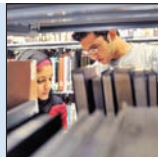




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ESCO to supply 5,000 tons of rail tracks for domestic railway project

TEHRAN — Iran's Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) has signed a deal with Khatam-al Anbiya Construction Headquarters for manufacturing 5,000 tons of rail tracks to be used by Khatam-al Anbiya in a railway project.

The agreement was signed in a ceremony attended by Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami, Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani, and Khatam-al Anbiya Chief

Saeed Mohammad at Tehran Mosalla, Shata reported on Saturday.

As reported, the mentioned rail tracks are going to be used in the construction of a railway which connects Chabahar Port to Zahedan City (both in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan).

According to Eslami, the Chabahar-Zahedan railway project requires at least 50,000 tons of rail tracks, 5000 of which is going to be supplied under this deal. [→4](#)

Zarif, Guterres discuss Afghanistan developments

TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has discussed the latest developments of Afghanistan with UN Secretary General António Guterres.

Zarif and Guterres discussed the subject in a phone conversation on Friday, according to the Foreign Ministry website.

No further details about the conversation was reported by the Foreign Ministry.

It came after the UN secretary general issued a statement saying he “welcomes the announced nationwide reduction of violence

in Afghanistan, which is the result of talks between the United States and the Taliban, as well as consultations with the Government of Afghanistan.” He hoped this critical step will lead to intra-Afghan negotiations and a comprehensive peace process.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) welcomed the announced start of a seven-day period of reduced violence, saying it represents an unparalleled opportunity that can lead toward a durable and lasting peace. [→3](#)

COVID-19 cases in Iran rise to 28, death toll hits 5

TEHRAN — The number of people diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, in Iran has increased to 28, of whom five have so far lost their lives.

“Up to now, 785 persons suspected of having the virus have been tested at clinics nationwide,” deputy health min-

ister Kiyannoush Jahanpour said, adding that over the past day ten new cases of infection were confirmed.

Out of the ten new cases, eight are in the city of Qom and two have come from Qom and hospitalized in Tehran, he explained, IRNA reported.



ARTICLE

Mohammadreza Frahadi
Journalist

Can Democrats compete with Republican billionaires?

Tump is at the helm of the \$35 billion American cabinet, which has been backing by Wall Street and the lobbying of U.S. corporations in the oil, pharmaceutical and weapons sectors. Trump is the first impeached U.S. president to run in the next election.

Unlike the 2016 election, which Trump and his cabinet members had no record of government jobs, they are now casting the 2020 election campaign with greater wealth and executive experience. In other words, the upcoming election will be a competition between Republicans and Democrats.

In the 2020 election, the American people should choose a person among Republican billionaires and Democratic millionaires. Any decision that the people make will determine the future of themselves and their children for another four-year term.

Democrats, who cannot financially compete with Republican billionaires, have relied solely on popular donations in their election campaign, which has so far been estimated \$5.18 per donor.

Democrats have not performed well in the debates so far, so candidates are trying to defame Trump in their domestic policies and goal setting. They do not consider Trump as a right person for presidency position due to his narcissism, lies, instability and moral corruption and continue their propaganda against him.

By criticizing Trump's foreign policy, the Democrats' chances of winning the election will be increased because they can gain the support of foreign countries that have been heavily suffered from by Trump's plans. Emphasis on unstructured diplomacy, part-time strategies, and decision making based on Trump's tweets, which even have confused European allies of the U.S., have been mocked by Democratic candidates to pave the way for foreign political support for the Democratic Party. [→10](#)

Health Ministry's delay to announce coronavirus in Qom justifiable

By Mohammad Ghaderi

TEHRAN — Normally, unnatural incidents similar to epidemic diseases should be publicly announced after conducting accurate assessments and detailed probes in order not to create panic in the society.

Accordingly, accusing the Iranian Health Ministry of purposefully acted slowly to inform the society about possible outbreak of coronavirus in the central part of the country is not correct, as the ministry is not logically and legally allowed to release news on the COVID-19 outbreak hurriedly.

On the other hand, impacts of the coronavirus disease will be diagnosed two weeks after a patient is affected, therefore, the Health Ministry announced outbreak of the virus in the central city of Qom after it was assured about the results of detailed studies.

Certainly, the people in Tehran, Qom and any other place across the country should observe personal and public healthcare instructions.

It should be mentioned that such pre-cautionary measures, announced by the Health Ministry, should not terrify the people at all and instead

they should go on with their normal activities as they have been doing so in recent days.

Unfortunately, certain hostile media outlets are trying to weaken the people's trust on the government under any pretext even through spreading false news or accusing this or that ministry of being indifferent towards such vital issues.

Currently, each and every development related to COVID-19 is under the control by the relevant bodies across the country and the ministry is on high alert to inform people quickly about any new development.

Pompeo drums up 'Iran threat' on visit to Saudi Arabia

PRESS TV — Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has repeated trumped-up “Iran threat” on a visit to Saudi Arabia amid US push to sell more arms to Riyadh, which is America's number one weapons buyer.

He met with Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and discussed shared security interests in the Persian Gulf and the alleged Iran threats.

Pompeo “assured the Crown Prince that the United States stands with Saudi Arabia in the face of these threats, as reflected in our greater military presence in Saudi Arabia,” US State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said in a statement.

Pompeo also visited Sultan Air Base near the Saudi capital, where some 2,500 US troops have been stationed since last summer.

“The visit to Prince Sultan air base and a nearby US Patriot battery highlights the longstanding US-Saudi security relationship and reaffirms

America's determination to stand with Saudi Arabia in the face of Iranian malign behavior,” the State Department said.

The base is home to a squadron of US Air Force F-15E fighter jets that fly daily missions over Iraq and Syria and Patriot missile batteries.

Pompeo's visit to Saudi Arabia revolved mostly around countering Iran, although he was forced by a group of US Senators to address the issue of imprisoned US citizens inside Saudi Arabia.

Among those imprisoned are two writers and dual US-Saudi citizens, Badr al-Ibrahim and Salah al-Haidar, son of prominent imprisoned feminist Aziza al-Yousef.

They were arrested in April 2019 amid Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's crackdown on pro-democracy activists.

Like most of Saudi Arabia's human rights violations, the imprisonment of US citizens does not affect US support for the kingdom, US media said.

Speaking in Ethiopia before his visit to Saudi

Arabia, Pompeo stressed that the US “pressure campaign” against Iran continues, adding, “It's not just an economic pressure campaign, it's diplomatic pressures, isolation through diplomacy, as well.”

The top US diplomat further held talks with Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Prince Khalid Bin Salman, who was previously ambassador to Washington. They discussed the US-Saudi partnership and ways to counter Iran, among other issues.

The US started beefing up its military presence in Saudi Arabia last year as both regimes claimed Iran has played a role in two separate attacks on oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman in May and June 2019, without providing any evidence to support their accusation.

Additionally, Washington and Riyadh rushed to point the finger at Iran over the September 14, 2019 Yemeni air raids on Aramco installations, which disrupted about half of Saudi Arabia's oil capacity or 5 percent of the daily global oil supply.



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Dutch FM, Zarif hold talks on a range of issues

TEHRAN — Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok and Mohammad Javad Zarif held two rounds of talks in Tehran on Saturday.

Blok and Zarif also held private talks. According to the Foreign Ministry media department, the two chief diplomats exchange views about bilateral issues as well as regional and international developments. [→2](#)



ARTICLE

Mahnaz Abdi
Head of the TehranTimes Economy Desk

Knowledge-based companies to help car industry nullify sanctions

While Iran is considering knowledge-based economy a strong tool to compensate for the losses caused by the sanctions, the country is seriously supporting knowledge-based companies and startups, also cementing relationship between domestic universities and industry sector.

Regarding the necessity of promoting domestic production under the sanctions and all the endeavors that different sectors are taking for indigenizing technology of manufacturing their required products, one can understand that why the knowledge-based companies are taking the center stage in Iran's industry sector.

Signing numerous indigenizing agreements with the knowledge-based companies over the past months is an indication of their significant status which is becoming more and more important in the country.

Also, these companies have now some stronger presence in the country's national and international exhibitions which makes the industry sector more acquainted with their activities.

Being strongly supported by the government, the knowledge-based companies' role in flourishing different industrial sectors of the country is noticeable.

One sector in which the part played by these companies is under the spotlight is the auto industry.

During a recent ceremony on signing a cooperation agreement between Iran Khodro Company (one of the major Iranian carmakers) and some knowledge-based companies on designing and manufacturing some auto parts, Iran's Vice President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari said the auto industry moving toward being more knowledge-based will result in designing different car models every year through benefiting from domestic platforms.

“In today's industrial environment of the country, difference between having an auto industry or owning car plants is being determined by befitting from knowledge-based companies”, the official underscored. [→4](#)

Police seize over 500 kg of narcotics in Kerman province

POLITICAL d e s k TEHRAN – The anti-drug police in the central province of Kerman has seized more than 500 kilograms of narcotics, a police commander said on Saturday.



Second Brigadier General Abodlreza Nazeri, the police chief of the province, said that the big consignment was seized after a series of intelligence operations in the Orzueeyeh region.

According to the police chief, 544 kg of opium were confiscated and a vehicle seized during the operation.

Two traffickers have also been arrested, he added. The Islamic Republic has been actively fighting drug-trafficking over the past three decades, despite its high economic and human costs.

The war on drug trade originating from Afghanistan has claimed the lives of nearly 4,000 Iranian police forces over the past four decades.

The country has spent more than hundreds of millions of dollars on sealing its borders and preventing the transit of narcotics destined for European, Arab and Central Asian countries.

Ara Shahverdyan, Robert Beglaryan elected members of Iranian parliament

Two Iranian-Armenians, Ara Shahverdyan and Robert Beglaryan, have been elected members of the parliament (Majles) of Iran, Raffi Pirumian, head of the campaign office of Ara Shahverdyan told ARMENPRESS on Saturday.

“Four Armenian candidates were running for parliament in the northern part – Ara Shahverdyan, Albert Poghosyan, Aris Shahbazyan and Sevan Sohrayi. Ara Shahverdyan received nearly 66% of the votes”, he said, adding that Robert Beglaryan won the election in the northern part, where Emin Hovsep was the 2nd candidate.

The parliamentary elections in Iran took place on February 21. The number of eligible voters in Iran is nearly 58,000,000. The Iranian parliament has 290 seats, 5 of which are allocated to religious minorities.

Dutch FM, Zarif hold talks on a range of issues

1 → The JCPOA, INSTEX, the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani, current developments in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan, and also the Ukraine plane crash featured in the talks.

Blok made a two day-visit to Iran, starting on Friday. He first visited Isfahan, where he met the provincial governor and visited certain touristic sites.

Blok also held a separate meeting with President Hassan Rouhani on Saturday.

While in Isfahan, the Dutch foreign minister expressed his country's will to broaden relations with Iran.

“We hope to improve relations with Iran by reduction of tensions in the region,” Blok told Governor Abbas Rezaei.

“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,” he added.

Additional U.S. service member diagnosed with brain injury from Iran attack

One more U.S. service member has been diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury following Iran's January missile strike in Iraq, the Pentagon announced Friday.

The new diagnosis brings the total number of U.S. service members who suffered brain injuries in the attack to 110, the Hill quoted the Pentagon as reporting.

“From (Ein) al Assad to Germany and the United States, the military's medical professionals continue to work diligently to ensure the appropriate level of care for our service members, which has enabled 70 percent of those diagnosed to return to duty,” the Pentagon said in a news release Friday, referring the military base in Iraq.

“The department is committed to delivering programs and services intended to lead to the best possible outcomes for our service members,” the statement added.

In early January, Iran struck a military base in western Iraq housing U.S. troops in retaliation for the U.S. drone strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

U.S. officials initially said the attack caused no injuries, but later revealed that dozens were suffering traumatic brain injuries (TBI).

Officials have attributed the delay in reporting the injuries because symptoms from TBI can sometimes take time to present themselves.

For that same reason, officials have said the number of diagnoses may continue to rise.

Of the 110 troops who have been diagnosed, 77 have since returned to duty, the Pentagon said Friday.

Since the Pentagon's last update on the injuries Feb. 10, another eight have been taken to Germany for further evaluation. That brings the total treated in Germany to 35.

Of those taken to Germany, 25 were later brought back to the United States, an increase of four since the last report. Seven are getting further medical evaluation, two have returned to Iraq and one is ready to return to Iraq but is waiting for transportation.

When the Pentagon first reported that service members suffered TBIs in the attack, President Trump downplayed the injuries, saying he “heard that they had headaches and a couple of other things” and calling them “not very serious.”

The Veterans of Foreign Wars called on Trump to apologize for the remarks.

Frank Luntz, a Republican strategist, also said on Twitter: “We shouldn't hide our veterans' injuries just to pretend like we're invincible”.

Principlists win most parliamentary seats

Qalibaf on top in the 30-candidate principlist list in Tehran

POLITICAL d e s k TEHRAN – Principlists captured the great majority of the seats in the parliament in the Friday elections.

The independents and reformists came second and third in the elections.

Initial vote counting in the metropolis of Tehran, shows that the 30-candidate list headed by former Tehran mayor Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf has won all the 30 seats reserved for Tehran in the 290-seat chamber.

All analysts are unanimous in their view that Qalibaf, who ran for presidential post in 2005 and 2013, is poised to be elected parliament speaker in the next parliament, which starts its work in late spring.

Mostafa Mirsalim, a former culture minister in the Hashemi Rafsanjani administration, has secured the most votes after Qalibaf.

Both Mirsalim and Qalibaf ran against incumbent president Hassan Rouhani in the 2017 presidential election; however, Qalibaf withdrew candidacy in favor of Ebrahim Raisi, who now chairs the Judiciary.

According to the latest information, the following list includes those candidates who gained most of votes in Tehran:

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Mostafa Mir



Salim, Morteza Agha Tehrani, Elyas Naderan, Mohsen Dehnavi, Mahmoud Nabavian, Mohsen Pirhadi, Ehsan Khandouzi, Abolfazl Amoei, Fatemeh Rahbar, Eghbal Shakeri, Bijan Nobaveh, Mojtaba Tavangar, Rohollah Izadkhah, Ahmad Naderi, Zohreh Elahian,

Nezmoldin Mousavi, Abdul-Hossein Rouhoulamini, Mehdi Sharifian, Reza Taghavi, Malek Shariati, Somayeh Rafiei, Ali Yazdikhah, Ali Khezarian, Fatemeh Qasempour, Mojtaba Rezakhah, Reza Taghipour, Zohreh Lajevardi, Gholam-Hossin Rezvani and Ezatollah Akbari.

Iran urges U.S. to withdraw troops from Afghanistan after peace deal announced: Newsweek

By staff and agency

Iran is urging the U.S. to withdraw troops from neighboring Afghanistan after the United States and the Taliban announced a tentative ceasefire ahead of a peace deal expected to be signed next week, Newsweek reported on Friday.

Asked what sort of timeline Tehran would like to see for the Pentagon and other allied international forces to exit Afghanistan, an Iranian official speaking on condition of anonymity told Newsweek, “the sooner the better.”

The official said only then could Afghans truly find peace among themselves.

“When we reach that moment, all issues related to Afghanistan should be dealt with by the people of Afghanistan,” the Iranian official said, adding that Tehran was prepared to play a role in supporting the war-torn country.

“If a future Afghan government asks Iran to do certain things, if we can do it, then we will,” the official said. “The security of Afghanistan is the security of Iran.”

“In the last 30 years the region has witnessed three wars, the Iran-Iraq War, the first U.S. war with Iraq in 1991 and the second U.S. war on Iraq in 2003, there is also the U.S.



“The security of Afghanistan is the security of Iran.”

war in Afghanistan that has gone on for the past 18,19 years. The region is fed up with conflict, and we know the effects of a conflict,” the Iranian official said.

U.S. officials told Newsweek last month that a deal with

the Taliban was expected to soon be signed, even as deadly unrest spurred by the conflict continued to grip the nation. Such a plan might include, the officials said, a reduction of the roughly 14,000 U.S. personnel in Afghanistan to about a third of that force strength.

On Friday, the U.S. and the Taliban announced they had reached an understanding allowing them to reduce violence for a week. This pause would be followed by a historic peace agreement to be signed February 29, concluding a year-long series of negotiations in the Qatari capital of Doha and ending the longest war in U.S. history.

Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid declared all fighters “must adhere to their given duties for the upcoming seven days, must remain defensively alert in case of violation by the opposition and must strictly refrain from entering enemy territory.” He emphasized that the agreement was mandatory.

Once the deal is signed, Taliban fighters “will be given new information and instructions in accordance with the agreement and implementation of those should be commenced,” Mujahid instructed.

Iran has not closed dialogue with EU, Rouhani says

POLITICAL d e s k TEHRAN – President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday that Iran has not closed the path of dialogue with the European Union on the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the JCPOA.

During a meeting with Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok in Tehran, Rouhani said that all must make efforts to preserve the JCPOA.

In May 2015 the U.S. unilaterally and illegally abrogated the JCPOA and slapped the harshest ever sanctions against Iran. Following the sanctions, European companies also cut their cooperation with Iran, a move which has incensed Iran.

“We believe the nuclear deal was beneficial to the region and the world and the United States' action was harmful to all, even the people of the United States. Unfortunately,

during the past 21 months since the United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA, the European Union could not take an effective step in line with implementing its commitments,” Rouhani complained.

For his part, Blok said it is essential to keep the JCPOA alive as an international agreement and the Netherlands will continue efforts in this respect.

“For this purpose we should continue dialogue and dialogue can be a solution to problems and differences,” the chief diplomat remarked.

He added, “We have told the United States privately and publicly that withdrawal from the JCPOA was not a right thing to do.”

■ ‘Region will be secure if U.S. stops interference’
Rouhani also said that the region will

be secure if the U.S. stops interference and taking terrorist actions.

“The principle of our policy is that the security in the region must be provided by the regional countries. We do not consider presence of foreign forces in the Persian Gulf region useful for the security in the region,” he said.

■ ‘Iran keen to have warm ties with EU’

Rouhani also said that Tehran is interested to develop economic and political ties with the Netherlands.

“We are interested in expansion of political and economic ties with Holland.”

Rouhani also said Iran's foreign policy is based on “constructive interaction with countries and like to have a warmer ties with the European Union”.

In late November 2019, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden issued a joint statement, announcing becoming shareholders of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX).

“In light of the continuous European support for the agreement and the ongoing efforts to implement the economic part of it and to facilitate legitimate trade between Europe and Iran, we are now in the process of becoming shareholders of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) subject to completion of national procedures. INSTEX was established by France, Germany and the United Kingdom in January 2019,” read the statement, published by the Foreign Ministry of Finland.

Iran has likened INSTEX to a beautiful car which has no gasoline.

Army chief in central Iran to oversee military preparedness

POLITICAL d e s k TEHRAN — Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, the chief of Iran's Army, paid a visit to different military centers in the central province of Kerman to oversee the forces' combat and defense capabilities at the highest level possible, a military source reported on Saturday.

The source said the Army chief was accompanied by Ground Force Commander Brigadier General Kiomars Heidari.

The commanders managed to pay visit to the Army's Airborne Unit near Kerman city, according to the source.

General Mousavi addressed the military staff and commanders during his visit, urging them to do their best to reinvigorate their military might and preparedness.

Earlier this month, Heidari announced that the Airborne

Unit has boosted the range of missiles fired by helicopters.

“Today, the range of Army Airborne Unit's missiles has increased to a very desirable level and we have achieved self-sufficiency in the field of night-vision systems and we can fly over night and destroy targets,” General Heidari said, addressing a meeting in Tehran at the time.

He described the Airborne Unit as the biggest helicopter fleet in the Middle-East.

Elsewhere, General Heidari also said that experts at the Defense Ministry in cooperation with other industries inside the country managed to overhaul 33 helicopters for future missions.

General Heidari had announced in 2018 that the Airborne Unit had tripled the range of missiles mounted on its helicopters.

More Iranian students challenge removal from U.S., file complaints over ill-treatment

TEHRAN — More students from Iran with valid visas in hand were barred from entering the United States as Washington continues to increase harsh pressures on Iranians after economic sanctions failed to subdue Tehran.

Three more Iranian students attending New England colleges have filed civil rights complaints with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, stating that they were mistreated and illegally denied entry into the country, the FNA reported.

Pegah Karimi said in her complaint filed earlier this month that she was denied entry at Boston's Logan International Airport in August despite having a student visa to attend graduate school at Southern New Hampshire

University in Manchester.

Mohammad Moradi said in his separate complaint filed this month that he had a student visa to pursue a doctorate degree at Northeastern in Boston, adding that he was denied entry in October as he returned from a conference in Paris, where he presented an academic paper.

Moradi noted that officials denied him entry even though he'd been admitted to the US three times prior that year, including after two brief trips to Canada to visit relatives.

Behzad Rezaei has also stated in his complaint that he had a student visa to pursue a doctorate degree at Worcester Polytechnic Institute but was denied entry in August.

Homeland Security spokespeople didn't respond to an email seeking comment.

Ali Rahnama, legislative counsel for the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans, has claimed that at least 17 Iranian students have been deported from the U.S. since August.

During interviews with CNN, several deported students and their attorneys detailed their experiences at U.S. airports, describing what they said were hours of questioning that left them feeling exhausted and confused.

It's not only Iranians who've been affected. Some students from other countries have also been turned back in recent months, Hartle stated, such as a group of Chinese students who were heading to Arizona State Univer-

sity in September. U.S.-China relations have worsened during Trump's presidency over several issues, including Iran's Nuclear Deal which Washington, in May 2018, announced its withdrawal from, trade relation and Uighur Muslims.

Tensions around Iran have been rising since President Donald Trump torpedoed the landmark 2015 nuclear deal and re-imposed sweeping sanctions targeting large swathes of Iran's economy.

The conflict between Washington and Tehran hit record highs after an intruding American spy drone was shot down by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) in Iranian sky.

FATF blacklisting of Iran politically motivated, Tehran says

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Friday that the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) blacklisting of Iran is “politically motivated”.

“Unfortunately, what happened is politically motivated which exists in the international mechanisms by the United States, Saudi Arabia and the Zionist regime of Israel. They have influence on these mechanisms and make efforts to politicize them,” he said.

He noted that Iran can never be labeled with money laundering and financing of terrorism.

The FATF on Friday placed Iran on its blacklist after Iran refused to comply with the body’s requirements.

Mousavi said, “Saudi Arabia, as central bank of terrorism, and the Zionist regime, as a terrorist government, have provided most supports for the terrorist groups and organizations across the world, but Iran is blacklisted despite cooperation and transparency.”

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 counter-measures independently of any call by the FATF to do so.”

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

Abdolnasser Hemmati, Iran’s central bank



“Saudi Arabia, as central bank of terrorism, and the Zionist regime, as a terrorist government, have provided most supports for the terrorist groups and organizations across the world, but Iran is blacklisted despite cooperation and transparency.”

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.

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.”

Two border guards killed in clashes with terrorists



POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Two Iranian border guards were killed in clashes with members of a terror outfit in the southeastern province of Sistan-Balouchestan.

According to the police, the guards noticed several terrorists who had advanced towards Iran seeking to attack border units on Friday night.

The police said the border guards immediately countered the terrorists’ heavy fire and made them flee to the neighboring country, Press TV reported.

The counterattack caused fatalities among members of the terrorist outfit. Sergeant Major Ahmad Rahmani-Fard and Private Ahmad Tavakoli were killed in the clashes, the police said.

A delegation led by the border police commander has travelled to the area to investigate the incident.

The clashes took place while millions of Iranians went to the polls to cast their votes in the country’s 11th parliamentary elections and Assembly of Experts polls. The elections were held with no security incidents.

Iran has lost many of its border guards

in recent years in clashes with terrorists who attempted to infiltrate the border and carry out attacks.

Such clashes are not rare in Sistan-Balouchestan, which borders Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The commander of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force said last week that Saudi Arabia has provided a Pakistan-based terrorist group conducting acts of terror against the Islamic Republic with at least three plane loads of weapons and equipment.

Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour made the remarks on Tuesday, when he said members of the so-called Jaish ul-Adl terrorist group operating on southeastern borders of Iran are well-armed.

This shows that the terrorists enjoy the “all-out backing of the U.S., Saudi Arabia and their regional allies,” Pakpour said.

The general added that the IRGC Ground Force had dealt a “heavy blow” to the terrorists despite the Saudi support.

The Jaish ul-Adl terrorist group, which is based in Pakistan, has been behind several bomb attacks and kidnappings in the southeast of Iran.

Tehran, Moscow discuss latest developments in Syria’s Idlib



POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Iran’s new ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali, met on Friday with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin to discuss a range of issues, including the latest developments in the de-escalation zone of Syria’s Idlib province.

During the meeting in Moscow, Jalali and Vershinin spoke about the most important issues in the Middle East, including the situation in Idlib, according to RIA Novosti.

The two diplomats emphasized the continued cooperation of the two countries in resolving the Syrian crisis in the context of the Astana process, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

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

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

A source in the Turkish Foreign Ministry informed TASS on Thursday that

Turkish, Russian and Iranian representatives are working on coordinating the date for a trilateral summit on the Syrian settlement process.

“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.

Zarif, Guterres discuss Afghanistan developments

➔ “The United Nations remains committed to working with all parties to support an inclusive Afghan-led process that includes women, minorities and youth; upholds the human rights of all citizens; and leads to a sustainable peace in Afghanistan,” the UNAMA said in a statement on Friday.

Last month, UN secretary general’s Special Representa-

tive for Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto praised Iran for its contribution to the settlement of the Afghan problems.

In a meeting with Zarif in Tehran on January 28, Yamamoto expounded on the latest internal developments in Afghanistan, highlighted the Islamic Republic of Iran’s support for the Afghan government and nation throughout the years

of war in that country, and lauded Iran’s positive role in helping resolve the problems of Afghanistan.

Zarif also voiced Iran’s support for the process of peace under the aegis and guidance of the Afghan government until reaching an intra-Afghan agreement with the participation of all Afghan groups, including the Taliban.

benefit the Americans themselves as well.

Masjedi, meantime, stressed that the Iraqi people should be the only one to decide their own fate, noting that Iran does not dictate its will on others.

Iraq’s parliament last month voted to have the U.S. troops removed from the country, heeding a call from caretaker Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi to take urgent measures and end the foreign forces’ presence as soon as possible.

On January 5, the Iraqi Parliament passed a resolution to work to end the foreign troop presence in the Arab country in the wake of a U.S. targeted assassination of a top Iranian general and a commander of Iraqi popular forces.

The resolution, which was passed anonymously,

instructed the government to cancel a request for military assistance to the U.S.-led coalition, which was issued in response to the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (known as ISIL, ISIS or Daesh) terror group.

“The government commits to revoke its request for assistance from the international coalition fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant due to the end of military operations in Iraq and the achievement of victory,” the resolution read, adding, “The Iraqi government must work to end the presence of any foreign troops on Iraqi soil and prohibit them from using its land, airspace or water for any reason.”

The resolution stated that Iraqi military



leadership has to report the number of foreign instructors that are necessary for Iraqi national security.

Earlier, Abdul Mahdi had requested that parliament order the withdrawal of foreign troops from the country.

Rouhani congratulates Brunei on national day

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani has offered his congratulations to the government and people and Brunei on their National Day.

In a message to Sultan of Brunei Hassanal Bolkiah, Rouhani expressed hope for promotion of relations between the two countries in light of Islamic, cultural and political affinities, IRNA reported on Saturday.

He also wished good health and success for the Sultan of Brunei and dignity for the people of that country.

Brunei gained its independence from the United Kingdom on January 1, 1984. The National Day, which celebrates the country’s independence, is held by tradition on 23 February.

Iranian, Russian diplomats discuss Tehran’s cooperation with SCO

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali has met with the Russian president’s Special Representative for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Bakhtiar Hakimov, discussing Tehran’s cooperation with the organization.

Hakimov said Russia supports Iran’s full membership in the SCO, ISNA reported on Saturday.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has supported Iran’s full membership in the SCO.

“Iran is an observer and we are supportive of the Iranian request for full membership,” CNS News quoted him as saying on Friday during a speech at a geopolitics forum in New Delhi.

He added, “And most of the [SCO] countries support this request and I’m sure this would be satisfied.”

The SCO is a Eurasian political and economic organization which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and India are its main members, and Iran, Mongolia, Afghanistan and Belarus are observers.

40,000 liters of smuggled fuel seized in Bandar Mahshahr

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Nearly 40,000 liters of smuggled diesel fuel have been seized in Bandar Mahshahr in the southwestern Province of Khuzestan, chief of provincial maritime guards has said.

Lotfali Pakbaz said fuel smugglers were trying to transfer the illicit cargo to Persian Gulf Arab states.



He added some 60,000 liters of smuggled fuel have been seized over the past seven days in the province.

Cheap fuel in Iran has made its trafficking quite enticing.

Iran has launched a border market to sell diesel fuel to buyers in Pakistan and Afghanistan to counter smuggling of fuel at border areas.

Despite a substantial increase in gasoline fuel in November, which led to widespread protests in Iran, the commodity is still cheapest in the world.

Cleric says elections disappoints enemy

POLITICAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Seyyed Hashem Bathaie Golpayegani, a top cleric and a representative of Tehran Province in the Assembly of Experts, has said parliamentary elections on Friday disappointed the enemy, Iran Press reported on Saturday.

In an exclusive interview with Iran Press, Golpayegani also said the Islamic Revolution has relieved Iran from tyranny and domination of arrogant powers and it is “unique throughout history”.

He added the enemy has practiced atrocities against Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

It imposed eight years of war, introduced sanctions targeting even pharmaceutical needs and assassinated Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani “who was a great man in fighting against international terrorism and global arrogance,” the cleric explained.

Iran has been grappling with many problems since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. In September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran and captured large swathes of the Iranian territory. American official have acknowledged that the U.S. aided Saddam Hussein during the war against Iran.

Also, in 2003 the U.S. and its Europeans partners used Iran’s civilian nuclear program as a pretext to put economic and financial pressure on Iran.

After nearly 12 years of negotiations, finally in July 2015 Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear program in exchange for termination of economic and financial sanctions. However, in May 2018 the U.S. abrogated the nuclear agreement and slapped the harshest sanctions against Iran in history in line with Washington’s “maximum pressure” policy against the Islamic Republic.

A total ban on Iran’s oil export by the U.S. is intended to strangle the Iranian economy.



STOCK MARKET	
TEDPIX	481869.6
IFX	6213.32

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES	
USD	42,000 rials
EUR	45,548 rials
GBP	54,428 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES	
Brent	\$57.94b
WTI	\$53.38/b
OPEC Basket	\$58.94/b
Gold	\$1,645.50/oz
Silver	\$18.56/oz
Platinum	\$979.15/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

TPO to hold intl. conference on supply of basic goods in early Mar.

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) of Iran is going to hold an international conference on the sustainable supply chain of essential and strategic goods on March 3 at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds.

As announced by the TPO portal, the event is going to be attended by senior officials from various government bodies and the private sector, including the industry ministry, the country's banking system, and the Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI), as well as insurance and transportation companies.

Passenger car output at 612,000 in 10 months

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian carmakers manufactured 612,000 passenger cars during the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019-January 20, 2020), IRNA reported citing the data released by Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry.

The ministry's data show that car manufacturing in Iran has fallen 18.5 percent in the 10-month period of this year compared to the same period of time in the previous year.

In the mentioned time span, Iranian carmakers also manufactured 1,675 buses, minibuses, and vans and 3,603 trucks, which indicates a 49.2 percent and 60.5 percent fall, respectively.



Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani has said that the policy of domestic manufacturing of auto parts should be seriously followed up and in this due capable manufacturers should be supported.

According to the data released by Codal website, three major Iranian carmakers, namely Iran Khodro (IKCO), SAIPA Group and Pars Khodro, had manufactured 604,806 vehicles during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 22).

In mid-May 2019, Rahmani issued a directive on "strengthening domestic manufacturing of imported auto parts".

Addressing two of his deputies, Farshad Moqimi, deputy for industrial affairs, and Mohammad-Baqer Ali, the board chairman of Iran's Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO), the minister put emphasis on using the highest potential of human resources for strengthening domestic manufacturing of auto parts which are currently imported to the country.

Highlighting the orders of the Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei on supporting production in the current Iranian calendar year (began on March 21), which is named the year of "Pickup in Production" by the Leader, Rahmani stressed that cooperation among all car makers, auto part manufacturers, knowledge-based companies and enterprises is vital for strengthening domestic manufacturing of imported auto parts.

This movement should be all-out promoted to combat sanctions and also prevent from exit of foreign currency from the country, the minister noted.

TEDPIX surpasses 481,000 points on Saturday

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran stock Exchange (TSE), ended 3,111 points higher at 481,867 on Saturday, the first day of the Iranian calendar week, IRNA reported.

The index went up 19,675 points to 478,754 in the past Iranian week.

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.

ESCO to supply 5,000 tons of rail tracks for domestic project

1 → The deal was signed on the sidelines of a conference on the country's capacities and capabilities in engineering and technical sectors, in which a memorandum of understanding was also signed between Khatam-al Anbiya and the ministries of transport and industry for cooperation in promoting domestic production.

Back in September 2019, Eslami had announced that Iran will become a major rail track producer in the region in near future.

Mentioning the hand-over of the first domestically-manufactured rail tracks (known as National Rail) to Islamic Re-

public of Iran Railways (known as RAD), Eslami said moving toward self-sufficiency in this sector is a must and delivery of the first cargo of the National Rail has been a big achievement in this regard.

In November 2016, ESCO signed a contract with RAI to produce 40,000 tons of U33 rails, and consequently launched its rail production line with €28.2 million plus 573 billion rials (about \$13.6 million) of investment.

Iran's sixth five-year economic development plan (2016-21) stresses, among other things, the need to develop the rail transport network.



Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami (L), Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani (middle), and Khatam-al Anbiya Chief Saeed Mohammad (R) signing a memorandum of understanding at Tehran Mosalla on Saturday.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Railways says Iran needs an average of 300,000- 400,000 tons of rails per year to meet the needs of this key transport sector.

Knowledge-based companies to help car industry nullify sanctions

1 → "If we design and manufacture the cars ourselves it means that we have the industry, but if the ideas come from outside the country, it's the meaning of just owning the plants", he noted.

Knowledge-based companies' role in indigenizing the manufacturing of auto parts is also being stressed, as it is one of the major plans that the Industry Ministry is following up in the current condition.

On Saturday, Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Reza Rahmani announced that indigenizing the manufacturing of auto parts, which used to be imported previously, has so far saved over \$2 billion for the country, while creating jobs for 40,000 people, something achieved through befitting from the capabilities of the knowledge-based companies.

During a ceremony last week, three Iranian-made cars were unveiled in the presence of President Hassan Rouhani. The new cars are 90 percent domestically made and



just a few of their parts are imported, Rahmani said during the unveiling ceremony, adding that based on the planning underway manufacturing of those imported parts will be indigenized as well in the present and coming years.

Refrigerators, freezers manufacturing climbs 6.3%

ECONOMY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Manufacturing of refrigerators and freezers in Iran has risen 6.3 percent during the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019-January 20, 2020), from the same period of time in the previous year.

According to the data provided by Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry, 900,621 refrigerators and freezers have been manufactured in the ten-month period of this year, IRNA reported.

Manufacturing of these products in the country has been on an increasing trend in the present year and all reports released by the Industry Ministry have indicated this rising trend for the specified periods of time in this year compared to the previous year.

As the current Iranian calendar year of 1398 is named the year of "Pickup in Production" by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei and given that realization of this motto toward Iran's self-reliance is in fact the only way to tackle the U.S. cruel sanctions, all governmental bodies have defined programs to boost and flourish domestic production and are seriously pursuing them.

In this due, the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade has defined seven major plans to materialize this significant objective, among them the most important one which is development of domestic production has specified programs for boosting production of products in different sectors.

For home appliances, the set program is manufacturing of 1,000 refrigerators, 800,000 washing machines, and 300,000 gas fireplace stoves in the current Iranian year (ends on March 19, 2020).

As the import of many products of this group has been banned, it could be an op-



portunity for domestic manufacturers to promote their products, something which will lead not only to self-reliance but also to high quality of products which will create export markets.

Foreign companies leaving Iran under the sanctions is also an opportunity for the Iranian companies to be reinvigorated.

South Korea's LG Electronics and Samsung have ended their presence in the Iranian market over the past few months, abiding by the U.S. pressures for cutting ties with one of their biggest markets.

The withdrawal of Samsung and LG from Iran not only is not a bad thing for the country but can be considered a blessing for the domestic production sector.

Iran was among the top producers of home appliances in the Middle East for more than 85 years and long before the establishment of companies like Samsung and LG, major Iranian companies were mass-producing home appliances.

Therefore, the departure of the Asian companies from the Iranian market can be considered a new opportunity for domestic companies to, once again, come to the spotlight for showcasing their capabilities and benefit from a market that belongs to them.

Eurozone manufacturing slump eases despite coronavirus

The slump in eurozone manufacturing activity eased in February, defying fears of a deterioration due to the coronavirus outbreak, while the dominant services sector remained resilient pushing business activity to a 6-month high.

The manufacturing purchasing managers' index for the euro area rose to 49.1 in February, up from 47.9 in the previous month and above analysts' expectations of 47.5. While this is still below the 50 mark, indicating a majority of businesses still reporting a contraction, it is still the highest value since February 2019.

Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit, said the region's economy picked up momentum "despite many companies having been disrupted in various ways by the coronavirus". He added the impact of the disease had caused supply problems, and showed some signs of hitting travel and tourism numbers.

The euro rose following the release of the figures, to trade 0.3 per cent higher at \$1.081, while European stocks marginally recovered some of their earlier losses.

"Markets and forecasters were coming into this release with fears of a virus-hit, those fears have been convincingly dispelled, at least for now," said Claus Vistesen, chief eurozone economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

The improvement in manufacturing reflects an easing of a prolonged slump in Germany, the region's largest industrial producer and the eurozone country most exposed to China. In contrast, factory activity deteriorated in France.

Germany's improved PMI reading of 47.8, up from 45.3 in the previous month, surprised investors that expected the country to take a more significant hit from the coronavirus.

The "small increase in the eurozone composite PMI was a big surprise. This should at least temporarily put to bed worries over an imminent recession in Europe," said Oliver Rakau, chief German economist at Oxford Economics. Still, he warned that the "fragility of global supply chains means that even small disruptions in China could spell large repercussions for Europe down the line".

The slower pace of decline in German

factory activity was largely the result of new domestic orders, while foreign orders fell markedly, and at their fastest rate for three months in February.

German goods producers reported "a slump in both exports and sentiment, linked to the impact of the coronavirus on activity in China and the wider region", according



The Norwegian Refugee Council in Iran intends to arrange English classes for its employees in both Tehran and Kerman offices. The NRC is seeking to contract 2 different individuals as consultants— one located in Kerman and one located in Tehran for this purpose. The deadline to apply for this position will be 29th February 2020. For more information on the position and how to apply, please visit: <https://www.nrc.no/vacancies/>

Nearly 5.7m tons of oil products traded at IRENEX since Mar. 2019

E N E R G Y TEHRAN — Managing Director of Iran Energy

Exchange (IRENEX) says nearly 5.7 million tons of oil products have been traded at the IRENEX since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019).

Some 5,690,074 tons of the mentioned products have been traded at IRENEX since March and the total offerings have been two times more than the figure for the trades, Seyed Ali Hosseini told IRNA.

According to the official, during the mentioned period, every week 500,000 tons of oil products were offered at IRENEX.

Most of the traded products were exported to the neighboring countries, Hosseini said.

“The share of exports was higher than domestic sales, so that about 4.6 million tons of the traded products were exported,” he noted.

Since the U.S. withdrew from Iran’s nuclear pact in May 2018, vowing to drive



Iran’s oil exports down to zero, the Islamic Republic has been taking various measures

to counter U.S. actions and to lessen its economy’s reliance on oil.

The country also sought new strategies to help its oil exports afloat, one of which is diversifying the mechanism of oil sales, like offering oil and oil products at the country’s stock market.

In the past few years, Iranian think-tanks and energy experts have been repeatedly stating that the country should increase its refining capacity in order to lessen the economy’s reliance on crude sales.

In this regard, one of the main strategies of the National Iranian Oil Company in recent years has been focusing on the country’s refineries and offering various oil products at IRENEX in order to increase the exports.

In early August 2019, National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) offered 18,000 tons of 95 octane gasoline produced in Iran’s Persian Gulf Star Refinery (PGSR) at IRENEX, of which 5,000 tons were sold to be exported to Afghanistan, Armenia, and Iraqi Kurdistan.

What a breakdown in the Saudi-Arabia-Russia oil alliance would mean to the market

By Myra P. Saefong

Saudi Arabia and Russia have so far failed to reach an agreement to cut oil production even with the COVID-19 epidemic in China expected to significantly hurt energy demand this year, putting the more than three-year-old alliance between the two major oil producers at risk.

Saudi Arabia is weighing a break in its alliance with Russia, The Wall Street Journal reported Friday, citing people familiar with the matter. The Saudis are holding talks with Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates this week to discuss a possible joint production cut of as much as 300,000 barrels a day, the report said.

“If the alliance were to split, the immediate reaction would be a drop in oil prices, but that could be reversed by a strong OPEC cut,” said James Williams, energy economist at WTRG Economics. “I doubt that OPEC is anywhere near a breakup, but the alliance between OPEC and non-OPEC producers is fragile.”

“OPEC for decades wanted to get the Soviet Union and then Russia to become a member,” he explained to MarketWatch. “Since the 80s the Russians avoided it and it took the collapse of oil prices in 2015 and 2016 to bring them to the table. The rising shale production was the prime mover.”

The news Friday of a rift in the alliance followed a technical meeting earlier this month between members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and their allies, known collectively as OPEC+. The committee in Vienna recommended that OPEC+ extend current production adjustments to the end of the year.

The current agreement calls for OPEC+ cuts of 1.7 million barrels a day, from the October 2018 baseline, through March.

Continuation of production cuts

The “tussle between OPEC and Russia raises substantial doubt about continuation of production cuts and therefore a return to a heavily oversupplied market,” said Manish Raj, chief financial officer at Velandera Energy. The “market is factoring in the possibility of a total breakdown of the OPEC+ alliance, which can boost supplies by (two to three) million daily barrels in an already oversupplied market.”

Reported comments from Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman on Friday, however, helped to pull oil prices off their lows. “This is absurd and utter nonsense, the energy minister told Reuters on Friday, referring to the media report that the Saudis were considering a break from the OPEC+ alliance with Russia.

On Friday, April West Texas Intermediate crude CLJ20, -0.78% fell by 50 cents, or 0.9%, to settle at \$53.38 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange. April Brent crude BRNJ20, -0.24%, the global benchmark, ended at \$58.50 a barrel on ICE Futures Europe, down 81 cents, or 1.4%.

“In the past, Saudi Arabia has been adamant that all production cuts be shared pro rata between OPEC and Russian alliance members,” said Raj. The “money question is whether OPEC would continue to shoulder all the cuts on its own without pro rata participation from Russia. The market believes it won’t, and this fear is weighing in on the oil price” Friday.

Proceed with additional adjustment

The technical committee in Vienna earlier this month also

recommended that the group “proceed with an additional adjustment until the end of the second quarter.”

During that meeting Russia, however, rejected a Saudi push to curb output by an additional 600,000 barrels per day, according to The Wall Street Journal. The Journal reported that Russian officials don’t see a need for reductions as the impact of the virus in oil demand is limited and they expect weaker demand to be offset by reduced supply from an oil shutdown in Libya and new sanctions targeting Venezuela’s crude sales.

If the cuts were to be implemented in the second quarter and demand starts to revive by that time, the OPEC+ alliance “could just lose more market share to unconventional producers,” said Marshall Steeves, energy markets analyst at IHS Markit.

“If the viral outbreak isn’t contained by March 5-6, I would expect the group to adopt the deeper cuts,” he said.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) recently lowered its view on world oil demand and growth to the lowest level since 2011 due to the coronavirus outbreak. The IEA cut its growth forecast for 2020 by 365,000 barrels a day to 825,000 barrel a day.

But “if it does appear that the rate of (coronavirus) infections has peaked, no additional cuts would likely be adopted,” said Steeves. OPEC and OPEC+ will hold their next official meetings on March 5 and March 6 in Vienna.

In the short term, Williams said he expects the Saudis, Kuwait and UAE to “cut even more to shore up the market in the face of the impact of the coronavirus impact on Chinese and global demand.”

(Source: marketwatch.com)

Offshore wind farms could power much of coastal China

Under the Paris Climate Agreement, China committed to rely on renewable resources for 20 percent of its energy needs by 2030. Currently, the country is on track to double that commitment, aiming to hit 40 percent by the next decade. Wind power is critical to achieving that goal. Over the past 20 years, China’s wind power capacity has exploded from 0.3 gigawatts to 161 gigawatts.

Populous coastal provinces, including Guangdong and Jiangsu, consume about 80 percent of the nation’s total electricity but the vast majority of China’s wind capacity comes from land-based wind farms in places like Inner Mongolia, more than a thousand miles away from most major cities.

To make matters worse, recent climate studies have suggested that the weakening

land-sea temperature gradient due to global climate change is making historically windy regions, like Inner Mongolia, less windy.

In addition, much of the wind power from those regions isn’t being used because of when it’s produced. Research has suggested that some 16 percent of total potential wind generation was wasted between 2010 and 2016, costing more \$1.2 billion.

In a recent study, researchers from the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS) and Huazhong University of Science and Technology in China, found that offshore wind could be a big part of the solution.

Abundant off-shore wind potential

“This is an important new contribution,

recognition that China has abundant offshore wind potential that can be developed and brought on shore to the power hungry coastal provinces at costs competitive with existing coal-fired polluting power plants,” said Michael McElroy, the Gilbert Butler Professor of Environmental Studies at SEAS and senior author of the paper.

To calculate the capacity and cost of offshore wind in China, the researchers first identified the regions where offshore wind farms could be built, excluding shipping zones, environmentally protected areas and water depths higher than 60 meters. They calculated the wind speeds in those areas and estimated the hourly capacity for each of the turbines.

They found that the total potential wind

power from wind farms built along the Chinese coast is 5.4 times larger than the current coastal demand for power.

“Offshore wind turbines have historically been prohibitively expensive, but it is clear now that, because of significant technological advances, the economics have changed such that offshore wind could be cost-competitive now with coal and nuclear power in China.”

The researchers estimated that if electricity prices are high, offshore wind could provide more than 1,000 terawatt-hours, or about 36 percent of all coastal energy demand.

If electricity prices are low, it could provide more than 6,000 terawatt-hours, or 200 percent of total energy demand.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

Global LNG glut drives cancellations at key U.S. shale terminals

By Anna Shiryayevskaya, Naureen S. Malik

A buyer of liquefied natural gas (LNG) has canceled two cargoes from Cheniere Energy Inc., the biggest U.S. exporter, as a global glut pummels prices for the fuel and threatens to shut a key outlet for shale production.

Spanish utility owner Naturgy Energy Group SA has decided not to take delivery of two shipments from Cheniere, according to people with direct knowledge of the matter. The cargoes, one of which was scheduled for April delivery, were rejected by Naturgy’s clients Repsol SA and Endesa SA, who had originally purchased the volumes from Naturgy and will now pay a fee, the people said.

Cancellations of U.S. cargoes were closely watched and highly anticipated amid a grim outlook on global prices. It could be an early sign that global oversupply is poised to hammer the U.S. gas market, which is already straining under the weight of a domestic glut.

Prices in Europe and Asia collapsed as storage levels rose during a mild winter, making it tougher for LNG buyers to make a profit reselling U.S. cargoes abroad.

The coronavirus outbreak in China is stifling LNG demand from the world’s fastest-growing importer. While the Asian nation hasn’t directly imported any U.S. cargoes in more than a year amid trade tensions, the virus has contributed to the global price rout.

The virus has wreaked havoc on commodity markets from LNG to copper while disrupting global industrial production, travel



and supply chains.

World’s biggest LNG trader

As Chinese demand for the fuel declined, PetroChina Co. is said to have delayed discharge of multiple cargoes. Qatar and the world’s biggest LNG trader, Royal Dutch Shell Plc, said they’re working with customers to reschedule or reroute deliveries.

While lower prices are opening up demand in places such as India and Turkey, they’re also testing Europe’s ability to absorb extra supply in a weak market.

“We are seeing supply reduction before demand maximization in Northwest Europe,” said Verena Viskovic, an analyst at BloombergNEF. Even with European benchmark Title Transfer Facility prices crashing more than a fifth since the start of the year, those TTF levels still “are not low enough to fully maximize lignite-to-gas switching,” she said.

At current forward prices of U.S. and European gas, the profit margins of delivering U.S. LNG to Europe and to Asia are thin, according to a BloombergNEF note this week. Exporters of U.S. LNG may be forced to keep

gas at home during the next seven months despite the potential demand in the German power sector.

At least two Japanese buyers are also considering canceling cargoes from the U.S. that they had expected to load before summer, according to traders with knowledge of the matter, adding that no final decisions have been made.

LNG exports have been a relief valve for U.S. gas producers as output from shale basins soars to record highs. In the Permian Basin of West Texas and New Mexico, where gas is extracted as a byproduct of oil drilling, prices have slid below zero amid pipeline bottlenecks; that means producers are paying others to take their supply.

Gas-fired power plants

More gas-fired power plants would have to be built in the U.S. and abroad to ease the current supply glut, said Campbell Faulkner, chief data analyst for commodities broker OTC Global Holdings.

“Prices globally are converging and until there is a boatload of new generation built

domestically and abroad, there is just simply not much room in the market” for more gas, he said. LNG, once vaunted as a savior for the U.S. gas market, “looks to be a damp squib,” he said.

Cheniere, while declining to comment on specific commercial arrangements, said the flexibility its contracts provide is appreciated by customers and that the fixed-fee portion of the agreements ensures cash flow to the company even when a delivery is suspended. Naturgy and Repsol declined to comment. Endesa didn’t immediately comment.

Customers of the American exporter have to pay a fixed tolling fee to reserve capacity, whether or not they take the LNG. Contracts give oftakers an option not to lift cargoes but to do so, they need to notify the exporter 45 to 60 days before the delivery date and pay their fee.

The canceled cargoes were to be loaded from Cheniere’s Corpus Christi facility in Texas, the people said. Naturgy has said it also has a contract with the exporter’s second plant, the Sabine Pass facility in Louisiana. Naturgy has sold volumes from Cheniere to its own clients in advance, the people said.

The “market seems to be overreacting to the perceived contract risk to established LNG companies like Cheniere, who signed very favorable contracts when the market was short gas in the early 2010s,” Katie Bays, co-founder of Washington-based Sandhill Strategy LLC, said in a message.

(Source: worldoil.com)

The case for pivoting into renewable energy

By Frank Holmes

Bernard Looney, BP’s new chief executive, wants to cut his company’s greenhouse gas emissions down to zero by 2050. To do that, the world’s sixth-largest energy company is committing itself to massive investment in renewable energy, including wind, solar and biofuels.

The UK-based energy provider may be more aggressive than its peers when it comes to plotting a carbon-free future, but it’s certainly not alone. Royal Dutch Shell, Total, Equinor and other traditional fossil fuel producers have also recently been diverting significant amounts of capital to renewable energy.

And it’s not just energy companies. Teck Resources, the giant Vancouver-based miner of copper, coal and zinc, announced in early February that it too has plans to be carbon-neutral by 2050.

It may require reimagining what it means to invest in energy and natural resources. Although we’re not ready to toss out fossil fuel and carbon emitting companies altogether, we have been increasing exposure to clean renewable energy through companies such as Vestas Wind Systems, the world’s top supplier of wind turbines, and AGL Energy, which includes thermal and hydroelectric energy.

Copper will continue to play an important role in the gradual shift to renewables. In some cases, wind turbines and solar facilities can use as much as 12 times more of the red metal than traditional energy systems, according to the Copper Development Association (CDA).

Key copper producers include Ivanhoe Mines, Anglo American and BHP, whose stock may benefit from higher copper prices.

Developing alternative energy

More and more, people are demanding cleaner, more sustainable energy. A November survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that a whopping 77 percent of Americans believe that developing “alternative energy” is a more important priority right now than producing more fossil fuels.

Even if you’re not personally sold on the idea of sustainability and “green energy,” you must acknowledge that this is the direction the world is headed in. Rather than fight it, we’ve made the decision to follow the money.

Just look at the facts. Last year, corporations around the world bought a record amount of clean energy through power purchase agreements (PPAs).

According to BloombergNEF, as many as 100 companies in 23 different countries signed clean energy contracts amounting to 19.5 gigawatts (GW) of power, a 44 percent increase from 2018. Since 2009, a cumulative 52.9 GW have been purchased.

Among the biggest buyers in 2019 were American tech firms, including Google, Facebook and Amazon. A number of traditional oil and gas companies also signed contracts. Houston-based Occidental Petroleum, for instance, now powers its oil operations in the Permian Basin using solar energy.

In Europe, which is undergoing a rapid transition to clean energy, renewables accounted for an incredible 34.6 percent of total electricity generation in 2019. Today a greater share of European households and businesses get their power from wind and solar than they do coal.



The U.S. isn’t too far behind. In its latest long-term projection, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) expects electricity generation from renewable sources to surpass nuclear and coal by as early as next year. By 2045, it may even surpass natural gas.

Thanks to these efforts, energy-related carbon emissions in advanced economies have remarkably dropped to levels last seen in 1993, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). This helped total world emissions stabilize in 2019 for the first time in three years, even as developing economies, led by China and India, have been polluting more.

China isn’t resting on its laurels, however. Not only has the Asian giant been a leader in clean energy investment, but it’s also recently joined a number of other countries in announcing a ban on single-use plastic items, starting with bags.

The world’s largest producer and consumer of plastic, China will ban non-degradable plastic bags in major cities by the end of this year and everywhere else by 2022.

By 2025, non-degradable, single-use plastic packaging of all kinds will be forbidden in the country.

Single-use plastic items

Other countries — as many as 60, in fact — have passed similar legislation. Among the most aggressive is the law approved by the European Parliament in October 2018 that bans 10 common types of plastics, including straws, plates, cutlery and cotton-swab sticks. Canada plans to ban all single-use plastic items by the end of 2021.

The reason I bring this up is because it represents a major headwind for oil and gas companies that manufacture the petrochemicals needed to make plastic products. Those that cannot adapt to changing policy and consumer habits will likely continue to face significant divestiture in favor of paper packaging companies and suppliers such as International Paper, Canfor Pulp Products and more.

Speaking of divestiture, every day, it seems, you hear of another institutional investor that’s getting out of fossil fuels. Norway’s Government Pension Fund — the world’s largest sovereign wealth fund at over \$1 trillion in assets — made headlines last year when it announced it would divest from oil and gas companies. What made this particularly notable is that the Fund was set up in 1990 specifically to invest in Norway’s prolific oilfields.

College endowments have followed suit, with Georgetown University and the University of California among the biggest to divest. Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) are under considerable pressure from students, faculty and alumni to sell all shares of fossil fuel companies.

In January, BlackRock, the world’s largest fund manager, said it would begin shifting out of fossil fuels, and I wouldn’t be surprised if similar announcements from Vanguard and State Street Global Advisors were forthcoming.

To be clear, we’re not at the moment considering such drastic moves. It must be said, though, that with so much capital being transferred out of traditional oil and gas companies and into renewables, there may come a day when it no longer makes sense to fight the mob.

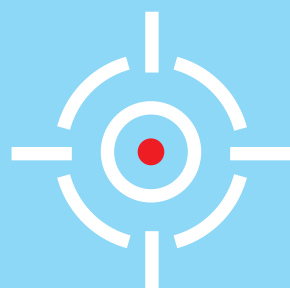
And the mob is clearly telling us which way the wind is blowing. Take a look at the chart above. Clean energy stocks have completely decoupled from natural resources, returning more than 66 percent for the three-year period through February 18. Natural resources stocks, meanwhile, returned only 11 percent over the same time.

(Source: forbes.com)

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KHOSCo intends to assign the project performing to a qualified contractor through two-stage public bidding on the basis of (EPC & F) contract.

Eligible to apply for Prequalification

All competent Iranian and foreign contractors who are experienced in execution of a cost effective, environment friendly project on the basis of proven technologies with technical knowledge and proper experiences who can arrange for the financing of the project are hereby invited to apply individually or as a consortium for prequalification for participation in the tender.

Management of the Tender :

Deputy of planning and development department will manage the tendering process on behalf of KHOSCo. Mr. Razani will handle all questions and clarifications.

The address of him is as follows:

Tel: (+98 61) 32909000-9, ext. 4000 Fax : (+98 61) 32909066 E-mail : n.razani@oxinsteel.ir

Application For Prequalification :

Applicants shall apply in writing for prequalification to development department before March 10, 2020. Applications received after the closing date will not be considered.

Pre-qualification Documents:

Pre-qualification documents including general information, questionnaire and instructions to applicants will be provided to all Applicants free of charge.

Upon completion of pre-qualification process, the considered qualified applicants will be invited in writing to participate in the limited tender

Rights of KHOSCo:

KHOSCo shall be free in assessment of the Applicants and acceptance or rejection of one or all of the Applicants at its own discretion. Participation in the pre-qualification shall not create any right for the Applicants.

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Oil min. holds phone talk with Russia's energy min. on reducing oil output

TEHRAN, Feb. 20 (MNA) -- Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh held a phone conversation with the Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak on Thu. with regards to the cooperation of the two countries within the framework of OPEC Plus.

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- Islamic Revolution Leader casts his vote in ballot...
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Baghdad, Damascus owe freedom to Gen. Soleimani, KRG politician says

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Secretary-General of the Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party paid tribute to Lt. General Qassem Soleimani for supporting Kurds in combatting the threat of ISIS, saying Baghdad and Damascus would have fallen into the hands of terrorists without the late Iranian commander’s help.

In an interview with Tasnim, Secretary-General of the Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party Mohammed Haj Mahmoud lauded Lt. General Soleimani as a professional expert in the regional affairs, saying the region is not going to see anybody similar to the late Iranian commander even in the next 20 years.

Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party is one of the oldest and most influential political parties in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, founded in 1976.

The political party and its leaders have played an active role in the past recent years, particularly in confrontation with the ISIS when the terrorist group launched an offensive on the Kurdistan Region.

In an interview with Tasnim, conducted in his house near the Iraqi city of Sulaymaniyah, Mohammed Haj Mahmoud has expounded on the assistance that Iran and Lt. General Soleimani provided for Kurds in various issues, particularly in combatting the threat of ISIS.

What follows is the full text of the interview:

■ At the beginning, we should thank you for having us. The interview is being held around 40 days after the martyrdom of Lt. General Qassem Soleimani. We want to take a look at the late commander’s performance and his cooperation with and help for the Kurdish forces in the Kurdistan Region in the fight against the threat of Daesh (ISIS). Let us begin the conversation with an introduction and a summary of your political background.

A: You’re really welcome here. I am also glad to see you here. My name is Mohammed Haj Mahmoud. We began an armed struggle in 1976 against the then regime of Iraq -Saddam’s regime- and our struggle went on in the region until 1979 and the victory of the Islamic Revolution and even during the years of the Iraqi imposed war on the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Socialist Democratic Party of Kurdistan, which is also active at present, is a party that has taken part in all of the events and all of the political processes in Kurdistan and Iraq and in all of the elections.

We now have offices and representatives in Kurdistan and in the other countries such as Iran, Syria, Germany and other countries, and we are also involved in the incumbent cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region.

■ When did you get to know General Soleimani and in what fields did you work together?

A: After Mr. Ahmad Vahidi left his post (in the IRGC Quds Force) and after Hajj Qassem Soleimani was appointed as the commander of the Quds Force, we were acquainted with him, and the continuous relations between the Iraqi Kurdistan currents and the Islamic Republic of Iran were shaped via the Quds Force.

Before his (General Soleimani’s) presence in the Quds Force, I had met him during a military exercise attended by (a number of members of) the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution (in Iraq) and Sayyid Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim and a number of other people. Also later, our relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran were resumed via Hajj Qassem. These relations also continued throughout the past years, as meetings and sessions have been held in Iran, Iraq and Kurdistan.

■ You must have had talks and contacts with General Soleimani in many meetings about various subjects. What is the most notable feature and quality of the late commander –such as the personal qualities of a man, like the behavior, morals, sincerity or piety- that has stayed in your mind?

A: Hajj Qassem had unique qualities and distinguishing characteristics. He was a serene and graceful character who behaved respectfully towards the other people all the time. He always listened carefully to the remarks of the other side to know what was being said. He always tried to satisfy the other side somehow, and did not behave in such a way that a meeting would reach an impasse and not yield results.

The meetings attended by Hajj Qassem always achieved certain results. The main topics that we discussed were mainly pertaining to the Ba’athist regime, Iraq, cooperation, coordination and development of Kurdistan, Iraq, and the relations between the party and the Islamic Republic of Iran, or the security conditions in the region. Our meetings were sometimes held bilaterally, and sometimes in a broader manner with the participation of parties, at which many issues were being discussed.

Apart from his relations with the parties, Hajj Qassem also maintained special personal relations with all of the currents, and such ties were highly significant. He was in contact with all of the currents for nearly 25 years. Such period gave Hajj Qassem a great opportunity to establish contacts with the groups.

In summary, he was a professional character with a good knowledge of the social, military and combat issues. He had also fought in the war between Iran and Iraq as a commander. This fact equipped him with good and strong relations in a very real sense in the military, political, administrative and diplomatic fields.

■ How familiar was General Soleimani with the Iraqi Kurdistan Region? Above all else, he was from another country with a different culture, while the Iraqi Kurdistan has its own particular features.

A: Due to his personal relations, he had a thorough knowledge of all Kurdish strata like an expert in various fields of the Kurdistan Region and familiarity with the Kurdish people. He used to analyze different issues. He got the other side’s meaning and was acquainted with everybody. In critical issues, he had a good knowledge of all details, in such a way that, as if he was living in the Kurdistan Region himself.

■ Was there ever any meeting that meets a challenge amid the discussions about the issues? Or had he ever become angry? How were the impasse or possible problems in the meetings resolved?

A: I had attended several meetings with General Soleimani. Those meetings were held in various places, in his office in Tehran, in the Kurdistan Region, and in the other locations. He was a serene and graceful man. As I told before, he carefully listened to the words of the other side and agreed to the comments.

I believe there has not been a single meeting attended by him (General Soleimani) that may have not yielded results. We had a meeting in Tehran during which a series of subjects were mooted. Although he did not agree with a number of the issues, he did not say anything. We also had bilateral meetings at resting places, in offices and even here (in Iraqi Kurdistan).

Hajj Qassem was a capable and fearless person who always craved martyrdom. He performed great services for fulfilling the goals of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

I believe that he served the Islamic Republic of Iran during his life, and offered even very greater services to Iran with martyrdom. His martyrdom has unified Shiites. The Shiites have become united.

■ General Soleimani always insisted that Iran has been helping various regions regardless of their nationality or faith. Such assistance may have been provided for the Kurds, Shiites or Sunnis. As regards the Iraqi Kurdistan, there exist cultural and religious differences anyway. How did such issues affect the consultations, contacts and cooperation?

A: He always tried to achieve success in his work. He did not have any problem with such issues, held meetings with everyone, came to agreements, and supported all sides, be it Shiites or Sunnis, as well as all parties and groups, and worked in cooperation with all of them. I never saw him have any specific trouble with this.

■ Let’s talk about the war on Daesh (ISIS) which has been very active in recent years, particularly in Iraq. It has been said that when Daesh attacked the Iraqi Kurdistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and General Soleimani were the first to help. What is your opinion? How far had Daesh advanced at that time, and how did Iran and General Soleimani assist the Kurds?

A: When Daesh reached Mosul for the first time, an Iranian delegation came to Kurdistan Region and held meetings with the whole currents and groups within the KRG. They raised alarm about the threat of Daesh, but a number of currents believed that the mission of Daesh was moving towards Baghdad, and that Daesh would not come to Kurdistan. The (Kurdish) groups did not pay much attention to the explanations provided by that (Iranian) delegation, but as soon as Daesh launched an attack and reached Makhmur, Gawir, Kirkuk and other regions, the first country that arrived at the airport of Erbil was the Islamic Republic of Iran, even before the US and Europe. Hajj Qassem showed up with 70 forces, including military experts, and three consignments of ammunition needed for the fight against Daesh, and he began to cooperate with the Peshmerga forces in person. A number of them (General Soleimani’s forces) were even martyred in the Makhmur region.

■ What would have happened if such supports had not been provided from the very beginning of the Daesh offensive? What conditions could the Iraqi Kurdistan face if Daesh was



not fought against at the first moment?

A: The Kurdish forces were short of arms and ammunition. Daesh had disarmed 90,000 Iraqi troops, including 60,000 Army forces and 30,000 forces of the Iraqi Federal Police. Those 90,000 forces had been equipped with the latest advanced American weapons, from tanks and missiles to the artillery and other ordnance. As a result, the newest versions of advanced military equipment had come into the Daesh’ possession.

Daesh started the war on Kurdistan with such equipment. The arrival of the Iranian forces under the command of Hajj Qassem and their cooperation with the Peshmerga forces resulted in the defeat of the Daesh terrorists in a short time. The number of those Iranian forces was not too high, but that small group –which included around 70 military experts as I mentioned– were professionals in utilizing military equipment, and provided very good and effective assistance for the Peshmerga forces of Kurdistan, until the Peshmerga forces could be reorganized. Meanwhile, the cooperation from Hajj Qassem in the war against Daesh continued, such as by supplying ammunition and weapons. They played a major and influential role, not only along 1,500 kilometers of the borders of Kurdistan Region from Naft Khana, Khosravi and Khanaqin to the Syrian border, but also inside Iraq. He (General Soleimani) was personally present in the battlefield like a Peshmerga and soldier, and participated in the war against Daesh. Hajj Qassem was present in all battlefields longer than everyone else.

■ Your son, Ata, was martyred in the fight against Daesh. Please tell us about your son. He was apparently martyred in Kirkuk region, is it right? How effective was the cooperation and coordination between the Peshmerga forces and Hashd al-Sha’abi (Popular Mobilization Forces) in the fight against Daesh?

A: I had been in Kirkuk before Daesh reached that region. I had the feeling that Daesh has come to fight against everybody and did not make any difference between the people, either Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, Turks or others. Daesh did not make any difference between them.

As the Socialist Party, we deployed our forces to the region, and went to Kirkuk region with the Peshmerga forces. Daesh had just arrived at the region. We defended Kirkuk. In the next stage, we made advances and Daesh was forced to retreat.

In the third stage, we launched a series of attacks on Daesh. In 2014, when we were in that region, the war continued for around four or five months. A large number of Daesh forces launched an offensive. There were locations in those regions called Maktab Khalid and Tel al-Ward. Tel al-Ward was a critical region with hills and heights which came under the control of Daesh. Daesh had also gained control of Kirkuk, and the main gas resources of Kirkuk were also there. There were fears that Daesh may explode that site anytime. If that reservoir of gas had exploded, Kirkuk would have been razed to the ground. When that region was occupied by Daesh, I was here (in Sulaymaniyah). I was informed that Tel al-Ward had been conquered by Daesh. I went there, but Ata was not with me. He was in the university at that time, but came to the region as soon as he knew that I had gone there. There were clashes in Mullah Abdullah region for a couple of hours and the Peshmerga forces had retreated after the advances of Daesh. When I got there, I held a meeting with the commanders as the commander of the Kirkuk front in order to figure out how we could liberate the regions from the grip of Daesh. Many commanders believed that without the US artillery and warplanes, it would be impossible to recapture those regions. We waited. It was autumn. It was around two hours before dawn, but we did not see any sign of Americans. There was no artillery either. Nevertheless, we started the attack and could liberate the region within around an hour and a half. It was the first time that the Kurdistan forces had managed to recapture regions from Daesh without any foreign support or fighter jets. We had taken control of all regions, but at the last moments, my son, Ata, was martyred beside me.

■ Many believe that the US proved to be a terrorist state by assassinating General Soleimani, an official figure who was the formal guest of another country. Following the assassination, the US president has also announced repeatedly that ‘we killed the number one terrorist in the world’. What is the purpose behind such comments? Who do you think was General Soleimani? Was he a terrorist or someone who saved the lives and assets of people from the grip of terrorists?

A: The truth is that the countries like the US label anybody who is not a friend of them as terrorist. For instance, they (Americans) were against the United Arab Emirates for some time, but when they reached an agreement and the US received a sum of money from the United Arab Emirates, Trump described the UAE as a brother. But he (Trump) has branded as terrorist whatever country with which he has trouble. The basis of American manner is that they are well disposed towards you as long as you are well disposed towards them, but if you turn against them, you’ll be bad.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, Hajj Qassem, and his colleagues have exerted very significant influence on the war against Daesh, and played a leading role in defeating Daesh. I believe that without the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hajj Qassem,

Baghdad and Damascus would be now under occupation of Daesh. Those two capitals would have been under the control of Daesh for sure. But thanks to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Russia came to the region, Hezbollah came to Syria, and they defended that country. They defended Iraq as well. In Iraq, Daesh was closing in around Abu Ghraib, Karbala and other regions. Hajj Qassem played a key role in the confrontation with Daesh. He was a revolutionary person, and managed to turn Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Afghanistan into a united front under his command. Those countries were in contact with the Islamic Republic of Iran via Hajj Qassem. Hajj Qassem transferred the Hezbollah forces from Lebanon to Baghdad and Syria. He established a united axis in Syria, Yemen and the other regions, and was commanding it in person.

■ Apart from the meetings that you held with General Soleimani, do you have any other memories of the Iranian commander in the battlefield? Considering that you personally participated in the battlefield.

A: I was in Kirkuk when I was informed that the Peshmerga forces have launched an attack, but it has faced resistance from Daesh and the forces have also suffered casualties, in a way that 30 corpses had remained in the region. We went to the clash zone swiftly, and saw Hajj Qassem and a number of his forces in there. He asked me why I had gone there. I responded, “The Peshmerga forces have suffered casualties, that’s why I have come here.” He said, “I had cautioned the brothers in the Patriotic Union (of Kurdistan) not to attack without informing me.” We held a meeting in there, attended by Hajj Qassem, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and others. A series of decisions were made in that session which led to the liberation of all regions within a week.

■ How did you hear the news of his martyrdom, and how did you feel?

A: It was not surprising for me to hear the news of his martyrdom. He was present in Damascus, Yemen, Lebanon, Baghdad, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and other regions on a daily basis. He did not hide himself from the threats, so the probability of his martyrdom was high considering the extent of the threats. However, the news of his martyrdom really saddened me, particularly given that he was martyred as a guest in Iraq. This fact made the news more saddening.

■ The front of resistance lost one of its most important symbols, commanders and figures after the martyrdom of General Soleimani. His loss was a blow to the front of resistance. How do you see the future of this front after the martyrdom of General Soleimani? How do you think will the process initiated by General Soleimani continue, particularly in the fight against the terrorist groups and the US acts of occupation in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and elsewhere?

A: Hajj Qassem had definitely a unique character. He had very good relations with the political currents and various countries, and above all, he was honest with his friends.

I remember that we and a number of other parties were holding talks with Hajj Qassem at a meeting, and we requested support from him in the elections. Hajj Qassem only said, “I pray for the best for you and wish you luck.” We were also accompanied by two of our clerics. I told him (General Soleimani) in jest, “Haji, if there is a need for a prayer, these clerics of ourselves would pray for us.”

General Soleimani had personally close ties with many people. Such factors had helped him turn the region into a united front, under his own command. He stayed in contact with the countries for nearly 25 years, and this turned Hajj Qassem into an expert in the regional affairs.

I believe the region is not going to see anybody similar to Hajj Qassem even in the next 20 years. The Islamic Republic has a population of 70 to 80 million and has well-known individuals in the political and military fields and other spheres. But Hajj Qassem was a distinctive character in the Islamic Republic and across the region. I believe that it is difficult to find somebody with all of those qualities until the next 20 years.

■ A revenge for the martyrdom of General Soleimani would be the expulsion of American occupiers from the region, particularly from Iraq. What do you think about the outcome of this issue, which is now being seriously pursued in Iraq? Will the region get rid of the US occupation or not?

A: Although the Iraqi parliament and government have adopted a series of decisions, the eviction of Americans is not an easy job. The Americans would not abandon the region easily, and cast a greedy eye on the region. The US claims that it has spent billions of dollars in Iraq, and seeks to reclaim it. They have withdrawn from Syria, but stationed a series of forces, tanks and military equipment on the oilfields.

Upon return from a visit to Saudi Arabia, Trump did not declare that he has reached an agreement with that country, but said ‘I have brought a sum of more than \$400 billion from Saudi Arabia to the US’. This is the truth about the US, while Trump is sincerely expressing the realities and the truth about his country, which has a greedy eye on oil and other resources of the other countries to fulfill its own interests.

■ If you want to tell General Soleimani a few words, as a friend and as a person with whom you had close ties, what would you say?

A: Honorable Hajj Qassem! As a devoted person, as a hero character, as an altruist figure, and as a person that devoted your life to your country, your goals and your friends, you were martyred hundreds of kilometers away from your homeland. Your name will be indelibly imprinted on the minds of conscientious people. Your martyrdom in here (Iraq) sends the message that you have been serving the goals and your country, and I believe that you will be in heaven.

■ At the end, let us know about anything that may have been missed.

A: I believe that a person with such qualities (like General Soleimani) would be rarely found in a society or country throughout the years, and General Soleimani was one of those characters. Such a character could hardly ever be found, one that would devote his life to safeguarding his soil, motherland, country, oppressed people and friends.

Hajj Qassem is a name that will go down in the history of Iran and the region forever. He made history for himself, for the Islamic Republic of Iran, and for the people of region that were his friends and colleagues. Qassem Soleimani is a name that will never die.

The distinction between martyrdom and normal death is that a martyr devotes his life to the goals of himself, his country and his nation. The greatest asset of every human being is his or her life, and these people (martyrs) will stand in the front row on the day of judgement according to the teachings of Islam.

First Announcement



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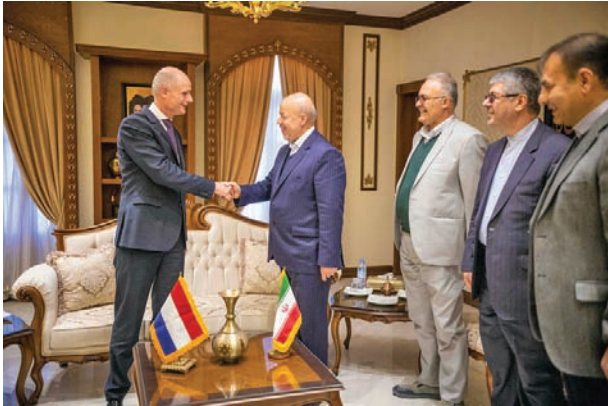
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Dutch FM visits Isfahan, says ready to deepen tourism ties

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Foreign Minister of the Netherlands Stef Blok said on Friday that his country is willing to expand economic and tourism relations with Iran, particularly with Isfahan province.

“We came to Isfahan because we have heard a lot about the rich culture and hospitality of the people here,” Blok said in a meeting with Isfahan Governor General Abbas Rezaei.

“Government of the Netherlands is ready to boost economic relations as well as tourism exchange with Iran, especially with Isfahan,” Moj news agency quoted Blok as saying on Friday.



Talking about U.S. sanctions against the Islamic Republic, the Dutch official noted that over the past two years, sanctions have limited bilateral cooperation, adding “Efforts are being made to expand cooperation [despite economic sanctions].”

Rezaei for his part said the ground is fertile for expansion of bilateral tourism relations with the aim of hosting Dutch tourists in Isfahan.

“Despite international restrictions imposed by cruel U.S. sanctions, Iranians welcome enhanced ties with people of the Netherlands,” the Iranian official expressed.

“Rich in history and culture, Isfahan is renowned as ‘half the world’ [meaning seeing it is relevant to seeing half the whole world].”

Isfahan was once a crossroad of international trade and diplomacy in Iran and now it is one of Iran’s top tourist destinations for good reasons. The city is filled with many architectural wonders such as unmatched Islamic buildings, bazaars, museums, Persian gardens and tree-lined boulevards. It’s a city for walking, getting lost in its mazing bazaars, dozing in beautiful gardens, and meeting people.

Ski resort uses helicopter to bring in snow in a bid to stay open

A mountain resort in France has been forced to helicopter in snow in order to keep its ski hills open after unusually warm temperatures led to a shortage of snow this winter.

The Superbagnères resort, located in the Pyrenees mountains near the country’s border with Spain, had the snow delivered so that it could be operational during the upcoming school holidays, CNN reported this week.

A resort in the French Alps reportedly did the same, The Local France reported, with one of the snow deliveries taking three hours and 400 liters of fuel to complete.

While average temperatures in the region in February are around 43 degrees Fahrenheit, this winter has seen temperatures rise over 50 degrees, according to CNN, which is too warm to create artificial snow with machines.

France’s environmental minister Elisabeth Borne criticized the move to bring in snow, however, saying that it was only adding to the climate change that had caused the issue in the first place.

(Source: MSN)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Western Ghats

The Western Ghats are internationally recognized as a region of immense global importance for the conservation of biological diversity, besides containing areas of high geological, cultural and aesthetic values.

A chain of mountains running parallel to India’s western coast, approximately 30-50 km inland, the Ghats traverse the States of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat.



Older than the great Himalayan mountain chain, the Western Ghats of India are a geomorphic feature of immense global importance. The Outstanding Universal Value of the Western Ghats is manifested in the region’s unique and fascinating influence on large-scale biophysical and ecological processes over the entire Indian peninsula.

The mountains of the Western Ghats and their characteristic montane forest ecosystems influence the Indian monsoon weather patterns that mediate the warm tropical climate of the region, presenting one of the best examples of the tropical monsoon system on the planet. The Ghats act as a key barrier, intercepting the rain-laden monsoon winds that sweep in from the south-west during late summer.

A significant characteristic of the Western Ghats is the exceptionally high level of biological diversity and endemism. This mountain chain is recognized as one of the world’s eight ‘hottest hotspots’ of biological diversity along with Sri Lanka. The forests of the Western Ghats include some of the best representatives of non-equatorial tropical evergreen forests in the world.

Of the total 325 globally threatened species in the Western Ghats, 129 are classified as Vulnerable, 145 as Endangered and 51 as Critically Endangered.

(Source: UNESCO)

Archaeological survey confirms Iron Age site in northeast Iran

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iranian archaeologist Hassan Basafa said on Wednesday that further surveys confirm the previous notion that Seh Tappeh (meaning three hills), an archaeological site near Neyshabur city in northeast Iran, dates back to the Iron Age.

“Seh Tappeh, which is situated near Neyshabur, belongs to the Iron Age according to series of analysis conducted on cultural materials (especially potteries) and architectural remains found in the site,” Said Basafa, who is a professor at the University of Neyshabur.

He made the remarks during the 17th Annual Symposium on the Iranian Architecture which was attended by international cultural heritage experts, historians and archaeologists at the National Museum of Iran in downtown Tehran, IRNA reported.

Basafa briefed audiences about findings of the third archaeological digs conducted at Seh Tappeh, which is situated in Khorasan region of the ancient country.

The Archaeologist stated that original architecture of the site was built on a large brick platform.

“This area can be compared to the cultural scene of the Central Asia so that it (Seh Tappeh) can be regarded as being on a business route between the Central Asia and the Iranian Plateau.”

“Cultural materials excavated from the area along with clay fragments, beads of different genres such as azure and turquoise and bronze, and stamped seals indicate a cultural and commercial link between Khorasan region and Central Asia and possibly



the Iranian plateau.”

The second season was conducted in 2017 by a team of younger generations of Iranian archaeologists and researchers whose efforts led to the discovery of ruined architectural structures, artifacts, and human remains.

Supervised by Iran’s Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism (RICHT), excavations at Seh Tappeh are aimed to shed a new light on the life, culture and economy of Neyshabur residents in Iron Age as well as probing their cultural and trans-regional

communications with other nations of the time.

The Iron Age is an archaeological era, referring to a period of time in the prehistory and protohistory of the Old World (Afro-Eurasia) when the dominant toolmaking material was iron.



Atashgah: A hillside Zoroastrian fire temple in Isfahan



TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Though Iran is a Muslim-majority country, it is home to ancient Zoroastrian sites still retaining otherworldly charm.

Isfahan’s Atashgah is one of those which is situated on a mountain of the same name in western site of the central Iranian city. Experts say the fire temple dates back Sassanid era (224–651).

From architectural point of view, Atashgah is considered as a wonder of its time. The design is round with eight sides all of which has a large window that enabled people to see the fire from each window. There is also an entrance door.

Narratives say that Zoroastrian priests made fire inside the temple before saying prayers.

Atashgah and its fire temple on top registered in the list of national monuments of Iran in 1951, with the registration number of 380.

As a visitor, when you reach the top of the mountain ultimately, and after refreshing your breath, you may be impressed with the ancient temple! It also offers you amazing vistas of the city especially at night.



9 things that will make flying on an airplane better



I believe it would help many areas of the country -- particularly in the Northeast and Midwest -- as enhanced air service could support efforts of legacy cities, such as Dayton, to attract new business and residents.”

■ Improve airport security screening

Most people interviewed wanted a better TSA security experience, whether we have to remove our shoes or not (if we have TSA Pre-Check or Clear).

“I’d like to see more technology, such as the automated bins, to keep lines moving and cut the hassle factor,” says aviation expert Benét Wilson, credit cards editor with The Points Guy.

And because not everyone can or will participate in TSA Pre-Check, aviation historian Bednarek wishes that we could design the security areas with the expectation that people will be removing their shoes, laptops and other items before screening and re-packing after.

Security screening can feel like attending a reception “with a drink in one hand and an hors d’oeuvre in the other, and now someone wants to shake your hand,” says Bednarek.

■ Make airports more comfortable (and quiet)

Longtime United Airlines customer Peter Sasaki, who’s flown more than a million United miles and has invitation-only Global Services status with the airline, would like to see more quiet spaces in airports.

“Major airports are worse than a 1980s shopping mall with regards to crowds, noise, retail space management and

aggressive sensory overload,” he says. “Airline lounges are most often no better. I enjoy the meditation/yoga rooms at SFO and the outdoor patio at Terminal 7 LAX and would like to see more spaces to relax at major airports.”

Wilson also wishes for independent, paid airport lounges for those without status.

“I don’t have enough elite status on any airline, and the big three have made it almost impossible to buy your way into their lounges,” she says. “So, I’d love to see more [of] The Clubs or Escape lounges in the larger US airports.”

■ Make the gates nicer

Bednarek wishes for “more comfortable seating in the gate areas, more moving sidewalks, and for passengers with long layovers or unexpected flight delays, some place they could store their luggage so they don’t have to haul it all over the airport.”

Airport lockers started to disappear after airport bombings in the 1970s and were completely removed after 9/11, she says. “A return to lockers may not be the answer, but surely we could come up with something.”

■ Give us space for our legs

While coach is a tight fit for anyone who isn’t tiny, really tall people in coach have to sit with their legs literally jammed up against the seats in front of them.

We’re so jammed into airliners that aviation security consultant Jeff Price says we may not have enough room to evacuate some airplanes in the 90 seconds required by the US Federal Aviation Administration.

“I wish the airlines would give the coach class enough legroom so regular airline passengers can really evacuate in the 90 seconds the FAA requires,” says Price, who is 6 feet tall.

“I’m not talking about whoever they are using to conduct the certification testing,” says Price. “My legs are so wedged between seats, it takes me 90 seconds to get out of my row, much less out of the plane.”

■ Update those aircraft charging stations

Many Southwest Airlines passengers are superfans, explaining the numbered boarding process and friendly flight attendants to anyone who will listen. And yet, there’s still room for improvement, says Wilson.

“Anyone who knows me knows I love this airline,” she says. “It has better Wi-Fi, free movies, TV, text messaging [and] WhatsApp. But I have nowhere to plug in my electronics on those longer flights.”

Airplane charging stations are becoming not just welcomed but required.

■ Make safety improvements

Boeing and the FAA need to solve the problems with the Boeing 737 MAX and get it flying again, Bednarek says.

“More importantly, though, I wish that they would solve it in a way that would move toward a stronger safety and regulatory culture,” she says.

“In some ways the airline industry is as large and strong as it is because regulations aimed at flight safety helped remove one of the biggest factors holding back people from becoming passengers -- fear.”

■ Create a more sustainable future for flying

Last year, United loyalist Sasaki saw runways that were too hot to use; air temperature and density issues with certain aircraft; flooding runways; and storm systems that were too difficult to navigate around.

“Man-made or not, climate change is real, and I expect more frequent weather-related delays,” says Sasaki. “I hope for a task force led by the airlines, NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and the FAA, but don’t expect one.”

(Source: CNN)

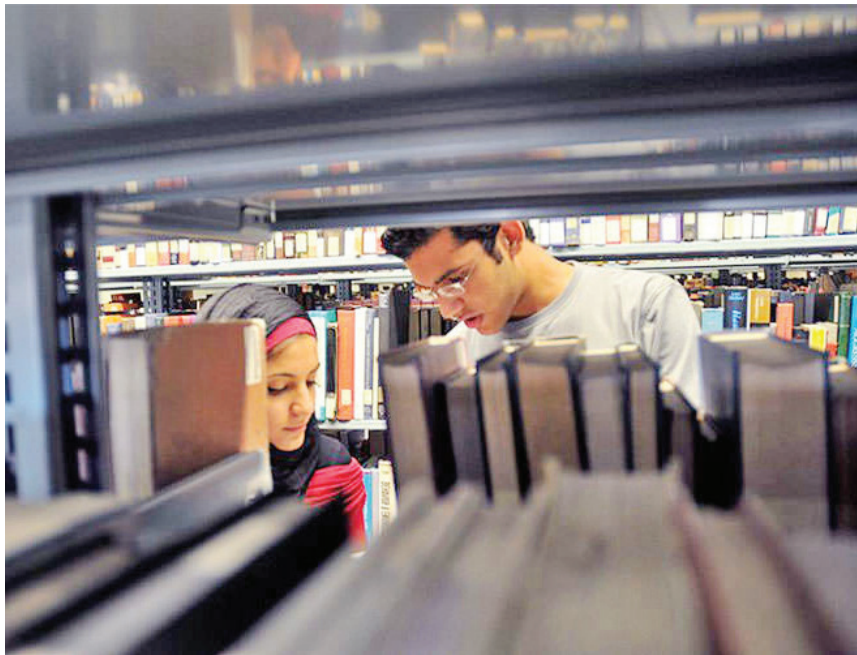
Iranian scientific papers surge 60-fold in 2 decades

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The number of Iranian scientific articles published on international databases has experienced a 60-fold growth over the past 20 years, IRNA news agency reported on Wednesday.

Mohammad Javad Dehghani, head of the Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC) said that in 2000, about 1,000 articles were registered by Iranian universities on international citation bases, while the number reached up to 60,000, last year.

There are currently about 75,000 faculties and about 4 million students in the country, he highlighted, adding that some 460,000 articles have been published on the Web of Science, of which 300,000 were produced over the past six years, equivalent to 65 percent.

ISC is the third internationally accredited citation center established in the Islamic Republic of Iran based on a resolution adopted in 2008 by the 4th Meeting of the Islamic Ministers of Higher Education (ICMHESR) in Baku, the



capital of the Republic of Azerbaijan, to index, evaluate and publish scientific productions in Islamic countries.

Iran has advanced notably in terms of scientific publications and research output worldwide, such as:

Iran was ranked fourth among 20 leading countries publishing nanotechnology articles in 2019, holding 6 percent share of the world's publications relating to nanoscience, according to StatNano website.

Iran is ranked at the 8th place among the leading countries in terms of publishing top papers in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), citing data released by the journal Nature.

Based on the latest data published by SCImago Journal & Country Rank (SJR), Iran took the first place among the Middle-Eastern countries for the highest number of citable documents in 2017.

Twelve Iranian researchers have been named in the Highly Cited Researchers 2019 List published by the Clarivate Analytics.

Climate change may doom 1 in 3 species of plants and animals in the next 50 years

Take a moment to cherish your plants and appreciate the animals you see around you.

In 50 years, a third of them may no longer exist. Using data from surveys that studied 538 animals, insects and plants from 581 sites across the globe, researchers John J. Wiens and Cristian Román-Palacios from the University of Arizona found that approximately one in three plant, insect and animal species could face extinction by 2070. However, things could be even worse if emissions continue to rise as rapidly as they have in recent decades.

In a worst-case scenario, that number could rise to over 55%.

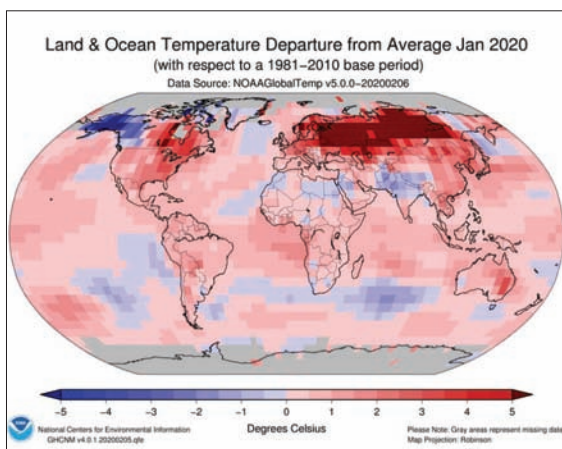
Of the 538 species studied, 44% of them have already experienced an extinction in a particular local area. The researchers found that local extinction sites had larger and faster changes in the hottest yearly temperatures than those that did not.

While many species were able to tolerate a moderate increase in maximum temperatures, 50% of the species had local extinctions if maximum temperatures increased by more than 0.5 degrees Celsius. That number rose to 95% if temperatures increased by more than 2.9 degrees Celsius.

The researchers found that the key to predicting whether a population will go extinct is the maximum annual temperature, as opposed to the average yearly temperature. This is notable because average temperatures are typically used as markers in measuring climate change.

With January going in the record books as the warmest January in 141 years and statistical analysis done by NOAA scientists predicting 2020 to be one of the five warmest years on record, the researchers believe there will be more local extinctions across the globe. And with summer heat waves potentially becoming more dangerous in the coming decades, the potential for loss of life will likely only grow from here.

However, that number could drop if we make a collective effort to address climate change, they say.



■ If we stick with the Paris climate agreement

The Paris Agreement was signed in 2015 by ministers from 195 countries from around the globe.

It committed these countries to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and below 1.5 degrees, if possible.

The researchers found that achieving the Paris goals could be the difference between extinction and survival for many species.

"Based on our sample of 538 species, we projected a loss of 30% of the species under a more extreme warming scenario, but only about 16% if we stick to the Paris Agreement," Wiens told CNN. "So, think in 1 in 6 species, not 1 in 3."

The researchers believe that some species loss is inevitable at this point, no matter what we do to curb greenhouse gas emissions. However, it is still possible to protect biodiversity and prevent massive species loss.

"I think that we should focus on preserving forests and other habitats in tropical areas, and this is part of the Paris Agreement," Wiens said. "Preserving forests protects biodiversity and can help reduce or even reverse global warming. It's a win-win."

■ If we don't stick with the Paris climate agreement

The Paris Agreement is an international pact aimed at curbing global emissions of heat-trapping gases.

Unfortunately, studies have shown that so far, many countries are failing to meet the emissions cuts they set to limit climate change.

Making matters worse, President Trump formally notified the United Nations that the U.S. would be pulling out of the Paris climate agreement in November. While it will take a full year for the U.S. to withdraw, losing the world's second-largest contributor of greenhouse gas emissions makes it more difficult to reach the agreement's goals.

"Some researchers have estimated that two-thirds of all species of plants and animals could be lost due to tropical deforestation alone," Wiens said. "If you combine that with climate change (which can impact species in protected forests and other reserves), then it really is terrible. Even from our data alone, there are extreme warming scenarios where 55% of the species would be lost from intact habitats. And note that deforestation also increases global warming. It is a double whammy against biodiversity."

Species that are in tropical regions are two to four times likelier to face extinction than those in temperate regions.

"This is a big problem, because the majority of plant and animal species occur in the tropics," Román-Palacios said.

Many species have migrated to cooler habitats to escape the warming temperatures, but the researchers found that most will not be able to disperse quickly enough to avoid extinction.

"In a way, it's a 'choose your own adventure,'" Wiens said. "If we stick to the Paris Agreement to combat climate change, we may lose fewer than two out of every 10 plant and animal species on Earth by 2070. But if humans cause larger temperature increases, we could lose more than a third or even half of all animal and plant species, based on our results."

(source: CNN)

WHO provides Iran with new coronavirus test kits

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iran has received extra diagnostic kits and personal protective equipment to combat the novel coronavirus outbreak.

The Iranian Ministry of Health announced that the fourth batch of test kits, special for diagnosing the coronavirus, known as COVID-19, has been delivered to Iran with the assistance of Christoph Hamelmann, World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in Iran, IRNA reported on Friday.



WHO Representative in Iran Christoph Hamelmann (L)

Iranian health authorities reported one fatality on Saturday and two fatalities on Friday, adding to the two elderly patients who died on Wednesday. A further 18 people tested positive for the virus.

World health officials have said the respiratory disease is capable of spreading through human-to-human contact, droplets carried through sneezing and coughing and germs left on inanimate objects. There are no proven therapies for the new virus.

Preliminary results from two clinical trials testing potential treatments for COVID-19 are expected in three weeks, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization said on Thursday.

Climate change, pollution could kill most coral reefs within 80 years

Coral reefs around the world are dying and scientists are looking at a variety of ways to save these endangered structures, including growing them in labs and trying to make them pollution-resistant. However, newly presented research says climate change and pollution could eliminate nearly all coral reef habitats on the planet by the end of the century.

The research said that warming, acidic oceans and rising temperatures could wipe out "nearly all existing coral reef habitats by 2100," adding that efforts to restore the reefs "will likely meet serious challenges."

"By 2100, it's looking quite grim," said University of Hawaii Manoa biogeographer Renee Setter in a statement. Setter presented her findings at the annual San Diego-based Ocean Sciences Meeting.

In August, the government agency that manages Australia's Great Barrier Reef downgraded its outlook for the corals' condition from "poor" to "very poor" due to warming oceans. Florida scientists have enacted a 10-year, \$100 million program in an effort to stop coral reef deaths in the Florida Keys.

Setter, along with the other researchers, noted that while the efforts being made so far to clean up plastic pollution in the oceans — which could have a \$2.5 trillion impact on the global economy — and cleaning the beaches are positive steps, much of the impact comes from emissions.

(Source: New York Post)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

The Future of Cyprus

(March 10, 2003)

The leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, Tassos Papadopoulos and Rauf Denktaş, are holding talks in The Hague with UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan about proposals to reunite the island of Cyprus. This report from Tabitha Morgan:

Greek Cypriots in the south of the island are enjoying a public holiday in warm spring sunshine, while for Turkish Cypriots it's a normal Monday. **Outwardly** there's nothing to suggest that this is, in Mr Annan's words, **Cyprus's date with destiny**. Most Turkish Cypriots want Mr Denktaş to agree to the idea of a referendum. They're tired of living in **political isolation** with increasingly difficult economic conditions. Many people in the north are going abroad to find jobs and many more have said they'll do the same if their leader rejects the UN proposals. A united island, they argue, would **open the way to** EU membership and economic prosperity. But Mr Denktaş, himself, has said repeatedly **over** recent days that the plan doesn't **provide the minimum that he regards as essential** for a deal.

Among most Greek Cypriots, on the other hand, the hope is that Mr Denktaş will be **the one to reject** the UN plan, to **save them the embarrassment of having to do so themselves**.

For Greek Cypriots the plan is **flawed** because it doesn't allow all refugees to return to their homes in the north; and they're unhappy at the idea of settlers from the Turkish mainland being free to come to the south.

■ Words

Greek Cypriots: people from the Greek part of Cyprus
Outwardly: According to the appearance of things, it would seem that

Cyprus's date with destiny: a day when an important decision will be made about the future of Cyprus
in political isolation: with no political allies (the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has been recognized only by Turkey itself)

open the way to: enable, make possible

over: here, during

provide the minimum that he regards as essential: meet his basic requirements

the one to reject: the person who rejects

save them the embarrassment of having to do so themselves: so that they will be able to avoid doing it themselves

flawed: unsatisfactory, has problems

(Source: BBC)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ◀ ▶ E

Educational projects worth \$330m to be inaugurated

A total of 1,015 educational projects worth 14 trillion rials (nearly \$330 million) will be inaugurated across the country, Mehrollah Rakhshanimehr, director of the organization for renovation, development, and equipment of schools, has announced. The projects will be inaugurated by the next 10 days, on the occasion of the 41st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, he stated, ISNA reported on Sunday. According to Rakhshanimehr, the projects include 4,168 classrooms, 11 swimming pools, and 32 gyms. About 14,000 classrooms have been built so far this year (started March 21, 2019), compared with some 10,000 last year, he concluded.

افتتاح ۱۴۰۰ میلیارد تومان پروژه آموزشی

رئیس سازمان نوسازی، توسعه و تجهیز مدارس کشور گفت ۱۰۱۵ پروژه آموزشی با اعتباری به میزان ۱۴۰۰ میلیارد تومان در سراسر کشور به بهره‌برداری می‌رسد. به گزارش ایسنا، مه‌راله رخشانی مهر افزود این پروژه‌ها طی ۱۰ روز آینده و به مناسبت چهل‌ویکمین سالگرد پیروزی انقلاب اسلامی افتتاح خواهند شد. به گفته او، این پروژه‌ها شامل ۴۱۶۸ کلاس درس، ۱۱ استخر، و ۳۲ سالن ورزشی هستند. رخشانی مهر ادامه داد تاکنون در سال ۹۸ حدود ۱۴ هزار کلاس درس افتتاح شده است در حالیکه در سال ۹۷ حدود ۱۰ هزار کلاس افتتاح شده بود.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“galacto-, gala-, galact-”

■ **Meaning**: milk

■ **For example**: The Milky Way is the *galaxy* which is the home of our solar system.

PHRASAL VERB

Grasp at something

■ **Meaning**: to try to hold on to something

■ **For example**: His foot slipped and he grasped at the top of the wall.

IDIOM

Bring nothing to the table

■ **Explanation**: to have nothing of interest to offer the other side in a negotiation

■ **For example**: We'll never reach an agreement if we don't all bring something to the table.

Israeli forces kill young Palestinian man over alleged stabbing attempt

PRESS TV — Israeli military forces have shot dead a young Palestinian man in the occupied Old City of Jerusalem al-Quds for an alleged stabbing attempt against police forces amid tensions over the so-called deal of the century unveiled by US President Donald Trump last month on the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israeli media outlets claimed that Israeli forces recognized the Palestinian while he was running and wielding a knife near Lion's Gate, known in Arabic as Bab al-Asbat, on Saturday morning.

Israeli troops purportedly yelled at the young Palestinian man, identified as 33-year-old Maher Ibrahim Zaatra, to stop, at which point he started running towards them. The officers said they responded by shooting at him.

A 42-year-old settler sustained a leg injury, when the Palestinian was shot, probably by a ricochet of the bullet fired at him. She sustained mild injuries but was transferred to the Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem al-Quds.

Eyewitnesses confirmed that the Palestinian man was shot several times and left on the ground bleeding before Israeli paramedics arrived at the scene.

Hours later, Israeli forces raided his home in the Jabal Mukabbir neighborhood of southern East Jerusalem al-Quds, and detained his mother and two of his brothers.

On Friday, a young Palestinian woman was arrested at the Armon Hanatziv promenade, which lies in the Jewish neighborhood of East Talpiot or Armon HaNetziv in southern East Jerusalem al-Quds, over an alleged stabbing attempt. No injuries were reported.

The developments come amid tensions in the occupied territories since Trump's unveiling on January 28 of his controversial peace plan, which was negotiated with Israel but without the Palestinians.

‘Russia, Turkey to intensify consultations on Syria’s Idlib’

PRESS TV — The Russian and Turkish heads of state agree during a phone call to step up their bilateral consultations concerning the situation in the terrorists-infested northwestern Syrian province of Idlib.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan agreed during the conversation that took place on Friday to “intensify bilateral consultations on Idlib with the aim of reducing tensions, guaranteeing a ceasefire, and neutralizing the terrorist threat,” the Kremlin said in a statement.

Putin, for his part, told his Turkish counterpart that he was “seriously concerned” by the “aggressive actions” of Takfiri terrorists in the province.

The province contains the largest remaining concentrations of the terrorists, who have fled there since September 2015, when Russia began lending airpower to Syria's counter-terrorism operations.

Backed by the Russian aerial support, the Syrian military has enhanced its anti-terror efforts in Idlib over the past months.

The advances have liberated many areas across Idlib, including some hosting Turkish observation posts. Turkey began setting up the facilities in the province in 2018, when it agreed to cooperate with Russia to contain the situation in the vicinity of the Turkish border.

Turkey claims that more than a dozen of its troops have died during clashes with the Syrian forces. It has been sending huge reinforcements to Idlib, has threatened an “imminent” assault on the Syrian military, and asked Russia to “stop” the Syrian gains.

Speaking with Putin, Erdogan repeated the demand, stressing that the Syrian government “should be restrained in Idlib,” the Turkish presidency said in a statement.

Damascus, however, has vowed to bring every inch of its soil back under sovereign control.

Syria has reclaimed the biggest part of the territory that it lost to the overwhelming foreign-backed violence that began afflicting the Arab country in 2011.

The violence, featuring rampant militancy and Takfiri terrorism, has been fuelled by many Western and regional countries, including Turkey, which still supports a number of anti-Damascus militant outfits in Idlib.

Ryanair CEO calls for profiling of Muslims, sparks outrage

PRESS TV — Ryanair's chief executive Michael O'Leary has sparked outrage after he called for the profiling of Muslim men at airports, claiming that terrorists are “generally of a Muslim persuasion”.

Muslim men should be profiled and face further checks at airports because “that is where the threat is coming from,” the controversial CEO of Europe's largest low-cost carrier said in an interview with the Times newspaper published on Saturday.

He further noted under such profiling guidelines, passengers that would be flagged as a potential threat for terrorism would “generally be males of a Muslim persuasion”.

“Who are the bombers? They are going to be single males traveling on their own... If you are traveling with a family of kids, on you go; the chances you are going to blow them all up is zero,” he said.

“You can't say stuff, because it's racism, but it will generally be males of a Muslim persuasion. Thirty years ago it was the Irish. If that is where the threat is coming from, deal with the threat,” he added.

A spokesman for the Muslim Council of Britain has accused O'Leary of “Islamophobia” and “encouraging racism”.

“In Germany this week a white person killed eight people. Should we profile white people to see if they're being fascists? He's being very blinkered and is actually encouraging racism,” Labour MP Khalid Mahmood told the Times.

The legislator was referring to mass shootings in Germany's southwestern city of Hanau late on Wednesday during which eight people were killed and five others wounded.

Germany has been targeted in recent years by several extremist attacks, one of which killed 12 people in the heart of Berlin in December 2016.

But far-right attacks have become a particular concern for German authorities. The increase in hate crimes in recent months has prompted the country to expand a crackdown on right-wing political violence in order to repress the disturbance.

It seems that there has been a rise in far-right attacks across Europe in recent years.

The challenges of announcing the outcome of the Afghan presidential election are heightened

INTERNATIONAL DESK **TEHRAN** — Supporters of Abdullah, who had threatened to form an independent government in opposition to Ashraf Ghani's announcement as the winner of the election, set a new governor for the provinces of Sar-e Pol and Panjshir.

U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad is in Jowzjan today for talks with the Taliban and met with General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the leader of the Afghan National Movement behind closed doors.

According to reporters in the area, the Jowzjan governor's office building is also surrounded by supporters of General Abdul Rashid Dostum and they want to remove Ashraf Ghani's governor from office and appoint someone else to represent him.

In conversation with General Abdul Rashid Dostum, Khalilzad has tried to dissuade him from continuing this path.

General Abdul Rashid Dostum was wealthy in Ashraf's first vice-president in the previous government but supported Abdullah in the recent election.

The United States is concerned that the heightened tensions between Abdullah and Ghani will affect the deal with the Taliban that began last night with a plan to reduce violence in Afghanistan.



Israeli bulldozer hits Palestinian protester with boulder



PRESS TV — A video has emerged showing an Israeli bulldozer hitting a Palestinian protester with a stone while driving at a high speed in the village of Kafr Qaddum in the occupied West Bank.

In the video released on Friday, the bulldozer is seen pushing large rocks towards protesters who were taking part in the weekly demonstrations against the Israeli occupation.

The bulldozer stopped when a man was hit by one of the stones, while rocks continued tumbling towards protesters at the bottom of the street which nearly hit a child.

The father of the child at the scene said the bulldozer continued advancing about a hundred meters from the place where the stones were placed, and drove exceptionally fast.

The Palestinian man who was hit by the stone was taken to a hospital in Qalqilya by the Red Crescent.

The Israeli military claimed in a statement that Palestinians have allegedly participated in a riot in Kafr Qaddum, during which they hurled stones at Israeli soldiers on the scene.

The statement said forces who worked to disperse the riot identified a stone barrier placed at the entrance of the village, adding that engineering tools were used to clear the stones from the road.

“While doing the clearing, mass

stone-throwing took place,” the statement said.

Residents of Kafr Qaddum regularly hold weekly protest rallies against the Israeli occupation.

Israeli forces have fired tear gas to disperse weekly anti-settlement protests in Kafr Qaddum, leaving a number of people, including children, suffering from suffocation. They have also used rubber bullets and sound bombs against the protesters.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds.

The UN Security Council has condemned Israel's settlement activities in the occupied territories in several resolutions.

Less than a month before US President Donald Trump took office, the United Nations Security Council in December 2016 adopted Resolution 2334, calling on Israel to “immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem” al-Quds.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem al-Quds as its capital.

The last round of Israeli-Palestinian talks collapsed in 2014. Among the major sticking points in those negotiations was Israel's continued settlement expansion on Palestinian territories.

U.S. conducts ‘mini exercise’ to brace for nuclear exchange with Russia



PRESS TV — The US military, in the presence of Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, has reportedly conducted a “mini exercise” in which Washington launched a simulated nuclear strike against Russia.

Speaking on condition of anonymity during a briefing on Friday, a senior Pentagon official said the exercise took place earlier this week at the US Strategic Command headquarters in Nebraska and that Esper had participated in the simulated showdown in Europe between Russia and NATO.

“We conducted a mini-exercise,” the official told reporters. “The scenario included a European contingency where you are conducting a war with Russia and Russia decides to use a low-yield limited nuclear weapon against the site on NATO territory, and then you go through the conversation that you would have with the secretary of defense and then with the president ultimately to decide how to respond.”

The US responded with what the senior official called a “limited response” to Moscow's nuclear attack in Europe.

The official did not say what type of target the US military had simulated attacking in retaliation.

While at Strategic Command in Nebraska, Esper had reportedly been briefed about the nuclear arsenals of North Korea, Russia, and China.

Earlier in the month, the United States announced the deployment of a new long-range nuclear missile aboard its stealth submarines to deter what it calls Washington's potential adversaries.

The US Department of Defense claimed in a statement that the low-yield warhead was deployed on the USS Tennessee submarine patrolling in the Atlantic Ocean to deter “potential adversaries, like Russia,” and in response to Russian tests of similar weapons.

The new missiles sparked fresh concerns as critics said the submarine-launched ballistic missile warhead would lower the threshold for using nuclear weapons.

In August, the US withdrew from the 1988 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia. The pact banned all land-based mid-range missiles. Washington's withdrawal from the INF has renewed tensions between the two nuclear powers.

Washington has been deploying its missiles in Eastern Europe and near Russia's western borders, a provocative move denounced by the Kremlin.

Moscow has repeatedly warned Washington not to deploy such missiles in the vicinity of Russia's borders, vowing to deploy its own missiles, capable of reaching all parts of Europe in response.

Can Democrats compete with Republican billionaires?

Iran, Trump’s Achilles heel in the 2020 election

→ 1 To draw the attention of countries around the world, Democratic candidates describe Trump policies, which are based on “political militarism” and “military terrorism”, as his obvious blunders. They insist that Trump has failed to redefine his friends and foes, becoming reliant on dictatorial regimes and distancing from its old allies.

Democrats have used the JCPOA in their election campaign as a bargaining chip against Trump. To further pressure Trump, they state that the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal has led to a series of events that threaten U.S. national interests and security.

In this regard, Democratic candidates are seeking to please China, Russia and Europe in an attempt for maintaining the JCPOA. Despite Trump, who left the nuclear deal and has consistently insisted on the benefits of this withdrawal, Democrats have agreed with conditioned return to the deal.

Of course, their conditions include extending the Iran deal's sunset provisions in the fields of nuclear and weapon restrictions or negotiating Iran's missile and regional behavior, which is also being followed by Trump and Europe.

Along with the Democratic election campaign, Trump has been setting his foreign policy to reduce tensions with China and Russia, which are the most influential states in

carrying out cyber-attacks or influencing the 2020 election.

Despite his efforts to find a way to negotiate with Iran, Trump has yet not succeeded, and the Democrats' focus on developments in Iran could become his Achilles heel in the 2020 election. Any unexpected event regarding Iran could faces Trump with trouble. Therefore, Iran and the developments in Tehran-Washington relations are at the center of the Democrats' attention.

In recent debates, the candidates were in obvious odd with Trump regarding the assassination of Commander Qassem Soleimani. By stating this issue, which is related to military terrorism, democrats are trying to show public and international opinion that, unlike Trump, they are predictable and hate war.

In recent debates, most recently held in New Hampshire (February 7, 2020), two candidates stated that if they were in such a situation they would never ordered such a strike unless they evaluate all of the intelligence aspects and effects and learn about the results, while with President Trump's decision, there is no evidence that the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani made the U.S. safer.

Candidates put forward their reasons for the lack of necessity to order the strike, saying that there is no ev-

idence yet of imminent threat that was going to come from General Soleimani.

One of the candidates stated, “You cannot go around saying you're a bad guy, we're going to assassinate you, and then you're going to have, if that happens, you're opening the door to international anarchy that every government in the world will then be subjected to attacks and assassination”.

In the Democratic candidates' debates, Trump is deliberately blamed for severe and dangerous tensions between the United States and Iran to the case of any disaster between two states like a serious military conflict he be claimed responsible. To create such a situation, all candidates denounce the use of a military option against Iran, and state the use other tools, including economic, diplomatic and international pressure, along with the U.S. allies, as their alternative strategy toward Iran.

The Democrats, in full alignment with global security strategies, see the most important reason for the continued pressure on Iran as the nuclear issues and the possibility of Iran's access to nuclear weapons, which is strongly agreed by the remaining states in the JCPOA, including Russia and China.

Iranian gymnasts win two silvers at FIG World Cup

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Saeedreza d e s k Keikha and Mahdi Ahmad Kohani claimed two silver medals at the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) World Cup in Melbourne on Saturday.

Keikha qualified for the pommel horse discipline on Thursday and bagged a silver with a score of 15.033.

American gymnast Stephen Nedoroscik won the gold with 15.400 and the bronze medal went to Japanese Kohei Kameyama (14.833).

"I want to thanks my wife for her support. I am very happy for winning the silver medal because it can be a step towards my qualification for the Tokyo Olympics," Keikha said. "I had a difficult task in the final because my opponents were very strong and I am happy because of winning the medal," Keikha said.

"I am a step closer to the Olympics, however it depends on the performance of my rivals. I have Baku and Doha World Cups ahead of me in March and I need to have good performance in two events."

In the still rings, Ahmad Kohani seized a silver with a score of 14.500.

Greek 2016 Olympic champion Eleftherios Petrounias took the gold with 15.066 and Egypt's Ali Zahran seized the bronze with a score of 14.200.

The event offers points towards qualification for this year's Olympic Games in Tokyo.

The Australian city is the sixth of eight stops in the 2019-2020 FIG World Cup series, a Tokyo 2020 qualifying event.

The 2020 FIG World Cup circuit in Artistic Gymnastics is a series of competitions officially organized and promoted by the



International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) in 2020. All three of the Apparatus World Cup series competitions (Melbourne, Baku, and Doha) will serve as opportunities for

gymnasts to earn points towards Olympic qualification through the FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Cup series route.

Additionally, the four All-Around World

Cups will serve as opportunities for the twenty-four teams (12 MAG, 12 WAG) who already qualified a team to the Olympics to earn an additional Olympic spot.

Reza Mohajeri resigns as Nassaji head coach



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Reza Mohajeri has resigned as Nassaji Mazandaran head coach on Saturday after eight months in charge.

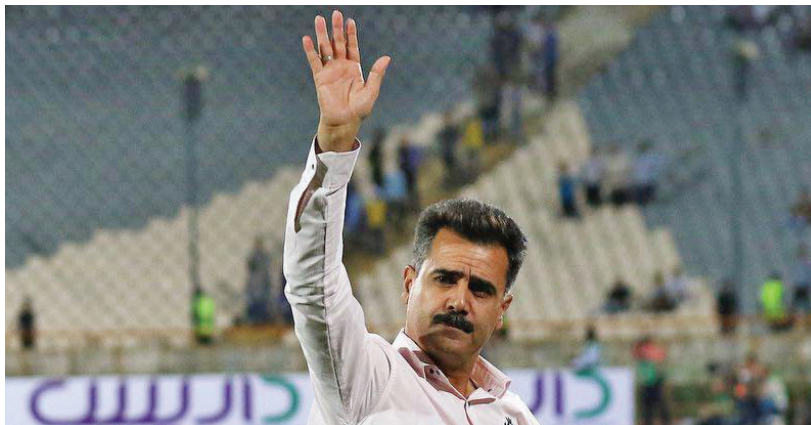
According to the statement released by Public Relations Department of the Nassaji football club, Mohajeri's resignation was due to exhaustion and illness and based on advice from his private doctor to stop working in football.

The 54-year-old coach had replaced Majid Jalali in Ghaemshahr-based football club in the last summer.

The former coach of Iranian clubs Machine Sazi and Padideh, had already resigned several times during this season of Iran Professions League (IPL) from his job because of financial reasons but every time his resignation had been refused by the club managers.

Mohajeri started his coaching career in Shirin Faraz in 2011. Nassaji stand in the 11th place of the IPL table after 20 games. The club has yet to announce the new head coach.

Pourmousavi steps down as Iran U19 coach



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Sirous Pourmousavi has stepped down as head coach of Iran U19 football team.

He has announced his resignation via his Instagram account.

Pourmousavi took charge of the team in December 2018 and under stewardship of him, Iran booked a place at the 2020 AFC U19 Championship qualification in last year November.

The competition will be held from Oct. 14-31.

Pourmousavi, who has already worked as grassroots coach in Esteghlal Ahvaz and Foolad clubs, has been linked with a move to Sanat Naft.

The media reports suggest that he has parted company with U19 football team after Iran Football Federation has failed to pay his salary for 14 months.

Pourmousavi led Iran U19 football team to win Central Asian Football Association's (CAFA) U19 Championship 2019 title in last year's August.

Persepolis coach admits disappointment over result against Sharjah

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Head coaches of the Iranian side Perspolis and Sharjah FC of the UAE have offered their views on the game between the two team in Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Champions League ended with a 2-2 draw.

Persepolis head coach Yahya Golmohammadi was disappointed that his side twice squandered their lead.

"It was a good match as the two teams played well and the fans enjoyed watching. However, we failed to get what we wanted as our goal was to get the three points.

"We lost our concentration and we didn't convert the chances that we had."

Golmohammadi said he would work on the Persepolis defence, which has conceded four goals in two matches.

"We have conceded four goals and we have to work on this before our next match."

Persepolis, third in the standings with one point, face leaders Al Taawoun of Saudi Arabia on March 2 while Sharjah play Qatar's Al Duhail on the same day.

Head coach Abdelaziz Al Yassi has described Sharjah FC's 2-2 draw with Persepolis FC in their AFC Champions League 2020 Group C match as a positive result.

Sharjah found themselves behind after only nine minutes at the Sharjah Stadium on Tuesday as Ali Alipour gave the visitors the lead before Mohammed Khalfan leveled the tie for the home side.

Alipour struck again on 27 minutes but Ryan Mendes scored the equaliser just before the half-time break for the

teams to share the points.

Al Yassi praised his players for fighting back, adding that a point was good following their opening defeat against Al Taawoun last week.

"We had a good performance against a strong team," said Al Yassi. "The match was quick and despite playing at home, the draw was positive if we consider the circumstances that we faced." "We worked very hard with the players in order to recover from the previous defeat (1-0 to Al Taawoun FC)," said the 42-year-old coach. "The players had a positive performance and the result was good.

"I'm happy that the reaction of the players was good and hopefully, we can maintain our performance in the coming matches and get positive results."

Giroud, Alonso back in favor as Chelsea sink Spurs

Olivier Giroud and Marcos Alonso came in from the cold to inspire Chelsea's 2-1 win against Tottenham as the Blues cemented their grip on fourth place in the Premier League on Saturday.

Giroud and Alonso had been reduced to fringe figures in Frank Lampard's first season as Chelsea manager.

But Lampard restored both veterans to the team at Stamford Bridge in a gamble that paid rich dividends.

With Tammy Abraham only fit enough to make the bench, Giroud started for the first time since November and the France striker's fine finish opened the scoring in the first half.

The 33-year-old could have joined Tottenham had Chelsea signed a forward in January, but instead he netted his first club goal since August and his first in the Premier League since April.

Alonso, 29, maintained the theme of exiles getting back in favor as the left-back

struck in the second half of his first league start since Chelsea's win at Tottenham in December.

Antonio Rudiger's own goal came too late to ruin Chelsea's first win in five league games, moving them four points clear of fifth placed Tottenham in the race to qualify for the Champions League.

Ending Tottenham's three-game winning streak in the league was the perfect response to Monday's home defeat against Manchester United.

It was no more than they deserved after a vibrant performance that finally answered Lampard's call for a killer instinct in the final third.

Tottenham have now won just once in their last 34 visits to Stamford Bridge, making it a painful return for their former Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho, who was beaten by Lampard for the second time this term.

Mourinho had ramped up the mind games on Friday when he claimed to know

Lampard was planning to use the same five-man defence that helped the Blues win at Tottenham earlier this season.

Mourinho was spot on, with Lampard making four changes in a return to the system he predicted, but he could not come up with an effective solution.

Lucas Moura and Steven Bergwijn, more often used as wingers, led a makeshift Tottenham attack in the absence of Harry Kane, Son Heung-min and Dele Alli, who was dropped after reacting angrily to his substitution in the midweek defeat against Leipzig.

Chelsea, pressing hard from the start, were always on top and when Alonso's superb pass picked out Mason Mount, the young midfielder's shot was pushed away by Hugo Lloris.

It was a warning Tottenham failed to heed and Giroud put Chelsea in front in the 15th minute.

Giroud had looked impressive in his substitute appearance against United.



And his physical style and clever movement were crucial to the goal as he held off Toby Alderweireld to reach Jorginho's pass for a shot that Lloris saved with his foot.

The rebound fell to Ross Barkley but his scuffed effort in the post and cannoned back to Giroud, who lashed a blistering strike past Lloris at his near post.

Willy Caballero almost gifted Tottenham a goal out of nothing before the break.

Needlessly rushing off his line, Caballero completely missed the ball and Tottenham defender Japhet Tanganga prodded just wide. (Source: AFP)

Persepolis defender Naderi linked with Antwerp

TASNIM — Belgian football club Antwerp have shown interest in signing Persepolis defender Mohammad Naderi.

Persepolis club have announced that the 23-year-old defender can join the Belgium top-flight team at the end of the season.

Persepolis goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand has already joined Antwerp and will leave the Iranian team at the end of the current season.

Royal Antwerp Football Club, often simply referred to as Antwerp, are a Belgian football club based in the city of Antwerp. It is regarded as the oldest club in Belgium.

Naderi has already experienced playing in Belgian First Division A. he was a member of K.V. Kortrijk in 2018.

Iran futsal to play Azerbaijan in friendly

TASNIM — Iran national futsal team head coach Mohammad Nazemosharia said Team Melli will play Azerbaijan in a friendly match as part of preparation for the 2020 Asian Futsal Championship.

The competition, scheduled to be played in Turkmenistan from February 26 to March 8, has been postponed by Asian Football Confederation due to the coronavirus outbreak in China and a growing list of other countries.

In the 2016 FIFA Futsal World Cup Iran drew 3-3 with Azerbaijani futsal team.

Team Melli finished third in the competition.

Persepolis disciplinary committee to decide about Stokes's future

IRNA — The disciplinary committee of Persepolis football club will make decision about its Irish forward Anthony Stokes.

Stokes was allowed to stay in the UAE one more day after the match against Sharjah on Tuesday but he has not joined Persepolis so far.

He penned a six-month contract with Persepolis in the January transfer window and represented the team in several matches as substitute.

Persepolis coach Yahya Golmohammadi is not satisfied with Stokes' behavior and has requested the disciplinary committee for appropriate punishment for breach of rules.

Persepolis, who are seeking to win Iran Professional League for the fourth time in a row, will play Spahan in Isfahan on Sunday.

Italian police raid Loginov and coach on suspicion of doping at Biathlon World Championships

Italian police have conducted an anti-doping raid on Russian Alexander Loginov and his coach Alexander Kasperovich during the World Championships in Antholz-Anterselva.

Recently crowned sprint world champion Loginov, who served a two-year doping ban between 2014 and 2016, told Russian media the raid was carried out following a request from the International Biathlon Union (IBU).

The 28-year-old said the Bolzano prosecutor's office, which searched the two Russians as part of an investigation into possible doping violations, had seized his phone and laptop.

Russian Biathlon Union President Vladimir Drachev told the Interfax news agency that the search was «linked to the fact that...Kasperovich was using another person's accreditation». Drachev also said the raid could be connected to Loginov's previous doping suspension after he tested positive for the banned blood booster Erythropoietin.

«This could be a repeat case,» he said.

«They (the police) searched his things for one and half hours and confiscated his devices.»

A police spokesperson confirmed to Agence France-Presse that the «alleged offence comes under article 586 bis of the penal code (use or administration of doping products)».

Loginov told Match TV that he was «upset» by the search, which came hours before he is due to compete in the men's 4x7.5 kilometres relay.

It is unclear whether Loginov will take part in the relay following the raid, which Drachev claimed had «rattled» the Russian team.

Russian Sports Minister Oleg Matytsin is aware of the search and has urgently asked for more information from the RBU.

In a statement, the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) said it was «extremely concerned about the events» in the Italian resort.

The ROC added that it had sent official letters to the IBU and the Italian National Olympic Committee requesting «detailed explanations regarding all the circumstances of the incident, as well as the grounds and availability of the corresponding powers of the Italian law enforcement agencies to carry out those essentially procedural actions that were committed against the Russians».

The Russian Embassy in Rome said it had «contacted the Italian Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's office and demanded explanations» following news of the raid.

The IBU said it was aware of the search carried out on the two Russians but declined to confirm it had tipped off the Italian police.

«Any police investigation is a matter for that police force/ service to comment upon,» the IBU said.

«The Biathlon Integrity Unit, which is an independent operational unit within the IBU responsible for all integrity matters, will provide full cooperation and assistance to the Italian authorities, and will take any further action required to protect the integrity of the sport.»

Loginov was among the five Russians investigated for possible anti-doping rule violations by Austrian police connected to the 2017 World Championships in Hochfilzen, before the charges were dropped.

Today's incident is the latest anti-doping raid to have been conducted during a major biathlon event.

Medical products were seized and 10 athletes were detained in Hochfilzen three years ago, while Italian police searched the accommodation of Kazakhstan's biathlon team during a World Cup in Antholz in South Tyrol in January 2018.

(Source: Insidethegames)

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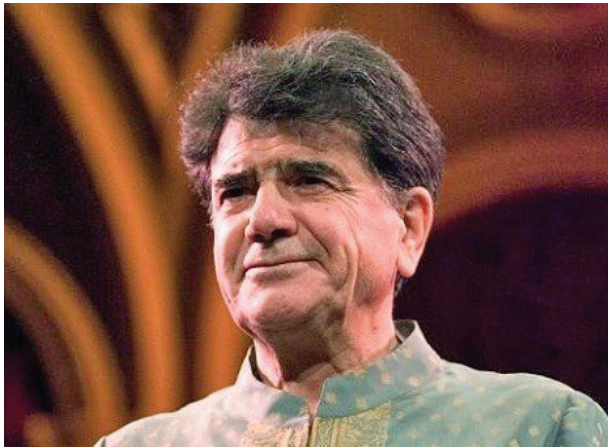
GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Justice puts everything in its place, and liberality
brings out things from a special direction.

Imam Ali (AS)

Mohammadreza Shajarian is magnificent voice of Iran: Culture Minister

A R T **TEHRAN** — Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi has called Mohammadreza Shajarian “the magnificent voice of Iran” following the legendary vocalist’s admission to a Tehran hospital.



Iranian vocalist Mohammadreza Shajarian in an undated photo.

Shajarian, who is battling kidney cancer, was admitted to the hospital a few days ago.

“Master Mohammadreza Shajarian is the magnificent voice of Iran. Now that he is in a difficult condition of illness, the prayers of the whole nation are with him,” Salehi tweeted on his personal page on Saturday.

The living legend of Persian traditional music Shajarian has been suffering from the disease for about 20 years.

Alliance with German troupe in “No Name” leaves sweet taste for Iranian director

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Neda Hengami has said that her collaboration with a German troupe on their joint production “No Name” was a great experience for her.

Hengami’s troupe, composed of eight actors, teamed up with a German group led by director Ismene Schell has been performing the improvisation at the Javanmard Hall of the Iranian Theater Forum in Tehran since February 9.

They will give their last performance of the play tonight.

The idea of collaborating on a joint production came last August when Schell held a 12-day acting workshop at Yerma House, a theater center in Tehran, Hengami told the Persian service of Honaronline on Saturday.

“A theater troupe and the social problems facing the members in their rehearsals are the subjects of the play,” she added.

“A group of German actors along with an Iranian cast work with each other without knowing each other’s language. Many people asked me to use subtitles for the German parts, but I didn’t agree, because this play doesn’t intend to tell a story, it aims to facilitate an interaction between two cultures and groups, and I feel that it has been highly successful in its mission,” she stated.

Hengami is eager to have similar experiences with groups from other countries.

Meryem Polat, Keso Khintibidze, Vitiko Schell, Danijel Marsanic and Alexander Hundt are the members of the German cast taking part in this project.

Sama Aqazamani, Mohammad-Hossein Samari, Mohammad Habibi and several other Iranian actors are collaborating in this production.



Iranian director Neda Hengami in an undated photo. (Honaronline/Farzan Qasemi)

“Sohanak” represents “Taste of Cherry” at Image of the Year Celebration

A R T **TEHRAN** — The 17th edition of the Image of the Year Celebration was inaugurated on Friday at the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) with a screening of “Sohanak”, a film that depicts Abbas Kiarostami playing the role of the leading character of his movie “Taste of Cherry” on a pilot project.

“When my father was working on the main idea of the film, he made a video maquette of the film instead of writing a screenplay and played the role of Mr. Badiei in a car traveling in Sohanak, a village near Tehran,” Kiarostami’s son, Bahman, wrote in a statement read by the director of the celebration, Seifollah Samadian, before the screening.

Samadian said that he is happy that Bahman submitted this film to this edition of the celebration.

“We should try our best that this film finds its real position,” Samadian said.

Samadian further added that a new section named “40 Years Tehran”, which reviews a lineup of top films made in Tehran or about Tehran over the past 40 years, has been added to this edition of the festival.

Filmmaker Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, actor Habib Rezaei and photographer Roshan Noruzi were attending the ceremony.

The exhibit featuring photos, posters and cartoons in addition to screening a number of films will continue until March 13, ending with honoring the winners.



“Taste of Cherry” director Abbas Kiarostami in an undated photo.

Iranian actor Payman Maadi on “Night Shift” at Berlinale



Iranian actor Payman Maadi acts in a scene of French filmmaker Anne Fontaine’s movie “Night Shift”.

A R T **TEHRAN** — French filmmaker Anne Fontaine’s latest movie “Night Shift” starring Iran’s Payman Maadi is competing at the 70th Berlin International Film Festival.

The film tells the story of three police officers Virginie, Erik and Aristide. All three try to keep their personal and emotional lives together while dealing with daily incidents of violence in homes and on the streets.

One night, they are assigned to drive a migrant (Payman Maadi) to the airport for unspecified reasons. On the way

there, Virginie discovers that the man will be sentenced to death if he goes back to his country.

Faced with an unbearable dilemma, she starts to question their mission. The trio has one night to decide a man’s fate.

Earlier last week, Maadi, the star of “Camp X-Ray” and “Last Knights”, was named best actor for his role in Iranian director Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian’s drama “Walnut Tree” at the 38th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran.

The 70th Berlin International Film Festival will come to an end on March 1.



Calligraphy works by Ahmad Ahmadi, Yadegar Khayyam and Mahmud Rahbaran are on display in an exhibition at Tehran’s Gooya Gallery.

Persian calligraphy works sell like hot cakes at “Dot” exhibit

A R T **TEHRAN** — All artworks showcased during a Persian calligraphy exhibit entitled “Dot” at Tehran’s Gooya Gallery were sold out during the opening day on Thursday.

The calligraphy works were created by Ahmad Ahmadi, Yadegar Khayyam and Mahmud Rahbaran, who are members of the Iran Calligraphers Association.

The opening ceremony was attended by a number of Iranian artists and calligraphy masters, including Yadollah Kaboli, Mohammad Heidari, Mohammad Shahbazi, Ali Shirazi, Rasul Moradi and Gholamreza Sepehri.

The exhibit opened with a message from Iran Calligraphers

Association director Gholamhossein Amirkhani.

In his message, which was read during the opening ceremony of the exhibition, Amirkhani praised the artists for their creativity and enthusiasm for Persian calligraphy and added, “Despite their younger age, Ahmad Ahmadi, Yadegar Khayyam and Mahmud Rahbaran are among the elites of the Persian calligraphers and have won several awards in Iranian and international events.

Over 30 calligraphy works priced from \$1500 to \$4500 are currently on display at the exhibit, which will run until February 26, at the gallery located at No. 89, Kharim Khan Ave.

Tehran’s Art Bureau to hold first art sale



A poster for Art Bureau’s art sale “Sign of Spring”.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Tehran’s Art Bureau will be holding its first art sale in an exhibition named “Sign of Spring” opening Tuesday.

In a press conference held at the bureau on Saturday, director of the Visual Art Center of the bureau, Masud Shojaei-Tabatabaie, said that the exhibit aims to help elevate the economy of art.

“The sale will help discover young promising artists, while it will also bring art to the houses of people,” he remarked.

Secretary of the event Shahabeddin Shakiba, also attending the conference,

said that the works offered at the sale will provide the chance for people from all walks of life to purchase the artworks they like.

Over 250 works by about 200 artists will be put on view at the exhibit and the works will be offered in the two sections of veteran and young artists.

Kazem Chalipa, Sadeq Tabrizi, Kambiz Derambashsh, Parviz Kalantari and Jalil Rasuli are among the veterans whose works will be shown.

The works will be on view until March 4.

Investing in the art world is now just a click away

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Owning a piece of art is not just for the ultra-wealthy anymore.

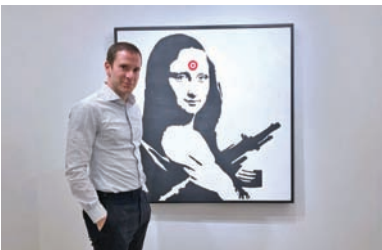
Masterworks, a two-year-old startup, buys artwork with profit potential then sells shares in it to its customers using its online platform.

“Our fundamental belief is that this is a very interesting asset class, which historically has been traded by the ultra-wealthy for hundreds of years,” said Scott Lynn, a 40-year-old founder and chief executive of Masterworks.

“But the only way to really invest in art has been to purchase a painting. Masterworks is the first platform that allows anyone to really invest in these great works of art.”

Customers sign up, pick a piece of art, and decide how many shares they want to buy in it, with minimums starting at \$1,000.

For instance, Monet’s “Coup de Vent” painting, valued at \$7 million, has a couple of thousand investors right now, according to Lynn, who expects more interest by



the time Masterworks decides to sell it to a collector and then shares profits with its clients.

Masterworks, based in New York, divides the art market into two segments, Lynn said. One, called “blue chips,” includes bankable artists like Monet, and performs with high-single-digit or low-double-digit returns, with low risk.

Another is defined by mid-career, living artists, whose work can yield investors a return of roughly 12% to 20% a year, with moderate risk, Lynn said.

WarnerMedia to reunite “Friends” in HBO Max special

NEW YORK (Reuters) — WarnerMedia is reuniting its “Friends” cast for an untitled, unscripted special for its upcoming streaming service, HBO Max, the company said on Friday.

AT&T Inc’s (T.N) WarnerMedia said here series stars Jennifer Aniston, Courteney Cox, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry and David Schwimmer will return to the hit comedy’s original soundstage, Stage 24, on the Warner Bros studio lot in Burbank, California.

There have been a flurry of media reports about a potential reunion since Aniston hinted last year that something might be underway.

Aniston spoke to talk show host Ellen DeGeneres about a possible new “Friends” project saying, “We would love for there to be something, but we don’t know what that something is. So we’re just trying. We’re working on something.”

The unscripted cast reunion special, which will be directed by Ben Winston, along



The cast of the American TV sitcom “Friends” (L to R) Matt Le Blanc, Courteney Cox, Matthew Perry, Jennifer Aniston and David Schwimmer pose for pictures at Channel 4 Television centre March 25, 1998. (File Photo)

with all 10 seasons of the Emmy-winning series, will be available to subscribers at the launch of HBO Max in May.

Earlier this month, the Wall Street Journal said the six stars would receive between \$2.25 million and \$2.5 million as part of the deal.