



**Tehran says won't let Gen. Soleimani's assassins go unpunished** Page 2



**Iranian Match Commissioner Shahriari invited to Tokyo** Page 3



**National Document on Rare Diseases approved** Page 7



**Children's Shahnameh illustration contest announces winners** Page 8

## Homegrown COVID-19 vaccine to be mass-produced in 40 days

See page 7

File photo



## Nasrallah: Israel, Saudi culprit in U.S. assassination of Soleimani, Muhandis

TEHRAN – Secretary-General of the Lebanese Hezbollah Resistance Movement Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah suggests that the U.S. assassinated Iran's top general Qassem Soleimani and deputy commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, at the request of the Israeli and Saudi regimes. "The criminal assassination of General Soleimani was not only an American crime, but I believe that Israel and Saudi Arabia

were culprits in this crime as well, even if their role was just to provoke Washington to commit it," Nasrallah said. He made the remarks in an exclusive interview with al-Mayadeen television network on Sunday night. During the interview, the Hezbollah leader reflected on major regional and international developments as well as domestic issues of Lebanon.

Continued on page 2

## ICCIMA to hold online meeting for exploring trade opportunities with Oman

TEHRAN – Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) plans to hold an online meeting on January 11, 2021 to explore opportunities and capacities of trade with Oman, ICCIMA portal announced.

The meeting will be attended by the head of the Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce, representatives of provincial chambers of commerce, and heads of relevant committees and organizations.

Opportunities, challenges, and obstacles related to the economic cooperation between the private sectors of the two countries will be reviewed by the ICCIMA deputy for international affairs and the chairman of the Iran-Oman Joint Chamber in this meeting and a report on the latest developments in the region, bilateral cooperation, and future prospects will also be presented.

Continued on page 4

## Game showing Gen. Soleimani in battle for breaking ISIS siege of Amerli produced

TEHRAN – A computer game depicting the commanding leadership of Iran's Quds Force chief, Qassem Soleimani, in the battle for breaking the 89-day siege of the northern Iraqi town of Amerli by the ISIS terrorists has been produced in Iran. "General in the Shadows" produced at the Islamic Revolution Center for Digital Products and Publications – MATNA will be unveiled during a special ceremony in the near future, MATNA director Mehdi Jafari Jozani

announced in a press release on Monday. "Concurrent with the martyrdom anniversary of Hajji Qassem Soleimani, we will announce the release of 'General in the Shadows', which is an amazing first-person action game showing the events that occurred during the siege of Amerli, and finally Hajji Qassem Soleimani and his heliborne troops step in to break the siege," he said.

Continued on page 8

## Iran football league's chaotic fixture bothers teams

**BY FARROKH HESABI**  
Just after eight weeks from beginning of 2020/21 Iran Professional League (IPL), there have been many controversies over the schedule of the matches.

The new fixture list announced by the Iran Football League Organization is controversial. It has raised many complaints, especially after some clubs argue that the schedule is in favor of just one team, namely Persepolis.

Bijan Zolfagharnasab, the Iranian football expert, believes that the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) and the Football Organization are to blame for the current situation.

"The FFIRI have to be more careful about the league matches schedule. In all the football leagues in the world, a fixture list is announced at the beginning of the season. After that, all the teams recognize their opponents from the first week of the league to the end", the retired Iranian football player and manager said.

"I'm not talking about the best leagues in the world or the top European leagues. It's something normal even in the weakest European leagues where their football level is lower than us. Everyone knew the calendar of the league, and it is published in newspapers and other media. All clubs can analyze their matches and properly prepare their players for the upcoming games.

"But here in Iran, we are watching the war of statements by the clubs against each other or accuse a team of being supported by the federation. This is the result of a lack of long-term planning. Our football federation and football league organization announce the matches' schedule just for two or three weeks and cannot make a clear fixture list for the whole season," he added.

"Some of the head coaches of the IPL teams are also complaining to take advantage of this situation to justify their probable failures. It has nothing to do with the coaches to talk about the federation or other teams. Each club must have a spokesman to talk about such issues," ex-Iran coach stated.

It shows that the federation and league organization are the main organizations who should be blamed.

In no other league we see the chaotic situation as we see in IPL. It's while Iran football has had a team in the AFC Champions League final twice in three years.

## I congratulate improvement of Iranian women: Rita Subowo

**BY MASOUD HOSSEIN**  
TEHRAN – President of Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) Rita Subowo is happy with improvement of Iranian women's volleyball team and predicts that the Team could be among the top teams of the world like the Iranian men's volleyball team. Subowo made history in late October after she was elected as the first-ever woman to lead AVC.

A key figure in the Olympic Movement in Asia and an Honorary Life Vice-President of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), the Indonesian lady praised the Iranian girls pursuing the sport in an exclusive interview with Tehran Times.

**You are the first woman in history to lead the AVC. It shows that the continent's associations have bestowed upon you. I think it will be a challenging job for you since volleyball has been always headed by men in Asia.**

I have worked with AVC more than 30 years

with the five AVC Presidents and also worked with three FIVB Presidents until now. It is a greatest honor for me to be elected as AVC President by 65 AVC affiliated federations and my greatest challenge to lead volleyball in Asia to compete with the other four continents. As my long experience as FIVB and AVC Vice Presidents as well as IOC Member, I will try my utmost effort together with all the members of AVC Board of Administration to develop and promote volleyball in Asia.

**Women's volleyball in Asia has progressed over the past years and some teams such as Thailand and South Korea have joined China and Japan. Do you have any plan to support the teams to strengthen more?**

Women volleyball in Asia is now one of the most popular sports and are among the top teams of the world.

Continued on page 3

## U.S. embassy attack false-flag strike by Washington: Iraq Kata'ib Hezbollah

Iraq's anti-terror group, Kata'ib Hezbollah, has called the last week's rocket attack against the U.S. embassy in Baghdad a false-flag strike and a plot hatched by Washington.

Muhammad Mohi, the spokesman for Kata'ib Hezbollah, which is part of the country's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), made the comments in an interview with the Al Jazeera news broadcaster, saying Washington is the "sole beneficiary" of the so-called attack as it "wants to increase pressure on Iraqi resistance groups."

On December 20, a series of Katyusha rockets landed near the U.S. embassy complex, which is inside Baghdad's heavily-fortified Green Zone. The attack caused minor damage to buildings there.

Mohi said the pressure by the U.S. comes as Iraqis are preparing to commemorate the first anniversary of the Trump-authorized assassination of Iran's top anti-terror commander

Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy head of the PMU, in a U.S. airstrike near Baghdad airport on January 3.

After the terrorist act, the Iraqi parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of a resolution calling for the expulsion of U.S. forces from the Arab country.

Anti-American sentiments have run even higher in the past few days as Iraqis are outraged by the U.S. president's decision to pardon four war criminals. The Blackwater contractors had been jailed for killing of unarmed Iraqi civilians in Baghdad in 2007.

The U.S. embassy has been targeted several times this year amid heightened anti-American sentiments in Iraq in the aftermath of the assassinations of General Soleimani and al-Muhandis.

Continued on page 5

## The Importance of International Law – the JCPOA must be upheld

**BY PROFESSOR KHAWAR QURESHI QC**  
It often said that International Law is predominantly a tool for some States to pursue their own aims and justify their actions against others. However, whilst International Law and its institutions are far from perfect, they provide the only viable means through which States can interact with each other on a basis of mutual respect and co-operation.

In this article, an overview is provided of the context for the JCPOA 2015, and why it is not just

in Iran's interest, but also of the international community as a whole to ensure that International Law is observed – whatever the provocation or behaviour of other States.

### BACKGROUND

1. In recent years, Iran has been the subject of sanctions (sometimes known as restrictive measures) imposed by each of the USA, the EU and the UN concerning Iran's nuclear-related activities. Whilst the USA's nuclear-related sanctions against Iran were imposed as early

as 1995 under the Clinton Administration, the UN's nuclear-related sanctions against Iran were first imposed in 2006 by UN Security Council Resolution 1737. The EU strengthened its own sanctions program concerning Iran in 2012 and afterwards.

2. The overall effect of the collective sanctions regime has caused massive economic damage to Iran, greatly restricting the country's potential for growth and development.

Continued on page 2

## American expert says interest groups to further stir up Moscow-Washington animosity

**BY YASSER NAZIFI GILAVAN**

Noting that there are political lobbies in Washington who benefit from epitomizing Russia as an imminent threat to the U.S., an American analyst says that arms industries are always after creating defensive concerns.

The interest groups "justify their expenditures on the grounds that they're required to 'defend' their interests from the multitude of threats that they regard Russia as posing, both in the military and non-military realms," according to Andrew Korybko.

During presidential debates in the U.S., Donald Trump and Joe Biden criticized one another for being too soft with enemies of the United States. Trump accused Biden of making up with the Chinese and Biden countered by accusing Trump of having secret ties with Moscow.

Even after Biden's victory, the American media released cartoons which depicted Russian President Vladimir Putin upset with the U.S. presidential election result.

The U.S. and Russia have been rivals since the end of the Cold War. Even the collapse of the USSR did not make Americans to remove Russia from the list of top threats to their national interests.

As a result, many experts and analysts have tried to touch upon the prospect of U.S.-Russia relations during the incoming presidency of Joe Biden.

Continued on page 5



File photo

## Ancient textiles on the verge of oblivion in western Iran

TEHRAN – Handicraft skills of namad-mali, jajim-bafi and moj-bafi, which are considered as ancient Iranian textiles native to Kordestan province, are on the verge of oblivion, deputy provincial tourism chief has warned.

Namad-mali is a traditional craft to make wool felt rugs and other objects by rolling and pressing them. Jajim-bafi and moj-bafi are both the art of making hand-woven floor coverings.

Unfortunately, in recent years, some handicrafts fields have been forgotten across the province as their usage was defined for a specific period and nowadays crafters don't practice these fields anymore, Farhad Hamedi said on Sunday.

Continued on page 6

## Assassination of General Soleimani 'against international law': Afghan politician

**POLITICAL** TEHRAN – The U.S. decision to assassinate the commander of the IRGC Quds Force, General Qassem Soleimani, was “against international law,” the leader of Afghanistan’s National Congress Party (NCP) has said.

Abdul Latif Pedram said the U.S. terror attack that assassinated the top Iranian general was “not forgivable by any means and has to be prosecuted at international bodies.”



“The assassination of the Iranian general was condemned by most of the world countries, even by some of the U.S. traditional allies,” the Afghan politician told Iran’s state news agency IRNA. “The U.S. government, as a symbol of state terrorism, assassinated General Soleimani in an international criminal action for fear of his courageous anti-terrorism acts.”

According to Pedram, the U.S. government is “the root cause of the greatest evils of human society and state terrorism.”

The U.S. criminal acts are not limited to Iran, Pedram said, adding that the U.S. state terrorism is becoming globalized.

“The Americans have committed acts of state terrorism in Afghanistan, Middle East (West Asia), Latin America, and any other country they could,” he continued.

General Soleimani was assassinated by an American drone strike earlier this year near Baghdad’s international airport alongside his comrade Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy head of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). The strike was ordered by U.S. President Donald Trump, a reckless move that brought Iran and the United States close to an all-out war. In response, Iran showered a U.S. airbase in western Iraq with missiles, causing brain injury among several dozens of American servicemen.

In addition, Iran has said that the revenge for the assassination of the general will also include the expulsion of the U.S. from the region.

## Nasrallah: Israel, Saudi culprit in U.S. assassination of Soleimani, Muhandis

**1 →** On January 3, U.S. President Donald Trump ordered drone strikes that martyred Major General Soleimani, chief of the IRGC Quds Force, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Units (PMU).

Iran has vowed to target whoever had a role in the cowardly assassination of General Soleimani, who was on a peace mission to Iraq when he was targeted by the U.S. military.



Nasrallah also said the Israeli regime’s forces are on high alert after the November assassination of top Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh.

He noted that the Israeli regime is worried about the approach of the new U.S. administration regarding the region, adding that he could be a target of the Israeli regime’s assassination operation as he is a Resistance leader.

“Other Hezbollah leaders and I are targets for America and Israel,” he said.

“We have information that Saudi Arabia is instigating to assassinate me at least since the war on Yemen started,” he continued.

Nasrallah pointed out that the assassination of Soleimani and Muhandis was an uncovered operation, unlike the assassination of martyrs Mughniyeh and Fakhri-zadeh.

“Hajj Qassem was a very special person on the humanitarian and moral levels... he had a special charisma and a strong ability to have an influence on anyone who knows him,” he highlighted.

“Militarily, Hajj Qassem was the frontline man not the man in the operation room, he was the many of strategy and tactics... Politically and culturally, he was well-educated in various fields,” the Hezbollah leader emphasized.

“In the last period before his assassination I was very concerned about him, especially after I saw how much the Western media were focusing on him and were highlighting his role and movement,” he added.

Nasrallah went on to say that Martyr Muhandis was a great commander and he resembled Hajj Qassem a lot. “His role on the political and military levels was great. He had the main role in the victories against the U.S. and ISIL,” he said.

“Hajj Qassem had a relation with all the Palestinian factions, and his concern was that these factions get the support they need to resist the occupation. He had no red lines on the logistic support to them,” he said.

The Hezbollah secretary-general said Iran is only an excuse for the Arab regimes that normalized relations with Israel. “This took place because the Palestinian cause has only become a burden on them.”

“There is no excuse for anyone to abandon Palestine,” he stressed.

Nasrallah added that the Resistance Axis’s power today is greater than in the past and what’s important today is the determination.

# Tehran says won't let Gen. Soleimani's assassins go unpunished

**POLITICAL** TEHRAN – The Iranian Foreign Ministry confirmed on Monday that it will not let those behind the assassination of the Islamic Republic’s legendary anti-terror commander General Qassem Soleimani evade justice.

“We will not allow the martyr’s blood to go to waste and those who did it escape punishment,” ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told a regular news briefing, according to Press TV.

Iran has ceaselessly pursued this matter and will keep doing so through the international channels, Khatibzadeh said.

“This is not something that the Iranian government and the establishment could let go by. The U.S. administration is accountable in this regard,” the spokesman added.

Khatibzadeh said the United States committed a monumental strategic mistake by perpetrating this terrorist act.

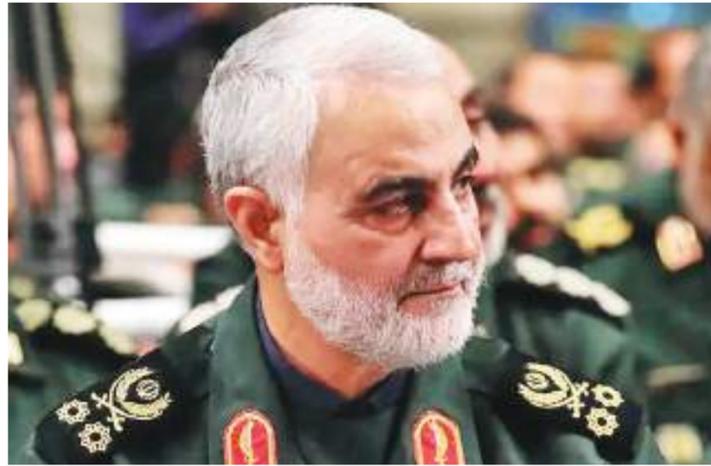
“We will not abandon this pursuit until we have taken all those who abetted this [atrocities] or were involved in it, to the altar of justice.”

General Soleimani was the chief of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC). He was admired as the most potent counter-terrorism commander, with a unique charisma.

He was Iran’s lead military advisor helping Iraq and Syria defeat Takfiri terrorist groups, chiefly Daesh.

He was assassinated in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad Airport on January 3 during an official visit. His Iraqi comrade Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of Iraq’s anti-terror popular forces, was also killed along with their other companions when their convoy was hit.

Former CIA officer John Maguire had called



him “the single most powerful operative in the Middle East”.

In an interview with al-Mayadeen television network on Sunday night, Hezbollah Secretary-General Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah said the U.S. assassinated General at the request of the Israeli and Saudi regimes.

“The criminal assassination of General Soleimani was not only an American crime, but I believe that Israel and Saudi Arabia were culprits in this crime as well, even if their role was just to provoke Washington to commit it,” Nasrallah stated.

Khatibzadeh touched on Tehran’s efforts to present the enormity of the atrocity to the world and bring the perpetrators to justice.

The Islamic Republic, he said, has registered

more than five letters and official notes with the United Nations and used its diplomatic missions to introduce General Soleimani and the nature of his mission to the world.

The official said Agnes Callamard, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, denounced the assassination as an act of terrorism earlier this year, only after Iran’s Foreign Ministry presented the world body with a detailed account of the circumstances surrounding the terrorist act.

Tehran will follow up on its efforts in this area across international courts and tribunals, he added.

Apart from commanding the Quds Force, General Soleimani served as a “pillar of re-

gional stability” who contributed most to the realization of peace and maintaining interaction with different leaders of the region, Khatibzadeh said.

The spokesman touched on General Soleimani’s famous “We are a nation of martyrdom” remarks, saying extremism cannot be defeated unless through the courage and pure blood of those confronting it.

On Monday, the head of the Iranian Judiciary’s High Council for Human Rights said 48 suspects have been identified in connection with the assassination of General Soleimani.

“Some 48 suspects have been identified [in relation to Lt. Gen. Soleimani’s assassination] and all necessary measures have been taken to prosecute them,” Press TV quoted Ali Baqeri-Kani as saying.

He added that countries, which have been somehow involved in this crime, have been asked to provide relevant information and documents to the Iranian Judiciary.

“Germany was the last country. We have obtained reports and information that the U.S. (Ramstein air) base in Germany was involved in the exchange of information among the American drones that were involved in the assassination of Martyr Soleimani,” Baqeri-Kani said, commenting on the latest developments regarding the case.

On Sunday, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, who advises the parliament speaker on international affairs, also said Iran has drawn up a list of 48 individuals against whom legal action will be taken in relation to the assassination.

Amir-Abdollahian said that Iran had already prepared a list of 45 individuals who were one way or another related to the assassination, and the list has now been extended to include 48 people.

## The Importance of International Law – the JCPOA must be upheld

**1 →** It is not the purpose of this article to analyse the positions being adopted “pro-sanction” or the responses thereto. First and foremost, all States must abide by International Law.

3. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (“JCPOA”) is a detailed agreement reached between Iran and the E3/EU+3 (comprising China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK and the USA, together with the EU) on 14 July 2015. Its Preface shows that it was intended to adequately address the concerns on both sides: whilst Iran envisioned that “the JCPOA will allow it to move forward with an exclusively peaceful, indigenous nuclear programme, in line with scientific and economic considerations... and with a view to building confidence and encouraging international cooperation”, the E3/EU+3 countries envisioned that “the implementation of this JCPOA will progressively allow them to gain confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran’s programme”.

### OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE JCPOA

4. Article (viii) of the Preamble to the JCPOA included the imposition of a ‘good faith’ obligation concerning the performance of the JCPOA commitments:

“The E3/EU+3 and Iran commit to implement this JCPOA in good faith and in a constructive atmosphere, based on mutual respect, and to refrain from any action inconsistent with the letter, spirit and intent of this JCPOA that would undermine its successful implementation. The E3/EU+3 will refrain from imposing discriminatory regulatory and procedural requirements in lieu of the sanctions and restrictive measures covered by this JCPOA”.

5. On 14 July 2015, Iran began providing the International Atomic Energy Agency (“IAEA”), the body with responsibility for verifying Iran’s compliance with the nuclear-related provisions of the JCPOA, with information necessary for the IAEA to complete its investigations into previous activities concerning the development of nuclear industry.

6. Whilst the details of the JCPOA, set out in its substantial annexes, are technical and complex, the main requirements of each side are set out in the summary produced which can be viewed at <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>[1].

7. The dispute resolution mechanism under the JCPOA

is found in paragraphs 36-47 of its main text. There are some who may criticise the vague nature of the provision, and suggest its dispute resolution mechanism is imbalanced. For better or worse it was agreed to by all the parties.

### DEVELOPMENTS AND ALLEGED BREACHES

8. On 18 October 2015, 90 days after the UN Security Council endorsed the JCPOA through its resolution 2231, Iran and the E3/EU+3’s obligations to take steps to meet their commitments to implement the JCPOA fully took effect.

9. On 16 January 2016, known as ‘Implementation Day’, the IAEA certified that Iran had taken the key steps necessary for the restriction of its nuclear program and that increased monitoring had been put in place in that regard. The IAEA certification triggered the relaxation of sanctions (sometimes known as restrictive measures) that had been implemented against Iran by the US, EU and the UN.

10. Notwithstanding that the IAEA had verified Iran’s compliance with the terms of the JCPOA up until that point, the USA unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA on 8 May 2018. All US sanctions on Iran that had been lifted by the JCPOA were reintroduced. Further, since that date, the USA has terminated almost all designated sanctions waivers for cooperative nuclear projects (the Bushehr nuclear power plant was, in May 2019, the subject of a separate 90-day waiver from the USA).

11. Accordingly, in May 2019, Iran (whilst still remaining a participant in the JCPOA) began to row back on the steps it had previously taken to comply with its terms, justifying its decision to do so on the JCPOA’s failure to deliver the sanctions relief that it originally envisioned. Iran’s position is that the European participants in the JCPOA failed to take sufficient steps to negate, offset or otherwise lessen the effect on the Iran of the reintroduction of US sanctions.

12. Iran has already taken legal action in respect of the USA’s unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA (announced by the US President on 13 October 2017). On 16 July 2018, Iran filed an application instituting proceedings at the International Court of Justice against the USA concerning the USA’s reintroduction of sanctions against Iran. This case was framed not under the dispute resolution mechanism provided for in the JCPOA itself, but as a breach of the Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations and

Consular Rights, which entered into force between Iran and the USA on 16 June 1957. The USA’s jurisdictional objections, including that the case’s subject matter concerns the JCPOA, not the Treaty of Amity, were heard by the International Court of Justice in September 2020, and, at the time of writing, are still awaiting a substantive ruling.

13. Whilst the majority of EU sanctions were lifted in early 2016 under the terms of the JCPOA, some sanctions remained in place. Those that remained were applicable to all EU business and nationals inside and outside of the EU territory as well as to any overseas business and individuals when they are in the EU or doing business within the EU. The remaining sanctions restricted the direct or indirect sale, supply, transfer or export to any individual, entity or body in Iran (or for use in Iran) of the items specified in Regulation 267/2012 and Regulation 359/2011. These items included, but were not limited to, nuclear-related items featuring on the Nuclear Suppliers Group list, various items with the capability to contribute to reprocess or enrichment-related or heavy water-related activities (or other activities inconsistent with the JCPOA). In addition, the provision of various services related to those items, as well as the direct or indirect acceptance of funds or economic resources from targets of financial sanctions against Iran, remained prohibited.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic which some commentators suggest has been exacerbated by globalisation, as well as humanity’s insatiable appetite for devouring what is left in terms of Earth’s natural resources, it is all too clear that any State which adopts a short term view of self-interest ignores the reality – namely that every action often has unforeseen “self-damaging” consequences. The World can ill afford division or disunity at this juncture. We must all hope that 2021 brings greater emphasis upon co-operation and respect for International Law.

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## Iran welcomes exchanging views on human rights with the West: diplomat

**POLITICAL** TEHRAN – Mohsen Baharvand, Iran’s deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, said that Iran welcomes exchange of views with the West and human rights organizations, but the proud nation of Iran does not accept any kind of interfering viewpoints.

In an interview with the Iran newspaper published on Monday, Baharvand said the Islamic Republic has differences with some human rights organizations and Western countries on the implementation of citizenship rights.

He said there is no fundamental difference with Western countries regarding the observance of human rights, but the mechanism and the West’s political misuse of the issue are among the subjects of disagreement.

There are some judicial procedures in Iran that should be reviewed to stop exploitation by Western states, said the deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs.

Baharvand pointed out that the West is grappling with apparent violation of human rights within its own societies.

He went on to mention the West’s attempt to resort to human rights as a tool to pressure countries that they do not have friendly ties with, saying that the Western powers’ critical stance toward Iran comes from their political motivations.

Referring to his recent speech at the Geneva University, the deputy minister underlined that

the globally accepted human rights principles need to have a mechanism, which enables the implementation and inspection of the principles at international level.

Thus, he continued, targeting certain countries and ignoring others’ blatant human rights violations seem to be completely discriminatory.

However, there is a need to make some reforms in certain laws and procedures as well as a number of misconducts by a few people in charge of dealing with the Iranian nation, the diplomat stated.

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes in respecting human rights as the main element to strengthen trust-building between the people and the government, he said, adding that the observation of human rights would help economic growth and security enhancement in every society.

He said the states, which pay great attention to human rights, are well aware that the issue affects all other aspects of life, therefore, the judicial systems play a key role in bolstering trust and confidence in all countries.

He argued that there is a direct link between the rule of law and economic development.

Concluding his remarks, Baharvand said that countries should avoid interfering in other states’ internal affairs, including issues related to judicial procedures, but they could exchange views in order to provide each other with a precise understanding of their justice systems.

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# Iran says doesn't seek tensions

“We will use everything in our power to defend the interest and national security of Iran”

**POLITICAL** TEHRAN — Iran once again on Monday condemned threatening remarks by U.S. leaders against Iran, saying that it does not seek to escalate tensions in the region.

Saeed Khatibzadeh, spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry, has responded to U.S. threats against Iran over a recent attack on the U.S. embassy in Iraq, reiterating that Iran rejects such attacks on diplomatic missions. The spokesman said Iran does not want to escalate tensions.

Speaking at a weekly press conference, Khatibzadeh stated, “As I said last week, we fully reject attacks on diplomatic and residential areas. Iran's diplomatic missions in Iraq had come under attack several times. We condemn and reject what [U.S. President Donald] Trump and [U.S. Secretary of State Mike] Pompeo said. The kind, timing and content of their statements and tweets are dubious and ill-intended. We have made it clear that while we are not after tensions, we will use everything in our power to defend the interest and national security of Iran.”

Last week on Sunday night, the U.S. embassy in Baghdad came under attack after weeks of relative calm. More than 20 rockets landed inside the Green Zone of Baghdad, a heavily fortified district in which the U.S. embassy and other government buildings are located. The U.S. embassy's C-RAM defense system was activated to intercept the rockets, a move that frightened Baghdad residents.

The U.S. blamed the attack on Iran shortly after it happened. Pompeo claimed in a tweet that “Iran-backed” groups were behind the attack.

“Iran-backed militias once again flagrantly and recklessly attacked in Baghdad, wounding Iraqi civilians. The people of Iraq deserve to have these attackers prosecuted. These violent and corrupt criminals must cease their destabilizing actions,” Pompeo tweeted.

President Trump also pointed the



“We have told neighboring countries several times that they have indisputable sovereign responsibilities in the face of this White House's insurrection and they need to perform their duties in this regard.”

finger at Iran, warning that he will hold Iran responsible if Americans die in an attack in Iraq.

“Our embassy in Baghdad got hit Sunday by several rockets. Three rockets failed to launch. Guess where they were from: IRAN. Now we hear chatter of additional attacks against Americans in Iraq. Some friendly health advice to Iran: If one American is killed, I will hold Iran responsible. Think it over,” Trump said in a tweet on Thursday.

Iran said these tweets were dubious and as if they had been already prepared to escalate tensions with Iran. During his last week's press briefing, Khatibzadeh called into question the U.S. statements against Iran.

“Unfortunately, Iran's diplomatic places

in Iraq had also been attacked. We had pursued a steady policy that targeting diplomatic missions and residential areas is unacceptable,” he said.

He added, “But the kind and timing of this attack [on the U.S. embassy], as well as the statement issued by the U.S. secretary of state, show that [the attack] is very dubious. Its timing is dubious. And more importantly, it seems that as if they had already prepared a statement to publish. And I strongly condemn the remarks of the U.S. regime's secretary of state, who is known for his lies and cheating, whether in his current capacity or in his previous capacity as the CIA director. Therefore, I firmly and strongly condemn the remarks by the U.S. secretary of state.”

Khatibzadeh reiterated this position on Monday, accusing the U.S. of fomenting tensions in Iraq to harm Iran's interests.

Responding to a question on Moqtada Sadr's recent statement accusing Iran of turning Iraq into a battlefield to settle its differences with the U.S., Khatibzadeh said the U.S. is to blame for the current tensions.

“The U.S. and those who hatch these plots are responsible for these tensions and their consequences. The Islamic Republic of Iran has always pursued the policy of good neighborliness and has never sought to settle its differences in another region,” the spokesman stated.

He also said that the U.S. has turned Iran's neighbors into bases to threaten Iran's interests and national security.

“We have told neighboring countries several times that they have indisputable sovereign responsibilities in the face of this White House's insurrection and they need to perform their duties in this regard,” he continued.

Iran has also warned Trump against any “adventurism”. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said that Trump will bear responsibility for any provocative move against Iran in the final days of his administration.

“@realDonaldTrump uses a worthless photo to recklessly accuse Iran. Last time, the US ruined our region over WMD fabrications, wasting \$7 TRILLION & causing 58,976 American casualties. FAR WORSE this time. Trump will bear full responsibility for any adventurism on his way out,” Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a tweet moments after Trump's threat against Iran.

Tensions have soared in the region following the recent rocket attack on the U.S. embassy in Iraq. The U.S. has deployed new military assets such as B-52 bombers and USS Georgia submarine to the region after it accused Iran of targeting the embassy.

## Iran says visit of Iraqi delegation was ‘quite common’

**S P O R T S** TEHRAN — Saeed Khatibzadeh, the spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry, said on Monday that the Sunday brief visit of an Iraqi delegation to Iran was “quite common”.

Speaking at a weekly press conference on Monday, the spokesman said, “This visit took place and the advisor to the Iraqi prime minister came to Iran, and we have regular and close contacts with the Iraqi officials in various fields. They traveled to Iran at our invitation and have come to Iran to discuss bilateral issues and developments, and these talks between Iran and Iraq are quite common.”

On Sunday morning, Iraqi news media reported that an Iraqi delegation is expected to arrive in Tehran on Sunday afternoon. The delegation was carrying a message from Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi.

The Iraqi delegation paid a brief visit to Iran by order of the Iraqi prime minister and it was headed by Abu Jihad al-Hashemi.

The visit came against a backdrop of heightened tensions between Iran and the United States following a rocket attack



on the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. The U.S. blamed the attack on what it called “Iran-backed militias” but Iran rejected the accusation as dubious.

Iran's Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian is also expected to pay a visit to Iraq on Tuesday to hold talks with Iraqi officials on energy issues.

Iraq's Electricity Ministry spokesman Ahmed al-Abadi

has said that the visit of the Iranian minister has something to do with the reduction of Iran's gas export to Iran in recent weeks. The spokesman told Asharq Al-Awsat that Iran has lowered its gas exports to Iraq due to Iraq's inability to pay its debts to Iran.

According to a Reuters report, Iran has reduced gas exports to Iraq to five million cubic meters from 50 million cubic meters two weeks ago citing unpaid bills, and it also officially informed Iraq's Electricity Ministry on Sunday that it plans to cut shipments further to three million cubic meters.

Ahmed Moussa, also a spokesman for Iraq's Electricity Ministry, said Ardakanian is scheduled to visit Baghdad on Tuesday to discuss the unpaid bills with his Iraqi counterpart.

“We strongly encourage Iraq's Finance Ministry to resolve the unpaid bills with Iran to avoid critical shortages of power supplies in Baghdad and other cities,” Reuters quoted Moussa as saying.

Iraq relies on Iran's gas to keep its power plants running but the country has faced difficulties paying its debts to Iran in cash due to U.S. sanctions on the country.

## Senior Iraqi military official: U.S. has no evidence Iran was behind attack on embassy

**POLITICAL** TEHRAN — A senior Iraqi military official has said that the U.S. has no evidence whatsoever that Iran or its Iraqi allies were involved in a recent attack on the American embassy in Iraq.

“Despite accusations by [U.S. President Donald] Trump and some U.S. officials, they have no evidence that Iran or the resistance groups were behind the rocket attack or had any role in it, and that some of the rumors in this regard are not true,” the Iraqi military official told Iraqi news website Middle East News.

Last week, more than 20 rockets landed inside Baghdad's Green Zone, a heavily fortified district where the U.S. embassy and several government buildings are located. The U.S. was quick to put the blame on Iran. U.S. Secretary of State claimed that “Iran-backed” groups were behind the attack and the U.S. president also echoed the claim while threatening to hold Iran responsible for any American being killed in Iraq.

Iran rejected the accusations leveled at Iran by the U.S. officials, calling these accusations “dubious.” Iran also warned President Trump against any “adventur-



ism” on his way out.

“Trump will bear full responsibility for any adventurism on his way out,” Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a

tweet after the U.S. president threatened to hold Iran responsible for the potential killing of the Americans in Iraq.

The Iraqi military official also said that 21 rockets were fired at the U.S. embassy during the recent attack, seven of which hit the embassy. Three rockets hit the outer wall of the embassy, four landed inside it while one rocket hit the embassy's sports club.

According to the official, seven Americans were injured during the attack. One of them is reported to be severely injured. The U.S. and Iraq have not confirmed that Americans were injured during the attack.

## Iranian, Armenian officials discuss regional issues

**POLITICAL** TEHRAN — Top Iranian and Armenia officials held talks on Monday over a range of regional issues more than four weeks after Armenia and Azerbaijan, two neighbors of Iran, agreed to put an end to a 44-day war over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenian Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian held a telephone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif on Monday to discuss regional issues, Armenia's Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Monday.

“On December 28, Foreign Minister Ara Aivazian held a phone conversation with Foreign Minister of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif. During the conversation, the sides discussed issues of the agenda on bilateral and regional cooperation. The interlocutors touched upon issues of regional security and stability. In this context, the sides underlined the prospects of cooperation aimed at addressing new regional challenges,” the statement said.

According to the Armenian Foreign Ministry, the chief Iranian diplomat “conveyed condolences for the victims of the war in Artsakh and expressed solidarity to the people of Armenia.”

Artsakh is the Armenian name of the Armenian enclave in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, where Armenia and Azerbaijan have recently fought a deadly war that resulted in Azerbaijan retaking most of Nagorno-Karabakh.

“The interlocutors emphasized the importance of fur-

ther promoting the contacts and dialogue at various levels, based on the centuries-old friendly relations between the two peoples. The sides reiterated mutual readiness to deepen the close cooperation in bilateral and multilateral formats,” the statement concluded.

The phone conversation came a day after Armenia Ambassador to Iran Artashes Toumanian met with Ali Shamkhani, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran (SNSC). The meeting was held on Sunday but it was made public on Monday.

“During the meeting, Mr. Ambassador briefed Mr. Shamkhani about the situation in Armenia, Artsakh and the regional developments as well,” the Armenian embassy in Iran said in a statement on Monday afternoon.

According to the embassy statement, the top Iranian security official “expressed that authorities of Iran are ready to have contributions in expanding the relations of the two countries particularly in this severe situation in Armenia, reiterating the stance of Iran in establishing a stable and lasting peace.”

A day before Toumanian's meeting with Shamkhani, an Armenian delegation headed by Hakob Vardanyan, deputy minister of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, held meetings with Iranian energy officials.

The Armenian embassy in Iran said in a statement on Sunday that “The Armenian deputy minister was received



by Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, the Iranian oil minister. Prior to the meeting, a meeting had been held with Amir Hossein Zamaninia, deputy oil minister, to discuss the operational issues.”

According to the embassy, the two sides agreed to make amendments to energy contracts between Tehran and Yerevan. They also agreed to increase gas and electricity trade between Armenia and Iran.

Iran and Armenia enjoy good relations and have sought to deepen their cooperation in various fields. During the Nagorno-Karabakh war, Iran had presented a peace initiative to end the war peacefully.

## SPORTS

### I congratulate improvement of Iranian women: Rita Subowo

**1→** I am very pleased to see that not only China, Japan and Korea are the top teams of Asia but also Thailand, Kazakhstan, Chinese Taipei and Iran have joined them. The gap among top eight women teams of Asia is closer, the fans are more excited with the matches of the mentioned teams. I expect to support more Asian women teams like Australia, Vietnam, Indonesia and Philippines to improve their teams close to the top eight teams of Asia by organizing more women's events in order for them to have more opportunity to get more experience with the top teams of Asia. I also expect to have more Asian women teams among the top 10 of the World Ranking.

**Volleyball is a gender balanced sport by nature but the men's competitions are being held at a higher level. Do you have any plan to narrow the gap?**

It is not true that the men competitions are being held at a higher level than women competitions. It depends upon the countries like in Iran, the level of men competition is higher than women. But women competitions are higher than men in many countries like in China, Japan and Thailand. Each federation has to try to balance if the gap of men and women is much different.

**Iranian women have started to make their way to the forefront of Asian volleyball. Do you have a message for the Iranian girls pursuing the sport?**

Sincerely congratulate the improvement of Iran women teams, the women teams of Iran at all levels have been improving very fast and now are among the top eight of Asia. I am confident that the Iran Women Team could be among the top teams of the world like the Men team.

**Iran men's team have established themselves as one of international volleyball's leading powers. The Persians are looking forward for podium in Tokyo Olympic Games. As a person who has served as the Executive Vice President of the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB), what's the secret behind their success?**

The secret behind the success of Iran Men Team is the greatest contribution and very hard work of the key persons of Iran Volleyball Federation together with very well-supported and excellent cooperation of all concerned, the government authority, sponsors, especially Iran volleyball's fans.

**The Iranian players including Amir Ghafour, Shahrar Mahmoudi, Saied Marouf, Mohammad Mousavi and Milad Ebadipour have stolen the show in the past decade. They can be the role model for the grassroots in the continent and the world.**

All the volleyball stars of Iran and other distinguished players of Asia shall be the Idols and the sample for the young generations of our continent. I will try to recommend them through our media as soon as possible.

**And the last question. Iran was chosen to host FIVB Volleyball Boys' Under 19 World Championship by the FIVB and it's an opportunity for the country to show the world how strong Asia is. Do you intend to travel to Iran for the competition?**

If I have no important activity during FIVB Volleyball Boys' U19 World Championship in Iran, I will join this important championship.

## Iranian Match Commissioner Shahriari invited to Tokyo

**S P O R T S** TEHRAN — In a letter sent to Iran Football Federation, head of Beach Soccer at the Iran Football Association, Paria Shahriari, has been invited to Tokyo as Match Commissioner.

She served as match Commissioner at the 2019 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Paraguay.

Now, Shahriari has been invited to Tokyo as Match Commissioner for the Olympic Football Tournament.

“Further to our previous communication and confirmation of your role as Match Commissioner for the OFT, we would like to understand if you still are interested and available to be considered for this role in 2021,” the letter said.

The OFT will start on July 21 and will run until Aug. 8.

## Iran, India, Qatar, Saudi Arabia in contention to host AFC Asian Cup 2027

**S P O R T S** TEHRAN — The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has published the AFC Asian Cup 2027 Bid Books of the four Member Associations that remain in contention to host the AFC's flagship competition – the All India Football Federation (AIFF), the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI), the Qatar Football Association (QFA) and the Saudi Arabian Football Federation (SAFF).

All four Member Associations had submitted their Bid Books for the tournament within the stipulated deadline and in the interest of conducting a fair and transparent Bidding Process, the AFC is for the first time providing, for the benefit of fans, members of the media and all stakeholders of Asian football, the opportunity to access the proposals on the AFC.com.

The AFC confirms that the Uzbekistan Football Association (UFA) submitted their intention to withdraw their interest and will now be excluded from the Bidding Process for the AFC Asian Cup 2027.

The Bid Book proposals draws to a close an extensive and comprehensive 10-month long bidding documentation submission process, which began in February 2020. Kindly refer to the links of the following Member Associations to access the respective Bid Books – AIFF, FFIRI, QFA and SAFF.

The last edition of the AFC Asian Cup in the UAE in 2019 signaled a major shift for football in Asia after the tournament broke all digital media engagement and TV viewership records, following the widely acclaimed decision to expand Asia's flagship competition from 16 to 24 national teams.

China PR, who were confirmed as hosts for the upcoming AFC Asian Cup 2023 at the AFC Extraordinary Congress in Paris, France in June 2019, will be looking to build on the legacy of the last edition in the UAE and setting the benchmark for the 2027 edition.



## Over 300,000 tons of banana imported in 9 months

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Iran has imported 308,970 tons of banana worth \$210.32 million during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20), according to the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

Ruhollah Latifi said the nine-month import equals the whole imports of this product in the past year.



As the IRICA has announced, Iran's non-oil imports stood at 25 million tons valued at \$26.8 billion during the first nine months of this year.

As reported, the country's top five sources of imports during this period were China with \$7 billion, the UAE with \$6.3 billion, Turkey with \$3 billion, India with \$1.6 billion, and Germany with \$1.6 billion worth of imports.

## Housing price in Tehran falls 1.1% in a month

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Housing price in Tehran city has dropped 1.1 percent in the ninth Iranian calendar month (November 21-December 20), from its previous month, according to the latest report released by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

The CBI's report put the average price for one square meter of a residential unit at 269.1 million rials (about \$6,407) in the capital city in the ninth month of this year, up 98.9 percent from the figure for the same month in the past year.

Meanwhile, the number of real estate deals has fallen 42.8 percent in Tehran in the ninth month of this year compared to the eighth month, and 73.2 percent compared to the same month of the past year.

Back in September, a member of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) Civil Committee had said that the drastic and unprecedented rise in housing prices in recent months is going to lead the housing market to a recession in the coming months.

"With the dramatic and unprecedented rise in housing prices, the market is expected to enter a recession for at least three to four years in the coming months, but naturally, as the recession intensifies, housing prices will fall by about 10 to 20 percent", Mojtaba Yousefi stated.

Unfortunately, housing prices have risen by about 200 percent in recent months, and this has created many problems for real house buyers, he lamented.

"The main problem is that in such a market real buyers cannot afford to buy houses and instead the market has become a playground for brokers and speculators."



According to the official, the housing market trend in Iran has been sinusoidal, meaning that housing prices have risen over a period of time and then the market has entered a recession, however, in the last two years the trend has become contrary to the previous years and the housing prices have been constantly increasing.

Last week, the deputy managing director of Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) for economic studies said that the exchange plans to presell housing units through standard salaf bonds in near future.

"We will soon see the issuance of standard housing salaf bonds in the capital market to help financing in the housing sector and construction of new housing units in the country," Javad Fallah said.

A standard parallel salaf is an Islamic contract similar to futures, with the difference being that the contract's total price is paid in advance.

According to the official, IME is following two major approaches for implementing the mentioned plan, one is offering bonds related to the already existing housing units like assets owned by the government and state banks and the other is preselling the units that are going to be constructed in the future.

Outlining the procedure, the official said the total value of a housing unit or a construction project will be securitized and converted into marketable bonds which will be offered through salaf contracts.

The official further explained that each salaf bond would be backed by one square meter of a housing unit, which means each bond would be offered at the price of one square meter of a particular housing unit at the time of offer.

Fallah underlined the implementation of this method as a way to develop reliable investment in the housing sector and added: "In this way, micro-capitals will lead to the increase of construction and supply of housing units and will consequently curb the rampant rise in housing prices."

Back in July, the High Council of Securities and Exchange announced the approval of a decision for establishing a specialized exchange for real estate trade in the country.

It will be the fifth exchange operating in the country after the Tehran Stock Exchange, the junior equity market Iran Fara Bourse, Iran Energy Exchange, and the IME.

# SATBA offers rooftop PV systems to high-consuming electricity subscribers

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Iran's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (known as SATBA) has started a program for offering rooftop photovoltaic power stations (known as PV systems) to high-consuming electricity subscribers, an official with the organization announced.

According to Mohammad-Taqi Ziari, high-consuming applicants can visit SATBA website to register in the mentioned program and will be able to pay for the mentioned systems in installments, IRNA reported.

Ziari noted that the program will be implemented in one province as the pilot.

He put the price of one rooftop power station at 150 million rials (about \$3,500), adding that each high-consuming household will receive a PV system with a capacity of 600-700 watts.

Managing electricity consumption by various sectors including households, agriculture, and industry, and reducing the consumption of fossil fuels used by power plants has become one of the major priorities for the government in recent years.



Back in August, Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian had said that his ministry prepared two programs for managing

high-consuming electricity subscribers and to encourage them to join the low-consumer group.

The first program was to offer a training course to teach consumption management methods with the help of knowledge-based companies and start-ups, while the second plan was to offer solar panels to high-consuming subscribers so that such households would meet their electricity needs by installing these PV stations.

Earlier this year, the Energy Ministry spokesman for the electricity sector, Mostafa Rajabi Mashhadi, had told Tehran Times that the ministry's specialists and experts defined different packages for different sectors to manage the country's electricity consumption.

According to the official, since households account for the majority of the electricity consumption in urban areas, the main part of the Energy Ministry's programs is focused on encouraging the households in metropolitan areas like Tehran to reduce their consumption in peak hours.

In a recently-implemented program the Energy Ministry awards low-consuming electricity subscribers with a 100 percent discount on their bills.

## ICCIMA to hold online meeting for exploring trade opportunities with Oman

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Also, problems and solutions to facilitate the entry of Iranian companies into the Omani market will be discussed by the representatives of the provincial chambers, as well as the heads and representatives of the relevant committees and organizations.

Despite the U.S. re-imposition of sanctions against the Islamic Republic, Oman is getting closer to Iran both politically and economically. There is also the same approach adopted by Iran, as Iranian companies now prefer to conduct trade with Oman rather than the United Arab Emirates (UAE), given that the UAE is highly complying with the sanctions.

Iran is somehow replacing some of its previous strate-



gic trade partners such as UAE with Oman, considering the Sultanate as an economic-trade hub.

Over the past year, there have been many meetings and negotiations between trade and economic officials from the state-run and private sectors of the two sides with the aim of strengthening and expanding bilateral trade ties.

During the 18th meeting of the Iran-Oman Joint Economic Committee in Tehran last December, Omani minister of commerce and industry said his country is trying to boost its trade and economic ties with Iran, stressing that this goal can be achieved through more cooperation between the two sides' private sectors.

## Iran slashes gas exports to Iraq due to outstanding payments

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Iran has reduced its natural gas exports to Iraq and threatened further reductions due to the Arab country's failure to pay its dues. Bloomberg reported on Sunday, quoting a spokesman for Iraq's electricity ministry as saying.

Iran has slashed the amount of gas sent to its neighbor to five million cubic meters (mcm) from 50 mcm two weeks ago, Ahmed Moussa said in an interview.

The Islamic Republic has threatened to further cut the gas supply to three million cubic meters a day, and this has increased the likelihood of more electricity shortages in Baghdad and other major cities,



according to the official.

Iran started cutting exports to its neighbor, which is OPEC's second-biggest oil producer after Iraq fell behind on its gas

payments. Iraq owes around \$2.7 billion in unpaid bills, Moussa said.

According to the spokesman, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian is going to meet Iraqi officials in Baghdad on Tuesday to discuss the issue.

Power production has dropped by around seven gigawatts as a result of the gas supply curbs, Moussa said. Baghdad and other central locations have been hit hardest by electricity shortages.

While Iraq's supply of Iranian gas has been disrupted, its electricity imports are underway as before, he added.

Iran has inked two separate contracts to export the product to the Iraqi cities of

Basra and Baghdad.

Given Iraq's need for natural gas for consumption in power plants, negotiations on importing Iranian gas were started in late 2010 while a contract for gas sales to Baghdad was sealed in June 2013.

The two countries also inked the agreement for the deployment of natural gas to Basra in October 2015, but the exports were halted due to payment issues.

Later on, the Iraqi government approved a deal in late 2017 to import gas from Iran to the eastern border province of Diyala, increasing purchases of the Iranian fuel, which were resumed in June 2017 after several years of hiatus.

## Unemployment in home appliance industry falls due to surge in production

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — The spokesman of Iran's Home Appliances Manufacturers Union said with foreign companies leaving the country's home appliance market the production of domestic companies has increased and the unemployment rate in this sector has significantly declined.

While it was expected that the home appliance industry, like some other industries, would suffer from the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic and the U.S. sanctions, the inauguration of several new projects in this industry showed that the industry is expanding strongly and moving forward, Hamidreza Qaznavi said on Monday.

"The sanctions not only have failed to curb production, but they have also created unique opportunities for this industry," Qaznavi said.

The official noted that before the sanctions, foreign companies held more than 60 percent of the country's home appliance market, which had significantly weakened domestic industries and created serious employment problems.

He further mentioned some of the problems that the



producers are facing in this industry, saying: "The main problem of the production sector these days, despite all the efforts of the Central Bank, is the supply and allocation of foreign currency, and if this issue is resolved the employment problems will also be solved."

Following the re-imposition of the U.S. sanctions, most

of the major international home appliance manufacturers — mainly Asian brands — that were enjoying Iran's 80-million market suddenly gave in to the U.S. pressures and left Iran.

This has created a good opportunity for domestic companies to take over. In this regard, domestic home appliance manufacturers started a new movement to push for more production on one hand and to indigenize the knowledge for producing high-tech components and parts used in this industry, on the other hand, to cut off reliance on foreign sources.

According to the data released by Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry, manufacturing of washing machines in Iran increased 58.2 percent during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-November 20), compared to the same period of time in the past year, while the production of refrigerators and freezers increased by 29.2 percent.

The production of other products like television sets, air conditioners, water air coolers, stoves and etc. have also increased.

## Production rises over 20% in 330 companies with high value-added products

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — The deputy industry, mining and trade minister announced that with the supply of raw materials for production units following the new announcements of the government's Economic Headquarters, production has grown over 20 percent in 330 units with high value-added products.

Mehdi Sadeqi Niaraki, who is the deputy minister for the industrial affairs, said the new announcements of the government's Economic Headquarters have reduced the problems of production units for the supply

of raw materials, and these units achieved good results as they can supply raw materials through imports in exchange for exports.

Supporting production units is a major policy of Iranian government in this Iranian calendar year (begins on March 20), which is named the year of "Surge in Production".

The acting head of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) has recently announced that 1,170 idle industrial units have been revived in the country during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20).



Asghar Mosaheb said that reviving the mentioned units has created jobs for 19,446

persons.

According to the official, there are over 46,000 small and medium-sized industrial units in Iran's industrial parks and zones, of them about 9,200 units are inactive.

Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry was initially planning to revive 1,500 idle units in the current year, but then it revised its programs to revive 2,000 units.

Bringing the mentioned 1,170 units back to the production cycle, the plan for reviving such units in the present year has been completed by 78 percent.

## IME offers colored steel sheets for 1st time

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) witnessed for the first time the offering of 1,000 tons of colored steel sheets from Mobarakeh Steel Company.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and Public Relations Department, the exchange also offered on the same floor

125,070 tons of HRS, 3,000 tons of galvanized steel sheets, 1,000 tons of CRS, 1,475 tons of copper rods, 380 tons of zinc ingots, 100 tons of lead ingots and 300 tons of aluminum rods.

Based on this report, the IME had 27,164 tons of polymeric products, 2,051 tons of base oil, 14,000 tons of vacuum bottom and 3,200 tons of bitumen offered on its oil and petro-

chemical trading floor.

Meanwhile, the IME's side market offered 286 tons of PDA on the same day.

IME is one of the four major stock markets of Iran, the other three markets are Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), and Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX).



# American expert says interest groups to further stir up Moscow-Washington animosity

**1 →** A: Russian-American relations are expected to worsen under the incoming Biden Administration, though the outgoing Trump one recently engaged in a series of provocations earlier this month which left no hope for them to improve even in the very unlikely event that the incumbent somehow remains in office after 20 January. Biden's team is made up of former Obama-era and -influenced officials whose political Russophobia leads them to regard the Eurasian Great Power as their country's top foe. They'll therefore continue the New Cold War that they inherited and intensify it in certain ways, perhaps on so-called "democratic" pretexts in order to appeal to a wider number of their allies. Geopolitical friction in Eastern Europe and the Mideast (West Asia) will remain at the forefront of their relations, but the Biden administration will probably also emphasize the perceived difference of values between both sides in an attempt to restore some of America's lost soft power under Trump.

**Why should the issue of Russia still be among the top in the U.S. foreign policy, while the threats posed by China and North Korea are more tangible?**

A: Russia, China, and North Korea aren't so much "threats" to the U.S. as they are challenges in different spheres. Russia is the only country capable of destroying the U.S. with nuclear weapons, while China is the only one that can economically compete with it. North Korea, meanwhile, is only an issue of regional concern, and that's just because of its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. To the question of why Russia will probably move to the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda under Biden, this is due to his team's political Russophobia. They don't deny the economic challenge posed by China but seem to consider the military one to be manageable, unlike Moscow's. As for North Korea, they haven't



said much about it and might be hoping to retain the status quo for as long as possible, barring any unexpected provocations by either side. Arguably, the U.S. foreign policy should be more balanced and not obsess over any single challenger.

**Is not it a waste of resources by the European Union, NATO, and the U.S. to keep spending budgets against Russia, while they are suffering from shortcomings in other areas?**

A: Those actors justify their expenditures on the grounds that they're required to "defend" their interests from the multitude of threats that they regard Russia as posing, both in the military and non-military realms. In a perfect world, everyone would invest solely in their own people and not in the military-industrial complex, but that's not the world in which we live. Special interest groups of both a political (Russophobia) and economic (military-industrial complex) nature vie for a slice of the pie every

year and usually succeed in getting more than their "fair share" of it. Even if the so-called "Russia threat" were to recede from the public consciousness due to a political decision by their leaderships, then it would simply be replaced by the Chinese, Iranian, or some other one because that role will need to be filled by someone to justify continuing such expenditures. It's unforeseeable that any realistic alternative to this model will emerge anytime soon.

**To what extent are anti-Russia claims by the U.S. politicians legitimate or attention-worthy? Can we just label them as baseless claims meant to promote a smear campaign against Russia?**

A: It's difficult to ascertain the veracity of most of the Americans' claims since they don't publicly provide any evidence to back them up such as when accusing Russia of hacking the U.S. or engaging in other such provocations. There are, however,

some objectively existing developments that they misportray in accordance with their political interests to justify their Russophobia such as Russia's reunification with Crimea or anti-terrorist operation in Syria. These veritably happened, but the motivation, sequence of events, and outcomes are presented differently than they actually occurred. Regardless of one's opinion towards them, *the fact of the matter is that Russia is indeed one of the country's most confidently reasserting its sovereign interests against the U.S. unipolar hegemonic designs, which is why it'll always remain in the news.* As a result, America will continue to seek public justifications for continuing its "containment" policy against it.

**Will Russia join Biden's administration to push Tehran into making more concessions in the face of demands for limiting Iran's missile program and changing Iran's regional policies?**

A: Russia hasn't indicated that it would join Biden's political campaign regarding Iran, but its representatives have previously called on Tehran to abide by the terms of the nuclear agreement. This implies a degree of unease about Iran's sovereign right to advance its interests in the face of the U.S. withdrawal from the deal, though it would be premature to interpret that as blaming it. Russia will probably oppose the U.S. efforts to add additional terms to the deal in exchange for America's return to it, but such opposition would only remain political and not carry with it any meaningful consequences to change its rival's behavior. What's most important to Moscow is publicly presenting itself as a guardian of international law and state sovereignty, and it also hopes to sell some arms to Tehran and cooperate with it to varying extents across the region. These plans would be jeopardized if it jumped on Biden's anti-Iranian bandwagon.

## Biden seeing disaster created by Trump's Max Pressure policy: Former French amb.

By Zahra Mirzafarjouyan

**TEHRAN** — Stressing on immediate return of U.S. to JCPOA, François Nicoullaud said Biden doesn't need the approval of Congress to return to it, adding that Biden is able to see the disaster created by Trump's policy towards Iran.

On Tuesday, May 8, 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the international agreement and announced the return of nuclear sanctions, in violation of Washington's commitments under the JCPOA. But despite using sanctions and other pressure, Trump has been unable to lure Iran into negotiating a new deal.

Joe Biden has said he sees a return to the current 2015 agreement as the best immediate route to regional stability. The approach — which is likely to disappoint the U.S.'s main Middle East (West Asia) partners — sets the stage for Biden's administration to lay out its strategy once it takes office next month.

European powers are backing president-elect Joe Biden's suggestion that the U.S. returns to a landmark nuclear deal with Iran in its existing form. Germany, France, and the UK committed, along with fellow accord signatories Iran, Russia, and China, to "positively address" Washington's possible re-entry after President Donald Trump quit in 2018.

Recently, 150 House Democrats signed a letter backing President-elect Joe Biden's plan to reenter the Iran nuclear deal without any new conditions. The letter is enough to block any congressional bid to block the move.

To shed light on the issue, we reached out to François Nicoullaud, a veteran diplomat and former ambassador of France to Tehran.

Following is the text of the interview with him:  
**Why does Biden want to return to the deal? What is the importance of the deal particularly for Europe?**



A: Biden wants to return to the JCPOA because, as Vice-President of Barack Obama, he was part of the process which led to the conclusion of this agreement. He has been able to see the disaster created by Trump's policy of maximum pressure. He is sincerely convinced that a return of the U.S. to the deal would be in everybody's interest and first of all, in the interest of nuclear non-proliferation. As for Europe, there is no doubt that it has always considered the survival of the JCPOA as a matter of utmost importance, and has always been in favor of the U.S.' return, precisely because it has quickly realized that it would not be able to alleviate all the damages that were created by the U.S.' departure.

**Considering the viewpoints of some of Biden's men and women towards his return to the JCPOA, do you think that it will be an easy job for him?**

A: Most people around Joe Biden were also part of Obama's administration and favor a return to the deal. I do not see any risk of conflict here. Of course, the case is different with people in the House of Representatives

and in the Senate. Most Republicans and many Democrats maintain a hostile attitude towards Iran. But Biden does not need the approval of Congress to come back to the deal. A simple signature of him will be enough, as a simple signature of Donald Trump was enough to quit the JCPOA without delay.

**What can be the most urgent steps that Biden should take to pave the way for the U.S. return?**

A: There is a signal of goodwill that the new President could immediately deliver. That would be to lift all obstacles to humanitarian help in favor of Iran's fight against the COVID-19. Again, a simple and clear order to the U.S. office in charge of sanctions should suffice, and, of course, a close oversight on the way this order would be implemented, to be sure that it would get a fast and fair implementation. Concerning the return to the JCPOA, a pragmatic, result-oriented negotiation between the U.S. and Iran should quickly lead to an agreement based on a simple principle: a simultaneous return, as fast as possible, to the full implementation of the JCPOA, that is for the U.S. the lifting of all sanctions figuring in the Vienna agreement, and for Iran a comeback to the strict provisions concerning its nuclear program. This would leave of course open the question of the many additional sanctions adopted in Trump's time. This point, probably more complex to solve quickly in its entirety, could be addressed in the same negotiation, or immediately after. But if there is a common will, there will be away.

**Given that we are on the eve of 2021, we would be grateful if you tell us what was the most important event in 2020?**

The most important event of the year 2020 has been undoubtedly the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the challenge it has raised against our way of life, and even our civilization. Because of its geopolitical implications. And because of the human suffering, it has created in each and every corner of our world.

## Why U.S. targeting Nicaragua with coercive measures

By Stephen Sefton

I think that's very easy Nicaragua is an ally of Venezuela, and Cuba. And it has very good relations with Iran and the Russian Federation.

And that sets it firmly among the governments that the United States regards as its enemies. And, that's basically why the United States is currently targeting Nicaragua, but historically the U.S. interest in what after all is a very tiny country of barely six and a half million people has to do with its geopolitical interests in Latin America and specifically in Central America.

So that's basically why they're seeking to engage in this aggression against Nicaragua even though it presents no threat at all to the United States.

In contrast to Venezuela and Cuba, Nicaragua has not yet suffered very severe economic sanctions. For example, there's been no trade boycott, as there has been in Venezuela, and there hasn't been anything like the sanctions that have been imposed for example on Iran, or the allies of Iran.

In the case of Cuba, as you pointed out, Cuba has been resisting the U.S. blockade now for over 60 years. And it's a very heavy cost, but they've consistently defended their national sovereignty, their right to self-determination. And they've consistently condemned the U.S. sanctions as being illegal.

So, when there are different kinds of resistance. So, for example, there's the resistance on a diplomatic front and Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela has maintained very strong diplomatic relations with countries in the Security Council, for example, in particular, the Russian Federation, but also other countries internationally.

And that has been that has been one of the ways that they've been able to defend themselves against the ramifications of U.S. sanctions.

In Nicaragua's case the United States is likely to ramp up and increase the sanctions, that is all.

Here we don't like calling them sanctions because we regard the measures that the United States is taking as illegal, coercive measures that have no basis in international

law, because the only entity in international law that is entitled to impose sanctions is the United Nations Security Council.

So, what the United States is doing and also its European allies are imposing measures against Nicaragua against Venezuela against Cuba, that are essentially illegal. And that in itself is those countries, a basis on to appeal to for support among members of the international community that are not aligned with the Western countries essentially the NATO countries, the United States and its NATO allies, who are seeking to impose their will not just in Nicaragua and Cuba and Venezuela but around the world.

And I think that's a function of their desperation. I think they're desperate because they can see that their power and influence and control over international affairs, and even in regional affairs is slipping relative to the emergence of countries like the Russian Federation, like the Islamic Republic of Iran, like China to positions of influence in the world.

And you can see that in the way, Iran

was able to break the U.S. fuel blockade against Venezuela. And you can see it in the way the Russian Federation and China has given tremendous support to Venezuela and Cuba.

And if the United States does decide to increase its sanctions against Nicaragua, we can expect to see the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, and also the Islamic Republic of Iran, naming the three countries, increasing their support for the Nicaragua.

Stephen Sefton is a journalist who was born in Ireland, and now lives in Estelí, Nicaragua. (Estelí is not too far from our El Sauce, Rochester's Ciudad Hermana.) Stephen has worked in Central America since 1986—mostly in Nicaragua, but also for a few years in Honduras. He does community work in Nicaragua that involves education, training, and health programs. Since 2008, he had also coordinated the Tortilla con Sal website, which publishes information about Nicaragua through a Sandinista lens.

(Source: Press TV)

## U.S. embassy attack false-flag strike by Washington: Iraq Kata'ib Hezbollah

**1 →** Washington claims it fears another attempt against its diplomatic missions and military bases in Iraq as the first anniversary of the martyrdom of the two popular anti-terror commanders nears.

"Washington fears demonstrations near its embassy or any kind of popular activities aimed at exposing the U.S. role in Iraq, and this concern has prompted the American leaders to launch these (fake) strikes against their [own] embassy," further said the spokesman of the Kata'ib Hezbollah group.

Mohi added that the outgoing Trump administration is trying to push Iran and the resistance groups to give "a reckless response" by exerting pressure and creating a crisis, "but we are aware of this plot."

According to Press TV, The targeting of the U.S. embassy has already sparked a war of words between Washington and Tehran, with Trump blaming Iran for the attack and warning of retaliation if "one American is killed."

In response, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif suggested that Trump's remarks — which were made via Twitter — were reminiscent of the Bush administration's accusations against Iraq, which led to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

## 'UAE working with Israel to liquidate UNRWA'

The United Arab Emirates is working together with Israel to liquidate the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), French newspaper Le Monde reports.

Emirati officials plan to gradually eliminate UNRWA, without making it conditional on a resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue, the report said.

The process, the paper said, has been underway since Israel and the UAE announced a deal for full normalization of their relations in August, Press TV reported.

"In doing so, Abu Dhabi would be rallying to a long-standing demand from Israel, which insists that the agency is obstructing peace by nurturing refugees in the dream of returning to the lands from which their parents were driven in 1948," Le Monde journalist Benjamin Barthe wrote.

U.S. President Donald Trump brought UNRWA to the verge of bankruptcy in 2019 when he halted funds to the agency, but the UAE offset the demise by funding the agency along with Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

UNRWA was established 70 years ago to supply aid to Palestinian refugees and its mandate is renewed every three years.

## Nasrallah: Hezbollah's precision missiles doubled in a year

Hezbollah's secretary-general says the Lebanese resistance movement has, within the space of just one year, doubled the size of its missile arsenal, and has the entire occupied territories inside the range of the precision projectiles.

Speaking to Lebanon's al-Mayadeen television network late Sunday, Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah said, "The number of precision missiles at the resistance's disposal has now doubled what it was a year ago."

"Any target across the area of occupied Palestine that we want to hit accurately, we are able to hit accurately," he told well-known Arab journalist Ghassan bin Jiddo.

The movement fought off two wholesale wars against Lebanon in the 2000s, forcing the Israeli military into humiliating retreat on both occasions.

Nasrallah said Hezbollah is determined to avenge Israel's killing of one of its members, Ali Kamel Mohsen Jawad, in an airstrike in Syria on July 20.

Since the attack, the Israeli military has been on high alert near the Lebanese border, fearing retaliation by Hezbollah. Experts say several trigger-happy actions by Israeli troops near the border have exposed the extent of qualm in the regime.

## Resistance News

### Palestinian prisoner's health condition alarmingly worsened in Israeli jail

**INTERNATIONAL TEHRAN** — The health condition of an ill Palestinian prisoner has suffered a sharp decline in an Israeli jail, a report warns.

Jamal Amr, who has already a liver problem, started to complain of pains all over his body a few days ago, the Palestinian Information Center reported on Sunday, citing an alarming report by Asra Media Office, which is a Palestinian prisoners' rights advocacy group.

It added that despite Amr's constant and increasing pains, the prison administration only informed his family about his serious liver disease, without providing him with any proper medical treatment.

The rights group affirmed that the Palestinian inmate suffers from serious kidney and liver problems as well as being in dire need of medical tests to diagnose the exact problems.

Amr's family, for their part, appealed to international human rights groups to swiftly intervene to save his life before it is too late and to ensure his access to appropriate medical treatment, it added. Earlier this month, the Prisoners and Ex-prisoners Affairs Authority, a group advocating Palestinian prisoners' rights, expressed serious concern over the difficult health condition of two Palestinian inmates in an Israeli prison, warning that the pair's conditions were deteriorating because of deliberate medical negligence.

More than 7,000 Palestinian prisoners are currently being held in some 17 Israeli jails, with dozens of them serving multiple life sentences.

Over 500 detainees are under Israel's so-called administrative detention in various Israeli prisons. Some prisoners have been held in that condition for up to 11 years without any charges.

The so-called Israeli administrative detention is a form of imprisonment without trial or charge that allows the Israeli authorities to incarcerate Palestinians for up to six months, which could be extended for an infinite number of times.

Palestinian detainees have continuously resorted to open-ended hunger strikes in an attempt to express their outrage at the detentions.

## Ancient hill may contain ruined castle near Persepolis, archaeologist says

**TOURISM** TEHRAN – Jelogir Mound, a prehistorical hill situated northward of the UNESCO-tagged Persepolis, may be home to a ruined Achaemenid-era castle, an Iranian archaeologist suggests.

"Based on the archaeological evidence that is currently being studied, it can be hypothesized that Jelogir Mound was once home to an Achaemenid castle, which was probably existed in the [subsequent] Sassanid era," CHTN quoted senior archaeologist Vahid Younesi as saying on Sunday.



Younesi, who leads an archaeological survey on the mound, believes pottery fragments scattered at the site are a rich source of information that could shed a new light on ancient life on Jelogir Mound and its surroundings.

"Recognition of relative chronology and introduction of pottery features of various historical periods (Achaemenid, Parthian, Sassanid) of this area in Fars region will pave the way for us to access valuable information and findings of cultural heritage," he explained.

Situated northwest of Marvdasht plain, Dorudzan district, Jelogir mound is registered first by Andrea Williamson, then by William Samner through archaeological surveys at the southern Iranian plain, but regarding to its strategic location and it demands comprehensive investigation around the site to recognize peripheral settlements to understand the site position in Marvdasht Plain.

In the present paper, it is attempted to estimate the mound chronology, and the site role within the plain according to a comprehensive survey and analyzing the collected data.

Persepolis, also known as Takht-e Jamshid, whose magnificent ruins rest at the foot of Kuh-e Rahmat (Mountain of Mercy), was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire. It is situated 60 kilometers northeast of the city of Shiraz in Fars Province.

The city was burnt by Alexander the Great in 330 BC apparently as revenge to the Persians because it seems the Persian King Xerxes had burnt the Greek City of Athens around 150 years earlier.

The city's immense terrace was begun about 518 BC by Darius the Great, the Achaemenid Empire's king. On this terrace, successive kings erected a series of architecturally stunning palatial buildings, among them the massive Apadana palace and the Throne Hall ("Hundred-Column Hall").

This 13-ha ensemble of majestic approaches, monumental stairways, throne rooms (Apadana), reception rooms, and dependencies is classified among the world's greatest archaeological sites.

Persepolis was the seat of the government of the Achaemenid Empire, though it was designed primarily to be a showplace and spectacular center for the receptions and festivals of the kings and their empire.

## Markazi province to encourage bird-watching as leisure activity

**TOURISM** TEHRAN – Bird-watching as a branch of ecotourism, has a vast potential to be developed and promoted in the central Markazi province, deputy provincial tourism chief has said.

This branch of tourism is popular among nature lovers and ordinary tourists as well as ornithologists and experts, said Seyyed Hassan Hosseini during a visit to Arak's ornamental birds' center on Sunday.

Unlike other branches of nature tourism, bird-watching tours are suitable for people with less physical abilities, who could observe the life in nature up close, he explained.



The bird-watching has the potential to become a lucrative sector for the tourism industry, not only in the province but also in the country, however, it has remained unknown to many, the official added.

The world's rare parrots are bred in Arak's ornamental birds' center to preserve endangered species as well as protect endemic species while treating damaged birds and release them into the wild.

Among the breeding species in the center are Green-cheeked Conure, Red-rumped Parrot, Crimson Rosella, Lovebird, Sun Conure, and Spectacled Parrotlet.

So far, 550 bird species have been distinguished and registered across Iran.

Bird-watching, the observation of live birds in their natural habitat, is a popular pastime and scientific sport that developed almost entirely in the 20th century.

The south Caspian Sea retreats are amongst the most famed heavens for birdwatchers in Iran, usually being dominated by its northerly guests until about mid-May when the migration season comes to an end. In a wider scene, the mid-winter population of the migratory birds is estimated to exceed over a million in the whole southern sandy shorelines of the Caspian Sea that spans some 700km.

The northern provinces of Gilan, Golestan, and Mazandaran embrace a variety of freshwater lakes, wetlands, and lagoons, which are the main destinations for traveling pelicans, flamingos, ducks, swans, coots, and some other species.

Markazi province is considered the industrial capital of the country. It is rich in natural, historical, cultural, and religious attractions. Hand-woven carpets and kilims, made in its cities including Farahan, Sarugh, Lilivan, Senejan and Vaf are known internationally.

# Iran tourism insiders to mark Chinese New Year

**TOURISM** TEHRAN – Iran's tourism ministry plans to hold an online campaign entitled "Centuries of Friendship; the Third Chinese Spring Festival in Iran" to celebrate Chinese New Year.

The campaign aims to attract more holidaymakers from China, a massive travel market with records of some 150 million outbound tourists [per annum], said Mohammad Qasemi, the director for marketing and advertising at the tourism ministry on Sunday.

Various videos and online programs promoting Iranian tourist attractions in the Chinese language are being prepared as a part of the project, which will be held from February 12 to 27, 2021 coinciding with the Chinese New Year holidays, the official added.

Although due to the coronavirus pandemic Iran cannot host tourists this year, such programs could promote the country as a destination for the post-coronavirus era, he explained.

He also noted that this campaign could extend the cultural and tourism ties between the two nations.

The worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 has brought the world to a standstill, and tourism has been the worst affected of all major economic sectors.

Back in March, the UN specialized agency for tourism announced that it expected international tourist arrivals would be down by 20 percent to 30 percent in 2020 when



compared with 2019 figures.

However, earlier this month the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) announced that world tourist arrivals fell by 72% over the first ten months of the year.

Restrictions on travel, low consumer confidence, and a global struggle to contain the coronavirus pandemic are amongst factors contributing to the worst year on record in the history of tourism.

Iran has also suffered the same fate as its foreign arrivals plunged 72% during the

first eight months of the year when compared to 2019.

### Critical situation

In October, Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan warned that Iran's cultural heritage and tourism will be in a critical situation if the crises caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus continue.

In August, Mounesan said that Iran's tourism has suffered a loss of 12 trillion rials (some \$2.85 billion) since the outbreak of

the coronavirus pandemic.

"The tourism industry of the country was growing and progressing well but unfortunately, it has faced the coronavirus outbreak, which brought the industry into a standstill."

"Many tourism projects have been completed, or are being implemented, showing that a very good capacity has been created in the field of tourism in the country and [this trend] should not be stopped," he explained.

The minister said the coronavirus pandemic should not bring traveling to a complete standstill. "Corona is a fact, but can the virus stop tourism? Certainly not. For us, the coronavirus is a new experience in dealing with crises that teaches tourism experts around the world how to deal with such a disaster, and thankfully governments are turning this into an opportunity for better planning."

Optimistic forecasts, however, expect Iran to achieve a tourism boom after coronavirus contained, believing its impact would be temporary and short-lived for a country that ranked the third fastest-growing tourism destination in 2019.

Iran expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 24 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, it aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

## Bronze lion to return home after decades

**HERITAGE** TEHRAN – A bronze statue of a lion which had been unearthed in Hormozgan province some 37 years ago, but kept at a museum in Kerman province, will be returned home.

The statue, dating back to the Achaemenid era (c. 550 – 330 BC), was discovered in 1983 in the agricultural lands of Fareghan district, Hajjiabad county, however, due to the lack of storage facilities at that time, it was sent to Kerman Museum, Hormozgan tourism chief Reza Boroumand said on Monday.

Follow-up sessions, organized by the provincial tourism department, were finally paid off, paving the way for the return of the bronze lion, he explained.

The official pointed out that the correspondence for the transfer of this valuable treasure has been

done, noting, "We are waiting for the cooperation of the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of Kerman province to transfer this work to the province."

"We hope that with the cooperation of the Kerman Museum, this important thing will be realized as soon as possible and that the lovers of culture and history of the province will be able to observe this valuable work at the Persian Gulf Anthropology Museum of Bandar Abbas."

The bronze lion statue is 62 kilograms in weight and about 42 centimeters in height. Four conical nails of eight centimeters high are under its four arms and legs, indicating that this statue was [originally] standing in a metal or stone place, the official explained.



## Turkey requires negative COVID-19 tests for all Iranian passengers

**TOURISM** TEHRAN – Iranian passengers to Turkey must provide negative COVID-19 test results before boarding, as the government looks to further reduce the risk of imported coronavirus cases amid increased international travel.

Recent news shows that the air border between Iran and Turkey is still open and passenger traffic is not stopped, but Turkey has set new regulations, ISNA reported on Monday.

"According to the rules of this country, the entry of a passenger with Iranian citizenship with a residence permit or as a tourist to Turkey is not prohibited. But



the new strain of COVID-19 in the UK has once again changed travel rules and even imposed restrictions on some borders,"

the report said.

Effective as of Monday (December 28), Iranians traveling to Turkey by air must produce proof of having tested negative for COVID-19 using a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test taken within no more than 72 hours before entry.

Any traveler unable to submit a negative test result at the point of departure will not be allowed to board their flight; persons arriving in Turkey without proof of having tested negative will be required to quarantine either at their reported address in Turkey or a government-designated facility for two weeks.

Regarding the new strain, Iran has halted

flights to and from the United Kingdom following the discovery of a new variant of COVID-19, which is said to spread faster than others.

The new coronavirus variant, which prompted the UK government to impose a Tier 4 lockdown in London and south-eastern England, and tighten restrictions for all of England over the festive period, is "out of control," Health Secretary Matt Hancock said on Sunday – the same day that the UK broke its daily coronavirus case record, recording some 35,000 new cases.

The ensuing wave of travel bans has also cut off UK travelers from much of Europe and other parts of the world.

## Ancient textiles on the verge of oblivion in western Iran

➔ However, to revive, preserve and protect such handicrafts fields, the province's cultural heritage department plans to train crafters and equip workshops in the villages and rural areas, the official explained.

Meanwhile, new uses according to customer needs have been defined for the handmade products while modern technologies are also planned to be taken into account, he added.

Back in June, provincial tourism chief Esmail Marivani announced that handicrafts exports from the western province reached some \$592,000 during the previous Iranian calendar year 1398 (ended March 20).

Some nine high-quality works by artisans in the province were also awarded the National Seal of Excellence during the last year, he added.

He also noted that some 258,000 people are currently working in various fields of handicrafts in the province, of which 70 percent are women.



The name Kordestan refers to the region's principal inhabitants. After the Turkish invasion of Iran in the 11th century CE (Seljuq period), the name Kurdistan was ap-

plied to the region comprising the northwestern Zagros Mountains. It was during the reign of Abbas I the Great of Iran's Safavid dynasty (1501–1736) that the Kurds rose to prominence, having been enlisted by Abbas I to help stem the attacks of the marauding Uzbeks from the east in the early 17th century.

Iran exported \$523 million worth of handicrafts during the past calendar year 1398 (ended March 19). Of the figure, some \$273 million worth of handicrafts were exported officially through customs, and about \$250 million was earned via suitcase trade (allowed for customs-free and tax-free transfer) through various provinces, according to data provided by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

Ceramics, pottery vessels, handwoven cloths as well as personal ornamentations with precious and semi-precious gemstones are traditionally exported to Iraq, Afghanistan, Germany, the U.S., the UK, and other countries.

## Some \$1.9m paid to support tourism businesses in Kerman

**TOURISM** TEHRAN – The Iranian government has paid 80 billion rials (about \$1.9 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) in loans to the tourism businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic in the southeastern Kerman province.

Although the province's tourism sector has asked for 240 billion rials (\$5.7 million), so far only one-third of this amount has been provided, provincial tourism chief Fereydoon Fa'ali announced on Sunday.

In late October, deputy tourism chief Vali Teymouri said that a new support package

to pay loans to businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic was approved by Iran's National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control.

He also announced that depending on the type and activity of the businesses, they could benefit from at least 160 million rials (some \$3,800) to nine billion rials (some \$214,000) of bank loans with a 12-percent interest rate.

The loans would be allocated to tourist guides, travel agencies, tourism transport companies, tourism educational institutions, eco-lodges and traditional accommoda-

tions, hotels, apartment hotels, motels, and guesthouses as well as traditional accommodation centers, tourism complexes, and recreational centers, the official explained.

In September, Teymouri said that around 1.3 million tourism workers in the country were facing problems due to the coronavirus crisis.

The government has allocated a 750-trillion-rial (about \$18 billion) package to help low-income households and small- and medium-sized enterprises suffered by the coronavirus concerns.

Optimistic forecasts, however, expect



Iran to achieve a tourism boom after coronavirus is contained, believing its impact would be temporary and short-lived for a country that ranked the third fastest-growing tourism destination in 2019.

# Homegrown COVID-19 vaccine to be mass produced in 40 days

**SOCIETY** TEHRAN — The production line of the Iranian coronavirus vaccine with a capacity of 1.5 million doses per month will be launched within the next 40 days.

By the next six months, vaccine production will reach up to 12 million doses per month, Hoojat Niki Maleki, head of the information center of Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam, said on Monday, IRNA reported.

**Strict restrictions**  
Due to the high prevalence of the disease, strict COVID-19 restrictions took effect on October 26.

The National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control started strict restrictions in 43 cities that had the highest rate of infection in the country. Ten days later,



decisions were made to set new limitations on highly-affected areas for another 10 days, through which 46 cities undergone restrictions.

The plan divided cities into three levels of alert, namely red, orange, and yellow.

Another plan also went into effect on November 21, according to which all occupations, except for emergency services and basic food suppliers, get closed for two weeks in high-risk cities.

Alireza Reisi, a spokesman for the National Headquarters for Coronavirus Control, said a week earlier that the disease prevalence is declining in 30 of the whole 31 provinces and the death toll had dropped to 50 percent in comparison to the previous month. Also, the hospitalization rate has been reduced by 40 percent.

## National Document on Rare Diseases approved

**SOCIETY** TEHRAN — The National Document on Rare Diseases has been approved with the aim of preventing the birth of infants with rare diseases, medical and therapeutic problems.

Patients with rare diseases launched and signed a petition calling for drawing up a national document on rare diseases on the occasion of Rare Disease Day, February 28, 2019.

The National Document on Rare Diseases, which was recently prepared in collaboration with the Rare Diseases Foundation of Iran and the University of Tehran and was drafted by prominent domestic and foreign experts, was approved by the Ministry of Health.

Hamidreza Edraki, CEO of the Rare Diseases Foundation of Iran, said that the strategic document is a big step towards resolving medical and treatment problems and relieving

the pain of rare patients, IRNA reported on Monday. After the approval of the Document, all related bodies will be obliged to take measures in this regard, and the programs will be monitored nationally.

The main vision of this document is to prevent the birth of infants with rare diseases and to solve the medical and therapeutic problems of rare patients in the country.

According to the statistics published in 2019, the number of rare diseases identified in Iran has reached 332 types of diseases and about 4,750 people are covered by the Rare Diseases Foundation of Iran.

Out of a thousand population, 2 people get a rare disease, while the prevalence can be curbed by changing people's culture, screening, identifying, preventing the births, and raising awareness.

According to WHO, rare diseases are often serious,

chronic, and life-threatening. The European Union (EU) definition of a rare disease is one that affects fewer than 5 in 10,000 people. At present, more than 6000 rare diseases are known; around 80 percent of them are genetic disorders and half of them occur during childhood.

Grouped together, rare diseases affect 6–8 percent (or about 30 million people) out of the 508 million population of EU countries. This roughly equals the estimated prevalence of diabetes in the World Health Organization European Region, which in 2013 was 6.8 percent of 658.7 million adults in the 20 to 79-year age group.

Rare diseases are associated with a high psychological burden for the patient but they can also have a major impact on a patient's family. In addition to the health burden on patients, few of these diseases have an effective drug treatment available.

## Sanctions won't affect importing COVID-19 vaccines by Iran: WHO

**SOCIETY** TEHRAN — Sanctions imposed by the United States will have no effect on importing coronavirus vaccines by Iran from the COVAX, a global initiative to ensure rapid and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, Christoph Hamelmann, WHO Representative in Iran, said on Monday.

"We support and assist Iran in obtaining essential items from the global market, and we did so since the beginning of the pandemic, as we anticipated the provision of medicine to be affected by sanctions," he added, ILNA reported.

COVAX member states, including Iran, will jointly decide on which brand of vaccine each country to purchase, and

the final decision will be announced by the officials, he noted.

**Iranian COVID-19 vaccine on human trial phase**

Iran started testing its first domestically-made coronavirus vaccine by injecting it to 56 volunteers aged 18 to 50 years on December 20.

Mostafa Ghane'ei, an official with the Vice Presidency for Science and Technology, has said that the domestically produced COVID-19 vaccine will probably be injected into the whole population by September 23, 2021.

Now that coronavirus vaccines have been developed in the world and the third phase of clinical trials has passed, the possible side



effects are almost certain, and Iran will be aware of the side effects which speeds up the process, he noted, adding, "vaccines produced in Iran are the same as those produced in China, India, the United States, etc."

In December, Health Minister Saeed

Namaki expressed hope that the country will introduce the home-grown COVID-19 vaccine by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19, 2021).

**COVID-19 death toll, new cases**  
In a press briefing on Monday, Health Ministry spokesperson Sima-Sadat Lari confirmed 5,908 new cases of COVID-19 infection, raising the total number of infections to 1,206,373. She added that 960,751 patients have so far recovered, but 5,174 still remain in critical conditions of the disease.

During the past 24 hours, 121 patients have lost their lives, bringing the total number of deaths to 54,814, she added.

So far, 7,460,422 diagnostic tests have been performed in the country.

## Pollution killed nearly 1.7m people in India in 2019 – study

Pollution accounted for nearly 1.7m premature deaths in India in 2019, or 18% of all deaths, according to a study that lays bare the human cost of the country's toxic urban air.

A report published by the Lancet says pollution in India has led to an increase in diseases such as lung cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, neonatal disorders and respiratory diseases, resulting in millions more deaths.

The data shows that pollution-related deaths in India are on the rise, increasing from 1.24m in 2017 to 1.67m in 2019, the Guardian reported.

India's capital, Delhi, often becomes the most polluted city in the world during its winter, as the city is engulfed in a thick smog and toxic air particles rising to as much as 500% higher than the level the World Health Organization deems healthy. Though the issue resurfaces every year with increasing ferocity, India's central and state governments have failed to introduce effective pollution controls.

Six of India's cities are among the top 10 most polluted in the world, according to a recent World Air Quality report.

As noted in a 2019 Lancet article, pollution has become one of India's greatest dividers between rich and poor, with affluent Indian residents able to offset the pollution with air purifiers in their cars and homes, while poorer people, who often live in unsealed homes, bear the brunt of the toxic air and its long-term health impacts.

This year pollution in Delhi was connected to a rise in Covid-19 cases and deaths as the winter months set in, with the Indian Medical Association stating in November that 13% of the city's recent Covid-19 cases may be linked to air pollution.

This week's Lancet report also sets out the economic cost of the contaminated air, saying pollution fatalities in 2019 led to a total loss of \$36.8bn, or 1.36% of India's gross domestic product, with the poor and populous states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar hit worst.

"The high burden of death and disease due to air pollution and its associated substantial adverse economic impact from loss of output could impede India's aspiration to be a \$5tn economy by 2024," the report says.



### ENGLISH IN USE

#### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

## Iran will defeat COVID-19, we believe: Chinese envoy

Chinese Ambassador in Iran, Chang Hua, has said he believes that Iran would overcome the crisis of coronavirus outbreak.

"We believe that by sending humanitarian aid, Iran will overcome the crisis," he said in a meeting with Mahmoud Reza Peyravi, secretary general of the Iranian Red Crescent Society, IRNA reported.

The envoy praised Iran's Red Crescent Society as the first organization affiliated with the Red Cross and the Red Crescent societies which sent humanitarian shipments of aid to the Chinese people.

A delegation of Chinese medical experts arrived in Tehran on Saturday with a cargo of aid to help combat the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19.

## سفیر چین: باور داریم ایران بر بحران کرونا غلبه خواهد کرد

سفیر جمهوری خلق چین در تهران ابراز امیدواری کرد ایران بر بحران شیوع ویروس کرونا غلبه خواهد کرد.

به گزارش ایرنا، چانگ هوا روز دوشنبه در حاشیه دیدار با محمودرضا پیروی دبیرکل جمعیت هلال احمر ایران گفت: ما باور داریم که با ارسال کمک های انساندوستانه از سوی دوستان دولت ایران از بحران این بیماری عبور خواهد کرد.

دیپلمات ارشد چین در ادامه ضمن قدردانی از جمعیت هلال احمر ایران به عنوان نخستین سازمان بشردوستانه عضو جمعیت های ملی صلیب سرخ و هلال احمر که محموله های کمک را برای مردم چین ارسال کرد، گفت: ما هم با شدت گرفتن ویروس کرونا در کنار ایران هستیم.

## Southern right whales could face new threat from ocean heating, study warns

The world's rapidly changing oceans could pose a new threat to southern right whales, a new study suggests.

Southern right whales were nearly hunted to extinction in the early 20th century. However, after an international ban on hunting right whales was introduced in the 1930s, populations began to rise again in the Southern Ocean.

This recovery was hailed as one of conservation's greatest success stories by Sir David Attenborough in his recent documentary series Seven Worlds, One Planet.



But new research suggests that recent declines in food availability, and therefore reproductive success, for South Africa's southern right whale population could be linked to rising ocean temperatures and changes to sea ice levels in parts of Antarctica, the Guardian reported.

Southern right whales are migratory animals who feed as far south as Antarctica in the spring before returning further north to sheltered coastal areas in South Africa, South America, Australia and New Zealand to breed in the winter.

The study found that, since the 1990s, South Africa's southern right whales have begun hunting for food further north – possibly in an attempt to adjust to environmental change in the ocean. However, this change in strategy appears to be linked to declines in reproductive success.

"What we found is that the whales are changing their behaviour," Dr Emma Carroll, study co-author and ecologist at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, told The Independent.

"South African southern right whales are feeding further north and on different prey in the last five years than they did in the 1990s. The bad news is that this change is linked to poorer outcomes for the population's recovery."

"Essentially, we think that they are changing their behaviour but not fast enough to keep up with the changing oceans."

The scientists hypothesise that this behaviour shift could be in response to a decline in the abundance of Antarctic krill, a key food source for the whales. Previous research has linked the decline in krill to rising ocean temperatures and sea ice decline in parts of Antarctica.

The new research is published in the journal Global Change Biology and was led by Gideon van den Berg, a masters student at the University of Pretoria in South Africa.

To understand how the whales' behaviour is changing, the scientists used biopsy samples collected in the 1990s, 2015-16 and 2019.

"We used micro-chemical markers that vary predictably across the Southern Ocean and are stable over time, kind of like a map," said Dr Carroll. "The microchemical markers in the whale's skin tell us where on the map they have been feeding."

By looking at markers taken from the 1990s to 2019, the scientists were able to determine where the whales had been feeding over time.

Southern right whales are "capital breeders" – meaning they consume large amounts of food in the summer and then use their energy reserves to sustain them and their calves through the reproductive season.

The whales typically breed every three years. But, recently, South Africa's southern right whale population has switched to breeding every four to five years, said Dr Carroll.

"We think it is because of problems getting enough food," said Dr Carroll. "Without enough food during summer, mums don't store enough fat to sustain them and their calves over winter."

"They need a lot of fat because the calf, which is four to five metres long when born, will grow about one metre per month, and mum will lose about 25 per cent of her body size while nursing her baby."

A reduction in breeding could lead to declines in population numbers, she added.

"This means fewer southern right whales along the South African coast – and a slower population recovery from whaling," she said.

## LET'S LEARN PERSIAN

(Part 94)

(Source: saadifoundation.ir)

۱. همه همدان دوست، را دارند

۲. دید علی، را در همدان، دوستش

۳. به، با، غار رفت، دوستش، علی

۴. ما، گنجنامه، میرویم، به، با هم

۵. دوست، شب، به، می‌رسد، اینجا، ما

۶. را، می‌دهند، کتیبه‌ها، تاریخ نشان

### Conjunction (Relative)

(موصول)

The conjunction که may be called a relative pronoun, meaning "that, which, who or whom", when it refers back to a previous word or phrase:

مریم اهل همدان است، مریم در تهران زندگی می‌کند.

مریم که اهل همدان است در تهران زندگی می‌کند.

تعمیر ۳. چله‌ها را با که ترکیب کنید

۱. پایاظهار شاعر معروفی است. پایاظهار آرامگاه قشنگی دارد.

۲. ابن سینا دانشمند بزرگی است. ابن سینا کتاب‌های زیادی نوشته است.

۳. مینو با من دوست است. او به دانشگاه تهران می‌رود.

۴. غار علی‌صدر غار آبی بزرگی است. غار علی‌صدر نزدیک همدان است.

۵. لاله‌چین محل کوچکی است. لاله‌چین با همدان فاصله دارد.

۶. خانی در اتوبوس است. آن خانم به دیدن کتیبه‌ها می‌رود.

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**GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING**

Love children and be kind to them and keep your promises to them since they only know you as their providers.

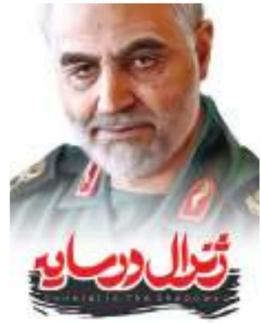
Prophet Muhammad (S)

## Game showing Commander Soleimani in battle for breaking ISIS siege of Amerli produced

Amerli, an Iraqi town of Shia Turkmen located in the Tooz District of Saladin Governorate, was besieged by the ISIS terrorists from June 2014, cutting off access to food, electricity and water.

On August 31, the Quds Force, the overseas arm of the IRGC under the command of Soleimani, joined the Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and the Popular Mobilization Units – Hashd al-Shaabi, breaking the siege, which was described by some top analysts as Iraq's biggest victory against ISIS.

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



A poster for "General in the Shadows".

Earlier last week, MATNA announced that it had created an action-adventure game named "Ambassador of Love", whose producer called it the largest Iranian-Islamic computer game project.

"Ambassador of Love" is a third-person action-adventure game that starts with the journey of Muslim ibn Aqil al-Hashimi (AS), the messenger of Imam Hussein (AS), to Kufa a few days before the Ashura uprising that led to the martyrdom of the Imam and his companions in 680.

Jafari Jozani has compared the game with world-renowned games such as "Gears 5" and "Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order".

## Iranian bookstores offer "A Map Is Only One Story"

Twenty Writers on Immigration, Family, and the Meaning of Home" compiled by Nicole Chung and Mensah Demary has recently been published in Persian.

Khazeh Publications in Tehran is the publisher of the book translated into Persian by Mahmud Qolipour.

From rediscovering an ancestral village in China to experiencing the realities of American life as a Nigerian, the search for belonging crosses borders and generations. Selected from the archives of Catapult magazine, the essays in "A Map Is Only One Story" highlight the human side of immigration policies and polarized rhetoric, as twenty writers share provocative personal stories of existing between languages and cultures.

Victoria Blanco relates how those with family in both El Paso and Ciudad Juárez experience life on the border. Nina Li Coomes recalls the heroines of Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki and what they taught her about her bicultural identity. Nur Nasreen Ibrahim details her grandfather's crossing of the India-Pakistan border sixty years after Partition. Krystal A. Sital writes of how undocumented status in the United States can impact love and relationships. Through the power of personal narratives, as told by both emerging and established writers, "A Map Is Only One Story" offers a new definition of home in the twenty-first century.

Mensah Demary is a founding editor of Catapult and Nicole Chung is the editor in chief of the magazine and the author of "All You Can Ever Know".

Nicole was born severely premature, placed for adoption by her Korean parents, and raised by a white family in a sheltered Oregon town. From childhood, she heard the story of her adoption as a comforting, prepackaged myth. She believed that her biological parents had made the ultimate sacrifice in the hope of giving her a better life, that forever feeling slightly out of place was her fate as a transracial adoptee. But as Nicole grew up, facing prejudice her adoptive family couldn't see, finding her identity as an Asian American and as a writer, becoming ever more curious about where she came from, she wondered if the story she'd been told was the whole truth.

With warmth, candor, and startling insight, Nicole tells of her search for the people who gave her up, which coincided with the birth of her own child. "All You Can Ever Know" is a profound, moving chronicle of surprising connections and the repercussions of unearthing painful family secrets - vital reading for anyone who has ever struggled to figure out where they belong.

# Syrian cultural centers to remember Commander Soleimani with art exhibitions

Two cultural centers in the Syrian capital of Damascus will open two exhibitions of posters and photos of Qassem Soleimani on January 6 to commemorate the first martyrdom anniversary of the Iranian commander.

The Kafarsouseh Center will be hosting a photo exhibition entitled "Narrative of Love", which will display the photos of Soleimani's funeral procession.

Posters by a group of artists are also scheduled to be showcased in an exhibition titled "Only for God" at the Aburmaneh Center.

Soleimani, the chief of IRGC Quds Force, was assassinated during a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on January 3.

The events have been organized by Syria's Ministry of Culture in collaborations with Iran's Cultural Center in Syria and the Art Bureau of the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization.

The Art Bureau in Tehran has launched a campaign named "My Hero" to remember Commander Qassem Soleimani, a few days before the first anniversary of his assassination.

The campaign takes its name from an album the bureau released last week featuring nine ballads composed by Alireza Qazveh, Reza Yazdani, Ali-Mohammad Moaddab, Mohammad-Hossein Nemat, Faezeh Zarafshan, Milad Habibi, Mohammadreza Shafiei and Omid Mahdinejad.

The main goal of the campaign is to promote the album "My Hero", and also help the singing style of ballads find its way among the citizens, and thereby discover talented youths.

After his martyrdom, Soleimani has become the subject of several films, theatrical productions and festival programs.

In February, only one month after his martyrdom, the courtyard of Tehran's City Theater Complex hosted some open-air performances named "The Soldier" on the military life of the commander.

The play, which was performed in three acts, was written by Amir-Hossein Shafiei and directed by Pejman Shahverdi.

The first act of the play was dedicated to Soleimani's leadership of Iranian forces during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

His role in the victory of the Lebanese in the Israeli 33-Day War of 2006 was spotlighted in the second stage.

The last act of the drama focused on the key role he played in the defeat of the ISIS terrorists in Syria and Iraq.

"The Soldier" was a joint production of Iran's General Office for Dramatic Arts and the Islamic Revolution and Sacred Defense Theater Association.

Recently, young filmmaker Behnam Bahadori announced that he has made a short documentary named "Green Zone" about the good conduct of Commander



An illustration by Negin Tajik.

## Children's Shahnameh illustration contest announces winners

Winners of a children's Shahnameh illustration contest organized by the Ferdowsi Foundation on the sidelines of the 2nd Shahnameh and Children International Conference were announced on Monday.

In a call published by the organizer, children were asked to illustrate stories from Ferdowsi's epic masterpiece Shahnameh, including journeys of Eskandar, Kingdom of Bahram Gur, Kingdom of Anushirvan, Kingdom of Khosro Parviz and stories of Buzarjomehr.

The winners were members of the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) from different cities.

Setayesh Rahimi, Negin Tajik and Mahdis Azizi from different cities in Isfahan Province, and Azal Dabirian from West Azarbaijan Province were the winners of the contest.

The Shahnameh millennium was accepted on UNESCO's 2010 calendar of events.

The Shahnameh, in which the Persian national epic found its final and enduring form, was completed in 1010. It was written for Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna. However, he didn't welcome it because of the Shia religion of Ferdowsi.

According to some historical sources on Persian literature, Ferdowsi spent 30 years writing the Shahnameh, which is comprised of nearly 60,000 verses.

Also known as the "Book of Kings" in English, the Shahnameh is based mainly on the Khwaday-namak, a history of the kings of Persia in Pahlavi (Middle Persian) from mythical times down to the 7th century.

For nearly 1000 years, Shahnameh has remained one of the most popular works in the Persian-speaking world.

## Persian writer's new poetry collections feature teenage concerns

Iranian writer Kamal Shafiei has said that his latest two poetry collections feature concerns of the teenage years.

The Gooya House of Culture and Art has recently released his new collection, "If Trees Could Walk".

"The collection contains 30 new poems and a selection of works I had composed long ago," Shafiei told the Persian service of Honaronline on Monday.

"I've tried to feature the teenage years as they seem and talk about their concerns," he added.

Shafiei called the teenage years the most important period of life "because children begin seeking independence and shape their



Front cover of Iranian writer Kamal Shafiei's poetry collection "In the Silence of Sands".

social characters in this period."

"The teenage years are also the most sensitive period of everyone's life. They need

an atmosphere to care about and respect them," he added.

He noted, "Cultural products, especially those in literature and poetry created for an audience of young adults, should not deem [teenagers] as people who have no choice, because the teen years are the period of choices."

"Poetry for young adults should lead them toward creative thought and raise questions in their minds. We see that the characteristics of the teen years in our country are changing, and poets should keep up with these changes, otherwise, their works will not be welcomed by the young adults," he stated.

Shafiei's other series "Thousand Times

More" and "First Apples of the Yard" will soon be published by Madreseh Publications and the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) respectively.

He is currently working on a book that will provide a comparative study of Iranian and foreign novels. He said that novelists are the target audience of this study, which will be published in the near future.

He is the composer of "In the Silence of Sands", a poetry collection for young adults, which has been published by the IIDCYA.

The institute also published the Braille version of these books last summer.

## Iranian photographers added to global list of Hundred Heroines

Iranian photographers Fatemeh Behbudi, Shadi Qadirian and Azadeh Akhlaqi have been added to Hundred Heroines, a pioneering list of global women photographers.

Hundred Heroines was initiated by the Royal Photographic Society in 2018 to mark the centenary of the women's right to vote in the UK by identifying outstanding female photographers from around the globe.

"The initiative increased public awareness of the contribution that women have made in photography and continue to make globally to the medium and to society," the organizers have said in a statement.

"We can now build on its international success to ensure that women's voices continue to be heard," they added.

"Through their work, heroines worldwide are using photography to change perceptions of women by highlighting inequalities, pushing boundaries, tackling taboo subjects,



A photo from Iranian photographer Fatemeh Behbudi's series "Mothers of Patience".

examining difficult social issues and challenging norms," they stated.

Behbudi has been selected for her collection "Mothers of Patience", also known as "Waiting Mothers", which depicts those Iranian mothers who are looking forward to hearing from their sons or other beloved ones who have been missing in action since the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

Akhlaqi has been picked for her staged photos on the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Qadirian was added to the list for several collections of her staged photos of Iranian women.

Del Barrett, the founder of Hundred Heroines, has said, "We're excited by the names on this list, but there's still so much incredible work which isn't being recognized. The mission of Hundred Heroines remains vital; it is imperative that our journey continues."

## Iran National Instruments Orchestra to give concert online

Member of the Technical Council of the Iran National Instruments Orchestra Ali-Akbar Qorbani said that the ensemble will be giving an online concert with vocalists Vahid Taj and Rashid Vatandoost, probably in late January.

"In this concert, part of the repertoire will be accompanied without lyrics, while the second part will be dedicated to Iranian songs to be performed by Taj, and Azerbaijani songs to be performed by Vatandoost," Qorbani said.

"We still don't know how we are going to offer the concert to the audience. The concert will be for free and we have plans to repeat the concert if it is warmly welcomed," he added.

He also added that during the pandemic he has published a book, which contains a selection of his personal compositions and two older ones by other musicians that he has arranged anew.

Asked his opinion about online teaching classes of music, Qorbani said that he believes online teaching has its own difficulties.

"Keeping face to face with students is much easier and has better quality, however, online instruction has provided better opportunities for students who live far away and find it difficult to attend classes. Those [students] can make better use of the online classes."

Earlier in May during the pandemic, the Iran National Instruments Orchestra



The Iran National Instruments Orchestra gives a performance during the 34th Fajr Music Festival, February 2019. (Fajrmusic.ir)

in collaboration with the Azerbaijani virtuoso Ramiz Guliyev released the music

video, "Lullaby".

The idea came from the orchestra and Guliyev warmly welcomed it, saying that listening to music in these difficult days of quarantine even for a short period of time can help relieve stress and encourage people.

The orchestra proposed several compositions and Guliyev proposed "Lullaby" by Azerbaijan's most distinguished composer, Vasif Adigozelov.

Members of the orchestra and Guliyev recorded their performances for the video separately under the supervision of Qorbani.

The members of the orchestra were Alireza Daryai, Kurosh Danaei, Shahin Safai, Maryam Khodabakhsh, Masud Firuznejad, Forugh Fazli and Amin Heidari.