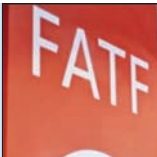




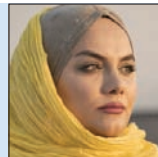
**Iran has set the bedrock for elections in the region** **2**



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**HUMNetwork to honor Iranian filmmaker Abyar with Women Leaders Award** **12**



**EXCLUSIVE REPORT**  
See page 2

## Iran's gas condensate output up 5% in 10 months

**TEHRAN** — Managing director of Iran's South Pars Gas Company (SPGC) said the country's gas condensate output has increased by five percent in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019-January 20, 2020). "The figure has not only increased compared to [the same period in] last year, but also shows a 100-percent realization of our plans for this time span," Hadi Hashemzadeh Farhang

told ISNA on Monday. According to the official, ethane production has also grown significantly over the same period, and eight South Pars refineries are currently producing this valuable product. He also mentioned that South Pars field's propane production has also increased over the past year, saying that there are currently seven refineries that produce propane. **→4**

## Larijani meets top Lebanese officials

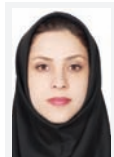
**TEHRAN** — Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani met on Monday with top Lebanese officials, including Lebanese President Michel Aoun. During the meeting with the Lebanese president, Larijani conveyed a message of President Hassan Rouhani and invited Aoun to visit Iran. Way to expand relations have been mentioned in Rouhani's message. During a separate meeting with a group

of Lebanese intellectuals, Larijani also said Iran is ready to hold political talks with its Arab neighbors. "The Islamic Republic of Iran considers political dialogue the solution to problems with certain Arab countries in the region. We are ready for talks," he said. He noted that Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has announced Iran's readiness to hold talks with Saudi Arabia. **→2**

## Syrian forces consolidate control of Aleppo

The Syrian army said on Monday it had taken full control of dozens of towns in Aleppo's northwestern countryside and it would press on with its campaign to wipe out militant groups "wherever they are found". Backed by Russian air power, the Syrian army has made unprecedented advances in the northwestern Aleppo Province, which borders Turkey, as Ankara is about

to take up its grievances about Damascus' breakthroughs with Moscow. The Syrian military has brought back most of the province under sovereign control. Russian aircraft targeted terrorist positions there in advance to facilitate government movement on the ground. Reuters referred to the towns of Anadan and Haritan as some of the places liberated in the joint counterterrorism push. **→10**



**ARTICLE**  
**Mahnaz Abdi**  
Head of the TehranTimes Economy Desk

## Iran should go big on Halal industry

**H**alal food has become a lucrative business in the global economy over the recent years and as announced by the World Halal Council (WHC), this industry is globally worth over \$2.5 trillion.

While at the first glance, such great capacity seems to be held majorly by the Muslim countries, due to some negligence mainly in proper and on-time investment making, the largest part of Halal market's profit goes to some non-Muslim nations that have recognized this sector's demands soon and taken the market share on time. The world's Muslim population is now 1.8 billion people who needs foods prepared based on their religious rules and beliefs, and Halal industry's growing trend in the global markets indicates that the Muslim countries, that are the major source of demand for Halal products, should play some more active role to be also the main source of supply in this sector.

Like the other Muslim countries, Iran holds a small share in the global Halal market. Such minor part indicates that the country should make more investment and take more effective steps to promote its status in this profitable market.

Head of Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran (ISIRI) Nayerreh Pirouzbakht says that while Halal products valued at \$700 billion are supplied to the global markets per year, Iran's share of this export market is very low.

There are already 250 Halal brands in the world, and Muslim countries like Malaysia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) hold some big shares of the market, while Iran that all of its produced foodstuffs are Halal, has lagged behind in exporting its products to the global markets.

While Iran should elevate its status in Halal industry, in general, moving toward this objective is now more necessary, as the country is trying to replace its oil income with other sources of revenues mainly with non-oil exports under the sanctions which are targeting Iran's oil sector.

Zhila Yazdani, an official with ISIRI, believes that if Iran takes five percent of the Halal market in the world, it can earn an income up to 2.5 folds higher than its oil revenue. **→4**

## I love Iranians, their unique culture: Ecuador's ambassador

**TEHRAN** — German Alejandro Ortega Almeida, Ecuador's ambassador to Tehran, has said he loves Iranians and their unique culture after three years of stay in the country and visiting places at its every corner. "It is three years that I live in Iran as an ambassador. Iran is amazing. I love Iran and its unique culture, a country with a 2500 years of [written] history and culture. [It] treats international tourists very well," the envoy told CHTN in an interview released on Sunday. He underlined that people of Ecuador know Iran based on what depicted in the news [usually] by Western media. "We are in American continent and people know other countries according to the news they read, but if they travel to Iran they will under-

stand some of the news are not true and Iran is rich with culture." "I think Iran should work more on its tourist attractions and promote them. You [Iranians] know them all because you are here but people outside like in my country, are more in touch with Western media," he stated. The ambassador made the remarks during a visit to the 13th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition, which was opened to the public concurrent with the 33rd National Handicrafts Exhibition at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground. Answering a question on how many Iranian cities (towns or villages) he has visited so far, the envoy said, "I've visited many cities including ones in Lorestan, Kermanshah, Isfahan and Fars."

"During these trips I've seen many different traditions and cultures. I think I have so far visited Iran as much as a [typical] Iranian [does]." He also referred to the long distance and the high transport charges as main barriers to exchange travelers between the two countries. "Long distance and high transport charges reduce tourist numbers, but if there will be some combined tours with other countries it will rise the chance." **■ Anti-Iranian sentiment doomed to fail** Last November, Iran's deputy tourism minister Vali Teymouri said "anti-Iranian sentiment or Iranophobia, which has long been forged and spread by some Western governments and media, has not prevented foreign travelers from visiting the country." **→8**

## UAE issues operating license for Arab world's first nuclear plant

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) issued an operating license for the first reactor at the Arab world's first nuclear power plant, paving the way for it to start production later this year. The Barakah nuclear power plant in Abu Dhabi, which is being built by Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO), was originally due to open in 2017 but the start-up of its first reactor has been delayed several times. A 60-year operating license will be granted to the plant's operator, Nawah Energy Company, Hamad al-Kaabi, deputy chairman of Federal Authority for Nuclear Regulation (FANR) told a news conference on Monday. Nawah can now begin the commissioning phase by loading fuel into the reactor in preparation for operation, a process that will take a number

of weeks and will be accompanied by testing of the safety systems, al-Kaabi said. When completed, Barakah will have four reactors with a total capacity of 5,600 megawatts. Al-Kaabi said construction of the plant's second reactor was 95 percent complete and that FANR had started looking into an operating license for it. Christer Viktorsson, director-general of FANR, said Nawah can start initial power production by May or June of this year. Reaching the first reactor's full production capacity would take eight to 12 months if all tests went well, he added. "Today marks a new chapter in our journey for the development of peaceful nuclear energy with the issuing of the operating license for the first [unit of] Barakah plant," Abu Dhabi Crown

Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed wrote on his official Twitter account. **■ Regional concern** Last month, state news agency WAM reported an operational readiness assessment performed by the Atlanta centre of the World Association of Nuclear Operators concluded that the first of the four planned reactors was fit for its start-up phase. The UAE is the only country that has purchased a KEPCO reactor. Expressing concern, Qatar's foreign affairs ministry reportedly sent a letter in March to the International Atomic Energy Agency saying a radioactive plume from an accidental discharge could reach its capital, Doha and a radiation leak could harm the Persian Gulf's water supply. **→10**



© ISNA/ Mona Hoobehfekar

## 15 projects receive awards at Khwarizmi International Festival

**TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani conferred awards on 15 selected projects at the 33rd Khwarizmi International Festival in Tehran on Monday. The annual festival is an opportunity for both Iranian and foreign participants to put their scientific achievements on display. Khwarizmi International Award is dedicated to recognizing outstanding scientific achievements made by researchers, inventors, and innovators from all over the world. **→9**



**ARTICLE**  
**Ramin Hossein Abadian**  
Mehr News Agency journalist

## Secret of Turkish-backed terrorist movements in Idlib

**T**ensions between Ankara and Damascus have escalated in recent days. The main cause of heightened tensions between the two sides is a series of widespread and rapid advances by the Syrian forces in the fight against Takfiri terrorists in northwest Syria. This developments are not in Turkey's favor at all.

Following the escalating tensions between Ankara and Damascus, the Turkish government has begun sending more military equipment to the outskirts of Idlib in order to prevent the rapid advances of the Syrian forces.

At the same time, it is said that in addition to the military equipment, Turkey has also dispatched troops to Idlib, and thus, about 9,000 Turkish forces have crossed the Syrian border.

Tensions started to heat up as the Syrian army is liberating different areas of Idlib and simultaneously making advances in Aleppo. Syrian forces have so far purged many areas of Idlib and Aleppo from Takfiri terrorists.

On the one hand, Turkey is stepping up its support for Takfiri terrorists in Idlib, and on the other hand, it is sending troops to the city and its outskirts.

Turkey's National Defense Minister Hulusi Akar called on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to support the Turkish military in order to halt the Syrian army's offensive against Idlib in northwest Syria. Akar added that Ankara is waiting for tangible NATO assistance and action against Syrian army attacks in Idlib, otherwise there will be a new wave of refugees, which is a threat to Europe.

Therefore, the complete liberation of Idlib and its outskirts will thwart the long-lasting hostile behaviors of Turkey in Syria. It can be concluded that Turkey's behavior is in fact a reflection of the series of defeats that it has suffered in different parts of Syria.

By this behavior, Turkey has practically broken commitments to the Sochi agreement and the Astana process, assuming that it can play with the U.S. and Russia through contradictory coalitions. **→10**



## U.S. officials' remarks on elections a stale habit: Iran

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Instead of accusing Iran of engineering outcome of elections, Washington must explain about its close ties with the countries that have not experienced even one single case of elections, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Monday.

Abbas Mousavi was reacting to remarks by Brian Hook, the special representative for Iran and senior policy adviser to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who on Friday had called the Iranian parliamentary elections a "pure theatre".

Mousavi said certain U.S. officials are used to talk irrelevantly about Iran.

"The U.S. officials should, instead of putting Iran's elections under question, respond to a large spectrum of people's questions about complicated and unclear process of elections in the U.S., which ignore the vote of majority, or respond to questions about Washington's close relations with certain countries that are strange to the simplest forms of elections," Mousavi told reporters.

## Iran has set the bedrock for elections in the region: Rouhani

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Monday that Iran has set the bedrock for democracy and elections in the West Asia region.

"In this region, we laid the grounds for democracy. We formed parliament before anyone in this region had parliament. We formed elections and took the people to the ballot box," he said during a speech at a ceremony to praise the top Khwarizmi International Award winners.

Rouhani also said that the Iranians should be optimistic and be proud of not being broken by the sanctions pressure.

Despite the sanctions and pressure, Iran has continued the right path, he noted.

In a press conference on Sunday, Rouhani said the United States' maximum pressure against Iran has failed and sanctions will be ineffective.

"20 months have passed since the United States' sanctions and maximum pressure. Our situation has become better in the past 6 months and the maximum pressure has failed," he said.

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

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

## Trump has revoked Gerald Ford's executive order by assassinating Soleimani: Joseph Nye

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Veteran U.S. diplomat Joseph Nye has said U.S. President Donald Trump revoked an executive order signed by President Gerald Ford by ordering the Pentagon to assassinate General Qassem Soleimani.



"By assassinating of a high official in a third country when you are not at war, you are revoking what Gerald Ford had done after Vietnam which says we are not to get into business of assassination. I don't think we really want to drop that norm," he told CNN in an interview aired on Saturday.

"What happens for example if Secretary [Mike] Pompeo goes to Baghdad and somebody shoots him? We'd have no right to complain if we've shot Soleimani."

He noted, "We gave up assassination after the Vietnam war after Gerald Ford signed an executive order. I am not sure that Trump thought through what it means if you drop that moral principle."

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

The U.S. Senate passed a legislation on Thursday to limit President Donald Trump's ability to wage war against Iran. According to AP, the measure, authored by Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., says Trump must win approval from Congress before engaging in further military action against Iran.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed two pieces of a legislation on January 30, seeking to limit Trump's authority to go to war with Iran.

"The Constitution gives Congress, not the president, the power to declare war. And with President Trump taking steps toward dangerous conflict with Iran - without any consultation with Congress - we need to reassert the responsibility given to us," Democratic Representative Eliot Engel, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, said in support of the legislation.

In an interview with Geo News published on January 25, Engel criticized Trump for beating drums of war against Iran. "The United States, frankly, has been involved in too many wars in the last twenty years. And, I think it's time to back off and not have a perpetual war," he said.

He also called assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani "an ill-advised action".

Many members of Congress, including some Republicans, have been pushing the administration for more information about assassination of Soleimani, Reuters reported.

Trump did not inform Congress about the drone strike until after it took place and then, according to many lawmakers, his administration held back too much information about the reason for the strike and its legal justification.

# Larijani meets top Lebanese officials

'Iran is ready to hold talks with Arab neighbors'



Majlis Speaker Larijani (L) holding talks with Lebanese President Michel Aoun.

into its previous standing."

Assad said, "The Syrian people have laid emphasis on cleaning their country from the terrorists."

According to Press TV, the Syrian army has made unprecedented advances in the northwestern Aleppo Province, which borders Turkey.

The Syrian military has brought back most of the province under sovereign control. Russian aircraft targeted terrorist positions there in advance to facilitate government movement on the ground.

Reuters referred to the towns of Anadan and Haritan as some of the places liberated in the joint counterterrorism push.

**'Iranian support for Syria not a tactical issue'**

During his stay in Damascus, Larijani

held a meeting with his Syrian counterpart Hamoudah Sabbagh on Monday morning.

"The U.S. created terrorist groups in the region which was unfortunately supported by certain regional countries, but you (the Syrians) foiled the plot by your resistance," Larijani said in the meeting.

"We are determined to support Syria. We have supported Syria with a complete knowledge about Syria and the region. We don't consider our supports for Syria as a tactical issue," he added.

Sabbagh, for his part, highlighted martyr General Qassem Soleimani's role in war on terrorism.

Both speakers called for expansion of all-out ties between Tehran and Damascus.

The Iranian speaker also exchanged views with Syrian Prime Minister Imad Khamis in

Damascus on Monday.

Larijani and Khamis, in their meeting, voiced their countries' enthusiasm to reinvigorate cooperation in various economic, political and scientific arenas.

Larijani further said that Iran is well prepared to assist Syria to reconstruct its infrastructure.

**'Regional countries should settle disputes via dialogue'**

Speaking at a press conference in Damascus on Monday, Speaker Larijani said Iran has always been a full supporter of settling possible disputes between the regional countries through diplomatic ways.

On Tehran's policies, Larijani said, "Iran intends the nations of region to enjoy friendly relations and if there is any dispute in between it should be solved through dialogue."

Larijani further termed Iran-Syria trade ties as important and said the two governments should pave due ground for expansion of cooperation in order to facilitate the process.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Larijani pointed to the Syrian government and nation's campaign against terrorism and said, "We have always supported the Syrian nation. We believe that war on terrorism is an important issue, but the U.S. and certain countries in the region covertly provided support for terrorists."

The Iranian speaker added that Syria is a key part of the axis of resistance.

Iran and Syria have been taking major steps for the expansion of their trade ties. The two sides have exchanged numerous trade delegations in the past few months and Iranian private companies are investing in various fields of the Syrian economy like providing construction materials especially cement and working on several reconstruction projects.

## Who will be next speaker?

factions that are critical of the government.

Of course, a group of the principlists acted like the previous elections and separated their way from the main principlist groups. It has presented a list titled Jebhey-e Paydari (Resilience Front). Morteza Aqa Tehrani is heading the list.

Aqa Tehrani represented Tehran in the 8th and 9th parliaments. He is now the secretary general of the Jebhey-e Paydari Party.

Now that the factions have released the list of their candidates, speculation and anticipation over possible supremacy of one list over another is a heated debate across the country.

Based on a survey conducted by a reliable academic center across the country that its results published on Feb. 10, %57 percent of the electorate will vote for the Iran-e Sarboland list led by Qalibaf.

According to the survey, only %27 of the people will vote for reformists and pro-government candidates, who are backed by former president Mohammad Khatami.

It should be mentioned that most of the surveys conducted by the abovementioned academic center about the outcomes of elections, including 2018 presidential polls, have come true.

It is worthy to say that in this round of parliamentary elections, lists of Yaran-e Hashemi and Etelaf Barayeh Iran are pro-Mohammad Khatami and Hassan Rouhani.

In addition to scientific surveys, analyses by Western institutes have predicted that principlists will form the majority in the next parliament.

In President Rouhani's press conference on Sunday, Franc 24 reporter said, "Anticipations show that the president, in his last year in the office, must work with a parliament whose majority of its seats belong to the principlists, who are openly opposing most of the president's policies."

The anticipation has led to widespread presumption in different media outlets.

Following release of the factions' lists, media outlets and elites have started to express views over the possible winners in the

From a long time ago, political factions had saddled their horses to partake in the marathon of parliamentary race on Feb. 21.

The factions have been utilizing their entire capacities to announce a suitable arrangement of candidates and programs to line up for the Friday polls in order to win more seats in the Baharestan green pyramid (a common name for the Majlis).

However, and as always, the most determinant seat in the parliament is no one's seat but the speaker's.

Following various levels of differences, the political factions lined up and released their list of candidates.

On one hand, the reformists, as the main supporter of the current government, have entered the race with different lists, including those by Kargozaran Sazandegi (Servants of Construction Party) and Etelaf Barayeh Iran (Coalition for Future of Iran).

Kargozaran Sazandegi's list has been titled Yaran-e Hashemi (Supporters of Hashemi Rafsanjani). Majid Ansari is heading the list. Ansari was President Hassan Rouhani's deputy for legal affairs. Currently is a member of the Expediency Council.

Etelaf Barayeh Iran's list includes candidates from eight different parties and groups. The list is not headed by a certain candidate. Some figures, including sitting MPs Alireza Mahjoub and Mostafa Kavakebian, and the secretary general of Mardomsalari Party (Democracy Party) are among the senior candidates of the list.

The mentioned lists include candidates who are reformists and have been supporter of the Rouhani government.

On the other hand, the principlists and those parties who have been criticizing the current government, managed to reach a partial consensus and presented a united list titled Iran-e Sarboland (Proud Iran). Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf is heading the list.

Qalibaf, who was Tehran's mayor for 12 continuous years, police chief and a presidential contender for two rounds (2005 and 2013), is the chief figure of the list.

Iran-e Sarboland covers most of the

## 310 hi-tech components designed, produced in Iran under sanctions

**TEHRAN (MNA)** — Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami announced on Monday that under the tough U.S. sanctions, Iran has been able to design and manufacture some 310 modern and complex radar, missile, aviation, maritime components.

He made the remarks while visiting an exhibition on localization of hi-tech electronic and microelectronics components held by Iran Electronics Industries Company.

The minister hailed Iranian defense experts for domestic production of such modern products.

"Manufacture of these products in Iran has saved \$140 million," he said.

During his visit to the event, Hatami also inaugurated 15 groups of products from Iran's auto industry.

"Iranian automakers have manufactured these products in two years, saving \$60 million for the country," he explained.

The minister elaborated that Iranian auto industry faced a big challenge when foreign major automakers and companies left due to U.S. sanctions. To overcome the challenge Iranian private sector was called on, he added.

## INTERNATIONAL TENDER NOTICE NO. 98007



Hereby Sirjan Jahan Steel Complex (SJSCO) invites reputable firms and companies to the international tender No. 98007, in respect of selling and exporting 30.000 Mt of 5SP Steel Billets (Size; 150 × 150 mm) on the basis of FOB shipping point, therefore interested bidders are invited to obtain the tender documents by sending a formal letter of interest to the E-mail addresses below:

**SJSCO.SALES@gmail.com**

**DKMSJSCO@gmail.com**

S No.	Description	End Date
1	Submission of Financial Bid	7 (seven) days from the publication of this notice.

Terms & Conditions:

- The tender documents will be sent to the bidders via E-mail.
- All bids should be sent in sealed envelopes.
- Conditional bids shall not be accepted.
- LOI should be prepared on company's heading, stamped and signed by the authorized signatories.
- No financial bid shall be accepted later than above-said end date of bid submission.
- SJSCO reserves the right to reject any or all the proposals.

For more information, please contact us at:

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Cell: +989901212678



# Iran's revenge for Soleimani destroyed U.S. grandeur: IRGC chief

**POLITICAL**  
d e s k

**TEHRAN** — The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran's response to the U.S. assassination of its top general, Qassem Soleimani, destroyed the United States' fictitious grandeur in the world. "Our response to the assassination of General Soleimani was completely a military response because the response should have been clear and comprehensible for the whole world," ISNA on Monday quoted Major General Hossein Salami as saying, citing Al Mayadeen.

The American rulers "are used to confronting any government and receiving no response from those governments," Salami said. "And this matter led them to make a miscalculation regarding Iran."

He added that it was necessary to stop them once and for all and make them change their calculations with regard to Iran.

"Our response to General Soleimani's assassination was strategic and limited, but it showed our power," Salami stated.

"Iran's response was carried out in a specific geographical point but its impact was worldwide," he said, adding that the retaliatory measure was completely "defensive" and "legitimate", and that Iran was entitled to defend itself.

On January 3, U.S. President Donald Trump ordered strikes that martyred General Soleimani, chief of the IRGC Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the



**"Our response to General Soleimani's assassination was strategic and limited, but it showed our power."**

second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).

In the early hours of January 8, the IRGC attacked the U.S. airbase of Ain al-Assad

in Anbar province in western Iraq as part of its promised "tough revenge" for the U.S. terror attack.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said Trump was misled to believe his country would get away with the assassination of General Soleimani.

Trump believed that the assassination would augment U.S. security but it worked the other way around, Zarif said in an interview with NBC News' Richard Engel in Munich on Friday on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference.

"It was the beginning of the end of the U.S. presence in the region, and we were very close to a war, because the United States initiated an act of aggression against Iran in a very, excuse the language, cowardly way," Zarif said.

Brian Hook, the U.S. special representative for Iran, told the Arabic-language daily Asharq al-Awsat on January 23 that Esmail Ghaani, who is the successor of General Soleimani, could also be assassinated as well.

Responding to the remarks soon afterwards, General Salami warned the U.S. and Israel that none of their military commanders will be safe should they take action against Iranian generals.

"The Americans and the Zionists beware that if they threaten our commanders with assassination and if they implement their threat, life of none of their commanders will be safe," he said.

## Guardian Council: U.S. elections merely façade of democracy



**POLITICAL**  
d e s k

**TEHRAN** — Abbas Kadhodaei, the spokesman for the Guardian Council, said on Monday that elections in the United States are just a façade of democracy.

"While 60 percent of Americans do not trust the elections in their country, the authorities of the cheating, falling America pass their days and nights with a fantasy of dominating and interfering in the internal affairs of other nations," Kadhodaei said in a tweet.

The 2020 United States presidential election is scheduled for Tuesday, November 3, 2020. It will be the 59th quadrennial presidential election.

Voters will select presidential electors who in turn on December 14, 2020, will either elect a new president and vice president or reelect the incumbents Donald Trump and Mike Pence.

Also, Iran's 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.

Election campaigns for 290 seats in the parliament officially started in Iran from Feb. 13.

The candidates have eight days to campaign. 24 hours before the elections, campaigns must be stopped.

In the capital Tehran, the principlists released their 30-candidate list named the "council of coalition". On the top of the list is Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the former Tehran mayor who ran for presidential post three times: in 2005, 2013 and finally 2017.

Mostafa Mirsalim, a top figure from the Islamic Coalition Party, who also competed with Hassan Rouhani in the 2017 presidential election is included in the list.

While the policy-making council of reformists failed to agree on a candidate list, a few pro-reform parties like the Servants of Construction Party and Unity and National Cooperation Party presented their list.

## Statistics concerning parliamentary candidates announced



**POLITICAL**  
d e s k

**TEHRAN** — Spokesman of the Interior Ministry election headquarters has announced new details about the candidates running for parliament.

Ismail Mousavi said of the 16,044 who had registered to run for parliament, the competence of 7,157 were confirmed, according to Mehr. He said 782 of the candidates are female and 6,375 are male.

Regarding the average education level of the candidates, Mousavi said 422 have seminary degrees, 1,021 Ph.D., 5,308 masters, 404 bachelor degrees, and two have associate degrees.

Referring to the average age of candidates, he said those within the age range of 30-40 have the highest share of candidacy with 2,523, 2,390, 1,827, and 417 candidates fall within the age ranges of 41-50, 51-60, and over 60, respectively, he said.

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.

According to the latest estimates, 57,918,159 individuals are eligible to vote in the Friday election.

The election campaigns officially began in Iran at 00:00 Thursday (20:30 GMT, Wednesday), and will last until the end of Feb. 19.

There are 290 seats in the parliament up for grabs. 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.

President Hassan Rouhani has 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."

"The people understand well and choose well too," he added.

## Lavrov says assassination of Soleimani was a flagrant violation of international law

**'These actions on the part of Americans are beyond the limits'**

*By staff and agency*

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said that assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani by the United States was a flagrant violation of international law.

"If we are talking about the latest swirl of U.S.-Iranian escalation with which the current year started, then our position is known. We condemn any actions that contradict the principles of the UN Charter and lead to increased tensions in the region. The Pentagon attack on the airport in Baghdad organized on January 3, which killed the commander of the special forces of [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] IRGC of Iran [Qassem] Soleimani, became a flagrant violation of international law," UrduPoint quoted him as saying on Monday in an interview with the Italian La Stampa daily.

The Russian foreign minister pointed out that it was a civilian airport, emphasizing that "these actions on the part of Americans are beyond the limits."

"Russia advocates overcoming the existing differences solely through dialogue, at the negotiating table. This is what the Russian concept of collective security in the Persian Gulf region, presented last summer, is aiming for. So, in contrast to the confrontational schemes pro-



moted by a number of states, we are offering the region a constructive, unifying agenda, and are calling for the formation of mechanisms for joint responses to challenges and threats," he said.

In a phone call with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in January, Lavrov called on Washington to abandon "unlawful tactics".

"They [Lavrov and Pompeo] have discussed the sit-

uation related to the murder of Iranian Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani by the U.S. military in an airstrike on the Baghdad airport," the Russian Foreign Ministry stated.

"Lavrov stressed that the purposeful actions of a UN member state on eliminating officials of another UN member state, especially on the territory of a third sovereign state without giving it prior notice, blatantly violate the principles of international law and should be condemned."

"The Russian minister has pointed out that this step by the U.S. is fraught with serious consequences for peace and security in the region and that it does not aid the efforts on finding solutions to difficult issues accumulated in the Middle East. On the contrary, it leads to a new wave of escalation. Moscow urges Washington to abandon unlawful forceful tactics of achieving its goals on the international arena and to resolve any issues at the negotiating table," the ministry added.

The U.S. assassinated Soleimani, Iran's top anti-terror commander, in an airstrike in Baghdad on January 3. Iran retaliated to the attack on January 8 by firing dozens of ballistic missiles at a major U.S. air base in western Iraq, dealing a great blow to the U.S. that it is invincible.

## Iranian national detained in Germany arrives home

**POLITICAL**  
d e s k

**TEHRAN** — An Iranian national who had been detained in Germany over accusations of violating U.S. sanctions has been released and returned home.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Monday that Ahmad Khalili has returned home after extensive diplomatic work, Press TV reported.

Khalili was released on Sunday night following extensive diplomatic consultations and with effective cooperation of Iran's Judiciary and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Intelligence Organization, said Mousavi.

He explained that Khalili had been detained in Germany at the request of Washington on the pretext of violating the United States' illegal sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

He was set to be extradited to the U.S., the spokesman added.

He said Khalili returned home with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who had visited Germany to attend the Munich Security Conference.

Late last year, Iranian scientist Masoud Soleimani returned home following his release from a U.S. prison.

Soleimani, a 49-year-old stem cell scientist, left Iran on sabbatical last year, but was arrested upon arrival in Chicago and transferred to prison in Atlanta, Georgia for unspecified reasons.

The United States released him in a prisoner exchange, after which Soleimani flew along with Foreign Minister Zarif from Zurich to Tehran in December 2019.

The prisoner exchange happened through mediation efforts by Switzerland.

Iran also freed an American graduate student who had been imprisoned in Tehran for more than three years on charges of espionage.

U.S. President Donald Trump has imposed the harshest ever sanctions against Iran since he pulled the United States out of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Trump's administration has even threatened to penalize any country or company that does business with Iran.

Under the nuclear accord, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran had agreed to put limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

Since assuming office, Trump's anti-Iran rhetoric and actions have intensified tension between Tehran and Washington. His policies have also escalated regional tensions, especially in the Persian Gulf.

In reaction to Trump's strategy of "maximum pressure", which includes illegal sanctions, Iran has said it is adopting "maximum resistance".

## Reformist MP: Parliamentary hopefuls come from across the aisle

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — A senior reformist legislator said that candidates with different political tastes and from across the aisle are present in the parliamentary race.

"People with different thoughts, tastes and tendencies are present on the scene in the upcoming elections," Nour-mohammad Torbatinejad told FNA on Monday.

He added that despite the negative propaganda about disqualifications, representatives of different tastes and political parties are present among the wide spectrum of the candidates.

"People in Iran are free-handed to choose anyone with any level of capabilities and any taste and thought," Torbatinejad said.

Iranians go to the polls on February 21, 2020 to vote for all 290 seats in the unicameral parliament.



Campaigns officially kicked off in Iran on early Thursday by nominees of parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections due to be held on February 21.

The campaigns officially started at 00:00 Thursday (20:30 GMT, Wednesday), and the candidates will have one week to win the people's support for their candidacy.

The 11th parliamentary elections and the midterm elections for the Assembly of Experts — a body whose members designate the country's Leader — are to be held simultaneously on February 21.

The candidates will have until Wednesday night to promote themselves, and after that, there will be a 24-hour silence until the voting begins on Friday morning.

The elections, held every four years, are scheduled to take place on February 21. A second round could take place in the second month of the next year on the solar calendar (April 20-May 20, 2020) if some seats remain vacant.

Last year, Iran's parliament objected to a motion to increase the number of the seats, keeping the figure at 290.

A total of 57,918,000 people are eligible to cast their ballots, therefore; there would be one lawmaker at the parliament per each 190,000-strong segment of the Iranian population.

A total of 7,148 candidates, including dozens of Iranians from the religious minorities, are running for the parliament.

In capital Tehran, 1,453 candidates are contesting one of the 30 allocated seats on the legislature.

The lawmakers are elected for a 4-year term, with no limitation for the incumbent or former parliamentarians to run again.

## U.S., Israel impede de-escalation of Iran-Saudi tension: ex-diplomat

**POLITICAL**  
d e s k

**TEHRAN** — Ahmad Dastmalchian, Iran's former ambassador to Lebanon, is of the opinion that the United States and the Zionist regime of Israel are impeding a de-escalation of tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

"In my opinion, Saudi Arabia seeks to reduce tension with Iran, but the United States

and the Zionist regime have prevented Saudi Arabia to implement this issue, because their interests depend on a crisis among Iran and Arab brothers in the region," ISNA quoted him as saying in an interview published on Monday.

Dastmalchian said after developments in Syria and Iraq, the Saudis have come to the conclusion that they cannot do anything in

the region without Iran and that they must enter talks with Tehran.

The former diplomat added that Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani was on a mission to Iraq to reduce tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia, however, the U.S. assassinated him because Washington seeks to increase the tension.

During a press conference on Sunday, President Hassan Rouhani said that Iran has "no unsolvable" problem with Saudi Arabia.

"We have always said that we have no complicated and unsolvable problem with Saudi Arabia and the issues between the two countries can be discussed whenever Saudi Arabia is ready," Rouhani stated.



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	476812.8
IFX	6143.33

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	45,526 rials
GBP	54,792 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$57.30/b
WTI	\$52.10/b
OPEC Basket	\$55.86/b
Gold	\$1,582.00/oz
Silver	\$17.81/oz
Platinum	\$971.45/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran’s gas condensate output up 5% in 10 months

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

Natural-gas condensate, also called natural gas liquids, is a low-density mixture of hydrocarbon liquids that are present as gaseous components in the raw natural gas produced from many natural gas fields.

Iran should go big on Halal industry

**1 →** Despite the sanctions, Iran exported \$4.2 billion worth of Halal products to the global markets in the past year, and given the country’s high potentials in this field, it’s obvious that there is a promising outlook for Iran’s presence in this lucrative market.

Realizing the urgent need for more and stronger presence in the world’s Halal market, the country is taking fruitful steps to achieve this target.



To facilitate the condition for those active in this sector inside the country, Iran has recently launched an integrated Halal system.

Launching this system, which integrates activities of related organization including Agriculture Ministry, Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Iran, and Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), leads to reducing production costs and time of permit issuance besides more facilitation in this regard.

While Iran is a country where 100% of foodstuffs are Halal, it can easily achieve a huge share of the world’s Halal market, something that not only expands the country’s sources of income, but also leads to higher employment and economic growth.

Stimulus hopes give European stocks a boost, DAX posts a new record high

Markets in Europe have got off to a positive start to the week, with the German DAX making a new record high in early trade, taking their cues from an expectation that Chinese authorities, as well as the Singapore and Hong Kong governments might well embark on some form of fiscal stimulus in the coming weeks, as investors reflect on valuations after the new record highs seen in U.S. markets last week, as well as the Stoxx 600.

The continued rise in equity markets on both sides of the pond, appears to run counter to the narrative of a global economy that is likely to be much weaker over the course of the rest of the year, due to the continued ripple out effects of the coronavirus, which is likely to act as a significant brake on economic activity, not only now, but for the next few months.

While this slowdown may well prompt further easing from global central banks, with China cutting a key rate overnight, and the recent falls in yields more broadly which has prompted the move into stocks, those who suggest that there will be a v-shaped rebound once the virus has been contained may well be being overly optimistic.

The fact that Chinese authorities are looking at delaying the National People’s Congress next month and have also cancelled the Shanghai Grand Prix in April suggest that the impact on the Chinese economy is likely to be longer lasting than thought, with the prospect that the Chinese economy could well contract in Q1.

This will inevitably impact the global economy, and Europe in particular where data last week showed that the German economy stagnated in Q4 while the French and Italian economies contracted. With this morning’s Japanese data also showing significant economic weakness in the last quarter, and that’s even before the effects of the virus become apparent it is becoming increasingly clear the coronavirus outbreak is unlikely to make things better, and will in fact make things worse in the short to medium term.

(Source: cmcmarkets.com)

RUSI acknowledges FATF being a political tool for U.S.

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), in its latest report, acknowledges that the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is politically oriented and acts as a leverage for the U.S. government.

Although, Iran’s interactions with the FATF so far confirms the fact that the FATF is a political entity rather than a technical and expert institution, and the U.S. is seeking to enhance the impact of the sanctions against Iran using FATF standards.

Since, in its September statement, FATF has threatened that the task force is going to once again add Iran to its blacklist if the country does not join the Convention on the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) and the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo) by the end of February.

This decision is a clear indication that the FATF is more a political entity rather than a technical one, and the core of the action plan against Iran is set in the two mentioned conventions.

In fact, of the 41 measures which were recommended to be taken by Iran, only two have a central role and these two aren’t essential in the context of money laundering since they are more focused on international interactions and cooperation.

If the FATF was merely a technical institution aimed at fighting money laundering, it would have taken into account the serious



and important actions that Iran has taken in this area, but it is clear that the FATF is looking beyond these issues and its goal is to make Iran vulnerable to sanctions.

A question that U.S. officials might have repeatedly asked themselves is “why Iran can still move forward despite the crippling sanctions?” and the FATF is clearly seeking to answer this question.

A recent report by the Royal United Services Institute is proof of the validity of this claim.

**■ A new proof on politicization of FATF**

Western think-tanks have repeatedly reported on the political nature of the FATF.

‘Private sector able to account for 55% of GDP’



**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian private sector has the capacity to account for up to 55 percent of the country’s total gross domestic production (GDP). IRNA reported on Monday, quoting the head of Isfahan Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture.

“We can take advantage of the sanctions opportunity and increase the private sector’s share of the economy from the current 15 percent to 50 percent,” Masoud Gol-Shirazi said.

In this regard, chambers of commerce should establish networking among their members and pay more attention to investors and systematization of investment, he stressed.

According to Gol-Shirazi, nowadays, chambers of commerce need to focus on startups, knowledge-based companies, and international business growth centers and lobby for creating communication networks.

“If we want to have a chamber of commerce that is effective for the economy, we need to set up a new paradigm and move on to the second and third generations of chambers that are more focused on networking,” the official stressed.

According to Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani, the private sector is the main factor for economic growth during the sanctions time.

In recent years, the government has been counting on the capacities of the country’s private sector in order to boost domestic production and non-oil exports.

In this regard, the industry ministry has been taking necessary measures for supporting the private sector.

Back in August 2019, Rahmani unveiled a master plan for promoting domestic production and increasing exports in the current Iranian calendar year (ends on March 20, 2020).

Iran Mine House’s policy council holds meeting

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran Mine House (IMH)’s policy council, on Sunday, gathered together to discuss issues and problems of the country’s mining sector in the sanctions era, IRNA reported.

In this meeting, the need for close communication between the High Council of Mines and various organizations and entities active in this sector was emphasized.

The issue of imposing duty on the exports of raw minerals (especially iron ore) was one of the most important issues discussed in this meeting.

Speaking in the meeting, the IMH Head Mohammadreza Bahraman said imposing such regulations has negatively impacted the performance of the companies in this industry and even the minerals transportation network has also faced serious problems.

“The decorative stones sector has suffered a great deal from the implementation of the duty policy, these regulations were supposed to support domestic companies but they have done nothing so far,” Bahraman regretted.

In a bid to prevent the exports of unprocessed minerals, creating more value added and meeting the requirements of domestic producers for the raw materials, Iran has levied a 25-percent duty on the



exports of raw minerals (especially iron ore) since September 2019.

While the new duty has satisfied steel producers in the country, it has provoked severe criticisms from those active in the mining sector, as they believe that such sudden decision can be a big shock to investment in this sector.

Is has been said that the shock will be even bigger for the private companies investing in the mining sector, because under the current economic condition of the country they are seriously in need of the liquidity secured from the exports.

IMH is a non-government organization that supports and promotes the Iranian mining industry. The House serves its members and promotes their interests by providing strategic support and advisory input.

TEDPIX, IFX rising more



**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), rose 4,062 points to 476,812 on Monday, IRNA reported.

Over 6,437 securities worth 42.382 trillion rials (over \$1 billion) were traded at TSE, while the first market’s index rose 1,120 points and the second market’s index climbed 16,143 points.

TEDPIX posted a new record high on Sunday, as the index surpassed 472,000 points.

As reported, TEDPIX ended 10,761 points higher at 472,749, as 9.572 billion securities worth 47.175 trillion rials (about \$1.123 billion) were traded at TSE on Sunday.

The index went up 13,185 points, or 2.96 percent, to 459,080 in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday).

Some 29.020 billion securities worth 170.657 trillion rials (about \$4.063 billion)

**■ An opportunity for EU to pressure Iran**

The RUSI report, further mentions the history of Iran’s interactions with the task force and says: “FATF partnership provides a great opportunity for dialogue between Europe, and Iran’s key players.”

In fact, RUSI analysts believe FATF to be a good opportunity for Europe to hold its grip on Iran’s economy by influencing the decisions made by Iranian officials.

The recent experience with the Europeans in recent years is a clear indication of such an attitude, for instance, the continuous delay in realization of various promises made by the European signatories of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to Iran for encouraging the country to stay in the deal.

**■ FATF heavily influenced by the U.S.**

Elsewhere in its report, RUSI states that: “It is no secret that the United States has a significant influence among FATF members, which are mostly from OECD nations which does not include Iran, although it remains to be seen how this impact will be used in future meetings!”

This statement is an acknowledgment of the U.S.’s widespread influence on the FATF and its standards so that they are set in such a way to help toughen the U.S. sanctions, and the U.S. Treasury is using FATF as an effective weapon to increase the effectiveness of its sanctions against Iran.

Japan’s recession risks grow as economy skids in fourth-quarter, virus clouds outlook

Japan’s economy shrank at the fastest pace in almost six years in the December quarter as last year’s sales tax hike hit consumer and business spending, highlighting a fragile outlook made worse by growing coronavirus risks.

Analysts say the widening fallout from the epidemic, which is damaging output and tourism, could undermine growth in the current quarter and push Japan into recession - defined as two straight quarters of decline.

“There’s a pretty good chance the economy will suffer another contraction in January-March. The virus will mainly hit inbound tourism and exports, but could also weigh on domestic consumption quite a lot,” said Taro Saito, executive research fellow at NLI Research Institute.

“If this epidemic is not contained by the time of the Tokyo Olympic Games, the damage to the economy will be huge,” he said.

Japan’s gross domestic product (GDP) shrank an annualized 6.3% in the October-December period, government data showed on Monday, much faster than a median market forecast for a 3.7% drop and the first decline in five quarters.

It was the biggest fall since the second quarter of 2014, when consumption took a hit from a sales tax hike in April of that year.

The weak data also comes amid signs of struggle in the wider region with the coronavirus and a broader softness in demand clouding the outlook.



Singapore cut its economic growth projections for 2020, Thailand posted its slowest expansion in five years and China’s home prices rose at their weakest pace in almost two years.

Japanese stocks slipped on the recession prospects with the benchmark Nikkei average .N225 and the broader Topix .TOPX both giving up more than half a percent by the midday break.

The latest sales tax hike in October last year - as well as unusually warm weather that hurt sales of winter items - weighed on private consumption, which sank a bigger-than-expected 2.9%, marking the first drop in five quarters.

Capital expenditure fell 3.7% in the fourth quarter, much faster than a median forecast for a 1.6% drop and the first decline in three quarters, the data showed.

(Source: reuters.com)



# ‘Over 80% of petchem equipment can be made domestically’

**ENERGY** TEHRAN — Head desk of Iran's Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industry Company (PGPIC) says domestic companies are capable of manufacturing up to 80 percent of the equipment needed in the country's petrochemical industry, Tasnim reported on Monday.

Speaking on the sidelines of an exhibition and conference on promoting domestic production in petrochemical industry in the southern Kish Island, Jafar Rabiei said: "If we can indigenize and supply 85 to 90 percent of the petrochemical industry's demand for equipment by domestic companies, then we can say that we have reached a desirable point."

According to the official, petrochemical companies deliver up to \$5.5 billion of raw materials to downstream industries annually, and this figure can be increased even more by capacity building in the downstream sector.

Rabiei further noted that the country's petrochemical industry needs \$40 billion in



the next 10 years to complete semi-finished projects.

Emphasizing that the country's liquidity

has exceeded 20 quadrillion rials (about \$476 billion), he said: "if we could attract part of this liquidity into the petrochemical industry, it

would be an effective step in securing part of the petrochemical industry's financial needs because this industry is very profitable and can capitalize by attracting investment and expanding its assets.

Nowadays, petrochemical industry is playing a crucial role in Iran's non-oil economy. According to official data, petrochemical exports constitute the second largest hard currency earner in Iran after crude oil. Petrochemical exports already make up nearly 33 percent of the country's non-oil exports.

Iranian Oil Ministry and the country's National Petrochemical Company (NPC) have been taking major steps to facilitate further development of this industry in recent years.

Iran's annual petrochemical output, which is currently at 65 million tons, is planned to reach more than 100 million tons by the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (ends on March 2022) and to 130 million tons or nearly doubled) by 1404 (ends on March 2026).

## Kish Island hosting expo on promoting domestic production in petchem industry

**ENERGY** TEHRAN — Kish Island in southern Iran is hosting a specialized exhibition and conference on promoting domestic production in petrochemical industry, IRNA reported.

Attended by more than 112 domestic companies active in a variety of areas, the three-day event kicked off on Sunday at Kish international exhibitions center.

The exhibition is organized by the Science and Technology Vice-Presidency Office in collaboration with Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industry Company as well as Iranian Petroleum Industries Equipment Manufacturers Association (IOIEMA).

As reported the event is aimed to promote domestic production, through supporting and maximum utilization of the capacity of domestic producers, especially knowledge-based companies in the field of petrochemicals.

Covering various areas including consulting, engineering, production lines and services, the exhibition and its sideline conference have it on the agenda to promote maximizing purchases of Iranian products, and also focusing on the downstream industries.

Various workshops, sessions and B2B meetings have also been scheduled to be held on the sidelines of this event.



## Oil prices steady as coronavirus-related demand concerns weigh

Oil prices were little changed on Monday as concerns of falling fuel demand caused by the economic fallout from the coronavirus outbreak in China were offset by expectations that output cuts from major producers will tighten crude supply.

Brent crude LCOc1 was at \$57.27 a barrel, down 5 cents by 0754 GMT after rising 5.2% last week, the biggest weekly gain since September 2019.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude CLc1 rose 3 cents to \$52.08 a barrel, after a 3.4% gain last week.

Japan, the world's fourth-largest oil consumer, reported an economic contraction of 6.3% for the October to December period and there is an expectation of a further contraction in the January to March quarter because of the contagion. Singapore, whose trade-dependent economy is a barometer for the region, also warned of the potential for a recession this quarter because of the outbreak.

"Oil remains acutely vulnerable to both excess supply and the economic coronavirus-induced slowdown in China and other parts of Asia," Jeffrey Halley, a senior market analyst at OANDA in Singapore said.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) said last week the virus is set to cause oil demand to fall by 435,000 barrels per day (bpd) in the first quarter of 2020 from the same period a year ago, in what would be the first quarterly drop since the financial crisis in 2009.

Analysts at Capital Economics said over the weekend that it is too soon to start assessing the longer-term economic fallout from the epidemic and investors will be looking for February manufacturing data, particularly in Asia, for an early indication of how significantly the virus is affecting global manufacturing supply chains.

"We expect the data to be weak, but if they



are better-than-expected then industrial commodity prices could see further gains," the analysts said.

Oil did rise last week for the first time since early January on optimism that Chinese economic stimulus measures amid the outbreak could lead to a recovery in oil demand in the world's largest importing country.

There are some indications of prompt demand for oil as the front-month Brent futures market has shifted to a backwardation, when near-term prices are higher than later-dated prices, from a contango. The April to May spread LCOc1-LCOc2 is now at a premium of 19 cents a barrel after reaching a discount of as low as 33 cents on February 7.

Investors are also anticipating that the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, including Russia, will approve a proposal to deepen production cuts to tighten global supplies and support prices.

The group, also known as OPEC+, has an agreement to cut oil output by 1.7 million bpd until the end of March.

A technical committee has recommended the group reduce production by another 600,000 bpd because of the impact from the coronavirus.

(Source: reuters.com)

## New strategy to help Vietnam scale up and better utilize solar power

A report based on two years of World Bank (WB) support to the Government of Vietnam recommends new approaches to bidding and deployment for solar projects that will help Vietnam substantially boost and effectively manage its abundant solar energy resources.

Such approaches could boost Vietnam's solar generation capacity from the current 4.5 gigawatts to the tens of gigawatts range in ten years, while creating thousands of new jobs, according to the new World Bank Vietnam Solar Competitive Bidding Strategy and Framework report.

The deployment of new solar generation will be a critical factor for the Government of Vietnam to meet its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) climate change target and reduce its need for new coal generation.

The report comes as Vietnam is considering moving from a feed-in-tariff (FIT) policy to a competitive bidding scheme for solar projects to reduce the cost of solar generation. The FIT has been successful in recent years, spurring the fast deployment of projects at a time when Vietnam has also become a world leader in solar module manufacturing. However, this success has also given rise to new issues, including curtailment — or underuse of solar generation capacity.

The report, supported by the Global Infrastructure Facility (GIF) and the World Bank's Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP), recommends two new deployment schemes for projects: competitive bidding for solar parks, and 'substation-based bidding' — competitive bidding based on available capacity at electrical substations. These approaches would address the curtailment issue as well as improve risk allocation between public and private investors.

### ■ The first pilot tenders

The first pilot tenders — 500 megawatts

(MW) for substation-based bidding and another 500 MW for ground-mounted solar parks — are being planned for later in 2020 with the technical and financial support of the World Bank.

The "WB is fully committed to helping Vietnam achieve its sustainable energy ambitions," said Ousmane Dione, World Bank Country Director for Vietnam. "We expect that this new strategy will open up a new chapter in Vietnam's already successful solar power expansion."

### ■ The independent power producers

Beyond the new approaches to competitive bidding, the report recommends setting yearly and medium-term solar deployment targets and revisions to the legal framework covering the competitive selection of independent power producers.

The report estimates that the expansion in solar generation capacity in Vietnam could generate as many as 25,000 new jobs in project development, services and operations and maintenance annually through 2030 and another 20,000 jobs in manufacturing provided Vietnam maintains its current share of the global solar equipment market.

"We are grateful for World Bank support to promote renewable energy in Vietnam," said Hoang Tien Dung, General Director of Electricity and Renewable Energy Authority, Ministry of Industry and Trade. "In particular, the World Bank's support to the Government's effort in shifting from FIT to a competitive bidding mechanism for solar PV could be applied for other types of renewable energy in the future. It contributes to the sustainable and transparent development of renewable energy in Vietnam by harmonizing the interests of private investors, the government and customers."

(Source: moderndiplomacy.eu)

## Oil suppliers slash prices to save Asian market share

By Julianne Geiger

As the coronavirus continues to take a toll on oil markets, competition is heating up for crude oil suppliers — all of which are vying for a piece of the dwindling oil demand in China and Japan as refineries there cut their run rates.

Crude oil suppliers are now slashing prices for certain grades of crude oil, according to refinery officials and trading managers who spoke to S&P Global Platts. The difference in some cases are multiple dollars per barrel for April loadings compared to March loadings.

Thousands of flights have been cut into and out of China, and travel within certain areas of the country have also been restricted. As a result of these restrictions and on reduced industrial throughput, fuel demand from the otherwise oil-thirsty nation continues to sink.

As China's demand for fuel wanes, refiners are faced with a grim reality — it might be some time before demand picks back up — so it's best to settle in and get comfortable. That comfort has come in the form of cutting run rates.

China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation, or Sinopec, Asia's largest refiner, cut its refinery production by 600,000 barrels per day this month. This is a 12% cut of its 5 million bpd average that it saw in 2019.

### ■ China's second-largest refiner

PetroChina, China's second-largest refiner, has also cut refinery runs, by 320,000 barrels per day PetroChina has also asked Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait about the



possibility of deferring its crude oil loadings or reducing volumes. This volume equates to about 10% of its 3.32 bpd of fuel production.

Independent refiners in China are also cutting run rates, with many operating at even less than half capacity.

The independents are in the unfortunate position of not being able to export fuels — unlike the state-held refinery giants such as Sinopec and PetroChina.

In Shandong Province, independents have said that they have collectively shut in 795,000 bpd of refinery runs, according to S&P Global Platts.

Altogether, IHS Market has estimated that China's February refinery runs will take a 1.7 million bpd hit — compared to its previous expectation that refinery runs in China would increase by 760,000 bpd.

But the pain extends beyond China. Japan refiners, too, are cutting run rates by between 3-4% from the last week of January to the first week of February.

### ■ A reduced need for crude oil

As these refiners cut back their runs in a big way, naturally they will have a reduced need for crude oil, and suppliers in Brazil, Russia, and Angola are having to adjust to stay at the top of the pile as the Asian refiners look to take less crude.

Brazil's Lula crude grade, according to Platts, was trading at a \$3 premium to dated Brent for April delivery this week, compared to a \$4 premium last week — and compared to an \$8.50 per barrel premium for March delivery.

Angola's Pazflor grade traded at a premium of just \$0.20 to dated Brent for March loading cargo, compared to a \$2 premium for February loadings.

One shipment of Russia's Sokol crude for April 8-14 loading sold at a premium of \$4.30 per barrel to Platts Dubai crude, while March loadings were trading at a premium upwards of \$8 per barrel. In October, in the wake of the embargo on Chinese tankers, it was trading at a premium of \$9.

The number of coronavirus cases had claimed 1,357 lives as of Thursday, with the total number of confirmed cases rising to more than 60,000 — with a sharp increase in the number of new cases reported on Wednesday.

Despite the sour note oil prices were trading modestly up on Thursday, even as Russia and OPEC have not yet come to an agreement as to how they will handle the depressed demand.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## Critical minerals are vital for renewable energy. We must learn to mine them responsibly

By Bénédicte Cenki-Tok

As the world shifts away from fossil fuels, we will need to produce enormous numbers of wind turbines, solar panels, electric vehicles and batteries. Demand for the materials needed to build them will skyrocket.

This includes common industrial metals such as steel and copper, but also less familiar minerals such as the lithium used in rechargeable batteries and the rare earth elements used in the powerful magnets required by wind turbines and electric cars.



Production of many of these critical minerals has grown enormously over the past decade with no sign of slowing down.

Australia is well placed to take advantage of this growth — some claim we are on the cusp of a rare earths boom — but unless we learn how to do it in a responsible manner, we will only create a new environmental crisis.

What are critical minerals?

"Critical minerals" are metals and non-metals that are essential for our economic future but whose supply may be uncertain. Their supply may be threatened by geopolitics, geological accessibility, legislation, economic rules or other factors.

One consequence of a massive transition to renewables will be a drastic increase not only in the consumption of raw materials (including concrete, steel, aluminum, copper and glass) but also in the diversity of materials used.

Three centuries ago, the technologies used by humanity required half a dozen metals. Today we use more than 50, spanning almost the entire periodic table. However, like fossil fuels, minerals are finite.

Can we 'unlearn' renewables to make them sustainable?

If we take a traditional approach to mining critical minerals, in a few decades they will run out — and we will face a new environmental crisis. At the same time, it is still unclear how we will secure supply of these minerals as demand surges.

### ■ China is a major producer

This is further complicated by geopolitics. China is a major producer, accounting for more than 60% of rare earth elements, and significant amounts of tungsten, bismuth and germanium.

This makes other countries, including Australia, dependent on China, and also means the environmental pollution due to mining occurs in China.

The opportunity for Australia is to produce its own minerals, and to do so in a way that minimizes environmental harm and is sustainable.

Where to mine?

Australia has well established resources in base metals (such as gold, iron, copper, zinc and lead) and presents an outstanding potential in critical minerals. Australia already produces almost half of lithium worldwide, for example.

In recent years, Geoscience Australia and several universities have focused research on determining which critical minerals are associated with specific base ores.

For example, the critical minerals gallium and indium are commonly found as by-products in deposits of lead and zinc.

To work out the best places to look for critical minerals, we will need to understand the geological processes that create concentrations of them in the Earth's crust.

Critical minerals are mostly located in magmatic rocks, which originate from the Earth's mantle, and metamorphic rocks, which have been transformed during the formation of mountains.

Understanding these rocks is key to finding critical minerals and recovering them from the bulk ores.

For most western economies, rare earth elements are the most vital. These have electromagnetic properties that make them essential for permanent magnets, rechargeable batteries, catalytic converters, LCD screens and more.

Australia shows a great potential in various deposit types across all states.

The Northern Territory is leading with the Nolans Bore mine already in early-stage operations. But many other minerals are vital to economies like ours.

Cobalt and lithium are essential to ion batteries. Gallium is used in photodetectors and photovoltaics systems. Indium is used for its conductive properties in screens.

### ■ Opportunity for exploration

Critical minerals mining is seen now as an unprecedented economic opportunity for exploration, extraction and exportation.

Recent agreements to secure supply to the U.S. opens new avenues for the Australian mining industry.

How can we make it sustainable?

Beyond the economic opportunity, this is also an environmental one. Australia has the chance to set an example to the world of how to make the supply of critical minerals sustainable. The question is: are we willing to?

Many of the techniques for creating sustainable minerals supply still need to be invented. We must invest in geosciences, create new tools for exploration, extraction, beneficiation and recovery, treat the leftover material from mining as a resource instead of waste, develop urban mining and find substitutes and effective recycling procedures.

In short, we must develop an integrated approach to the circular economy of critical minerals. One potential example to follow here is the European EURARE project initiated a decade ago to secure a future supply of rare earth elements.

More than ever, we need to bridge the gap between disciplines and create new synergies to make a sustainable future. It is essential to act now for a better planet.

(Source: theconversation.com)



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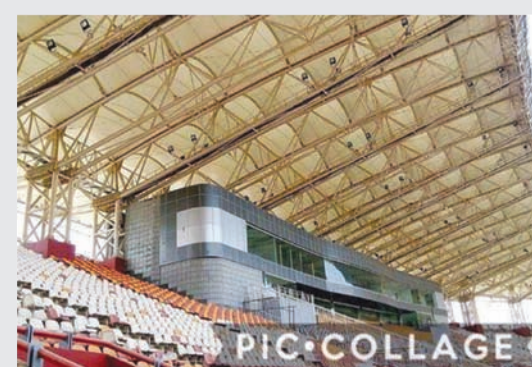
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# Iraqi leader hails General Soleimani's effectual military plans

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** – Leader of Iraq's National Wisdom Movement Seyed Ammar al-Hakim paid tribute to late Iranian commander Lt. General Qassem Soleimani for his great contribution to the fight against terrorism in Iraq, saying the commander always came up with ingenious military plans.

In an interview with Tasnim, Hakim lauded Lt. General Soleimani as an exceptional commander with high intelligence, saying the martyr had indescribable skill in organizing military operations and guerrilla wars against terrorists.

Ammar al-Hakim was frequently in contact with the former commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Quds Force.

Lt. General Soleimani, the deputy head of Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'abi Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and a number of their entourage were assassinated in an airstrike by American drones near Baghdad International Airport in the early hours of January 3.

Following is the full text of Ammar al-Hakim's interview with Tasnim about the late Iranian commander:

■ You are among the people who had close ties with General Soleimani throughout the past years and worked with the martyr on various issues. How did you get to know General Soleimani?

A: In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. I greet you and once again offer my condolences over the martyrdom the great commander of Islam, highly-revered Lt. General martyr Qassem Soleimani to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, to the great and dignified Iranian nation, and to the respected family of the martyr. My close acquaintance with the dear martyr dates back to 2003, when we were preparing to return to Iraq following the overthrow of Saddam's Ba'athist regime.

At that juncture, I was assigned by the Shaheed al-Mehraab (martyr of the altar, namely Ayatollah Sayyid Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim) to organize and dispatch the religious education students from the seminary of Qom to Iraq. It was then that I met General Soleimani for the first time in the presence of Martyr Hakim, and was acquainted with him. Since that time, perfect coordination was formed with him (General Soleimani) in the dispatch of those dear individuals (clerical students). Afterwards, we maintained close contacts with each other since General Soleimani was in charge of Iraq's case inside the Islamic Republic.

■ How good were the relations between Martyr Soleimani and the prominent Iraqi figures, including the martyrs Sayyid Mohammad Baqir and Sayyid Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and the other Iraqi elders?

A: They had such brotherly, cordial and warm relations that truly enjoyed a considerable reputation among everyone. General Soleimani's move to cordially see Martyr Hakim out on the way to Iraq and the great martyr's (Gen. Soleimani's) special respect for late Sayyid Abdul Aziz in the hard time of his illness would be never forgotten.



■ What is your analysis of General Soleimani's personal and management qualities, in terms of moral characteristics, treatment of the other people, the power of predicting and analyzing the incidents, and the management of crises?

A: Late Martyr Soleimani was a matchless and exceptional person. One can find a clear model for jihadi management in his personal manners, moral behavior, and also the way he organized and managed the work, which could be hardly found in anyone else. He was quick-witted with high intelligence in analyzing, had special capability to organize the forces on the field, and enjoyed indescribable and unique efficiency in designing the military operations and guerrilla wars.

■ The front of resistance involves many people with different nationalities, Iranians, Iraqis, Afghans, Syrians, Lebanese etc., with respective cultures and faiths. Apart from their different nationalities, the forces in the front of resistance follow various religions and faiths, like the Shites, Sunnis, Christians etc. all fighting together against a common enemy. How could General Soleimani gather all of them together and create a mood in which all of those fighters were fighting in a brotherly manner?

A: You mentioned an important issue in the exact way. That is true. He treated everybody equally, regardless of the sectarian, racial, or religious differences. He did not

care about such differences, but attached significance to the materialization of goals of Islam and the Revolution. This was one of the major unique qualities of our dear and revered martyr.

■ What role did General Soleimani and the IRGC Quds Force play in dealing with the recent regional crises, particularly in the fight against the Takfiri terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria?

A: As mentioned before, the highly-revered martyr had high intelligence and special acumen in handling guerrilla wars and irregular warfare, and the result of such quality was that his plans entailed the lowest possible costs and resulted in the highest number of victories.

When Daesh (ISIS) conquered Mosul, he (Gen. Soleimani) went to Baghdad. The atmosphere of Baghdad and other regions was very tense. With his great self-confidence, he then presented an inclusive plan to stop the advance of Daesh which addressed the main weak points and deficiencies of the security forces. Afterwards, the offensive attacks began and various regions under the control of Daesh were being cleansed of them (terrorists) one after another.

(General Soleimani's) Great power to mobilize forces, the accurate assessment of the enemy's power, the ability to recognize the power of the friendly fire, and a proper

understanding of the enemy's psychological war resulted in the gradual degradation and ultimate collapse of a powerful force such as Daesh.

The martyr's (Gen. Soleimani's) presence in the battlefields and the front line and his personal visits to the operation zones, despite the huge risks, played a leading role in the management of irregular wars and was a perfect model.

■ Considering the magnificent funeral of those martyrs in Iran and Iraq, what effect do you think the blood of General Soleimani and his comrades, including Martyr Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and other Iraqi martyrs, will have on the unity and proximity between the two nations?

A: Given the great martyr's role and mission, he always pushed for the materialization of such proximity in all arenas. Despite the whole hostile plots to damage the significant and strategic relations (between Iraq and Iran), such ties will continue to get stronger and institutionalized thanks to the blood of those dear martyrs, God willing. The existing commonalities between the two nations are numerous and extensive, which must be taken into account.

■ What is your evaluation of future of the front of resistance after the martyrdom of General Soleimani?

A: The dear martyr's unique role in strengthening the front of resistance is undoubtedly matchless, however, we hope that the presence of the noble and devoted brother, his (Gen. Soleimani's) age-old comrade, the great commander, Mr. Qaani, and all of his dear colleagues and the elements of this front in various regions would result in strengthening and continuation of it (resistance front).

■ By assassinating General Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in such a way, the Americans have actually committed an act of official assassination, which will naturally have consequences for them, particularly considering a strong reaction their move sparked in various countries, specifically among the people of Iran and Iraq. What consequences do you think such terrorist activity will have for the Americans?

A: The biggest revenge for the blood of the great martyr is that his path will be continued to achieve the goals to which he devoted his life. We in Iraq believe that the foreign military forces must withdraw from the holy soil of this country, and the national sovereignty and political independence of Iraq must be ensured at the hands of the grown children of the Iraqi nation.

■ At the end, if you want to tell Martyr Soleimani a few words, what would you say?

A: We'd tell the great martyr, Hajj Qassem, that 'you left us and marked a wound on our hearts which will remain with us forever. Rest in the peace of martyrdom that you gained in the path of God and which was the result of your jihad and efforts. May God let us join you in safeguarding the religion and its superb values. Your manner, fortitude and perseverance will always exist in our hearts.'

## Why world rejects Trump's Middle East plan



**TEHRAN (FNA)** - Just like Muslim nations and the rest of the international civil society, the European Union has also rejected the new US peace plan for the Middle East, saying the plan broke with "internationally agreed parameters", and any Israeli annexation of Palestinian land would be subject to challenge.

President Donald Trump's plan, also rejected outright by the Palestinians, seeks to give Israel most of what it has sought during decades of conflict, including nearly all Palestinian land on which it has built illegal settlements.

There are many reasons why the world rejects the apartheid plan.

The timing of the announcement was aimed at bolstering the political base of both Trump and Netanyahu - Trump embroiled in an impeachment battle was trying to appease pro-Israeli evangelical Christian voters, a key component of his support base, while Netanyahu used the occasion to go one-up over his political rivals.

The plan they unveiled promotes anything but peace and is an agenda to legalise Israel's illegal land grab on the West Bank. No wonder peace

analysts are unanimous in condemning the Trump plan as 'dead on arrival'.

It is one-sided and a travesty of justice in breach of international law which requires that the other side also be listened to. There was no Palestinian side in this ruling that Trump's pro-Israeli son-in-law Jared Kushner was instrumental in drafting.

If there is one US president who has displayed his lack of care for the Palestinians, it is Trump. He stopped aid to Palestine and his country's annual contribution to the United Nations Relief Work Agency which cares for more than five million Palestinian refugees. Trump, Kushner and Netanyahu could not find a single Palestinian to endorse the plan made by Zionists for Zionists to continue their crimes in Palestine.

Pro-Arabian Arab states, however, welcomed the plan but avoided extending support for the content of the plan. Key regional powers Turkey and Iran, meanwhile, have given an outright thumbs-down to Trump's plan, which declares Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel, thus ignoring the Palestinians' right to have Jerusalem Al-Quds as their capital.

The Palestinians have also dismissed the plan as Balfour 2.0, whereby one country (the United States) is trying to hand over chunks of another's country (Palestine) to a third country (Israel) just as Britain in 1917, through an atrocious colonial act of injustice, allowed the Zionist movement to occupy Palestine.

At any rate, the Trump plan will leave the Palestinians with a mere 15 percent of historic Palestine. In other words, 85 percent of Pal-

estine will come under Israel's control.

Trump's plan was conveyed to Arab leaders more than two years ago. This came after the Trump administration recognized Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital. At the US-sponsored Middle East economic conference in Bahrain in June last year, the plan was unveiled by Kushner.

It's a shame that the Arab leaders didn't reject

the apartheid plan two years ago. It's also a greater shame that they now welcome the plan as a "peace plan", which in fact only promotes further chaos and bloodshed in the Holy Land.

They know and the whole world knows that the plan ignores international law, UN resolutions and principles of justice for the long-suffering people of Palestine.

## Iran-U.S. disputes not affecting Afghan peace process: Taliban

**TEHRAN (MNA)** – A Taliban spokesman rejected any influence of heightened tensions between Tehran and Washington on the process of establishing peace in Afghanistan.

While some media outlets and Afghan observers believe that deteriorated ties between Iran and the United States can negatively affect the peace process in Afghanistan and that Washington has asked the Taliban to cut ties with Tehran, Suhail Shaheen rejected the rumors in an interview with Mehr News Agency. America has not asked us to change the peace deal or cut ties with Iran, he said.

He went on to say that the Taliban and the U.S. have agreed for a one week of reduced violence before the signing of a peace deal, adding that this agreement has not yet been implemented. He noted that a separate announcement will be released on the issue.

Asked whether the group intends to hold

direct talks with the Afghan government or start intra-Afghan talks, Shaheen said that intra-Afghan talks will start with the participation of all Afghan groups after the release of a certain number of Taliban prisoners.

He refrained from giving a clear answer to the possibility of direct talks with the Afghan government, just saying that parties will act according to the yet-to-be signed deal.

In another interview with Afghan television station ITV on Monday, Shaheen said that a peace deal with the U.S. has been finalized and will be signed by the end of February.

Meanwhile, Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah confirmed to the TOLONews channel that a deal had been agreed, though noted that whether it is signed will depend on the success of a proposed period of reduced violence. "The agreement between the Taliban



and U.S. has been finalized and the signing of the agreement is based on the reduction in violence over seven days and then it will continue," Abdullah explained. "It is also an opportunity for the opposite side to show that they want peace in the country."

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## I love Iranians, their unique culture: Ecuador's ambassador

➔ **1** He pointed out that the biggest tourism challenge that Iran faces is that it is still somewhat "unknown" for many potential travelers.



Ecuador's ambassador to Tehran, German Alejandro Ortega Almeida, talks to an interviewer (unpictured) during his visit to the 13th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition running from February 12 to 15, 2020.

"I, as an expert, who have been working in the field of tourism for the past twenty years, believe that the main challenge of our travel industry is that Iran is internationally unknown. Moreover, over the past years, an Iranophobia project [orchestrated] by our enemies have been added too."

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

## Japan confirms 99 more cases of new virus on cruise ship

**TOKYO (AP)** — Japanese officials have confirmed 99 more people infected by the new virus aboard the quarantined cruise ship Diamond Princess, bringing the total to 454, the Health Ministry said Monday.



The ministry has been carrying out tests on passengers and crew on the ship, docked in Yokohama, a port city near Tokyo.

The 14-day quarantine for those on the ship was due to end Wednesday.

Outside China, the ship has had the largest number of cases of the COVID-19 illness caused by the virus that emerged in China late last year.

The ministry said it now has tested 1,723 people on the Diamond Princess. The ship had about 3,700 passengers

and crew.

Two chartered planes flew 340 Americans who were aboard the vessel out of Japan late Sunday. About 380 Americans had been on the ship. The State Department announced later that 14 of the evacuees were confirmed to have the virus in tests given before they boarded the planes.

They were taken to the U.S. because they did not have symptoms and were being isolated from other passengers on the planes, it said.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the 14 were included in the 99 new cases announced by Japan on Monday.

Australia, Canada, Hong Kong and Italy were planning similar flights for their citizens.



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### St Mary's Cathedral and St Michael's Church at Hildesheim

St Michael's Church was built between 1010 and 1020 on a symmetrical plan with two apses that was characteristic of Ottonian Romanesque art in Old Saxony. Its interior, in particular the wooden ceiling and painted stucco-work, its famous bronze doors and the Bernward bronze column, are — together with the treasures of St Mary's Cathedral — of exceptional interest as examples of the Romanesque churches of the Holy Roman Empire.



The ancient Benedictine abbey church of St Michael in Hildesheim, located in the north of Germany, is one of the key monuments of medieval art, built between 1010 and 1022 by Bernward, Bishop of Hildesheim. St Michael's is one of the rare major constructions in Europe around the turn of the millennium which still conveys a unified impression of artistry, without having undergone any substantial mutilations or critical transformations in basic and detailed structures.

St Mary's Cathedral, rebuilt after the fire of 1046, still retains its original crypt. The nave arrangement, with the familiar alternation of two consecutive columns for every pillar, was modelled after that of St Michael's, but its proportions are more slender.

The church of St Michael and the Cathedral of St Mary with its church treasure contain an exceptional series of elements of interior decoration that together are quite unique for the understanding of layouts used during the Romanesque era. (Source: UNESCO)

# Iranian desert to play host to 4WD car rally

**TOURISM TEHRAN** — Rig Jenn d e s k ("Dune of the Jinn"), a barren desert situated in central Iran, will host tens of motorists driving a variety of 4WD cars for a rally scheduled to be held on February 20 and 21.

"Competitors will be divided into teams, each composed of three cars. And the rally will be held in a single class through a route of about 100 kilometers," ILNA reported on Monday.

According to organizers, the event is aimed to promote domestic tourism; an appropriate safari culture without damaging the nature and the environment; knowledge and driving skills in the desert; social vitality; and finally to encourage practical assistance between participants.

The rally is organized by the Touring and Automobile Club of Iran in close collaboration with the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Ministry, the report added.

Rig Jenn (also spelled Rig-e Jenn) received its name from the belief that the area was haunted by spirits and the devil. This belief was strengthened by, and probably originated from the fact that perhaps many had entered the desert and never returned. Sometimes the notorious winds of Rig-e Jenn howl ominously, sounding like a supernatural wail that triggers even the most rigid skeptics' imagination.

Rig Jenn is situated in a border area between Semnan and Isfahan provinces. In



File photo depicts a huge 4WD competing in an off-road desert route

another world, it is part of Dasht-e Kavir (the central desert of Iran). It consists of

sand dunes, dry riverbeds, crystallized salt flowers, salt planes, rare vegetation

here and there and a hard and often dried and cracked mud surface.

## Robert H. Dyson, discoverer of Gold Bowl of Hasanlu in Iran, dies at 93



Robert H. Dyson, Jr. with the famous "Gold Bowl" of Hasanlu at the time of its discovery in 1958.

**HERITAGE TEHRAN** — Celebrated anthropologist d e s k and archaeologist Robert H. Dyson, Jr., who shined at Iran's archaeology scene in mid-20th century, passed away on Sunday. He was 93, ISNA reported.

Dyson is best remembered in Iran as the discoverer of the "Gold Bowl" of Hasanlu, ca. 900 BC, which is now being kept at the National Museum of Iran.

Dyson directed the Hasanlu Project from 1956 to 1977. He received his PhD from Harvard University in 1966. Before working in northwestern Iran, he participated in research projects in Africa and at Jericho, Nippur, Susa and Bahrain Island, as well as in the United States.

The senior archaeologist served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania from 1979 to 1982.

From 1982 to 1994, he was the Director of the University of Pennsylvania Museum. He was president of the Archaeological Institute of America and he is a member of the American Philosophical Society. Dr. Dyson has written numerous articles on ancient Iran, especially the sites of Hasanlu Tepe and Tepe Hissar.

Among the most important objects uncovered at Hasanlu were an unusually decorated silver bowl, several iron garment pins headed by bronze lions, a solid gold bowl, a knife handle with gold cloisonné, and two hollow bronze horse heads that served to hold liquids.

According to the Britannica Encyclopedia, Hasanlu was inhabited from about 2100 to about 825 BC, but the richest period yet excavated dates to the 10th and 9th centuries BC. The period, often called "Mannaeen" after the name of the people who lived in the area, is characterized by a gray pottery accompanied by black and red varieties, the black ware being of much finer quality and probably made in imitation of metal vessels.



A view of the Gold Bowl of Hasanlu, ca. 900 BC

Experts say parallels to the motifs on the Hasanlu objects have been found in Elam, Assyria, north Syria, and Urartu, indicating that Iran not only received considerable cultural and artistic stimuli from other areas but also in turn exerted influence on the Middle East.

## Dam tourism one step closer to take off

**TOURISM TEHRAN** — Dam tourism is one step closer to launch in Iran as Energy Ministry has finally announced readiness to create and develop required infrastructure in partnership with the private sector.

"Until the yearend (March 19, 2020) a select of dams will be at the disposal of the private sector for tourism development," deputy energy minister Ghasem Taghizadeh Khamesi said on Saturday, Mehr reported.

"We have negotiated with a number of tourism agencies to arrange water tours, and it seems that people are keen to learn how potable water is produced [within dam zones]."

The official noted that 182 national dams have been built in the country, most of them have potential to be tourism destinations.



## Exempt Chinese students from coronavirus travel ban, New Zealand universities urge

New Zealand universities have called on the government to exempt thousands of Chinese students from the travel ban sparked by the coronavirus crisis, saying it could them more than NZ\$150m in tuition fees.

Chinese foreign students make up roughly half of all foreign students studying at New Zealand's universities but are unable to get into the country for the start of the academic year. Orientation week begins next week.

On 2 February the government placed temporary restrictions on entry into New Zealand for all foreign nationals travelling from, or transiting through, mainland China.

The restrictions coincided with the usual peak travel period of lunar new year, and were extended at the weekend for another eight days by the health minister, David Clarke.

On Monday, China's health commission revealed the total number of cases in the country now stood at 70,548, a rise of 2,048. Total deaths now stand at 1,770, after 105 more deaths were reported in the past 24 hours. Of those new deaths, only five were reported outside Hubei province (3 in Henan,

and 2 in Guangdong).

Hundreds of Americans have been flown out of Japan after leaving the quarantined Diamond Princess cruise ship on Sunday night, as a further 70 people onboard tested positive for Covid-19, bringing the total to 355.

As well as separating families and preventing people from returning to work, the ban has prevented about 12,000 Chinese students — or around 41% of all Chinese international students studying in New Zealand — from returning to begin the academic year, the government said.

Chinese foreign students are charged significantly higher fees than domestic students, making them a valuable stream of revenue for tertiary institutions around the country.

The director of Universities New Zealand, Chris Whelan, said the travel ban could potentially cost universities NZ\$170m in lost fees, and the situation was "extremely serious".

"We're currently discussing the idea of an exemption, so some students may be able to come to New Zealand even if there is a more general travel ban," Whelan told

RNZ. "We would be only doing that with the full support of the Ministry of Health and certainly observing any guidelines that they put around it. There are some challenges but we are hopeful we might be able to do something in that space."

The prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, told Radio NZ that although discussions were taking place, no decision on a student exemption had been made.

"The first thing we've done is say yes, their student visas will be still able to give them entry to the country later on — but universities have indicated to us that they have a particular window ... about April, that's the time by which they need their international students to start," Ardern said.

"Public health is our No 1 priority here. There are a couple of things which make any exemptions tricky. Of course ... you'd basically have to be making these individualised decisions for what are thousands of visa holders, and that is quite a logistical exercise."

Ardern said any students arriving would

need to self-quarantine and this could be a complicated logistical exercise, but Whelan said plans had already been made to make any quarantine period as smooth and streamlined as possible.

Whelan said any first-year student who was not able to begin the academic year would likely choose to start their degree elsewhere — meaning the New Zealand university would lose four of five years of fees.

The Chinese consulate in New Zealand has expressed its disapproval of the travel ban and said it should be lifted for all Chinese nationals, who could self-quarantine once they arrived in the country instead. The ban was not in line with WHO recommendations, the consulate said.

So far there have been no confirmed cases of coronavirus in New Zealand, though more than eight people have been tested for the virus, and hundreds remain in quarantine in Auckland after being evacuated from Wuhan, the city at the heart of the outbreak in Hubei province.

(Source: The Guardian)



# 15 projects receive awards at Khwarizmi International Festival

1 → Development of thermal solar energy technology, synthesis of peptide radioactive raw materials, research and development of pharmaceuticals from Marine species, research, design and implementation of renewable technologies in micro-networks, Bitban malware analysis platform were among the selected projects, IRNA reported.

Ten laureates from Iran and five from other countries received the awards during the ending ceremony which held with Vice President for Science and Technology Sourena Sattari in attendance.

Selected foreign projects are from Australia, China, South Korea, and the United States and in the fields of electricity, chemical technology, materials and metallurgy, electricity and computers and biotech and medical base, he explained.

According to Khwarizmi official website, in 1987, the leading Iranian Research Organization for Science and Technology (IROST), affiliated to the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, decided to institute an award, which acknowledges the Iranian outstanding achievements in the field of science and technology.

IROST proposed the creation of the Khwarizmi Award in memory of Abu Jafar Mohammad Ibn Mousa Khwarizmi, the great Iranian mathematician, and astronomer (770-840 C.E).



## Shipping pollution regulations 'could harm food chain'

New shipping pollution regulations introduced earlier this year could harm humans by contaminating fish and crustaceans with toxins, according to an internal report compiled by the International Maritime Organization and obtained by the Guardian.

In the report the IMO, the United Nations agency responsible for regulating shipping, says that there is insufficient "toxicity data" to be able to assess the risk to humans caused by the increased use of exhaust gas cleaning systems, which are also known as "scrubbers".

These devices reduce the amount of pollution emitted into the air by ships, but the cheapest and most popular models dramatically increase the amount of pollutants pumped directly into the sea.

Shipping companies have spent more than \$12bn (£9.2bn) fitting thousands of scrubbers on vessels around the world in order to meet new air pollution standards that were introduced on 1 January 2020.

Some of the pollutants deemed most concerning by experts that are pumped into the sea by scrubbers are polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), which have been linked to skin, lung, bladder, liver and stomach cancers.

In its report, the IMO says "carrying out a preliminary risk assessment [on the PAH emissions from scrubbers] was not possible considering the available information" and warns that "secondary poisoning (via consumption of seafood) had been mentioned as a likely exposure route for humans".

Critics say IMO member states should have conducted thorough risk assessments before deciding to allow the use of scrubbers under the new legislation.

Lucy Gilliam, a campaigner for the Brussels-based NGO Transport & Environment, says the IMO should stop the use of scrubbers until it can answer key questions about how discharges may affect health.

"Ships should not be allowed to use scrubbers if the IMO has no idea what the consequences will be for human health and food chain contamination," she said.

"The surge in scrubber use means that increasing amounts of PAHs will accumulate in sediment over time, and no one knows what the impact on human health will be.

"It is going to have an impact on the food chain and, as



things stand, we have no reliable information about when safe threshold limits will be breached."

Christopher Elliott, a professor at the Institute for Global Food Security at Queen's University Belfast, believes the effect of bioaccumulation of PAHs in the food chain is a worrying issue.

"Any increase in PAHs at the bottom of the food chain can have a negative impact on human health over the long term, damaging immune systems and potentially increasing susceptibility to cancer," he said.

Shipping companies have repeatedly said that they have commissioned rigorous studies to test pollutants discharged by scrubbers.

Earlier this year a study commissioned by Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) Europe, the world's largest cruise industry trade association, concluded that "exhaust gas cleaning systems have a limited impact on water quality".

In March last year Carnival, the world's biggest cruise company, published a study that described scrubbers as "a safe and effective" way of complying with the recently implemented regulations for cleaner air emissions.

The Clean Shipping Alliance, a lobby group for companies that have invested in exhaust gas cleaning technology, says it believes that sufficient research has been conducted and discharges from the devices are safe for marine ecosystems.

"There is well-documented evidence relating to the composition of scrubber washwater," a spokesperson said.

However, in the IMO's new internal report it criticises

the existing body of research that been published based on analysis of chemical discharge from the devices, saying that some of the existing studies cannot be trusted.

"In a number of reports, no basic information was provided either on the sampling techniques, or on the quality assurance and control of the analytical methods used," it says.

"Lack of all this information put a great uncertainty on a number of presented results and the quality of the provided data could not be fully judged and trusted."

Gilliam says many of the existing studies looking at chemical discharges from scrubbers have been done by entities that benefit financially from the use of them.

"In some cases they are commissioning studies by independent groups, but the samples are being collected by their own staff," she said.

"How do we know exactly where they are taking the sample from, at what time, at what engine load? We don't have those answers. It can't be regarded as rigorous, independent, peer-reviewed research.

"We don't know if this will be a health crisis in 20 or 30 years, because proper research just hasn't been done."

A spokeswoman for CLIA said: "Cruise lines are committed to environmental stewardship and have invested more than £16bn in ships with new technologies and cleaner fuels to reduce air emissions and achieve greater energy efficiencies.

"Exhaust gas cleaning systems (EGCS), which are designed to remove 98% of sulphur and well over 50% of particulate matter from exhaust, have been proven safe for maritime environments. Publicly available studies on the long-term impact of discharges from exhaust gas cleaning systems have found minimal environmental impact on water and sediment quality when benchmarked against new European environmental quality standards entering into force in 2021."

In October, the British Ports Association warned that the use of scrubbers by shipping companies could render some UK ports unusable by contaminating sediment and increasing the cost of dredging.

The IMO is due to discuss future regulation of scrubbers at a meeting starting on Monday.

(Source: The Guardian)

## Iran unveils domestically-made environmental drone

**ENVIRONMENT** **TEHRAN** — Domestically made environmental drone was unveiled on Sunday by the Department of Environment (DOE) chief, Issa Kalantari, IRNA news agency reported.



It is a perpendicular drone that can handle up to 4 hours of continuous flight, which also carries a scanning camera and is able to send movies and photos simultaneously.

It has an RGV camera that can detect any object that the eye cannot see. For example, if an animal is behind a rock, this camera can see it.

Karkheh and Hirmard rivers and also Bandar Anzali and Mi-ankaleh wetlands will be monitored for the first time by the drone.

## Wild beavers reduce flood risk and boost wildlife, study finds

Beavers living wild on an English river have reduced the risk of flooding for local people and boosted wildlife, a five-year trial has found.

The aquatic mammals living on the River Otter in Devon have caused some localised problems for several landowners, but these could be addressed successfully with "active management", the study said.

Other wildlife, including fish, water voles, amphibians and birds, have benefited from the presence of the beavers living on the river and creating new habitat.

The findings are the culmination of a five-year study of the first licensed release of beavers into the wild in England since they were hunted to extinction more than 400 years ago.

It found the wild beavers on the south Devon river provided more benefits to people and the landscape than the costs they caused.

As the report was published, the government said the trial has been extended until the end of August to assess the findings, which will help inform decisions on the future of the Devon beavers and their wider status in England.

The species has been given protected status in Scotland, where it returned through an official trial and illegal releases or escapes, while England also has a number of fenced enclosures with beavers in to manage the landscape.

National polling as part of the study showed 86 per cent of people support reintroductions and three-quarters think beavers should be protected. Beavers had been living wild on the Devon river for up to a decade when the trial began in 2015, but faced being re-homed in captivity after evidence emerged that they were successfully breeding.

Plans for a monitoring trial were put forward by Devon Wildlife Trust and were given the green light by government agency Natural England, with the two family groups allowed to remain on the water.

There are now at least eight pairs of beavers, occupying the main River Otter and the connected Tale, as well as some smaller tributaries.

Research by the team of scientists, overseen by professor Richard Brazier from the University of Exeter, found they are providing benefits to people, including in the flood-prone community of East Budleigh. Beavers have constructed six dams upstream of the village, which have measurably and significantly reduced peak flood flows through the community, the report said.

Evidence from another trial in north Devon, where beavers in an enclosure have built 13 dams and ponds, shows they also play a role in filtering soil, manure, slurry and fertilisers from farmland.

(Source: The Independent)

## WORDS IN THE NEWS

### Bangladesh air force to attack mosquitoes

(February 19, 2003)

The Bangladesh Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, has, for the first time, authorised the air force to be used in the fight against the city's mosquito problem in the capital, Dhaka. The **declaration of war** by the Bangladesh government against Dhaka's huge mosquito population is likely to be welcomed by most of the city's **hard-pressed** residents. The insects are found everywhere, from the homes of the wealthiest industrialists to the **lowliest** slum dweller. Although Dhaka isn't an area where malaria is common, mosquitoes are responsible for frequent **outbreaks** of dengue fever. Air force planes and helicopters will now, for the first time, be adapted so that they can carry **anti-mosquito spray**. It's hoped that the aircraft will be ready to **dive bomb** parts of the city where mosquitoes breed, in advance of the monsoon period which begins in late June. Areas where there is **stagnant water** will be especially targeted.

The authorities say they will make every effort to ensure the **offensive** doesn't cause **collateral damage** among humans who could end up breathing poisonous **larvicide**. Pregnant women and babies are feared to be especially **vulnerable**.

■ **Words**  
**declaration of war:** a formal announcement of war  
**hard-pressed:** if you are hard-pressed then you are experiencing difficulties or you are under great pressure  
**lowliest:** low in status or importance  
**anti-mosquito spray:** a spray that will kill mosquitoes  
**dive bomb:** to drop bombs or, in this case, anti-mosquito spray, after flying steeply downwards towards the target of the bomb  
**stagnant water:** water that is not flowing or moving  
**offensive:** here, an aggressive attack  
**collateral damage:** here, injury or death to humans rather than the intended target (mosquitoes)  
**larvicide:** a chemical that kills the larvae of insects  
**vulnerable:** exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally

(Source: BBC)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

## Lake Urmia water level keeps rising

The level of water at Lake Urmia is on the rise, as increased by a 1.7 billion cubic meters compared to the previous year, according to the studies conducted by the Lake Urmia restoration program committee.

The lake is expected to reach its ecological level (1,274 meters) within 10 years by completing the restoration plans which started four years ago.

Farhad Sarkhosh, head of the Lake Urmia restoration program's office in West Azarbaijan province, said the lake's level has reached 1,271 meters, adding the figure has increased by 68 centimeters compared to last year, according to the latest survey.

He said that the lake surface area has reached 2,828 square kilometers, adding that the figure is increased by 689 square kilometers compared to the same period last year.

## رند سعودی تراز دریاچه ارومیه

تراز دریاچه ارومیه روند صعودی به خود گرفته است به طوری که حجم آب دریاچه در مقایسه با سال گذشته یک میلیارد و ۷۰۰ میلیون مترمکعب افزایش یافته است.

دریاچه ارومیه از اواسط دهه ۱۳۸۰ شروع به خشک شدن کرد و بنا بر آمار بین المللی تا سال ۲۰۱۵ میلادی حدود ۸۰ درصد از مساحت آن خشک شد.

این دریاچه در قالب طرح های احیا قرار است ظرف مدت ۱۰ سال از ۱۳۹۴ به تراز اکولوژیک خود (یک هزار و ۲۷۴ متر) برسد.

به گزارش ایرنا، فرهاد سرخوش رییس دفتر استانی ستاد احیای دریاچه ارومیه در آذربایجان غربی با اشاره به ثبت تراز یک هزار و ۲۷۱ متر و ۳۰ سانتی متری طبق آخرین پایش برای دریاچه ارومیه اظهار داشت ارتفاع دریاچه نسبت به سال گذشته ۶۸ سانتی متر بیشتر شده است.

وی با بیان اینکه مساحت دریاچه به ۲ هزار و ۸۲۸ کیلومتر مربع رسیده، بیان کرد این رقم نسبت به زمان مشابه سال گذشته ۶۸۹ کیلومتر مربع افزایش نشان می دهد.

## PREFIX/SUFFIX

### “mono-”

■ **Meaning:** one, alone

■ **For example:** he was reciting some of the great **monologues** of Shakespeare.

## PHRASAL VERB

### Put away

**Meaning:** to return something to the place where it is usually kept

**For example:** Please put away the dictionary when you've finished using it.

## IDIOM

### Deep pockets

■ **Explanation:** A person or organization who has deep pockets has a lot of money

■ **For example:** Andy's business is not doing well at the moment. He says he needs a friend with deep pockets!



## No let up in Taliban attacks, fresh orders awaited over deal with U.S.

Taliban fighters attacked Afghan government forces overnight, and militant commanders said Monday insurgency operations would go-ahead until they receive fresh instructions based on a deal with the United States to reduce violence in the country.



Last week, a senior U.S. administration official said negotiations with Taliban representatives in Qatar had resulted in and agreement in principle for a week-long reduction of violence, but the seven-day period had not commenced. The official said the agreement covered all Afghan forces, and would be closely monitored.

“Our leadership hasn’t conveyed any message about a ceasefire to us,” a Taliban commander in Helmand, a southern province that has

seen some of the fiercest fighting.

Commanders in Paktika and Nangarhar - two other provinces regarded as strongholds for the Taliban - also said they would continue their attacks as planned.

On Sunday night, Taliban fighters attacked Afghan government forces manning a checkpoint in the northern province of Kunduz. According to a statement by Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid, they killed 19 security personnel.

The Afghan defense ministry confirmed the attack in a statement but put the death toll at five. It also said retaliatory air strikes were conducted against the militants.

A Taliban spokesman also issued a statement Monday saying an Afghan military helicopter had been shot down in Nimroz province, but an official there said the helicopter made an emergency landing and had not been attacked.

Despite the violence on the ground, a senior Taliban leader in Doha confirmed a deal with the United States is set to be signed by the end of February in a “signing ceremony” in Doha.

(Source: Reuters)

## Russia says U.S. using weapons in space an irreversible blow to security: RIA

Russia said that plans by the United States to deploy weapons in space would deal an irreversible blow to the current security balance in space, the RIA news agency cited the foreign ministry as saying.

Russia does not have plans to solve problems in space using weapons, the foreign ministry added.

(Source: RIA)

## Sudan opens airspace to Israeli aircraft

Sudan is said to have opened its airspace to Israeli aircraft for the first time, with a private Israeli jet using Sudanese airspace to travel from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Tel Aviv, amid warming ties between the African country and the Israeli regime.

“The first Israeli airplane passed yesterday over the skies of Sudan,” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in Jerusalem al-Quds on Sunday.

He said that Israel and Sudan were “discussing rapid normalization.” An Israeli official who spoke on the condition of anonymity said the plane was “a private Israeli executive jet,” not a flight with the Israeli “flag carrier” El Al, according to the Associated Press.

Sudan’s leader, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who heads a ruling council in the country, met with Netanyahu in Uganda earlier this month. That meeting was made public only when the Israeli prime minister took to Twitter to claim that an agreement had been reached with Sudan to “begin cooperation that will lead to the normalization of relations.”

Israel has no formal diplomatic relations with Sudan, where public and government support for the Palestinian cause runs strong. The Khartoum-Tel Aviv relationship has also historically been hostile.

Burhan said back then that his country would now allow Israeli planes — with the exception of those operated by El Al — to fly over its territory.

(Source: AP)

## UAE issues operating license for Arab world’s first nuclear plant

→ 1 The UAE insists its nuclear power programme is transparent, safe and only intended for civilian use.

Qatar is currently under a continuing diplomatic, trade and transport blockade by the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt over allegations that Doha supports «terrorism» and is too close to Iran. Qatar has rejected such claims.

(Source: al Jazeera)

## Secret of Turkish-backed terrorist movements in Idlib

→ 1 In any case, a series of advances by the Syrian forces in various parts of Idlib has made it less possible for media outlets to introduce Turkey as the winner of the developments in Syria, particularly Idlib. Today, whatever is presented by the various Arab and Western media reveals the failure of Turkish policies in Syria, which is obvious to everyone.

The violation of the sovereignty of Syrian as an independent state has made Turkey no longer trustworthy. In the accords on Syria, such as the Sochi agreement, a safe zone was supposed to be created in Idlib, but Turkey did not value the agreement at all in the past.

# Syrian forces consolidate control of Aleppo

→ 1 “There is very rapid advance by the [Syrian] regime in this area,” a London-based war monitor said.

The official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) also said Syrian soldiers had established full control over all areas surrounding Aleppo’s provincial capital of the same name for the first time since 2012. The conquests drove away members of the notorious Takfiri terrorist group of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, formerly known as al-Nusra Front or al-Qaeda’s Syria offshoot.

In all, the army liberated 23 villages to the west and north of Aleppo, from where the terrorists shelled Aleppo, the country’s second-largest city.

Aleppo’s residents took to the streets afterwards in celebration, waving the national flag and honking the horns of their cars.

Prior to the headway, the Syrian military had liberated the M5 Highway between Aleppo and Damascus, the fastest route linking the two cities.

The gains have coincided with similar advances in the neighboring province of Idlib. The province hosts the largest remaining concentration of militants and Takfiri terrorists in the Arab country since foreign-backed militancy began in Syria in 2011.



Turkey, however, has been uneasy with Syria’s progress in Idlib, claiming that the Syrian offensive there killed 13 of its troops this month. It has threatened to attack the Syrian military unless government forces abandoned the liberated areas, and asked Moscow to “stop” Damascus. Ankara has also made unverified claims that it has

killed dozens of Syrian soldiers in one alleged retaliatory strike.

At one point, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan even threatened to end its involvement in a peace process for Syria.

Turkey has 12 observation posts in Idlib, set up as part of an Iran-brokered agreement with Russia to de-escalate the

situation near the Turkish border. Some of the posts, however, now lie in the territory that has been recaptured in joint Russo-Syrian efforts.

President Bashar al-Assad has said his country is determined to liberate all Syrian land.

Meanwhile, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said during a briefing at the Munich Security Conference that Turkish and Russian officials would discuss Ankara’s complaints about the Syrian advances in Moscow on Monday. Cavusoglu also said he had met with some U.S. lawmakers at the Munich conference and called for Washington’s support.

Also on Sunday, the White House said U.S. President Donald Trump had called Erdogan, conveying Washington’s “desire to see an end to Russia’s support” for Syria.

Turkey has so far sent thousands of troops and many convoys of military equipment to reinforce its presence in northwestern Syria.

Over the past four years, the Turkish military has staged at least two unauthorized incursions into northern Syria. And the U.S., too, has been leading a number of its allies in establishing an unlawful military presence in the Arab country since 2014.

(source: agencies)

## EU presses Austria to lift veto on Libya sea patrols

EU plans to resume maritime patrols in the Mediterranean faced more delays Monday as foreign ministers struggled to convince Austria to lift its objections in a blow to efforts to uphold a UN arms embargo on Libya.

The EU’s foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell hoped that Monday’s meeting of foreign ministers would agree to revive the EU’s military mission, which stopped deploying ships last March after Italy said it would no longer take in migrants rescued at sea.

“I do not think today we are going to be able to (reach a final decision),” Borrell told reporters.

Italy is ready to restart the sea patrols, its vice foreign minister said last week, but diplomats said Austria was still blocking, based on its position that people rescued on the

high seas should not be taken to Europe.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas urged the EU to agree on a mission, a day after a senior UN official warned that the arms embargo aimed at curbing fighting in Libya was meaningless because there is no one to enforce it.

“It’s about the security of Europe,” Maas said.

On Sunday, Borrell criticized Vienna, although he did not mention Austria by name, saying it was unacceptable that a country with no navy could hold up an EU sea mission.

Borrell needs the backing of all 27 governments to proceed, provoking frustration among ministers.

“I cannot understand that a country like Austria at the end of the day says ‘no’. We have a European responsibility,” Luxembourg’s Jean Asselborn said.

## U.S. openly paves way for INF-banned missiles to be placed in Europe & Asia: Lavrov



Just out of a milestone nuclear missile accord, the U.S. is about to deploy short- and intermediate-range missiles in Europe and Asia, prompting Moscow to engage France and other partners to preserve security on the continent.

“In order to agree on specific solutions, we need multilateral talks and multilateral consultations involving, of course, the United States, who destroyed the treaty,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Monday, referring to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

This pact saw Washington and Moscow eliminate entire classes of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and missile launchers capable of carrying nukes back in the 1980s.

Japan, South Korea and some “Pacific islands” are the likeliest locations for these deployments, Lavrov noted.

Meanwhile, the minister, who unexpectedly met with his American counterpart Mike Pompeo at the Munich Security Conference, said he felt “certain shifts” in

how the U.S. approaches arms control now.

“We discussed a number of issues relating to the whole range of problems that are on the agenda of our strategic dialogue, including those that are within the competence of the five permanent members [of the UN Security Council], and those relating to arms control issues,” he revealed.

Lavrov and Pompeo have agreed “to continue pointed professional conversation on it.” But until U.S.-Russia relations thaw, Moscow will reach out to other partners in Europe concerned about the fate of the INF.

“Of course, we will talk about this with the French,” the foreign minister added. France seems to be particularly responsive to Russia’s concerns. This month, President Emmanuel Macron insisted the Europeans cannot sit idle as they “could rapidly face a new race for conventional weapons, even nuclear weapons, on their own soil.”

(Source: RT)

## Russia will support Syria’s fight against terrorism in Idlib despite Trump’s calls to stop it: Kremlin



Moscow has vowed to continue its fight against terrorism in Syria’s Idlib province alongside Damascus, even though this doesn’t fit with Washington’s vision for resolving the crisis.

Both the Russian Armed Forces and the country’s advisers will “support the Syrian Arab Republic armed forces in their fight against terrorism,” Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said in a briefing on February 17.

Referring to escalating terrorist attacks in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib, he said that the Russian government “still regrets that these terrorists have revitalized in Idlib.”

The statement follows U.S. President Donald Trump’s recent call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during which Trump “expressed concern over the violence in Idlib.” He also praised “Turkey’s efforts to prevent a humanitarian crisis” in the province, and hoped that Russia would stop supporting the Assad government,

according to Deputy White House Press Secretary Judd Deere.

Tensions in the Idlib de-escalation zone have been steadily rising in recent weeks. On February 3, a Turkish armed convoy came under artillery fire, leaving five dead as a result. The tragedy occurred when the Syrian Army was conducting an operation against terrorists in the area, and was not notified of the convoy’s movements, according to the Russian Defense Ministry.

Ankara retaliated, firing on known Syrian Army positions, and sending additional troops into the de-escalation zone 10 days later. In response to the troop surge, Damascus officially recognized the Armenian genocide by the Ottoman Empire.

Erdogan and Russia’s President Vladimir Putin also discussed the situation on the ground in a phonecall last week. The two leaders agreed that the Sochi agreement on the Idlib de-escalation zone must be fully implemented.

(Source: RT)

## India summons Turkish envoy over Erdogan’s remarks on Kashmir

India summoned the Turkish ambassador on Monday to lodge a diplomatic protest over President Tayyip Erdogan’s remarks on the disputed region of Kashmir and warned it would have a bearing on bilateral ties.

During a visit to Pakistan last week, Erdogan said the situation in Indian Kashmir was worsening because of sweeping changes New Delhi introduced in the Muslim-majority territory and that Turkey stood in solidarity with the people of Kashmir.

India, which considers all of Kashmir an integral part of the country, told Turkish envoy Sakir Ozkan Torunlar that Erdogan’s comments lacked any understanding of the history of the Kashmir dispute, the Indian foreign ministry said.

“This recent episode is but one more example of a pattern of Turkey interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. India finds that completely unacceptable,” foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said.

He said that India had served a strong demarche, or formal diplomatic note.



India withdrew Kashmir’s autonomy in August and brought it under federal rule as a way to integrate the territory fully into India and quell a 30-year revolt. Pakistan, which controls a part of Kashmir, slammed the measure, and other Muslim-majority countries such as

Turkey and Malaysia joined in calls for India to reconsider its actions.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s administration has put curbs on palm oil imports from Malaysia in retaliation and officials have said it is planning to cut some imports from Turkey as well.

India blames Pakistan for stoking the revolt in the territory in which tens of thousands of people have been killed. It accused Turkey of trying to justify its arch foe’s use of “cross border terrorism.”

“These developments have strong implications for our bilateral relations,” the foreign ministry spokesman said, referring to Erdogan’s comments.

Pakistan denies direct involvement in the rebellion, but says it provides diplomatic and moral support to the Kashmiri people in their struggle for self determination.

Erdogan told Pakistan’s parliament that the Kashmir problem cannot be solved through pressure but on the basis of justice and fairness.

(Source: Reuters)



# Sharjah match like a final: Yahya Golmohammadi

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Persepolis coach Yahya Golmohammadi says that they need to beat Sharjah to keep their hopes alive at the 2020 AFC Champions League.

Persepolis started the campaign with a 2-0 defeat against Al Duhail of Qatar in Group C last week while the Emirati football team also lost to Saudi Arabia's Al Taawoun 1-0.

Despite dominating the Iran Pro League since 2017 with three consecutive titles, Persepolis' impressive run of back-to-back AFC Champions League semi-finals in 2017 and 2018 gave way to a group-stage exit in the 2019 edition.

"Both teams will come for a win since they have lost their opening matches," Golmohammadi said. "Our players have shown that they can get themselves back on track in the hard situations."

"The match against Sharjah is like a final and we also know that how strong they are. We hope the fans enjoy the match," he added.

"I hope we win the match because Persepolis need three points to stay on course. It's our second away match and it makes situation difficult for us. Under normal condition, Sharjah had to come to Tehran to play Persepolis ahead of our fans but we are here because the AFC has decided to change the match schedule," Golmohammadi stated.

The Persepolis coach also praised Sharjah players Caio Lucas and Ryan Mendes.



"Lucas and Mendes are dangerous players and we have to be careful. Our players

should not give them space because they can create opportunities," he concluded.

The match will be held at the Sharjah Stadium in Sharjah on Tuesday.

## Iran's Shahr Khodro fall short against Uzbek side Pakhtakor

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — An Igor Sergeev brace and a late Sherzod Azamov header helped Pakhtakor brush aside Shahr Khodro FC 3-0 to record their second consecutive win in the 2020 AFC Champions League Group A on Monday.

Shahr Khodro came into their second-ever AFC Champions League game dreaming of collecting their first point or scoring their first goal in the group stage, but at the end of the 90 minutes, they would have neither as the home side added another three points to their haul after having opened their campaign with a 2-1 win over Shabab Al Ahli Dubai last week.

A cagey first half saw few opportunities on either goal, even as Pakhtakor dominated possession and Shahr Khodro sat deep to keep the danger at bay, the-afc.com reported.

Dragan Ceran's misdirected header in the 20th minute and Sergeev's high effort just before the half-time whistle were the closest Pakhtakor came to scoring.

The Uzbek champions started the second half with a bang



and before the first 15 minutes of the second period were over, they had put the game to bed with a quick double-salvo.

Masharipov showed spectacular skill in the 56th minute to dribble past two Shahr Khodro defenders in one go and pulled it back for Sergeev to sweep home the opener for Pakhtakor.

The home crowd at Pakhtakor Stadium had barely finished celebrating the opener when their side delivered again.

Masharipov was again the creative heart of the time, this time he supplied a defence-splitting pass to Dostonbek Khamdamov who, despite being through on goal, showed selflessness and squared for Sergeev to add his second of the night into the empty net in the 59th minute.

As the game looked headed to a close, the hosts added their third of the night.

Once more, it was Masharipov delivering the golden pass. The 26-year-old curled a corner to the near post for Azamov who powered his header into the back of the net to round off the scoring in the 90th minute.

The result means Pakhtakor stayed perfect, while Shahr Khodro remain rooted at the bottom of the group without a point.

The Uzbek side travel to Riyadh to face Al Hilal SFC on March 7, while the same day sees Shahr Khodro visit Shabab Al Ahli Dubai on Matchday Three.

## Preview MD2 - Group C: Sharjah (UAE) vs Persepolis FC (IRN)

UAE Pro League champions Sharjah host Iran Pro League winners Persepolis as both sides look to bounce back from opening day defeats in Group C of the 2020 AFC Champions League on Tuesday.

Sharjah were beaten 1-0 by Saudi Arabia's Al Taawoun FC last week, while Persepolis' Matchday One trip to Doha saw them concede two early goals to lose 2-0 to Al Duhail SC.

Returning to the competition after 16 years of absence, the Emirati champions hope to get off the mark on Tuesday, having failed to find the back of the net in their first game. In fact, Sharjah had the lowest shooting accuracy of any team on Matchday One, with only one of their seven shots against Al Taawoun hitting the target.

Sharjah's attacking struggles are, perhaps, not surprising; coach Abdulaziz Al Anbari's side have failed to replace Cape Verde striker Ricardo Gomes who was offloaded to Ittihad Kalba in January. Instead, they opted to add more width with the signing of former Kashima Antlers and Al Ain winger Caio Lucas.

Despite dominating the Iran Pro League since 2017 with three consecutive titles,



Persepolis' impressive run of back-to-back AFC Champions League semi-finals in 2017 and 2018 gave way to a group-stage exit in the 2019 edition.

Over the past 12 months, the Tehran giants replaced coach Branko Ivankovic with Gabriel Calderon, but the Argentine's reign lasted just five months before he stepped down. In came former club icon Yahya Golmohammadi with the stated objective of bouncing back to compete in the advanced stages of the AFC Champions League.

Sharjah FC (UAE) v Persepolis FC (IRN)  
Venue: Sharjah Stadium, Sharjah  
Kick-off: February 18, 19:35 UTC+4  
(Source: the-afc)

## Preview MD2 - Group D: Al Sadd SC (QAT) vs Sepahan FC (IRN)

Qatar's Al Sadd SC will aim to get the first win of their 2020 AFC Champions League campaign when they host Islamic Republic of Iran's Sepahan FC on Matchday Two of Group D on Tuesday.

The 2011 AFC Champions League winners came away from Riyadh with a 2-2 draw against Al Nassr on Matchday One, while Sepahan stunned Al Ain 4-0 in their opening match.

Last week, Al Sadd showed resilience to come back from a goal down inside the first seven minutes to snatch a 2-2 draw from a difficult Al Nassr side, with Hassan Al Haydos scoring early in the second half after an own goal had helped the Qataris equalise.

Since becoming the first Qatari side to win the AFC Champions League in 2011, Al Sadd reached the semi-finals twice - in the last two editions. For coach Xavi, the 2020 campaign might finally be the year they go all the way to the final, but for now the next challenge is to overcome the high-flying visitors.

For Sepahan, Tuesday's encounter offers an opportunity to cement their early lead in the group and put themselves in a comfortable position, knowing they play



their last two games of the group stage on home soil.

The Isfahan-based side might not boast the history or the popularity of Esteghlal and Persepolis, but Sepahan are in fact IR Iran's most successful side in the AFC Champions League, having appeared in the competition 11 times, reaching the final in 2007 - the first Iranian side to achieve this feat, which has since been replicated by Zobahan in 2010 and Persepolis in 2018.

Al Sadd SC (QAT) v Sepahan FC (IRN)  
Venue: Jassim bin Hamad Stadium, Doha  
Kick-off: February 18, 18:35 UTC+3  
(Source: the-afc)

## ACL 2020: Esteghlal suffer defeat against Al Ahli

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Esteghlal football team of Iran lost to Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia 2-1 in Group A of the AFC Champions League on Monday.

In the match held at the Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium in Kuwait City, Al Ahli forward Mazen Abu Sharah was brought down by Esteghlal goalkeeper Hossein Hosseini in the area and Salman Muwashar converted the penalty with a right footed shot to the bottom right corner in the 17th minute.

Five minutes later, Esteghlal striker Amir Arsalan Motahari equalized the match. Muwashar was on target once again in the 29th minute after receiving the ball from Abdulrahman Ghareeb.

Esteghlal could have equalized the match in the 41st minute but Vouria Ghafouri failed to score his penalty.

Esteghlal were dominant in the second half but their strikers lacked a cutting edge in attack.

Earlier on the day, Al Wahda of the UAE defeated Al Shorta 1-0.

Al Ahli and Al Wahda sit top of the table with four points, and Esteghlal and Al Shorta are third and fourth with one point.

Esteghlal will travel to Abu Dhabi on March 2 to meet Al Wahda at the Al Nahyan Stadium, while Al Ahli host Al Shorta of Iraq in Jeddah.

## 'United by Emotion': Tokyo 2020 unveils Games motto

Tokyo 2020 organizers on Monday rolled out the motto for this year's Olympics, "United by Emotion", which they said reflected the "universal values" and "unifying power of sport".

"Crowds of spectators who do not know each other prior to the Games will come together and learn that there is more that unites them than divides them," Tokyo 2020 said as it unveiled the motto.

The official Olympic motto is "Citius, Altius, Fortius" or "Faster, Higher, Stronger", but each host city chooses its own motto to accompany that edition of the Games.

London's motto in 2012 was "Inspire a Generation", whereas Athens in 2004 went for "Welcome Home" -- a nod to the birthplace of the Games in Olympia.

Less well-received was Sochi, which plumped for "Hot. Cool. Yours", sparking derision in some quarters.

Tokyo said the motto would be beamed onto the Skytree tower in the Japanese capital to raise awareness as it will be seen for miles around.

The opening ceremony will be on July 24 and organizers have stressed there is no discussion about changing this date despite the coronavirus crisis hitting global transport.

Tokyo 2020 roll-outs have not always been smooth. In September 2015, the Games logo was ditched after accusations of plagiarism.

Designer Olivier Debie said the design was stolen from his logo for a Belgian theatre and threatened court action before officials withdrew the emblem, saying it "no longer has public support".  
(Source: AFP)

## Iranian Greco-Roman team to compete in Asian championships

**TASNIM** — Iran Greco-Roman Wrestling team arrived in India Sunday morning to take part at the Asian Wrestling Championships.

The competitions will be played at the KD Jadhav Indoor Hall at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in New Delhi from February 18 to 23.

The governing body of the sport, the United World Wrestling, has announced that this edition will be considered to determine rankings for the 2020 Olympic Games.

Iran has sent 10 wrestlers to the competition.  
55kg: Pouya Nasserpour  
60kg: Mehdi Mohsennejhad  
63kg: Meysam Delkhani  
67kg: Hossein Asadi  
72kg: Amin Kavianinejad  
77kg: Pejman Poshtam  
82kg: Mehdi Ebrahimi  
87kg: Behrouz Hedayat  
97kg: Mohammad Hadi Saravi  
130kg: Amin Mirzadeh  
The team is headed by Mohammad Bana.

## Uzbek referee Asimov Chosen to officiate Al Sadd v sepahan

**TASNIM** — Uzbekistani referee Aziz Asimov will officiate the match between Al Sadd of Qatar and Iran's Sepahan.

The Qatari giant will host Iran's Sepahan at the Jassim bin Hamad Stadium in Doha, Qatar in Group D of the AFC Champions League.

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

Asimov officiated the match between Al Duhail and Persepolis in Group C last week, where the Iranian team lost to its Qatari opponent 2-0.

Also, Australian referee Christopher James Beath has been chosen to officiate the match between Sharjah of the UAE and Iran's Persepolis.

The 35-year-old referee will be assisted by his countrymen Anton Shchetinin and Ashley Beecham.

UAE Pro League champion Sharjah will host the Iran Pro League winner in Group C of the 2020 AFC Champions League on Tuesday at the Sharjah Stadium in Sharjah on Tuesday.

Beath was added to the FIFA International Referees List in 2011.

## Iran's female runner ranks 1st in Istanbul Cup

**IRNA** — Iranian runner Farzaneh Fasihi ranked first in 60-meter indoor competition in Istanbul Cup.

In her competition with Kazakh rival, Fasihi could register 7.25 second record and stood on the first place.

She had earlier registered 7.29 record in Belgrade competitions.

She is now the best athlete in the premier league and has joined Belgrade's Partizan Club.

## Munich air crash hero and goalkeeping great Gregg dies

Harry Gregg -- hailed as a hero for saving lives in the air crash which killed eight of Manchester United's "Busby Babes" in Munich -- has died at the age of 87.

Gregg, who was United's goalkeeper, rescued a mother and her baby daughter, team-mates Bobby Charlton and Jackie Blanchflower and manager Matt Busby from the wreckage of the plane on February 6, 1958.

He was back playing for Manchester United just 13 days later against Sheffield Wednesday.

Gregg became the world's most expensive goalkeeper when he joined United in December 1957 for £23,500 and went on to be voted the best at the following year's World Cup in Sweden.

He was capped 25 times by Northern Ireland and played 247 times for United from 1957-66.

"It is with great sorrow that we inform of the death of Manchester United and Northern Ireland legend Harry Gregg, OBE," the Harry Gregg Foundation announced on its Facebook page Monday.

"Harry passed away peacefully in hospital surrounded by his loving family. The Gregg family would like to thank the medical staff at Causeway Hospital for their wonderful dedication to Harry over his last few weeks.



"To everyone who has called, visited or sent well wishes we thank you for the love and respect shown to Harry and the family." Charlton, who is the last survivor from the United group, paid a handsome tribute.

"He will always be remembered as a heroic figure," said Charlton. "A shining light both on and off the pitch."

United posted a tribute on their website. "It is with deepest sadness that we have learned of the passing of former player Harry Gregg OBE," said the club. Legendary United manager Alex Ferguson, who remarked

in the past Gregg was his hero, said he was deeply saddened.

"Harry was a man of great character and a true legend at our club," said Ferguson.

"I loved his company and the many pieces of advice he gave me."

■ **'It was about goodness'**  
Gregg was humble about his bravery in Munich.

"I would be telling lies if I said that I thought about it all the time. In fact I would go insane," he said in 2018 before a service marking 60 years since the disaster.

"I know the media would like to talk about what happened on a runway. I don't blame people for that, but if all I was ever part of, or all I ever achieved was to do with what happened in Germany, in Munich, if that was what my life was all about, it didn't come to very much."

It was left to others such as fellow Northern Ireland great George Best -- who cleaned Gregg's boots -- to sum up his courage.

"Bravery is one thing but what Harry did was about more than bravery," Best wrote in the foreword to Gregg's autobiography in 2002. "It was about goodness."

Carlisle, one of four clubs he managed after he hung up his boots in 1967, also tweeted a tribute.

(Source: AFP)



INTERNATIONAL DAILY  
www.tehrantimes.com

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

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



Tehrantimes79



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



## GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Indigence is a distress, and worse than that is illness and worse than illness is weakness and gloom of the heart.

Imam Ali (AS)

## Iran to host Italian film program

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A lineup of seven Italian movies will be reviewed during a weeklong program to be held in three Iranian cities from February 20 to 26.

The festival entitled “Spotlight on Italian Cinema” will be organized by Iran’s Art and Experience Cinema and the Italian Embassy in Tehran at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran, Golestan Cineplex in Shiraz and Labkhand Cinema on Kish Island.



A poster for “Spotlight on Italian Cinema”

“Equilibrium” by Vincenzo Marra, “The Path of Oil” by Bernardo Bertolucci, “My Mother” by Nanni Moretti and “Martin Eden” by Pietro Marcello are among the films selected to screen during the program.

The lineup also includes “Where the Shadows Fall” by Valentina Pedicini, “Intrepid: A Lonely Hero” by Gianni Amelio and “Happy as Lazzaro” by Alice Rohrwacher.

Italian filmmaker Vincenzo Marra and producer Sergio Toffetti are scheduled to attend the program.

Review sessions and filmmaking workshops by cinema experts will also be organized on the sidelines of the festival.

## Iranian artist Matak wins Illustrators of the Future Contest award

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** —Iranian illustrator Mohamad-Hossein (Mason) Matak has been selected as one of the 12 winners of the Illustrators of the Future Contest in the U.S. city of Los Angeles, the organizers announced last week.

Matak has been selected for his illustrations for the book “Machucheh and Crow” written by Iranian writer Afsaneh Shaban-nejad.

The winners will illustrate the twelve winning stories of the Writers of the Future Contest, which will be published in the 36 edition of the Writers and Illustrators of the Future Anthology.

The competition is organized by the Writers of the Future writing contest, which was initiated by L. Ron Hubbard, an American author of science fiction and fantasy stories, in 1984 to provide “a means for new and budding writers to have a chance for their creative efforts to be seen and acknowledged.”

Illustrators from over 170 countries entered the contest, which aims at introducing aspiring artists of science fiction and fantasy.

The award ceremony will be held in Los Angeles on April 3.

## “Driving Lessons” to go on screen at U.S. Best of Fests

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Marzieh Riahi’s acclaimed short movie “Driving Lessons” will go on screen at the 2nd edition of the Best of Fests of the North Texas Film Festivals in the U.S. city of Dallas.

The film tells the story of Bahareh, a young woman who, according to Iranian law, must have a man from among her relatives accompany her on driving lessons so she and her male instructor won’t be alone.

Over 35 award-winning feature and short films from 18 festivals will be competing during the event, which will be held from February 27 to March 1.



A scene from “Driving Lessons” by Iranian director Marzieh Riahi.

# HUM Network to honor Iranian filmmaker Narges Abyar with Women Leaders Award

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Narges Abyar, the director of acclaimed movies such as “Track 143”, “Breath” and “When the Moon Was Full”, will receive the HUM Women Leaders Award in a ceremony at the Governor’s House in the Pakistani city of Karachi today.

The HUM Women Leaders Award is presented to female achievers from Pakistan and abroad by the HUM Network Limited, a global entertainment and news network and one of the largest broadcasting brands with a strong following among South Asia diaspora around the world.

Social activist Fouzia Saeed, Seemin Jamali from the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, and human rights attorney and political activist Jalila Haider are the national recipients of the awards.

Abyar is one of Iran’s book writers of the past two decades who began making films based on the heroines of her books.

Her recent films have won a great number of national and international awards.

The HUM Women Leaders Award aims to recognize and honor the contributions and achievements of iconic women from Pakistan and around the world who are change-makers in their respective fields and act a symbol and source of hope, courage, determination and inspiration for women across the globe.

These iconic women are mentors and role models for girls who aspire to be achievers.

President of Pakistan Arif Alvi is expected to attend the award ceremony.



Iranian filmmaker Narges Abyar.

## “The Servant” director Farnsuh Abedi making animation on man’s hostility to Earth



A scene from “Spraying Herbicide” by Iranian animator Farnsuh Abedi.

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Farnush Abedi, the director of the acclaimed animated movie “The Servant”, is doing her new project on man’s hostile attitude towards the Earth.

The Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) is the producer of the animation entitled “Spraying Herbicide”, the institute announced on Monday.

The story of the movie is set in an unknown land, where a group of soldiers is on a mission to destroy all types of growing plants.

One of the soldiers realizes that the plants are not only safe but also useful. Therefore, despite his mission, he tries

to preserve one of the plants.

“Due to recent changes in the environment, the hostility of human beings with the Earth, global warming, the gradual erosion of the Earth, and a desperate struggle to save the future, it seems the greatest threat in the course of history is happening for man,” Abedi said.

“The animation is a symbolic look at this great threat, which can turn into a global issue,” she added.

Abedi’s “The Servant” won awards at several international events, including the Atlanta Horror Film Festival and the College Competition of the Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival in 2017.



Banners for the 12th Fajr Festival of Visual Arts hang from the Saba Art and Cultural Institute building in Tehran on February 17, 2020.

## Banksy plays with violence and innocence in Valentine’s Day graffiti

**LONDON (Reuters)** — British street artist Banksy is thought to have given a Valentine’s Day gift to his home town of Bristol in western England with the appearance of a new mural showing a small girl with a catapult and a splatter of red flowers.

Banksy - whose identity is not publicly known - has not confirmed that the artwork is his. He often uses Instagram to claim ownership of his works but has yet to do so this time. His agent did not respond to Reuters’ request for confirmation.

The graffiti shows a young girl in a headscarf, stencilled onto the side of a house in the Barton Hill area of Bristol with black and white paint.

She holds a catapult in one hand with the other hand behind her, as though she has just launched a projectile. At the end of the catapult’s trajectory is a bright red shape like a blood splatter, made of red plastic leaves and flowers.

It was spotted on Thursday morning, the day before Valentine’s Day.



Banksy’s street art often draws attention to social issues by adding elements of darkness to otherwise joyful scenes.

In December, the elusive artist highlighted the issue of rough sleeping with a mural showing two flying reindeer pulling a homeless man on a street-bench sleigh, in the central English city of Birmingham.

## IIDCYA to introduce new books by veteran children’s writers Hassanzadeh, Farjam



A poster for an introduction ceremony for the books “A Careless Mouse” and “Birds and the Sky” at the Institute for Intellectual Development Children and Young Adults.

**CULTURE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Institute for Intellectual Development Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) will introduce two new books by veteran children’s writers Farhad Hassanzadeh and Farideh Farjam during a special ceremony today.

Hassanzadeh’s “A Careless Mouse” illustrated by Ali Khodai and Farjam’s “Birds and the Sky” with illustrations by Mohammad-Ali Baniyasi have recently been published by the IIDCYA.

IIDCYA director Fazel Nazari and some children’s literature experts, including Shokuh Hajnasrollah, are scheduled to attend the ceremony.

Farjam is the writer of “The Uninvited Guests”, the first book the IIDCYA published in 1966. Her books “Flower, Glass and the Sun” and “Uncle Noruz” were on IIDCYA’s bestseller list.

Hassanzadeh, a nominee for the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award, is the author of bestsellers “Hasti” and “Call Me Ziba”, which have been translated into several languages.

“Call Me Ziba” was added to the Honor List of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) in 2018.

His “An Umbrella with White Butterflies” illustrated by Ghazaleh Bigdelu was nominated for the illustration section of the IBBY 2019 Honor List.

## 12th Fajr Festival of Visual Arts to open today

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The 12th Fajr Festival of Visual Arts will open today during a special ceremony at the Saba Art and Cultural Institute in Tehran.

A selection of 900 works will be put on view in different sections of painting, photo, sculpture, calligraphy, miniature, illustration, cartoon, graphic design and new media, the organizers announced on Monday.

Almost 450 works by about 340 artists will be competing for the Golden Tooba at the festival. For the first time, the

artworks will be offered for sale.

“Chaharsu-e Honar”, a new section dedicated to displaying works from galleries in Tehran and other cities, will also offer the artworks for sale.

Charkhaneh is the other section of the festival, which discusses the art of photography in other provinces.

The festival will be running until February 24 at the institute located on Mozaffar St., near the intersection of Taleqani and Vali-e Asr Ave.

## “Parasite” director Bong Joon-ho gets hero’s welcome in South Korea

**INCHEON (Reuters)** — “Parasite” director Bong Joon-ho was greeted with cheers and applause as he returned to South Korea on Sunday after his historic four-Oscar win.

About 300 reporters and fans were waiting to greet Bong as he arrived at the Incheon International Airport.

“Thank you for the applause, I would like send a round of applause back to you all for coping so well with the coronavirus,” Bong said.

“I will join the effort to overcome the corona by washing my hands diligently. Happy to be home.”

“Parasite” became the first foreign-language film to win best picture in the 92-year history of the Academy Awards on Feb 9.

It won a total of four Oscars, including best director and original screenplay for Bong Joon-ho and best international feature film.

The film is a tale of two South Korean families - the wealthy Parks and the poor Kims - that mirrors the deepening disparities in Asia’s fourth-largest economy and has struck a chord with global audiences.

Koreans have been celebrating for the



Director of four Oscar award-winning film “Parasite” Bong Joon-ho poses for photographs upon his arrival at Incheon International Airport in Incheon, South Korea, February 16, 2020. (Reuters/Kim Hong-Ji)

past week.

Local cinemas and TV channels began a rerun of the film, as well as showing Bong’s other films including “Snowpiercer” and “Memories of Murder.”

Bong and the cast of “Parasite” are scheduled to hold a press conference on Wednesday.