

Russia, Turkey, Iran working to agree on date for Syria summit **2**

Tehran slams Washington's 'insane' sanctions **3**

Iraq's anti-terror PMU appoints Abu Fadak as al-Muhandis successor **10**

Naqqali icon Mostafa Saeidi dies at 83 **12**



Another manifestation of democracy

See page 2



EDITORIAL
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Another victory by the Iranian nation: Political authority and spirit

The massive turnout of the people in the polls to elect the representatives for the 11th parliament holds many messages for those who find the power and progress of Islamic Iran distasteful.

For the past three years, the Iranian people have faced the most intense and widespread hostility by the Western-Arab-Zionist axis and have experienced a totally hybrid warfare.

This full-scale warfare is aimed at exerting maximum pressure on the Iranian people and includes various aspects, such as crippling economic sanctions, military-security threats, widespread cognitive warfare in the context of media and social media, creation of chaos and domestic unrest, diplomatic movements, assassination, and so on.

This year's events, which could happen in any country, can also serve as a factor to discourage people from continuing their path of resistance and progress and reduce the social capital of the Islamic Republic in order to the enemies of the Iranian nation obstruct the launch of the second step of the Islamic Revolution.

But, all these intentions practically failed by the massive turnout of the people on the 41st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution last Tuesday and in processions to honor the martyrs of the resistance movement, in particular Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, as well as yesterday's parliamentary elections.

This burdensome defeat of the enemies of Islamic Iran is even worse as they have always made mistake in their calculations about the Iranian nation and have no accurate estimation of the extent of the people's attachment to this revolution and the system.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, as one of the most democratic political systems in the world, has the most popular support and is therefore not comparable to anywhere in the world. One notable example of this support is how the people attend the 41th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the maximum participation at the ballot box.

This is while, for the past 41 years, the hegemonic system has made every efforts against the Iranian people so that divert and prevent them from their path. The vigilant nation of Iran has repeatedly defeated the foes, which seriously infuriated them.

Celebration of parliamentary elections in Iran

By Nasser Kandil
BEIRUT — Iran after the assassination of Soleimani celebrates the commemoration of the revolution and the preparation for the parliamentary elections.

The consensus around the choice of resistance that Soleimani was asking for has been achieved by his martyrdom and has frustrated the external bet on the interior.

The reformist movement faces the dangers of the loss of the parliamentary elections in which it dreamt of a majority.

The nuclear file is not for the negotiation with

Washington, if Europe withdraws, Iran will leave the UN treaty.

The linkage between the ousting of the Americans and the fall of the Deal of the Century needs an Iranian country that can build a resilient economy.

The political diversity is present strongly and the vitality of discussions presents Iran as an example of a 41-year-old vivid revolution.

Introduction

This Friday's Talk will be devoted for one file: Iran which is still living the repercussions of the assassination of the Commander Qassem Soleimani and celebrates the forty-first

commemoration of the victory of the Islamic Revolution and is preparing for the parliamentary elections at the end of this month. My visit to Tehran has allowed me to meet a number of senior officials, to discuss many issues, ideas, hypotheses with a number of elites, intellectuals, and journalists, and to listen to some examples deprived from analyzing the trends of the public opinion and the points of view of its classes regarding many titles. So this pushed me to share these impressions, conclusions, and readings with the widest number of readers and followers. **→7**

Afghan banks to open branches in Iran's Chabahar port

TEHRAN — Iran has approved two Afghan banks to open branches in its southeastern strategic port of Chabahar, ILNA reported quoting the Secretary General of Iran-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce Mozafar Alikhani.

"Due to the strategic nature of the Chabahar port and being exempted from the U.S. sanctions, Iran has allowed two Afghan banks to establish branches in the port so that the two countries' businessmen could be able to use their facilities and services," Alikhani said.

There are strong economic ties between the

two countries in terms of cultural, linguistic and historical commonalities, and many of Afghan traders are familiar with the patterns of trade and consumption in Iran, he said. "Iran currently supplies about 35 percent of Afghanistan's total imports, apart from the technical-engineering, and educational services," Alikhani added.

Mentioning the banking relations between the two countries, the official said: "The Central Bank of Afghanistan had earlier canceled Aryan Bank's license for activity in that country, but the bank has been re-licensed and is preparing

to start operations in the near future."

The neighbor Afghanistan is a major export destination of Iranian products, and as Iran is seriously pursuing the objective of boosting non-oil exports to its neighbors, making the exporters acquainted with this country's markets is an agenda.

As reported by IRNA, the 8th Iran Trade Fair, which was held in Kabul from Tuesday until Friday, was warmly welcomed by the Afghan consumers.

According to Iran's Commercial Attaché to Afghanistan Javanmard Qasab, the two countries' trade exchanges currently stands at \$3 billion.

Yemeni forces hit Aramco oil facilities in western Saudi Arabia: Saree

PRESS TV — Yemeni armed forces have pounded facilities belonging to the state-run oil giant Saudi Aramco as well as strategic targets inside the kingdom's western province of Madinah, a high-ranking Yemeni military official says.

The spokesman for Yemeni armed forces, Brigadier General Yahya Saree, said in a press conference in the capital Sana'a that Yemeni missile operators

together with air defense units launched an operation, dubbed 'The Third Balance of Deterrence Operation', on Friday and struck energy facilities in addition to sensitive sites in the Saudi port city of Yanbu, situated about 165 kilometers west of Medina. Saree further noted that Yemeni forces used a squadron of 12 Samad-3 (Invincible-3) combat drones as well as a volley of winged and long-range

ballistic missiles to strike the important targets.

He went on to say that Yemeni armed forces reserve the right to respond to crimes being perpetrated by the Saudi-led military alliance against the Yemeni nation — the last of which took place on February 15 when more than 30 civilians were killed and many more sustained injuries in airstrikes on Yemen's northern province of Jawf. **→10**



© ISNA / Erfan Khoshkhou

Fajr Music Festival ends with "Under Siege" in memory of Martyr Soleimani

TEHRAN — The 35th edition of the Fajr Music Festival wrapped up on Thursday night at Tehran's Vahdat Hall with a performance of "Under Siege" by the Tehran Symphonic Orchestra in commemoration of Martyr Qassem Soleimani.

The commemoration of the IRGC Quds Force commander, who was assassinated in a U.S. air raid in Baghdad on January 3, went on with screening a music video from vocalist Mohammad Motamedi. **→12**

PERSPECTIVE
Hanif Ghaffari
 Political analyst

Continuous presence under the banner of NATO: A new American trick for survival

Since the passage of the resolution on the expulsion of foreign troops by the Iraqi parliament, the U.S. has strongly reacted in political, social and security aspects and is trying to avoid any form of enforcement.

In this regard, the Americans initially claimed that the resolution was not legal and was only voted by Shiite groups to bring it into question, a plot that was foiled.

The Americans continued by provoking Iraqi Sunni and Kurdish leaders to state that the security of Iraqi Kurd and Sunni civilians would be endangered if U.S. troops were to withdraw. Unfortunately, some political figures accompanied the U.S. in carrying out this plan.

On the other hand, the Americans have been suggesting the possibility of Iraq's partition and ISIS's resurgence as a result of the withdrawal of U.S. troops in social media to prevent people from backing the resolution. It is a psychological operation which is widely being carried out by Etidal's management.

The Americans have also twisted and misinterpreted the remarks by the Iraqi religious authority regarding the need to address key issues after the early election and the formation of a new government. They also tried to portray that the religious authority is not agree with U.S. troops' withdrawal from Iraq.

The important point about U.S. efforts for staying in Iraq can be seen in the recent NATO meeting on February 12 and 13. During the meeting, it was seriously discussed that the U.S. presence should be placed under the banner of NATO, that is the U.S. will be practically keep its troops and equipment in Iraq under the pretext of training the Iraq army and combating terrorism on behalf of NATO.

The Americans are now fully consulting with Iraqi officials and groups to state the presence of NATO instead of the United States'. Thwarting this plot naturally requires the vigilance of Iraqi officials and nation.

In this connection, Iraq's National Wisdom Movement, led by Ammar al-Hakim, has announced the first day of Rajab (February 25) as a deadline for mass demonstrations against the continued presence of U.S. troops. Anti-U.S. protests are expected to be continued if Americans insist on their presence in Iraq.

Russia, Turkey, Iran working to agree on date for Syria summit

(Sputnik) — Turkish, Russian and Iranian representatives are working on coordinating the date for a trilateral summit on the Syrian settlement process, a source in the Turkish Foreign Ministry informed TASS on Thursday.

"The parties are working to agree on the date for the summit. As soon as an agreement between the three countries is reached, the date of the summit will be announced to the public," the Turkish Foreign Ministry stressed.

Russian Presidential Envoy for the Middle East and Africa and Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov earlier told TASS that a trilateral Russian-Iranian-Turkish summit could be held in Tehran in early March, if the Turkish leadership agreed.

The previous, the fifth in a row, trilateral meeting between the presidents of the countries acting as guarantors of the Astana process to promote a peaceful settlement in Syria took place in Ankara in September 2019. The three countries also maintain contacts as part of the high-level meetings on Syria in Nur-Sultan (the new name of Astana). The last such meeting was held on December 10-11, 2019.

'Sanctions on Guardian Council members is an honor'

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Guardian Council is honored that its members are being sanctioned by the United States, a member of the council said on Friday. "This action of the United States is a medal of honor for members of the Guardian Council and I congratulate them," ISNA quoted Hadi Tahaan as saying in a televised interview.

The U.S. imposed sanctions on five senior members of Iran's Guardian Council on Thursday. Washington took the action one day before the parliamentary elections in Iran.

Tahaan said, "The United States could not hide its hatred even one day before the elections, which is Iranians' national feast, and imposed ineffective sanctions."

Article 99 of the constitution states that the Guardian Council "is responsible for supervising the elections of the Experts Assembly, the President of the Republic, the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and referrals to the public vote and referendum."

The sanctions have been ridiculed by the council's secretary Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, who was among the sanctioned members.

"We can't go to the U.S. for Christmas celebrations any longer," Ayatollah Jannati said on Friday, according to Press TV.

Six Iranian-Armenians among parliamentary candidates

YEREVAN (ARMENPRESS) — Iranians headed on Friday to polling stations to elect a new parliament.

The Iranian parliament, known as the Majlis, is a 290-seat unicameral legislature, with 5 seats envisaged for religious minorities.



Iranian-Armenian lawmaker of the Majlis Karen Khanlaryan told ARMENPRESS that the competition in the election is rather big, with an average of 50 candidates running for a single seat.

In addition to political parties, independents also ran in the election.

Khanlaryan himself did not seek re-election. The Armenian community of Iran has two seats in the parliament. One seat is for the Iranian-Armenians from southern Iran, and the other for the north.

Khanlaryan said 4 Armenian candidates were running for parliament in the northern part — Ara Shahverdyan, Albert Poghosyan, Aris Shahbazyan and Sevan Sohrayi. Two candidates — Robert Beglaryan and Emin Hovsep — were competing to represent the Armenians of Iran's south.

The Iranian-Armenian candidates campaigned during this period and presented their messages to voters: preservation of community organizations, protection of rights, resolving the community's issues and recognition of Armenian Genocide, etc.

The number of eligible voters in Iran is nearly 58,000,000.

Friday prayers leader calls for more unity among new parliament members

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Ahmad Khatami, the provisional Friday prayers leader of Tehran, called on those who will be elected for the next parliament to become more united to keep the people's rights and interests.

Ayatollah Khatami said, "I advice the constituencies' elites nationwide to hold a unity conference after the Majlis elections and embark on inviting the newly-elected lawmakers to pact a unity agreement hand in hand."

Another manifestation of democracy



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran held parliamentary elections on Friday. Simultaneously, mid-term Assembly of Experts elections were held in five constituencies, including Tehran province.

Voting for elections officially began at 8:00 a.m. and was to last until 6:00 p.m. However, the Interior Ministry extended election hours.

Elections were held in 208 constituencies for a 290-seat parliament. Nearly 58 million Iranians, out of a population of more than 80 million, were qualified to vote.

All people above 18 could vote. Over 2.9 million were first-time voters.

Vote counting started immediately after polling stations were closed.

Leader calls election a "national celebration"

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who cast his vote immediately after the polling stations opened, described the election as a "national celebration".

The Leader, whose remarks were broadcast live on national TV, said, "Firstly, election day is a national celebration and I congratulate this celebration to all dear countrymen across the country. Secondly, it is the day of the materialization of the civil rights of the nation.... Thirdly, this is a religious duty."

Ayatollah Khamenei also called on all those interested in the country's "national interests" to vote.

"The fact is that elections guarantee the country's national interests (and) anybody who is interested in the country's national interests should vote."

Judiciary chief says election is "the best anti-dote against plots"

Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Raisi said, "Election is the best anti-dote against plots."

The top judge said Iran is being ruled based on the people's "will" and the faithful people are the main elements of power.

Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi said people have "always played their role in the best way possible."

Alavi said people started voting since the polling stations opened but as the election hours were nearing end the numbers of voters started to increase.

First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri said "we should get the people's message" through elections, "and respect their views."

Larjani says Majlis is manifestation of democracy

Parliament Speaker Ali Larjani who cast his vote in the city of Qom, the city he represents in the sitting parliament, called parliament a manifestation of democracy that has an important status in making decisions.

"Definitely, Majlis is one of the pillars of the decision making of the establishment," Larjani said.

Larjani did not contest the election this time. He has been heading the parliament for three consecutive terms.

Zarif says people won't allow 'a person in Washington' to decide for them

After casting his vote, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said people, despite having complaints, want to decide about their destiny rather than allowing U.S. President Donald Trump to decide for them.

"People will not allow a person in

Washington to decide for them," the foreign minister remarked in an open reference to Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran after pulling the U.S. from the multilateral nuclear agreement and illegally imposing sanctions against Iran.

Zarif had said on Wednesday that participation in election will strengthen diplomacy against the U.S. policies against Iran.

Presidential chief of staff: Strong voter turnout shows national unity

Mahmoud Vaezi, the presidential chief of staff, who cast his vote at the Interior Ministry election headquarters, said a strong voter turnout shows national unity.

In such a sanctions time, he said, massive participation in election will send a message to the countries in the region and beyond that "sanctions and maximum pressure lead to more unity and solidarity between people in the country."

"Strong participation means a stronger and more secure Iran, and an Iran that have not been affected by sanctions," Vaezi said.

Rouhani hopes the most qualified would find a seat in parliament

President Hassan Rouhani expressed hope that the "best" candidates would find a seat in the next parliament.

The president hoped that a "more active and more enthusiastic" parliament would be formed to approve legislations more speedily to better help resolve problems and monitor the performance of other bodies.

The next parliament is being formed through the people's vote, the president said, adding, "Today the Iranian people are forming the country's next Majlis with their

own choice."

The president, who visited the Interior Ministry election headquarters, also said Imam Khomeini always insisted that elections be held on time and since the 1979 Islamic revolution there has been no interruption in holding elections and this is "unprecedented in the history of democracy".

Rouhani also expressed hope that the Interior Ministry would hold presidential and city council elections in 2021 electronically.

People are real winners in elections, Shamkhani says

Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said undoubtedly the people "are the real winners in the elections".

"I hope the next Majlis to do its best to allay the people's concerns," the top security official said.

Interior minister says elections enjoy high security

The interior minister expressed satisfaction over security of the elections across the country.

Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, whose ministry was responsible for holding the elections, underscored that all cities and towns across the country were in full security.

On Wednesday, the intelligence minister had announced that there was no security concern over the Friday elections as the entire relevant bodies had done their best to prevent any possible mishap.

"The entire bodies, involved in restoring security to the elections, have kept it via complete intelligence-security supremacy," Alavi said after a session of the cabinet of ministers.

No major election violation: Guardian Council

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The spokesman for the Guardian Council said on Friday that none of the constituencies across the country reported any major violation of election across the country.

Abbasali Kadkhodaei said, "No major violation of the election law were reported. Some minor cases were settled. We did not face any problem."

The Guardian Council is constitutionally tasked to monitor the elections.

Touching upon the people's percentage of participation, Kadkhodaei said, "I do not have now any idea about comparing the rate of participation, but, according to the reports it has been good. It has not been less than the previous rounds."

Early on Friday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei cast his vote both for the 11th parliamentary

elections and the mid-term election for the Assembly of Experts.

Ayatollah Khamenei cast his vote at the Hussainiyeh of Imam Khomeini in Tehran, where a polling booth -- ballot box 110 -- is located.

Broadcast live on national TV, the Leader described the election as a "national celebration".

Nearly 58 million across the country were eligible to vote. Polling stations opened at 8:00 a.m. Until our closing hour, the election hours were extended until 22:00 by the Interior Ministry.

The Iranian parliament, officially known as the Islamic Consultative Assembly, is a 290-seat legislative body with 207 constituencies. Its members are elected every four years, and former and current members can be re-elected.



There is good solidarity between Dutch, Iranians: Dutch FM

TEHRAN (MNA) — Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands Stef Blok said that there are solidarity and good relations between the people of his country and the Iranians which can be used to develop communications between two countries.

He made the remarks in his meeting with the governor of Isfahan on Friday. "Although the relations between the Iranians and the people of the Netherlands are

affected by international policies, the two countries can increase their economic and tourism relations," said Stef Blok.

"We hope to improve relations with Iran by reduction of tensions in the region," he added.

Dutch FM said, "Iran and the Netherlands are cooperating in various fields, such as the water industry or cycling sport, and their cooperation can be extended to the

agricultural industry as well."

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands Stef Blok arrived in Iran on Friday to hold talks with top Iranian officials.

He is scheduled to hold meetings with President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on bilateral, regional and international issues.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas

Araghchi visited The Hague in November to attend the third round of political talks between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Netherlands. The Iranian diplomat held a meeting with Blok on issues of mutual interest.

Relations between Tehran and Amsterdam have soured in the past few years following the European country's expulsion of two Iranian diplomats in June 2018, and Tehran's reciprocal measure in February 2019.

FATF puts Iran on blacklist

central banker says it won't affect Iran's foreign trade, stability in foreign exchange market

POLITICAL TEHRAN — The Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on Friday placed Iran on its blacklist after Iran refused to comply with the body's requirements.

Opposition to join the FATF grew after the U.S. abrogated the 2015 nuclear deal and imposed the harshest ever sanctions in history against Iran.

According to Reuters, the FATF appeared to leave the door ajar for Iran saying "countries should also be able to apply countermeasures independently of any call by the FATF to do so."

The United States, the Zionist regime and Saudi Arabia had made great efforts to pressure the international body to blacklist Iran.

Abdolnasser Hemmati, Iran's central bank governor, said the move by the FATF will not affect the Iranian foreign trade and stability in foreign exchange market.

"The performance of the central bank over the last year has given this assurance to the people that such events will not create for Iran's foreign trade and the stability of foreign exchange market," Hemmati wrote on his Instagram page.

Hemmati said such "political and unprofessional" behaviors toward Iran has been continuing against Iran since the summer of 2016.

He said the representatives of the U.S. and its allies at the FATF had been trying to undermine expert reports about the great steps taken by Iran in line with the FATF requirements.

Three regimes against FATF's extension of deadline for Iran: Zarif

Hours before the announcement, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif



had said all countries with the exception of three terrorist regimes supported the FATF's extension of the deadline for Iran's accession to the body.

"Almost the vast majority of the speakers who spoke during the meetings of the FATF in the past few days were in favor of extension of deadline for Iran," Mehr quoted Zarif as saying.

"The three countries of the United States, Saudi Arabia and the Israel regime which support terrorism, are against the extension of the deadline," he said.

The FATF said in October 2019 that it has given Iran a final deadline of February 2020 to tighten its laws against money laundering in compliance with the global

watchdog's financial standards.

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

In November 2019, Gholamreza Mesbahi-Moghadam, a cleric member of the Expediency Council trained in economy, said, "In a situation in which the country is under the most severe sanctions, joining such conventions is self-inflicted sanctions. In the situation in which the

United States seeks to limit the country's financial relations, it is not beneficial to join institutions like FATF."

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

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

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

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

Foreign businesses say Iran's compliance with FATF rules is key if Tehran wants to attract investors, especially since Washington withdrew from the nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions on Iran in 2018.

Washington has since pushed a policy of "maximum pressure".

Deputy Chairman of the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Kamal Dehghani said in December that failure to join the FATF will limit Iran's economic interaction with the world.

"Definitely, the Expediency Council has prioritized national interests, because according to experts, joining the convention will solve part of problems we are facing; on the other hand, if we do not join it, our economic interaction with the world will be very limited," Dehghani told ISNA.

Every vote is a slap in enemy's face, says IRGC chief

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has described every vote cast as a "slap in the face of enemy".

"People's turnout in the elections is not only about voting or electing a representative," Major General Salami said on Thursday, Press TV reported.

"Every vote by people is like a slap in the face of the enemy that hopes people would not take part in the elections," Salami remarked.

The general argued that the Iranian nation has always astonished the world with its turnout at the polls, hoping that the same happens in the Friday elections as well.

People would create a beautiful turn of events through their participation in the elections, he said.

Voting for parliamentary elections began across Iran on Friday at 8:00 a.m., with nearly 58 million Iranians, out of a population of more than 80 million, qualified to vote.

Senior officials urged people to vote.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said, "Firstly, election day is a national celebration and I congratulate this celebration to all dear countrymen across the country. Secondly, it is the day of the materialization of the civil rights of the nation.... Thirdly, this is a religious duty."

Ayatollah Khamenei also called on all those interested in the country's "national interests" to vote.



"The fact is that elections guarantee the country's national interests (and) anybody who is interested in the country's national interests should vote."

President Hassan Rouhani expressed hope that the "best" candidates would find a seat in the next parliament.

The president hoped that a "more active and more enthusiastic" parliament would be formed to approve legislations more speedily to better help resolve problems and monitor the performance of other bodies.

The next parliament is being formed through the people's vote, the president said, adding, "Today the Iranian people are forming the country's next Majlis with their own choice."

The president also said Imam Khomeini always insisted that elections be held on time and since the 1979 Islamic revolution there has been no interruption in holding elections and this is "unprecedented in the history of democracy".

Jannati mocks U.S. ban, says 'I cannot go to the U.S. for Christmas anymore'

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Chief of the Guardian Council Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati has made fun of a recent move by the U.S. government to impose sanctions against the council's members, including himself, saying he can no longer go to the U.S. for Christmas celebrations.

"They have sanctioned us, now I'm thinking what we should do with all the money we have in American banks, and also we can no longer go to Christmas celebrations in the U.S.," Jannati said at a polling station in Tehran on Friday, Tasnim reported.

He said stupidity has no boundaries, while referring to U.S. President Donald Trump, adding, "After all, what harm do we suffer from this sanction?"

The Treasury Department said in a statement on Friday that it had imposed sanctions on the members of the Guardian Council and its Elections Supervision Committee over the council's role in disqualifying the candidates.

"The Trump Administration will not tolerate the manipulation of elections to favor the regime's malign agenda, and this action exposes those senior regime officials responsible for preventing the Iranian people from freely choosing their leaders," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in the statement.

"The United States will continue to support the democratic aspirations of Iranians," he added.

The U.S. sanctions targeted Ayatollah Jannati, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, a member of the Guardian Council who was



formerly Iran's first Judiciary Chief, and three members of the Elections Supervisory Committee, according to Reuters.

The bans freeze any American-held assets of the officials and generally bar American citizens from doing business with them.

The Guardian Council has said that the vetting process for the candidates in the elections was solely based on law and had nothing to do with the political factions the nominees represent.

The sanctions were first announced by the U.S. special representative for Iran, Brian Hook, on Thursday, a day before a key parliamentary vote in Iran.

Hook accused the Iranian officials of preventing free and fair elections by disqualifying a number of candidates.

He also labeled Friday's general elections as a "political theater."

Earlier this week, Hook made similar remarks about Iran's polls, which were dismissed by Iran's Foreign Ministry as nonsense.

China to cooperate with Iran to prevent coronavirus epidemic

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang said on Friday that his country will follow the COVID-19 situation in Iran and will cooperate to prevent coronavirus epidemic.

"China will maintain close communication, coordination and cooperation with Iran to defeat the epidemic as soon as possible and safeguard the health of our two peoples and global public health security," the official website of the Chinese Foreign Ministry quoted Geng as saying in a press conference on Friday.

He added, "In this fight against the virus, China and Iran have been standing firmly together. The Iranian government and people provided China with valuable support and help, and Foreign Minister Zarif was the first

foreign minister who publicly voiced support for China."

Iran confirmed four persons diagnosed with the coronavirus outbreak have died.

In a message published by Tasnim news agency on Friday, China's Ambassador to Tehran Chang Hua said, "China closely follows the COVID-19 situation in Iran. The spokesman of Foreign Affairs Ministry of China has expressed condolences over the passing of the Iranian patients."

"As ambassador of China to Iran, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the Iranian government and people. In this fight against the virus, China and Iran have been standing firmly together," he said.

He noted, "Since the outbreak of China, the Iranian

government and people have provided precious support and assistance to China at the first time. We remember and cherish this friendship."

The new virus emerged in China in December. Since then, more than 70,000 people have been infected globally, with more than 2,000 deaths being reported, mostly in China.

He also said that the epidemic in Iran has also affected the hearts of the Chinese people.

"China will maintain close communication and coordination with Iran, strengthen cooperation in epidemic prevention, and strive to overcome the epidemic as soon as possible, to safeguard the health of our two peoples and global public health security," he said.

Tehran slams Washington's 'insane' sanctions

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi has said the government, nation and all pillars of the Islamic Republic of Iran do not attach the slightest significance to the United States' "insane" sanctions.

According to The Associated Press, the Trump administration on Thursday ratcheted up pressure on Iran by slapping sanctions on top members of Iran's Guardian Council, a body that vets candidates before elections.



The sanctions came a day before Iranians go to the polls to participate in the parliamentary elections.

Those targeted include the chief of the council, Ahmad Jannati, and senior member Mohammad Yazdi. The sanctions also affect Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei, who serves as the council's spokesman.

"Such measures are nothing but failure, disappointment and collapse of the American regime's maximum pressure policy," Mousavi said on Friday, according to Mehr.

"Those who have put 83 million Iranians under their sanctions, economic terrorism and maximum pressure but failed have now targeted Iran's electoral system out of desperation and disappointment," he said.

This proves the extent of their fear from Iran's democracy and people's turnout, the spokesman concluded.

Mousavi also said Iran's approach in the fight against maximum pressure is "maximum resistance".

It's the American rulers who will have to bow before the Iranian nation's resolve and will have to learn that they must speak with the Iranian people through reverence, not sanctions, he added.

The sanctions announced by the State and Treasury departments include freezes on any assets the sanctioned individuals may have in U.S. jurisdictions, or that they try to move through the U.S. banking system. Also, Americans are barred from doing business with them. It was not immediately clear if the sanctions would have any practical effect, but Brian Hooks, the U.S. special envoy for Iran, said it's important to highlight the role of clerics who are not widely known outside of Iran.

Thursday's announcement was the latest move in the Trump administration's "maximum pressure campaign" against Iran that began after Trump withdrew the U.S. from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and began to re-impose sanctions that had been eased under that accord and imposed new ones.

Iran responded to the maximum pressure campaign on May 8, exactly one year after the U.S. abandoned the deal, when it said its "strategic patience" is over and began to partially reduce its commitments to the agreement at bi-monthly steps.

Eventually, in its fifth and final step on January 5, Iran suspended all limits under the nuclear pact.

Austrian FM plans to take a 'European message' to Iran

By staff and agency

Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg was scheduled to visit Iran on Saturday and take a "European message" to Tehran.

Schallenberg said after meeting his German counterpart in Berlin that he will be taking a "European message" to Tehran on Saturday and Sunday after also meeting the European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, this week, AP reported.

He said on Wednesday that he will travel to Tehran this weekend amid efforts by European countries to keep alive Iran's nuclear agreement with world powers.



Borrell said on Sunday that he will remain committed to keep the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the JCPOA, alive.

"As coordinator I remain committed to listen to all sides and keep the #NuclearDeal alive," he said in a tweet.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on February 14 that Iran's decisions to reduce JCPOA commitments are reversible if Europe takes "meaningful" steps in preserving the JCPOA.

Tehran's moves to ramp-up its nuclear program in the past few months are reversible "providing that Europe takes steps that are meaningful," Zarif told reporters on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, according to AP.

Borrell has said that Europe must ensure Iran's benefits from the nuclear deal if it wants the deal to survive.

"If we want the Iran nuclear deal to survive, we need to ensure that Iran benefits if it returns to full compliance," he wrote in an article in the Project Syndicate published on February 8.

Borrell was notified in January by Paris, London, and Berlin that they had triggered the resolution dispute mechanism.

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

"There is an agreement that more time is needed due to the complexity of the issues involved. The timeline is therefore extended," Borrell said in a statement on January 24.

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

Hatami hails Iran aviation efforts to neutralize sanctions



TEHRAN (MNA) — Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami said Thursday that the country has taken important measures in the aviation sector that prove its self-confidence in neutralizing sanctions.

He made the remark during a ceremony where eight domestically-overhauled military aircraft were delivered to the Army on February 20.

Speaking at the Iran Aviation Industries

Organization of the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, the Iranian minister said the overhauled jets are of F-4, F-14, F-27, Sukhoi and Mirage types as well as C-130 and 707 transport aircraft.

He also noted that the tech-savvy countries have refused to provide Iran's Air Force with even the smallest spare parts and services it needs under threats from the U.S. and its allies as well as tough sanctions and an all-out economic war against the Islamic Republic

over the past 40 years.

However, he added, Iran has taken important measures in the aviation field that prove its self-confidence in neutralizing sanctions.

Hatami further stressed that the "complicated" process of overhauling military jets is monopolized by some powerful countries. He also appreciated the government backing for boosting Iran's defense power and thanked managers, experts and scientists working in the aviation industry.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	478755.7
IFX	6206.67

Sources: tse.ir, ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	45,346 rials
GBP	54,217 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$57.60/b
WTI	\$52.85/b
OPEC Basket	\$58.35/b
Gold	\$1,635.20/oz
Silver	\$18.53/oz
Platinum	\$989.00/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Coronavirus will impact China's economy but has also been 'helpful' for its business: executive

A top executive at Chinese conglomerate Ping An Insurance says the coronavirus outbreak in China has in some ways been "helpful" for the business.



"This virus actually, it's been particularly helpful because we've suddenly had requests you know, (from) over 30 over banks and ... 20 over insurers whereby we provide our technology to help of them to get up back to work very quickly," Jessica Tan, co-CEO of Ping An, a Chinese insurance firm listed in Hong Kong.

Speaking to CNBC on Friday, Tan said: "What we see about the impact in virus, particularly in the first half, will definitely impact the economy. Of course, the financial services industry is less hit by the virus."

The global outbreak of COVID-19, most keenly felt in China and its Hubei province where most of the deaths and cases have occurred, has so far claimed more than 2,000 lives. It has impacted economies, especially those in Asia, as well as the outlook for large companies such as Apple.

Investors are still struggling to grapple with the potential impact of the mysterious disease as China locked down cities and extended the Lunar New Year holiday for factories and schools, in order to limit the spread of the pneumonia-like virus.

The current coronavirus situation

In a separate interview with Reuters, Tan appeared less upbeat and acknowledged that the current coronavirus situation is "very challenging" as the bulk of Ping An's business is driven "primarily by agents."

"There are guidelines that they can't visit customers," Tan told Reuters. "We, as well as the rest of the industry, are trying to accelerate the transition to work in a new model whereby the agents are unable to visit the customers and yet you able to maintain your business."

During her interview with CNBC, Tan said Ping An was "one of the few financial institutions that were able to get 1.4 million of our people, employees and agents, completely working online on 3rd of February," referring to the extended holiday period in China. "That's something that very few people can do and we've been offering that to our financial services partners as well."

She also said that services in areas such as the firm's health technology and smart city businesses have seen "huge demand" during this period.

Earnings that missed expectations

Tan's comments came a day after Ping An posted earnings that missed expectations despite a more 39% surge in its 2019 net profit.

The firm saw a net profit attributable to shareholders of the parent company of about 149.4 billion yuan (approx. \$21.27 billion) in the year ended Dec. 31, 2019. That compared to a figure of about 107.4 billion yuan (approx. \$15.29 billion) the previous year.

In the 2019 annual report, Ping An said the virus "may affect the quality or the yields of the credit assets and investment assets of the Group in a degree."

Still, that was lower than expectations of 157.6 billion yuan in a Refinitiv-compiled SmartEstimate based on a survey with analysts, according to Reuters.

"This may affect the quality or the yields of the credit assets and investment assets of the Group in a degree, and the degree of the impact depends on the situation of the epidemic preventive measures, the duration of the epidemic and the implementation of regulatory policies," the report said.

Speaking with CNBC on Friday, Tan said a recovery was expected in the second half of the year and the outbreak will likely pan out positively in the longer-term for Ping An's health insurance and tech businesses.

(Source: cnbc.com)

PMO to hold conference on effective rail-port connection

ECONOMY TEHRAN – Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) is going to hold a conference on efficient connection of the country's ports to the national railway network, IRIB reported on Thursday.

"The purpose of this conference is to promote inter-organizational interaction between government and private entities and facilitate cooperation among them to increase the share of rail traffic in the freight transportation in the country's ports," PMO's Deputy Director Farhad Montaser Kouhsari said.

The necessary measures and actions

required to be taken to achieve a favorable outlook for rail transportation in ports, as outlined in the country's Sixth National Five-year Development Plan (2016-2021), are among the issues which are going to be covered in this conference which is co-organized by the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (known as RAI).

Investigating the indicators of efficiency and productivity for intra-port rail transport, analyzing existing barriers and problems, and interacting with public and non-governmental organizations involved in port transportation, as well as supporting research, studies and practical projects on efficient linking of the



country's ports by railway are also among the main goals of the conference, Kouhsari said. Back in July 2019, the RAI Head Saeed Rasouli said that the development of railways for transport of cargos from ports is a top

agenda of RAI's activities.

Rasouli mentioned linking the cargo hubs to the railway network as one of the main priorities of RAI in the current Iranian year (ends on March 19).

Inflation rate drops 1.6%: SCI

ECONOMY TEHRAN – The Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) announced that the inflation rate in the twelve-month period ended on February 19, which marks the end of the eleventh Iranian calendar month of Bahman, stood at 37 percent.

The SCI said that the inflation rate has fallen 1.6 percent in the mentioned time span from the twelve-month period ended in the last day of the tenth Iranian month of Dey, IRNA reported.

The center also announced that the point-to-point inflation rate has dropped 1.3 percent to 25 percent in the eleventh month from its previous month.

Point-to-point inflation has fallen 1.1 percent to 25.1 percent in the urban areas and slid 2.6 percent to 24.4 percent in the rural regions on a monthly basis, the same report confirmed.

On Tuesday, Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati said that the inflation rate in Iran is predicted to go down to under 20 percent in the coming Iranian calendar year (begins on March 19). Speaking to the media after the annual



conference of "Resistance Economy", the official said, "Our goal is curbing inflation rate and no estimation shows an inflation rate of over 20 percent for the next year".

In the Iranian calendar year of 1395 (ended on March 20, 2017), Iran could manage to experience a single-digit inflation rate after 26 years.

The inflation rate stood at 9.8 percent in that year according to the Statistical Center of Iran and at nine percent according to CBI.

But since the last year's calendar month of Khordad (ended on June 22, 2018), when the inflation rate stood at 10.2 percent, as announced by the CBI, the country's experiencing double-digit inflation rates again.

TEDPIX rises over 19,000 points in a week

ECONOMY TEHRAN – TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), went up 19,675 points to 478,754 in the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), IRNA reported.

Banks and carmakers, chemical and pharmaceutical companies, base metal and foodstuff industries, as well as computer, cement, water, electricity and gas companies contributed to the most part of growth at TSE in the past week, which was the last week of Iran's eleventh calendar month of Bahman.

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

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

Tehran Stock Exchange has been ranked as the second best performer among the members of the World Federation of Exchanges (WFE) in terms of the main index growth during the 12-month period of December 2018-December 2019.



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

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

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

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

4th National Excellence and Progress Award to be held tomorrow

ECONOMY TEHRAN – The fourth edition of Iran's National Excellence and Progress Award which celebrates achievements and improvements of the country's economic sectors is slated to be held on Sunday, IRIB reported.

According to the Head of the Award's Policy Council, Mohammad-Javad Irvani, this year's award ceremony is

going to be held on February 23, on which 150 companies are going to compete and the top competitors will be honored in the end.

"There are capacities in the country that enabling them is going to boost exports in addition to meeting domestic needs," Irvani said.

Since the re-imposition of the U.S. sanctions, the Iranian

Government has been taking various measures to develop the country's non-oil economy and in this regard domestic production has been a top priority in the government's policy making in the past few years.

The country's top companies will be provided with various facilities and advantages like tax exemptions and export incentives.

Recovering factories keep UK economy on track in February: PMIs



By Andy Bruce

British businesses kept up a solid rate of growth in February as factories posted the fastest rise in output for 10 months, despite ripples from China's coronavirus outbreak affecting supply chains, a business survey showed on Friday.

The 'flash' early readings of the IHS Markit/CIPS UK Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) showed the expansion of Britain's vast services sector slowed slightly this month, but this was canceled out by an unexpected upturn in manufacturing.

Britain's performance bettered the eurozone's for the second month running, as the PMI suggested the world's fifth-largest economy looked on track to grow around 0.2% in quarterly terms after it slowed to a crawl late last year.

The composite PMI, which combines manufacturing and services indexes, held steady at 53.3 in February, jointly the highest reading since September 2018 and beating the consensus forecast of 52.8 in a Reuters poll of economists.

The survey chimed with other gauges which show the economy has picked up since Prime Minister Boris Johnson's election victory in December, even though the level of the PMI remains below its long-run average.

The "recent return to growth signaled by the manufacturing and services PMIs

provides a clear indication that the UK economy is no longer flat on its back," said Tim Moore, associate director at IHS Markit, which compiles the survey.

The manufacturing PMI rose to 51.9 in February from 50.0, its highest level since April and above all forecasts in a Reuters poll, although there were signs that the coronavirus outbreak might have an impact on production in Britain.

"Manufacturers noted that abrupt shortages of components from China had reverberated through their supply chains and led to difficulties sourcing critical inputs," Moore said.

He cited a record deterioration in the PMI's gauge of suppliers' delivery times, meaning manufacturers were forced to wait much longer this month for the arrival of parts.

Delivery times increased more sharply than the previous record in September 2000, when British truck drivers blockaded petrol stations in protest at high fuel taxes.

The services PMI, which covers the bulk of British economic output, fell in February to 53.3 from 53.9, close to the Reuters poll forecast for a reading of 53.4.

The "latest survey ... revealed a solid upturn in the service economy, driven by improving domestic spending and a recovery in new business enquiries since the start of 2020," Moore said

(Source: investing.com)

European stocks drift lower as virus spread offsets data showing better economy



European stocks slipped on Friday, as worries about the coronavirus spreading beyond China offset indications the economy is improving.

The Stoxx Europe 600 SXXP, -0.13% fell 0.4% to 428.33, as banks including UniCredit UCG, -3.44% and oil producers including BP BP, -1.97% declined.

The yield on the 10-year German bund TMBMKDE-10Y, +1.24% fell 1 basis point to -0.45%.

The economic news for Europe showed improving conditions. The IHS Markit flash eurozone manufacturing purchasing managers' index rose to a 12-month high of 49.1 in February and the services PMI reached a 2-month high of 52.8, both beating economist forecasts. Any reading below 50 indicates worsening conditions.

The "expansion is being led by welcome resilience in the service sector but manufacturing is also showing encouraging signs of pulling out of the downturn that has plagued producers for over a year, with new orders falling at the slowest rate since late-2018," said Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit.

One caveat to the better numbers was that the PMI was aided by longer delivery times — which typically is a sign of greater demand — but in February was more an indication of supply disruptions stemming from the coronavirus.

South Korea's government declared a health emergency in its fourth largest

city as 100 new virus cases were reported, while China reported another fall in new virus cases.

Of stocks on the move, Pearson PSN, -4.18% fell 4.8% as the educational publisher forecast adjusted operating profit of between £410 million to £490 million, down from £581 million in 2019.

"Pearson has seen a big drop in demand for its printed textbooks in the U.S. and is in the middle of moving to more online provision of educational material. Despite a small rise in the dividend and optimistic talk by the outgoing CEO about the strength of the company's new digital learning platform, the market is clearly waiting to see some tangible evidence of an improvement in the key North American market," said Ian Forrest, investment research analyst at The Share Centre.

Allianz ALV, +0.20% rose 0.9% after the German insurer reported a better-than-forecast fourth-quarter profit, helped by its life and health segment. Allianz also increased its dividend by 7% and said it would buy back up to 1.5 billion euros in stock.

Information technology consulting firm Sopra Steria SOP, +7.08% rose 7.2% after reporting a stronger-than-forecast 2019 profit and proposing to buy 94% of Sodifrance SOA, -2.15%, a French IT firm focused on insurance and banking, for 17.10 euros per share, which is a discount to Thursday's 18.60 euros close.

(Source: marketwatch.com)

Iran's envoy discusses oil market with OPEC secretary general

ENERGY TEHRAN — Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations, held talks with Secretary General of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Mohammed Barkindo on Thursday to discuss the oil market.

In the meeting, held at the OPEC place, the two sides discussed the market's latest developments following the coronavirus outbreak, Shana reported.

They also stressed the important role of OPEC in maintaining the balance in the oil market.

Gharibabadi for his part emphasized the need to keep the oil market's sustainability to serve the interests of both consumers and producers.

Referring to the unjust and illegal sanctions of the U.S. against the Islamic Republic, the Iranian envoy stated that Washington's measures are totally



Iran's permanent representative to the Vienna-based international organizations Kazem Gharibabadi (R) holds talks with OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo in Vienna on Thursday.

against the international law and sovereignty of states enshrined by the United Nations Charter.

Barkindo also expressed hope that closer consultations among the OPEC and non-OPEC members in the future will help to address the current issues more properly.

OPEC will host a ministerial meeting in Vienna on March 5.

Earlier this month, Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh had said that he had held talks with the OPEC president, to emphasize that if there was to be a gathering before the scheduled meeting in March, all members should be prepared to reduce their production.

"If we have to negotiate the matter in an extraordinary meeting and then decide, there would be no need to hold an early meeting and the 178th gathering should be held on the previously scheduled date that is March 4-5," he said.

NIOC to renovate southern oil facilities

ENERGY TEHRAN — National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) is following a program to renovate all the country's old and worn-out oil facilities, IRNA reported quoting a senior official with the company.

"Reconstruction and renovation of oil facilities is one of the main priorities of the company for achieving safe and sustainable production of oil and gas in the country," Farrokh Alikhani, NIOC's deputy director for production affairs, said in a seminar on introducing investment opportunities in crude oil processing projects in Tehran.

Mentioning development and production as two major pillars of the oil industry, the official said: "regarding development, many projects are underway for increasing and maintaining production capacity of the country's oil and gas fields, and in the production sector, we are pursuing serious plans for safe and sustainable production."

In order to achieve safe and sustainable production,

various programs have been defined which cover all activities starting from the reservoirs followed to digging and maintenance of the wells and up to the processing facilities, pipelines and finally the delivery point, Alikhani explained.

"At the reprocessing stage, two major issues, namely reconstruction and renovation of worn out equipment are our top priority," he added.

The country's southern oil-rich regions are a top priority for NIOC's renovation and rebuilding programs, since over 75 percent of the country's oil is supplied from this region.

The official also highlighted the important role of desalination and sweetening plants in the safe and sustainable production of oil in the southern regions, saying that four major desalination and processing projects have been considered for investment in this area.



Vitol sees oil recovery this year after big slump from virus

The oil market is poised for a recovery but will have to first tackle a severe virus-induced demand slump, the chief of Vitol Group said.

The market is facing a 200 million-barrel demand loss in the first quarter, with a 4 million-barrels-a-day decrease in China currently as the virus hits economic activity and restricts travel, Chief Executive Officer Russell Hardy said.

While that adds to similarly pessimistic views, including from the International Energy Agency (IEA), he said lower supply from Libya and Venezuela and the prospect of deeper cuts from OPEC are easing concerns for the market.

"All of those factors are going to help re-balance the 200 million barrels, which will leave the market in a better position for the second half of the year," Hardy said in a Bloomberg television interview. "There's an OPEC meeting to come in a couple of weeks' time and the market's anticipating some kind of supply response from OPEC."

Brent rose for eight consecutive days through Thursday in the longest rally in a year, after hitting the lowest since December 2018 earlier this month. Expectations of the worst-case scenario from the impact of the virus have been reduced, boosting prices towards \$60 a barrel, Hardy said.

Vitol, the world's largest independent oil trader, expects prices to recover to \$60-\$70 a barrel in the coming months. Prices were at \$58.38 as of 08:20 A.M. in London



on Friday.

OPEC and its allies will have a big part to play in the market's revival.

Technical experts from the coalition this month recommended a further supply curb of 600,000 barrels a day until June. That's on top of the 2.1 million barrel-a-day cut it is already making. The alliance is scheduled to meet March 5-6 in Vienna.

While the Vitol boss's comments indicate an oil market in repair, whittling down any glut created by the demand loss in China will be a difficult task.

Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman, which has been pushing for weeks for an emergency meeting of OPEC+, this week equated the coronavirus's impact on the market to a house on fire.

The IEA expects global oil demand to drop in the first quarter for the first time in over a decade. For 2020 as a whole, the virus will curb annual growth in global consumption by about 30% to 825,000 barrels a day, the lowest since 2011, according to the Paris-based agency.

(Source: bloomberg.com)

Oil falls 1% as spreading virus compounds concerns over demand hit

Oil prices fell around 1% on Friday, pressured by growing worries about fuel demand as a coronavirus epidemic spread further beyond China, and as major crude producers appeared to be in no rush to cut output to buttress the market.

Brent crude LCOc1 was down 64 cents, or 1.1%, at \$58.67 a barrel by 0703 GMT, while U.S. crude CLC1 dropped 54 cents, or 1%, at \$53.34 a barrel.

South Korea's fourth-largest city has become the latest virus hotspot, with streets abandoned and residents staying indoors after dozens of people were infected in what authorities described as a "super-spreading event" at a church.

Singapore and Japan are on the cusp of recession and the epidemic will be a major focus of talks at a meeting of G20 finance leaders on the weekend.

In China itself, the world's biggest importer of crude oil, new cases also rose on Friday from the day before even as Beijing presses on with efforts to contain the spread that has largely paralyzed the world's second-biggest economy.

"I think there is a lot of reason for caution right now, as the impact of coronavirus on demand is still unclear," Stratford oil analyst Greg Priddy said by email.

"If it begins to look like the impact will be modest, that could affect Russia's decision at the March 5-6 OPEC+ meeting

on whether they are willing to endorse a further cut," he added.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said on Thursday that global oil producers understood that it would no longer make sense for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies to meet before their gathering.

The grouping, known as OPEC+, has been withholding supply from the market to support prices for several years now and many analysts expect an extension or deepening of the restrictions on production.

Moscow has said it will disclose its stance in the coming days.

"We still believe that the market is likely to trade lower from current levels, given the scale of the surplus over the first half of this year," ING Economics said in a note.

Adding to pressure on oil prices was the strength of the U.S. dollar as investors looked for safe havens. A stronger greenback typically makes oil more expensive as the commodity is usually priced in dollars.

In the United States, crude stockpiles rose for a fourth week last week, although less than analysts had forecast. Gasoline and distillate inventories continued recent declines.

(Source: reuters.com)

Shell sees LNG market returning to balance by 2021

By Tsvetana Paraskova

The supply growth of liquefied natural gas (LNG) on the global market is set to slow down later this year and in 2021 when the last of the new projects currently under construction will be completed, Shell said in its latest LNG Outlook 2020 published on Thursday.

From the second half of this year, Asia will absorb the excess supply and Europe will stop being the 'balancing market' to absorb the supply growth coming from new projects in the U.S. and Australia, according to Shell, which has one of the strongest LNG trading businesses among the oil majors.

"Europe absorbed the majority of 2019 supply growth as competitively-priced LNG furthered coal-to-gas switching in the power sector and replaced declining domestic gas production and pipeline gas imports," Shell said in its outlook today.



LNG imports in Asia grew modestly in 2019 compared to the previous two years due to milder winters and increased electricity generation from nuclear power in the major LNG importers Japan and South Korea, Shell noted.

"In the short-term, supply growth is expected to slow down as the last of the new LNG projects under construction will be completed by 2021, restoring equilibrium," the supermajor said.

Over the past few months, LNG prices hit a decade low due to warmer winter weather in many parts of Asia, booming new LNG supply, and slower import growth in China.

Last week, spot LNG prices in Asia plunged to a new all-time low of \$2.70 per million British thermal units (MMBtu), down by \$0.25 from a week earlier, due to low demand from China amid the coronavirus outbreak, industry sources told Reuters on Friday.

"While we see weak market conditions today due to record new supply coming in, two successive mild winters and the Coronavirus situation, we expect equilibrium to return, driven by a combination of continued demand growth and reduction in new supply coming on-stream until the mid-2020s," Maarten Wetselaar, Integrated Gas and New Energies Director at Shell, said in a statement.

In the longer term, Shell expects global LNG demand to double to 700 million tons by 2040.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Well-supplied global LNG market sees demand build for cleaner-burning energy

Global demand for liquefied natural gas (LNG) grew by 12.5% to 359 million tons in 2019, according to Shell's latest annual LNG Outlook published on Friday – a significant increase that bolsters LNG's growing role in the transition to a lower-carbon energy system.

Natural gas emits between 45 and 55% fewer greenhouse gas emissions and less than one-tenth of the air pollutants than coal when used to generate electricity.

The "global LNG market continued to evolve in 2019 with demand increasing for LNG and natural gas in power and non-power sectors," said Maarten Wetselaar, Integrated Gas and New Energies Director at Shell. "Record supply investments will meet people's growing need for the most flexible and cleanest-burning fossil fuel."



"While we see weak market conditions today due to record new supply coming in, two successive mild winters and the Coronavirus situation, we expect equilibrium to return, driven by a combination of continued demand growth and reduction in new supply coming on stream until the mid-2020s."

Europe absorbed the majority of 2019 supply growth as competitively-priced LNG furthered coal-to-gas switching in the power sector and replaced declining domestic gas production and pipeline gas imports.

New spot-trading mechanisms and a wider variety of indices used for long-term contracts point towards LNG becoming an increasingly flexible commodity.

There was a modest rise in imports to Asia in 2019, compared to the previous two years, a result of mild weather and rising electricity generation from nuclear power in Japan and South Korea, two of the three largest global importers.

In China, LNG imports increased by 14% in 2019 as efforts continued to improve urban air quality. Also notable was LNG demand growth in South Asia.

In total, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan imported 36 million tons, an increase of 19% over last year, pointing to emerging growth countries in Asia.

Over the longer-term, global LNG demand is expected to double to 700 million tons by 2040, according to forecasts, as gas plays a significant role in shaping a lower-carbon energy system.

Asia is expected to remain the dominant region in the decades to come, with South and South-east Asia generating more than half of the increased demand.

(Source: hellenicshippingnews.com)

Renewable energy could power the world by 2050

By Paul Brown

Virtually all the world's demand for electricity to run transport and to heat and cool homes and offices, as well as to provide the power demanded by industry, could be met by renewable energy by mid-century.

This is the consensus of 47 peer-reviewed research papers from 13 independent groups with a total of 91 authors that have been brought together by Stanford University in California.

Some of the papers take a broad sweep across the world, adding together the potential for each technology to see if individual countries or whole regions could survive on renewables.

Special examinations of small island states, sub-Saharan Africa and individual countries like Germany look to see what are the barriers to progress and how they could be removed.

In every case the findings are that the technology exists to achieve 100% renewable power if the political will to achieve it can be mustered.

The collection of papers is a powerful rebuff to those who say that renewables are not reliable or cannot be expanded fast enough to take over from fossil fuels and nuclear power.

Once proper energy efficiency measures are in place, a combination of wind, solar and water power, with various forms of storage capacity, can add up to 100% of energy needs in every part of the planet.



Stanford puts one of its own papers at the top of the list. It studies the impacts of the Green New Deal proposals on grid stability, costs, jobs, health and climate in 143 countries.

The fossil fuel resources

With the world already approaching 1.5°C of heating, it says, seven million people killed by air pollution annually, and limited fossil fuel resources potentially sparking conflict, Stanford's researchers wanted to compare business-as-usual with a 100% transition to wind-water-solar energy, efficiency and storage by 2050 – with at least 80% by 2030.

By grouping the countries of the world together into 24 regions cooperating on grid stability and storage solutions, supply could match demand by 2050-2052 with 100% re-

liance on renewables.

The amount of energy used overall would be reduced by 57.1%, costs would fall by a similar amount, and 28.6 million more long-term full-time jobs would be created than under business-as-usual.

The remarkable consensus among researchers is perhaps surprising, since climate and weather conditions differ so much in different latitudes. It seems though that as the cost of renewables, particularly wind and solar, has tumbled, and energy storage solutions multiplied, every part of the world can now find a system that edges fossil fuels out in costs.

That, plus the benefit of clean air, particularly in Asian countries like India and China, makes renewables far more beneficial on any cost-benefit analysis.

The appearance of so many papers mirrors the consensus that climate scientists have managed to achieve in warning the world's political leaders that time is running out for them to act to keep the temperature below dangerous levels.

Since in total the solutions offered cover countries producing more than 97% of the world's greenhouse gases, they provide a blueprint for the next round of UN climate talks, to be held in Glasgow in November. At COP-26, as the conference is called, politicians will be asked to make new commitments to avoid dangerous climate change.

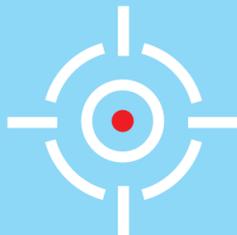
This Stanford file shows them that all they need is political will for them to be able to achieve climate stability.

(Source: ecowatch.com)

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International Public Re-Tender Notice

Tender Subject: Manufacturing, Shipment, Training and Delivery of Four Units of Ship to Shore Gantry Crane (STS) for Shahid Beheshti Port of Chabahar No. PE/1014/98

It is hereby notified that Aria Banader Iranian Chabahar Marine and Port Services Development Company as the company in charge of procuring equipment for phase 1 of Shahid Beheshti Port of Chabahar development plan is calling for tenders (re-tender) for the international public tender of Manufacturing, Shipment, Training and Delivery of the above mentioned equipment in a two-stage manner, after the quality assessment.

All manufacturers with the experience of manufacturing the above-mentioned equipment are invited to receive the CD containing the quality assessment forms and the tender documents by presenting a written introduction letter and the original bank receipt of 5,000,000 IR Rials deposited to the bank account no. 0203568843007 in the name of Aria Banader Iranian Chabahar Marine and Port Services Development Company with Bank Day at the below address maximum two weeks after the publishing date of this advertisement.

The deadline for submitting the documents, evidences and the completed quality assessment forms is at the latest by Wednesday, April 08, 2020; 10:00 A.M. (local time).

- Purchase and delivery address of the tender documents:
No. 40, Kish St., Nelson Mandela Blvd., Tehran, IRAN, Postal Code: 1518814111, Phone: +982188190677-9, FAX: +982188190679, Email Address: m.niapak@abiports.com.

- To keep the date of the documents delivery, any question is allowed until 72 hours before the deadline of the documents delivery.

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- The cost of the advertising is undertaken by the tender winner.

- After the quality assessment the qualified companies will be invited to provide the technical and commercial documents.



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Celebration of parliamentary elections in Iran

1 → ■ The martyrdom of Soleimani is the earthquake of conscience:

The photos of Qassem Soleimani fill the streets, the facades of the big buildings, the offices of the government officials and the armed forces, and the advisory offices working with the Leader of the Revolution Al Sayyed Ali Al Khamenei. Soleimani's name is repeated tens of times in every talk with any official or a leader in Iran. The talk starts with an idea in which Soleimani is mentioned then it continues with another idea to mention Soleimani once again. The feeling of fulfillment to this leader is accompanied with the feeling of underestimation, and maybe with the feeling of guilt, but the feeling of the burden of responsibility and the collective love to him is felt by everyone.

This young man who is religious, devotional, and humble in his relationship with God, Prophets, and the People of the house, who is faithful in every word he says, who loves the poor and the needy, who is concerned about the future of Iran from all kinds of obsession, the obsession of authority, the obsession of money, the obsession of corruption, the obsession of bureaucracy, and the obsession of laziness and inactivity, and who is sixty-year old, has become the difficult number to Israel, America, and Al-Qaeda and ISIS organizations and a number of the Gulf countries until the date of his martyrdom. This leader made the contemporary glory of Iran, so that it turns through his leading position into a fearful superpower. As he was during his life the guard of the revolution and the republic behind the enemy's lines amid a large political internal division over his role, he has become after his martyrdom the guard because of the deterrent popular gathering against every thought of escalation against Iran which is fortified with a popular flood that emerged to revenge for the blood of Soleimani contrary to the bets and hypotheses based on the decline of the popular support of the choice of revolution, republic, and their leader Al Sayyed Ali Khamenei and his policies. Iran which is technically and militarily capable and which targeted Ain Al-Assad base showed that it has the resolution and the will along with the war techniques sufficient to evade from the targets of the American technical capacities. It frustrated the bet on the American technical superiority as it frustrated the bet on Iranian internal division.

Soleimani was spending a lot of time and effort before the nuclear file and after it to make out of the option of supporting the resistance against the American hegemony and the Israeli aggression a subject that gets a political consensus among the competing movements for the power in Iran. Despite his conviction of the decisive reference role of Al Sayyed Khamenei in such strategic matters, but he was seeing in neutralizing this trend a strength to Iran and a message to the abroad that enhances the position of Iran in the confrontation of its opponents and rationalizes the internal political conflicts by making them just political competition that deals with the problem of economy, construction, education, health, services, the constitutional organizations and their activation and combating corruption. But what has been achieved during the negotiation on the nuclear understanding and after signing it through unifying the position inside the ranks of the Iranian leaderships has enhanced the position of the Iranian negotiator through the abidance of the conservatives and fundamentalists especially the leadership of the Revolutionary Guard with this position which it started to be affected after the American withdrawal from the nuclear understanding and the emerge of positions that behold the role of the Guard especially the role played by Soleimani the responsibility of the deterioration of relationships with the Americans which has been culminated with the withdrawal from the nuclear understanding. However the martyrdom of Soleimani at the hands of the Americans and the subsequent announcement of the Deal of the Century reveal the goals of America in the region especially in Iran, and how Soleimani and his role were an additive value to Iran and an insurance policy that protects it, and how the resistance option was not mere an ally that is given capabilities from Iran to do its active role in the confrontation of the region but rather a partner in protecting Iran and raising its status. Therefore, every investment spent by Iran in supporting the resistance forces is a serious investment in favor of its national security and a protection of its political independence and food sufficiency, it is not an attrition of its resources which are supposed to be allocated to its internal affairs as some symbols of the reformist movement said, or as their supporters chant in demonstrations. Therefore, the funeral of Soleimani and the accompanied popular flood formed a message

far from being addressed to the Americans and many people who deal with the public affairs in Iran in the authority and in the opposition only but to reveal the truth of the position of the Iranian people towards the confrontation with the Americans and towards the higher policies drawn by Al Sayyed Ali Khamenei that most of which Soleimani was entrusted with.

■ The elections and the coming change:

The feeling of remorse expressed by those who did not respond to Soleimani's efforts of the unification of the interior is no longer enough according to those who share with him the opinion and the choice and to the most of those belong to the conservative and fundamentalist movement who speak out in what they believe in terms of the call to question the reformist movement in the parliamentary elections since the martyrdom of Soleimani which has no relation with the parties in the interior formed an end of a phase and a start of another, in other words the end of the bets promoted by the reformist movement on making understandings with Washington with good intentions. The announcement of the Deal of the Century completes what is interpreted by the assassination of Soleimani from the point of view of those who call to follow a strict policy regarding the future of the relationship with Washington, the nuclear file, the economic construction, and the social and cultural fortification, reforming the role and the position in the region in a way that is appropriate to the change caused by the assassination of Soleimani and the Deal of the Century. Those consider that this strategic burden that must be bear by the constitutional institutions cannot be entrusted to those who have opposite convictions because those cannot be entrusted to lead Iran according to the orders of Al Sayyed Ali Khamenei while they are talking in their assemblies that they do not believe in them.

The traditional conservative movements expect the winning in the parliamentary elections. It is remarkable that the groups that support the former President Ahmadi Nejad are among them. The expectations of relative neutral sources talk about a great winning of the conservatives that may range between two-thirds to third-quarters of the



is no favoritism or nepotism. Just for that, when the President Rohani refused the nominations by saying we do not want to turn the elections into appointments he got a direct response from Al Sayyed Ali Khamenei without mentioning his name, but it was understood that he was meant by his saying: those who object the role of a prestigious and efficient institution in ensuring the right electoral process; the Guardian Council forget that they reached to their positions through elections.

Those who follow-up and those who are interested along with the opinion polls do not expect that the Iranians who want to elect the parliament within less than twenty days are more than 50%. This ratio may decrease in Tehran to only 30%. One of the reasons of reluctance is that the voters do not know that the Supreme Leader needs a wider representation of options, demands, and objects in the parliament which represents people in all its different classes and moods, because some consider strongly that there is a part of voters cannot be ignored think that their participation will not cause a change as long as everything belongs to the country and its decisions is under the control of the Higher Leader so what is the advantage of such participation? But those

a semi-industrial sufficiency, a scientific progress in which it competes the countries of the industrial world, and it provides the main services with cheap prices as electricity, gas, internet, and fuels which despite the increase of its price it remained the cheapest in the world, where the price of a liter of water equals twice times the price of a liter of gasoline.

■ In the commemoration of revolution: Independence and Development

The four decades that have passed since the revolution and the building of the country and what they have achieved at the levels of independence and development formed the criterion for the rise and the fall of the liberal projects in the third world. Iran has passed them but looking to pass them fully. The upcoming challenges which the conservatives, the fundamentalists, and the extremists are looking to wage to manage the country in the last period of the term of the President Al Sheikh Hassan Rohani are related to the nuclear file and the issues of poverty, corruption combating, and the issues of the regional environment whether they are related to the relationship with each of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen as arenas of the resistance forces or



new parliament. It is remarkable as well that the speaker of the parliament Ali Larijani whose term is at its end did not submit his candidacy for the elections in preparation for the candidacy for the presidency of the republic which its elections will take place after a year and a half, where the former mayor of Tehran Mohammed Baqir Qalibaf is the most prominent candidate for the presidency of the council. The President Hassan Rohani expressed his protest against the Guardians' Council's refusal of dozens of reformist candidates including nearly eighty deputies. The objections of the Guardian Council as shown by sources of reformists and conservatives have no bias or politicization rather these objections are based on an a fundamental factor related to the files of corruption and the illicit wealth which the council had investigated when it studied all the applications of candidacy, therefore, it refused the nominations of many reformists and conservatives, since it reflected what has happened to many politicians after forty years in power and after the winning of the revolution, but it reveals that the supervision strong independent institutions are still have the spirit of revolution and held accountability according to assets and rules where there

who are close from the source of decision say that this reluctance contradicts the understanding of the role of the Wilayat el Faqih who does not make a decision from nothing or illegally, but he makes balance between what is shown by the institutions that represent the choices of people in a legal way and the interest, so he made out of them orders to authorities. So those recognize the weak needed mobilization under the title that the Higher Leader needs your participation to build on them decisions so your absence confuses his decision.

Those who are close from the authority refuse to say that this reluctance is a result of despair, on the contrary they consider it stems from trust, this trust is the same that appeared in the crowds of millions who pledged allegiance to the Higher Leader in order to revenge for the blood of the Commander Qassem Soleimani. Furthermore, the people who participated in the festivals of the commemoration of revolution after forty-one years of its founding do not do that out of courtesy or fear but because it knows the gains which it got from the revolution which brought Iran not only to the rank of the superpowers politically and militarily but also to be a country that lives a food sufficiency and

related to the Gulf and the management of the relationship with the positions which it lives at the forefront Saudi Arabia.

According to the conservatives there is no return to negotiation with the Americans regarding the nuclear file, but this does not mean the final exit from the nuclear agreement and from the treaty of non-proliferation of the Nuclear Weapons but it means leaving the issue related to how to deal with the remaining partner in the agreement, it means Europe including France, Britain, and Germany. If the Europeans go to the Security Council to work under the terms of leaving the agreement, the talk about the exit from the agreement and the treaty will become on table. The understanding with the Americans is hopeless and there is no interest for Iran to have an agreement with them, if the other partners dare to carry out the agreement despite the threat of the American sanctions, since the sanctions that concern Iran are those which restrict Europe, the American military exit from the region will not be a slogan, but rather an independent project that many countries do not dare to present. Iran bears the responsibility on the behalf of everyone to make it the title of the future stage, it does not matter how far it is. Iran

cannot expect the results of the American elections, but until then Iran will interpret its commitment through cooperation with the peoples of the region and the resistance forces to impose that withdrawal, where the Iranian and the Iraqi people have said their word regarding along with the majority of the Lebanese and the Afghans. Syria is approaching form the moment of deciding the fate of the American troops on its land.

The relationship with Washington is determined by the issue of the blood of the Commander Qassem Soleimani and the future of Palestine. The Deal of the Century which has shown the credibility of the options of the resistance forces has provided an opportunity to form a wide front, it is not important to be organized under one institution but rather it is a popular political resisting front spreading on the Islamic world rises up for the right of return of the Palestinian refugees and against the tamper with the future of Jerusalem in favor of the occupation. Therefore, the region is going to confrontation. Iran cannot behave as if its issue is confined to how to build its international relationships but to how to lead the region under the titles of the American withdrawal and the fall of the Deal of the Century and how Iran can be a component that integrates with the people and the Revolutionary Guard and under the supervision of the Higher Leader and can win in these two battles. So this requires a review of the economic and political approach taken by the governments which linked the fate of their plans with the hypothesis of partnership with the West whether through the nuclear understanding or through understandings in politics and economy that reflects the regional position of Iran. These hypotheses have led to a waste of time and money in the investment on an illusion that will not be realistic except by showing more ability and imposing more of the policy of fait accompli.

Many experts and thinkers from the conservatives and extremists see that one part of the problem of the Iranian people with the governmental policies is a result of the leakage of resources resulting from the siege, and one part is a result of the emergence of economic problems as the tyranny of the rentier economy in the real estate market and currencies in the major cities especially in Tehran, and the failure of integrating the national capital which most of it was accumulated during the revolution in a productive investment process, and another part is the result of the corruption phenomenon and the illicit wealth which is the main concern of the political process and which must turn in the successive governments into an institution that is not affected by the authority circulation and the policy changes.

It is remarkable that the Iranians whom you meet in Tehran as officials, advisors, experts, and military leaders do not feel embarrassed to talk about the problems of state- construction experienced by the revolution and the country, but they consider that it is a courage to talk in such issues to show that the revolution is still vivid and capable to face these problems. Despite the economic and financial suffocation they feel comfortable with the situation of their country which they assure that it has passed the most difficult consequences of sanctions, and began to adapt to the economic and investment alternatives of the sectors which are linked to the opportunities of openness and transcended the foundational stage of turning the challenges into opportunities.

The vivid discussions experienced by Tehran and the diversity and the multiplicity of movements, ideas, and visions are an expression of the strong project launched by Imam Ruhollah Khomeini which its leadership and patronage has been continued by Al Sayyed Ali Khamenei. Iran is a real state and has real institutions, serious economy and judiciary, a highly prepared combating ability, a professional diplomacy, and a wide variety of media that expresses the opposing ideas in the community, a life cycle lived by the Iranians away from the austerity but under controls related to Islam, and a high degree of tolerance found in restaurants, streets, and the public parks. This confidence is worthy to respect, the next generation which did not live in the time of revolution to owe it the getting rid of the previous regime gets the opportunities of modern education and the partnership of the scientific research and innovation, without forgetting that the creativity spreads in the atmosphere of dream and freedom will reflect in the young enthusiastic political interpretations that are not in their view a cause for concern but rather a hope, because the whole world changes where people searches for peace and the internal balance of individuals and peoples. The Iranians see that they get the high ratio of this balance comparing with what is known and lived by the peoples on these two levels.

Pakistan plays host to joint tourism conference with Iran

HERITAGE TEHRAN – Attendees including Iranian and Pakistani cultural officials, diplomats and tour operators discussed ways to deepen tourism ties between the two neighboring countries in a conference held at Mehran Arts Council in Hyderabad on February 15.

Addressing the event, Consul General of Islamic Republic of Iran Ahmad Mohammadi stated that Iran and Pakistan have vast potential to encourage traveling, including many places of ancient culture and history, the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization of Iran reported.



Iranian Consul General in Karachi Ahmad Mohammadi addresses a conference on Tehran-Islamabad tourism ties held at Mehran Arts Council in Hyderabad on February 15, 2020.

In 2019, Iran launched an e-visa system for Pakistani citizens in order to facilitate travels abolishing old-fashioned paper visas. E-visas were announced to be issued by Iranian consulates in four [Pakistani] provinces and the Iranian embassy based in Islamabad.

Iran aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025 under its 2025 Tourism Vision Plan.

Hotel groups are waiving coronavirus cancellation fees

In view of the ongoing health crisis in Greater China, where the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) originated in the Hubei province at the end of 2019, many major hotel operators have put provisions in place for guests who had already booked travel into or out of the affected region but are now deterred by fears of contracting the infection.

Citing the health and safety of both their guests and employees as their top priority, major hospitality brands have offered to waive cancellation or booking modification fees as the epidemic continues to evolve unpredictably.

While eligible time periods and certain conditions may vary by company, with bookings through at least the end of February may wish to contact their hoteliers to inquire about making changes to their reservations at no charge. The following are some major brands with properties in operation throughout the region and the exemptions they're currently offering to clients.

(Source: MSN)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Serra da Capivara National Park

Many of the numerous rock shelters in the Serra da Capivara National Park are decorated with cave paintings, some more than 25,000 years old. They are an outstanding testimony to one of the oldest human communities of South America.



Established in 1979, the Serra da Capivara National Park stretched across the municipalities of Sao Raimundo Nonato, Sao Joao do Piaui, and Canto do Buriti in the south-eastern section of Piaui state in Brazil's Northeast Region.

In 1994, the municipality of Brejo do Piaui and, in 1995 the municipality of Joao Costa were dismembered of Sao Joao do Piaui. The municipality of Coronel Jose Dias was dismembered of Sao Raimundo Nonato in 1992. These three municipalities, plus Sao Raimundo Nonato, are partially located in the area of the Serra da Capivara National Park.

The Park covers nearly 129, 140 hectares and has a circumference of 214 kilometers. It is situated in the morphoclimatic zone of the Brazilian Caatinga, distinguished by the multiplicity of plant formations typical of the semi-arid regions of Northeast Brazil. The region's plant species are primarily characterized by the loss of most of their leaves during the dry season, extending from May to December, serving to lend the landscape its silver hue. The region borders two major geological formations – the Maranhao-Piaui sediment basin and the peripheral depression of the Sao Francisco River – and is endowed with a diversity of relief vegetation and landscapes of breathtaking beauty and dotted with exceptional vistas of the surrounding valleys, mountains, and plains.

(Source: UNESCO)

A tour of 10 most famous historical monuments in Tehran

HERITAGE TEHRAN – Modern Tehran is home to skyscrapers and high-rise buildings of all variations, but there are many other beautiful structures of note.

Over the past decades and centuries, inhabitants of the Iranian capital have built impressive houses, mansions and so on, used by and home to some of the most important figures and merchants, many of which still stand, providing some of Tehran's major tourist attractions.

The following is a list of ten historical buildings scattered across the hectic metropolis that indeed worth to pay visit to. The sites have been selected by theculturetrip.com.

Masoudieh Palace

Masoudieh Palace is one of the most beautiful historical buildings of the Qajar dynasty. Built in 1879, this palace has witnessed many events, including the formation of the first ministry of education and the establishment of the first official library.

Among its characteristic traits are the plasterwork, mosaics, and gardens. Today, it's a popular spot with visitors brunching in its cozy cafe with stained glass windows, before walking around to snap some photos of the picturesque edifice.

Cinema Museum

Cinema Museum of Iran at the Ferdows Garden (Bagh-e Ferdows) in northern Tehran houses a Qajar-era mansion surrounded by a well-manicured garden.

The most delightful feature of the monument may be its balcony, with walls and columns adorned in detailed floral plasterwork and arched wooden-framed windows.

There are exhibitions take you through Iran's century-old film industry, and the surrounding cafes allow you to admire the building (and check out Tehran's artsy crowd) a little longer as you sip on some tea.

Saray-e Roshan

On Naser Khosrow Street, one of the oldest streets in downtown Tehran, stands the bewitching Saray-e Roshan. Established in 1932 as one of the first commercial centers, this gothic-inspired building is strikingly unusual in the setting of Iran.

While the faces and statues, nearly nonexistent elsewhere in Iran, are more reminiscent of European architecture, the symbol of Zoroastrianism in the center, Ahura Mazda, gives it a distinctly Persian flavor.

Tamasha-gah-e Zaman (The Time Museum)

Sitting amidst a luxurious Persian garden, the Time Museum not only has an extensive collection of timekeepers, but the building itself is the epitome of authentic Iranian architecture.

This decades-old manor once belonged to Hossein Khodadad, a well-known Iranian merchant, but now serves as a museum to showcase numerous clocks and watches. The pastel-blue exterior boasts windows that resemble cream-colored lace, and the inside does not cease to dazzle with its decorated ceilings, plasterwork, and colorful orosi



A view of Abgineh Museum (PHOTO: Leo71538 / Wikimedia Commons)



Gothic style of Saraye Roshan (PHOTO: Sepideh Sadafi / Wikimedia Commons)

(stained-glass) windows.

Abgineh Museum

The remarkable Glassware and Ceramic Museum is housed in a beautiful Qajar-era building constructed almost a century ago by Ahmad Qavam as his private residence and work office. It later served as the embassy of Egypt, before turning into a museum in 1976.

It gracefully blends European and Iranian architectural styles with a Russian staircase to connect the first and second floors. The ornate plaster, carved wooden columns, and crystal chandeliers make the interior of this building just as beautiful, if not more so, as the exterior.

Golestan Palace

Declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2013, Golestan Palace consists of a group of royal buildings that once served as the seat of government during the Qajar era. It exemplifies a fusion of Persian and Western designs, with immaculate archways, mirrored halls and ceilings, and decorative tiles all placed within the confines of a lavish Persian garden. Words don't do justice to the ancient Persian badgir, windcatchers, and exquisite varied mosaics bordering the rounded windows, which are among the many highlights.

Shams-ol-Emareh

Although it comprises part of Golestan Palace, Shams-ol-Emareh, or "Edifice of the Sun", is a masterpiece deserving its own recognition.

The Qajar monarch Nasser-ol-Din Shah started with the idea to build a tower that gave a panoramic view of the city, and in 1867, construction was finished two years after it began. Twin two-tiered towers sit atop the structure with arched windows, intricate tile work, and an open hall in the center. Though it's not possible to climb to the top, it's easy to imagine Nasser-ol-Din Shah's success in achieving his desired view.

Green Palace

One of the buildings of the Sa'ad Abad complex, which is located in northern Tehran, and perhaps its most beautiful is the Green Palace. Built at the end of the Qajar era and later remodeled by Reza Shah, serving as his residence for one year, before turning into a guest house. Brought from mines in the Zanjan and Khorasan provinces, the marble

used to construct its exterior has a unique hint of green. Just as elaborately designed are the interiors, with a mirror hall and a Persian rug woven over a period of seven years, among their other ostentatious features.

Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art

One of the largest art museum in the country, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art is an impressive concrete feat in itself. To design this building, architect Kamran Diba was inspired by integrating traditional Persian architectural elements with modernity.

This is particularly embodied in the four structures sitting atop the building, which resemble a modernized twist on the windcatchers of ancient Persia.

Te'atr-e Shahr (City Theater)

Completed in early 1970s, the City Theater deserves regard for its cylindrical design that combines both the traditional and modern.

The standing columns add geometric patterns to the roof, which are then filled in with ceramic tiles. The grand entrance is made of wood, giving it a warm, earthy feel. It contains several stages and continues to be a top venue for the performing arts.



Golestan Palace (PHOTO: Ninara / Flickr)

Intl. rally completes Iran itinerary under slogans of justice and peace

TOURISM TEHRAN – An estimated year-long rally called "Jai Jagat 2020", carrying Mahatma Gandhi's message of non-violence, justice and peace, has completed its second leg of journey across Iran before it reaches Armenia on Thursday.

It started from Raj Ghat in New Delhi on October 2, 2019, which marks the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the renowned anti-colonial nationalist and political ethicist who employed nonviolent resistance to lead the successful campaign for India's independence from British Rule.

Iran's itinerary of the campaign was made in close collaboration with Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts and its local departments en route.

"The rally of Jai Jagat [2020] across Iran reflects a clear message of security, peace, hospitality and friendship form Iranian people to the world," ILNA quoted Mohammad-Ebrahim Larjani, the ministry's director of advertising and marketing office, as saying on Wednesday.

The journey is planned to come to an end in Geneva,



Switzerland, where a dialogue will take place with UN agencies on implementation of UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

According to organizers, the Jai Jagat vision emerged

as Rajagopal, the founder of Ekta Parishad, visited numerous groups and projects throughout India and other nations to explain Ekta Parishad's methods of empowering poor communities.

"Never in human history have we faced such a crisis as we face now. There are the ancient problems of poverty and injustice, along with new and escalating wars and migration on a massive scale. Increasing automation is bringing the mass employment model of capitalism to an end," the campaign highlights.

"Millions of jobs are threatened as human labor becomes redundant across many industries. In addition to all that, the profound effects of global warming and extreme weather conditions need to be halted, or at least mitigated, to prevent a catastrophic future with significantly diminished food and water."

Iran was ranked the third fastest-growing tourism destination in the globe in 2019, with 27.9 percent growth year on year, according to the latest statistics released by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Coronavirus: air travel demand 'will fall for first time in 11 years'

The spread of the coronavirus will result in the first fall in global air travel in more than a decade, the international airline industry body has predicted.

The International Air Transport Association (Iata) warned that falling passenger demand as a result of the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus would cost the airline industry \$29.3bn (£23.7bn) in lost revenues this year.

In its initial assessment of the impact, the organization said it expected global demand for air travel to fall by 4.7% in 2020, the first overall decline since the global financial crisis in 2008-09.

"Airlines are making difficult decisions to cut capacity and in some cases routes. Lower fuel costs will help offset some of the lost revenue," said Alexandre de Juniac, director general and chief executive of Iata. "This will be a very tough year for airlines."

The vast majority of the financial impact will hit airlines in the Asia Pacific region, where revenues will fall by \$27.8bn, with the bulk borne by carriers registered in China. Iata estimates that losses in China's domestic market will hit \$12.8bn. Carriers outside Asia Pacific are forecast to lose about \$1.5bn this year, "assuming the loss of demand is limited to markets linked

to China".

Iata said: "The sharp downturn in demand as a result of Covid-19 will have a financial impact on airlines – severe for those particularly exposed to the China market. These estimates are based on a scenario where Covid-19 has a similar V-shaped impact on demand as was experienced during Sars. That was characterized by a six-month period with a sharp decline followed by an equally quick recovery."

De Juniac warned that Iata's assessment was based on the coronavirus public health emergency not spreading beyond China.

"If it spreads more widely to Asia Pacific markets then impacts on airlines from other regions would be larger," he said.

Iata said it was "premature" to estimate what the revenue loss would mean for the global profitability of the airline industry. Airlines including Qantas and Air France-KLM have cancelled flights to and from China and have warned of weaker demand for travel in Asia. The Franco-Dutch group Air France-KLM expects the Covid-19 outbreak to wipe between €150 and €200m (£130 and £170m) off its earnings.

(Source: The Guardian)

In fight against COVID-19 we are together, Chinese envoy to Tehran says

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Chang Hua, Ambassador of China to the Islamic Republic of Iran, has said the Chinese and the Iranian nations stand together in fight against the novel coronavirus.

"Fight against the #COVID19! We are together," the ambassador wrote on his Twitter account on Friday.

In a ceremony on Tuesday night in the presence of the Chinese ambassador, a projection mapping was carried out on the iconic Azadi Tower in Tehran to convey the message of sympathy with Chinese people fighting coronavirus.

On February 14, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi appreciated his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif for being the first foreign minister who sent sympathy to the Chinese people since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

"You are the first foreign minister who sent sympathies to the Chinese people since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, which



fully reflects the profound friendship between the people of the two countries, who support each other and tackle difficulties in a cooperative manner," said Wang.

In a tweet in Persian language on February 13, Chang Hua thanked Iranian people for sympathizing with the Chinese in their campaign against coronavirus.

"There is a proverb in the Persian language that says 'heart speaks to heart'. In China's struggle against coronavirus we deeply felt the friendship of the government and nation of Iran," the ambassador said.

Meanwhile, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang on February 14 announced that many foreign ambassadors and representatives to China have said on social media platforms that they stand with China in this fight against the virus.

He thanked the Iranian ambassador to China, Mohammad Keshavarz-Zadeh, for saying, "I'm sure China, with 5000 years of civilization, will overcome this problem."

The world is failing to ensure children have a 'livable planet', report finds

Every country in the world is failing to shield children's health and their futures from intensifying ecological degradation, climate change and exploitative marketing practices, says a new report.

The report says that despite dramatic improvements in survival, nutrition, and education over the past 20 years, "today's children face an uncertain future", with every child facing "existential threats".

"In 2015, the world's countries agreed on the sustainable development goals (SDGs), yet nearly five years later, few countries have recorded much progress towards achieving them," says the report by a commission of 40 child and adolescent health experts from around the world.

"Climate change, ecological degradation, migrating populations, conflict, pervasive inequalities, and predatory commercial practices threaten the health and future of children in every country," it says.

The commission, convened by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations children's agency, Unicef, and medical journal the Lancet, calls for radical changes to protect children's health and futures from the intensifying climate emergency.

It also highlights the threat of predatory commercial practices, linking children's exposure to marketing of fast food and sugary drinks to an 11-fold increase in childhood obesity, from 11 million in 1975 to 124 million in 2016.

The report includes an index of 180 countries that compares data on survival, wellbeing, health, education and nutrition; as well as sustainability, with a proxy for greenhouse gas emissions, and equity, or income gaps.

Norway, South Korea, the Netherlands, France and Ireland are found to be the best countries for a child to flourish in his or her early years. The Central African Republic, Chad, Somalia, Niger, and Mali are the bottom five in the list, based on the same ranking.

But when performance is compared taking per capita carbon emissions into account, Burundi, Chad and Somalia are best performers, while the US, Australia and Saudi Arabia are among the bottom 10 countries.

"When authors took per capita CO2 emissions into account, the top countries [on the child flourishing ranking]

trail behind: Norway ranked 156, the Republic of Korea 166, and the Netherlands 160," the report says. "Each of the three emits 210% more CO2 per capita than their 2030 target."

"The only countries on track to beat CO2 emission per capita targets by 2030, while also performing fairly (within the top 70) on child flourishing measures are: Albania, Armenia, Grenada, Jordan, Moldova, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Uruguay and Vietnam," the report says.

The UK is ranked among the top 10 countries when it comes to child flourishing, but placed 133rd on "delivering on emissions targets"; it is "currently on track to emit 115% more CO2 than its 2030 emissions target".

Experts behind the report agree that "while the poorest countries need to do more to support their children's ability to live healthy lives, excessive carbon emissions – disproportionately from wealthier countries – threaten the future of all children".

Stefan Peterson, Unicef's chief of health, said children living in the poorest countries are facing the brunt of a changing climate, despite having a tiny carbon footprint.

"These children face enormous challenges to their health and wellbeing, and are also now at the greatest disadvantage due to the climate crisis," he said. "We need sustainable gains in child health and development, which means that big carbon emitters need to reduce their emissions for all children to thrive, poor and rich."

The report says: "If global warming exceeds 4C by the



year 2100 in line with current projections, this would lead to devastating health consequences for children, due to rising ocean levels, heatwaves, proliferation of diseases like malaria and dengue, and malnutrition."

Anthony Costello, professor of global health and sustainable development at University College London, said the commission was calling for a radical rethink on global child health.

"Climate change threatens our children's future so we must stop carbon emissions as soon as possible," he told the Guardian. "Our new index shows that not a single country performed well on both child development and emissions indicators."

"We also call for greater regulation of marketing of tobacco, alcohol, formula milk, sugar-sweetened beverages and gambling to children, and of social media companies which target children through secret algorithms and the inappropriate use of their personal data."

The report says children are at risk from harmful marketing. "Evidence suggests that children in some countries see as many as 30,000 advertisements on television alone in a single year, while youth exposure to vaping (e-cigarettes) advertisements increased by more than 250% in the US over two years, reaching more than 24 million young people."

Industry self-regulation has failed, said Costello, adding that in Australia, for instance, "children and adolescent viewers were still exposed to 51 million alcohol ads during just one year of televised football, cricket and rugby".

"The reality could be much worse still," he said. "We have few facts and figures about the huge expansion of social media advertising and algorithms aimed at our children."

The commission calls on governments to put measures in place "to ensure children receive their rights and entitlements now and a livable planet in the years to come".

"We live in an era like no other. Our children face a future of great opportunity, but they stand on the precipice of a climate crisis... our challenge is great and we seem to be paralysed," it says.

(Source: The Guardian)

Iran announces 13 new cases of coronavirus infection

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Thirteen new cases of infection with the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, have been identified in Iran, deputy health minister Kiyanoush Jahanpour said on Friday.



"Based on latest experiments, 13 new cases of the coronavirus have been so far identified, of whom two have lost their lives," the official said, IRNA reported.

He went on to say that over the past couple of days, thousands of people have referred to clinic and a total of 735 people with symptoms of influenza have been hospitalized.

More than 2,200 people have now died from the coronavirus in China, with the majority of deaths coming out Wuhan, capital of Hubei province.

In China alone, there have been more than 75,000 cases of infection. The virus has also spread around the globe with more than 1,000 cases and several deaths worldwide.

How urban trees and hedges help cut air pollution

Hedges and trees in towns and cities are more than just attractive, they can behave like natural air filters, trapping traffic pollution made up of dangerous microscopic particles blamed for a range of serious health problems, ranging from heart disease, asthma and strokes to diabetes, obesity and dementia.



A study at Lancaster University showed that silver birch trees maintained as hedges at about the height of an adult person were particularly good at cleaning the air.

Their leaves are covered in tiny hairs and ridges that help trap the polluting particles and each time it rains the particles are washed off the leaves, freeing them to trap more particles. The suggestion is that the trees could be planted at pollution hotspots.

A study at the University of Surrey also found hedges or a combination of hedges and trees help to cut down the spread of air pollution from roads, including black carbon, harmful heavy metals and microscopic particles. The hedges acted as barriers at breathing height, usually between 1.5 and 1.7 metres.

And quite apart from scrubbing the air clean, hedges and their trees also help to cool the atmosphere in cities, protect against flooding by soaking up heavy rainfalls, and absorb carbon dioxide.

(Source: The Guardian)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Camera traps picture Asiatic cheetah, Persian leopards in Semnan

An Asiatic cheetah and three Persian leopards have been observed through camera traps in Shahrood county in north central Semnan province, Amir Abdous, the provincial department of environment chief, has announced.

"Cameras have recently captured photos of an Asiatic cheetah and three Persian leopards around watering troughs," he said.

All are mature and physically healthy, which is so precious, Abdous further highlighted, Mehr reported on Wednesday.

Referring to ten camera traps installed in the area by the environmentalists to determine the exact distribution of the species, he said that Asiatic cheetah and Persian leopard are two invaluable species which are endangered despite being among umbrella and flagship species.

تصویر برداری همزمان از سه پلنگ و یک یوزپلنگ در شاهرود

مدیرکل حفاظت محیط زیست استان سمنان از تصویربرداری سه پلنگ ایرانی و یک یوزپلنگ آسیایی در پارک ملی توران شاهرود خبر داد.

امیر عبدوس در گفتگو با خبرنگار مهر، تاکید کرد: تصاویر ضبط شده از سه قلاده پلنگ توسط دوربین تله‌ای در کنار یکی از آبشخورهای این پارک ملی تهیه شده است، تصاویر شاهد سلامت و وضعیت جسمی مناسب این گونه دارد.

مدیرکل محیط زیست استان سمنان گفت: نصب ده دوربین تله‌ای توسط یکی از عکاسان و دوستداران طبیعت در توران همچنین ثبت تصویر یک قلاده یوزپلنگ آسیایی را نیز به دنبال داشت، تاکید کرد: پویایی جمعیت جانوران وحشی در یک زیست بوم در گرو حفظ گونه‌های شاخص آن زیست بوم به خصوص گونه‌های چتر و پرچم است و پلنگ به عنوان گونه چتر و یوزپلنگ به عنوان گونه پرچم در این پارک ملی نقش بسزایی در پویایی جمعیت سایر گونه‌ها به خصوص طعمه‌های خود دارند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"-ish"

■ **Meaning:** sort of or similar to
■ **For example:** One of the twins is athletic while the other is more **bookish**.

PHRASAL VERB

Pick somebody/something out

■ **Meaning:** to choose or recognize someone or something from a group
■ **For example:** She was able to pick out her father at the other side of the room.

IDIOM

Dab hand at something

■ **Explanation:** If you're a dab hand at something, you're very good at doing it
■ **For example:** Why don't you call Suzy? She's a dab hand at planning parties.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Thailand's war against drugs

(March 03, 2003)
International concern has been growing after more than 1,100 people were killed during the first month of Thailand's war on the drug trade. The government said that most of the victims were gangsters, trying to get rid of informants. But human rights groups have accused the authorities of ordering unlawful executions. This report from Phil Mercer: More than fifty diplomats gathered at the ministry of foreign affairs to hear what the Thais had to say about this **controversial and bloody campaign**. They were **briefed** by senior civil servants and police officers who told them Thailand's drugs problem was **so severe** that decisive action was needed. The **crackdown**, they insisted, would not allow the security forces **to operate outside of the law**. Those who did would face prosecution. The police have said every death will be investigated. It'll be a **tough task**; more than a thousand people have been killed since this ninety-day **crusade** began, just over a month ago. Thailand's prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra said most were the victims of **inter-gang fighting**. He's urged people not to worry about the high number of deaths. Their concern, he said, should focus on the millions of Thais whose lives have been **blighted by** drug addiction.

■ **Words**
controversial: if a subject is controversial it causes lots of discussions and arguments
bloody campaign: a planned action for a specific amount of time that results in injuries and death
briefed: if you brief someone you give them information on a particular topic
so severe: so serious, so bad
crackdown: a strong, sharp action to stop something from continuing
to operate outside of: to work or do something without following the usual rules and guidelines
a tough task: a very difficult job
crusade: a long and dedicated effort to achieve something that is believed to be very important – in this case, an end to the drug trade
inter-gang fighting: fighting between gangs
blighted by: spoil or damaged by

(Source: BBC)

Russia says Turkey sends large amounts of ammo to Syria's Idlib ahead of large-scale op

PRESS TV — Russia says Turkey has sent large amounts of ammunition and armored vehicles into Syria's Idlib province, apparently in preparation for its anticipated large-scale operation in the Arab country.

Turkey has brought large amounts of military hardware and ammunition into Idlib in recent weeks, Russia's Defense Ministry said on Friday.

The deployment comes as Turkey announced Thursday it wanted no "face-off" with Moscow over Syria's offensive against terrorists near the two countries' border but said it might receive US defense missiles to protect Turkish forces.

"We have no intentions of a face-off with Russia," Turkey's defense minister Hulusi Akar told CNN Turk broadcaster, adding that talks would continue with Russian officials.

However, Ankara has asked the US to conduct aerial patrols in its airspace bordering Idlib to show support for Ankara's imminent large-scale military operations against the Syrian army, a Turkish official told Middle East Eye.

The request came earlier this month in meetings with US Special Envoy James Jeffrey in Ankara, where Turkish officials also asked Washington for two batteries of Patriot missile systems to shield the border area from possible air attacks, the official told MEE on condition of anonymity.

Another Turkish official said that Ankara was also waiting for a response from US-led NATO to provide more support for its air defense needs.

Russia urges Turkey to allow Syrians flee to gov.-held areas

Amid an imminent operation by Turkish forces in Idlib, the Russian defense ministry has urged Ankara to allow Syrian civilians to enter government-controlled parts of the Arab country. The ministry also denied reports that hundreds of thousands of Syrians were fleeing Idlib in the direction of Turkey.

The Russian defense ministry issued its comments in a statement, saying it had been using drones and other resources to monitor the situation in Idlib.

The Kremlin also announced on Friday that a summit of heads of Russia, France, Germany, and Turkey on Syria is under discussion.

Tensions have mounted in the last three months between Turkey, which backs anti-government militants in Syria, and Russia which backs the Syrian army's offensive in Idlib, the last militant-held region of the country.

Trump ally Roger Stone sentenced to over 3 years in prison

PRESS TV — Roger Stone, President Donald Trump's longtime friend and political adviser, has been sentenced to more than three years in prison over charges stemming from investigation into the alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election.

Stone is the sixth Trump aide convicted in a criminal case as part of special prosecutor Robert Mueller's probe into alleged collusion between Moscow and the Trump campaign during the 2016 election.

The penalty from US District Judge Amy Berman Jackson came on Thursday over charges that include witness tampering, false statements, and obstruction of justice.

Jackson also ruled that Stone, 67, pay a \$20,000 fine, serve two years of probation after his sentence, and perform 250 hours of community service.

"The defendant lied about a matter of great national and international significance. This is not campaign hijinks. This is not just Roger being Roger," said Jackson.

Stone "was not prosecuted for standing up for the president; he was prosecuted for covering up for the president," she added.

She also rejected Trump's attacks on federal prosecutors for bringing the case against Stone, saying that "there was nothing unfair, phony, or disgraceful about the investigation or the prosecution."

The federal prosecutors in Stone's case originally recommended a sentence of seven to nine years based on federal sentencing guidelines. Trump had previously called the initial recommendation "horrible" and "unfair."

This is a horrible and very unfair situation. The real crimes were on the other side, as nothing happens to them. Cannot allow this miscarriage of justice!

After the ruling, the president said he would be monitoring Stone's case closely, suggesting he may pardon his ally.

"We will watch the process and watch it very closely. And at some point I will make a determination. But Roger Stone and everybody has to be treated fairly. And this has not been a fair process."

"I'd love to see Roger exonerated, and I'd love to see it happen," he said at an event in Las Vegas. Stone lied in 2017 testimony to lawmakers on the House Intelligence Committee -- which Adam Schiff leads -- about acting as an intermediary between the Trump campaign and WikiLeaks, which released hacked documents that embarrassed Democratic rival Hillary Clinton during the campaign.

Kremlin Spokesman slams allegations about Russian Election interference as 'Paranoid'

TEHRAN (FNA) — The Kremlin expects that as the US presidential election approaches, there will be an increasing number of reports about Russia's alleged attempts to interfere in the vote, Russian Presidential Spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, commenting on a New York Times article claiming that Moscow "was interfering in the 2020 campaign to try to get President Donald Trump re-elected".

"This is another in a series of paranoid reports, and we regret to say that their number will grow as the election approaches. They certainly have nothing to do with the truth," he pointed out, according to TASS. According to The New York Times, "intelligence officials warned House lawmakers" about Russia's alleged election interference at a classified briefing, which "angered Mr. Trump, who complained that Democrats would use it against him."

"The day after the February 13 briefing to lawmakers, the president berated Joseph Maguire, the outgoing acting director of national intelligence, for allowing it to take place, people familiar with the exchange said," the newspaper pointed out. The US president later "announced that he was replacing Mr. Maguire with Richard Grenell, the ambassador to Germany and an aggressively vocal Trump supporter."

Will U.S. and Taliban manage to ink final peace agreement in Feb.29?

By Mohammad Ghaderi

TEHRAN — The Afghan armed group of Taliban, as its first reaction to inking the final peace agreement with the U.S., announced that the deal will be signed in February 29.

According to Al Jazeera's report on Friday, the U.S.-led forces, Kabul forces and Taliban fighters will observe a seven-day period of reduced violence.

In the meantime, the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in a statement on Thursday, confirmed that Washington and the Taliban will ink the agreement in February 29.

A week-long "reduction in violence (RIV)" between the Taliban, the United States and Afghan security forces will begin at midnight on Friday, Al Jazeera quoted informed officials as saying.

The agreement struck during negotiations between U.S. and the Taliban representatives, if maintained, could secure a peace deal that would lead to a withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan.

In his statement, Pompeo also confirmed that in consultation with the national unity government, the American negotiators reached an agreement with the Taliban's representatives in Doha to reduce violence



across Afghanistan.

Soon after Pompeo's announcement, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed the development and said both

sides will invite senior representatives to take part in the peace deal "signing ceremony (in Feb. 29)".

The Taliban's statement also said the

signing of the peace deal would be followed by intra-Afghan talks with various political parties in the country.

The Afghan armed group, which was removed from power in a U.S.-led invasion in 2001, has previously refused to speak directly to the Kabul government, which it denounces as a "U.S. puppet".

Also, Javid Feisal, the spokesman for Afghan National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib, has confirmed that, within the framework of reached agreements with the Taliban, the 7-day long period of RIV will start at Friday (Feb. 21) midnight.

The 7-day RIV agreement will cover the entire provinces across Afghanistan.

The Russian Foreign Ministry also reacted to the ongoing developments in Afghanistan and announced, "Moscow hopes that the political crisis in Afghanistan would not affect (negatively) on the trend of inking agreement between the U.S. and Taliban."

The experts familiar with the negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban have opined that declaring a 7-day period for reduction of violence and halting attacks on the Afghan government forces as well as the U.S. troops are somehow pre-conditions for signing the mentioned agreement and are also testifying the Taliban's supremacy over its armed wing across the country.

India will 'not rush into deal' with U.S. during Trump's visit to Ahmedabad



PRESS TV — India has dashed hopes of an early trade deal with the United States, saying it will not rush into an agreement during a visit by President Donald Trump to the country next week.

Indian foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said on Thursday that "complex negotiations" are underway for reaching an agreement, but "these are complex negotiations. We would not like to rush into a deal."

"We do hope to reach an understanding with an outcome that strikes the right balance for both sides," he added.

He made the remarks as many were expecting a deal next week, when Trump is due for a visit to Ahmedabad on Monday.

Days ahead of the visit, Trump said that Washington and New Delhi could make a "tremendous" trade deal as he was "going to India"

He further said that the US has not been treated well by New Delhi, but said, "I happen to like Prime Minister Modi a lot."

In response to Trump's remarks, Kumar said, "It is important to understand the context under which these remarks were made."

"Please understand that the US is India's largest trading partner" he said adding that "there has been a consistent growth in trade between the two countries over the last few years."

The Indian Congress criticized Trump for making the remarks ahead of his visit to India, saying he has "undermined" all the progress achieved so far in bilateral relations.

"It is an insult and affront to the dignity of the country and the Ministry of

External Affairs should respond to it," said congressional leaders.

They also called on the Modi government to respond to Trump's comments.

Negotiations are underway between New Delhi and Washington over several agreements, including military contracts worth \$3 billion and several other deals worth over \$7 billion.

The Indian cabinet committee on security (CCS), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the procurement of 24 MH-60R Seahawk multi-role helicopters worth \$2.6 billion for the Indian Navy.

The US has also moved ahead on its offer for a missile shield system to protect the India capital.

Progress has also been made on the sale of the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAMS) to India under a Foreign Military Sales pact.

The US has also moved ahead on its offer for a missile shield system for the Indian capital.

Ahead of Trump's visit, US manufacturer, Lockheed Martin also offered a helping hand to India in developing next-generation advanced aircraft equipped for multi-role combat.

The American aerospace giant that manufactures fighter jets such as F-16s and F-35s, has also offered to cooperate with India to help develop Indian-built Tejas into a much more effective fighter plane.

The US remains the top trading partner for India; the bilateral trade between the two countries is approximately 62 per cent in goods and 38 per cent in services.

Iraq's anti-terror PMU appoints Abu Fadak al-Mohammedawi as al-Muhandis successor



PRESS TV — Abu Fadak al-Mohammedawi as the new deputy commander of Hashd al-Shaabi following the martyrdom of his predecessor Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was killed in a US drone attack last month.

According to PMU official Abu Ali al-Bassari, the Popular Mobilization Units chose Abu Fadak based on a decision made at a recent meeting of its board.

"Following the appointment, the chief-commander of the Iraqi armed forces will sign Abu Fadak's decree in the next couple of days," he added.

Al-Mohammedawi earlier served as the secretary-general of Kata'ib Hezbollah. Since joining the founding core of Kata'ib Hezbollah in 1997, he has been a prominent figure, even though his real name is not known to the public.

"Abu Fadak is strong and a true leader with honorable positions and good relations with all," an Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq commander said earlier.

Known as the "uncle", Abu Fadak is praised for his military prowess and confidence. He was reportedly close to al-Muhandis.

Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, along with late anti-terror Commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and a number of their comrades, was assassinated in a US drone attack near the Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

The People's Mobilization Units (PMU) of Iraq, better known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, is a government-sponsored umbrella organization composed of around 40 factions of volunteer coun-

ter-terrorism forces, including mostly Shia Muslims besides Sunni Muslims, Christians and Kurds.

The PMU's formation goes back to the summer of 2014, shortly after Daesh, the world's most notorious Takfiri terror group, showed its face and managed to occupy swathes of territory in Iraq. The lightning gains made by the foreign-backed terrorists caught the national army of Iraq off guard, pushing government forces to the verge of collapse and leaving the Arab state in disarray.

On June 15 that year, Iraq's prominent Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani intervened to help rebuild the national army, issuing a fatwa that called on all Iraqi people to join forces with the army in the face of the Daesh threat.

The historic fatwa led to a mass mobilization of popular volunteer forces under the banner of Hashd al-Sha'abi. The force then rushed to the aid of the army and took the lead in many of the successful anti-terror operations, which ultimately led to the collapse of Daesh's territorial rule and the liberation of the entire Iraqi land in December 2017.

The PMU's efficient role in the Takfiri outfit's defeat turned the force into a permanent and broadly-popular feature of Iraq's social, political and security landscapes, despite attempts by the US and its allies to depict the PMU's mission as sectarian in nature.

In November 2016, the parliament recognized Hashd al-Sha'abi as an official force with similar rights as those of the regular army, therefore legally establishing it as part of the National Armed Forces.

Yemeni forces hit Aramco oil facilities in western Saudi Arabia: Military spokesman

→ 1 Saree also highlighted that the Saudi regime will suffer more painful strikes if it continues its onslaught against Yemen.

Back on September 18, 2019, the Yemeni spokesman lauded the highly disruptive drone attacks on Saudi Aramco petroleum and gas processing plants at Abqaiq and Khurais in Eastern Province as an outstanding example of the military prowess of Yemeni army troops and allied fighters from Popular Committees.

"Our forces have reached a high level of efficiency and ability. They can manufacture various types of unmanned aerial vehicles in record time. The Second Deterrent Balance Operation, which targeted Saudi oil installations, is a perfect example of the capabilities of our forces in terms of planning and implementation," Saree said at the time.

"We assure the world that the free and steadfast Yemeni nation will not hesitate to respond to the (Saudi-led) coalition of aggression, and will use its legitimate right to target all targets deep inside the countries involved."

"The destruction of the targeted facilities is far greater



than what has been announced. Americans sought to publish fabricated pictures of the operation aftermath as part of attempts to downplay it. The blaze lasted for several hours and authorities in the state of aggression (Saudi Arabia) could not contain it."

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing back to power the government of former President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi and crushing the Ansarullah movement.

The US-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past nearly five years.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have purchased billions of dollars' worth of weapons from the United States, France and the United Kingdom in the war on Yemen.

The Saudi-led coalition has been widely criticized for the high civilian death toll from its bombing campaign. The alliance has carried out nearly 20,500 air raids in Yemen, according to data collected by the Yemen Data Project.

The UN says over 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger.

Legendary midfielder Karim Bagheri turns 46

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Ex-Persepolis and Iran national football team iconic midfielder Karim Bagheri turned 46 on Thursday, and it's hard to forget someone who gave the supporters so much to remember.

Tabriz-born Bagheri was discovered by Romanian coach Vasile Godja in 1992 and began his football playing for his hometown club Tractor. After two years, he was transferred to Tehran-based football team Keshavarz, where he caught the eye of Iranian giants Persepolis. There, Bagheri enjoyed much success winning numerous titles and becoming a fan favorite. Numerous impressive displays ended up in Bagheri attracting attention from many European clubs and on Aug. 1, 1997, a year after he signed a contract with Persepolis, Bagheri signed with German Bundesliga side Arminia Bielefeld along with his fellow Iranian international Ali Daei.

In 2000, Bagheri became the first when he made his debut in England for Charlton — although he had very little success there, only playing 15 minutes during the entire season in a game against Ipswich Town. His father's death, international call-ups and injuries restricted him from making appearances in his first year.

«Bagheri is a holding midfielder with great physique and an eye for goal. His goal-scoring record is unbelievable. He's got almost a goal every other game in 70 internationals which is an amazing feat for a midfielder player. He understood the English game,» Charlton coach Alan Curbishley had said about Bagheri.

In 2001, Bagheri joined Al Sadd and after playing one season for the Qatari club, he returned to Persepolis to play nine years for the Reds, spanning a decade.

Bagheri nearly played 200 matches for Persepolis and scored 33 goals.



He also made 87 appearances for Iran national football team and scored 50 goals.

Bagheri was a member of the team who defeated Australia in the 1998 FIFA World Cup qualifier. He scored the first of two goals that took Iran from two goals down to tie the game 2-2 and eventually become the last team to qualify for the tournament. He also

represented Iran in the 1998 World Cup in France, where Iran failed to qualify for the knockout stage.

Bagheri announced his retirement from national duty in a friendly match against Brazil at the Sheikh Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates on Oct. 7, 2010.

Bagheri started his coaching career in

Persepolis in 2012 and has played a key role in the team's successes in the recent years.

As Branko Ivankovic's assistant, he helped Persepolis win three titles in Iran Professional League, one Hazfi Cup and three Super Cups during a three-year period.

He will forever be known as a gentleman of football.

Iran remain unchanged in FIFA ranking



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran football team remained unchanged in the FIFA World Ranking released on Thursday.

Japan remained as Asia's best (28), followed by Iran (33).

Korea Republic, at 40th, are the Continent's third highest ranked side, while Australia (42) and Qatar (55) completed the top five.

With few matches having been played on the international front so far this year, there is little movement in the first ranking of 2020.

Indeed, with just 15 friendlies taking place since the last Ranking update in

December — including two games in late 2019 — the top 20 remain unchanged, with Belgium, France and Brazil still making up the top three, FIFA.com reported.

Some minor movement in the top 50 sees Wales (23rd, down 1) and Paraguay (41st, down 1) each fall down a spot, while Ghana (46th, up 1) rise ever so slightly.

Palestine (103rd, up 3) are the first biggest climbers of 2020. The AFC side's success in January's Bangabandhu Cup sees them leapfrog Estonia, Trinidad and Tobago, Mozambique and Kenya as they secured the biggest move by points and rank.

The next FIFA World Ranking will be published on 9 April 2020.

Iran ease past Syria at FIBA Asia Cup qualifier



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran were too strong for Syria at the 2021 International Basketball Federation (FIBA) Asia Cup qualification, beating them 94-48 on Thursday.

Hamed Haddadi led Iran with 14 points in Tehran's Azadi Hall, while Syrian Abdulwahab Alhamwi scored 11 points.

Team Melli will meet Qatar in Group E on Sunday.

«We don't take nothing for granted against Qatar. As you remember, we defeated Qatar in the 2019 World Cup qualifier 77-75 in a difficult match and the result show that a tough match is waiting for us,» Iran coach Mehran Shahintab said.

A total of 24 countries will take part in the qualifiers — divided into six groups. According to FIBA, the top two teams of each group will secure places at the 2021 Asia Cup. Meanwhile, the third-placed team in each group will battle over the four remaining slots in the tournament.

The qualifiers will run until February next year, as teams play both home and away matches — giving local supporters the opportunity to cheer on their national squads directly during the matches.

The second window of the qualifiers will be held in November, while the last is scheduled for February 2021.

ACL2020 MD2 Toyota Player of the Week: Teruhito Nakagawa, Alipour fourth

Yokohama F. Marinos forward Teruhito Nakagawa netted a brace to help the J.League champions ease past Australia's Sydney FC 4-0 at home in Wednesday's Group H tie as the 27-year-old picked up this week's top player plaudit.

Nakagawa's two goals came from two shots on target, with his first effort, a deft chip over Sydney FC goalkeeper Andrew Redmayne, nominated for Goal of the Week. The wide forward also created three chances for his teammates.

The one-club man also made 30 passes with a passing accuracy of 93.3% and had 50 touches to earn a 9.2 rating to top the Toyota standings for this week.

Bafetimbi Gomis also shone on Matchday Two with the Al Hilal SFC striker scoring twice in the defending champions'

2-1 win against Shabab Al Ahli of the United Arab Emirates.

The 2019 MVP and Top Scorer scored his double from three shots on goal, all of which were on target, taking his tally for the 2020 Continental campaign to three from two matches.

Gomis additionally made 12 passes, won 2 duels and 1 aerial duel for his 8.7 rating.

Al Sadd star Akram Afif rounds off the top three as the Qatar forward shone against Sepahan of Islamic Republic of Iran, registering a goal and an assist in their 3-0 win in Doha.

Afif also created three chances for his teammates and made 32 passes with 75% accuracy (24 in the opponent's half at 71% accuracy) for his 8.6 rating.

Persepolis frontman Ali Alipour enters the list at number four after netting a brace in the Tehran side's 2-2 draw with Sharjah FC of the UAE. The 24-year-old's goals came from two shots on target, while he also won six duels to earn an 8.4 rating.

Completing the top five is Pakhtakor striker Igor Sergeev who also registered an 8.4 after he scored twice in the Uzbekistan champions' 3-0 win over with Iran's Shahr Khodro.

Also scoring an 8.4 rating is another man who scored a brace this week, Yokohama F. Marinos' Adu Onaiwu, followed by Leandro of FC Tokyo and Al Sadd midfielder Hassan Al Haydos who both tallied 8.3 ratings.

(Source: the-afc)

Tokyo 2020 Mascots Miraitowa and Someity to Promote 'Make the Beat!'

The Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games on Thursday (20 February) announced that Paralympic mascot Someity and Olympic mascot Miraitowa will travel to six cities throughout Europe to promote the Tokyo 2020 'Make the Beat!' cheering project.

The mascots will depart Japan on 25 February and travel to Barcelona, Paris, Bonn, Athens, London and Lausanne. This will be the first time the Tokyo 2020 mascots have visited Europe.

The four destinations include four Summer Olympic and Paralympic host cities — Barcelona (1992), Paris (1900, 1924, 2024), Athens (1896, 2004), and London (1908, 1948, 2012) — as well as the home of the International Olympic Committee, Lausanne, and home of the International



Paralympic Committee, Bonn.

At each stop, the mascots will participate in events and promotions to raise awareness and engagement with 'Make the Beat!', a unique cheering project that will engage

fans all over the world via social media, introducing them to the Tokyo 2020beat, a melodic rhythm that spectators can dance or clap along to.

In the leadup to the Games, fans are invited

to post videos of themselves performing the 2020beat to social media using the hashtag #2020beat. During the Tokyo 2020 Games, a selection of the submitted material will be displayed inside venues and at Live Sites as a compilation generated using Alibaba Cloud technology.

In this way, fans who will not be able to attend events at the venues can still participate in the Tokyo 2020 Games and cheer on the athletes to the sound of the beat.

Fans can post their #2020beat videos to TikTok, Instagram, Facebook or Twitter. Videos will be stored and compiled from March onwards. Full participation guidelines as well as terms and conditions can be found on the official Make the Beat! website. (Source: Paralympic.org)

Persepolis forward Stokes goes AWOL from training

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Anthony Stokes has reportedly refused to return to Tehran for Persepolis team's training on Friday.

The Irish striker was absent in the training after being given permission by the club to stay one more day in Dubai, the UAE and it has angered Persepolis coach Yahya Golmohammadi.



Following the Persepolis 2-2 draw against Emirati side Sharjah, Anthony Stokes asked the coach to stay in Dubai for an additional day to visit his son there and then return to Tehran to join the team. Golmohammadi agreed with his request and the Irish striker, having a return ticket to Iran on Friday, was supposed to be present at the training session of the team.

Stokes, 31, has signed a six-month contract with Persepolis in Iran Professional League (IPL) during the winter transfer window. It came after he was released by Turkish second-tier outfit Adana Demispor.

The Irishman, who had earlier spell with Tractor, had sparked some controversies in the Tabriz-based team regarding going AWOL in the training sessions.

Five Iranian coach shortlisted for Team Melli's assistant role

PLDC — Iran Football Federation has released a five-candidate list for working as Dragan Skocic's assistant.

Vahid Hashemian, Karim Bagheri, Pirooz Ghorbani, Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh and Moharram Navidkia are the nominees to be appointed as Skocic's assistant.

Team Melli prepare for four must-win matches in late March and early June in the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 and AFC Asian Cup China 2023.

Iran will entertain Hong Kong on March 26 in Tehran and meet Cambodia five days later in an away match.

The Persians will face Bahrain and Iraq on June 4 and 9, respectively in Tehran.

Iran, who are going to continue their quest for a sixth World Cup appearance, sit five points behind leaders Iraq in Group C but having played one game fewer.

Majid Hosseini sidelined for three weeks

Trabzonspor Iranian defender Majid Hosseini has been sidelined for three weeks due to a hamstring injury.

He suffered the injury while warming up for the match against Sivasspor.

Hosseini will be out of action for three weeks, the club announced.

Trabzonspor leads the Turkish Süper Lig table. (Source: Foto Mac)

Boundedjah gets two-month suspension for unsporting behavior

Al-Sadd striker Baghdad Boundedjah has been banned for two months by the Asian Football Confederation for "unsporting behavior," the Qatari side announced on Thursday.

The Algeria international posted a photo on his Instagram account, accusing the referee of a game between Al-Sadd and Saudi side Al-Hilal in the Asian Champions League semis last year of bribery.

Al-Hilal defeated Al-Sadd 4-1 in a game that saw Al-Sadd defender Abdel-Karim Hassan receive a red card last October.

The Saudi side advanced to the final and won the title at the expense of Japanese side Urawa Red Diamonds.

Boundedjah is the Qatari league top scorer with 13 goals so far this season. (Source: Ahram Online)

Iran to participate in Intl. Ladies Amateur Golf Championship

MNA — Iran golf team will take part in the International Ladies Amateur Golf Championship due to be held in Lahore, Pakistan, February 21-23.

Nazanin Shahraki and Elina Nadi are the members of Iran team, who will leave Tehran for Lahore tonight (Feb. 19) along with the team supervisor Negar Sayadi.

Thailand, Turkey, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Afghanistan and Qatar are other countries attending the tournament that is organized by Pakistan Golf Federation.

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GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

One can purchase the world with contentment and live in happiness with benevolence.
Imam Ali (AS)

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES



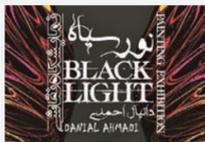
Painting
■ Tehran's CAMA – Contemporary and Modern Art Gallery is hosting an exhibition of paintings by Reza Bangiz. The exhibition will run until March 3 at the gallery located at No. 44, 10th Golestan, Pasdaran St.



■ An exhibition of paintings by Kiana Abdollahi is underway at Kabiri Gallery. The exhibit named "Sunrise" will run until February 26 at the gallery located at No. 60 South Dibaji St.



■ Paintings by Bamdad Nurian, Parisa Kazemi, Delaram Talakub, Maryam Shadanlu, Alireza Seiri, Tina Bayat and 13 other artists are on display in an exhibition at Atashzad Gallery. The exhibit titled "New Season" runs until February 26 at the gallery located at 3 North Abbaspur (Tavanir) St. near Vanak Sq.



■ Danial Ahmadi is showcasing his latest paintings in an exhibition at Aliha Gallery. Entitled "Black Light", the exhibit will be running until March 3 at the gallery located at 31 Ramezani Alley, Mahurzadeh St. off Shariati St.



■ A collection of paintings by Huya Mirmoqtadai is on display in an exhibition at Golestan Gallery. The exhibit will be running until February 26 at the gallery that can be found at 34 Kamasai St. in the Darus neighborhood.



■ An exhibition of paintings by Mohammad-Ali Moshrefi is underway at Atbin Gallery. The exhibit named "Treed Minutes" will continue until March 3 at the gallery that can be found at 42 Khakzad Alley, Vali-e Asr Ave. near the Parkway Intersection.



■ Saless Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Saeid Rafiei Monfared. The exhibit entitled "Common Passion" will run until February 26 at the gallery located at 148 Karim Khan Ave.



■ Paintings by Satin Ghaffari are on view in an exhibition at Baroque Gallery. The Exhibit titled "Human Being" runs until February 26 at the gallery, which can be found at No. 1736, Shariati St.



Multimedia
■ Farshid Mesqali is showcasing his paintings and sculptures in an exhibition at Etamad Gallery 1. The exhibition will be running until March 17 at the gallery located at 25 Shirudi Alley, Mofatteh St., near Haft-e Tir Square.

NEWS IN BRIEF



German church hosts installation exhibit by Iranian artist Homa Emami

TEHRAN — Sets of installation by Germany-based Iranian artist Homa Emami were put on display in an exhibition at St. Gertrude's Church and Cultural Center in the German city of Cologne. Entitled "Yesterday from Tomorrow - Archaeology of the Present", the showcase, based on a theory of Aristotle's on time, was organized from February 2 to 20.

Fajr Music Festival ends with "Under Siege" in memory of Martyr Soleimani

The orchestra conducted by Nasir Heidarian also dedicated a piece to those people killed in the Ukrainian jetliner downing in January near Tehran.

A number of top musicians and cultural officials, including Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi, attended the closing ceremony of the event.

"At present, 92 percent of Iranian people on average listen to music for an hour and 12 minutes every day," Salehi said in his brief speech.

"This means that listening to music is deeply ingrained in most people. Consequently, we need to pay more attention to all events concerning Iranian music," he added.

Musicians Nader Mashayekhi, Mohammad Sarir, Hassan Eskandari and Ofelia Parto were honored for their lifetime achievements during the festival.

Musicians from several countries, including Tunisia, Italy, France, Belgium and Azerbaijan gave performances during the event, which was non-competitive.



Nasir Heidarian conducts the Tehran Symphonic Orchestra during the closing ceremony of the 35th Fajr Music Festival at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on February 19, 2020. (ISNA/Erfan Khoshkhu)



Morshed Seyyed Mostafa Saeidi gives a naqqali performance in an undated photo.

Naqqali icon Mostafa Saeidi dies at 83

TEHRAN — Seyyed Mostafa Saeidi, a master of naqqali – a dramatic style of storytelling dedicated to stories from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and other epic Persian stories – died of effects of aging on Friday. He was 83. He learned Islamic eulogy from Seyyed Mehdi Safaripur in Hamedan when he was only nine. At twelve, he began to learn naqqali from Karam Esfahani, one of the eminent artists of the traditional dramatic style.

At seventeen, Saeidi started his career as a morshed or naqqal, someone who performs naqqali, in Borujerd at Haji Abbas Shakhnabat's teahouse, where naqqali performances were hosted in the past.

He then left Borujerd to Malayer to pursue his career at Vali Zargaran's teahouse. For years people watched his

powerful performances in teahouses in Khorramabad, Dorud and several other nearby towns.

Shokri Ghadiri's teahouse in Borujerd was a favorite haunt of his fans who, over a period of thirty years, came there to watch his performances.

He compiled various stories for naqqali in the book "Naqqali Scroll", which was published in two volumes.

Parisa Simimmehr is one of his disciples, who studied the art under Saeidi for 11 years.

The oldest form of dramatic performance in Iran that has long played an important role in society from the courts to the villages, naqqali was inscribed on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2011.

Italian film program opens in Tehran

TEHRAN — "Spotlight on Italian Cinema", a weeklong Italian film program, opened during a special ceremony at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran on Thursday.

The ceremony was attended by Italian Ambassador Giuseppe Perrone, the director of Iran's Art and Experience Cinema Institute, Jafar Sanei-Moqaddam, and a number of Iranian cultural officials and artists.

In his brief speech, Perrone said that such events show the deep friendship between Iran and Italy.

"The films selected to be screened during the festival have been produced in recent years and depict a real face of Italian society," he added.

Vincenzo Marra's "Equilibrium" was screened during the opening ceremony, and the Italian director and the Iranian cast member, Babak Karimi, attended a review session afterwards.



Italian Ambassador Giuseppe Perrone autographs a poster for "Spotlight on Italian Cinema" during the opening ceremony of the Italian film program at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran on February 20, 2020.

A lineup of seven Italian movies will go on screen during the program, which will continue until February 26 in the three Iranian cities of Tehran, Shiraz and Kish Island.

"The Path of Oil" by Bernardo Bertolucci, "My Mother" by Nanni Moretti and "Martin Eden" by Pietro Marcello are among the films.

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.

Filmmaking workshops by Italian producer Sergio Toffetti are also being organized on the sidelines of the festival.

The program has been organized by Iran's Art and Experience Cinema and the Italian Embassy in Tehran.

Jennifer Lawrence to star in Adam McKay comedy for Netflix



In this Sunday, Feb. 24, 2019, file photo, Adam McKay arrives at the Oscars in Los Angeles. Jennifer Lawrence will star in the McKay comedy "Don't Look Up" for Netflix. (Photo by Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP, file)

NEW YORK (AP) — Jennifer Lawrence will star in the Adam McKay comedy "Don't Look Up" for Netflix.

The streaming giant on Wednesday announced that it acquired the project. McKay, who wrote the script, will direct the film about two low-level astronomers who go on a media tour to warn of an approaching asteroid heading for Earth.

Lawrence has been little seen on the big screen lately, most recently co-starring in last year's "X-Men: Dark Phoenix." The 29-year-old actress took a roughly two-year hiatus from acting but has recently returned to work. She recently wrapped production on an untitled film for A24 directed by Lila Neugebauer.

"I'm so thrilled to make this movie with

Jen Lawrence," McKay said in a statement. "She's what folks in the 17th century used to call 'a dynamite act.' And the fact that Netflix sees this movie as a worldwide comedy sets the bar high for me and my team in an exciting and motivating way."

McKay's most recently movie was 2018's Oscar-nominated "Vice," starring Christian Bale as Dick Cheney.

"Adam has always had great timing when it comes to making smart, relevant and irreverent films that depict our culture," said Scott Stuber, head of film at Netflix. "Even if he somehow ends up predicting planet Earth's imminent demise, we're excited to add this to our slate before it all comes to an end."

Shooting on "Don't Look Up" is set to begin in April.

Scorsese awaits next film by director of South Korea's Oscar-winning "Parasite"



Director of four Oscar award-winning film "Parasite" Bong Joon-ho answers a reporters' question during a news conference in Seoul, South Korea, February 19, 2020. (Reuters/Kim Hong-Ji)

SEOUL (Reuters) — Hollywood veteran Martin Scorsese told the South Korean director of "Parasite", this year's winner of the Oscar for best picture, that he is waiting to see his next film, Bong Joon-ho said on Wednesday.

The comment figured in a letter from the acclaimed director to Bong, who had paid homage to Scorsese in a speech accepting an Oscar for his work on the first non-English language movie to win the coveted award, as well as three more.

"He told me to take rest, but just a little bit of it and get back to work, as he is awaiting my next movie," Bong said, describing the contents of the letter.

"I read the letter this morning and it was an honor," Bong told a news conference with the film's cast and crew in Seoul, the South Korean capital.

While accepting the best director award at the Oscars, Bong turned his speech into a tribute to Scorsese, who had been nominated for mob drama "The Irishman", invoking the latter's statement, "The most personal is the most creative."

Bong has said he was working on two projects, one of which he described as being based on a "fearful" incident in Seoul, and is also producer for an HBO limited series on "Parasite", a dark satire whose accolades sparked celebrations in South Korea.