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Trade with Iran rising despite pressures: Russian official

TEHRAN – The trade turnover between Iran and Russia has followed an upward trend in the past two years despite the challenging external conditions, Tass reported, quoting Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov.

“Despite the challenging external conditions, the Russian-Iranian trade turnover is rising. It increased to \$2 billion last year,” he said.

Mentioning the preferential trade

agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Morgulov expressed hope that the agreement would facilitate the trade between the two sides and give an extra impetus to the expansion of ties.

According to the official data, trade turnover between Russia and Iran amounted to \$1.74 billion in 2018 and \$1.589 billion in the period between January-September 2019. **→4**

Iran to send Zafar-2 satellite into orbit in months

TEHRAN — An Iranian-made satellite called Zafar-2 will be launched in the Iranian calendar month of Khordad (May 21- June 20), IRIB reported on Wednesday.

The country launched its domestically-made Zafar satellite using a Simorgh (Phoenix) satellite carrier on Sunday, but the missile fell short

of reaching the designated orbit.

Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, Minister of Communication and Information Technology, said that Zafar-2 satellite has been designed and completed with the same capabilities as the first Zafar, however, the cameras have more accuracy of 16 meters. **→9**

Damascus: Erdogan is ‘disconnected from reality’

The Syrian government on Wednesday described Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as “disconnected from reality” after he threatened to attack regime forces “everywhere” in Syria.

“The head of the Turkish regime comes with empty... statements only issued by a person disconnected from reality,” state news agency SANA quoted a source at the foreign ministry as saying.

The comments “only reveal ignorance

in threatening to hit Syrian army troops,” the source said.

■ Syrian army, Russian forces target terrorist organizations only: Moscow

Vladimir Tarabrin, Head of the Department of New Challenges and Threats at the Russian Foreign Ministry affirmed that the Russian forces and the forces of the Syrian Arab Army target in their operations the terrorist organizations only. **→10**



PERSPECTIVE

Javad Heirannia
political analyst

Zafar Satellite or producing nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles?

Satellite launch vehicles (SLV) are being politically interpreted by Western countries because of their technical similarities to intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM).

That is to say, despite the absence of any legal restrictions on testing and launching satellites, there has always been a political interpretation by Western states about Iran’s satellite launches.

A recent example of this issue was the stance of the U.S. and Western countries, especially France. In an interventionist move, France even called on Iran not to launch Zafar satellite.

For the West and Israel, testing satellite launch vehicles means testing long-range missiles, which they consider as a security threat.

It should be noted that carrier rockets (three-stage rocket) are similar to intercontinental ballistic missiles. In the first stage a rocket separates from the main rocket, in the second stage the other rocket separates and in the third stage it places the satellite into orbit, just like a missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead. The only difference is that a missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead then enters the Earth’s atmosphere and launches a nuclear bomb. That is, a nuclear warhead must go out of the Earth’s atmosphere and return to it safely.

Technically, producing intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads is more difficult than producing rocket launchers.

Although Iran has announced that its space program is for scientific and research purposes, the Western countries interpret the Iranian satellite program politically. They claim that Iran is trying to simulate intercontinental ballistic missiles by satellite launches and learn about the technology related to satellite launch vehicles.

For example, the French Foreign Ministry issued a statement on Monday in response to the launch of Zafar atop Simorgh rocket, saying, “France condemns this launch, which employs ballistic missile technologies, in particular those used for intercontinental missiles”. **→10**

Scholar says nuclear activity back to pre-JCPOA level, predicts change in Majlis composition

By Salman Parviz

QOM — Hojatolislam Mohammed Nasir Saghaye-Biria is deputy chief for research at Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute in Qom. The 61-year-old cleric was also the head of Psychology Department at the institute.

He graduated with a BA from McGill University in Montreal and later in 2004 got his EdD (Doctor of Education) from the University of Houston.

In an exclusive interview with Tehran Times, Biria talked about his background and perspectives. “Prior to McGill I studied in Hozeh (seminary) in Qom at the highest level of Hozeh under the instructions of Ayatollah Hossein Mazaheri who is now in Isfahan.”

“When I returned to Iran, I was a member of

the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute and after few years I became head of the Psychology Department. Presently I am a deputy for research in the institute for some nine years.”

He is one of the founding members of Front of Islamic Revolution Resistance (FIRR) (Jebheye Paidari Engelab-e Islami) and the secretary of the front in Qom province.

Dr. Biria is a protégé of Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi and served as adviser to former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on clerical and religious affairs for nearly five years in his first term and one year of the second term after which he resigned due to differences with Ahmadinejad’s policies.

For his time in Texas, Biria worked at the

Islamic Education Center in Houston for a period of ten years, from 1995-2005. “I was the Imam of the community, a brilliant experience for me. However, post 9/11 many things changed because of the pressure of Islamophobia and harassment by American officials at the time.”

About the news of the seizure of the Islamic center in Houston by the U.S. federal government in 2017, Biria said: “They haven’t seized the building. As far as I know they have established another center, but they are still using this building. That is because the community has a long history of using that place and the local government cannot easily take it away from them. Recent news is that the community won the appeal and the center now is declared as the community’s property.” **→3**

Ashiq Hassan Eskandari asks for officials’ special concern for Ashiqlar music

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — Ashiq Hassan Eskandari, a top musician from Iran’s Azarbaijan, has called on the country’s cultural officials for their particular concern for Ashiqlar music and all musicians working in this field.

The 35th edition of the festival, which will open in Tehran today, plans to honor Eskandari for his lifetime achievements in the field of Ashiqlar music, which was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity Inscribed in 2009.

“I feel proud to be honored at the closing ceremony of the festival, however, I like other Iranian musicians,” he told Tehran Times in a telephone interview on Wednesday.

Ashiqlar is a unique style of traditional music, which is mainly common in Iran’s Azarbai-

jan region. Ashiqlar music is performed by an ashiq, who blends together instrumental and vocal music, dance, poetry and storytelling in his performances.

Ashiq Eskandari said that Ashiq music is not being shown sufficient concern at present and noted that it needs more help and attention from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

“The costs for holding concerts have been increasing these days and we are sometimes forced to cancel our programs due to this problem,” he said.

“However, there needs to be increased funding from the public sectors and especially the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to support this type of music and its musicians, and provide more facilities to offer lessons at lower prices to the youth,” he proposed.



© Tehran Times / Mohammad Moheimeini

Child labor drama “The Sun” shines as best film at Fajr festival

By Seyyed Mostafa Mousavi Sabet

TEHRAN — “The Sun”, Majid Majidi’s drama about child labor in Tehran, won the Crystal Simorgh for best film at the 38th edition of the Fajr Film Festival on Tuesday.

Majidi and his co-producer Amir Banan received their award during the closing ceremony of the festival organized at Tehran’s Milad Tower. **→12**



ARTICLE

Syed Zafar Mehdi

Journalist
from New Delhi

Islamic revolution and legacy of martyrs

The night was heavily overcast with snow and cold, but the day started with gentle breeze and bright sunshine. The mood on the streets was cheerful as the occasion was historic and momentous.

Tens of thousands poured into the streets of Tehran and other Iranian cities on Tuesday, Bahman 22, to mark the 41st anniversary of the Islamic revolution.

Exactly 41 years ago, the West-backed despot monarch Reza Shah Pahlavi was deposed by the people of Iran, led by their charismatic leader Rohullah Mosavi Khomeini, popularly known as Imam Khomeini.

Imam Khomeini had triumphantly returned to Iran from Paris on February 1 (Bahman 12), ending his 15-year long exile. Ten days later, on February 11 (Bahman 22), the final vestiges of the Pahlavi regime crumbled as people reclaimed their country with honor and pride.

With the disgraceful ouster of Pahlavi, a minion of the Western powers, America’s criminal interference in Iranian affairs also came to an end. It was only a matter of time that they packed up and left, which was triggered by the takeover of the US embassy by angry Iranian students.

Bahman 22 is observed every year with tremendous patriotic fervor in Iran. It serves as a powerful reminder of what the foreign powers and their pawns inside the country did to destroy the sovereignty and independence of a proud nation and make it subservient to the West. People have not forgotten their history, which is evident by the massive participation in these annual rallies.

On Tuesday, like every year, there was a tremendous buzz as people marched from different parts of the city and converged at the city’s most popular landmark, Maidan e Azadi, where President Hassan Rouhani addressed the people.

Patriotic songs filled the air as marchers, young and old, men and women, sporting colorful outfits and carrying flags and posters, marched in unison towards Maidan e Azadi, which translates into ‘Freedom Square’, a reminder of the great sacrifices rendered by the people of Iran to liberate themselves from the shackles of Pahlavi dictatorship. **→10**

UN Security Council not discussing extension of arms embargo on Iran: Moscow

MOSCOW (Sputnik) — The United Nations Security Council is not currently discussing the possibility to extend the arms embargo imposed on Iran, which is due to expire in October, Russian Foreign Ministry's Department for Nonproliferation and Arms Control Director Vladimir Ermakov has said in an interview with Sputnik.

"I can assure you that there is no official discussion on reviewing the UN Security Council's Resolution 2231 either at the Security Council or at any other platform," Ermakov said, when asked whether there were any talks on possibly extending the embargo.



"The above-mentioned resolution, which, I would like to note, envisions an authorization-based procedure for delivering weapons and military equipment to Iran and from Iran,... does not actually provide a mechanism or even an option to extend it," Ermakov added.

The official noted that all the provisions of the resolution were initially not aimed at "limiting Iran's legal rights."

"It was aimed at creating good conditions for throwing some light upon the questions that the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA] than wanted to ask Tehran. All the questions were completely closed and removed from the agenda as early as in December 2015, which is reflected in IAEA's documents and the decisions of its board of governors," Ermakov added.

Russia has always observed all the demands outlined in the UN Security Council's Resolution 2231, Ermakov stressed.

No fault with Palermo bill based on constitution: presidential aide

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Laya Joneidi, the presidential aide for legal affairs, said on Wednesday that based on the constitution, there is no fault in the Palermo bill.

"There is no fault with the Palermo bill based on the constitution. The Guardian Council and parliament should come to an agreement on this issue and send it to the government," she told reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting.

She also said that the Palermo bill was approved by the parliament and the faults with it were corrected.

The Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) said on October 18 that it has given Iran a final deadline of February 2020 to tighten its laws against money laundering in compliance with the global watchdog's financial standards.

"If before February 2020, Iran does not enact the Palermo and Terrorist Financing Conventions in line with the FATF Standards, then the FATF will fully lift the suspension of counter-measures and call on its members and urge all jurisdictions to apply effective counter-measures, in line with recommendation 19," the FATF said in a statement, Reuters reported.

The government is pushing for the approval of the FATF.

In October 2018, the parliament voted to join the FATF. However, the Guardian Council rejected it. Now the ball is in the Expediency Council's court.

When there is a dispute between parliament and the Guardian Council the issue is referred to as the Expediency Council for final arbitration.

One of the actions Iran is required to take to appease the FATF is joining the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), which is also called the Palermo Convention, a 2000 United Nations-sponsored multilateral treaty against transnational organized crime.

The other action is to ratify the CFT, the convention combating financing of terrorism.

Satellite carriers have no military feature: defense minister

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Wednesday that Iran's satellite carriers have nothing to do with the country's military activities.

"The satellite carriers have nothing to do with the subject of missiles, and constitute a completely non-defensive and non-military issue," Press TV quoted Hatami as saying after a cabinet meeting.

The defense minister said a satellite might be used for defense-related purposes, but the carriers are totally non-defensive in nature.

On Sunday, the Iranian Space Agency launched a communications satellite called Zafar 1 (Victory 1) atop a Simorgh rocket from Imam Khomeini Space Center in northern Iran. However, Zafar 1 didn't make it all the way to orbit.

The defense minister said like any other country that has launched satellites, the Iranian nation has a right to benefit from the technology, noting that Iran would, therefore, strongly pursue its relevant plans in this regard.

The Iranian defense minister was openly reacting to claims made by France and the U.S. about Iran's space program following the Sunday launch.

Reacting to the launch on Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused Iran of trying to improve its ballistic missile skills through the satellite launch and vowed to exert more pressure on Iran.

A day earlier, France also criticized the launch and claimed that it was inconsistent with UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which "calls upon" Iran not to undertake any activity related to missiles "designed to be capable of" delivering nuclear weapons."

Commenting on missile activities, Hatami noted that the defense program was in complete accordance with international regulations that prohibit the development of projectiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

"Nothing of the kind exists in the Islamic Republic," Hatami said. "All of our missiles, which we take pride in and which constitute an important factor of Iran's defense and military power, are made with conventional warheads."

‘Brian Hook met with MKO rep. before, after Gen. Soleimani assassination’

(Press TV) — Brian Hook, the United States' point man on Iran, met with a representative of the anti-Iran Mujahidin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) group both before and after Washington's assassination of senior Iranian commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, a report says.

Hook, the U.S. special representative for Iran and senior adviser to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, held the meetings with Robert G. Joseph, who represents the so-called National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) in September 2019 and on January 31, American news and opinion website The Daily Beast reported on Tuesday.

On its website, the NCRI calls itself the MKO's "umbrella coalition," but many consider the two to be synonymous.

Joseph referred to the meetings in a semi-annual report he filed with the U.S. Justice Department earlier this week in line with the U.S.'s Foreign Agent Registration Act.

The U.S. assassinated General Soleimani, the former commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and a number of others in a set of drone strikes targeting Baghdad's civilian airport on January 3.

General Soleimani, who had earned reputation as the region's most popular anti-terror military figure, was on an official visit to the Iraqi capital when the attack took place.

Joseph, a former senior State Department official under President George W. Bush, advises the NCRI at \$15,000 a month.



Relentlessly an Iran hawk, Joseph told a meeting of the group last March that he hoped that the Iranian government would soon fall.

The MKO has conducted a litany of assassinations and bombings against Iranian officials and civilians since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. It notoriously sided with former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein during Iraq's Western-backed war of 1980-88 against the Islamic Republic.

Out of the nearly 17,000 Iranians killed in terrorist assaults since the Revolution's

victory, about 12,000 have fallen victim to the MKO's acts of terror.

The terrorist outfit was on the U.S.'s list of terrorist organizations until 2012.

Many other Western states have crossed its name out on their blacklists, too. The NCRI has its headquarters in Paris, which also serves as the venue for the MKO's annual conferences.

The group throws lavish conferences every year in the French capital, with certain American, Western, and Saudi Arabian officials in attendance as guests of honor.

U.S. customs chief admits misconduct towards Iranians at U.S.-Canada border

By staff and agency

The Customs and Border Protection agency's top official, in a rare admission of misconduct, said Tuesday that agents should not have detained Iranian Americans at the U.S.-Canada border last month, The Seattle Times reported.

Mark Morgan, the agency's acting commissioner, acknowledged that agents behaved in a way "that was not in line with our direction" when they held dozens of U.S. citizens of Iranian heritage, and others with ties to Iran, for questioning at a border crossing in Washington state. His comments were the agency's first public admission of the incidents.

U.S. border officers working at Canadian border crossings were directed to stop travelers of Iranian descent for questioning following the U.S. assassination of top Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani on January 3.

More than 60 people were held for additional questioning in Washington State, the New York Times reported, citing advocacy groups and accounts from travelers.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has condemned the U.S. Customs and Border Protection for its

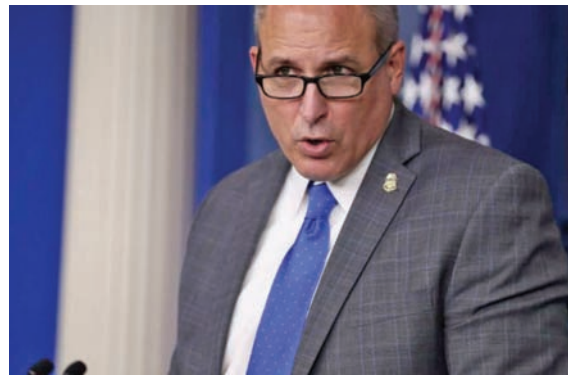
"illegal" and "inhumane" treatment of Iranian nationals as a brazen violation of human rights.

In a statement, Mousavi said a complaint could be lodged against such conduct at human rights courts.

"Such absolutely discriminatory measures that are taken only because of the race, nationality or maybe the faith of people are totally rejected in terms of the international human rights laws and principles, and would result in accountability for the U.S. government," he added.

"Since those (Iranian) individuals have been questioned by the U.S. border guards and security forces about their political and theological beliefs and their accounts in the virtual space have been also investigated coercively, such measure amounts to an example of inquisition and a blatant violation of human rights," the spokesman deplored.

Mousavi further condemned the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's harassment of the Iranian citizens, saying, "Such measures against the Iranians are part of the U.S. regime's hostile and vindictive policy towards Iran and its identity and existence that transpires once in the shape of the decision to ban Iranians from entering the U.S., once in the (form of) threat of attack on Iran's



cultural and civilizational centers, another time in the cowardly assassination of the mythic hero of the fight against terrorism, and most recently in another form in the harassment of Iranians at the borders of the U.S."

"Such behavior from the U.S. government could be definitely brought to and sued by the human rights tribunals," the spokesman concluded.

INSTEX a prime example of futility of Europe's struggle for strategic autonomy from U.S.: NY Times

By staff and agency

In an article published by The New York Times on Monday, it is said that the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) is a prime example of the futility of Europe's struggle for strategic autonomy from the United States.

Ever since U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in May 2018, European countries have struggled to come up with an appropriate response, says the article.

The European Union, including Germany, has pledged to uphold its commitment to trading with Iran, it added.

"But Europe has had a hard time living up to this promise," the paper said.

It also said, "The enormous impact of America's secondary sanctions comes not just from the market power of the United States, but also from the power of the dollar and America's capacity to legally or factually control financial transaction systems."

"One key, then, to Europe obtaining 'strategic autonomy' in international relations,



is obtaining a capacity for independent financial transactions. Which brings us back to INSTEX," it added.

"INSTEX — stay with me here! — is part of a barter system that is intended to avoid payments being exchanged directly between European and Iranian companies when they do business with one another, in order to avoid setting off American sanctions. Under this barter system, money doesn't have to 'cross' the invisible line between Europe and Iran: INSTEX and its Iranian

counterpart record the value of shipments from Europe to Iran, and vice versa, and organize the exchange of the appropriate amount of funds among exporters and importers on the same side of the line."

"Sound complicated? It is. And while it works on paper, it's proved extremely hard to realize in the real world. Policymakers in Berlin admit freely today under the condition of anonymity that they had underestimated the technical difficulties," the article said.

INSTEX has been designed by the European Union to facilitate legitimate trade with Tehran. It was introduced on January 31, 2019 by France, Germany and Britain, the three countries party to the nuclear deal.

INSTEX is supposed to be a financial channel and a special mechanism for transferring money in spite of U.S. sanctions on Iran. Its objective is to facilitate Iran's transactions with European companies.

On March 20, Iran's central bank governor Abdolnaser Hemmati announced

that a mechanism similar to INSTEX has been registered in Iran, officially called the Special Trade and Finance Institute (STFI).

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araghchi said in November that INSTEX has not been yet fully implemented.

"This financial system was suggested too late and [it] operates at a low level. It has not been yet fully implemented," Sputnik quoted Araghchi as saying.

Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior advisor to the Iranian Parliament speaker, said in November that INSTEX lacks locomotive engine to start working.

"There is no hope for the implementation of the JCPOA by the Europeans. In fact, the U.S., Britain, France, and Germany have agreed on the partitioning mission of weakening the Islamic Republic. INSTEX lacks locomotive engine too," Amir Abdollahian wrote on his Twitter account.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said the INSTEX mechanism still remained on paper.

People entitled to protest peacefully against economic, political situation: MP

POLITICAL

d e s k **TEHRAN** — Senior parliamentarian Ali Motahari said on Tuesday that the people are entitled to protest against economic shortcomings or political situation in a peaceful and legal manner.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Feb. 11 rallies marking the 41st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, Motahari said, "Protest is a legal right of any citizen. People should be allowed to express their protest in a peaceful way."

"Such protests can be against economic or political situation," the lawmaker said, adding that participation in the Feb. 11 rallies is a duty but the people are also entitled to criticize the current situation.

In relevant remarks in November, Tehran Friday prayers preacher Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami said based on the Article 27 of the constitution, the people were entitled to hold peaceful gatherings and rallies provided that "principles of Islam" were not harmed.

The constitution's chapter III (Article 19 to 42) refers to the rights of the Iranian people saying "Article 27 provides for freedom of assembly, provided that arms are



not carried and the assemblies are not detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam. The law shall determine the details of this exception."

In January and in reaction to students' protests against

the downing of a Ukrainian passenger plan in southern Tehran that left 176 passengers killed, Motahari had said that no government would tolerate protests with subversive agendas.

"In the event that these gatherings go on and protesters resort to acts of violence and pursue subversive agendas, they need to be dealt with," Motahari said at the time.

"These gatherings and chanting of slogans is natural to a certain degree."

"Students are upset and they want to make their protest heard by the authorities," he said.

Motahari said protests to this extent must be tolerated so that the protesters would be able to voice their grievances.

On January 8, the Iranian military mistakenly downed the Ukrainian passenger plane. The shooting took place a few hours after Iran fired missiles at a U.S. airbase in Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani. The operator had mistaken the passenger plane with an invading missile as the military had been put on high alert.

Scholar says nuclear activity back to pre-JCPOA level, predicts change in Majlis composition

Biria says ‘my time as Imam in Houston Community Center was brilliant’

1→ Post 9/11 Islamophobia experience in U.S.

Commenting on his post 9/11 experience at the Islamic center in Houston, Biria said, “We were harassed by the propaganda of media and government after September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. However, many people from various churches and other communities came to talk to us about Islam and Christianity. I was personally invited to various churches. Our educational center visited other educational centers ... Our school was located inside the community center, we didn’t have enough facilities. When other educational centers visited us they realized the values we inculcated in our pupils.”

Al Hadi School was established in 1995 as part of Islamic Education Center in Houston. During a competition on how to build a city Al Hadi School got first position for several years in a row. “We had one of the highest ranking in terms of education and training. Al Hadi is still continuing to provide services and has more than 400 students from KG -12 grade.”

About acceptance of Islamic values by native Americans in a post 9/11 environment, Biria said, “We had some people who had accepted Islam, we had three or four Shia and numerous Sunni centers... We had books and correspondence Even some people in prison, mostly African Americans, studied Quran and became familiar with Islam and after they finished their term in the prison they visited the center. The officials of the prison appreciated that because Islam had educated these people with criminal backgrounds and their behavior improved while in prison.”

■ Parliamentary elections

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani have called for a high turnout in the upcoming parliamentary election.

Biria predicted that the turnout will be like the previous years.

“It’s going to be as usual. People will take part in the polls just like in the past. The election date falls close to 22nd Bahman (Feb. 11), the 41st anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution. Our people have shown their love for Islam and they have always participated in the ballot boxes. We are not worried about participation. I think that the ballot turnout may even improve this year, because one of things is the martyrdom of Gen. Soleimani which inspired a new spirit among the people, even though people are under the pressure of sanctions. We didn’t anticipate that 25 million people would participate for Gen. Soleimani’s funeral which shows how much people are behind the revolution.”

■ JCPOA

Spokesman of Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, Hossein Naqavi



During an interview in Qom on Feb. 7, Hojatoleslam Dr. Mohammed Nasir Saghaye-Biria remembered his times as Imam in Houston. (Photo: M. Sahebfoosol)

Hosseini has criticized France, Britain and Germany for triggering the dispute mechanism under the Iran nuclear deal, officially called the JCPOA.

Hojatoleslam Biria said the possibility that Iran quit the NPT in the future is not “weak”.

“Of course, we have started our nuclear activities and returned to pre-nuclear deal level ... The government has threatened to walk out of the NPT because of the undue pressures they have put on us. So the possibility to walk out of the nuclear deal in the future is not weak,” he said when asked about the destiny of the agreement.

Commenting on Rouhani’s economic policy of boosting foreign trade and investment, Biriati stated without hesitation that “we need to pay more attention to the Leader’s voice and follow the Resistance Economy, i.e. improving economy from inside, restore and activate stalled factories, so unemployment rate falls. This way outside decision will not have an impact on us.”

He added, “We don’t believe that foreigners have much benefit for us, they are after their own benefits. Foreigner’s involvement in economy is not a solution. The capacity we have inside the country is enough to boost the economy ... we have many countries around us that we can have trade with and we don’t need other people from outside to come help us. We do not need people from outside the country to invest, although we do not reject it but we should not depend on it. It is a side issue and not the main one.”

The cleric also predicted a change in the composition of Majlis as the parliamentary elections are approaching.

“The present parliament is not dominated by principlist faction ... the Majlis is on the side of reformist camp and we see the

parliament mostly matches the ideas of the government. For example some debates on issues like JCPOA... In my opinion Majlis is more reformist at present. I must add that Mr. Larijani is labeled as Osulgara (loyal to the principles of the revolution) but he is leaning towards reformists and that’s why he has been the Speaker of the Majlis throughout the term. That is the reality of the current parliament.”

On the Rouhani administration’s efforts to remove sanctions and alleviate economic pressure, the religious scholar said, “The current government didn’t do much to help people’s problem, they couldn’t remove sanctions, rather they made decisions that doubled and tripled the inflation ... so people are under economic pressure. Despite the insistence of the Leader for paying attention to the inside rather than outside of the country, the present administration has been inactive in utilizing our economic and human capacity.

“People have come to realize that the Rouhani administration has lost validity with majority. Also parties close to the present government have lost people’s confidence. That’s why we predict that the future parliament will consist of revolutionary youth.”

■ Deal of the century

Commenting on the Leader’s remarks that the so-called “deal of the century” will not survive Trump’s lifespan, Biria said, “The Leader has repeated this point several times. Deal of the century is a hollow deal, because the owners of Palestine are absent from it and according to news reports they are demonstrating against it.

“When the main side is absent how do they want to have such a deal? During this last decade the occupant regime of Israel is showing its weaker side ... if there is an-

other war they may perish and they know it very well. They are just showing off their strength while they are coming from their weakness. The reality of the scene is that the ‘deal of the century’ will die before Trump dies, so it implies that Trump is also in a process of dying.

“Trump, himself came out of the brim of impeachment ... so he is dying also.” Israel as an occupying tyrant regime has exiled, imprisoned and killed many of the original occupants of Palestine for more than seventy years.

According to the Leader’s recent speech, the land belongs to the original occupants, whether they were Muslims, Christians or Jews.

Asked to comment on the issue, he said, “The conception of this regime is shaped with occupation. This is the nature of the beast. The mass killing of the people. In recent years Israel has become weak, was defeated in the last few wars including the 33-day 2006 conflict in Lebanon, 22-day in Gaza and the last one was a 2-day war in Gaza ... We have a solution and it is a logical one and it matches the democratic values of liberals: Leader has said that all the people who were originally from this land, e.g. Muslims, Christians and Jews should come and establish the rules for the land. Several times Islamic Republic has suggested these European immigrants in Israel to go to their original lands in Europe and U.S.”

“It is better for the world to understand that Palestine has its own people who like to govern over their own land. Alhamdulillah (praise be to God) people of Palestine have gained the will and due to victories have been encouraged to stand up for their right.”

Iran will never decides under pressure: Salehi

POLITICAL DESK TEHRAN — The head of Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization (IAEO), Ali Akbar Salehi, said on Tuesday that his country believes in logic and negotiations but will never make any decision under pressure.

Salehi made the remarks in a meeting with Rafael Mariano Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Organization (IAEA) in Vienna.

Salehi was in Vienna to attend an international nuclear security conference.

Salehi, a nuclear physicist, further said that the IAEA’s decisions should not be politically-tainted.

Also on Monday Salehi said if China did not help Iran to redesign its Arak nuclear reactor, Tehran would restore the previous one.

“If the project, due to U.S. disruption and the Europe’s shortcoming, is not implemented (by the Chinese contractor) Iran may inevitably return to the previous design of Arak’s Khondab heavy water project,” Salehi said in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart in Vienna.

They further exchanged views over mutual cooperation, especially over renovating and redesigning the Khondab reactor.

Salehi added that other signatories to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) should assist more seriously to implement the mentioned project to counter the U.S. unilateralism.

According to the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA, Iran is entitled to “redesign and rebuild a modernized heavy water research reactor in Arak, based on an agreed concep-



tual design, using fuel enriched up to 3.67 %, in a form of an international partnership which will certify the final design.”

In November 2015, the document on redesigning the heavy water reactor was signed by all parties to the JCPOA.

The JCPOA, better known as the Iran deal, was signed between Tehran and the 5+1 group -- the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - and Germany - in July 2015 and went into effect in January 2016. The UN Security Council also adopted resolution 2231 endorsing the international agreement.

However, U.S. President Donald Trump, a stern critic of the landmark deal, unilaterally pulled Washington out of the agreement in May 2018, and unleashed the “tough-

est ever” sanctions in history against the Islamic Republic in defiance of global criticism. The move was intended to strangle the Iranian economy, especially through a total ban on Iran’s oil exports.

Under Washington’s pressure, the three European signatories to the JCPOA have so far failed to protect Tehran’s business interests under the deal.

In May 2019, exactly one year after the U.S. quit the deal and imposed sanction on Iran, Tehran began to gradually reduce its commitments under the JCPOA to both retaliate for Washington’s departure and Europeans’ failure to honor their commitments.

On January 5, Iran took a fifth and last step in reducing its commitments, and said it would no longer observe any operational limitations on its nuclear industry, whether concerning the capacity and level of uranium enrichment, the volume of stockpiled uranium or research and development. However, Iran has insisted if the Europeans honor their obligations it will immediately reverse its decisions.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has said that Europe must ensure Iran’s benefits from the nuclear deal 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 Feb. 3. He held talks with Foreign Minister Zarif, President Rouhani and Parliament speaker Ali Larijani.

Iran able to produce strategic defense weapons, Hatami says

POLITICAL DESK TEHRAN — Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami announced on Tuesday that Iran is capable of producing strategic defense arms.

“Today Iran enjoys such a high-level of deterrence power that it is capable of producing strategic defense weapons based on domestic knowledge and capacities,” explained Hatami who had traveled to northern Iran to participate in the Feb.11 rallies marking the 41st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution but due to heavy snow he could not attend the marches.

“Iran can meet the entire requests of the armed forces at any level,” the minister announced.

Touching upon the country’s successful resistance against the U.S. “maximum pressure”, Hatami said Iran will certainly overcome the threats with reliance on domestic capacities.

Addressing number of Air Force officers on Saturday, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution suggested that Iran must become militarily powerful in order to prevent a war against itself.

“In order to prevent war and in order to put an end to threats we must become powerful,” Ayatollah Ali Khamenei remarked.

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.”

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.

Judiciary official calls for massive participation in parliamentary elections

POLITICAL DESK TEHRAN — The first deputy Judiciary chief on Wednesday called on the Iranians with different political tendencies to participate massively in parliamentary polls on February 21.

Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei said that people’s participation will empower the country against the enemies’ threats.



“Massive turnout in the Esfand 2 (February 21) elections will guarantee the country’s security and sovereignty,” Ejei underlined.

Touching the significant role of people in supporting the establishment over the past four decades, Ejei said, “The majority of challenges and threats in the past 41 years have been tackled by people’s presence and participation.”

Earlier this month, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said, “Those who love dear Iran and its credit and intend to solve the problems should take part in the upcoming elections.”

He added that the people must come to the scene on the elections day to manifest the country’s national might and firm will.

Last week, President Hassan Rouhani said, “No one is above the law and the people. We should not imagine that we are leading the people’s thoughts. We should not imagine that if we were not, the people would be misled.”

He added, “The people understand well and choose well too.”

“Undoubtedly, elections, especially the Islamic Consultative Assembly’s election is of great importance, but the people’s trust (in the rulers and the establishment), as well as social wealth, are more important than the elections,” Rouhani told a gathering of provincial and city governors.

The parliamentary elections, the 11th of its kind since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, will be held in over 200 constituencies across the country’s 31 provinces on Feb. 21.

Iran stresses right to enhance space technology, rejects French ‘meddlesome’ claims

PRESS TV — Iran has dismissed France’s “meddlesome” claim about its space program following a recent satellite launch, saying the Islamic Republic reserves the right to make scientific progress..

Tehran on Sunday launched its domestically-made Zafar (Triumph) satellite using a Simorgh (Phoenix) satellite carrier, but the missile fell short of reaching the designated orbit.

The satellite launch came on the same day that Iran unveiled a new missile, ‘Ra’d-500 (Lightning-500),’ which is equipped with a composite engine block as well as the new generation of propellant for missiles and satellite carriers.

The French Foreign Ministry on Monday condemned Iran for trying to put a satellite in space and unveiling the new ballistic missile, urging Tehran to abide by international obligations on its missile program.

“In keeping with its obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 2231, Iran cannot engage in activities, including launches, connected to ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons,” said the French statement, claiming that Tehran’s ballistic missile program “hurts regional stability and affects European security.”

Rejecting the “meddlesome” statement on Tuesday, Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said Tehran has “an inherent right to develop science and technology,” Press TV reported.

“Iran’s defensive missile program has also nothing to do with Resolution 2231 because Iranian missiles have not been designed to carry nuclear weapons,” he said.

Resolution 2231 endorsed a nuclear deal inked in 2015 between Tehran and six world states -- the U.S., France, Britain, Germany, Russia and China.

Senior Iraqi Sunni leader appreciates Iran for anti-terrorism assistance

POLITICAL DESK TEHRAN — A high-ranking religious leader of the Sunni community in Iraq has appreciated Iran’s firm stance in the war on Daesh (ISIL) in his country, praising Genera Soleimani and the Iranian government for their role in defeating the terrorist group.

Khalid al Mala made the remarks as he was addressing a ceremony marking the 40th day since General Qassem Soleimani was martyred in a U.S. drone strike on Baghdad’s international airport on January 3.

According to the New York Times, the top Iranian general was killed when an American MQ-9 Reaper drone fired missiles into a convoy that was leaving the airport.

The U.S. airstrike also martyred Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU or Hashd Al Shaabi) and some other forces of the PMU along with their guests.

In a statement, the PMU announced the Israeli regime and the U.S. were behind this act of terror.

According to the Pentagon, General Soleimani was killed upon direct order by President Donald Trump.

Elsewhere in his remarks, al Mala voiced his full support for the Iraqi parliament’s stance in adopting a legislation to expel the U.S. troops from Iraq.

“Revenge for our martyr commanders can be materialized via expelling the entire alien forces from Iraq,” the religious leader remarked.

Two days after the terrorist attack by the U.S., in an extraordinary session, the Iraqi parliament voted for a resolution requiring the government to order the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

“There is no need for the presence of American forces after defeating Daesh,” said Ammar al-Shibli, a lawmaker and member of the parliamentary legal committee.

“We have our own armed forces which are capable of protecting the country,” he said.

Around 5,000 U.S. troops remain in Iraq, most of them in an advisory capacity.



During a massive funeral procession for General Soleimani and al-Muhandis in Baghdad, al-Kadhimiya, Karbala and Najaf, hundreds of thousands of angry Iraqi mourners carried placards demanding an immediate expulsion of “U.S. troops” from their country.

STOCK MARKET	
TEDPIX	459079.5
IFX	5815.00
Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir	

CURRENCIES	
USD	42,000 rials
EUR	45,834 rials
GBP	54,428 rials
AED	11,437 rials
Source: cbi.ir	

COMMODITIES	
Brent	\$55.21/b
WTI	\$50.79/b
OPEC Basket	\$54.17/b
Gold	\$1,568.40/oz
Silver	\$17.61/oz
Platinum	\$967.30/oz
Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com	

Trade with Iran rising despite pressures: Russian official

1 → Agriculture products are the backbone of trade turnover between the countries. Trade in the agriculture sector amounted to 1.283 billion in January-September 2019, an increase of 41.6 percent year-on-year.



In late December 2019, Moscow's commercial representative in Tehran, Rustam Zhiganshin had announced that more than 50 percent of Iran and Russia's total bilateral trade is being conducted through national currencies.

"If in 2018 payments in national currencies comprised 40 percent [of the two countries' trade], in 2019 this quota has already exceeded 50 percent," Zhiganshin told sputnik.

TPO to send trade delegation to Dubai

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) is going to dispatch a trade and marketing delegation to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from February 16 to 20, the official portal of the state-run organization announced.

The delegation will make its trip to Dubai simultaneous



with the 25th edition of one of the world's largest annual food, beverage and hospitality exhibitions, Gulfood 2020.

The delegation is aimed to hold business talks and meetings with foreign counterparts on the sidelines of the exhibition, while exploring the opportunities and capacities of other markets participating in this year's exhibition.

130 companies attending intl. jewelry expo in Tehran

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** —The 12th International Exhibition of Gold, Silver, Jewelry, Watch and Related Industries is hosting more than 130 domestic and foreign companies at Tehran Permanent International Fairground from February 12 to 15, IRNA reported.

Foreign exhibitions from different countries including Turkey, Italy, Germany, Britain and Japan are showcasing their latest products and achievements in the event.

According to the Deputy Head of Iran's Union of Gold, Silver, Jewelry and Precious Stones Esfandiar Seifi, the exhibition seeks to introduce Iran's latest products and services in this industry to the world as well as making domestic producers familiar with destination markets and improving their competitiveness. It also tries to encourage exports and services of domestic jewelry sector.

The official noted that the number of participants in this year's exhibition has increased by nearly 50 percent compared to the previous edition.

Italy, Turkey, India, South Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand and Iran are the world's top seven jewelry producers, and Iran is attempting to improve its position among them by increasing its exports, Seifi said.

Iran's non-oil GDP growth seen to reach 1.8%: report

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's gross domestic product, excluding oil sector, is expected to register a positive growth rate of 1.8 percent in the current fiscal year (March 21, 2019-March 19, 2020), Majlis research center said in a report on Iran's economy.

"Although due to the significant negative growth rate of the oil sector, economic growth in the country will continue to be negative in 1398 [the current calendar year] but oil-free economic growth is estimated at 1.8 percent for the year," the report said.

The report sees the growth for the

country's agriculture, industries, energy, construction and services sectors at 5.5 percent, 1.5 percent, and 10 percent, as well as 14.5 and 0.5 percent, respectively for the current Iranian calendar year.

Earlier this week, the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) reported that the country's non-oil gross domestic product has recorded a positive growth rate of 0.9 percent in the third quarter of the current fiscal year (September 23-December 21, 2019).

The overall GDP growth, including oil production, however, stood at -1.7 percent for the period, new data provided by the



head of the Statistical Center of Iran, Javad Hosseinzadeh, showed.

Economic growth in the first three quarters has been put at -7.6 percent. By excluding oil, the figure stands at 0 percent.

The sectors of agriculture, industries and mines, and services registered the growth rates of 3.2 percent, -16.6 percent and -0.2 percent, respectively for the three quarters.

Iranian economy emerging from recession: central bank

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) said CBI's major economic indicators show that the economy is emerging from a recession that began nearly two years ago when the United States imposed sanctions on Tehran.

"Although some are trying to mispresent the country's economic situation and picture a darker economic future, but according to the Central Bank of Iran data, important macroeconomic indicators such as the growth of non-oil sector, inflation and other variables are all pointing to the relative stability and gradual recovery of the economy from recession, and this is amazing compared to what the enemies were looking for and imagined," Abdolnasser Hemmati wrote in an Instagram post on Tuesday.

Hemmati has previously cited reports by the CBI and the Statistical Center of Iran suggesting that the economy had started to grow regardless of the share of oil revenues



in government budgets.

The chief banker also said that rampant inflation that caused a major slowdown in the economy after Washington imposed its sanctions in November 2018 had been brought

'36,000 public transport vehicles to become dual-fuel by yearend'

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Deputy Director of National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) says 36,000 vehicles of the country's public transportation fleet are planned to become dual-fuel by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March, 19).

According to Hamid Ghasemi, the mentioned vehicles will be converted as part of a government program for converting over 1.46 million public vehicles into dual-fuel ones within the next 15 months, IRNA reported.

The program which includes converting a variety of public vehicles like vans, trucks and buses, was officially launched on Monday.

In early December 2019, NIORDC signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with state-owned automaker Iran Khodro Company (IKCO) to add new dual-fuel vehicles to the country's public transportation fleet.

Based on the mentioned MOU, the two sides agreed to

cooperate in converting or manufacturing 1.46 million dual-fuel vehicles to be added to the public transportation fleet.

The program is expected to reduce the country's daily gasoline consumption by 10 million liters and save the government 200 trillion rials (about \$4.7 billion).

Iran has recently started a program for the rationing of subsidized gasoline and increased fuel prices to reduce the energy subsidies and to use the revenue for supporting underprivileged families.

According to the spokesman of Iranian Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Products Exporters Union (OPEX), the gasoline rationing scheme has made it possible for the country to export 25-30 million liters of gasoline every day.

Iran produces 115 million liters of gasoline per day, of which 60 to 65 million liters are provided as subsidized fuel and another 20 million liters are sold in the free market, the rest which is about 30 million liters is exported.



Singapore seen unveiling historic budget deficit to soften coronavirus hit

Singapore is set to roll out a hefty package of measures to cushion the blow from the coronavirus epidemic on its economy next week, with some analysts expecting it to budget for its biggest deficit in over a decade.

The Southeast Asian business and travel hub, expected to see its economy contract this quarter after a paltry 0.7% growth last year, could also unveil schemes to tackle cost of living issues ahead of an election expected this year.

Economists at Citi and Maybank expect a virus relief package of at least S\$700 million (\$505 million) at the Feb. 18 budget, while Singapore's biggest bank DBS predicts a deficit of S\$7.9 billion, the highest since at least 2005.

The "latest coronavirus outbreak has thrown a spanner in the works," said Irvin Seah, senior economist at DBS. "Couple that with an impending general election and the massive accrued surpluses, expectation for the budget is naturally high."

Singapore tends to be conservative in its



fiscal forecasts. During the 2009 financial crisis, it forecast a S\$8.7 billion deficit, only to land a S\$819 million shortfall, government data shows.

As a percentage of GDP, the virus spending economists are predicting is comparable with the S\$230 million (\$166 million) package

issued during the 2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which killed over 30 people in Singapore and nearly 800 worldwide.

Measures could include property tax rebates for retailers and hotels, lower foreign worker levies for tourism-related sectors and

bridging loans for smaller firms.

Economists forecast a fiscal deficit of 1.4-2% of GDP - in the range of the 1.7% reached during the 2001 dotcom bubble collapse.

The economic impact from the outbreak could potentially be deeper than the SARS episode given stronger economic links with China.

Visitor arrivals are expected to drop by nearly a third this year and Singapore has so far reported 47 cases of coronavirus, which has already claimed over 1,000 lives in China.

Economists also expect spending on schemes to retrain workers and help offset an impending hike in the goods and services tax. Measures to tackle costs of living - a hot election issue - such as tax rebates and cash transfers are also possible.

Singapore's elections must be held by early 2021, and the government was expected to call for one within a few months before the coronavirus outbreak hit Singapore in late January.

(Source: nytimes.com)

Crunch time for Argentina's debt revamp as IMF mission due this week

Argentina heads into do-or-die talks this week with its biggest creditor, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), fresh from a failed bond sale on Monday that augured poorly for the government's plan for revamping about \$100 billion in debt.

The country wants to postpone debt payments while honoring its promise to voters to avoid painful budget cuts. That agenda was dealt a blow on Monday when the Economy Ministry sent a one-sentence statement saying, without explanation, that the planned issue of peso-denominated debt had been abandoned.

The "government wanted to issue debt at a lower interest rate than investors were willing to accept. This unsuccessful episode is not a good sign ahead of the IMF talks and the restructuring process," said Gabriel Zelpo, director of Buenos Aires economic consultancy Seido.

Left-leaning President Alberto Fernandez hopes to convince the fund to rejig \$44 billion in suspended loans under a program that would avoid the kind of fiscal austerity and structural reforms the IMF typically imposes to restore nations' finances.

The government also wants IMF approval of its plan to restructure tens of billions of dollars owed to bondholders.

It hopes to achieve all this before a March 31 deadline it has imposed on itself so it may refocus on restoring growth.

The future of Latin America's No.3 economy hinges on the Wednesday-through-Friday discussions to be held in Buenos Aires between IMF and Argentine officials.



The week may end without a hard statement from either side about new economic or debt management policies, however.

The "government needs to make the perfect move, with a bond restructuring that the IMF can approve and that balances the need for some fiscal austerity with the political restrictions imposed by the government's leftist coalition," Zelpo said.

"If it is successful the economy will recover. If not, the recession will deepen," he said.

■ An average economic contraction

Analysts expect on average an economic contraction of 1.5% this year.

Fernandez's late 2019 election was a rebuke to previous leader Mauricio Macri, who killed his own hopes of reelection

by imposing unpopular subsidy cuts that fueled inflation while his overborrowing in the bond market helped weaken the local peso currency by 83% during his four-year term.

The IMF and Argentina have a complicated past. Many blame the fund's policies for causing a 2001 economic meltdown that threw millions of middle-class Argentines into poverty.

A 2018 run on the peso nonetheless forced Macri into a \$57 billion IMF loan agreement that included tough fiscal targets.

Only \$44 billion of that money was distributed before the agreement was put on hold last year when Argentina admitted it would have to rejig a total of about \$100 billion in debt.

Economy Minister Martin Guzman has approached the IMF and bondholders with talk of an investor-friendly bond revamp, while making it clear the government will neither risk worsening the recession by imposing fiscal austerity nor keep making unsustainable bond payments.

The fund and the government both say they expect a productive dialog this week.

The ministry wants to get the IMF on board with its plan for delaying debt service payments long enough to let the economy emerge from recession and to improve its repayment capacity.

"I don't know if there will be an explicit or implicit endorsement from the IMF of the actual bond restructuring," said Siobhan Morden, head of Latin America Fixed Income Strategy at Amherst Pierpont Securities.

(Source: the-japan-news.com)

Iran's daily gas consumption touches 600 mcm

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** – Iran's daily natural gas consumption has once again hit a record high of nearly 600 million cubic meters (mcm) a day due to the unprecedented snowfall and cold weather which has blanketed the country, said the spokesman of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC).

"Domestic Gas consumption increased by more than 20 percent or 100 million cubic meters on Tuesday, compared to the previous day, and reached 590 million cubic meters," Mohammad Asgari told Tasnim.

According to the official, considering the pervasive cold weather in the country, gas

consumption is expected to increase even more and exceed 600 million cubic meters.

He further noted that despite the cold weather and the great surge in the consumption, gas supply to all areas across the country is uninterrupted.

In late-January, Iran's daily natural gas consumption had hit a record high of 592 mcm a day due to heavy snowfall across the country.

Iran is currently producing over 810 mcm of natural gas on a daily basis which is mostly used inside the country for the domestic sector and also as fuel for the power plants and small portion is also exported to the neighboring



countries like Iraq.

Currently, about 30,000 villages with 4.6 million households as well as 1,148 cities with over 18 million households are connected to the national gas network in Iran.

Back in January 2019, the NIGC's manag-

ing director had announced that 93.6 percent of Iran's population enjoy natural gas.

Gas is supplied to 97 percent of people in the urban areas and 82 percent of people in the rural regions, according to Hassan Montazer Torbati.

Over \$7.8b worth of energy projects to be inaugurated by mid-March

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** – Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said on Tuesday 330 trillion rials (about \$7.85 billion) worth of major energy projects are going to be inaugurated across the country by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March, 19).

"We have plans to inaugurate 227 water and electricity projects, with 330 trillion rials of investment, in the remaining two months of the current Iranian calendar year," Ardakanian told IRNA on the sidelines of the Islamic Revolution celebrations on Tuesday.

According to the official, so far more than 143 projects, have been inaugurated with 220 trillion rials (about \$5.2 billion) of investment in the current calendar year (started on March 21, 2019).

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



is pursuing seriously.

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

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

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

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

Oil prices rise as new virus cases slow, easing Chinese demand concerns

Oil prices rose for a second day on Wednesday amid preliminary signs that new coronavirus cases are slowing in China, easing concerns over the demand impact from the disease in the world's second-largest oil consumer.

Brent crude LCOc1 was up 73 cents, or 1.3%, at \$54.75 per barrel at 0137 GMT. U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) CLc1 rose 46 cents, or 0.9%, to \$50.39.

According to data through Monday, the growth rate of new coronavirus cases in China has slowed to the lowest since Jan. 31.

Bans on travel to and from China and on

the movement of goods inside the country have cut fuel usage.

The two biggest Chinese refiners have said they will reduce their processing by about 940,000 barrels per day (bpd) as a result of the consumption drop, or about 7% of their 2019 processing runs.

"Concern over weak demand in China is forcing many producers to look for alternatives," ANZ Research said in a note. "Companies such as Vitol, Shell and Litasco have been preparing to hire supertankers to store crude that would be otherwise destined for China."

The demand concerns from the outbreak pushed Brent and WTI to their lowest in 13 months on Monday. Both benchmarks are down more than 20% from highs reached in January.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) on Tuesday cut its global oil demand growth forecast for this year by 310,000 bpd as the virus outbreak crimps oil consumption in China, the world's second-largest economy.

On the supply side, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies including Russia, known as OPEC+,

recommended a further cut of 600,000 bpd last week to stem the oil price fall.

However, Russia has been hesitant to commit to the additional cut, while Saudi Arabia wanted global major oil producers to agree a quick oil supply cut.

U.S. crude inventories rose by 6 million barrels in the week to Feb. 7 to 438.9 million barrels, beating analysts' expectations for an increase of 3 million barrels, data from industry group the American Petroleum Institute showed late on Tuesday.

(Source: reuters.com)

Behind the flurry of big solar deals in 2020: Conventional Energy Companies

Total confirmed Tuesday that it will add another 2 gigawatts of capacity in Spain, including a development pipeline of 1.2 gigawatts and a 65 percent stake in a joint venture with Powertis for another 800 megawatts. Last week Total bought a 50 percent share in a 2-gigawatt pipeline with Adani in India for \$510 million.

According to project data tracked by Wood Mackenzie Power & Renewables, more than 6 gigawatts' worth of solar deals have been transacted barely six weeks into Q1, not counting the 800-megawatt joint venture between Total and Powertis. The comparable figure for Q1 2019 was 10.5 gigawatts, but 6 gigawatts of that figure came from one deal: the acquisition of Tradewind's assets by Enel Green Power. The first six weeks of this year are already ahead of all of Q1 2018 and Q1 2017.

There are two main drivers behind the recent rush of activity. One is the increased interest from utilities and oil and gas players. The other is market dynamics in Spain, where the government is attempting to hit 40 gigawatts of PV by 2040 from a base of 10.6 gigawatts at the start of this year. "We're seeing so many transactions in Spain because it's extremely difficult now to do greenfield project developments (there)," Tom Heggarty, principal analyst at Wood Mackenzie's energy transition practice, told GTM.

■ The grid connection points

"All of the grid connection points are more or less saturated, either with existing assets in operation or those under development. Effectively that means that if you want to develop and own assets in Spain, and you're not in the market already with grid connection in place, then you need to go into the secondary market."

A wider trend in place in markets in Spain and beyond is the increased activity of oil and gas majors and utility firms in developing and acquiring their own assets.

"When everything was done under feed-in tariffs, green certificates or even by auction regimes, that allowed smaller, locally focused independent power producers to do pretty well. But now things are moving more toward merchant business models in many markets," said Heggarty.

"That really requires a different set



of capabilities, particularly around risk management, around power trading, around (power-purchase agreement) origination.

This pattern is likely to continue in developed markets where either there are no auctions or support mechanisms, or those instruments aren't sufficiently stable to attract investors, Heggarty said.

■ Total the largest solar player

Total the "largest solar player" among energy majors

Total's entry into Spain is spearheaded by the acquisition of a 1.2-gigawatt development pipeline spread across Andalusia, Aragon and Castile-La Mancha. The 65/35 joint venture with solar developer Powertis will initially look to develop a pipeline of 800 megawatts.

The first projects could be operational by the end of the year, with Total aiming to have all of them up and running by the end of 2023.

Heggarty said Total had now "cemented its place as the largest solar player among the energy majors."

So far this year, Portuguese oil firm Galp Energia bought 2.9 gigawatts of Spanish solar from ACS, a construction firm and renewable energy developer. PV equipment manufacturer Hanwha Q Cells has also acquired 1 gigawatt of capacity this year, also in Spain.

Other oil supermajors have been co-developing PV pipelines. BP expects to have a 50 percent share of 10 gigawatts of solar by 2023 via its Lightsources BP joint venture.

Shell has a major stake in U.S. developer Silicon Ranch and interests in a number of commercial and industrial players in Australia and India; it is also developing a 120-megawatt plant for one of its own gas facilities in Australia.

(Source: greentechmedia.com)

European electrification 'would boost need for renewables': researchers

The electrification of transport, buildings and industrial sectors in Europe could help to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Europe by 60% between 2020 and 2050.

This could be achieved by increasing the uptake of electric heating systems, such as heat pumps, and electric vehicles (EVs), as well as using green hydrogen to provide heat for buildings and in industrial processes, researchers at BloombergNEF (BNEF) explained.

As a result, electricity's share of these sectors' final energy demand could increase from 10% to 60% by mid-century.

BNEF added some activities, such as aviation and shipping, will remain difficult to electrify, and their emissions difficult to lower.

This electrification of transport, buildings, and industry could create a need for 75% more generation capacity in a typical country in northern Europe by 2050, compared with the additions needed without sector coupling.

The researchers added that clean power sources — especially wind power and solar PV — should meet as much of this additional power demand as is feasible to maximize the climate benefits of sector coupling.

BNEF suggested meeting the extra demand created by electrification would require a 400% increase in total capacity from today (above), rather than the analysts' projected 180% increase in a scenario without sector coupling.

While power sector emissions may increase because more fossil-fuel plants will be needed to provide flexibility, electrification would result in economy-wide emissions reductions as the alternative would be for transport, buildings, and industry to continue to use fossil fuels, BNEF explained.

Governments should introduce incentives or requirements to cut emissions from building heat, support demonstration projects for electrification, and remove barriers to the production of green hydrogen, BNEF's head of global policy analysis Victoria Cuming said.

They will also need to appease public



opposition to wind and solar as higher volumes of capacity will be needed, and incentivize communities and companies willing to be early starters for sector coupling, BNEF added.

■ Energy demand patterns

The European power system would also need to be more flexible due to the different energy demand patterns of heating and transport.

However, they suggested these newly electrified sectors could create new sources of flexibility by altering their consumption patterns as long as the right policies and technologies are in place.

Meanwhile, the higher power volumes and greater renewables penetration accompanying this sector coupling mean grids will need to be reinforced and extended.

This will also create a need for more flexible resources such as battery storage and gas peaker plants.

BNEF did not suggest the total cost of the new technologies required to electrify transport, buildings, and industry.

However, its head of analysis Albert Cheung suggested that electricity market design should enable developers of wind, solar PV and battery storage projects, as well as those providing demand response services, to expect returns that justify their investment.

To avoid sector coupling resulting in increased fossil-fuel build, policymakers could open capacity markets to wind and solar plants, BNEF suggested.

This would enable operators of such projects to receive payments for providing reliable generation, creating another revenue stream and therefore boosting the investment case for wind and solar projects.

(Source: windpowermonthly.com)

PNG plays hardball with ExxonMobil over LNG expansion

By Damon Evans

ExxonMobil's PNG LNG expansion project risks being delayed several years after the government of Papua New Guinea rejected the U.S. major's proposed terms for the P'nyang field development.

In a statement on 31 January — the government-imposed date by which Exxon had been asked to provide its best offer — PNG Prime Minister James Marape revealed that negotiations had been halted as Exxon was unwilling to make any "significant" fiscal concessions beyond the terms of its opening offer last November.

Crucially, Marape said talks have stalled as the U.S. major failed to "agree to reasonable terms in line with other international gas projects" and the offer was not substantially different from the Papua LNG Gas Agreement initially signed with Total in April 2019.



Significantly, the perception the country is not obtaining large-enough rewards from the petroleum industry helped bring about a change in government in May 2019 that saw former Prime Minister Peter O'Neill ousted in favor of James Marape.

The Marape-led government was unhappy with the agreement the previous administration signed with Total for its proposed 5.4 mtpa Papua LNG project. As the deal was reportedly only marginally better than the terms agreed for the Exxon-operated PNG LNG plant, which are considered generous for investors by global standards.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that negotiations over the P'nyang Gas Agreement are bearing the brunt of political and public anger over the perceived lack of economic benefits PNG has received from its first LNG development, which currently produces 7.9 mtpa. Indeed, fighting for a better government take could play well for the government even if it comes at the expense of project delays.

■ Terms of the Papua LNG deal

The "new leadership has staked public credibility on securing a bigger share of the benefits from the country's extractive sector. Marape resigned as finance minister in part over the terms of the Papua LNG deal, and there would be a political cost if he was now seen to accept broadly similar terms for P'nyang," Joseph Parkes, Asia analyst at global risk consultancy Verisk Maplecroft, told Energy Voice.

"By accepting the risk of delays to major projects the government has signaled its commitment to securing a better deal. Companies should clearly expect a tougher ride under Marape," added Parkes. Analysis from Credit Suisse suggests the incumbent fiscal terms are materially worse for the people of PNG compared with other benchmarks, even after considering risk profile and equity stake factors.

"Of course, we acknowledge fiscal terms are complex and there is more to it than headline fiscal take numbers, but this may help explain the government position in our view," said Saul Kavonic, an Australian-based energy specialist at Credit Suisse.

"We think any government desire to see an FDI boost may be tempered by the knowledge that even if FEED was entered soon, large FDI is still unlikely to flow ahead of the next election. And taking a tough line against the industry could play well politically, so the political calculus for the government to compromise remains unclear in our view," added Kavonic.

Nevertheless, ExxonMobil chief executive Darren Woods said he still hoped to agree a deal for the development of the P'nyang field but suggested there was no urgency to strike a "win-win" deal with the government given the soft state of the LNG market. This suggests the supermajor is not prepared to compromise much.

The expansion of the Exxon-operated PNG LNG plant is set to be supplied by gas from Total's Papua LNG project as well as from Exxon's P'nyang field. Oil Search is a partner in both ventures. The JV partners, led by Exxon and Total, are developing Papua LNG and the expansion of the existing PNG LNG complex together at the same time to save billions of dollars in costs.

■ Major Total feeding trains

The original plan was to add three new trains to the existing two-train PNG LNG development — one train (PNG LNG T3) operated and fed by ExxonMobil's P'nyang field, with French major Total feeding the other two trains (Papua LNG) from its Elk-Antelope field.

However, the expansion plan, which would double LNG exports from PNG, hinges on separate agreements to develop the P'nyang and Elk-Antelope fields. But the collapse of negotiations with the PNG government leaves outstanding the critical deal to develop P'nyang. Last year, Oil Search said that signing a Gas Agreement for the P'nyang field is a requirement for launching the FEED phase of the proposed three-train PNG downstream development.

On 6 February, Total chief executive Patrick Pouyannet, reiterated that his company's project will be jointly developed with Exxon and that the U.S. giant and the government should return to the negotiating table.

But the window of opportunity to expand PNG LNG is narrowing as more cost-competitive LNG export projects are soon expected to be sanctioned in the U.S., Africa and Qatar. Indeed, the lack of positive momentum for a final investment decision around the PNG expansion is concerning, said Angus Rodger, Asia research director at Wood Mackenzie.

"While the abandoning of P'nyang negotiations certainly means LNG expansion will be delayed, it may not mean the overall development has been derailed. P'nyang is the most remote and difficult field to develop associated with the expansion project, and as such the latest setback will likely lead to a re-shuffling of priorities and development timetables. However, going back to the drawing board in terms of how expansion might look — two trains versus three for example — and what fields will feed them will inevitably require lots more time," added Rodger.

Still, doubts remain around Oil Search's claim that Papua LNG will proceed without P'nyang, especially given Exxon may have a veto right over Papua, and given the delay entailed in redoing pre-FEED work and commercial access arrangements, cautioned Kavonic.

Kavonic thinks P'nyang negotiations resuming is a more plausible scenario than Papua proceeding alone, but he also is not ruling out a four-year plus delay or a no expansion scenario, where the fields are relegated to backfill the original two-train PNG LNG plant in the 2030s.

(Source: energyvoice.com)

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Wuhan is for all of us a test of the human mind and spirit against the Deep State and technocracy.

Iran's flag carrier launches Asaluyeh-Doha service

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iran's flag carrier –IranAir d e s k – has launched new service connecting southwestern port city of Asaluyeh to Qatar's capital, Doha, according to the Ministry of Transport and Urban Development's portal.

The new route was operated for the first time on Feb. 9 from the Persian Gulf International Airport in Asaluyeh, Bushehr province, to Doha International Airport, according to Abolqasem Jalali, an official with Iran Air.



Using ATR aircrafts, the flight is operated on Sundays every week leaving Doha at 5 p.m. local time for Asaluyeh. The return flight is operated on the same day, leaving Persian Gulf International Airport at 7:40 p.m. local time for Doha International Airport.

Iran grants holders of Qatari passports tourist visas upon arrival at Iranian airports. Qatari nationals can obtain a single or multiple-entry visa from Iran's Embassy in Doha, to avoid occasional delays at the port of arrival in case of crowding of passengers at the airport's visa office.

Mud wasp nests used to date ancient Australian rock art

Researchers have used mud wasp nests to narrow the age range of Aboriginal rock art in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Previous surveys suggested some Kimberley painting were 16,000 years old, but the latest findings proved the Aboriginal rock art was much younger.

"This is the first time we have been able to confidently say Gwion style paintings were created around 12,000 years ago," Damien Finch, doctoral student at the University of Melbourne, said in a news release. "No one has been able present the scientific evidence to say that before."

For the study, published this week in the journal Science Advances, scientists collected and analyzed 100 mud wasp nests from rock art sites.

"A painting beneath a wasp nest must be older than the nest, and a painting on top of a nest must be younger than the nest," Finch said. "If you date enough of the nests, you build up a pattern and can narrow down an age range for paintings in a particular style."

Gwion Gwion paintings, also called Bradshaw rock paintings, are one of the two main regional rock art traditions in Western Australia's Kimberley region.

The paintings, ranging in size from six inches to six feet, feature tall and slender human figures in ornate costume. Many Gwion paintings include figures sporting headdresses, arm bands and anklets.

"The Kimberley contains some of the world's most visually spectacular and geographically extensive records of Indigenous rock art, estimated to include tens of thousands of sites, only a small fraction of which have been studied intensively," said Andy Gleadow, professor of geology at the University of Melbourne.

By pinpointing the age of the Gwion Gwion art tradition, scientists can link the paintings with other kinds of contemporaneous artifacts, giving researchers a better sense of the environment from which the painting emerged.

(Source: UPI)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Robben Island

Robben Island in South Africa was used at various times between the 17th century and the 20th century as a prison, a hospital for socially unacceptable groups, and a military base.

Its buildings, and in particular those of the late 20th century maximum security prison for political prisoners, testify to the way in which democracy and freedom triumphed over oppression and racism.

What survives from its episodic history are 17th century quarries, the tomb of Hadije Kramat who died in 1755, 19th century 'village' administrative buildings including a chapel



and parsonage, small lighthouse, the lepers' church, the only remains of a leper colony, derelict World War II military structures around the harbor and the stark and functional maximum security prison of the Apartheid period began in the 1960s.

The symbolic value of Robben Island lies in its somber history, as a prison and a hospital for unfortunates who were sequestered as being socially undesirable.

This came to an end in the 1990s when the inhuman Apartheid regime was rejected by the South African people and the political prisoners who had been incarcerated on the Island received their freedom after many years.

(Source: UNESCO)

Isfahan excavations bring to light relics dating from 4th-millennium BC onwards

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Newly-conducted excavations have yielded a fresh view over the olden days of Isfahan, a well-known historical tourism destination in central Iran.

The findings include brick paving textures, estimated to date from Qajar era (1789 to 1925) and Safavid era (1501 to 1736), potteries dating to Sassanid epoch (224 CE–651), as well as a significant number of animal bones and remains from [some] six thousand years ago, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

Led by Iranian archaeologist Mohsen Javari, the excavations were carried out in several points of Isfahan, which predominantly lies on its historical layers and texture.

The surveys have been conducted several trenches carved across the city's Amadgah St., Enghelab Sq. and Chahar Bagh-e Abbasi St., the report said.

"Several waterways were discovered during an excavation done in an area opposite Amadgah Street. They were related to water division [mechanism] used in the Safavid era," Javari said.

Commenting on the fate of the new discoveries, the archaeologist said, "Significant discoveries (relics), such as the one found opposite the Amadgah St. and ones found in Enghelab Sq. will go into the glass [cases] to go on display forever."

"We are set to present information about these discoveries and their [associated] periods in multi-language texts accompanied by photographs so that passersby could learn about the history of the place while crossing the Chahar Bagh to answer their [probable] questions about history of the locale."

Soaked in a rich history, Isfahan was once a crossroad of international trade and diplomacy in Iran and now it is one of Iran's top tourist destinations for good reasons.



Experts say an ancient town, which lies partly beneath modern Isfahan, can be traced back to at least the Achaemenid era (559–330 BC), but little is known about the area before the rule of the Sassanid dynasty.

The modern city is filled with many architectural wonders such as unmatched Islamic buildings, bazaars, museums, Persian gardens and tree-lined boulevards. It's a city for walking, getting lost in its mazing bazaars, dozing in beautiful gardens, and

meeting people.

Isfahan has long been nicknamed as Nesf-e-Jahan which is translated into "half the world"; meaning seeing it is relevant to seeing the whole world. In its heyday it was also one of the largest cities in the region with a population of nearly one million.

The cool blue tiles of Isfahan's Islamic buildings, and the city's majestic bridges, contrast perfectly with the encircling hot, dry Iranian countryside. The UNESCO-regis-

tered Imam Square, best known as Naghsh-e Jahan Sq. (literary meaning "Image of the World"), was laid out under the reign of the Safavid ruler, Shah Abbas the Great, to signal the importance of Isfahan as a capital of his powerful empire.

Modern Isfahan is now home to some heavy industry, including steel factories and a nuclear facility on its outskirts, however its inner core wants to be preserved as a priceless gem.



Visit majestic Ameri House while making excursion to central Iranian oasis, desert



HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Many visitors to Ameri House (also called "Khaneh-ye Ameriha), which in fact constitutes one ring of a circle of historical mansions in Kashan, say it is a must-see destination while making an excursion to the oasis city that lies on the margins of a central Iranian desert.

In short, it is a magnificent house with a unique architecture both in interior and exterior designs with spectacular painting, mirror arts, and vivid woodwork, stuccowork and tilework.

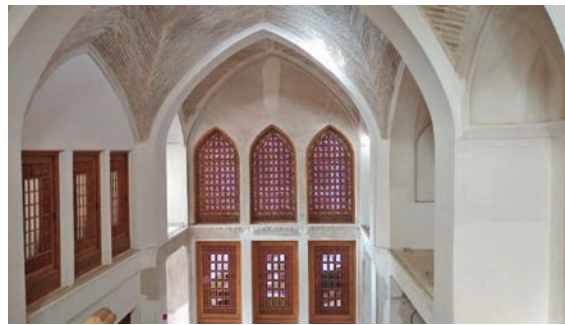
Narratives say that once at one time nine families lived there.

Nowadays it also serves as a boutique hotel. Travelers can rent beautiful rooms and have a pleasant staying. You can just pay a visit there if you are not willing to stay.

The well-preserved hotel keeps its original features intact. The restaurant of this residence is in the large saloon called mirror room and it's gorgeous.

Kashan not only boasts a cluster of architectural wonders, an atmospheric covered bazaar and a UNESCO-recognized garden, but it also offers a gateway to magnificent sceneries.

Many travelers opt to pass Kashan on their journeys between Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz and Yazd, because this delightful oasis city on the edge of the Dasht-e Kavir, is one of Iran's most alluring destinations.



Japan cruise ship virus cases climb to 174

Another 39 people aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan have tested positive for the new coronavirus, authorities said Wednesday, as thousands more steel themselves for a second week in quarantine.

With 174 confirmed cases, the ship that arrived with over 3,700 passengers and crew has become the largest single cluster of the newly named COVID-19 virus outside its origin in China, where it has killed more than 1,100.

Passengers and crew are now halfway through a 14-day quarantine that is due to end on February 19 and have been mostly confined to their quarters, aside from being allowed brief periods on deck while wearing face masks.

"You sit out on the balcony and you hear people coughing all the way along," British passenger Sally Abel said in a video streamed on Facebook.

"It is nothing like a holiday, but it is complete relaxation," she added.

Fellow passenger Yardley Wong tweeted: "Anxiety uprisen" on news of the new cases, saying she didn't know whether she or her family might be next.

On board the ship, the captain told passengers the situation was changing all the time.

"We are following the latest and best public

health guidelines from the authorities," he said in a broadcast that passengers relayed on social media.

He apologized for the "periodic service disruptions" to the internet, adding: "Diamond Princess has more bandwidth than any ship in the world, and at the same time, more mobile devices than ever before connected on a ship."

(Source: MSN)

5 common travel scams and how to avoid them

Traveling is often an enriching experience but more often than not scammers around the globe are waiting to prey on unsuspecting tourists.

To ensure your holiday is an enjoyable one, stay on high alert for these common scams:

■ Corrupt cab drivers

The broken cab meter is a frequently reported travel scam all over the world; the driver will claim the meter is broken and charge you an exorbitant price.

But the cab driver scams don't stop there; USA Today reported some drivers will go as far as dropping a large note and picking up a smaller hidden one in an attempt to have you pay more.

The solution? Book a cab from a hotel or restaurant, always insist on using the meter and ensure you're watching the driver when exchanging money.

■ Tour scams

A tour can be a great way to see the highlights of any destination, but travelers need to be aware of fake tours that can trick anyone out of hundreds of dollars.

News.com reported a Balinese tour guide charging deposits of up to US\$200 and then failing to return the money, offering instead a myriad of excuses.

One way to avoid this is always ensure you're going through a trusted company or guide, check the reviews and ask for recommendations.



■ Fake police

Fake police are extremely common around the globe and often travelers fall victim to fake authorities who are only out to make some easy money.

These smooth criminals will approach you, asking to search your wallet for counterfeit money. While they search your wallet, they'll help themselves to your money. Other versions of the scam include requesting your passport and requesting cash up front.

One solution offered by ABC.net.au is to never hand over your possessions before seeing police identification or to suggest visiting the police station to assess your items instead.

■ Be aware of the Wi-Fi

Wi-Fi is readily available in in almost all public spaces but Forbes warns unsuspecting travelers of phony airport Wi-Fi that can be used as a device for identity theft.

Scammers will create Wi-Fi hotspots with names almost identical to the airport's Wi-Fi, then access personal information from those who log in.

The recommended solution for this one requires close attention. As most airports have signs indicating their Wi-Fi name, be sure to stay on the lookout for copycat names that are nearly identical.

■ A not so happy snap

There's no blaming the tourist who wants a photo of their holiday but Traveller.com warns of thieves who approach people by offering to take a photo, only to run off with their camera or phone.

Avoid this by never handing over your camera or phone to a stranger, no matter how pure their intentions are. If you absolutely need that special shot, invest in a selfie-stick. Or maybe just try living in the moment.

(Source: The Jakarta Post)

Iran denies first case of coronavirus death

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — An official with the Iranian health ministry denied reports claiming that the first case of death has occurred as a result of coronavirus in the country.

Recently, Iran Persian-language newspaper, reported the death of a middle-aged woman suspected of coronavirus in a hospital in Tehran.

“Iran remains clear of the coronavirus,” Kianoush Jahanpour, head of the health ministry’s information center, emphasized, noting, there have not been any cases of the virus so far and no suspicious new cases reported in the country over the past two days.

Jahanpour said so far there have been no cases of coronavirus infection in Iran, both among Iranians and foreigners. However, students recently returned from Wuhan will remain in quarantine for another week as the virus has a long latency of 14 days.

An outbreak of the disease, originating at a seafood market, occurred in the central Chinese city of Wuhan; which killed at least 1,113 people and infected 44,653 in China, and about 393 cases have been confirmed in 24 other countries outside China.



The World Health Organization on Tuesday proposed an official name for the illness caused by the new coronavirus: COVID-19. The acronym stands for coronavirus disease 2019, as the illness was first detected toward the end of last year.

According to the WHO, coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). A novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

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

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

Iran to send Zafar-2 satellite into orbit in months

1 → Zafar satellite is able to create land use maps, urban development monitoring maps, agricultural land boundary maps, and natural land and forest change maps, as well as monitor permanent and seasonal lake changes and identify post-disaster demolition in urban areas and upgrade structural maps (fault and folding identification).

Iran launched its first satellite, called Omid (literally meaning hope), in 2009. Rasad (literally meaning observation) satellite was also sent into orbit in 2011.

In 2012, Iran successfully put its third domestically manufactured satellite, named Navid (literally meaning promise), into orbit.

Snowstorm kills 7, injures 80 in northern Iran



ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Severe snowstorms in Northern Gilan province, which in some areas have reached a thickness of over two meters, have killed 7 and injured about 80 people, IRINN reported on Wednesday.

Electricity had cut off in 250,000 households, but it has so far connected for 85,000 ones, Gilan Governor General Arsalan Zare’e said, adding, water dis-

ruption for 6,000 households of a total of 12,000 ones has so far been resolved.

Zare’e also announced the emergency resettlement of 1,630 people and the release of more than 500 cars caught in the snow, pointing out that power outages had cut off internet for 50 percent of subscribers, especially in rural areas.

All schools and universities in the province have also been closed.

Picture of squabbling mice wins wildlife photography award



A picture of two mice fighting over some crumbs on an empty Tube platform has won a prestigious ‘people’s poll’ award for wildlife photography.

Sam Rowley took the image one night on a London Underground platform, after seeing a pair of black mice squabbling over some food that had been dropped by a commuter.

Their scrap lasted roughly a second. This photograph won the Wildlife Pho-

tographer of the Year LUMIX People’s Choice Award, receiving 28,000 votes from the public.

The award recognises pictures that entered but did not win last year’s internationally renowned Wildlife Photograph of the Year.

Rowley’s “Station Squabble” will be displayed, along with the other 24 short-listed photographs, in the Natural History Museum until 31 May.

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ج

Iranian-made HPV vaccine to be commercialized in months

Production of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine (the virus that usually causes cervical cancer in women) is in the final stages of clinical trial and will be launched by the next few months, director of health technology development office of the Ministry of Health, has announced. According to the plan, the product was expected to enter the domestic market by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20), but sanctions caused problems in its manufacturing process, Hossein Vatanpour said, IRNA reported.

According to Ali Qanbari, head of cancer department at the Ministry of Health, every 3,000 to 4,000 women develop cervical cancer per 100,000, and as the Iranian population is aging, it is predicted that cervical cancer will grow among women over the next two decades. Referring to HPV virus statistics, he said that 8 percent of adult women are infected with HPV and in the next 10 to 25 years the prevalence of the virus may be higher than expected.

واکسن ایرانی HPV به زودی وارد بازار می شود

تولید واکسن HPV (ویروسی که معمولاً موجب سرطان دهانه رحم در زنان می شود) در مراحل انتهایی کارآزمایی بالینی (کلینیکال تریال) قرار دارد و اوایل سال آینده این محصول ایرانی وارد بازار می شود.

حسین وطن پور مدیرکل دفتر توسعه فناوری سلامت وزارت بهداشت در گفت و گو با ایرنا اظهار داشت: براساس برنامه ریزی انجام شده قرار بود این محصول تا پایان سال جاری، وارد بازار داخلی شود که تحریم مشکلاتی در روند کار تولید آن به وجود آورد.

به گفته علی قنبری رئیس اداره سرطان وزارت بهداشت، از هر ۱۰۰ هزار زن ۳ تا ۴ نفر به سرطان دهان رحم مبتلا می شوند و به دلیل اینکه جمعیت ایران رو به سالمندی می رود، پیش بینی می شود که در ۲ دهه آینده ابتلا به سرطان دهانه رحم در زنان ایرانی افزایش پیدا کند.

مطلق به آمار ابتلا به ویروس HPV اشاره کرد و گفت: بر اساس آمارها ۸ درصد خانم های بالغ به عفونت ناشی از ویروس HPV مبتلا هستند و در ۱۰ تا ۲۵ سال آینده ممکن است شیوع این ویروس بیش از پیش بینی ها افزایش پیدا کند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“ante-”

■ **Meaning:** before

■ **For example:** some *antecedents* to the African novel might exist in Africa’s oral traditions.

PHRASAL VERB

Pull off

■ **Meaning:** to succeed in doing something difficult

■ **For example:** The goalkeeper pulled off six terrific saves.

IDIOM

Dead man walking

■ **Explanation:** inevitably be in great trouble very soon, especially to lose job or position

■ **For example:** Because of the way he handled the recent riots, the minister is a dead man walking.

Air pollution has major impact on children in sport, study warns

Britain’s future sporting performance could be hampered by air pollution because some training grounds are in areas with dangerously high pollution levels, a report has revealed.

The Breathe GB study analysed pollution levels at 94 sporting sites, with one of the highest recorded levels at Birmingham’s Perry Park, host of the 2022 Commonwealth Games.



Other important training grounds, such as the running track where Sir Mo Farah and Christine Ohuruogu trained, have pollution levels that breach World Health Organization (WHO) recommended limits.

The study suggests children exercising in areas of high pollution will experience stunted lung function that will limit their future sporting performance.

Dr Ian Mudway, a senior lecturer in respiratory toxicology at King’s College London, said: “A child growing up with asthma in a polluted city will have worse symptoms that will limit their potential to train ... which is likely to have an impact on their optimal level of performance.”

Jonathan Grigg, a professor of paediatric respiratory and environmental medicine at Queen Mary University, said: “There is very strong evidence that exposure to air pollution stunts children’s lung function. Children with clinically low lung function will have reduced exercise capacity.”

At the launch of the report on Tuesday morning, Mark Bergin, a PE teacher from Manorfield primary school in Poplar, east London, said: “There are elements that we can see now because there is such an increase in the number of children who have asthma pumps; I’ve noticed that over the last 10 years or so of working in education.”

To produce the report, campaign group The Air Team spoke with senior respiratory consultants, as well as leaders in physical education, to assess the effects of air pollution on children’s lung function and sporting ability.

They also assessed air pollution at 94 sports sites in England and found that 25 broke WHO recommended limits, while 52 came close to the threshold.

Perry Park was the third most polluted of the sites across London, Birmingham, Nottingham, Salford and Sheffield, with an annual mean level of 50 micrograms of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) a cubic metre of air (µg/m3) – the WHO recommends a safe level of 40µg/m3.

The training grounds of Ridgeway Rovers, where David Beckham and Harry Kane formerly played, and Alpha & Omega FC, Raheem Sterling’s former youth team, have fine particulate matter levels (PM2.5) of 11, above WHO recommended limits.

St Augustine’s Hall, home of the Victoria Park Harriers and Tower Hamlets athletics club, had the highest air pollution levels out of those assessed, with 67 NO2 µg/m3.

Ben Paul, an Air Team campaigner who lives in Bloomsbury, central London with his 10-year-old son, said: “It’s like how it took time for the full health impacts of smoking to be understood. I think this could be a ticking time bomb for our children.”

“Kids’ lung capacity can reduce by up to 14% if they live in a high pollution area. Wouldn’t it be great if we could get 14% more medals at the next Olympics?”

The Air Team is calling on sports organisations, MPs, schools and athletes to back their Breathe GB campaign. Its spokeswoman, Anella Wickenden, said: “If you care about British sport, you need to care about air pollution.”

(Source: The Independent)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Small nations in the spotlight over Iraq

(February 05, 2003)

The US will probably soon ask the UN Security Council to vote for a resolution supporting war against Iraq. The US will need 9 votes out of 15 to get the resolution it wants. Does this mean some Council members will come under pressure to vote in favor? This report from Greg Barrow.

Although there’s no clear evidence that political **pressures are being applied** yet, some of **the council’s** smaller nations like Guinea, Cameroon and Angola are **bracing themselves**. 43» No single nation wants to be put **in the spotlight** as the **swing vote** that could give the United States the nine votes it requires to **get a new resolution through**.

In the run-up to the last Gulf War, intense pressure was applied to nations that **held important votes**. Non-permanent members like Yemen, that voted against a key Security Council resolution **authorizing** force against Iraq, found themselves punished **economically** by the US and had aid packages **cut off**. Others were rewarded with new aid initiatives for their ‘yes’ votes.

Words

pressures are being applied: if you apply pressure, you try to make someone do something

the council: The Security Council is a UN committee which exists to settle international disputes

bracing themselves: preparing themselves for something difficult

in the spotlight: if you are in the spotlight, everyone is watching you

swing vote: here, a country which has not yet chosen how to vote

get a new resolution through: if you get a resolution through, you ask for a yes-vote and get it

In the run-up to: in the time just before

held important votes: if you hold a vote, you are allowed to vote

authorizing: officially allowing

cut off: stopped

(Source: BBC)

Taliban could sign peace deal in February if Taliban reduces violence

A U.S.-Taliban peace deal could be signed this month if the Taliban significantly reduces violence, and that deal could lead to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, two Afghan government sources and a Western diplomat said on Wednesday.

The timeline shared by sources came a day after Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said there has been a possible breakthrough in U.S.-Taliban talks in Qatar.

The talks had been deadlocked in part over a U.S. demand that the insurgents agree to sharply reduce violence as part of any American troop withdrawal accord.

Taliban spokesmen were not immediately available for a comment.

A western diplomat in Kabul said the U.S. negotiators were working on idea that the Taliban should agree on a reduction in violence (RIV) for at least 10 days with no major violation.

The prospective deal, he said, would call for a ceasefire period between the Afghan and U.S. coalition and the Taliban, with hopes of a peace deal being reached in the near future.

“It is after those 10 days of RIV that both sides can hold talks and firm up plans to hold intra-Afghan dialogue,” said the source on condition of anonymity.

There are currently about 13,000 U.S. forces as well as thousands of other NATO troops in Afghanistan, 18 years after a U.S.-led coalition invaded the country following the Sept. 11, 2001, al Qaeda attacks on the United States.

The news of a potential agreement to decrease violence comes amid continued attacks in the country.

Last month, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction assessed that there had been a record-high number of attacks carried out by the Taliban and other anti-government forces during the last three months of 2019.

(Source: Daily Star)

Merkel allies press for swift resolution of succession question

Senior members of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s conservatives called for a swift decision on who should lead the party and be its next chancellor candidate after her protegee Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer threw in the towel.

Kramp-Karrenbauer said on Monday she would give up the party chair as well as her ambitions of running for chancellor, as she believed one person should do both. She would organize a process to fill both roles in the summer.

But Alexander Dobrindt, chief lawmaker of the Christian Social Union (CSU), the Bavarian sister party of Merkel’s Christian Democrats (CDU), said the so-called “Union” conservative bloc must find a much swifter solution.

“In my opinion, such leadership questions must be resolved quickly,” Dobrindt said. “We need decisions now to make things clearer.”

CDU deputy leader Volker Bouffier also put Kramp-Karrenbauer’s timetable into question. “I don’t think we’re going to wait that long, we’ll find a decision sooner,” Bouffier told public radio broadcaster ARD.

CDU parliamentary group leader Ralph Brinkhaus warned that a prolonged leadership debate could hamper the ruling coalition’s work. The party should not rush the decision, but definitely avoid a delay until autumn or even winter, he said.

(Source: DPA)

Islamic revolution and legacy of martyrs

➔ Pictures of Imam Khomeini, the chief architect of the Islamic revolution and Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran dotted the streets from every side. Latter, a protégé of the former, has quite impressively kept alive the illustrious legacy of his mentor and infused new life into the revolution. While Imam Khomeini led the first phase of the revolution that culminated with its victory in 1979, Ayatollah Khamenei has admirably led its second phase that continues till date.

The pictures of martyrs, most notably, the slain head of IRGC’s Quds Force Gen. Qassem Soleimani, were put up along the way from Maidan e Enghelab (Revolution Square) to Maidan e Azadi (Freedom Square). These bravehearts dedicated their whole lives to the revolution and ensured that Iran becomes a free, independent and proud nation.

It is important to note here that this Islamic revolution is not confined to Iran and Iranians. It is a guiding principle for every campaigner of truth and justice across the world. The glorious legacy of martyrs has inspired people in different corners of the world. That’s precisely why we see rallies commemorating the anniversary of the Islamic revolution in different countries today. People relate to it.

As I participated in the march on Tuesday, the feeling was strangely beautiful. I constantly reminded myself of the principles that guided the revolution, as envisioned by Imam Khomeini. I felt a hint of pride walking alongside these brave men and women, who are making history every single day by resisting the arrogant powers of the world. I felt immensely pleased to hold aloft a poster of Gen. Soleimani, who was the best student of the revolution that the great Imam Khomeini spearheaded.

Then I realized that the legacy of Imam Khomeini is no different from the legacy of Imam Hussain (as). Imam Khomeini is the product of the Karbala school of thought, where death with dignity is better than life with humiliation, where resistance against oppressors is a sacrosanct duty, where martyrdom is a badge of honor for the free men.

The revolution that toppled the Pahlavi regime has not culminated yet. It has taken a different shape and form, but the core idea, vision and concept is the same, rooted in the profound philosophy of Karbala. In every time and age, we have to identify Yazid and Hussain, Umr e Saad and Hurr. Then we have to choose our side wisely. That’s what separates free men from the slaves.

People who chanted ‘Death to America’ and ‘Death to Israel’ on the streets of Tehran today know the significance of these slogans. It is a part of resistance too, because as George Orwell puts it, during the times of universal deceit, telling truth becomes a revolutionary act.

This is the Iran that challenges the political and cultural hegemony of Western powers, this is the Iran that the likes of Trump and Netanyahu have to deal with, and this is the Iran that refuses to surrender despite overt and covert pressure. This Iran has survived thousands of years, and most probably shall outlive its enemies.

Britain and United States asked to investigate UAE ‘war crimes’ in Yemen

Britain, the United States and Turkey were Wednesday formally asked to arrest senior officials from the United Arab Emirates on suspicion of carrying out war crimes and torture in Yemen, three sources told Reuters.

British law firm Stoke White filed the complaints to Britain’s Metropolitan police and the U.S. and Turkish justice ministries on behalf of Abdullah Suliman Abdullah Daubalah, a journalist, and Salah Muslim Salem, whose brother was killed in Yemen.

The complaint, filed Wednesday, says the UAE and its mercenaries were responsible for torture and war crimes against civilians in Yemen in 2015 and 2019. A spokeswoman for the UAE could not be reached for immediate comment.

“It is requested that the UK, U.S. and Turkish police open investigations into these alleged crimes as soon as possible,” according to one of the sources.

The suspects identified include political and military leaders from the UAE who reside in the UAE and the United States but who travel to Britain regularly.

The UAE is a leading partner in a Saudi-led coalition that intervened in Yemen in March 2015 to restore ousted President Abd-Rab-



bu Mansour Hadi’s government after it was toppled in late 2014. In July the UAE said it was withdrawing its troops from Yemen, but remained a part of the coalition.

A spokeswoman for the UAE declined

immediate comment, as did a spokesman for London’s Metropolitan Police. There was no immediate reply to emails to the U.S. Justice Department and the Turkish embassy in London.

Bernie Sanders wins New Hampshire Democratic primary

US Senator Bernie Sanders has won New Hampshire’s Democratic presidential primary with former front-runner Joe Biden trailing badly.

Sanders got 25.8% of the vote, leading Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, by 1.4 points with 8.4% of New Hampshire precincts reporting on Tuesday night.

“With victories behind us, popular vote in Iowa and victory here tonight, we’re going to Nevada, we’re going to South Carolina, we’re going to win those states,” Sanders told the crowd in New Hampshire.

“Tonight I want to take my opportunity to express my appreciation and respect for all of the candidates we ran against: Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Elizabeth Warren, Joe Biden, and what I can tell you, with absolute certainty and I know I speak for every one of the Democratic candidates is that no matter who wins, and we certainly hope it’s going to be us, we are going to unite together and we are going to defeat the most dangerous president in modern history.”

Meanwhile, Buttigieg told his supporters in Nashua,



New Hampshire, that he admired his competitor Sanders when he was in high school.

“I admired Sen. Sanders when I was a high school student. I respect him greatly to this day, and I congratulate him on his strong showing tonight.”

Senator Klobuchar, looking for a breakthrough after a strong debate performance on Friday, was in third

Damascus: Erdogan is ‘disconnected from reality’

➔ Tarabrin, interviewed by Russian Sputnik Agency on Wednesday, said “We have announced many times that neither Russia nor the Syrian armed forces are shelling the civilian residents, and all the strikes are against terrorist formations and against those who carry weapons and fight against the legitimate authorities.”

Earlier on Tuesday, Russian Presidential Spokesman Dmitry Peskov asserted that the attacks launched by terrorists from Idleb are unacceptable and they shouldn’t be allowed to continue.

Earlier on Wednesday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened to target Syrian forces “everywhere” and “by any means” if Turkish troops in Syria are harmed.

Erdogan issued the threat during a meeting of the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party at the parliament in Ankara on Wednesday.

The Syrian army and allied forces have been gaining ground against Ankara-backed and other militants in the northwestern Idlib Province, just south of Turkey’s border, recently.

Under a deal reached with Russia and brokered by Iran in 2018 known as the Sochi agreement, a small number

of Turkish forces were allowed to man observation posts on Syrian territory to monitor the enforcement of certain de-escalation zones. However, Syrian forces have been advancing to re-establish control over sovereign territory in Idlib because militants have been targeting civilian targets from there. Turkey, meanwhile, has been sending in extra troops and military hardware in a provocative move that defies the Syrian government.

“If there is the smallest injury to our soldiers on the observation posts or other places, I am declaring from here that we will hit the regime forces everywhere from today, regardless of Idlib’s borders or the lines of the Sochi agreement,” he said. “We will do this by any means necessary, by air or ground, without hesitating, without allowing for any stalling.”

Turkey says it has lost over a dozen of its military personnel in Syrian shelling in Idlib over the past few days.

Ankara has also made unverified claims that its retaliatory strikes have hit positions held by the Damascus government and killed dozens of Syrian soldiers.

Erdogan expressed Turkey’s resolve

to push Syrian government forces away from Turkish observation posts in Idlib by the end of February.

He further claimed that the Syrian government is “continuously attacking civilians, committing massacres and shedding blood.” He alleged that the purported attacks were meant to push civilians toward the Turkish border in order to facilitate the easy takeover of the area.

The Turkish leader also said that aircraft involved in operations in Idlib would “no longer move freely.”

Separately on Wednesday, the Kremlin said Russian President Vladimir Putin and Erdogan had discussed the de-escalation of the tensions in Syria over the phone and emphasized the full implementation of Moscow-Ankara agreements.

“The importance was noted of the full implementation of existing Russian-Turkish agreements, including the Sochi memorandum,” it said in a statement after the phone call.

The leaders, it added, reviewed “various aspects of the settlement of the Syrian crisis, first and foremost in the context of a flare-up in the Idlib de-escalation zone.”

Issuing a statement on Tuesday, the

“The suspects reside in the UAE and the United States, and are not resident in the UK or Turkey,” said Hakan Camuz, head of international law at Stoke White. “However, they travel to the UK regularly.”

“It is requested that the police monitor their entry into the mentioned countries,” Camuz said.

The UAE is a leading partner in a Saudi-led coalition that intervened in Yemen in March 2015 to restore ousted President Abd-Rab-bu Mansour Hadi’s government after it was toppled in late 2014. In July the UAE said it was withdrawing its troops from Yemen but remained part of the coalition.

The counter-terrorism command of London’s Metropolitan police has a war crimes unit tasked with investigating alleged war crimes and torture.

Britain has prosecuted foreigners for war crimes committed in other countries twice this century, under the principle of universal jurisdiction. Afghan national Faryadi Zardad was jailed for 20 years in 2005 for torture and hostage-taking. In 2016, a Nepalese colonel, Kumar Lama, was acquitted of torture charges in a trial at London’s Old Bailey criminal court.

(Source: Reuters)

with 20%. Warren was able to capture just 9.4 percent of the vote and Biden, the former vice president, took fifth in the early results with 8.5%.

Sensing the disappointing result, Biden left New Hampshire for South Carolina before the results began rolling in.

The results thinned the field of Democrats wanting to beat President Donald Trump in the Nov. 3 election, with businessman Andrew Yang and Senator Michael Bennet dropping out after the polls closed.

This comes after Buttigieg took the lead among other rival candidates in Iowa’s caucuses last week.

Buttigieg was officially awarded the most delegates from Iowa’s caucuses after a recanvass of 55 precincts was completed, holding a 0.1% lead over Sanders in the state delegate equivalent count.

Combined with Iowa delegates, Buttigieg now has a total of 23, whereas Sanders has 21 and Klobuchar has 7. At least 1,991 delegates will be needed for any candidate to win the nomination.

(Source: agencies)

General Command of the Syrian Army and Armed Forces censured Turkey’s continued escalation of “aggressive acts and transgressions upon Syrian geography in violation of international law and the concept of the sovereignty of independent states in an attempt to halt the advance of the Syrian Arab Army and to prevent the fall of armed terrorist groups in Idlib and west of Aleppo.”

“The Turkish regime has deployed new military forces and escalated its aggression intensively, targeting areas populated by civilians and positions of the army units with rocket shells to help the terrorists maintain control over territory, keep using civilians as human shields, and carry out systematic crimes and vandalism,” added the statement.

The Syrian government has retook control of all but one area in Syria since militancy began in the country back in 2011, namely Idlib. Turkey backs anti-Damascus militants. Russia and Iran are Syrian government allies.

On Tuesday, there were reports that Syrian army forces had managed to wrest control of the M5 highway connecting the capital Damascus to the second largest city Aleppo.

(Source: agencies)

Zafar Satellite or producing nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles?

➔ U.S Secretary of State Mike Pompeo criticized the launch of satellite by Iran. He tweeted on Tuesday: “The Iranian regime uses satellite launches to further advance its ballistic missile capabilities that allow it to threaten its adversaries and threaten regional stability.”

In fact, the West’s goal is to portray Iran’s satellite launch as an attempt for launching intercontinental ballistic missile and claim that this is contrary to international agreements, including the UN Security Council Resolution 2231, so that they can take the issue of the Iranian missile program to the Security Council or consider it as one of the JCPOA commitments. The issue was first stated by U.S. President Donald Trump following his withdrawal from the JCPOA.

But the question is: Can one really benefit from the technical experience of launching satellites for military purposes (an intercontinental missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead)?

Missile experts reject this assumption. Michael Elleman, a prominent expert in the field of missile defense described the similarities and differences of the Simorgh SLV and intercontinental ballistic missiles in an analysis carried out in The Center for Strategic and International Studies, stating, “The technologies and components employed by satellite launchers, including the Simorgh, and long-range ballistic missiles are similar. Both use powerful rocket engines, high-strength and lightweight airframes, inertial navigation and guidance units, stage- and payload-separation mechanisms, as well as tracking and telemetry systems to support development and operations. Despite these similarities,

accusations that Iran’s use of Simorgh to launch satellites is a cover for ICBM development are misguided”.

■ Is Iran’s missile program inconsistent with Resolution 2231?

Two points need to be clarified to determine whether Iran’s missile program and satellite launch are inconsistent with UN Security Council Resolution 2231. The first point is the text of the resolution and what kind of missile has Iran been called upon not to design and undertake?

The second point is that which organization verifies the missile activity in a country?

Adopted in July 2015, UNCSCR 2231 endorses the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly called the Iran nuclear deal. Unlike the JCPOA, Resolution 2231 addresses Iran’s missiles and their potential role in delivering nuclear weapons to distant targets. The resolution states: ‘Iran is called upon not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons.’

The resolution proscribes Iranian missiles based on their intended purpose – those designed to carry nuclear weapons – rather than their inherent capability.

UNCSCR 2231 ‘calls upon’ Iran to refrain from developing a specific type of missile. “Call upon” does not represent a legally binding rule.

The term “call upon” is used in UNCSCR 2231, while the previous resolution that was repealed, Resolution 1929, stated about Iran’s missile program that the UN Security Council prohibits Iran from any activity related to ballistic

missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

The important question now is, what organization has been authorized to verify the missile program of countries? That is, based on which principle European countries consider the Iranian missile program inconsistent with Resolution 2231 and believe that Iran’s missiles are capable of delivering nuclear warheads?

Peter Jenkins, an associate fellow of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and former British ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, in a report released by the U.S. LobeLog website about a year ago, blamed Western governments, especially London, for adopting dichotomous policies toward Iran’s missiles program.

The former diplomat goes on to blame London for its hypocrisy because the Zionist regime has missiles that have far more ranges than Iranian missiles. Therefore, by what reason does Iran have no right to create a balance of power? In addition, what is the role of Saudi Arabia, which has all kinds of advanced weapons thanks to the West, in destabilizing the Middle East? Interestingly, Saudi medium-range missiles and Israeli possession of nuclear and chemical weapons do not make Britain concerned.

Criticism of Iran’s missile program comes as Israel has developed its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles with significant European backing, and Saudi Arabia has purchased advanced 2500-km range missiles from China. Saudi Arabia has also purchased advanced nuclear technology from the United States and recently unveiled its ballistic missile factory.

Sardar Azmoun needs to grow up

By Masoud Hossein

TEHRAN — Sportspersons have to behave more professionally since they serve as role models for future generations. On the other hand, they have no choice but to show professionalism.

Dragan Skocic was appointed as Team Melli coach last week and the Iran federation - without a shadow of a doubt - is subject to criticism over the lack of transparency but this doesn't mean that a player to allow himself to interfere the decision.

Sardar Azmoun used his Instagram account to publish a text attacking the newly-appointed coach closely related to what the federation has done.

It has nothing to do with the players to talk about the decision taken by the clubs and the federations.

Azmoun, as a rising star, has to grow and mature and take responsibility for his actions.

The Team Melli veterans have not expressed their opinions on the issue so far and have respected the federation's decision but young Azmoun has stated his dissatisfaction with the current situation.

The most promising young talent, Azmoun has represented Iran national football team at the 2015 and 2019 AFC Asian Cups and 2018 World Cup but he has not yet learned to focus solely on his own responsibility.

Iran football federation decided to appoint Skocic as the Team Melli head coach and the



players must respect the choice although they disagree with the decision.

Team Melli will have four must-win

matches in late March and early June in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023 and it shows how

difficult the situation is.

Every player must know what their role is on the field and Azmoun is no exception.

ACL 2020: Iran's Persepolis fall short against Al Duhail of Qatar



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Two early goals from Mario Mandzukic and Edmilson Junior earned Al Duhail FC a 2-0 victory over Iran's Persepolis as the Qataris got their AFC Champions League campaign off to a winning start on Tuesday.

In the match held at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha, Mandzukic header from very close range to the bottom right corner put the visiting team into the lead just five minutes into the match.

Edmilson Junior's right-footed shot

from the left side of the box found the back of the net in the 13th minute.

Persepolis put the hosts under pressure in the second half and created several scoring chances but failed to score.

Earlier on the day, Al Taawoun of Saudi Arabia had defeated Emirati football club Sharjah 1-0 in Group C.

Persepolis travel to Sharjah next week, while Al Duhail make the trip west to Buraidah where they face Al Taawoun on Matchday Two.

ACL 2020: Sepahan of Iran down UAE's AL Ain



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Sepahan of Iran began their 2020 AFC Champions League campaign in style after defeating UAE's AL Ain 4-0 in Group D at the Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium on Tuesday.

Sepahan took a half-time lead courtesy of Mohammad Mohebbi's header in the 38th minute when he rose the highest to nod home the opener from close range off Saeid Aghaei's cross.

Sepahan Brazilian striker Brazilian Kiroos made it 2-0 one minute into the second half when he pounced on an errant back pass to slot the ball past a full stretch Al

Ain goalkeeper Khalid Eisa.

Al Ain, the 2003 AFC Champions League winners, looked out of sorts as they began to give the ball away and fell further behind in the 52nd minute as Aghaei found an unmarked Rafiei, who blasted the ball into the bottom right corner to put Sepahan three goals up.

Mohammad Tayebi made it 4-0 with a header in the 78th minute following Omid Noorafkan's cross.

Sepahan will face Qatar's Al Sadd SC, while Al Ain will be hoping to bounce back against Al Nassr of Saudi Arabia.

Golmohammadi: Al Duhail punished us for our mistakes

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Persepolis head coach Yahya Golmohammadi says his side were punished against Qatari side Al Duhail due to their own mistakes.

Persepolis lost 0-2 to Qatari club in their first match of Group C of Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Champions League.

Two early goals from Mario Mandzukic and Edmilson Junior earned Al Duhail FC a 2-0 victory over Persepolis on Tuesday.

"We expected a difficult match but we made so many mistakes and Al Duhail punished us for a couple of mistakes," Golmohammadi said.

"After conceding two early goals we tried to score but the Qatari side played an intense and closed game and of course their goal-



keeper had a good day" he added.

The Reds put the hosts under pressure in the second half and created several scoring chances but failed to score.

Golmohammadi believes that Al Duhail made the most of their chances to score against his side: "They had only three chances and scored two goals. In the second half, we put all the attacking players on the pitch but we were unable to score. Conceding the two goals was just an unfortunate phase we went through. We had a bad start and we were not focused during the game and that caused problems for our team" he said.

Persepolis travel to Sharjah next week, while Al Duhail make the trip west to Buraidah where they face Al Taawoun on Matchday Two.

Chinese F1 postponed over coronavirus fears

The Chinese Grand Prix scheduled for April 19 has been postponed because of the "continued spread" of the deadly coronavirus, motorsport's governing body FIA announced Wednesday.

FIA said promoters of the Shanghai race had requested a postponement "in view of the continued spread of novel coronavirus", now named COVID-19.

"As a result of continued health concerns and with the @WHO (World Health Organization) declaring the coronavirus as a global health emergency, the FIA and @F1 Formula 1 have taken these measures in order to ensure the health and safety of the travelling staff, championship participants and fans."

The Shanghai race, the fourth of the new season, becomes the latest -- but easily the most high-profile -- sports event to fall victim to the virus outbreak which has killed more than 1,100 people in China, where it emerged at the end of last year.

The postponement also throws into doubt the inaugural race in Vietnam, which takes place two weeks before but where there have also been cases of COVID-19.

"The FIA and @F1 continue to work closely with the teams, promoter, CAMF and local authorities to monitor the situation," FIA said in relation to the Shanghai postponement.

"All parties will take the appropriate amount of time to study the viability of potential alternative dates later in the year should the situation improve."

That could prove tricky with FIA organizing a record-breaking 22 Grand Prix this season, including the Shanghai race.

■ Important part of calendar

FIA added: "The Chinese Grand Prix has long been an important part of the F1 calendar with many passionate fans. The FIA F1 community looks forward to racing in China as soon as possible and wishes everyone in the country the best during this difficult time."

"The global situation regarding this virus will continue to be monitored by the FIA with regard to other motor sport events."

Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff, speaking in London on Monday, said not going to Shanghai would be a "shame".

"We had full grand stands last year," he said, adding that China was beginning to become a "really important market in terms of fan followership".

"Not going there would not be great for the fans and ourselves, but health comes first."

China has been forced to cancel or put off a host of sporting events due to the coronavirus epidemic, from suspending all football in the country to postponing the first badminton tournament of the 2020 world tour season.



The world's most populous country has increasingly become a powerhouse in hosting international sport in recent years, but has had its sporting calendar thrown into chaos.

Athletics' World Indoor Championships, scheduled for Nanjing in March 13-15, have been postponed for a year.

The Chinese Formula E Grand Prix, due to take place in Sanya on the southern island of Hainan on March 21, was called off "after close consultation" with government authorities.

(Source: AFP)

Persepolis run riot against Al Shahaniya in friendly match

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Persepolis geared up for the second match day of Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Champions League with a thumping 8-0 win over Qatari club Al Shahaniya in a friendly match in Doha, Qatar on Wednesday.

Yahya Golmohammadi, head coach of Persepolis, used players who were not in the main squad against Al Duhail FC in the first day of 2020 AFC Champions League (ACL) group stage on Tuesday.

Persepolis lost 2-0 to Al Duhail in Group C at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha.

Anthony Stokes (2), Saein Hosseinpour (2), Omid Alishah, Christian Osaguona, Mehdi Abdi and Amir Roustaei scored for the Reds in the friendly match against Al Shahaniya.

Persepolis travel to Sharjah next week. The result of the match day one of the Group C means Al Duhail top the group after all teams had played their first match, with Al Taawoun second with three points. Meanwhile, Sharjah and Persepolis occupy the last two spots respectively.

Iranian referees to judge 2020 Volleyball Nations League

IRNA — International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) has invited three Iranian umpires to judge the 2020 FIVB Men's and Women's Volleyball Nations League slated for May.

Farhad Shahmiri, Massoud Yazdanpanah and Ebrahim Firouzi are the three invited Iranian referees.

In line with the League's competitions, Iranian volleyball team is to host Brazilian, Australian and Slovenian teams on June 12-15.

The 2020 Volleyball Nations League (VNL) will start on May 19 for women and on May 22 for men.

Casillas weighing run for Spanish football presidency: media

Former Spain goalkeeper Iker Casillas plans to run for the presidency of the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF), Spanish media reported on Wednesday.

Casillas told the national sports council (CSD) of his intention to run in the upcoming RFEF elections, reported the Cadena Ser radio station early Wednesday.

According to this media, Casillas "has made the decision to run" for the elections and has informed Irene Lozano, who as secretary of state for sport is president of the CSD.

Contacted by AFP, the CSD made no comment. The date of the election has not been decided. The AS newspaper, citing CSD sources, Casillas met Lozano and expressed an interest in running.

Casillas, 38, played 167 times for Spain, winning two Euros and one World Cup, and more than 700 games for Real Madrid, with whom he won the Champions League three times. He joined Porto in 2015.

Last April he suffered a heart attack during training and has not played since. His name has been linked with the RFEF presidency for some months.

The Catalan newspaper Mundo Deportivo said that "it was Casillas who requested the meeting" with Lozano.

Current RFEF president Luis Rubiales is in perpetual conflict with Javier Tebas, the president of the Spanish league.

According to the rules, the elections should be held in the second half of the year after the Tokyo Olympics. However, Rubiales has asked the CSD to bring the date forward to the first half of the year before Euro 2020, which will run from 12 June to 12 July. (Source: AFP)

On-form Iniesta steers Kobe to emphatic ACL victory

Andres Iniesta was in dazzling form on Wednesday as the former Barcelona midfielder drove Vissel Kobe to a 5-1 thrashing of Malaysia's Johor Darul Ta'zim in the Japanese club's first-ever appearance in the Asian Champions League.

Keijiro Ogawa scored a hat-trick with Kyogo Furuhashi and Brazilian striker Douglas also on target, but it was the Spanish World Cup winner who stole the show in the Group G clash with a vintage performance at the heart of Thorsten Fink's side.

Iniesta rolled back the years with a midfield masterclass, setting up Ogawa's first with a perfectly weighted pass from inside his own half that allowed his team mate to lift the ball over goalkeeper Farizal Marlias.

Iniesta pulled the strings for Vissel's third in the 58th minute as Ogawa scored again while Douglas outmuscled the defence four minutes later to claim the fourth.

The Spaniard was at his most audacious in setting up Ogawa's third, lifting the ball invitingly towards the far post for the forward to head into an empty goal.

It was a good night for Japanese clubs as J-League champions Yokohama F Marinos began their campaign with a 2-1 win over two-time champions Jeonbuk Motors in South Korea in Group H. (Source: Reuters)

Man Utd seek permission for 1,500 'safe standing' seats

A Manchester United fans' group says it welcomes the club's application to have 1,500 rail seats installed at Old Trafford, intended to allow supporters to stand in safety.

The club applied for permission to the local Safety Advisory Group (SAG) in December and hopes to be given the go-ahead to introduce a safe standing section.

United have experienced long-running problems with fans refusing to sit down in parts of their all-seater Old Trafford ground but rail seats are designed to lock into a folded position, giving fans space to stand.

"We hope to see this progress as quickly as possible as we have long argued that rail seats are a safety enhancement as well as popular with many fans whether they prefer to stand or indeed prefer to remain seated throughout the game in other areas with an unobstructed view," a statement from the Manchester United Supporters Trust (M.U.S.T) said on Tuesday. (Source: Mirror)

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Justice is a statesman who gives everyone his right, and liberality is a habit belonging to one person only.

Imam Ali (AS)

Tehran's Neauphle-le-Chateau Theater to host "A Romantic Dialogue"

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Hamid Rahimi said on Wednesday that he plans to stage "A Romantic Dialogue" based American playwright Eugene Gladstone O'Neill's 1916 play "Before Breakfast" at Neauphle-le-Chateau Theater in Tehran.



Director Hamid Rahimi in an undated photo.

"Some extensive modifications have been made to 'Before Breakfast', therefore, we should consider it as a loose adaptation of O'Neill's play," director Hamid Rahimi told the Persian service of MNA.

"I had read the play years ago, but I have found new topics in my review of it," he said.

"The lack of communication skills among people is the central theme of the play. They talk with each other, however, they do not achieve an understanding. Even those couples that have lived with each other for years may not reach a common language," he lamented.

"I wrote the play several years ago, but it is the story of modern society," said Rahimi who will premiere the play on February 20.

Robert Jackson's book on German navy in WWII published in Persian

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — American writer Robert Jackson's "The German Navy in WWII" has recently been published in Persian by Arman Publications in Tehran.

Translated by Mohammad Qahremani, the book covers each class of German naval vessels, including commerce raiders, battleships, cruisers, destroyers, torpedo boats, S-boats and U-boats.

Detailed information is given on each class of ship, including design and development history, deployment and tactics at sea.

In addition, comprehensive specification tables provide details on individual vessels: armament, armor, dimensions, machinery and complement, with all measurements in both metric and imperial.

"The German Navy in WWII" is not just a directory of technical information. The book also includes accounts of the ships in action.

German filmmaker Vilsmaier, known for "Stalingrad," dies

BERLIN (AP) — Joseph Vilsmaier, a German filmmaker whose striking portrayal of the Battle of Stalingrad brought home the horrors of war to a new generation, has died. He was 81.

His agent confirmed Wednesday that Vilsmaier "died peacefully at his home" in Bavaria on Tuesday.

Vilsmaier's 1993 film "Stalingrad" painted a grim picture of the fate of a group of Wehrmacht soldiers sent to the eastern front in 1942 to fight what would become a losing battle against the Soviet Army. The months-long siege of the city, now known as Volgograd, cost the lives of millions of soldiers and civilians and marked a turning point for Nazi Germany in World War II.

Born 1939 in Munich, Vilsmaier studied music and worked as a technician before gaining a foothold in the film business in the early 1960s as a runner and later making a name for himself as a cameraman for German television.

Vilsmaier made his debut as a director in 1988 with "Herbstmilch," or "Autumn Milk," the story of a Bavarian peasant woman that became a box office hit in Germany. Many of his films focused on tumultuous periods in German history, often from the perspective of ordinary people, a notable exception being "Marlene" (2000) about the life of actress and singer Marlene Dietrich.

Child labor drama "The Sun" shines as best film at Fajr festival

1 → "I hope I can still work for my people and my country," said Majidi who made his previous movie, "Beyond the Clouds", in India.

"We become familiar with our people's grief when we are working in the country, and I hope we can give our people a hopeful insight into life through the cinema," he added.

Banan also expressed his happiness over the collaboration with Majidi and noted, "This project was a jihadi one and all members of the crew worked with their total dedication for this project."

The film, co-written by Majidi and Nima Javidi, won the award for best screenplay.

"I hope people and officials help solve the problem of child labor, and we would not see child workers anywhere in our cities," Majidi said after accepting his award and called on cinematographer Hooman Behmanesh to the stage for presenting his award to him.

He called Behmanesh Iran's Vittorio Storaro, the renowned Italian cinematographer who collaborated with Majidi in his "Muhammad, the Messenger of God".

A cast of Iran's A-list film stars, including Ali Nasirian and Tannaz Tabatabai, and some students of a special school for child workers in the slums of Tehran played roles in the movie. The group of child workers received honorable mentions.

Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian received the Crystal Simorgh for best director for his drama "Walnut Tree" based on the true story of the profound tragedy of Iraq's chemical attack on the Iranian town of Sardasht in 1987.

Mahdavian said, "I thank producer Mostafa Ahmadi who agreed to finance this difficult project from the private sector."

"This film is about the grief of the fathers of this land, and I dedicate my prize to all the bereaved fathers of our country, to all people who lost their lives over the past few months, from those people who died in November [unrests] to those people who died in the Ukrainian jetliner and the people who died in the Kerman stampede during the funeral of Commander Soleimani," he stated.

Payman Maadi was crowned best actor for his portrayal Qader, the leading character of the drama. Maadi could not attend the ceremony due to his involvement in a film project outside Iran, therefore, Zhina Sadeqi, a child actor who played the role of Qader's daughter, received the award in behalf of Maadi.

However, Maadi thanked Mahdavian for "this important film" in a video shown at the ceremony.

The special jury prize went to director/



This combination photo shows directors Mohammad Kart, Majid Majidi and Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian and actress Nazanin Ahmadi posing with their Crystal Simorgh awards during the closing ceremony of the 38th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran's Milad Tower on February 11, 2020. (FFF)

producer Saeid Malekan for his directorial debut "Day Zero" about Iran's intelligence and police operations to arrest Jundallah terrorist group founder and leader Abdul-Malik Rigi.

The film also won Malekan the New Look award, which is presented to the best directorial debut feature film. The Golden Simorgh for best film from the national point of view also went to this movie.

No members of the cast and crew of the film were able to attend the ceremony. In an Instagram post, cast member Tino Salehi published a photo depicting empty seats reserved for the film's crew and a note reading "We don't take part."

In addition, Ebrahim Darughezadeh, the director of the Fajr Film Festival, said that Malekan declined to attend the closing ceremony in protest of the jury's decision to exclude from judgment those movies whose producers and directors have boycotted the festival.

The award for best actress went to Nazanin Ahmadi for her role in director Majid Barzegar's drama "The Rain Falls

Where It Will".

Tannaz Tabatabai received the best supporting actress award for her cameo role in Mohammad Kart's directorial debut "Butterfly Swimming", which also brought Amir Aqai the best supporting actor honor.

The film produced by Rasul Sadr-Ameli, the director of the award-winning drama "The Girl in the Sneakers", was crowned best audience film.

Earlier on January 3, the Fajr Film Festival announced that it would honor films on resistance and jihad this year with an award named after Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani following the assassination of IRGC Quds Force commander in a U.S. air raid in Baghdad.

The award went to "Abadan 11, 60" directed by Mehrdad Khoshbakht. Produced by Hassan Kalani, the film presents the people's fight against Iraqi forces in the southwestern Iranian city of Abadan during the early months of the Iran-Iraq war.

The following is a list of other winners at the festival.

Best editor: Esmail Alizadeh for "Butterfly Swimming."

Best director of cinematography: Morteza Najafi for "Tooman".

Best composer: Bamdad Afshar for "Skin".

Best sound engineer: Mohammad Saleh Kermani for "Butterfly Swimming."

Best sound effects engineer: Arash Qasemi for "Butterfly Swimming."

Best set design: Keyvan Moqaddam for "The Sun".

Best costume designer: Amir Malekpour for "Day Zero".

Best makeup artist: Mehrdad Mirkiani for "Exodus".

Best practical special effects supervisor: Mohsen Ruzbehan for "Day Zero".

Best computerized special effects supervisor: Mohammad Baradaran for "Exodus."

Best documentary: "No Place for Angels" directed by Sam Kalantari.

Best short film: "Dabur" by Saeid Nejati.

Best art and experience film: "Skin" co-directed by Bahman and Bahram Ark.

35th Fajr Music Festival opens with pop performance in Tehran

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — The 35th Fajr Music Festival opened in Tehran with the pop music performance by brothers Arash and Mashih at the Milad Hall of the Tehran International Permanent Fairground on Wednesday.

10 pop music bands and over 70 ensembles from Iran and other countries are scheduled to perform during the event.

The performances will be held at Tehran's Vahdat Hall, Rudaki Hall, Niavaran Cultural Center and several other halls.

The organizers have also held performances in the flood-stricken province of Sistan-Baluchestan since Sunday as a prelude to the festival.

Musicians will also be giving performances in several provinces including Bushehr, Khuzestan, Fars, Golestan, Zanjan, East Azarbaijan and North Khorasan, and in the Arvand Free Zone.

The organizers also plan to honor maestro Nader Mashayekhi, pianist Ofelia Parto, Ashiq Hassan Eskandari and tar virtuoso Hushang Zarif with lifetime achievement awards during the closing ceremony of the festival on February 19.



A poster for the 35th Fajr Music Festival.

Harvey Weinstein will not testify at his New York trial

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Former movie producer Harvey Weinstein will not testify in his own defense at his rape trial, his lawyers said on Tuesday as they rested their case.

Outside the presence of the jury, one of Weinstein's lawyers told Justice James Burke that Weinstein would not be taking the stand in the trial that began in New York on Jan. 6 and is a milestone in the #MeToo movement.

"That's correct," Weinstein confirmed when asked by the judge.

The defense rested its case shortly after this exchange, setting the stage for closing arguments to begin on Thursday.

Asked outside the courtroom whether he had been thinking of testifying, Weinstein responded, "I wanted to."

"He didn't have to," said one of his lawyers, Damon Cheronis.

Arthur Adala, another one of his lawyers, said outside the courthouse that Weinstein had been "anxious to testify to clear his name," but that his lawyers had advised him that "he did not need to do that because the evidence presented in this case was anemic at best."

Earlier on Tuesday, a former agent of accuser Jessica Mann took the stand, testifying that Mann showed no signs of distress on the morning she says she was sexually assaulted by Weinstein.



Film producer Harvey Weinstein arrives at New York Criminal Court for his sexual assault trial in the Manhattan borough of New York City, New York, U.S., February 11, 2020. (Reuters/Jeenah Moon)

Weinstein, 67, has pleaded not guilty to raping Mann, a onetime aspiring actress, and to sexually assaulting former production assistant Mimi Haley.

The trial is a key moment in the #MeToo movement in which women have accused powerful men in business, entertainment, media and politics of sexual misconduct.

Since 2017, more than 80 women have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct. The former producer, who was behind films including "The English Patient" and "Shakespeare in Love," has denied any nonconsensual sex.

Weinstein faces life in prison if convicted of predatory sexual assault, the most serious charge against him.

Oscars TV audience hits record low in 'driverless' ceremony

NEW YORK (Reuters) — The U.S. television audience for the 2020 Oscars fell to an all-time low for a ceremony that brought big wins for South Korean satire "Parasite" but was criticized by reviewers as long and haphazard.

Viewership for Sunday's show, broadcast on Walt Disney Co.-owned ABC, dropped 20% from a year ago to an average audience of 23.6 million, according to Nielsen data released on Monday.

It was the worst TV audience ever for the highest honors in the movie industry and beat the previous record low of 26.5 million in 2018.

"Parasite" made history by becoming the first non-English language film to win best picture, beating box office favorites like "Joker" and "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood." Joaquin Phoenix and Brad Pitt were among the acting winners.

The show, which ran 3-1/2 hours, was held without a host for a second year and was slammed by reviewers for random moments, inconsistencies and a surprise but puzzling performance by rapper Eminem of a 17-year-old song.

"The 2020 Oscars bellowed out for a ringmaster to harness what soon became a lackluster circus," wrote Dominic Patten at entertainment website Deadline.

The New York Times' James Poniewozik



Steve Martin and Chris Rock appear on stage during the 92nd Academy Awards Oscars show in Hollywood, Los Angeles, California, U.S. February 9, 2020. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

called it a "driverless" ceremony, while Variety's Caroline Framke said it was "frantic" but ultimately saved by the genuine emotion and joy over the "Parasite" win.

The Los Angeles Times bemoaned the inclusion of music and television stars, saying the telecast "struggled to entertain let alone find relevance in the art form it was honoring."

Audiences for live award shows have been declining in recent years, but the Oscars ceremony was still the biggest draw of Sunday night on television. Nielsen said the Academy Awards also dominated conversations on social media, producing 20.6 million social interactions on Twitter, Facebook and other platforms, up 16 % from 2019.