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## Iran: Aviation giants to fund plane purchases



IRNA

Iran's aviation officials played down speculations that the administration of US President Donald Trump would block sales of planes to the country and say they expect purchases to move ahead faster because mechanisms to fund the campaigns are being worked out by plane-makers, themselves.

Sharafbafi further added that her company would nonetheless continue negotiations with potential financiers. Ali Abdezadeh, the head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAO), also said that apart from Airbus, Boeing and ART had also agreed to fund a certain section of Iran's plane purchases.

Sharafbafi said a total sum of \$330 million had already been allocated from the National Development Fund to fund Iran Air plane purchases. The official emphasized that certain payments to the same effect had already been made to Airbus as a result of which three jets from the European plane-maker and six from its Italian-Franco offshoot ATR had been purchased.

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## Key oil players presented Azadegan plans: Official



IRNA

Several leading oil and gas players have submitted the results of their studies over the development of one of its biggest oil prospects - Azadegan oilfield. Ali Kardor, the managing director of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), was quoted by Press TV as saying that the companies included Total, Royal/Dutch Shell, CNPC and Impex. Kardor emphasized that the NIOC was already studying the studies presented by the companies. He added that several more had requested more time to present their technical evaluations over Azadegan, but did not name them.

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## Bombers attack church in Pakistan; eight dead

A suicide bomb attack on a Pakistan church killed at least eight people and wounded 30 during a service on Sunday, just over a week before Christmas. Two women were among the dead at a Methodist church in the restive southwestern city of Quetta in Balochistan Province, said Provincial Home Secretary Akbar Harifal, AFP reported.

Several of the wounded were in serious condition, police said. Officials said police intercepted and shot dead one attacker outside the church before he could detonate his bomb. But the second managed to reach the church's main door, where he blew himself up.

"Police were quick to react and stop the attackers from entering into the main hall," said provincial police chief, Moazzam Jah. Each attacker was carrying 15 kilograms (33 pounds) of explosives plus grenades, said civil defense official, Aslam Tareen.

In a brief statement on its Amaq propaganda outlet, Daesh claimed responsibility. Balochistan Provincial Home Minister Sarfraz Bugti said that around 250 people normally attend the church on Sundays, but the congregation had swelled to around 400 because it was close to Christmas.



REUTERS

"God forbid, if the terrorists had succeeded in their plans, more than 400 precious lives would have been at stake," tweeted the home minister. Hours after the attack, reports surfaced that a total of four attackers had been involved, with two escaping. Senior police official Abdul Razzaq Cheema said investigators were analyzing CCTV footage to check the claim and had launched a search for any further suspects. Christians make up an estimated 1.6 percent of Pakistan's 200 million people and have long faced discrimination.

## Thousands flee as wildfire 'beast' grows to California's third-largest



REUTERS

A raging California wildfire powered by fierce winds grew into the third-largest in state history on Saturday as forced evacuations turned neighborhoods into ghost towns and ash fell in some areas like heavy snow. High winds and dry conditions remained through the weekend to power the so-called Thomas Fire in Southern California. It has destroyed more than 1,000 structures and threatened 18,000 more since erupting on Dec. 4, including homes in the wealthy enclave of Montecito just outside the coastal city of Santa Barbara, Reuters reported on Sunday.

"It is a beast," Santa Barbara County Fire Department Division Chief Martin Johnson told a news conference. Nearly 8,500 personnel using nearly 1,000 engines and 32 helicopters were battling the blaze, which was 40 percent contained on Saturday evening. It has become the seventh-most destructive in state history, officials said. A new evacuation order was issued for parts of Santa Barbara County on Saturday as high winds whipped the fire through bone-dry terrain. In Montecito, smoke billowing from nearby canyons and pushed by the high winds choked the air, hindering aircraft

from dropping flame retardant, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services said.

The wildfire forced many schools to close for days, shut roads and drove hundreds of thousands from their homes. It was also responsible for poor air quality throughout Southern California.

The total cost of fighting the fire had come to more than \$110 million by Saturday evening, as flames blazing over steep hills lit up the night skies.

This year has been unprecedented for California in terms of structures lost and the size of the wildfires, officials said. Five of 20 most destructive fires in recorded history ravaged the state in 2017, according to Cal Fire.

The vast landscape charred by the blaze, centered fewer than 100 miles (160 km) northwest of downtown Los Angeles, reached 267,500 acres (108,253 hectares) late on Saturday. The largest wildfire in state history was the 2003 Cedar blaze in San Diego County that consumed 273,246 acres and caused 15 deaths.

The hot Santa Ana winds have propelled the fire's expansion, at times sending embers far ahead of its main flank.

Cal Fire engineer Cory Iverson, 32, died on Thursday while battling the flames near the Ventura County community of Fillmore. Fire officials said Iverson, the blaze's first fatality, left behind a pregnant wife and 2-year-old daughter.

He died of smoke inhalation and burns, the Ventura County Medical Examiner's office said.

## UNSC weighs measure rejecting US Beit-ul-Moqaddas bid



AP

The UN Security Council is considering a draft resolution affirming that any change to the status of Beit-ul-Moqaddas has no legal effect and must be reversed, in response to the US decision to recognize the city as Israel's capital.

Egypt circulated the draft text, and diplomats said the council could vote on the proposed measure as early as Monday, AFP reported.

Breaking with the international consensus, US President Donald Trump this month announced that he would recognize Beit-ul-Moqaddas as Israel's capital and move the US embassy there from Tel Aviv, sparking protests and strong condemnation.

The draft resolution stresses that Beit-ul-Moqaddas is an issue "to be resolved through negotiations" and expresses "deep regret at recent decisions concerning the status of Jerusalem (Beit-ul-Moqaddas)," without specifically mentioning Trump's move.

"Any decisions and actions which purport to have altered the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem (Beit-ul-Moqaddas) have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded," it said.

Diplomats said they expected the United States to use its veto power to block the measure while most, if not all, of the 14 other council members were expected to back the draft resolution.

Israel illegally occupied and seized control of the eastern part of the city in the 1967 Middle East war and sees the whole of Beit-ul-Moqaddas as its undivided capital. The Palestinians view the east as the capital of their future state.

The draft resolution calls on all countries to refrain from opening embassies in Beit-ul-Moqaddas, reflecting concerns that other governments could follow the US lead.

It demands that all member-states not to recognize any actions that are contrary to UN resolutions on the status of the city. Several UN resolutions call on Israel to withdraw from territory seized during the 1967 war and have reaffirmed the need to end the occupation of that land.

The Palestinians had sought a toughly-worded draft resolution that would have directly called on the US administration to scrap its decision.

But some US allies on the council such as Britain, France, Egypt, Japan and Ukraine were reluctant to be too hard-hitting and insisted that the proposed measure should reaffirm the position enshrined in current resolutions, diplomats said.