medalist at 62kg in Rio, who won the 67kg with 310kg, ahead of team-mate Deni on 285kg.

Irawan's total was better than the 73kg winner Triyatno, who made 306kg.

(Source: Insidethegames)

Iran come third at SAT International Futsal C'ship

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran B futsal team finished in third place at the SAT International Futsal Championship Hat Yai Thailand 2020 after a 2-1 defeat against Thailand A team on Saturday.

Ali Sanei's side defeated Tajikistan (3-2) and Malaysia (5-0) in their two first matches and lost to Thailand B (5-0) in their third match.



Thailand A took the first place and Thaind B placed second in the tournament.

SAT International Futsal Championship Thailand 2020 was 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 re-organized in a unique group of five teams.

Jordanian Al Ali to referee Al Shorta v Esteghlal

TASNIM — Ahmed Faisal Al Ali from Jordan will referee the match between Al Shorta of Iraq and Iran's Esteghlal.

He will be assisted by his countrymen.

The match will reportedly be held in Erbil.

The Iraqi football team will host Esteghlal in Group A of the 2020 AFC Champions League.

Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia and Emirati Al Wahda also are in the group.

Uzbekistani referee Aziz Asimov has been also appointed to officiate the match between Al Duhail of Qatar and Iran's Persepolis.

He will be assisted by his countrymen Ruslan Serazitdinov and Alisher Usmanov.

The match has been scheduled for Tuesday at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha in the 2020 AFC Champions League group stage.

Persepolis has been drawn in Group C along with Al Duhail, Saudi Arabia's Al Taawoun and Sharjah from the UAE.

India to play Romania in friendlies

The Indian U-17 women's team will be travelling on an exposure tour to Turkey as part of their preparation for the forthcoming U-17 Women's World Cup India 2020.

India travel to Istanbul on Monday where they will be playing two matches against U-17 Romania on February 16 and 19.

"It is a really good opportunity to play two matches against Romania. It's important for us to start implementing what we are doing in training sessions. We also have plans to introduce a new formation. It's always good for players to learn different formations," said head coach Thomas Dennerby mentioned.

"Romania are very strong in tackling, as well as in one-on-one situations. I expect both games will be played in a high tempo."

"The matches will enable us an opportunity to see which players are ready to play 90 minutes at a high pace. We have been working very hard to improve the endurance level," Dennerby stated.

The FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup India 2020 is on November 2-21.

(Source: All India Football Federation)

Japan's Honda gets hero's welcome in Brazil

Japanese midfielder Keisuke Honda was given a hero's welcome Friday from several thousand fans of Brazilian club Botafogo, where he recently signed to play until the end of the year.

"Ole, Ole, Ole, Ola, Honda, Honda," chanted a huge crowd of frenzied fans, brandishing Japanese flags as the 33-year-old arrived at the Galeao international airport in Rio de Janeiro.

Hidden by the pack of photographers shooting his arrival, Honda pleased the crowd by hopping onto a platform to greet them, then donned a Botafogo cap and waved a flag in the club's black and white colours.



Honda, one of the best players in Japanese football history, will be officially presented Saturday at Nilton Santos stadium, the athletics venue for the 2016 Olympics.

Botafogo are looking for a boost after finishing 15th in the Brazilian league last season, barely avoiding relegation.

Honda had been without a club since leaving Dutch side Vitesse Arnhem in December, less than two months after joining.

Formerly of AC Milan and CSKA Moscow, the midfielder has stood out for the Japan national team, scoring 37 goals in 98 appearances, including four FIFA World Cup goals.

In 2018 he became the first Japanese player to score in three World Cups.

(Source: AFP)

Olympic gold medalist Schoeman blames contamination for positive test

CAPETOWN (Reuters) — South African Olympic swimming gold medalist Roland Schoeman says he still has ambition to compete at the Tokyo 2020 Games despite serving a one-year suspension after testing positive for a banned substance.

Governing body FINA said Schoeman tested positive for the prohibited substance GW501516, a hormone and metabolic modulator, at an out-of-competition control on May 18 last year.

Schoeman, 39, issued a statement on Saturday, blaming his positive test on a contaminated batch of supplements, adding the levels found were trace amounts and his tests immediately before and after the positive result were clear.

"In May last year I was taking a variety of supplements,

all carefully selected, to avoid any possibility of dosing on something not allowed," his statement said.

"I had tested negative for any such contamination in the two tests before May 2019 and for two tests immediately after the one found to contain a trace of the substance.

"I would never knowingly take a banned substance and much less a substance known to carry cancer, heart attack and stroke risks."

Schoeman believes the fact he was handed a one-year ban, rather than the usual two-to-four year suspension, "is testament to FINA's understanding that this was possibly inadvertent contamination."

He said the positive test was "personally devastating and

very stressful", adding that he "disbelieved other athletes when they claimed contamination, but I now know from painful experience that it isn't quite that simple."

Schoeman won gold in the 4x100 freestyle relay at the 2004 Athens Games, plus individual silver and bronze medals in the 100 and 50m freestyle.

He also competed in the 2000, 2008 and 2012 Olympics, and says he retains the goal of going to Tokyo, with his ban to be lifted in May.

"It remains my ambition to compete in the Olympics this year, if possible. My commitment to maintaining the highest standards of ethics and fairness in sport remains undimmed," he added.

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
» Advertisements Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051450
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» www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
» Printed at: Jame Jam Bartar Borna - 44197737

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P.O. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713

GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

God has certain friends to whom He grants blessings in the interest of His servants, and leaves these blessings in their hands as long as they are generous.

Imam Ali (AS)

Faramarz Qaribian bids farewell to acting with “Exodus”

A R T **TEHRAN** — Faramarz Qaribian, the 78-year-old star of such acclaimed movies “The Deer” and “Beautiful City”, bowed out on Friday from his 50-year acting career, saying that he has done his final performance in the Iranian cinema with director Ebrahim Hatamikia’s peasant protest movie “Exodus”.



Iranian actor Faramarz Qaribian attends the 38th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran’s Mellat Cineplex on February 7, 2020. (ISNA/Hadi Zand)

He announced his retirement during a press conference after the premiere of the film during the 38th Fajr Film Festival at Mellat Cineplex.

“I believe this film is the highlight of my acting career. I’ve read lots of screenplays during the past seven years but I didn’t like any of them. I was waiting for something valuable to end my career with,” said Qaribian.

“I knew playing this role would be very difficult, but as it was the role of a protester and I’ve been playing protesters’ characters since the beginning of my career in movies like Masud Kimiai’s “The Deer”, he added.

“I’ve become weary of the negative attitude of Iranian cinema officials, therefore I announce that ‘Exodus’ is my final film,” he concluded.

Hatamikia also noted that he was very satisfied with Qaribian’s performance in the film.

“I’ve never seen such a literate and disciplined actor in my life, I bow down before him,” he stated.

Qaribian started his career with filmmaker Masud Kimiai’s “Come Stranger” in 1968. Some of his credits are “The Messenger” by Fariborz Saleh, “Tall Shadows of the Wind” by Bahman Farmanara, “Dancing in the Dust” by Asghar Farhadi and “Rubble” by Sirus Alvand.

He tried his hand at filmmaking with “The Law” in 1995, “Her Eyes” in 1999 and “The Sinners” in 2012.

He won the best actor awards in various editions of the Fajr Film Festival for “Train” in 1987 and “Misty Harbor” in 1992, both by Amir Qavidel, and “The Rain Man” by Abolhassan Davudi in 1999.

Hatamikia’s “Exodus”, a political statement

1 → Pantea Panahiha’s portrayal of Mehrbanu, the elderly lady who accompanies the group of old men on their trip to the capital, quite cuts the mustard.

The film is produced by the Owj Arts and Media Organization, the Tehran-based institution that produces revolutionary works in art and cinema.

This is Hatamikia’s third collaboration with Owj, after the political dramas “The Bodyguard” in 2016 and “Damascus Time” in 2018.

WarnerMedia nears deal with “Friends” cast for reunion special: reports

NEW YORK (Reuters) — The one with the long-awaited reunion. Warner Bros is finalizing deals with the cast of “Friends” for a reunion special that will likely be used to launch the HBO Max streaming service this spring, the Wall Street Journal reported on.wsj.com/2St9Pb5 on Thursday, citing people familiar with the matter.

There have been a flurry of media reports about a potential reunion since Jennifer Aniston, who portrayed Rachel in the hit sitcom series, hinted that something might be underway.

The Journal reported that under terms being discussed, each of the six “Friends” cast members Aniston, Matt LeBlanc (Joey), Courtney Cox (Monica), Matthew Perry (Chandler), Lisa Kudrow (Phoebe) and David Schwimmer (Ross) would receive between \$2.25 million and \$2.5 million.

Critics’ remarks draw ire of protest film “Exodus” director Hatamikia

A R T **TEHRAN** — Comments by critics and journalists about “Exodus” provoked the anger of its director, Ebrahim Hatamikia, during a press conference organized in Tehran Friday evening after the premiere of the movie.

“Exodus”, which is on a nowhere-land peasant protest against the local authority that symbolically resembles President Hassan Rouhani’s government, failed to receive the acclaims of the critics who judged the film as falling below expectations.

“Why is the nature of the criticisms and responses to my film like a court trial?” Hatamikia asked the critics and journalists during the press conference at the Mellat Cineplex.

“What is this rude language used in talking about me as a soldier... if I quit, will you be impressed?” he added.

He said that he is really indignant at the way his films have been criticized and noted that he has found the atmosphere increasingly difficult every year.

“I’m not concerned about the storms of criticism, some people may like or dislike my film, but I’m annoyed by coarseness,” he stated.

“Exodus” tells the story of a group of cotton farmers who leave their farms to protest the local official’s unfulfilled promises at the president’s office in the capital.

Hatamikia declined to respond to a journalist who asked for his opinion on the protests that spread across the country last November due to people’s daily economic problems.

However, he did make comments about the issue in response to another journalist who asked, “Is it your intimation in the



Director Ebrahim Hatamikia attends a press conference after the premiere of his movie “Exodus” during the 38th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran’s Mellat Cineplex on February 7, 2020. (ISNA/Hadi Zand)

film that, after 40 years, the Islamic system has not established any mechanism for people’s protests?”

“Why not?” Hatamikia said and added,

“We have not found this path. In my opinion, these protests should be allowed and I hope the parliament passes new laws to outline the ways to protest.”

He also expressed his strong desire to make a film about Martyr Qassem Soleimani, the Quds Force commander who was assassinated in a U.S. air raid in Baghdad on January 3.

City Theater Complex hosts “The Soldier” on military life of Martyr Soleimani



Thespians perform “The Soldier” in the courtyard of Tehran’s City Theater Complex on February 7, 2020.

A R T **TEHRAN** — “The Soldier”, a play on the military life of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, was performed in the courtyard of Tehran’s City Theater Complex on Thursday.

Written by Amir-Hossein Shafiei, the play will be performed at the courtyard of the complex for four more days during the 38th Fajr International Theater Festival. Pejman Shahverdi is the director of the play, which is performed in three acts.

The first act is dedicated to Soleimani’s leadership of Iranian forces during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

His role in the victory of the Lebanese in the Israeli 33-Day War of 2006 has been spotlighted in the second stage.

The last act of the drama focuses on the key role he

played in the defeat of the ISIS terrorists in Syria and Iraq.

The Thursday performance was largely welcomed by the audience who broke into tears listening to the voice of Soleimani praying to God and begging for martyrdom.

Shahverdi himself, Mehdi Jadaki, Masud Kordi, Siavash Moqaddasi, Alireza Hosseini, Mobin Kabudvand, Aref Kavand, Arash Fallahifard, Ali Dehrizi and Meisam Kordi are the members of the cast for the play, which has no dialogue.

“The Soldier” is a joint production of Iran’s General Office for Dramatic Arts and the Islamic Revolution and Sacred Defense Theater Association.

Quds Force chief Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on January 3.

Rahbari says Naxos Records will submit “World without War” for 2021 Grammy Awards

A R T **TEHRAN** — Composer Ali Rahbari said on Saturday that Naxos Records, a Hong Kong-based German record label specializing in classical music, plans to submit his “World without War” for the 2021 Grammy Awards.

“World without War” is Symphonic Poem No. 4 of “My Mother Persia”, a cycle of eight symphonic poems by Rahbari based on lyrics by Mohammad Farid Nasseri.

Rahbari, the former conductor of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra, has dedicated “World without War” to his master musician Hossein Dehlavi, mostly famous for “Sabokbal”, “Bijan and Manijeh” and many other compositions that connect traditional Iranian



Maestro Ali Rahbari in an undated photo.

music with Western classical music.

Vocalist Mohammad Motamedi has collaborated with Rahbari in the project “My Mother Persia”, which has been recorded by the Antalya State Symphony live in a concert.

The Prague Metropolitan Orchestra and the Antalya State Symphony collaborated with Rahbari on the first album.

The first volume of “My Mother Persia” was released in July 2019 and was warmly received in different countries and the second volume came out in November.

The first album features melodies and improvisations in Iranian traditional styles, including a violin concerto entitled “Nohe Khan” by soloist Paula Rahbari, as well as “Mother’s Tears” and “Children’s Prayer”.

Tehran fair to display Turkish translations of Persian books

A R T **TEHRAN** — An exhibition of Turkish translations of a number of books by Iranian writers will be placed on display at the 33rd Tehran International Book Fair during April.

“Turkey is the guest of honor at the 33rd edition of fair and the translated books will be introduced at the fair,” the director of the international section of the fair, Shiva Vakilnaslian, said in a press release published on Saturday.

She said that the exhibit aims to provide the necessary information for visitors about the Iranian books translated into Turkish.

Several books by famous writers have so far been

translated into Turkish.

They include Anahita Taimurian’s “My Moon, Our Moon” (“Ay Hepimizizin”), “Yasemin” (“Yasemin”) by M. Moaddabpur and “Hell but Heaven” (“Berzah Ama Cennet”) by Nazi Safavi.

“I’m Not Father’s Servant” (“Babanin Usagi Degilim”) and “The Emperor of Words” (“Kelimeler Imparatoru”) both written by children’s book writer Ahmad Akbarpur, which have also been translated by the prolific Turkish translator of Persian literature Nezahat Basci, are included.

Promoting the motto “Book Means Life”, the 33rd Tehran International Book Fair will be held from April 14 to 24, 2020.



People visit the Tehran International Book Fair at Shahr-e Aftab Fairground on May 8, 2017. (IRNA/Mehdi Ebrahimi)

China film industry’s ‘bleak winter’ deepens as coronavirus adds to censorship woes

BEIJING/SHANGHAI (Reuters) — Even before the new coronavirus, people working in Chinese entertainment had been calling the industry’s struggles their “bleak winter” - as tighter censorship, a crackdown on tax evasion and new government restrictions strangle opportunities for work.

The epidemic is only exacerbating that misery.

Cinemas across China have closed as part of efforts to curb the outbreak and the premieres of seven expected blockbusters scheduled for the Lunar New Year holidays - a time when box offices usually rake it in - were postponed or canceled.

Since Jan. 24, the day when the government warned against large gatherings in public and the day before the holidays, box office takings for the world’s most populous nation have been virtually negligible. Industry bodies have also asked actors not to return to work until further notice.

“I think China’s annual box office revenue will likely halve from last year due to the coronavirus outbreak. Nobody is going to a cinema until the danger has passed,” Qiu Hongtao, vice president of Taihe Entertainment, a movie production and investment firm, told Reuters.

“We expect quite a lot of cinemas will go bankrupt. Actors and actresses may have to cope with a lack of work, but for cinemas, the rent and management cost burden will crush them.”

The epidemic, which has so far claimed more than 630 lives, is forcing some production houses to make unconventional and controversial choices.

Huanxi Media Group released “Lost in Russia”, a comedy that was widely expected to go on to blockbuster success, on Bytedance’s online platforms free for consumers in return for 630 million yuan (\$90 million) to fund new films - a move that has infuriated China’s cinema industry.

The makers of the martial arts comedy “Enter the Fat Dragon” made a similar move, with video streaming service iQiyi Inc announcing a fee-based online release.

The virus-induced gloom comes at a time when the world’s second-biggest movie market has been in dire need of a shot in the arm.

While box office takings climbed to a record 64 billion yuan (\$9.2 billion) last year helped by higher ticket prices, the average occupancy rate at Chinese theaters hit a five-year low, Tencent Entertainment said in a report last month.

Domestic movie-making - essential to sustaining the market as the government generally caps the number of major foreign releases allowed in any one year at 34 - has also been in a precipitous decline as censorship grows.

Last year, censors were especially sensitive as the country celebrated the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China, industry

sources say. At least 15 movies were either pulled, rescheduled or amended, according to media reports.

The biggest to fall victim was the World War II epic “The Eight Hundred” by director Guan Hu with a reported budget of \$80 million. Its June release was suddenly canceled at the eleventh hour after retired Communist Party officials complained it glorified the heroism of the rival Kuomintang party.

Other movies are just not getting made. Beijing Enlight Media and Beijing Jingxi Culture had both planned 23 movie releases in 2019 but Enlight only released 11 while Jingxi Culture had just nine.

Creative freedom has shrunk so much that the China Independent Film Festival, one of the country’s longest-running and largest, said last month it had suspended operations indefinitely.

“It is impossible to organize a film festival that truly has a purely independent spirit,” the organizers said.