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**GENERAL SOLEIMANI INTERNATIONAL HERO**



# 100% sure about 20% enrichment

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## Iran decision to enrich uranium up to 20% was predictable: Russian diplomat

TEHRAN – A senior Russian diplomat has said that Iran's decision to increase uranium enrichment level up to 20% was predictable.

The diplomat, Mikhail Ulyanov, who is Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, was commenting on a tweet by Gerard Araud, the former French ambassador to the U.S.

Following Iran's move to inform the UN nuclear watchdog of its intention to increase uranium enrichment purity, Araud said the U.S. could have forecast this decision when

it withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal –officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – in May 2018.

"In a confrontation, you should always think of what could be the reaction of the other side if you make a move. Foreign policy is a chess game. When leaving the nuclear deal, the US could have forecast this one. I am only surprised the Iranians waited for so long," the former French diplomat said in a tweet on Saturday.

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## Foreign investment in industrial, trade sectors up 128% in 9 months

TEHRAN - The Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade has approved 104 foreign investment projects valued at about \$1.477 billion in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2020), up 128 percent compared to the last year's same period.

According to the latest data released by the ministry, in the mentioned nine-month period, 129 foreign investment cases valued at \$4.384 billion were approved in

the country, of which 33 percent, in terms of value, was the share of the industry, mining, and trade sectors.

Foreign investment approved by the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry in the first nine months of this year increased 48 percent and 128 percent in terms of number and value, respectively, compared to the same period of time in the past year.

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## Commander Soleimani's autobiography "I Feared Nothing" released

TEHRAN – Lieutenant-General Qassem Soleimani's autobiography "I Feared Nothing" was released on Sunday.

The book was introduced on Sunday at IRIB International Conference Center during a special meeting attended by Martyr Soleimani's daughter Zeinab, Academy of Persian Language and Literature director Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, IRIB

Managing Director Abdolali Ali-Asgari and a number of cultural figures.

Zeinab said that her father wrote the book with his injured hand adding, "The book is an account of the life of a man from the heart of a remote village of Kerman [Province] who had recounted some parts of his simple and compelling life story for you before."

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## Consistency is key to Persepolis' success: Ivankovic

BY FARROKH HESSABI

TEHRAN – Ex-Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic says that the consistency has been a key to the team's success over the past years.

At the beginning of 2021, Branko Ivankovic, the former coach of the Iran national football team and Persepolis and the Oman national team's current coach, talked in an exclusive interview with Tehran Times. Among other things, the Croatian coach discussed the 2020 year, revealed his goals for the Oman national team, the situation of Persepolis, and his dreams for 2021.

Tehran Times: Happy New Year, Mr. Branko Ivankovic. What is difference between this New Year's holiday with the former years?

I'm with my family in my hometown Varazdin in Croatia for the New Year. Finally, after a few months away from home, due to international restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, I'm with my family for the Christmas holiday with the permission of Oman Football Federation. The main difference with the previous years is that public places are closed in my country and as far as I know in Europe. People used to gather in the streets to celebrate in previous years, but now we can't see such gatherings. Families are limited in their connections with their relatives and also regarding travels to other cities or countries.

**2020 was a year that nobody predicted. In your opinion, how was it as a year in general?**

It was not a very good year! A very turbulent and dramatic year around the world for all the nations. Apart from the deaths and the health problem caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected and is still affecting all world economies. Many people in all continents have lost their jobs and cannot do their previous jobs again. The economic problems and the infectious disease caused by the coronavirus have made life more difficult for people around the world. In general, 2020 wasn't the year any of us expected and wasn't a good year.

**What is your assessment of the year 2020 regarding your own career? How would you describe the expectations or goals you hope to accomplish with the Oman national team in a long-term process?**

*Continued on page 3*

## Gen. Soleimani led Russia-Syria-Iran-Iraq-Hezbollah coalition against terrorism: Venezuelan ambassador

TEHRAN – The Venezuelan ambassador to Tehran describes the coalition created by Russia, Syria, Iran and Iraq, which also includes the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement, as one of the most capable alliances in the war against terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq.

Carlos Antonio Alcalá Cordones says this coalition was led by Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated in a U.S. drone strike near Baghdad's international airport on January 3, 2020.

"One of the most important coalitions, led by Martyr Qassem Soleimani, was the Russia-Syria-Iran-Iraq (RSII) coalition, which was later renamed as 4+1 due to the joining of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance group. The military coalition was formed to deal with the conflicts in Syria and Iraq," Ambassador Antonio Alcalá Cordones tells the Tehran Times as Iran is marking the martyrdom anniversary of General Soleimani.

The ambassador also says the United States

and its allies have launched a "hybrid war" against Iran which includes both economic sanctions and acts of terrorism.

"We should mention the hybrid war waged by the United States and its allies through economic sanctions and terrorist attacks against Iran," the top Venezuelan diplomat to Iran notes.

In the newest act of state terrorism against the Islamic Republic, Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, a top Iranian nuclear expert, was assassinated in a road outside Tehran on November 27. Iran has said Israel is directly responsible for the terrorist act.

Analysts believe the assassination was a joint project by Israel and the United States. Professor Hossein Askari, who teaches international business at George Washington University, says he is "almost sure" that the assassination of Fakhri-zadeh was a joint project carried out by the Israeli prime minister the U.S. president.

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## Mass New Year party breaks up in France amid coronavirus fears

Revelers began leaving an illegal New Year rave party in northwestern France that drew about 2,500 people, led to clashes with police and sparked concerns it could spread the coronavirus.

Police had failed to stop the underground event, set up in two warehouses in Lieuron, south of Rennes in Brittany on Thursday.

Such mass gatherings are strictly prohibited across France to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and a nationwide 8:00pm (19:00 GMT) curfew, which was not lifted for New Year, applies across the country, al Jazeera reported.

The local prefecture said on Saturday the music had been switched off after two nights and the first revelers began leaving the site before dawn.

"There has been no intervention by security forces," it said in a statement, but added that police were checking all those leaving the site.

Only "a few hundred" revelers remained,

the prefecture said, quoting an association that oversees the security risks of such events.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said on Twitter that the large police presence at the site had led to the breakup of the rave "without violence".

About half of the car park at the site was empty Saturday morning, according to AFP news agency. Local gendarmes tried to "prevent this event but faced fierce hostility from many partygoers" who set one of their cars on fire and threw bottles and stones, the prefecture said in a statement.

Those present had come from across France and even abroad, it said.

Prosecutors have opened an investigation into the illegal organization of a musical gathering and premeditated violence against people in authority.

Participants interviewed by AFP said the revelers had included partygoers from foreign countries, including Spain and the United Kingdom.

## Isfahan reopens tourist sites after 45-day coronavirus shutdown

TEHRAN- Museums and other cultural heritage sites in Isfahan have been allowed to reopen doors to the public after 45 days of closure resulting from soaring numbers of confirmed coronavirus infections in the central Iranian province.

Simultaneously with the third wave of COVID-19 in late November, over 500 historical sites, tourist attractions, and museums under the supervision of the tourism ministry went on lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus, provincial tourism chief has said.

However, as coronavirus lockdown measures

are relaxed gradually in the country, the sites could start their activities according to the announcement and decision of the Coronavirus Control Operations Headquarters, Fereydun Allahyari said on Sunday. Strict sanitary and social distancing requirements are being observed carefully in these tourist destinations, the official added.

In mid-November, the Iranian authorities imposed lockdown once again in the capital and some 150 Iranian cities defined as the high-risk "red" zones due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Due to a sharp rise in the number of coronavirus infections and deaths, all historical sites as well as all art and cultural centers, universities, schools, seminaries, English schools, libraries, movie theaters, mosques, beauty salons, and several other entities have been shut down once again.

The cultural heritage museums and historical sites have so far been closed and reopened for times from the pandemic's early days onward in a preventive measure to curb the disease.

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## Iraqis march on Gen. Soleimani, al-Muhandis assassination anniversary

TEHRAN - People in Iraq attended nationwide rallies to commemorate the first anniversary of the U.S. assassination of top Iranian and Iraqi anti-terror commanders, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The rally in the capital Baghdad began at 1 p.m. local time (1000 GMT) on Sunday, with participants gathering at Tahrir Square, Press TV reported.

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## General Soleimani: A superhero who stood up to reveal the ugly face of Western interferences

BY SONJA VAN DEN ENDE

On 3 January 2020 General Qassem Soleimani was brutally assassinated, with a specific targeted drone strike, in Baghdad, Iraq, by the United States. This was a terrible barbaric act of war on a great and high standing general, who was the driving force in eliminating the U.S. and Western funded terrorist group ISIS (DAESH).

General Qassem Soleimani was a hero, especially in Syria, where he is always remembered as the hero of Al-Qusayr, a small Christian town 35 kilometers from Homs and 15 kilometers from the Lebanese border, in the Rif Dimashq area. A key town, where the Dutch priest Father Frans van der Lugt established his religious Al-Ard (the earth) center, for disabled and sick people. The Dutch priest was murdered by DAESH terrorists in April 2014 and his grave can be visited in Homs. Al-Qusayr town was strategically important because of the illegal weapons flow from Western countries, transported through Al-Qusayr in Syria. The small town is not far from the Lebanese border. General Soleimani appeared in many places and battles in Syria and was giving his support to Hezbollah and the Syrian Arab Army. He was the strategic master of many battles against DAESH in Syria.

Also, he had a great reputation in Iraq, where ISIS conquered, with help of the U.S. and Western countries, large parts of the country and established a so-called Caliphate.

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## Gen. Soleimani assassination will remain in history forever: Hezbollah chief

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** – Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary general of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement, said on Sunday that the assassination of Lt. General Qassem Soleimani will “definitely be recorded in history forever”.

Nasrallah also said, “Perhaps the funeral of Gen. Soleimani was the greatest one in the history of mankind.”



In a televised speech through Al-Manar TV, Nasrallah also offered condolences to Muslims over the martyrdom anniversary of Gen. Soleimani and Second-in-Command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU) Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The two anti-terror commanders were assassinated near Baghdad International Airport on Jan. 3, 2020, by the U.S.

Described the assassination as a “tragedy”, the Hezbollah chief said, “It’s a duty to talk about favors offered by General Soleimani to the Muslim

ummah.”

He added, “Tensions have been high in the region and the Zionist entity is on alert on the first martyrdom anniversary of Soleimani and al-Muhandis.”

The Hezbollah secretary general also hailed Iran's unconditional support for the resistance movement in the fight against terrorism.

“When we thank Iran, this is out of loyalty to those who backed and supported us to liberate our country,” Nasrallah said.

Hezbollah succeeded to liberate southern Lebanon from the Israeli occupation in 2000. Israel had occupied southern Lebanon in 1982.

“One of the main factors of victory is loyalty and loyalty requires us to thank all those who have backed us,” the Hezbollah chief said.

## Foreign Ministry: Iran won't rest until it brings Gen. Soleimani assassins to justice

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** – The Foreign Ministry posted a statement on its website saying that Iran will never forget or forgive the criminal assassination of Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani by the United States and will not rest until it brings the perpetrators to book.

Following is the text of the statement:

On January 3, 2020, Lt. Gen. Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. drone strike near Baghdad airport after he arrived in the city to meet the Iraqi Prime Minister.

The assassination was called unlawful by a UN Special Rapporteur and was a violation of security agreement between Washington and Baghdad. It caused a wave of popular protests against the American military presence in West Asia.

Martyr Soleimani will be remembered for his courage, wisdom and an unparalleled role in the fight against terrorism and extremism.

The Iranian nation will never forget and will never forgive the criminal assassination and will not rest until brining those responsible to justice.

## Iraq does not back any anti-Iran decision, says envoy

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** – Iraqi Ambassador to Tehran Nasir Abdul Mohsen Abdullah says his country does not support any decision against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

“Iraq has been fundamentally against the proposal at the United Nations,” Abdullah said in an interview with IRNA on Saturday, referring to a recent U.S. attempt to re-establish a team of experts within the UN to monitor sanctions on Tehran.

He said Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi has sent a message to Iran to underline that Iraq does not support any decision against the Islamic Republic.

“Iran is a friendly and brotherly neighboring country and we have close relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Abdullah said.

“Iraq's strict policy has always been to oppose any decision or action against all its neighbors, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran,” the Iraqi envoy added.

On Thursday, the outgoing administration of U.S. President Donald Trump voted against the UN's budget of \$3.231 billion for 2021, citing disagreements on Israel and Iran.

Only Israel sided with the U.S., as the other 168 nations voted in favor of the annual budget that is traditionally approved by consensus.

With regard to Iran, the U.S. was unhappy due to the lack of support for its attempt to re-establish a team of experts within the UN to monitor sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

The U.S., under Trump, withdrew from a multilateral agreement on Iran's nuclear program in May 2018 and unilaterally slapped harsh economic sanctions on Tehran under what it called the “maximum pressure” policy.

Since its withdrawal from the deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Washington has been threatening other countries to cut trade with Iran or face punishments.

The other signatories of the nuclear deal – namely Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany – have opposed Washington's coercive measures, and rejected several anti-Iran measures initiated by the United States.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said last week that his administration is seriously pursuing the nullification of the U.S. sanctions.

“That the Leader told [us] to neutralize the sanctions, we are pursuing this moment by moment. Every time money enters the country and goods are exported, you should know that hours of fights have been behind it,” Rouhani pointed out.

He explained that this is something that has been done “for hours and moments” since more than two years ago, when the U.S. withdrew from the nuclear agreement and introduced the harshest sanctions in history against Iran.

The United States' sanctions have severely hampered Iran's power to contain the coronavirus outbreak, which has so far claimed the lives of 55,540.

President Rouhani also said the sanctions have prevented Iran's access to the coronavirus vaccines, adding that this is the case for all drugs and goods that Iran wants to import.

“But we overcome this problem, and we are overcoming this problem on a daily basis, and we are nullifying sanctions on both exports and imports,” he added.

# Gen. Soleimani foiled U.S. plot to break up regional countries: IRGC spokesman

‘The Americans did not expect General Soleimani to become a national hero’

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** – The spokesman for the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has said the assassinated commander, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, had successfully thwarted the U.S. conspiracies in the region, including disintegrating countries.

“America was busy in the region looting nations and disintegrating Islamic countries, but Martyr Soleimani created and led a front that disrupted the U.S. goals in the region and prevented the [global] arrogance's dream from coming true,” Brigadier General Ramazan Sharif said, IRNA reported on Sunday.

Sharif said the formation of a powerful Islamic force for the first time in 200 years helped Muslims fight unitedly against a common enemy.

The Americans did not expect General Soleimani to become a national hero, he said, pointing to various failed tactics adopted by Washington to distort Soleimani's image in Iran and across the region.

January 3 marks the first anniversary of the U.S. assassination of General Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).



He was admired as the region's most potent counter-terrorism commander.

He was Iran's lead military advisor helping Iraq and Syria defeat foreign-backed

Takfiri terrorist groups such as Daesh (ISIS).

General Soleimani was martyred in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad during an official visit. His Iraqi trenchmate Muhan-

dis, deputy commander of Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'abi anti-terror force, was also killed along with their other companions when their convoy was hit.

A few days after the assassination and as the “first slap”, the IRGC unleashed a barrage of missiles on January 8 at the United States' Ain al-Assad air base in the

## Soleimani played ‘vital role’ in fighting terrorism: American analyst

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** – An American political analyst says Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani played a “vital” role in fighting against terrorism in the region, especially the Daesh (ISIS) terrorist group.

“I understand that he was a person of great integrity and high principles. His role in fighting terrorism was vital: He was a key figure in the anti-Daesh leadership,” Patrick Lawrence told Tasnim in an interview published on Saturday.

“To begin, the criminal assassination of Qassem Soleimani a year ago this week was not President Trump's decision. As we have seen many times over the past four years, those around Trump imposed foreign policy decisions upon him,” Lawrence said.

He said that Soleimani's assassination was the doing of U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo and Defense Secretary Esper, adding that the two American officials presented the plan to Trump as a fait accompli a matter of hours before the drone strike occurred.

January 3 marked the first anniversary of the U.S. assassination of General Soleimani, the commander of Iran's IRGC Quds Force. He was admired as West Asia's most influential anti-terror commander.

He was martyred in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad during

an official visit. His Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'abi anti-terror force, was also killed along with their other companions when their convoy was hit.

Lawrence said the role of Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE in the assassination is not entirely clear at this point. “However, coordination among the U.S. and these nations is now a well-established reality.”

On the possibility of an attack against Iran, he said, “I don't think there is any real threat of an attack on Iran.”

“The Pentagon generals know any such thing would be foolhardy, and [Iranian] Foreign Minister [Mohammad Javad] Zarif has been clear about the Islamic Republic's willingness to respond as necessary for its self-defense. In my judgment, this is a final bit of theater authorized by Pompeo in his final days in office,” he argued.

On the characteristics of General Soleimani, the American analyst said Soleimani was a person of great integrity and high principles, who was en route to Saudi Arabia to advance efforts toward a rapprochement between Riyadh and Tehran, having stopped in Baghdad to confer with the Iraqi prime minister.

“I can't think of a worthier and more important contribu-



tion to the cause of regional peace and security,” he stated.

He also said the assassination of General Soleimani was a “turning point” in the effort to get U.S. troops out of West Asia.

“It turned Iraqis decisively against the U.S. presence on Iraqi soil, and one is sure the rest of the region was watching. I would like to see that tragic event as a key moment in Iran's effort to forge a regional security pact and the mechanisms to make it work,” he concluded.

## Zarif to Trump: Be careful of a trap by Israeli agent-provocateurs

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** – Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has warned the lame-duck U.S. President Donald Trump against any provocative moves in the final weeks of his administration, advising him to “be careful of a trap” by “Israeli agent-provocateurs”.

“New intelligence from Iraq indicate that Israeli agent-provocateurs are plotting attacks against Americans—putting an outgoing Trump in a bind with a fake casus belli,” Zarif wrote in a tweet on Saturday.

“Be careful of a trap, @realDonaldTrump. Any fireworks will backfire badly, particularly against your same BFFs,” he added.

It came after two nuclear-capable American B-52 bombers flew over the Persian Gulf on Wednesday in nonstop flights to the region from their U.S.-based hangars. It was the third time in six weeks that American bombers



were conducting long-range flights off the Iranian coast.

The latest deployments came after the U.S. Navy announced the arrival of a nuclear-powered submarine in the Persian Gulf a week earlier. The USS Georgia passed the Strait of Hormuz accompanied by two American

warships, making it the first missile-loaded submarine of its kind to enter the Persian Gulf in eight years.

On Saturday, a senior military advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution underlined the vulnerability of the U.S. military assets in the region, saying Iran is able to easily sink a U.S. aircraft carrier in a few hours.

Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi said the U.S. military forces in the region are currently on the defensive and they know how vulnerable they are.

“My assessment is that they (U.S.) are getting passive due to their weakness. They are concerned that we would carry out operations on the martyrdom anniversary of martyrs Soleimani and Abu Mahdi [al-Muhandis] as well as the martyrdom of Mohsen Fakhrazadeh,” asserted General Rahim Safavi, the former IRGC chief.

## Iraqis march on Gen. Soleimani, al-Muhandis assassination anniversary

Mourners hold a mock funeral procession on the highway leading to Baghdad's airport where the assassination took place

**1 →** Iraq's anti-terror Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), also known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, had called on the people to participate in the million-strong march, dubbed Days of Martyrdom and Sovereignty.

“We are here to commemorate the martyrdom of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and Qassem Soleimani,” one of the demonstrators at Tahrir Square told the Rudaw news agency. “Let us not forget, they sacrificed a lot for Iraq and they defeated America in Iraq.”

Qais al-Khazali, the leader of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq movement, on Friday invited “every honorable citizen of this country to participate in the demonstration of Days of Martyrdom and Sovereignty on Sunday in Tahrir Square.”

Similar rallies took place in the provinces of Basra, Dhi Qar, Maysan, Wasit and Muthanna on Sunday.

General Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and PMU deputy head Muhandis were assassinated along with their companions in a U.S. drone strike authorized by President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

Both commanders were highly popular because of the key role they played in eliminating the Daesh terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

The assassination of General “was a flagrant instance of state terrorism,” Richard Anderson Falk, a professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University, tells the Tehran Times.

Two days after Washington's assassination operation, Iraqi lawmakers approved a bill, demanding the withdrawal of all foreign military forces led by the United States from the country.

In the early hours of Sunday, a ceremony took place at Baghdad Airport to pay tribute to the martyred commanders. Thousands of mourners joined a mock funeral procession on the highway leading to the airport.

According to Al-Jazeera, the scene of the bombing was turned into a shrine-like area sealed off by red ropes, with a photo of Soleimani and al-Muhandis in the middle, as mourners lit candles.

“The protests are focused on demanding that the Iraqi government put pressure on the Americans to withdraw the remaining soldiers from the country,” Al Jazeera's Charles Stratford said.

Professor Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute, commands General Soleimani's leadership in the war against terrorists, especially ISIS. “I am on the record for saying that General Soleimani's legacy will be primarily determined by his leadership in the fight against ISIS,” Adib-Moghaddam tells the Tehran Times.

Speaking at the Sunday event, PMU Chairman Falih al-Fayyadh said, “We are honored to be present at a place where the blood of Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the leaders of the path towards victory, was shed and their bodies were torn apart in the way of God.”

He called for the continuation of the path pursued by the resistance martyrs, emphasizing that the first step in avenging the assassination is to renew allegiance to the commanders.

“Hashd al-Sha'abi is an Ummah and this Ummah is always faithful to the pure blood that was shed,” he added.

Abu Hussain al-Hamidawi, the secretary general of the Kata'ib Hezbollah group, which is part of the PMU, released a statement saying that resistance groups would allow no one

to confiscate their weapons, which are used for defending the country.

“We will keep our promise with the commanders of victory on the path of honor and pride, and we turn into a thousand Soleimanis and Abu Mahdis, with the help of God Almighty,” Hamidavi noted.

Tensions between Tehran and Washington have been rising in the run-up to the first anniversary of top Iranian general's killing.

In a letter to the United Nations Security Council on Thursday, Iran condemned U.S. “military adventurism” in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, and “fake information, baseless accusations and threatening rhetoric” against Tehran.

A day earlier, the U.S. military flew two nuclear-capable B-52 bombers over the Persian Gulf in a message of deterrence to Iran, the latest in a series of such moves in the past month.

“New intelligence from Iraq indicate(s) that Israeli agent-provocateurs are plotting attacks against Americans – putting an outgoing Trump in a bind with a fake casus belli (act justifying war),” Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said in a tweet on Saturday.

“Be careful of a trap, @realDonaldTrump. Any fireworks will backfire badly,” Zarif wrote.

With less than a month left in the White House, Trump is under pressure from key Middle East allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia, to act against Iran, Danny Postel, assistant director of the Center for International and Area Studies at Northwestern University, told Al Jazeera.

“Trump is a very wounded and very cornered animal in an end-game scenario. He's got a few weeks left, and we know that he is capable of extremely erratic behavior,” Postel, an expert on Iran and US foreign policy, said.



## SPORTS

## Consistency is key to Persepolis' success: Ivankovic

**I→** Professionally speaking, I could start a new project with the Oman Football Association to help the Omani national team develop in international competitions. It includes the plans for the senior team's progress and the U23 national team during the negotiation we've had with Sheikh Salem, the president of the football association. The situation has been almost good. However, the coronavirus pandemic affected our plans' main parts, which were scheduled for the past spring and summer to be done. Of course, the condition was the same for the other Asian countries as well. Anyway, all our efforts are to bring the level of football of the Oman national team closer to the top Asian teams' level.



**Persepolis and defeat in the Asian Champions League (ACL) final match; a familiar story for you! What do you think of the 2020 ACL final and its difference from the 2018 version, in which you were on the Persepolis' bench?**

It was a pity that Persepolis couldn't win the trophy in 2020. The main difference with my time as head coach was that I faced a two-window transfer ban, and practically it was not possible for me even to add a young player to my squad list. Furthermore, some of our key players had been injured during the path to the final, like Hossein Mahini. Fortunately, in 2020 the competition was held in a centralized format in a neutral venue. The teams played a single-elimination match in the knockout stage, while we had to travel to other countries in 2018 to play two-legged ties. So, the 2020 edition was easier for Persepolis, who have dominated Iranian football in the past years and have had consistency in the continental competition. It's a key to their success. It was a great opportunity to win the trophy, but unfortunately, two individual mistakes caused Persepolis to lose the game. The mistakes are part of football, and no one should be blamed for them. The Ulsan Hyundai were not an unbeatable opponent for Persepolis, but this is football, and because of such happenings, it has become the most popular sport in the world.

**Are you following the Iran Professional League yet? Are Persepolis favorites to win the trophy for the fifth consecutive season?**

I can assure you that Persepolis are the only team that feel confident in themselves and can repeat their success for the fifth time. It's because they have shown a progressive and rising trend both as a club and as a team, unlike other Iranian teams that have no consistency in their performance and their results despite being at the top of the table for a short time. So, don't doubt Persepolis' ability to win the title for the fifth time.

**Do you think that the departure of players like Shoja Khalilzadeh and Bashar Resan can lead to Persepolis' failure in the current season? Yahya Golmohammadi has been moaning continuously about it. However, many people compare this situation with the team you had in 2018 due to the transfer ban and consider this team much better regarding the players' quality.**

Look, in the last season of my presence at Persepolis, some players added to the team, and some others left the team so that we could strengthen the team after two difficult transfer-window bans. It continued during the time of Gabriel Calderon, and then Yayha Golmohammadi and several players came in or left the squad to keep the team's structure. Definitely, the departure of Bashar and Shoja can create problems for the team. But it's a normal condition for any player to change his team during his career. We cannot blame them, and they should be given the right to decide about their future. I think it's not a good time for Persepolis to think about the players who left the club. Some good players are added to the team in the previous transfer window, and the return of Vahid Amiri and signing of Ehsan Pahlavan, who missed the ACL final match, is a boost for the team. I believe that Persepolis own an organized team with great players and knowledgeable technical staff who have proven their qualities during the last and current season. So, they can achieve more success with current coaches and players.

**Your wishes and goals for 2021?**

Firstly, I wish health for myself, my family and all the people around the world. I hope that the deadly pandemic will be eradicated in 2021, and people find peace of mind not only for 2021 but in the upcoming years and decades. I want to try my best for the Oman national team to progress and accomplish the goals we have set in our project with hard work. Although, it all depends on the pandemic condition again, I hope to do our job in the best way possible.

## Iranian sports photographer Younes Alishiri dies

**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Iranian long-serving sports photographer Younes Alishiri passed away due to lung disease on Sunday.

Alishiri, who was also suffering from Alzheimer's disease, died at the age of 83 in Tehran, capital of Iran.

He was born in Bandar Anzali, north of Iran, and served as a photographer in the country's newspapers and weeklies for more than 60 years.

Younes Alishiri will be laid to rest on Monday in in Tehran's Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery.

Tehran Times extends deepest sympathy to Alishiri's family, loved ones, and friends over his demise.

## 100% sure about 20% enrichment

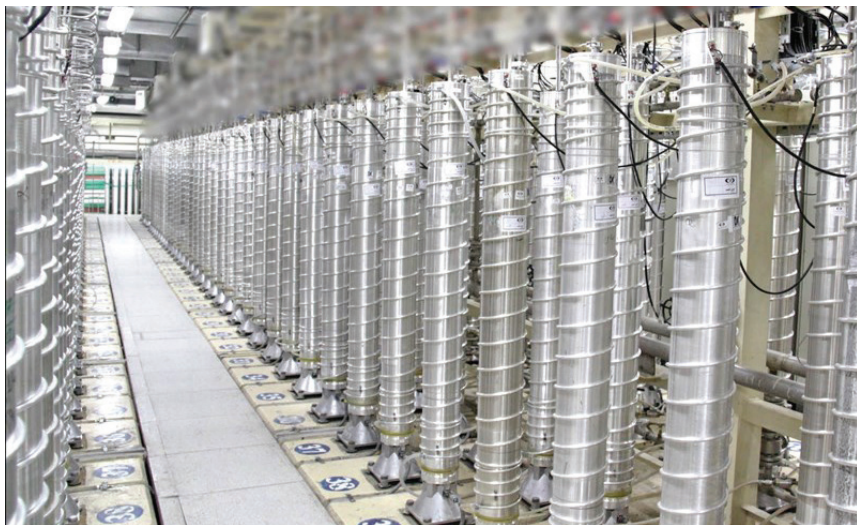
**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — In the latest sign that time is running out for the West to save the Iran nuclear deal, the UN nuclear watchdog has formally announced that it is informed by Tehran that Iran has decided to start enriching uranium to 20%, a major development that could spell the end of a deal that has long been on life support.

Following the leakage of an Iranian letter to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) outlining Iran's intention to resume 20% uranium enrichment, the UN nuclear body put out a statement confirming that Iran has actually informed it of its decision to substantially raise the level of uranium enrichment up to 20 percent, which is well beyond the 3.67% purity limit set by the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"Iran has informed the Agency that in order to comply with a legal act recently passed by the country's parliament, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran intends to produce low-enriched uranium (LEU) up to 20 percent at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant," the IAEA statement said.

Iran has confirmed that it intends to increase its nuclear activities, saying it will raise the level of uranium enrichment "as soon as possible."

"We have sent a letter to the representative of the Islamic Republic to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna to submit it to the Agency. This letter was submitted to the Agency on Friday, informing it that we want to start 20% enrichment in accordance with the parliament law," Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said in



a televised interview on Friday.

The Iranian nuclear official has used a slightly different tone of voice to describe the prevailing political zeitgeist in Tehran.

"God willing, we will start enriching [uranium] up to 20% soon. The president should issue an order. Of course, the president has already issued a preliminary order according to which we sent a letter to the Agency and made the announcement. We are just like a soldier having his hand on the trigger, waiting for the commander to issue an order to open fire. We are ready to do this and God willing, we will do it as soon as possible," he thundered.

The Iranian decision to speed up nuclear activities was taken in line with a recent law passed by the Iranian Parliament, which pushes the government of Hassan Rouhani

into speeding up the nuclear activities in a few months if the Western parties to the JCPOA, especially the Europeans, failed to lift sanctions on Iran.

The nuclear law, officially called "Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions and Protect Nation's Rights," outlines a step-by-step strategy for Iran to force the West into reconsidering its sanctions policy against Iran by increasing nuclear activities. It stipulates that the Iranian government should take certain nuclear measures such as raising the level of uranium enrichment to 20% and suspending the voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in few months if the Western parties failed to honor their obligations under the JCPOA.

The law, which was passed in early No-

## Iran decision to enrich uranium up to 20% was predictable: Russian diplomat

**I→** Ulyanov reacted the Araud's tweet, saying he is right to think that the U.S. should have predicted Iran resuming its nuclear activities.

"Yes, we should have expected something like that, especially in the light of the law adopted recently by the Iranian Parliament. The only question is if this step is being made by Tehran on the right time?" the Russian diplomat tweeted on the same day.

He also confirmed that Iran has submitted a letter to the International Atomic Energy Agency, saying the IAEA director-general has briefed the IAEA Board of Governors and the UN Security Council on the latest Iranian decision.

"IAEA DG reported to the Board of Governors and UNSC about intention of #Tehran to start enrichment up to 20%. Usually, such confidential reports are leaked to media in 10 minutes. Today it happened in about 2 hours. The person who leaks is a human being - relaxed on the holiday," Ulyanov said in a tweet on Friday.

The IAEA has confirmed in a statement that it was informed by Iran of the country's plan to produce 20% enriched uranium.

"Iran has informed the Agency that in order to comply with a legal act recently passed by the country's parliament, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran intends to produce low-enriched uranium (LEU) up to 20 percent at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant," the IAEA statement said.

The JCPOA has set a limit of 3.67% on Iran's uranium



enrichment. But following U.S. President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear deal in May 2018, after a year Iran started to reduce its nuclear commitments, increasing its uranium enrichment level to 4.5%. Iran also accumulated more nuclear materials, including low enriched uranium, than what was permitted under the JCPOA.

**"We are just like a soldier having his hand on the trigger"**

On Friday, the head of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), Ali Akbar Salehi, officially confirmed that Iran has told the IAEA that it will soon start 20% uranium enrichment in line with the recent law passed by the Iranian Parliament requiring the AEOI to make preparations to substantially increase the country's nuclear activities within few months if the Western countries that are party to the 2015 nuclear deal fail to honor their obligations.

## Full pullout of U.S. from the region is main response to Soleimani assassination: Vaezi

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Mahmoud Vaezi, the Iranian president's chief of staff, has said that the main response of Iran to the assassination of Lt. General Qassem Soleimani would be the full withdrawal of the U.S. forces from the region.

Vaezi said that Iran has responded militarily to the assassination of General Soleimani in an American drone strike last year and now it pursues the strategy of pushing the U.S. forces out of the region.

"In terms of the military response, you definitely know that the Islamic Republic of Iran poured missiles down on the American base involved in the assassination of martyr Soleimani. This targeted attack sent a clear message to the Americans that attacking the Islamic Republic of Iran and crossing its red lines will certainly not pass without a response," Vaezi said in an interview with Al-Ahed News.

He added, "However, as mentioned earlier, we view the main response to this crime as paving the way for a complete U.S. withdrawal from the region. Our basic strategy in the region, which we always

made known to neighboring states, is for those countries to ensure security for this region and confront foreign interference. The Hormuz peace plan announced by President Rouhani at the United Nations remains on the table, and we believe that it will be achieved with the help of regional states. We believe that through regional cooperation, we can establish peace and stability, and there is no need for foreigners to be present in the region. The presence of foreigners in the region has so far caused nothing but destruction and wars. We have always adopted this strategy, and after the martyrdom of Soleimani, we became more determined to achieve it."

The Iranian official praised Soleimani's role in the war on terrorism, underlining that the Iranian commander had played a "very clear" role in combating terrorism and supporting the peoples of the region in confronting terrorist groups.

"When the terrorists occupied two-thirds of Syrian territory, the siege they imposed was so severe that we witnessed bombings and terrorist operations near Damascus and near Syrian government institutions. The

situation in Iraq was very similar to that of Syria, where Daesh occupied most of the country, and the level of insecurity peaked. The images of the crimes committed by terrorists in these two countries, and of course in other parts of the world, have not yet been erased from the memory of the countries of the region. Whoever wants to realize the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran and martyr Qassem Soleimani in the region, must compare the images during those days when terrorism dominated the region with the situation today. The defeat of Daesh was the peak of the resistance in the region, and this would not have been possible without martyr General Soleimani and his field command," Vaezi continued.

The Iranian president's chief of staff pointed out that General Soleimani pursued the path of resistance against arrogance for the sake of God and that this path will not come to an end with the martyrdom of General Soleimani.

"In Islam, we do not believe that martyrdom is a conclusion or an end, for martyrdom makes the path to the truth stronger, more dynamic, and higher.

vember, is an indication that Iran is getting really fed up with the Europeans' procrastination. Because the European signatories to the JCPOA – France, Germany and the UK (E3) – have been encouraging Iran to remain committed to the nuclear deal while refraining from ensuring Iran's interests envisioned in the deal. The Europeans have been expressing regret over the Trump administration's withdrawal from the JCPOA, saying all the time that the U.S. should have not abandoned the deal. They made efforts to keep the deal alive and waited out Trump, pretending that the revival of the nuclear deal would be feasible under a Biden administration. They might have even cajoled the Rouhani government into believing that they would revive the nuclear deal in its original version if a Democrat is elected president.

But after Biden won the U.S. presidential election in November, the Europeans quickly showed their true colors by calling for a "nuclear agreement plus" with Iran and throwing away a deal they have been "tirelessly" pretending to save.

Iran is fully aware of the European plots and that is why it has issued an ultimatum to the West that if they don't change course on Iran, it will move forward with its plans to resume its nuclear program.

The Europeans and the Biden team have surely received the Iranian warning. As of this writing, there has been no response by the Europeans and Americans to Iran's letter to the IAEA. It remains to be seen whether they will change tack on Iran. But this time Iran is pretty serious about its threats to resume its nuclear program. Therefore, the Westerners need to quickly move to resolve their differences with Iran before it's too late.

"We have sent a letter to the representative of the Islamic Republic to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna to submit it to the Agency. This letter was submitted to the Agency on Friday, informing it that we want to start 20% enrichment in accordance with the parliament law. Because we must inform the Agency and then its inspectors should come to unseal certain things that have been sealed," the head of the AEOI said, according to a Fars News report.

He added, "God willing, we will start enriching [uranium] up to 20% soon. The president should issue an order. Of course, the president has already issued a preliminary order according to which we sent a letter to the Agency and made the announcement. We are just like a soldier having his hand on the trigger, waiting for the commander to issue an order to open fire. We are ready to do this and God willing, we will do it as soon as possible."

According to Salehi, the decision to increase uranium enrichment purity was made in accordance with the recent law passed by the Iranian Parliament in November.

The nuclear law, officially called "Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions and Protect Nation's Rights," introduces a step-by-step strategy for the government to increase nuclear activities in few months if the other side failed to implement certain commitments. The law is part of a broader strategy that aims to lift the United States sanctions on Iran and was put forward by the lawmakers in early November. It aims to force the United States into lifting sanctions on Iran by doubling down on nuclear activities.

Although Hajj Qassem Soleimani was a hero in fighting terrorism and opposing arrogance, his martyrdom does not mean weakening the axis of resistance. Ironically, thanks to his pure blood, the peoples of the region woke up today, and the axis of resistance has become stronger than ever," Vaezi noted.

The Iranian official also stated that the assassination of General Soleimani broke the backbone and domination of his fake and weak killers.

"In fact, we believe that his martyrdom broke the backbone and dominance of his fake and weak killers. When a country that claims to be a superpower in the world assassinates our military commander in such a treacherous and cowardly manner during an official diplomatic tour, it means that first, you were not a worthy opponent, and second, you are against his legacy. The legacy of martyr Soleimani is clearly evident today, not only in the region but in the whole world, especially since he was the first enemy of the terrorists who had turned the world into an insecure place," Vaezi stated.

The minister denounced U.S. President Donald Trump's "criminal and cowardly" move to assassinate General Soleimani as an "ill-advised measure" that resulted from frustration and was aimed at making up for the American defeats in the region.

"The notion that physical elimination of a person would halt the resistance current was a strategic mistake that Trump made. With his move, he (Trump) has increased the costs of presence of American forces in the region," the defense chief underlined.

He also said that confrontation with the U.S. forces in the region should turn into a constant demand, saying the withdrawal of U.S. from the region is the least price it has to pay.

## U.S. made a 'strategic mistake' by assassinating Gen. Soleimani: Hatami

**POLITICAL** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Sunday that the U.S. made a "strategic mistake" by assassinating top Iranian commander Lt. General Qassem Soleimani, saying such a miscalculation has increased the cost for American military presence in West Asia.

In a message released on the first anniversary of martyrdom of General Soleimani, the defense minister said the assassination was a strategic mistake and miscalculation because the loss of the commander has not affected the resistance movement.

Calling General Soleimani a brave commander in the

war on terrorism, he said the U.S. decided to assassinate him because he thwarted Washington's plots in the region.

"Nations across the region and the world will realize that the U.S. committed such a crime ... in order to support Daesh," the defense minister said, according to Tasnim.

Without the efforts of General Soleimani and his comrades, including the armed forces and popular fighters in Syria and Iraq, the Daesh terrorist group would have conquered the entire region, he added.

Europe, Asia and the U.S. owe their security to General Soleimani's devotion and efforts for the establishment of sustainable peace and security, he stated.



## Foreign investment in industrial, trade sectors up 128% in 9 months

**1 →** Of the total value of investment made in the mentioned period, 87.5 percent was the share of industry, 5.7 percent was the share of mining, while trade-related projects accounted for 6.8 percent of the total figure.

The highest volume of foreign investment approved in the industry, mining, and trade sectors in the period under review were in the categories of chemical materials and products, manufacturing of home appliances, manufacturing of machinery and equipment, as well as printing, and packing industries, respectively.

Germany, China, Turkey, and the UK were the countries with the highest volume of investment, while, Khuzestan, Sistan-Baluchestan, Tehran, Kermanshah, and Qazvin provinces were the top five provinces in terms of the volume of approved foreign investment.

The Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry had approved 75 foreign investment cases valued at about \$1.02 billion in the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-October 21, 2020).

As previously reported by the Industry Ministry, Iran expects a 10-fold increase of foreign investment in the industry and mining sectors by the end of the Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (March 2022).

## Gas storage capacity to reach 6.5bcm by March 2023

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The managing director of Iranian Gas Engineering and Development Company has announced that the country's gas storages' capacity will reach 6.5 billion cubic meters (bcm) by the Iranian calendar year 1402 (starts in March 2023).

Bahram Salavati put the country's current gas storage capacity at 3.25 bcm, and expressed hope that through implementation of different projects the figure will reach 6.5 bcm by the calendar year 1402.

Iran has two major natural gas storage facilities in Sarajeh and Shourijeh, in which every year the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) stores the gas received from gas refineries all over the country to be used in the colder months of the year.

Following the development of the South Pars gas field and the increase in the country's gas production capacity, construction and development of the country's natural gas storage facilities has become a top priority.

Reproduction from Sarajeh and Shourijeh storages increased by 33 percent in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19, 2020) compared to the preceding year, according to Ahmad Rajabi, director of technical affairs at the National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC).

The mentioned storages supply gas to six northern and north-eastern provinces that are far from the southern gas-rich regions, eliminating the need for importing gas from Turkmenistan.

As one of the world's top gas producers, Iran is planning to expand its underground natural gas storage capacity to ensure that enough natural gas is available during peak demand periods to avoid electricity supply shortfalls in the future.

According to the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC)'s plans, the capacity of the two storage facilities, Sarajeh and Shourijeh, is planned to increase to over seven billion cubic meters in future.

Back in November 2019, NIGC announced that the company had awarded the development project of Shourijeh gas storage facility to an Iranian company based on a build-operate-transfer (BOT) contract.

## More than \$14m allocated to Tehran-Hamedan railway

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** —The representative of Hamedan's people to the parliament announced that 600 billion rials (about \$14.28 million) has been allocated to Tehran-Hamedan railway project.

Hamid-Reza Haji-Babaei said this large development project of the province has an independent line in the country's budget bill (for the next Iranian calendar year, which starts on March 21, 2021).



He also put the allocated fund to this project at 300 billion rials (about \$7.14 million) in the budget law of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020-March 20, 2021).

The first passenger train from Tehran to Hamedan was inaugurated in March 2019, establishing a new link between the capital city Tehran, and Hamedan city in west-central Iran.

Construction operations of the rail route started in 2005. Back in November, Deputy Transport Minister Kheirollah Khademi said some 3956 kilometers of roads and railways worth 240 trillion rials (about \$5.7 billion) were going to be inaugurated throughout the country by the end of the Iranian calendar year 1400 (March 2022).

According to Khademi, over 3400 km of new railways are under construction across the country, of which eight projects with a length of 1560 km are the Transport Ministry's priority.

The development of the railway sector is one of the macro policies of the Iranian government as it has been emphasized by the general policies of the Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (2016-2021).

Advantages such as consuming less fuel and creating less pollution as well as high safety attaches priority to the railway when compared to some other transportation systems, and makes its development economically viable.

In this regard, in addition to infrastructure projects, the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (known as RAI) has also been implementing new programs for replacing old wagons and locomotives with new ones to reduce the age of the country's fleet.

As reported, some 521 units of various types of wagons and locomotives worth 13.5 trillion rials (about \$322.8 million) have been produced in the country and joined the national railway fleet since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020).

# Some 17m tons of basic goods imported in 9 months

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Over 17.46 million tons of basic commodities worth \$8.763 billion have been imported to the country during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2020), the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said.

Imports of basic goods in the mentioned period decreased by two percent in terms of weight compared to the same time span in the previous year, according to Rouhollah Latifi.

As reported by the IRICA, more than 2,136,175 tons of basic goods were cleared from the country's customs during the Ninth Iranian calendar months of Azar (November 21- December 20, 2020), about 450,000 tons more than the previous month.

Meanwhile, a total of 25 million tons of commodities were imported into the country during the mentioned nine months, of which 70 percent were basic goods.

Corn, barley, oilseeds, crude and liquid



edible oil, and soybean meal were the top five items imported in the mentioned period, with over 12.296 million tons of the mentioned products worth over \$4.145 being shipped into the country.

The said products accounted for 49 percent of the country's total imports as well as 70.5 percent of the imports of basic goods in the mentioned period, according to Latifi.

Iran imported 25 million tons of basic goods during the previous Iranian calendar year, based on the data released by the IRICA.

According to the IRICA Head Mehdi Mirashrafi, 35 million tons of commodities were imported into the country in the mentioned year, of which 25 million tons were basic goods.

"This year, the trend [of trade] has slowed down, and we hope that with the measures taken by the central bank, the Industry Ministry, and IRICA, we will be able to minimize the deposition of goods in the customs before and after clearance", Mirashrafi said in June.

## Iran to negotiate bartering frozen assets in S. Korea for COVID vaccine

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Hossein Tanhaei, head of the Iran-South Korea Joint Chamber of Commerce, has said the Islamic Republic is going to negotiate to barter its frozen oil money in South Korean banks for the COVID-19 vaccine and other goods.

"Yesterday, we had a meeting with First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri about our country's blocked money in South Korea, and suggestions were made to be presented to South Korea on how to barter our money in this country with a variety of goods including COVID-19 vaccine," Tanhaei told ILNA on Sunday.

The head of the Iran-South Korea Chamber of Commerce referred to an upcoming meeting between the representatives of the two countries on the matter and said: "In yesterday's meeting, we determined the type of commodities that can be bartered, and now we should wait and see that how much the Koreans are willing to cooperate for bartering the commodities specified in our list."

According to the official, raw materials, medicine, petrochemicals, auto parts, home appliances, and related parts are among the prioritized items on the list for bartering.

He put the amount of the money blocked in South Korea at about \$8 billion to \$8.5 billion, saying: "We will consider a sum for the import of each commodity, however, the imports ultimately depend on how much the Koreans are going to cooperate in this regard."

Earlier, President Hassan Rouhani had reacted to Seoul's blocking of Iranian assets, saying: "South Korea's ban on Iran's use of its central bank resources to buy basic goods, medicine, and humanitarian items is by no means acceptable, and we expect Seoul to lift this restriction as soon as possible."

Over the past two years, economic relations between Tehran and Seoul have fallen sharply under the increased U.S. sanctions against Iran.



Before re-imposing U.S. sanctions in 2018, South Korea had \$4 billion in annual exports to Iran and \$8 billion in Iran imports.

## Over \$3.3b invested in CNG development projects

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Head of Tehran Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) Association said the government has invested over 140 trillion rials (about \$3.33 billion) in CNG-related development projects across the country.

According to Ardeshtir Dadras, so far over eight kits and equipment factories, six CNG tank factories, and four compressor factories have been established across the country and the knowledge for the production of more than 80 percent of the parts and equipment used in the CNG industry are indigenized.

Currently, CNG accounts for only two percent of the country's total fuel basket and the figure should be increased to five percent, Dadras said.

Mentioning the country's huge gas re-



serves, the official put the current daily CNG consumption in the country at 22 million cubic meters (mcm), saying that this figure is not desirable considering the level of gas production in the country.

"Given that CNG previously accounted for only 15 percent of the public transport fleet's

fuel basket and the figure has now reached 20 percent, this number can be increased to 35 percent during the Seventh National Development Plan (2022-2026)," he stressed.

Iranian Oil Ministry considers CNG as the national fuel, therefore, the ministry has it on the agenda to increase the share of this fuel in the country's energy basket.

Back in November 2019, the ministry started a program for the rationing of subsidized gasoline and increased fuel prices to reduce the energy subsidies and to use the revenue for supporting underprivileged families.

The implementation of the rationing plan led to the reduction of gasoline consumption, presenting an opportunity for promoting CNG consumption in the country.

In December 2019, the National Irani-

an Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) and Iran's state-owned Iran Khodro Company (IKCO) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to add new dual-fuel vehicles to the country's public transportation fleet.

The mentioned MOU was aimed to add 1.46 million dual-fuel vehicles to the public transportation fleet.

Iran's CNG consumption stood at 19 mcm per day before the implementation of the fuel rationing scheme, however, in mid-September, an official with NIORDC announced that the daily consumption of CNG has reached nearly 23 mcm.

There are currently 2,495 CNG stations across Iran that supply 20 percent of the country's fuel basket.

## Electricity consumption breaks 40GW winter record

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Daily electricity consumption in Iran reached 40,342 megawatts (40.34 gigawatts) on Saturday to register the highest power consumption recorded during the winter season so far, IRNA reported.

Based on the data released by Iran Grid Management Company (IGMC), the recorded figure was 4,741 MW more than the last winter's peak consumption.

The consumption by the Industrial sectors also soared on the mentioned date to reach 5,002 MW.

The increase in the country's electricity consumption comes as due to the decline in the temperature across the country, natural gas consumption has also increased drastically leading to the limitation of fuel supply to the country's power plants.

Earlier on Saturday, the Managing Director of Iran's Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution Management Company (TAVANIR) had announced that the country's power plants were forced to consume liquid fuel instead of natural gas over the past few weeks.



"Due to the increase in gas consumption in the domestic sector, the supply of gas to power plants has been limited, which has led to the consumption of liquid fuel in these plants," Mohammad-Hassan Motevalizadeh said.

Iranian Energy Ministry has been implementing several programs for managing electricity consumption across the

country during the peak periods.

TAVANIR, on Saturday, announced that the company has rewarded domestic subscribers for low electricity consumption with 1.84 trillion rials (about \$43.8 million) of discount on their electricity bills since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2020).

The program for rewarding efficient electricity subscribers was implemented to both reward low-consuming subscribers and to encourage others to consume less.

According to the Energy Ministry, this program was expected to reduce domestic power consumption by 10 percent.

Two programs were also offered for high-consuming subscribers so that by implementing these plans, these subscribers would also join the low-consumer group.

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

## Erbil to host exclusive exhibit of Iranian products in March

**ECONOMY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran will hold an exclusive exhibition of Iranian products in Erbil, the capital city of Iraqi Kurdistan, during March 8-11, Farzad Piltan, the director-general of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO)'s Office of Arabian and African Countries, announced.

He said that according to the TPO's plans in the field of developing trade cooperation with neighboring countries through holding exhibitions and introducing Iranian products, the exclusive exhibition of Iranian products will be held at the Erbil International Exhibition Center in cooperation with the Consulate of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Erbil and under the supervision of (TPO)'s Office of Arabian and African Countries, TPO website published.

This exhibition will host Iranian products

in the fields of constructional materials and equipment, steel and other minerals, home appliances, food, detergents and sanitary materials, and industrial machinery and equipment, and the participants will enjoy the support facilities offered by the TPO, the official added.

Piltan went on to say that considering the suitable fields and capacities for exporting to Iraq, it seems that the presence of Iranian manufacturing companies in this exhibition can play an important role in understanding the market as well as familiarizing Iraqi traders and consumers with the products of these companies.

Iran had also held an exclusive exhibition of Iranian products in Iraqi Kurdistan region's Sulaymaniyah in late January 2020.

Having over 500 kilometers of shared



borders, Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan can use this capacity to expand their trade relations, Iran's Commercial Attaché in Iraq Naser Behzad said on the sidelines of the exhibit.

He described Sulaimaniyah as the gateway to Iraqi Kurdistan and said: "Due to the stability and security of this region, it is possible to transport goods from this center

to other neighboring provinces such as Erbil, Halabja, Diyala and Kirkuk and even other areas of Iraq."

In December 2019, the heads of Iran and the Iraqi Kurdistan region's customs administrations had expressed the two sides' eagerness for the expansion of bilateral customs cooperation.

They made the remarks during a meeting on the sidelines of a workshop held by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) to train 27 employees of Iraqi Kurdistan's customs administration in Tehran.

A memorandum of understanding was also inked by Mehdi Mir-Ashrafi, the head of IRICA, and Samal Abdulrahman Aziz, the head of the Iraqi Kurdistan region's customs administration, in the same day.



# Gen. Soleimani led Russia-Syria-Iran-Iraq-Hezbollah coalition against terrorism: Venezuelan ambassador

**➔** Following is the text of interview with the Venezuelan ambassador:

**Given the specific geopolitical situation in West Asia and the crises that have intensified in the region in recent years, how do you assess Iran's role in the fight against terrorism in the region?**

The regional situation regarding the fight against terrorism and the participation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in it is undoubtedly a very complex issue, and in the analysis that we can do, it is important to consider the geopolitical, religious and ideological issues.

In my view, there are various elements that the Islamic Republic of Iran has strongly defended in its foreign policy, which influence its strategies with allied countries and countries with which it is in conflict. First, its effort to achieve the economic development and growth of its nation. Second, defending its territorial integrity as enshrined in the country's constitution and Islamic principles. Third, defending its religious and ideological beliefs reflected in the confrontation with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United States, whose scenario is one of the constant dangers. And finally, the implementation of a strong internal structure that has allowed it to introduce itself as the main hero and guarantor of regional order. All of these elements, in addition to its constant anti-imperialist approach toward the international system, have led Iran to engage with actors associated with its ideology, such as its relationship with Lebanon's Hezbollah and Shiite groups, and strengthen its influence in the region, through traditional actors such as Syria and Russia.

Support for other strategic actors for which religious tendencies prevail over ideological beliefs, such as Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, are other elements that should be considered in the analysis. It is important to note that Iran has increased its political weight in the region since the Iraq war and is now seen as a direct threat by its enemies, turning this classic hostility through supporting actors in various conflicts in the region into an indirect confrontation.

To this analysis is added the historic struggle for supremacy in a conflict-ridden region whose heroes are precisely Iran and Saudi Arabia. As noted, the Arab Spring changed the regional context by reconfiguring the geopolitical map. The two countries have a clear internal cohesion because their religious populations, mainly Shiites and Sunnis, are also found in other regional countries and have significant military, ideological, cultural and economic capabilities, in a way that both countries have acted in countries with domestic divisions such as Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon and Yemen through actors; and in the case of Iran, this has led to a ground gain in the region.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia also plays an important role, as its foreign policy towards the region is more focused on its neighbors in the Persian Gulf and with a horizontal axis, especially in the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC), with the aim of isolating Iran and prevent its growing influence in the region.

Another important element that has reshaped the geopolitical chessboard and should be considered is the revitalization of Iran through the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was signed on July 14, 2015 in Vienna, under which it was agreed that Iran's nuclear program be limited for a decade in exchange for the lifting of international economic sanctions. This allowed Iran to maintain its position in the Middle East (West Asia) and seek to secure the role of discourse while expanding its territory in strategic areas. But that fact is changing, as on May 8, 2018, President Trump announced that the United States would withdraw from the JCPOA and reinstate U.S. nuclear sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran and once again put Iran in a very difficult position.

These points represent two opposing models domestically and internationally: a revolutionary, anti-imperialist model represented by Iran versus a conservative, pro-Western model represented by Saudi Arabia.

On the other hand, the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the geo-strategic field of energy is expanding. Therefore, it is a valuable point to control the exploitation of resources, maritime traffic and international oil trade via the Strait of Hormuz, through which 17 million barrels cross each day. The Saudi crude oil reserves are located in an eastern province, which has the largest Shiite population. Saudi Arabia has the money to build oil and gas pipelines from the east coast to the west, which will facilitate its outflow from the Red Sea, which is seen as a way to expand its trade to the Mediterranean. Similarly, from the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia supplies oil to Asian countries, its main customers in the region (China and Japan). This is a longer way to go, but it prevents a confrontation with Iran in the Strait of Hormuz, which is a strategic passage in international maritime navigation, because Iran has the longest coastline



in the Persian Gulf, and enjoys the opportunity to penetrate these waters in the above-mentioned strait.

It is noteworthy that since the Islamic Republic of Iran's declaration of existence in 1979, the Iranian government has been accused by the United States of financing terrorists, and providing them with equipment, weapons, training and shelter, and Iran has been described as a "sponsor of terrorism". They have described the country as the most important threat to the security of the Middle East (West Asia) and one of the most hostile countries in the international system and they have sought to isolate it.

Recall that the U.S. State Department currently identifies 60 groups as international terrorist organizations, including Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, Hamas, Al-Fatah, the Muslim Brotherhood and Hezbollah. And last April, Trump labeled the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a "foreign terrorist organization" and this is the first time the United States has taken action against another country's military. According to an old saying, "One person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter."

It should be noted that in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers, the United States implemented the Patriot Act which was a response by the Congress against terrorism and international organized crime. This is an extraterritorial law that includes international powers and is based on international treaties and bilateral agreements, but we all know that the United States systematically fights and acts with the aim of stigmatizing and harassing, under the name of "fighting terrorists" against Islam and to the detriment of various Muslim organizations, which are characterized by anti-terrorism and have connections with the popular, patriotic and social struggles.

But if we ask ourselves why there is violence in the region, we can quote some of the remarks made by Foreign Minister Dr. Zarif, in which he notes that "the increase in violence in the Middle East (West Asia) is rooted in the constant presence of foreign forces, and also in their interference in the internal affairs of regional countries to reshape the structure of the region." And this is what the interventionist policy of the North American empire constantly states. Likewise, we should mention the hybrid war waged by the United States and its allies through economic sanctions and terrorist attacks against Iran.

The phenomenon of terrorism and its consequences must be discussed and identified on the basis of the reasons that led to its development, or through the intensification and exploitation of religious dogmatism, as in the case of the Islamic State and its intention to incite sectarian tensions with the goal of unifying all the majority Muslim countries under one state and by one caliphate and through jihad, which is still a concern of the international community.

Finally, terrorism has directly or indirectly affected a large portion of humans, because the emergence of terrorism, in addition to increasing drug use and drug trafficking and organized crime networks, intensifies human rights violations, fatal migrations and also famine.

**Iran has been the victim of large and small terrorist acts since the victory of the Islamic Revolution. As a country that has suffered greatly from this ominous**

**“It (Iran) supports the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors everywhere in the world. This acts as a basis for the Islamic Republic of Iran's fight against terrorism.”**

## General Soleimani: A superhero who stood up to reveal the ugly face of Western interferences

**➔** For many Iraqis he was a hero, like in Syria. He managed to unite Kurds and Shia fighters in the battles against ISIS. He is most known (in Iraq) for his leading role in the battle of Jurf al-Sakhar, a strategic town 50 kilometers south of Baghdad. The town of Jurf al-Sakhar is important for Shia pilgrims; it's the main road on their way to the holy town of Karbala. It was conquered by DAESH in 2014 and liberated in October 2014, thanks to the great effort of General Soleimani. According to many fighters, he was always present at the battlefield.

Because General Soleimani was too powerful, strategic mastermind, dangerous to the U.S. and its allies, and revealed the ugly face of Western interference in both Syria and Iraq, he had to be killed according to them.

Afraid of losing control in both Syria and Iraq, the Zionist state of Israel urged on his assassination. The murder was in line of what the Obama Administration had started, the new way of killing by drones. President Obama secretly started his drone assassination program in 2008. A total of 563 strikes were carried out by drones; targets in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen during Obama's two terms. The Trump Administration continued these unlawful strikes, although not as many strikes as under Obama and eventually from pressure of Israel, who sees Iran as its biggest threat and enemy, he gave orders to kill General Qassem

Soleimani.

The U.S. and Israel have a long record of assassinating Iranian scientists and high ranking Iranian officials, in and outside Iran. According to international law it's prohibited to conduct killings, on foreign soil and is seen as an act of war. But it's not only the U.S. and Israel who are guilty, also European countries, who allow U.S. forces in Ramstein Airbase, Germany, to conduct their drone assassinations from there. It has been proven that the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, the Netherlands and Italy have played a significant role in supporting the U.S. lethal operations, including its drone program.

General Qassem Soleimani is seen as a hero in West Asia, Iran, Pakistan and parts of Afghanistan. He stood up for the suppressed and fought tirelessly against the Western funded ISIS group, or DAESH as Arab people call them. The meaning of DAESH is simple, whatever the West calls them moderate or any name they will give the so-called opposition, for Syrians and Iraqis they are terrorist. General Soleimani helped them to crush DAESH. According to many Syrians and Iraqis, he was fearless, courageous, unselfish, and always present on the battlefield. He was an inspiration for his soldiers, who went for battle and knew their life was in God's (Allah) hand. He was, according to many witnesses, a tolerant, righteous and religious man.

Leave us with the big problem, the Western

approach to human rights and terrorism. For many years Western politicians and sponsored human rights groups (mainly by George Soros), are conducting a heavy style propaganda on their own citizens, to condemn Iran, Syria and other countries who don't comply with their Western world view. Fuelled by Israel, who has its own aspirations in the region, a greater Israel, on the principles of the Yinson plan, a plan published in February 1982. It has played a role in both conflict resolution analysis by scholars who regard it as having influenced the formulation of policies adopted by the American administration under George Bush Jr., who started the "war on terror" in 2001. The claim has been made that Yinson's article was adopted by members of the Institute for Zionist Strategies in the American administration to further American interests in West Asia, as well as achieving the Jewish dream of a state "from the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates". Their dream is to conquer the whole of the region.

The Western countries are dominated by the U.S. and Israeli-Zionist doctrine. Their 'dirty' war in Syria is a good example, resulting from the so-called Islamic Awakening, a plan to colonize West Asia, with as a tool the Western mercenaries, the Muslim Brotherhood, who later got all different names like Al-Qaeda, etc. The funding of ISIS in camp Bucca, Iraq, and the making of Abu-Bakr-al-Baghdadi, some rumors have it he was a Mossad/CIA agent



called Shimon Elliot, trained among ex-Iraqi officers in camp Bucca and the source for the radicalization of the ex-officers.

The deceiving role of Western human rights groups like Amnesty which resulted in the inhumane CAESAR-act. Also, Western media role in lying about facts and not telling the truth. But Western media is a tool for politicians and not independent anymore. Western countries are under influence from the Muslim Brotherhood in politics and media, which in the end will be a big disaster for the Western world, as we know it. The politicians are just 'puppet-on-a-string' concerning their foreign policy making; the real power is not in their hands.

*Sonja van den Ende is an independent journalist from the Netherlands. Her expertise includes international affairs by special focus on Syria, West Asia and Russia. She is the former international secretary at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA - Vienna).*

**phenomenon and has gained valuable experience in the fight against terrorism at the national and regional levels, how do you assess Iran's efforts to build a consensus among regional countries to fight terrorism?**

The Islamic Republic of Iran has suffered severe blows since the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, including the assassination of four Iranian nuclear scientists between 2010 and 2012, and the recent terrorist attack on nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. In addition to an in-depth look at security systems, this incident has created a scenario of confrontation and tension, given that technological advances have changed the ways in which conflicts have escalated and changed the nature of threats.

Today, the use of artificial intelligence intensifies cyber, physical, and biological attacks, making them more selective and at the same time more anonymous, facilitating these attacks by reducing or even eliminating the need for the physical involvement of humans. This scenario is no longer a concern for human beings. Let us recall the terrorist attack in Iraq against the great martyr, Qassem Soleimani, the hero of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, whose absence is irreparable for the Islamic Republic of Iran.

It is difficult to reach a consensus on this issue with several countries in the region, but Iran's efforts to advance strategies that help combat terrorism are significant, such as the success in reducing the global terrorism index in the governments that it works in, especially because Iran is a country that has the power to challenge the interests of the great powers and has an excellent political, scientific, technological and military platform that supports its foreign policy.

It is also important not to politicize campaign against terrorism, and all countries should unite in this battle, regardless of political or diplomatic relations among them.

**In recent years, under the pretext of fighting terrorism, coalitions have been formed with the participation of countries outside the region (and even outside Asia). Alliances whose main goal, according to many political and military experts, is the political and economic exploitation of the current crises in West Asia. Some experts even believe that these countries themselves are the cause of such tensions. Do you think such coalitions can help resolve crises or defeat terrorism?**

Undoubtedly, the formation of coalitions creates a very complex scenario because different elements are interconnected according to the potential of their constituent countries. As I mentioned earlier, we are currently talking about cooperation in the fields of science, technology and military, in addition to the political and diplomatic relations between each of the countries.

One of the most important coalitions, led by Martyr Qassem Soleimani, was the Russia-Syria-Iran-Iraq (RSII) coalition, which was later renamed as 4+1 due to the joining of the Lebanese Hezbollah military group. The military coalition was formed to deal with the conflicts in Syria and Iraq in the Middle East (West Asia) and currently supports Lebanon's Hassan Nasrallah.

The coalition consists of the Russian Armed Forces and the Axis of Resistance (the IRGC, Syrian Armed Forces, Iraqi Armed Forces and Hezbollah forces). The importance of this coalition is that it was created as a counterweight to the U.S.-led international coalition against ISIL, although the RSII's military objectives are not limited to destroying the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), but also dismantling other jihadist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and al-Qaeda, as well as closing the Iraqi-Syrian borders, which are used as strategic corridors for the entry and exit of militants.

Coalitions should serve to resolve crises, not to promote terrorism, but the situation is not always favorable and has a history of unexpected turns that upset the balance of the intended goal.

**Given the need to form a coalition of countries in West Asia to fight terrorism in the region, what role can Iran play in creating such a coalition?**

In the international context, the unity that countries can create is very important and one of the precise principles of Iran's foreign policy is the promotion of these alliances, of course through respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations and as stated in Chapter 10, Article 154 of the Constitution, it supports the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors everywhere in the world. These elements act as a basis for the Islamic Republic of Iran's fight against terrorism.

Undoubtedly, Iran has played an important unifying role, and this has earned the respect of the countries of the region for it. Therefore, it is expected that a great unity will be created in the future, whose common interests are the fight against the plague of terrorism in all its forms.

## Pakistan arrests Mumbai attacks 'plotter' for terrorism financing

Pakistan has arrested Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, a leader of armed group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) – blamed by the United States and India for the 2008 Mumbai attacks, a counterterrorism official said.

The arrest is in relation to "terrorism financing", the official said on Saturday, and not a specific attack, al Jazeera reported.

"Proscribed organisation LeT leader Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi [has been] arrested on charges of terrorism financing," a spokesman for the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) of Pakistan's Punjab province said.

The suspect is said to have been running a medical dispensary to collect and disburse funds for "terrorism", the spokesman said.

A sanctions committee of the United Nations Security Council says Lakhvi is LeT's chief of operations and accuses him of being active in a number of other regions and countries, including Chechnya, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Indian authorities said the lone surviving attacker involved in the 2008 Mumbai siege, in which 166 people were killed, had told interrogators before his execution that the assailants were in touch with Lakhvi.

## Lethal airstrikes in Yemen 'left off' confidential UK record

The government is under pressure to explain why a series of air strikes in Yemen, many involving civilian casualties, have not been recorded in its confidential log of alleged breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL).

The existence of the database, which has been kept by the Ministry of Defense since 2015, emerged only when the government became embroiled in a legal challenge over its decision to grant UK arms manufacturers export licences to sell weapons to Saudi Arabia for use in Yemen. The challenge came amid claims the weapons were being used in breach of IHL.

By last July more than 500 possible breaches had been recorded in the database. But human rights groups allege that the true number of breaches in a conflict in which Saudi-led forces have conducted more than 20,000 air strikes must be much higher.

The government refuses to publish the database, making it impossible to know which incidents have been recorded. Defense sources suggest this is because it contains information from a wide range of assets, some of which are considered so sensitive they cannot be made public.

However, parliamentary questions have established that a number of air strikes in possible breach of IHL, recorded by human rights groups and NGOs in Yemen, have not been included.

Last October, Labour's shadow international trade secretary, Emily Thornberry, tabled a series of questions about a range of incidents identified by the Yemen Data Project, a not-for-profit initiative maintained by security, human rights, and humanitarian experts which is considered to be the most extensive record of air strikes available.

Among the attacks identified by the project, which the MoD confirmed were not included on the database, were those in January 2018 on a bridge and a market in Al-Mufdhah area, Qafalah Athr district, resulting in the killing of 17 people and injuries to more than 20 others, and a September 2015 air strike on a funeral gathering in Khabb wa ash Sha'af district in which 30 people died.

## 2 more French soldiers killed in Mali as Al-Qaeda claims responsibility for previous attack that left 3 dead

Two French soldiers have been killed in Mali after their vehicle was hit with an explosive device. Earlier this week, three other servicemen were killed in a similar attack claimed by a local al-Qaeda affiliate.

The new casualties were confirmed by the country's military and top leadership early on Sunday.

"Their vehicle hit an improvised explosive device during an intelligence mission," the French presidency said in a statement.

According to RT, the new casualties came just days after three other soldiers died in the county.

On Monday, a French armored vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device (IED) in the center of the Sahel state, killing three of its occupants. Late on Saturday, the local Al-Qaeda-affiliated Group (GSIM) claimed responsibility for the attack.

## Pence says he 'welcomes' efforts by senators to object to certifying election results on January 6

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence has backed the plan by a group of Republicans led by Ted Cruz to raise objections to formalizing Democrat Joe Biden's victory when Congress meets on January 6, according to his chief of staff.

"The vice president welcomes the efforts of members of the House and Senate to use the authority they have under the law to raise objections and bring forward evidence before the Congress and the American people on January 6," read the statement, issued to the media by Pence's Chief of Staff Marc Short on Saturday.

Pence, who is set to attend a rally in Georgia on Monday in a bid to drum up votes for Republican candidates Sen. David Perdue and Sen. Kelly Loeffler ahead of a crucial run-off there, has so far refrained from public comments on the plan by a group of his fellow Republicans to upend what is generally seen as a symbolic count of electors' votes, RT reported.

## Resistance News

## EU calls on Israel to investigate shooting of Abu Aram

**INTERNATIONAL DESK** **TEHRAN** — The European Union (EU) called on the Israeli occupation authorities to urgently investigate the shooting of Harun Abu Aram, 24, from Tawana village in Masfer Yatta, south of al-Khalil, and to hold the perpetrators accountable.

The EU stressed in a press release on Saturday its rejection of the excessive and disproportionate use of force.

It pointed out that the Israeli forces shot Abu Aram on Friday while he was rebuilding his house, which they demolished last November, in violation of international law.

On Friday, the Palestinian Ministry of Health announced that Abu Aram was shot by a live bullet in his neck at point-blank which caused him quadriplegic paralysis.



## A manifestation of Iran's cultural relations with the thousand-colored country of India

By Seyed Hossein Hosseini Seddiq

(Part 1/2)

Iran and the Indian subcontinent are two ancient and neighboring Aryan civilizations that, regardless of the relationships mentioned in myths and legends, have forged strong over the past centuries.

Bahram -e Gor and Balash Kings of the Sasanian Empire have lived in India for some time. Anoushiravan, another the Sasanian King of Kings, was extremely interested in Indian customs and traditions, and some doctors, chess players and it has housed Indian mathematicians and translators. Borzoyeh Tabib brought the book Kellileh and Demneh (Kalila wa-Dimna) to Iran from the subcontinent. Khosrow Parviz has always exchanged gifts with the kings of the subcontinent.



A folio of the book *Kalila wa-Dimna*, 1220 CE, depicting both "Kalila" and "Dimna"

The Ghaznavid sultans played an important role in the development of Islam and Persian language and literature. Mahmud Ghaznavi invaded the subcontinent seventeen times and occupied an important part of India until 418 AH. With the arrival of poets, writers, scholars, and Persian speakers in India, Persian language and literature developed in this great subcontinent, and until the arrival of the British in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, Persian was the official, scientific and literary language of this vast land.

During the reign of the sultans of Delhi, the Persian language and literature developed in the subcontinent, and the Indians also began to learn the Persian language and write poetry. The era of the Timurid kings of 932-1274 AH, such as Babor, Homayoun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzib, is considered to be the peak and perfection of the prevalence of Persian literature. Jalal al-Din Mohammad Akbar Shah developed Persian literature for half a century.

Akbar Shah's court became a gathering place for poets and writers of the time. His support caused poets and writers from Iran to come to his court. Nour al-Din Mohammad Jahangir, like his father, honored the Persian language. After Jahangir, Shahab al-Din Shah Jahan came to power in 1037 AH. He was an art-loving and art-encouraging man, and during his time all kinds of handicrafts and various arts grew in India and reached perfection.

During his period, the combination of Iranian and Indian art and Iranian techniques became popular in India, and one of the manifestations of the combination of these two civilizations can be clearly seen in the Taj Mahal mansion.

Shah Jahan and his wife Momtazmah both had literary taste and talent, and because of the environment of poetry and literature, especially Persian, which existed in his system and court, they narrate anecdotes, novels, and improvisations that emphasize the perfection of taste and culture of this king and the queen signifies.

It was due to the cultivation of art and the taste of Shah Jahan that prominent Iranian poets migrated to India. The court of Shah Jahan was a very fertile ground for the development of the Persian language and literature. During the reign of the same king, the combination of the two languages, Hindi and Persian, which began in Lahore in the fourth century AH, reached its perfection in the eleventh century.

One of the greats in the field of writing is Enayatullah Kanboh, the author of the book Bahar- e Danesh and one of the scientists of the Shah Jahan era. Bahar -e Danesh was written from fiction and ancient Indian romantic legends in Persian during the reign of lover king. In this age, storytelling grew at an unprecedented rate. In the Indian subcontinent, storytelling flourished and hundreds of stories were written. The profession of storyteller was recognized officially in the courts of the kings of Iran and India.

## Cooking ritual of Iranian thick stew named national heritage

**HERITAGE TEHRAN**—The ritual of cooking Bozbash Ash (a kind of meat and bean soup), which is widely practiced in Khusf, the eastern province of South Khorasan, has recently been inscribed on the national heritage list.

The Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts announced the inscription on Saturday in a letter to the governor-general of the province.



Some more eight items in the region including Golrizu ritual, Zafar Jen Tazieh (Iranian passion play), and the skill of jajim-bafi (a kind of hand-woven floor covering) were also added to the prestigious list.

Master Zolfaghar Bitaneh, dotar virtuoso and a luthier, was also registered on the list as Living Human Treasure. Located in eastern Iran, South Khorasan province is home to many historical and natural attractions such as Birjand Castle, Dragon Cave, Furg Citadel, and Polond Desert.

It is also known for its famous rugs as well as its saffron and barberry which are produced in almost all parts of the province.

# Neanderthal tooth put on show in Qazvin museum

**HERITAGE TEHRAN** — A fossilized tooth, which is amongst the earliest evidence of Neanderthal settlements in the Iranian plateau, has been put on show at a museum in Qazvin, west-central Iran, where the object was discovered in a nearby cave.

The opening ceremony of the public show was attended by Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Ali-Asghar Mounesan, several local officials, history buffs, archaeologists, and museum-goers, CHTN reported on Sunday.

Discovered in Qal-e Kord Cave in Avaj county, the tooth has been examined in two laboratories in France and the United States, and the results of radiocarbon dating experiments show that it relates to the oldest-known Neanderthal civilization in Iran, according to Alireza Khazaeli, the provincial tourism chief.

In November 2018, the first season of the joint Iran-France archeological exploration led to the discovery of over 6,000 cultural pieces in the area. It also yielded bone remains of horse, deer, bear, and



many stone tools belonging to the Middle Paleolithic period (between 200,000 up to 40,000 years ago).

A 2019 study published in the Journal of Human Evolution, suggests that Neanderthals were roaming at the Iranian Zagros Mountain sometimes between 40 to 70 thousand years ago.

Until the late 20th century, Neanderthals were regarded as genetically, morphologically, and behaviorally distinct from living humans. However, more recent discoveries about this well-preserved fossil Eurasian population have revealed an overlap between living and archaic humans.

Neanderthals lived before and during the last ice age of the Pleistocene in some of the most unforgiving environments ever inhabited by humans. They developed a successful culture, with a complex stone tool technology, that was based on hunting, with some scavenging and local plant collection. Their survival during tens of thousands of years of the last glaciation is a remarkable testament to human adaptation.

## Isfahan reopens tourist sites after 45-days coronavirus shutdown

→ 1 Soaked in a rich history and culture, Isfahan was once a crossroads of international trade and diplomacy in Iran. Now, it is one of Iran's top tourist destinations for good reasons. The ancient city is filled with many architectural wonders such as unmatched Islamic buildings, bazaars, museums, Persian gardens, and tree-lined boulevards. It's a city for walking, getting lost in its mazing bazaars, dozing in beautiful gardens, and meeting people.

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

Isfahan is renowned not only for the abundance of great historical bridges but also for its 'life-giving

river', the Zayandeh-Rood, which has long bestowed the city an original beauty and fertility. The cool blue tiles of Isfahan's Islamic buildings, and the city's majestic bridges, contrast perfectly with the encircling hot, dry Iranian countryside.

The huge Imam Square, best known as Naghsh-e Jahan Sq. (literary meaning "Image of the World"), is one of the largest in the world (500m by 160m), and a majestic example of town planning. Built in the early 17th century, the UNESCO-registered square is punctuated with the most interesting sights in Isfahan.

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



## Medical tourists to Mashhad at record low due to coronavirus curbs

**TOURISM TEHRAN** — The coronavirus pandemic is hitting hard at medical tourism of Mashhad, which used to be a thriving destination for health-care seekers in pre-pandemic times.

The number of international medical tourists to Mashhad has plunged 95 percent over the past months since the coronavirus pandemic started, IRNA quoted Esmail Khayyami, the health tourism manager of Mashhad University of Medical Sciences, as saying on Sunday.

"The remaining five percent were typically patients who had entered the country before the corona epidemic, but after a while, the number of such clients also dropped to zero," the official said.

"Since about two months ago, when it was possible to issue medical visas, such [health] patients have had the opportunity to enter the country and the



city of Mashhad in a limited range... in compliance with health protocols."

The official had earlier announced medical tourists admitted to Mashhad hospitals and medical centers were from 55 different nationalities, more than 60% of whom are from Iraq and the rest are from Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar,

Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, Khayyami said last July.

For the time being, 14 hospitals and three medical centers are offering special services to foreign patients in Mashhad, who are mostly visiting these centers for open-heart surgeries, vascular surgeries, general surgeries, orthopedics, skin, hair and beauty services, dental services, as well as women's and infertility services.

After Tehran, Mashhad has the most medical tourists in the country, the official added.

Iranian hospitals admitted nearly 70,000 foreign patients over the Iranian calendar year 1397 (March 2018 – March 2019) and it made an economic contribution of around \$1.2 billion to the country, according to the medical tourism department at the Ministry of Health.

In April 2018, the rotating presidency

of the International Health Tourism Conference of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was handed to the Islamic Republic for a three-year term.

Mohammad Jahangiri who presides over a national center for developing health tourism said in May 2018 that Iran can annually earn \$7 billion in medical and health tourism, though the sector now brings in only one-seventh or even lesser of the sum.

Before the coronavirus puts everything on lockdown, Mashhad played host to thousands of travelers and pilgrims who come from various Iranian cities, neighboring countries, and even across the globe to visit the imposing, massive holy shrine complex of Imam Reza (AS), the eighth Imam of the Shia Muslims.

The Islamic Republic has set its goals to exceed its yearly medical travelers to around 2 million in [calendar year] 1404.

## Private sector invests \$4.3m in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari's tourism

**TOURISM TEHRAN** — The private sector has invested 180 billion rials (about \$4.3 million at the official rate of 42,000 rials) in the tourism sector of Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari province during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started in March 2020).

This investment flow created 170 tourism-related jobs across the [less-known] province, provincial tourism chief Mehrdad Javadi announced on Sunday.

The official added that some 240 billion rials (\$5.7 million) were invested in the province's tourism industry by the private sector in the past [Iranian] year, which helped to generate 197 jobs.

Last November, the official announced that ten tourism-related projects, running by the private sector, are underway across the province and emphasized that the presence of private investors is a need for tourism development in the province.

"A tourist village, a hotel, sports complexes, accommodation and hospitality units, eco-tourism residences, and a museum constitute the development projects



which are estimated to worth 5,727,800 billion rials (about \$136 million), of which 654.8 billion rials (about \$15 million) has been spent so far," the official noted.

"A minimum of 528 job opportunities will be directly generated when the cited project is fully implemented," he said, adding that it adds at least 306 suites

## Iranian police arrest illegal excavators in Alamut

**HERITAGE TEHRAN** — Iranian police have recently busted a gang of illegal diggers in Alamut, a semi-mountainous region in Qazvin province, west-central Iran.

Four illegal diggers were detained in this regard and surrendered to the judicial system for further investigation; ISNA quoted provincial tourism chief Alireza Khazaeli as saying on Sunday.

Better known for being home to a well-fortified ruined castle and its lush cherry gardens, Alamut annually attracts

hundreds of thousands of holidaymakers to the castle that once sheltering the followers of Hasan-e Sabbah (1070–1124), a leader of Ismaili sect, known as 'Assassins'. In the early 1930s, British-Italian explorer and travel writer Freya Stark described her exploration of the place in her book "The Valleys of the Assassins".

In popular myth, Sabbah led a bizarre, much-feared mercenary organization whose members were dispatched to murder or kidnap leading political and

religious figures of the day.

Alamut, which means "eagle's nest", is a geographic region in the western edge of the Alborz range, between the dry and barren plain of Qazvin in the south and the densely forested slopes of the Mazandaran province in the north.

Nowadays, the ruined castle, which is also known as Alamut Castle, is a top travel destination in the northeastern side of Gazor Khan Village in the environs of Mo'alem Kalayeh, from the environs of Roudbar of Alamut, Qazvin province.









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www.tehrantimes.com  
■ Managing Director: Mohammad Shojaeian  
■ Editor-in-Chief: Ali A.Jenabzadeh

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895  
info@tehrantimes.com  
» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000  
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Zip Code: 1599814713

GUIDE TO  
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

How wonderful is the situation of a believer. There is good for him in everything and this applies only to a believer. If prosperity comes to him, he expresses gratitude to God and that is good for him; and if adversity befalls him, he endures it patiently and that is better for him.  
*Prophet Muhammad (S)*

Veracruz World Film Festival honors “The Lady”

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — “The Lady” by Iranian filmmaker Mohammad Habibi-Mansur has been honored at the Veracruz World Film Festival, a Mexican festival exclusively dedicated to independent films.

The film won a special mention at the festival that ran from December 7 to 30.



*A poster for 'The Lady' by Mohammad Habibi-Mansur.*

The film centers on the life of Lady Esmat Ahmadian, mother of Ebrahim and Esmail Farjavani, the two brothers who were martyred during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

The martyrs' mother began serious social and economic activities after the war, having become an influential lady in Ahvaz, a city in Iran's southwestern Khuzestan Province.

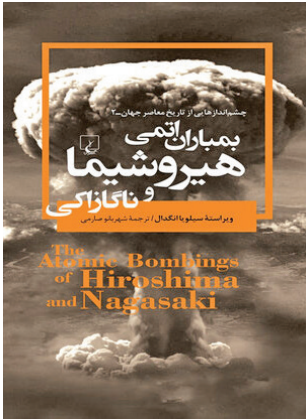
It took two years for the crew to portray an accurate image of a successful lady in this film.

“Lady” was an entry in the documentary section of the 38th Fajr Film Festival last year.

Sylvia Engdahl’s “Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki” appears in Persian

**CULTURE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A Persian translation of Sylvia Engdahl's book “The Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki” has recently been published by Qoqnu Publications in Tehran.

The book has been translated into Persian by Shahrbanu Saremi.



Each chapter of the book opens with background information, including primary source material, covering the periods leading up to, during and after the event.

Then, each chapter offers an in-depth, multinational perspective on the controversies surrounding the event and the current implications or long-lasting effects. Each volume concludes with first-person narratives from people who lived through or were directly impacted by the event.

Engdahl is the author of ten science-fiction novels, six of which, including Newbery Honor book “Enchantress from the Stars”, are the books also enjoyed by many adults.

Although she is best known as an author for young adults, her most recent novels, the duology “Hidden Flame” (Stewards of the Flame and Promise of the Flame) and the duology “Rising Flame” (Defender of the Flame and Herald of the Flame) are adult science fiction and are not appropriate for middle-school readers.

She has also written a nonfiction book, “The Planet-Girded Suns: The Long History of Belief in Exoplanets”, of which updated and expanded paperback and ebook editions were published in 2012, and three collections of her essays. Most of the nonfiction books listed under her name were edited, rather than written, by her as a freelance editor of anthologies for high schools.

Engdahl says, “I listed only a few of the books I’ve read here. Those that appear are just some of the best ones I read in the past about subjects dealt with in my novels.”

Ruholamin’s new painting depicting Soleimani, Al-Muhandis among companions of Imam Ali (AS)

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Hassan Ruholamin unveiled his new painting “Shias of Abu Turab” depicting commander Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis among the companions of Imam Ali (AS)

Ruholamin unveiled the painting on Saturday to commemorate the first martyrdom anniversary of Soleimani and Al-Muhandis, who were assassinated in a U.S. attack in Baghdad on January 3, 2020.

Abu Turab is a title attributed to Imam Ali (AS). The painting shows the Imam walking as Soleimani, Al-Muhandis and a number of his companions follow him.

Ruholamin, whose works usually illustrate stories from the history of Islam, criticized inept artworks created about Soleimani and said that artists should raise their knowledge of an issue to create an appropriate artwork about it.

He noted that artists should improve the quality of their artworks about Soleimani.

He also criticized Instagram for removing posts about Soleimani and added, “Now, artists are fearful about making a post about Martyr Soleimani, the minimum outcome



“Shias of Abu Turab” by Hassan Ruholamin was unveiled on Saturday.

of which would be the removal of their post by Instagram.”

“Shias of Abu Torab” is not Ruholamin's sole artwork about Soleimani.

Just one day after the assassination of Soleimani, Ruholamin unveiled his painting “The Apocalyptic Companion of Aba Abdillah” that depicts Soleimani's remains embraced by Imam Hussein (AS), the third Imam of the Shias.

An image of the artwork was published for the first time on khamenei.ir, the official website of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

In 2017, he also created a painting of Mohsen Hojaji, an Iranian soldier who was martyred by ISIS terrorists in Syria.

Ruholamin's paintings usually call to mind the ambience of Renaissance paintings. In his works, he regards stories from the history of Islam and contemporary events.

Tehran's Niavaran Cultural Center is currently hosting an exhibition of Ruholamin's paintings entitled “Family of Ali (AS)”.

The exhibition will be running until January 14.

Commander Soleimani’s autobiography “I Feared Nothing” released

**→1** “This is the story of the transformation of a man who evolved from living as a shepherd into an exalted position as high as the sky. I would like to inform those people who saw him only in his army uniform how he had grown up, and ‘I Feared Nothing’ is a beginning of a great mission to know an awe-inspiring man.”

The ceremony went on with the unveiling of a note written for the book by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

The Leader had received a rough copy of the book from Zeinab during his recent meeting with Soleimani's family.

“Whatever causes us to remember the dear martyr is really soothing and pleasant,” the Leader wrote in his note on December 27, 2020.

“Although he was highly acknowledged by God Who blessed him with a worldly reward due to his pure and exemplary behavior, we also have a duty [to him]. I have not read this book yet, but it seems to be a step in this direction.”



A poster for Lieutenant-General Qassem Soleimani's autobiography “I Feared Nothing” and Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's note for the book.

Actor Shahab Hosseini portrays physicist Ali Javan in new biopic

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Palme d'Or winning actor Shahab Hosseini will be playing the role of Iranian-American physicist and inventor Ali Javan in a biopic to be written and directed by Kurosh Ahari.

Javan first proposed the concept of the gas laser in 1959 at the Bell Telephone Laboratories. A successful prototype, constructed by him in collaboration with W. R. Bennett, Jr. and D. R. Herriott, was demonstrated in 1960. Javan also contributed to the fields of quantum physics and spectroscopy. His original 1960 helium neon-laser device is currently on display at the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of American History.

Ahari, Hosseini and producer Alex



Actor Shahab Hosseini in an undated photo. (Mehr/Hossein Esmaeili)

Bretow's production company Pol Media has acquired exclusive worldwide rights to the life of Javan. He is survived by his two daughters, Maia and Lila Javan, who will function as executive producers and

consultants for the project.

Hosseini is mostly famous for his role in Asghar Farhadi's “The Salesman”, which brought him the Palme d'Or for best actor at the Cannes Film Festival in 2016.

He also received France's Chevalier of the Legion of Honor (Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur) medal in February.

The medal awarded by the French government is one of the most coveted trophies in the world of art and culture.

Filmmaker and producer Ahari most recently directed the horror-thriller “The Night” starring Hosseini and helmed the award-winning short “Generations”.

Bretow produced “The Night” and “Generations” as well as the award-winning Iranian short “Numbness”.

Pol Media is currently meeting with writers to pen the script along with Ahari.

Hosseini, Ahari and Bretow teamed up to form the company Pol Media to distribute Iranian and international films within the U.S. and other countries.

“Pol”, which literally means “bridge” in Farsi, aims to “bridge the gap” between Iranian and international art, culture and cinema with that of the U.S., the Hollywood Reporter announced on Tuesday.

Pol Media will distribute Iranian and other international films both within the U.S. and abroad while also producing live events, including appearances from Iranian and international actors and filmmakers, as well as other artistic, cultural and cinematic programs.

Iranian children win awards at Japan’s Kao painting contest

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Members of Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) have won prizes at the Kao International Environment Painting Contest for Children in Tokyo, Japan, the IIDCYA announced on Sunday.

Mohammad-Mehdi Aali and Asal Tavvafi received the Jury's Special Prize, while Erfan Gholami, Mohammadreza Mosaei and Fatemeh Khosropanah won the Eco Friend Prize.

The “Eco Together” Planet Earth Grand Prix was given to Liang-En Yu from Taiwan.

Also in 2019, Baran Karami and Ghazaleh Mohammadi both won Kao Prizes, and Tohid Sangvini, Parsa Ildarabadi and Mohammad-Amin Asghari were

awarded with Eco Friend Prizes.

This year, 12,884 entries were received from all over the world for the contest, which was held on the theme of “Together, We Are Eco-Friendly”.

The contest has been held annually since 2010 and aims to encourage children around the world to think seriously about conservation of the environment around them and to take action in everyday life.

Kao will continue to engage in inspiring more people to think about their surrounding environments and lifestyles through these paintings, which are exhibited in various locations throughout Japan, as well through a book published featuring the selected works.



A painting by Asal Tavvafi received the jury's special prize at the Kao International Environment Painting Contest for Children in Tokyo.

Iranian musicians honored at Global Music Awards

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian musicians have been honored at the Global Music Awards, capturing four silver and one bronze medals.

Global Music Awards is a well-known international music competition that celebrates independent musicians.

Composer Ahmad Mirmasumi received a silver medal for his composition “Trustworthy”, and musician Farhad Harati won a silver medal for his composition

“Hidden Beliefs”.

Composer Mehrzad Khajeh Amiri won a silver medal for “Theos”, while Tehran Quintet won a silver medal for the album “Oblivion”.

In addition, the bronze medal winner was “Moslem Alipur” for the folk music, “Hor o Pari”.

Nine other musicians were also awarded gold medals. Among them are English composer Egidija Medeksaitė, American composer Danae Vlasse and Polish composer

Krzysztof Eugeniusz Penderecki.

Also in April 2020, three Iranian musicians were honored at the Global Music Awards.

Vocalist Abdolhossein Mokhtabad won a gold medal for his song “Az Sharm Dar Hejabam” (“I’m Acutely Embarrassed”).

Composer Ahmad Mirmasumi received a silver medal for his album “Caressing the Moments”, and musician Shahin Yusefzamani was awarded a bronze medal for his album “Morning”.



Cover of the album “Oblivion” by Tehran Quintet.

“Guest of the Revolution” comes into Iranian bookstores

**CULTURE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — American writer Kathryn Koob's 1982 book “Guest of the Revolution” has recently been published in Persian.

Cheshmeh is the publisher of the book translated into Persian by Ramin Nasser-Nasir.

The author describes her experiences as one of the fifty-two Americans held hostage in Iran and explains how her faith in God helped her to survive 444 days of captivity.

“This is not a definitive account of fifty Americans,” has written in her preface to the book.

“Rather it is my recollection of how I handled the situation during days ‘on the job’ that ranged from a little tougher than normal to downright terrifying.

“Each of the fifty-two of us was treated differently, and this only tells my story - and part of Ann's after we were finally permitted to become roommates on March 12, 1980.

“I understand from looking at headlines and articles that were written during the time of our captivity that the going was rough here in the United States.

“The time inside the compound was tough, too, but often in a way that was much different from the picture the American public carried in its mind's eye.

“Here, then, is what I remember as being important in my life from those days when I was an involuntary ‘guest of the revolution’.”



Front cover of the Persian translation of American writer Kathryn Koob's 1982 book “Guest of the Revolution”.