



Rouhani says his government's key failed to open locked social apps **2**



Far-right groups fingerprints is clear in anti-Iranian statement of Trump: Limbert **7**



No guarantee for winning medal: Igor Kolakovic **15**



Retrospective to highlight Ali-Akbar Sadeqi's inspiring ideas **16**

Turkey's continued inconsistent policy

See page 13



REUTERS / Osman Orsal

Turkish soldiers stand on top of tanks in a village on the Turkish-Syrian border in Gaziantep province, Turkey. 22 January 2018.



ARTICLE

By Sadollah Zarei
Political analyst

Chaos in December: the defeat of the enemy

The Islamic Revolution of Iran has been a matter of great concern for America, Britain, Israel and the West since 1979 and it seems it will continue to be so in the future.

The American government has viewed the Islamic Republic of Iran as a hostile nation since the tenure of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. U.S allies, such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, have been coerced to follow Uncle Sam's footsteps in an effort to demonize the sovereign nation of Iran.

Though the above-mentioned countries have attempted to cripple the Iranian economy via a harsh and unjust embargo and oppressive sanctions, they have failed to do so due to the formidable spirit of the Iranian people and their great sense of nationalism which was defined in the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

In recent years, certain members of the international community in Europe have distanced themselves from American's provocation to alienate Iran from actively taking part in world commerce and banking. This was clearly evidence by the enthusiasm certain members of the United Nations Security Council (United Kingdom, Russia, France, and China—plus Germany) demonstrated by signing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015.

Comprehensive revolution

When a nation faces an external enemy, its priority will be to survive in the face of its rivals. This focus on external forces causes internal reforms to slow down and after a while the system will face internal challenges that appear to be unmanageable.

Iran's progress validates the expansion of the nation's internal democracy, an increase in the influence of the Supreme Leader, not to mention advancement and achievement in science, industry and defense. The Islamic Republic's successful efforts in addressing complex regional issues demonstrates that notwithstanding the constant meddling by the West, it is able to continue its pursuit of progress and development. The massive and persistent support of the Iranian people who defend the revolution is the result of domestic stability and its significant strategic position. **→13**

Involving Syrian Kurds in settlement to limit U.S. influence: Logoglu

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — Criticizing the U.S. policy in Syria to bring Turks and Kurds into a full scale war, Turkish veteran politician says involving Syrian Kurds in the country's settlement process will limit the U.S. influence in Syria.

Turkish forces on Saturday launched attack on the Afrin region of northwestern Syria.

While Turkey claims the operation is intended to eliminate terrorists from the region, the Syrian government considers it as a violation of its territorial integrity.

To know more about the issue we reached out to the senior member of Turkey's Republican People's Party (CHP), Dr. Osman Faruk logoglu.



Following is the full text of the interview with him:

What is the real goal behind the U.S.' provocative acts in the region like creating a border security force in Syrian Kurdish region or arming SDF?

India's military operations with U.S. in Afghanistan unlikely: expert

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Gautam Adhikari, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress (CAP), says "India has been long involved in Afghanistan's reconstruction and attempted recovery."

"That role continues. But India's involvement in military operations with the U.S. in Afghanistan seems unlikely at this point," Adhikari tells the Tehran Times.

Following is the text of the interview:

■ The U.S. National Security Strategy has focused on the security of Afghanistan and Pakistan's role in this regard. What is the reason behind Trump's Negative Approach to Pakistan?

A: The U.S. for several years now has been deeply skeptical about Pakistan's role as a non-NATO ally. The Trump administration's

approach is not totally new in that sense. But by directly accusing Pakistan's leaders of "nothing but lies and deceit" in return for \$33 billion in aid since 2001 and of providing training and "safe havens for terrorists" who are killing American and allied soldiers in Afghanistan, President Trump has brought the case of Pakistan playing a double game out into the open.

Washington announced a \$250 million cut in military aid, suspended reimbursements to the Pakistani military for its efforts to tackle terrorists, and threatened to cut off all assistance that was in the pipeline. The Obama administration had also confronted Pakistan, particularly its military leadership, but it had done so more discreetly, although it did call Rawalpindi's bluff by launching a military operation without informing the Pakistanis to kill Osama Bin Laden who was hiding in a safe house about a mile from Pakistan's

A: One constant in the ever-fluctuating Syrian conflict has been the rivalry between Russia and the U.S. For influence and a say in the now and the future of Syria, Russia has put its stakes on Bashar al-Assad and the U.S. on the Kurds. Turkey on the other, supporting various Sunni groups — some of them regarded as terrorists by the U.S. and others — fighting Assad, opposes both Assad and PYD/YPG and thus has a more difficult path to tread.

Further complicating the situation has been recent U.S. acts of support to PYD/YPG despite repeated warnings from Turkey that it is aiding a terrorist organization. After supplying YPG with heavy arms, the most recent U.S. move to create a YPG-strong "border security force" was the "last straw that broke the camel's back" for Turkey.

leading military academy.

President Trump with a tweet on January 1 brought the issue into the public arena. Whether he should have done so or instead continued intense diplomatic and financial pressure away from the public eye is being debated by scholars and experts, many of whom feel that a public shaming of Pakistan will be less productive from the U.S. point of view than exerting leverage through diplomacy. But what you call a 'negative approach' is not exactly new.

■ In this strategy, India's role in Afghanistan is increasing. Why does the Trump government want to play India's wider role in Afghanistan?

A: India has been long involved in Afghanistan's reconstruction and attempted recovery. That role continues. But India's involvement in military operations with the U.S. in Afghanistan seems unlikely at this point. **→7**

Leader OKs \$4b withdrawal from National Fund for priority projects

POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has agreed with a request to withdraw four billion dollars from the National Development Fund for priority projects, particularly projects dealing with water management, environment protection, and boosting defense capability.

The announcement was made on Tues-

day by MP Ali Asghar Yousefnejad, the spokesman for the special parliamentary committee studying the proposed national budget bill for the next fiscal year 1397, which starts on March 21.

Yousefnejad said 150 million dollars has been allocated to counter dust storms and devise a system to prevent power cuts in the southwestern province of Khuzestan.

Saffron exports up 26% in 9 months

ECONOMY TEHRAN- Iran exported over 160 tons of saffron worth more than \$219 million to 56 countries during the nine-month period ended on December 21, 2017, with 26 percent growth in the value compared to the same time span in the preceding year.

The weight of exported saffron also

indicates 33 percent rise from the figure of its past year, ISNA reported.

United Arab Emirates (UAE), Hong Kong, Spain, Afghanistan and China were the top importers of Iranian saffron during the nine-month period, importing 33 tons, 15 tons, 14 tons, five tons and four tons of the product, respectively. **→4**

'Caspian Sea water transfer more disastrous than nuclear explosion'

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — The detrimental impacts of transferring water from the Caspian Sea to the central province of Semnan can be more catastrophic than a nuclear explosion, Mohammad Darvish, a faculty member of the Research Institute of Forests and Rangelands said on Monday.

Transferring water from the Caspian Sea can lead to multi-sided environmental disasters both for the sea and regions along the route, Darvish said, Mehr news agency reported.

He described two possible scenarios for this transfer, both of which damaging the environment. **→12**



ARTICLE

By Mahnaz Abdi
Head of the Economy Desk of the TehranTimes

Industrial units to receive more support

On January 10, Iranian parliament (Majlis) approved the bill on industrial support and prevention of closing factories.

The related bylaw was declared by First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri to the Ministries of Industry, Mining and Trade; Agriculture; Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare; Finance and Economic Affairs, and the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

Also, given the necessity of supporting small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) which are mainly active in production sector, on Sunday, Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari declared the instructions on recognizing the production units that are in need of repair and renovation and providing them with the required fund.

He also announced the banks and credit institutes' willingness to provide working capital for the production units and offer facilities to the development activities especially industrial ones.

Meanwhile, two months ago, the minister said that when it comes to imposing tariffs the government is trying to take an approach of supporting domestic industries and guaranteeing their competitive status.

Moreover, Sadeq Najafi, the managing director of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) has informed his organization's various supportive plans for boosting production and employment in the industrial parks.

In addition to the government's increasing supportive measures for the industrial units, the challenges faced by the private sector has promoted this sector to set up a union for supporting the industries. This union is due to remove the barriers that private industrial units have been tackling over the recent years.

This increasing trend of supports to the industrial sector has been apparently resulted in desire for more industrial activities as Shariatmadari announced on Saturday that demand for the establishment of industrial units has risen 23 percent in the country during a nine-month period ended on December 21, 2017, compared to the same time span in the previous year.

He said such growth and also the rising number of issued establishment permits indicate willingness for investment in domestic industrial sector despite all existing problems and barriers.



Tehran Times / Asghar Khamseh

Theater aficionados welcome Fajr street performance

Theater aficionados watch "War under the Skin of My Mother and Me", a street performance by a troupe from Abadan, during the 36th Fajr International Theater Festival in the courtyard of Tehran's City Theater Complex on January 22, 2018.

The street performances are competing in the Offstage Section of the festival, which will run until January 29.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



It is an ‘illusion’
to rewrite nuclear
deal: Shamkhani

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Speaking about rewriting the 2015 nuclear deal due to a pressure by U.S. President Donald Trump is just an “illusion”, Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said on Tuesday.

Speaking with al-Alam TV, Shamkhani said Washington’s efforts to contest nuclear deal, also called the JCPOA, is an “illegal” move and that Iran will “never agree to renegotiation” of the agreement.

The U.S. has shown flagrant disregard to the JCPOA and while Iran has been fully committed to the multilateral agreement, it has not been able to fully benefit from it, the top security official complained.



Israel is a threat
to all countries,
Larijani says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said on Tuesday that the Israeli regime is a threat to the national security of all countries.

Addressing a gathering called “Conference on Gaza: Symbol of Resistance” in Tehran, Larijani said the Israeli regime seeks to harm the economy of other countries, Press TV reported.

He said Iran is supporting the Palestinians because they are an oppressed nation expelled from their country by Israel.

Palestinians are living in poverty in camps in Lebanon, Syria and other countries and have lost their homes, assets and jobs, the parliament speaker lamented.



IRGC handing
out goods to
poor families in
Bushehr villages

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Director of the construction unit of the IRGC in Bushehr province has handed out 5 billion rials (about 125,000 dollars) worth of household goods and clothes to poor families in the villages across the southern province.

Speaking to Tasnim news agency published on Tuesday, Lieutenant Colonel Zolfagar Abbasifar said the construction unit aims to reduce deprivation and fight poverty in Bushehr province.

He said the unit has launched construction projects in all of the villages in the province, adding that 300 projects are implemented annually in the villages.



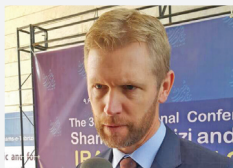
Jamshid Momtaz
chosen as Iran’s
judge in complaint
against U.S.

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Republic has chosen Jamshid Momtaz, an Iranian jurist and academic, to pursue the Central Bank of Iran’s complaint against the United States.

The central bank has filed a complaint against the U.S. at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Under international law, each side of the complaint must introduce a judge to the body.

Amir-Saed Vakil, an Iranian lawyer, said Iran’s complaint against the U.S. dates back to 8 years ago, ISNA reported.

He said the complaint is related to the freeze of the central bank’s assets which is against international law.



Norway backs full
implementation
of nuclear deal:
ambassador

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Norwegian ambassador to Tehran on Tuesday voiced his country’s resolve to support the 2015 nuclear deal, calling for further development of trade ties between the two countries.

Lars Nordrum made the remarks in a meeting with representatives of Iranian businesses and trade companies in Sari in northern Iran.

He said Norway and Iran has signed four contracts in the fields of oil and gas, shipping, renewable energy and aquaculture following the implementation of the nuclear deal.

“Norway has also inked a contract with National Iranian Oil Company for oil exploration in the Caspian Sea,” he was quoted by Mehr as saying.



Austrian
ambassador
hails 500-year-
old ties with Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Austrian Ambassador to Tehran, Stefan Scholz, said on Tuesday that his country’s relations with Iran date back to some 500 years ago and that ties are still developing.

Attending an Austrian food festival in Tehran, Scholz wished that 2018 would be a “golden year” for Austria-Iran ties.

He also said the two sides cooperate in different fields, including academic and research fields.

Scholz also said safeguarding the Iran nuclear deal is in the interest of the world, adding that his country attaches great importance to the lifting of anti-Iran sanctions.

Interior Ministry clarifies root causes of Iran protests

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Deputy Interior Minister Hossein Zolfagari has shed light on the root causes of the recent protests which broke out across the country and died out after a week, saying the ministry has provided President Rouhani with an inclusive report on the sources of public discontent.

The report has been issued to give an objective account of the recent unrest and is devoid of any political bias so as to avoid making miscalculations, Zolfagari was quoted by IRNA as saying on Tuesday.

On Sunday, Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli announced that he has presented the report to the president.

Rahmani Fazli said based on information provided by law enforcement and security bodies, the Interior Ministry has addressed and identified the causes behind the unrest and has suggested solutions to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future.

It came days after President Rouhani ordered the interior minister to prepare and present a detailed report on the recent unrest, in coordination with other state bodies.

Elaborating on the report, Zolfagari said the activities of Iran’s foreign enemies — especially the United States, its regional servants and opposition groups — was one of the reasons behind the unrest.



Another reason, the official said, is a decline in public trust which could be attributed to many reasons, including governmental bodies’ incompetence in meeting

Interior Ministry cites trust deficit, unfulfilled expectations raised in presidential elections, and provocations by foreign enemies as the major causes of protests.

Rouhani says his government’s key failed to open locked social apps



POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Iranian president has said his government’s measures failed to remove ban on some social apps in the country.

Hassan Rouhani made the remarks during a live interview on the national TV late on Monday.

Referring to his 2013 electoral campaign symbol of a key to the country’s problems, the host asked the president if his key failed to open the locked apps and Rouhani said: “The 11th administration’s key [Rouhani’s previous administration] could not open them. Let’s hope the 12th government succeeds.”

When the host asked him how it is that government officials use Twitter and other banned social apps to communicate,

Rouhani said: “I think your criticism applies there. But of course we at the executive branch did all we could to make [cyberspace] more accessible.”

“Some of these networks were locked before the 11th administration.... People may want to know that to keep this space open, the government took a lot of pains.”

Commenting on why social apps were blocked during recent riots in the country, Rouhani said: “It is possible that at some point this happens due to urgent needs. But we did not let it become permanent. Some people may hypothesize that we were looking for some excuse to lock some social networks forever. But that is not true. Our attempt is to make sure people can use this space.”

U.S. initiative on Iran deal not to yield positive results: Russia

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Russian deputy foreign minister has said the so-called initiative put forward by the U.S., France, Britain and Germany to set up a working group to “fix” the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers is unlikely to bring any positive results.

“Moscow” does not expect any positive developments in the light of such decisions and possible agreements... We do not believe that any agreements and

understanding that might be achieved in this format, without involving Iran and other parties to the JCPOA, will have any impact in terms of maintaining our position to support full implementation of the agreement without any adjustments,” Sergei Ryabkov told sputnik on Tuesday.

He stressed that Moscow had repeatedly stated that the issue of potential “improvement” of the nuclear deal “is becoming clearly targeted at jeopardizing the deal,

complicating its further implementation.”

“But, of course, we will follow this (issue), although we understand that these ‘games’ of the United States and its European allies will not have any influence on our position, our approach to the JCPOA and the importance of ensuring its normal implementation in its current form,” the diplomat stressed.

Ryabkov said Moscow is concerned about the trend of the ongoing negotiations. U.S. officials have repeatedly claimed

that progress is being made with Democratic lawmakers in Congress, as well as European allies, on legislation to “fix” the Iran nuclear deal without violating its terms.

On Monday, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson announced that the working group comprising the U.S. and EU diplomats had been established to discuss concerns about the nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
(Source: Tasnim)

Military adviser proposes Iran-Iraq-Pakistan alliance against U.S.

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi, a top military adviser to the Leader, on Tuesday proposed a coalition of “Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and other countries” against the United States in West Asia.

“This coalition should be formed with participation of governments and nations in order to be able to act successfully against the U.S.,” Rahim Safavi suggested.

He also said that provoking division among countries in region is on the U.S. agenda.

“The U.S. has on its agenda to keep conflict centers and use them to provoke division in the region,” IRIB quoted Safavi as saying on Tuesday.

He noted that Daesh waged war in Syria with a financial and political support by the U.S., the Zionist regime of Israel, and some reactionary Arab countries.



“Daesh actions were mainly beneficial to security of the Zionist regime,” added Safavi, the former chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps.

The general also said that the U.S. is promoting Iranophobia to achieve its political, economic and military objectives.

Elsewhere, he noted that the U.S. and Zionist regime’s powers are waning in the world.

Army conducts second day of military exercises

The Iranian Army on Tuesday conducted the second and final day of annual military drills involving ground, naval, and aerial forces in the country’s southern regions.

The exercises, codenamed Mohammad Rasoulallah (The Prophet of God), kicked off early on Monday.

They cover an expanse of 2.2 million square kilometers in south and southeast, the Makran Coast, and other areas in the Sea of Oman.

Rear Admiral Seyyed Mahmoud Mousavi, the spokesperson for the maneuvers, told Press TV that the second day of the drills

saw Iranian vessels conduct surface, anti-surface and anti-aircraft operations at the Sea of Oman.

The forces attending the maneuvers also employed radar and surveillance systems to detect ground and aerial activities by the mock enemy. They then used missiles and artillery fire to eliminate those threats.

During the exercises, short-range Nasr rockets along with medium- and long-range surface-to-surface missiles were used to strike enemy targets, Mousavi explained.

The Army’s Deputy Commander for Coordination, Habibollah Sayyari, said on



Monday that the maneuvers were aimed at improving defense capabilities, enhancing the preparedness and morale of the servicemen, and evaluating training tactics,

fire power and coordination among forces.

The first day of the drills featured the use of various precision-strike rockets and laser-guided artillery. Heavy and light submarines as well as helicopters were also deployed during the exercises.

Additionally on Monday, the Iranian Army warned off two U.S.-led coalition battleships that had approached the site of the drills for surveillance.

Iranian armed forces regularly conduct drills to maintain defensive readiness and to incorporate technologically new weapons systems.

Leader OKs \$4b withdrawal from National Fund for priority projects

1 → The rest of the allocations are as follows:

2.5 billion dollars to defense capabilities; 150 million dollars to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB); 100 million dollars to reconstruction of quake and flood-stricken regions; 100 million dollars to Rotavirus and Pneumococcal vaccine; 350 million dollars to finance facilities in Sistan in southeast Iran; 200 million dollars to water supply to villages; 250 million dollars to under pressure irrigation in agriculture; and 200 million dollars to watershed management.

The administration had proposed \$150 million in

the budget bill for the next calendar year for combating sand and dust storms in southwestern Iran, including Khuzestan

An Iranian MP told IRNA that 100 million dollars out

150 million dollars will be spent on the project to counter dust storms in Khuzestan province.

of this amount will be allocated to the project to combat dust storms and 50 million dollars to the utility projects.

According to Khuzestan’s provincial environment department, in recent days the concentration of fine dust in Ahwaz, Behbahan and Masjed Soleyman reached at a high of 627, 2926 and 2056 micrograms per cubic meter.

This is while the normal level of fine dust concentration is 150 micrograms per cubic meter.

Schools, universities and even offices were closed in some southwestern cities to temporarily protect the health of citizens.

UAE officials under investigation for torture



The UK police are actively investigating a group of United Arab Emirates officials for torture and cruel treatment inflicted on several Qatari nationals, a human rights lawyer has said.

The Emiratis may be questioned and arrested if they were to enter the UK under the principle of universal jurisdiction, says Rodney Dixon, a barrister at Temple Garden Chambers representing three Qatari nationals, who were imprisoned and tortured between 2013 and 2015 in Emirati prisons.

"We provided information about 10 suspects. All of them are Emiratis in official positions who were either directly involved in acts of torture or were superiors in charge, who failed to prevent torture to happen under their chain of command," Dixon told Al Jazeera on Monday.

The three Qatari nationals - Mahmoud al-Jaidah, Hamed al-Hammadi and Yousef al-Mulla - were taken into custody and held without charge by the UAE authorities at different times between 2013 and 2015.

Speaking to the press in Geneva, Mahmoud al-Jaidah, a 56-year-old medical practitioner at Qatar Petroleum, said he was arrested at Dubai airport and held without charge for 27 months between February 2013 and May 2015.

In the first three days of his detention, he was accused of being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and of having transferred funds to cells in the UAE, a charge he strongly denied.

He was held in solitary confinement for seven months, deprived of sleep, beaten up and threatened to be electrocuted, until he was forced to sign a 37-page false confession.

"The torture I was exposed to was unbearable. A man would admit to anything under those conditions. However, I didn't know what I was signing," said al-Jaidah, who has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression ever since.

■ Arbitrary detention

Al-Jaidah and the other victims of torture in the UAE prisons reported the same ordeal: arbitrary detention, solitary confinement, torture and forcible confessions extracted either under threat or with the promise of a speedy release.

"This is a recurring pattern in the UAE, which is of grave concern and has been highlighted also by the UN high commissioner for human rights. The commissioner has raised very serious questions about the UAE [judicial] system," said Dixon.

Toby Cadman, a lawyer specializing in human rights, said victims of torture in the UAE are seeking justice in the UK and other countries because the UAE's judicial system lacks independence and the procedural safeguards simply do not exist.

"We don't have the ability to ensure enforcement of these rights in the UAE, which is deeply regrettable," said Cadman, who represents David Haigh, a British national who was allegedly imprisoned without charge and subjected to brutal forms of torture in UAE prisons for 22 months.

"What we are seeing is a system which is abused by individuals in positions of power and a complete vacuum of accountability. It is the UAE's responsibility to implement a system whereby there is judicial independ-

ence and scrutiny of their criminal justice and their penal system."

Lawyers and victims say there is a culture of fear for those who fall into the hands of the UAE authorities and are arbitrarily arrested, in many cases for the most ludicrous allegations.

"We call upon the UAE to fundamentally reform their criminal justice system, and upon the UN to conduct a greater detailed assessment of the UAE system through the special procedures and working groups," Cadman said.

■ Commercial interests

Lawyers also raise concerns about the presence of international judges in Dubai courts [DIFC Courts for example], who lend credibility and legitimacy to a process that they say is used and abused to detain political opponents and individuals who are vulnerable due to their commercial interests, as in the case of Haigh.

Haigh, a former managing director of Leeds United, a leading English football club, flew to Dubai to solve a commercial dispute but, within hours of stepping off the plane, he was arrested and held in a prison for 22 months, during which he was allegedly starved, beaten, electrocuted and raped.

"I was tricked into going to Dubai," he said.

"I had no idea that what should have been a straightforward business deal would very quickly destroy my life. I now know that the people I was doing business with - people who had direct connections to the UAE government - were complicit in this."

Haigh was told to sign a confession and

settlement agreement if he wanted to be released.

Haigh announced this week the creation of a Swiss-based association to assist other survivors of torture in the UAE and bring the offenders to justice.

He said he was aware of at least 40 cases of torture and arbitrary detention in UAE prisons.

One is that of Lee Bradley Brown, who did not make it and died in custody following allegations he was beaten and tortured by the police while in detention for six days, Haigh said.

"The UAE is safe in the knowledge that there is no real consequence for its actions, and therefore there is no incentive to change. Four years on, I am still fighting for justice for myself from the UAE, even an apology would be a start," Haigh said.

■ Under scrutiny

On Monday the UAE's human-rights record came under scrutiny at the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland, as part of the UN Universal Period Review.

Anwar Gargash, the UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, announced the creation of a new human rights institution under the Paris Principles this year, but did not provide further information about the initiative.

During the UN Universal Period Review, Gargash denied that arbitrary detentions were taking place in the UAE, adding that a country report on alleged cases of torture was ready and will be submitted to the relevant UN committee.

"The UAE doesn't hold anyone arbitrarily ... the person who is arrested is immediately informed of the accusations and communication with their family and legal advisers is guaranteed at all times," he said.

The UAE has ratified the UN Convention Against Torture in 2012, but observers say the country has made little progress in implementing any of the convention's recommendations.

"The UAE ratification of the convention hasn't changed anything in practice," said Francois Membrez, a Swiss human rights lawyer.

"There is a strong obligation under the convention for a country to prosecute all cases of torture, but we have seen there is no prosecution at all despite many cases have been brought to the attention of the UAE judiciary."

Gerald Staberock, the secretary-general of the World Organization against Torture, said despite the ratification of the convention and the commitments made by the UAE, the country has not acted upon them.

"These can be said for other Persian Gulf countries, too, which have ratified a number of international human rights treaties," Staberock said. "But regrettably, there hasn't been any practical implementation. That culture has to change."

(Source: al Jazeera)

Egypt army arrests presidential hopeful Sami Anan



Egypt's army has arrested its former chief of staff and presidential hopeful Sami Anan, a top aide from his presidential campaign told media.

The Supreme Committee of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in Egypt has accused Sami of committing violations that "warrant official investigation".

In a statement released on Tuesday, SCAF said that the 69-year-old, who announced his candidacy for the presidential elections in March on Sunday, had forged official documents to end his military service and did not obtain the army's approval to run.

"The Armed Forces do not condone the blatant breach of the rules and regulations of military service that the accused has committed, such as committing the crime of forgery represented in the termination of his service in the armed forces, which led to his inclusion in the electoral roster," the statement said.

The statement also said that Anan was seeking to divide the armed forces and citizens.

Anan had announced his intention to run, two hours after current President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi declared his plan to seek a second term.

In a speech posted on his Facebook page, Anan called on the country's civil and military institutions to be neutral in the presidential race.

He said he was running because the plight of Egyptian people was worsening with the military's overbearing control of the the administration.

This, he said, did not enable the private sector to play its role in running the affairs of the state.

Earlier, Egyptian authorities stormed the homes of Anan's presidential campaigners and arrested a number of them. Anan's campaign announced their suspension of work on their Facebook page for fear of their workers' safety.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

EU foreign policy chief backs East Jerusalem as Palestinian capital

The European Union has assured President Mahmoud Abbas that the 28-nation bloc supports Palestinians' bid to have East Jerusalem al-Quds as capital of their future state.

During a meeting with Abbas at the EU headquarters in Brussels on Monday, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini rejected U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel's capital.

"I want to reassure President Abbas of the firm commitment of the European Union to the [so-called] two-state solution with Jerusalem [al-Quds] as the shared capital of the two states," media outlets quoted Mogherini as saying.

Mogherini, in reference to Trump's recognition of Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel's capital, also called on those involved in the process to speak and act "wisely," with a sense of responsibility.

Before Abbas' arrival, she was more outspoken, saying: "Clearly there is a problem with Jerusalem [al-Quds]. That is a very diplomatic euphemism."

Abbas' presence at the EU headquarters in Brussels was seized on by European officials and foreign ministers as a chance to restate opposition to Trump's decision to move the U.S. embassy to the occupied al-Quds.

Deputy German Foreign Minister Michael Roth said that Trump's decision had made talks between Palestinians and Israelis harder.

France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian also said that Paris wanted to push the European Union to offer closer trade ties through a so-called EU association agreement, an EU treaty covering unfettered access to the bloc's 500 million consumers, aid and closer political and cultural ties. "We want to say to Mahmoud Abbas that we want to move ... towards an association agreement and to start the process already."

But offering an EU association agreement to the Palestinians was also fraught with difficulties, diplomats said.

The Palestinian president, for his part, urged EU governments to recognize a state of Palestine immediately.

"We are keen on continuing the way of negotiations," Abbas said, adding, "We are determined to reunite our people and our land."

Palestinians want East Jerusalem al-Quds as the capital of a future independent Palestinian state.

Last week, Abbas said that Trump's so-called Middle East peace efforts are the "slap of the century" after his recognition of Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel's capital.

On December 6, 2017, Trump announced that Washington would recognize Jerusalem al-Quds as the capital of Israel and would relocate the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to the city.

At least nine EU governments, including Sweden and Poland, already recognize Palestine.

Slovenia has also recently raised the possibility of recognizing the state of Palestine. A parliamentary committee there is due to consider the issue on January 31.

EU governments also reject Israeli settlements on land Israel has occupied since a 1967 war -- including the West Bank, East al-Quds and the Golan Heights.

(Source: Press TV)

Saudi may pocket \$100bn in cash-for-freedom settlements with detained royals

Saudi Arabia is likely to bag over \$100 billion in monetary settlement deals with princes and businessmen detained as part of its so-called anti-graft purge, a senior government official says.

The official, who was speaking on condition of anonymity, told Bloomberg on Monday that the settlement payments were a combination of cash, real estate, stocks and other asset classes.

He also noted that only a handful of those held at Ritz-Carlton Hotel in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, would likely reach an agreement with the authorities, warning that the individuals who fail to come to a compromise would be referred to prosecutors.

Over 200 Saudi businessmen and royals were rounded up in November 2017 in an alleged "anti-corruption campaign" spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Observers said the campaign was actually meant to consolidate bin Salman's power and silence his critics. There have been reports of high-profile Saudi figures being beaten and tortured while in custody.

The purge sent shockwaves through Saudi markets, with reports saying many billionaires moved their assets out of the region to avoid getting caught up in the crackdown.

The Riyadh regime then began securing cash settlement deals with the high-profile detainees, receiving hefty amounts in exchange for their freedom.

Prince Miteb bin Abdullah, a son of the former Saudi king, was freed after reaching a one-billion-dollar "acceptable settlement agreement" with the authorities.

The Wall Street Journal also reported last month that the kingdom was pressuring al-Waleed bin Talal, a famous billionaire prince to pay up a whopping six billion dollars. Other reports suggested bin Talal had been subjected to torture in detention.

The Bloomberg report further cited Saudi Attorney General Sheikh Saud al-Mojeb as saying on Sunday that authorities had agreed to drop charges against about 90 detainees, who were released.

Some 95 others were still held at Ritz-Carlton Hotel, including five weighing settlement proposals, with the remaining reviewing evidence presented against them, he added. Earlier reports had, however, said the detainees had been transferred to a maximum-security prison facility.



"The royal order was clear. Those who express remorse and agree to settle will have any criminal proceedings against them dropped," he pointed out.

Al-Mojeb further denied reports of violation of the detainees' rights, saying all had access to legal counsel and some retained lawyers, while those released faced no restrictions on their movement.

Riyadh confiscates Mecca hotel

Separately on Monday, Qatari daily Al Sharq reported that the Saudi kingdom had confiscated Dar Al Tawhid Intercontinental Hotel, owned by Prince Abdul Aziz bin Fahd.

The 5-star hotel overlooks the Great Mosque of Mecca. The prince was taken into custody as part of the alleged anti-graft campaign late last year.

He was initially thought to have been killed in a firefight

while resisting arrest, but Saudi Arabia's Information Ministry later confirmed he was "alive and well." The prince's whereabouts are still unknown.

At the height of the clampdown, the Saudi crown prince, was linked to pricey art and real estate purchases, while overseeing the process and personally grilling some of the detainees, according to reports.

Bin Salman reportedly used a "proxy" to buy Leonardo da Vinci's painting the Salvador Mundi, which sold for a record \$450 million at auction, and a yacht for \$500 million.

An investigation by The New York Times also named the crown prince as the owner of the Chateau Louis XIV, a mansion outside Paris, which was sold to him for more than 300 million dollars back in 2015.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	99224.8
IFX	1087.54

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	45,470 rials
EUR	57,980 rials
GBP	63,400 rials
AED	12,530 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$69.29/b
WTI	\$63.78/b
OPEC Basket	\$66.48/b
Gold	\$1,337.10/oz
Silver	\$17.03/oz
Platinum	\$1,001.00/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Saffron exports up 26% in 9 months

1 → U.S., Germany, Britain, Italy, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, Canada and the Netherlands are among the countries with more purchase of saffron from Iran compared to the year before and Madagascar is the new buyer of Iranian saffron.

Iran's weight of saffron exports during the past Iranian calendar year (March 2016-March 2017) rose 60 percent compared to that of the previous year, according to Gholamreza Miri, the vice chairman of National Iranian Saffron Council.

The official put the weight of the country's exported saffron at 176 tons in last year while the figure stood at 113 tons in its previous year.

The value of saffron exports in the past year stood at \$253 million, he added.

NEWS IN BRIEF



50 new industrial estates to be constructed in rural areas

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Construction of 50 new industrial estates will be started in the rural areas in early February, the head of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization announced.

As IRNA quoted Sadeq Najafi on Tuesday, the constructions will be commenced on the occasion of Ten-Day Dawn (February 1-10, marking the victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution).

On January 10, Iranian parliament (Majlis) approved the bill on industrial support and prevention of closing factories.

The related bylaw was declared by First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri to the Ministries of Industry, Mining and Trade; Agriculture; Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare; Finance and Economic Affairs, and the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).



Tehran hosting intl. exhibit on real estate, property

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**— The Fifth International Exhibition of Real Estate and Property of Iran kicked off at Tehran Permeant International Fairground on Tuesday and will run until Friday, IIRB news reported.

In addition to the Iranian exhibitors, the four-day event is hosting 10 foreign companies from Spain, Italy, Turkey and Cyprus, Shahnam Sepasdar, the secretary of exhibition, announced and said that training workshops are being held on the sidelines of the exhibit.



Electricity to be supplied to 400 villages by late Mar.

ENERGY **TEHRAN**— Electricity will be supplied to some 400 villages, with population of less than 10 families, by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2018), an official from Iranian Energy Ministry announced in a conference on Tuesday, IRNA reported.

"Some 900 billion rials (about \$19.7 million) of finance is to be granted for supplying electricity to these villages," Valieddin Maslahati Sharbiani said.



Belarus interested in buying more Iranian oil: minister

ENERGY **TEHRAN** – Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said Belarus has expressed willingness to buy more crude oil from Iran, Shana reported. Zanganeh made the remarks after receiving Belarusian Industry Minister Vitali Vouk on Tuesday.

"Belarus has purchased two one-million-barrel oil cargos from Iran so far and they are interested in buying more cargos in the future," the minister said.

JICA to fund power plants rehabilitation project in Iran

ENERGY **TEHRAN**

— Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is going to fund the rehabilitation project of Iranian thermal power plants, IRNA reported on Tuesday quoting an official at Iran's Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH).

According to Hamidreza Azimi, the deputy for planning affairs in TPPH, Iranian power plants current efficiency

stands at 37.8 percent. The figure is due to reach 40 percent by the end of the Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (March 2021).

"There are near 3,000 megawatts (MW) capacity of old power plants with low efficiency across the country and the power plant rehabilitation project is aimed to upgrade such plants in order to decrease fuel consumption," the official said.

Japan says Trans-Pacific trade pact, without U.S., to be signed in March

Eleven countries aiming to forge a new Asia-Pacific trade pact after the United States pulled out of an earlier version will hold a signing ceremony in Chile in March, Japan's economy minister said on Tuesday in a big win for Tokyo.

Trade officials from the 11 countries had been meeting in Tokyo to try to resolve rifts including Canada's insistence on protection of its cultural industries such as movies, TV and music.

An agreement is a huge plus for Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government, which has been lobbying hard to save the pact, originally called the Trans-Pacific Partnership. U.S. President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the original 12-nation trade agreement last year.

Abe has painted the deal as a spur to growth and reform in Japan and a symbol of commitment to free and multilateral trade at a time when Trump is stressing "America



Azimi noted that the rehabilitation project for Shahid Rajaie and Shahid Mofateh power plants have been discussed with the Japanese side and JICA is going to finance the projects.

"JICA facilities will be provided with an interest rate of less than two percent and the repayment due will be six years after the allocation of facilities for 20 years."

First" policies.

Economy Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said that the new agreement, known as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTTP), or TPP-11, would be an "engine to overcome protectionism" emerging in parts of the world. He also said Japan would explain the importance of the deal to Washington in hopes of persuading it to join.

Ministers from the 11 countries including

Japan, Australia and Canada had agreed in November on core elements to move ahead without the United States, but demands by countries including Canada for measures to ensure the deal protects jobs have been a sticking point to finalizing the agreement.

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull also said last week that the new agreement would leave a door open for eventual U.S. participation.

(Source: Reuters)

Signs point to revival in international use of China's yuan



internal discussions of policy but who are not part of the decision-making process, said there was no sense of urgency in Beijing to push forward the yuan's internationalization, the name given to the process under which China permits increased use of the closely controlled currency outside China.

"We will follow the tide," said a policy source, who declined to be identified. "We won't push it forward too forcefully. This will be a long process."

In 2015, interest in the yuan offshore collapsed after China's dramatic intervention to head off a financial crisis as its stock markets crashed. Regulators tightened China's financial borders to stop a flood of capital flowing out of the country. The outflows were brought

under control in 2017, and they are growing once again.

IL&FS, an Indian infrastructure firm, completed the sale of its three-year yuan bond earlier this month priced to yield 8 percent. Order books for the bond reached more than 2 billion yuan, underscoring strong demand for the asset.

"Demand for dim sum bonds is increasing as the yuan has been gaining growth momentum, so it's good timing for companies which need to raise funds in this market," said Chao Li, a director of Standard Chartered's Asia Bond Syndicate, which was involved in the deal.

Yuan deposits in Hong Kong, the biggest offshore yuan hub, rose to 559.2 billion yuan in November, their highest since November

2016, while cross-border yuan trade settlement hit a 17-month high, Hong Kong Monetary Authority data shows.

Analysts said more broadly, China's Belt and Road project will help support more use of the yuan. Yin Yong, a vice-governor of the People's Bank of China, was quoted on Jan. 15 by Xinhua as saying that the Belt and Road initiative was providing strategic opportunities for yuan internationalization.

Nathan Chow, an analyst at DBS in Hong Kong, said many Belt and Road projects are expected to "step up pace, which will benefit the yuan's internationalization."

The central bank also introduced measures this month to encourage companies to increase their use of yuan for settling cross-border trade deals and support foreigners' use of the currency for direct investments in China.

However, the China policy sources said they don't expect any significant relaxation of capital controls on currency flows, which would limit any offshore growth in the currency's availability.

The yuan CNY=CFXS rose 6.8 percent against the U.S. dollar in 2017, its best annual performance since 2008, reversing three straight years of depreciation.

China International Capital Corporation (CICC) has forecast that the yuan would rise this year to 6.28 per dollar. On Tuesday it fetched around 6.4 per dollar. (\$1=6.4 yuan)

(Source: Reuters)

UBS chairman warns against bitcoin investment as cryptocurrency falls 12%

Bitcoin has fallen 12% over 24 hours while the chairman of UBS warned against investing in it and South Korea continued to crack down on cryptocurrencies by banning anonymous trading.

Talking at the Davos world economic forum, UBS Chairman Axel Weber, said that bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies were speculative, risky and "not an investment we would advise".

"Retail clients, who don't fully understand these products, should be protected from going into these products, because if there is a retail client affected in the future, the question will be again who was the bank that sold them these products and then banks



India Essar's Iran oil imports doubles in Dec. vs Nov. - trade

Indian private refiner Essar Oil imported 139,400 barrels per day (bpd) from Iran in December, almost double the previous month's level, according to tanker arrival data obtained from trade sources and ship-

tracking services on the Thomson Reuters terminal.

Russian oil major Rosneft and its partners, including global trader Trafigura and Russian fund UCP, in August closed a deal

to acquire a 98.3 percent stake in Essar Oil for \$12.9 billion, giving the consortium a foothold in Asia and securing a new outlet for its oil.

Essar Oil's imports from Iran in De-

cember was 16.5 percent higher than a year ago, the data showed.

In 2017 the refiner shipped in about 21 percent less oil from Iran at about 134,000 bpd, the data showed. (Source: Reuters)

Globalisation is losing its luster, India's Modi tells Davos summit

Protectionism is gaining ground and globalisation is losing its appeal, but India is open for business, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the World Economic Forum on Tuesday.

Modi is leading a big government and business delegation to the summit in Davos, the first Indian prime minister do so in 21 years, aiming to showcase India as a fast-growing economic power and a potential driver of global growth.

His comments on rising trade barriers came ahead of an address to the forum later this week by U.S. President Donald Trump, who has championed inward looking policies for the world's biggest economy.

"Instead of globalisation, the power of protectionism is putting its head up. Their wish is not only to save themselves from globalisation, but to change the natural flow of globalisation," Modi said at the opening of the forum, which has attracted 70 heads of state and government, chief executives and top bankers.

"The result of this is that we are seeing new types of tariff and non-tariff-based barriers being imposed. Bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations appear to have

come to a halt.

"There is a slowdown in cross-border financial investments and the expansion of (the) global supply chain appears to have slowed down."

Trump has been pushing an "America First" policy of getting businesses to invest in the United States instead of overseas, potentially affecting the growth prospects of emerging economies such as India dependent on foreign investment.

During his 2016 election campaign, Trump blamed globalisation for ravaging U.S. manufacturing jobs as companies sought to reduce labor costs by relocating to Mexico and elsewhere. Trump is due to address the forum on Friday.

Modi said climate change was a major threat to the world, yet the world had failed to come together to tackle it. He said everyone wanted carbon emissions to be cut, but the rich world was not ready to help developing economies with new technology.

India, one of the world's fastest growing major economies and a growing contributor to pollution, has said it is keen to honor its commitment to clean up the environment



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi gestures as he speaks at the Opening Plenary during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, January 23, 2018.

despite Trump pulling out of the Paris accord on cutting carbon emissions. (Source: Reuters)

Oil rises on IMF economic growth outlook, OPEC-Russian supply curbs

Oil prices rose on Tuesday, lifted by healthy economic growth as well as the ongoing supply curtailments by a group of exporters including OPEC and Russia.

Brent crude futures were at \$69.38 a barrel at 0756 GMT, up 35 cents, or 0.5 percent, from their last close, not far off the three-year high of \$70.37 reached on Jan. 15.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$63.93 a barrel, up 36 cents, or 0.6 percent, from their last settlement. WTI rose to its highest since December 2014 on Jan. 16 at \$64.89.

Traders said oil markets were generally well supported by healthy economic growth.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Monday revised upward its forecast for world economic growth in 2018 and 2019, to 3.9 percent for both 2018 and 2019, a 0.2 percentage point increase from its last update in October.

The "economic outlook and seasonally colder weather has led to firmer oil demand growth, facilitating the continuation of a fall in oil inventories towards OPEC's recent five-year average target," BNP



Paribas said in a note.

This growth, which is also translating into more oil consumption, comes at a time of supply curbs by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Russia, which began in January last year and are set to hold throughout 2018.

"The outlook for 2018 is roughly balanced for most of the year, but inventories are set to rise in Q4'18," the French bank said, adding that it has hiked its 2018 oil price forecasts by \$10 a barrel and expects WTI to average \$60 and Brent \$65.

But there have also been signs of a

possible price correction.

Crumbling refinery profits, first in Asia and now also in Europe and the United States, as a result of rising feedstock prices and plentifully available fuel products, point to lower crude orders going forward.

Barclays said it expected Brent to average \$60 per barrel this year.

While that is \$5 above its previous forecast, due to strong demand growth and falling output from OPEC-member Venezuela, the British bank said it had "a bearish view on oil prices for the quarters ahead."

In the long-term, investors are preparing for a decline in oil demand coming from the rise of electric vehicles.

Bank of America Merrill Lynch said in a note this week it saw "peak oil demand by 2030 on electric vehicles... (and that) electric vehicles will have replaced conventional (vehicles) by 2050."

The bank also said that "when gasoline demand peaks by 2025 (and total oil by 2030), refinery utilization rates may decline permanently and refining margins suffer heavily."

(Source: Reuters)

EIA weekly inventory data to be published today, despite govt. shutdown

The Energy Information Administration (EIA) will be releasing its weekly energy inventory data as scheduled today, despite the ongoing government shutdown, according to a new report by MarketWatch.

The agency is "continuing normal data collection and publications schedules until further notice," a spokesman told the news site. The EIA will be "able to operate for a short period of time during the lapse in appropriations."

The Senate passed a stopgap bill on Monday afternoon to keep the government functional through February 8th, though the House still needs to approve the temporary measure. President Donald Trump will then need to sign off on it. The bill in the Senate passed 81-18, with solid blue states voting against the reopening of the federal government.

"I think if we've learned anything during this process it's that a strategy to shut down the government over the issue of illegal immigration is something that the American people didn't understand,"

Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell said of the Democratic strategy to protect Dreamers from the Trump administration's deportation plans.

After the 2013 government shutdown, the EIA had halted the release of official American inventory data and other publications on its website.

Amid emerging doubts that OPEC and Russia have outdone themselves with the oil production cuts and are starting to suffer the consequences, the EIA had reported another large draw in oil inventories last week. At 6.9 million barrels, the draw was significant enough to support a further price rise for WTI.

Some analysts are warning that in this higher-price environment, OPEC and Russia may reconsider their cut strategy for this year and agree to phase the deal out earlier than the December 2018 expiry date, although today Saudi Arabia's oil minister said that OPEC's cooperation outside the group may continue after end-2018.

(Source: oilprice.com)

China exports record diesel, gasoline amid refinery expansion

China exported a record amount of diesel and gasoline last year amid an expansion in refining, a trend that will likely continue in 2018.

Outbound diesel shipments increased 11.6 percent in 2017 to average 351,335 barrels a day, according to Bloomberg calculations based on data posted Tuesday on the General Administration of Customs website. Gasoline exports climbed 8.5 percent to about 240,434 barrels a day.

Refining capacity continues to expand at the world's second-largest oil consumer, producing a record amount of fuels that exceed the nation's demand. Exports of diesel -- also known as gasoil -- are expected to soar 47 percent to 23.8 million tons in 2018 from a year earlier, according to an annual research report by China National Petroleum Corp.

"China's fuel supply swelled last year with new refining units and higher output from independent refiners," Li Li, a research director with ICIS China, said

before the data were released. "With the quite generous export quotas for this year, outbound shipments will likely jump further."

The Ministry of Commerce awarded the first batch of fuel export quotas totaling 16.24 million tons under the general trade system to Chinese state refiners for 2018, according to officials at firms that received notices and who asked not to be identified because of internal policy.

China's net oil-product exports -- a measure that strips out imports -- may climb about 31 percent to 46.8 million metric tons in 2018, the CNPC report said earlier this month. Shipments rose about 7 percent in 2017.

The nation's diesel exports were at 1.99 million metric tons in December, bringing the year's total to 17.19 million tons. Gasoline shipments to overseas markets were record 1.23 million tons last month, bringing the year's total to 10.51 million tons.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Will this cause an oil price reversal?

By Olgu Okumus

Last Friday, oil prices surpassed \$70 per barrel. With OPEC's decision to reduce oil production, oil prices continue their rise. While Iran's oil minister stated in early January that OPEC has no interest in prices jumping over \$60 per barrel, no major changes have yet come from OPEC, and market players continue to wonder what can cause the price rise to reverse.

Some analysis, built on conventional market principles, sees the cause of this tension as ongoing conflict in the Middle East — these analysts now await a strong reaction from Russia to change trends. However, as the International Energy Agency (IEA) notes, the explanation may be more unconventional...

Since oil prices surpassed \$70 per barrel on Friday, much international analysis narrows the cause to tensions in the Middle East — or more precisely, Iraq's decision to join OPEC's agreement to rein in output and ongoing conflict. Jabbar Ali Hussein Al-Luaibi, Iraq's oil minister, announced his country's decision to join OPEC's agreement with other suppliers to rein in output until the end of 2018. "The deal should continue," he said. "The market now is stabilizing somehow, but it's not yet stable."

Despite Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh previously stating that "members of OPEC are not keen on increased Brent crude prices above \$60 a barrel because of shale oil," so far no immediate policy shift came from OPEC on Friday before markets closed. Many analysts, putting the Middle East at the heart of the cause, also projected that tension and the Afrin operation might push prices up to \$80 per barrel.

Thus, raising questions about the foundation of this analysis is now important. Do we need to fear? If so, who or what

Final destination of tanker carrying Russian gas to us 'didn't change': Engie

Late last week, a tanker which was carrying Russian-produced liquefied natural gas (LNG) to the U.S. city of Everett reportedly made a U-turn in Atlantic to head to the Spanish port of Algeciras.

A representative of the French energy company Engie Sputnik that the final destination of a tanker carrying Russian-produced liquefied natural gas (LNG), which was en route from the Isle of Grain terminal in Britain to the U.S. city of Everett, "did not change."

"It is still Everett, but the date of delivery has been adjusted, in particular for weather reasons," the owners of the tanker said.

The statement comes after Bloomberg reported that a tanker which was transporting Russian-produced LNG to Everett was instead heading towards the Spanish port of Algeciras near Gibraltar and should arrive there next week.

Earlier, Carol Churchill, the spokesperson for Engie's office in Boston, issued a statement to Sputnik via email that the LNG cargo that Engie Gas & LNG recently purchased was loaded onto a tanker from Engie's fleet at the Isle of Grain facility in the United Kingdom.

"Isle of Grain is a large global import/reexport facility receiving LNG from nearly all exporting countries, and is well situated to

can stop this price hike? Answers vary upon how seriously the shale revolution is taken, as seen in two expert interviews with Bloomberg this week.

Ed Morse, Citigroup's global head of commodities research, told Bloomberg he doesn't know how OPEC will react, but he seemed confident regarding Russia's reaction. He expects Russia to call for a pause in the agreement during OPEC's summer meeting, as rising oil prices are endangering the ruble, and the Russian Central Bank is already considering an intervention.

However, the IEA's 2017 World Energy Outlook projected that China will overtake the United States as the world's largest oil consumer around 2030, as well as predicting the U.S. shale revolution will turn the country toward export, making the U.S. a net oil exporter by 2020. That said, the IEA estimates prices for oil will remain in the \$50-70/barrel range — suggesting that, even if the U.S. does become an energy exporter (as predicted), this will not be a game-changer for the U.S. economy.

Based on that projection, in his Bloomberg interview, IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol drew attention to the fact that OPEC's decisions today have a different nature than they did before the shale revolution. This is the new game in town, he noted.

Indeed, Birol's comment is clear. Growing U.S. shale production will push down oil prices over the long term. The countries who did not see this happening, such as Russia, now face severe economic challenges. The time of blaming Middle East conflicts for oil price fluctuations or passively expecting a Russian reaction seems to be ending, and it's time to begin replacing traditional energy analyses with unconventional ones.

It looks like the shale revolution — not Russian intervention or OPEC strategy — will be what ultimately causes prices to reverse.

(Source: oilprice.com)




serve markets on either side of the Atlantic," Churchill pointed out.

Despite the fact that the tanker is owned by Engie, it is carrying gas produced at the Yamal LNG plant in Russia, according to the Russian business daily Kommersant.


The Russian newspaper Izvestia, for its part, cited Yuri Melikhov, a spokesman for Russia's Novatek, which co-owns the Yamal LNG project, as saying that the company sold the gas to a trader and that it is no longer responsible for its transportation.

(Source: Soutnik)

Second Announcement



N.I.O.C
1396.4960



National Iranian Drilling Company

Public Calls For Quality Evaluating Of Tender(First Publish/Seconed Publish)						
One-Stage(compressed)						
TENDER GUARANTEE		ESTIMATED VALUE (Rial)	Subject of Tender	Tenders Portal Reg. No.	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial					
2,852	112,500,000	2,250,000,000	FLOW OUT PADDEL FOR MUD LOGGING UNIT.REF: VALCOM	3,148,717	TenderNo.:FP/12-95/044 Indent No.:08-23-9645036	1

Brief discription of subject:
National Iranian Drilling Company(NIDC) address pasdaran Blvd., Airport Sqare, Ahvaz, Iran hereby intends to purchase its requirements from qualified and interested tenderers through one-stage public tender (compressed) upon following terms and conditions:

A) Qualitative evaluation of tenderer:
The evaluation is based on article (J) implementing regulations of the law of tenders and also carried out base on worksheets qualitative evaluation inquiry in the tender documents. Minimum acceptable point of quality is 60.

B) Preparation of tender documents:
Purchasing of documents:
In order to receive the tender documents, **510,000 Rials** should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Melli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.

Reciving of documents:
Tenderers must be obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum ten days after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Hall No.:113, 1thfloor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahvaz, IRAN

C) Delivery of envelopes of bids and call quality evaluating:
Tenderers shall submit simultaneously envelopes of bids including bank guarantees(A), financial offer(C) and stamped and signed of tender documents(B) along with qualificaion worksheets in form of software in CD and documentary within 40 days from last day of document received deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1thfloor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahvaz, IRAN.

Notice: The deadline for the refusal of bidders participation in the the tender is the last day of determined for submission of bids.

D) Tender Guarantee:
Type of guarantee:
A)Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activites licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to National Iranain Drilling Company.
Duration of credit guarantee & quotation:
This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.

More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on. WWW.NIDC.IR
National Iranian Drilling Company
Contracts Department

تهران تایمز : نوبت اول ۹۶/۱/۱۳ نوبت دوم ۹۶/۱/۱۴

Securing the digital transition



By Carl Bildt

Former Sweden's foreign minister

Within a few decades, the Internet has transformed the global economy and rendered the old Westphalian order increasingly obsolete. But without a new governance framework to manage cyber threats and abuses, what has been a boon to globalization could become its undoing.

Every year, the World Economic Forum publishes a Global Risks Report, which distills the views of experts and policymakers from around the world. This year, cybersecurity is high on the list of global concerns, as well it should be. In 2017, the world witnessed a continued escalation in cyber attacks and security breaches that affected all parts of society. There is no reason to believe 2018 will be different.



The implications are far-reaching. Most immediately, we must grapple with governance of the Internet as well as on the Internet. Otherwise, the opportunities afforded by digital technologies could be squandered in a regulatory and legal arms race, complete with new borders and new global tensions.

But there's a broader issue: For all the speed with which we are racing into the digital age, efforts to ensure global stability are lagging far behind. In many respects, our world is still organized within a Westphalian framework. States with (mostly) recognized borders are the building blocks of the international system. Their interactions, and their willingness to share sovereignty, define the existing world order.

But globalization has gradually changed the realities on the ground. And while its force – waxing and waning since the decades preceding World War I – is nowadays being tempered by geopolitics, and by the impulse to slow the pace of technological change, the digital transformation will propel globalization forward, albeit in a different form. After all, the Internet's key feature is its non-territorial architecture. By breaking down traditional borders, it poses a direct challenge to the very foundation of the Westphalian order.

This is a profoundly positive development, because it facilitates free expression and the cross-border exchange of goods and ideas. But, as with all human inventions, the Internet can be abused, as evidenced by the rise in cybercrime, online harassment, hate speech, incitement to violence, and online radicalization.

Minimizing such abuses in the years ahead will require close international cooperation to establish and enforce common rules. There can be no solution in isolation, because no single government can tackle the problem on its own.

Over time, an alphabet soup of organizations has emerged to bring together the technical community, businesses, governments, and civil society. And bodies such as ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), IETF (Internet Engineering Task Force), and W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) now provide de facto governance of the Internet's architecture. But governance on the Internet is far more complex. Here, the institutional landscape is both crowded and unsettled.

It is crowded because numerous actors are competing to shape the normative framework of cyberspace. Many countries have multiple relevant ministries regulating online activity. Websites and online services have vastly different community guidelines and terms of service. Public- and private-sector developers determine the design of the Internet's changing infrastructure. And numerous civil-society groups are proposing their own sets of cyber principles, while international organizations attempt to develop multilateral agreements.

The landscape remains unsettled because intergovernmental cooperation has largely stalled, owing to conflicting priorities among countries. Making matters worse, there are still too few dedicated spaces for different stakeholders to interact and devise operational solutions.

In the absence of mutually agreed frameworks, governments will tend to adopt short-term unilateral measures – mandatory data localization, excessive content restrictions, intrusive surveillance – to address immediate concerns, or as a response to domestic political pressure. But by doing so, they could fuel a dynamic that heightens, rather than minimizes, international tensions.

Digital governance touches on everything from cybersecurity to the economy to human rights, and uncertainty about which laws apply in different jurisdictions weakens enforcement in all of them, leaving everyone worse off. Moreover, measures to address one dimension can easily affect the others, which means that uncoordinated and rash policy decisions can have negative consequences across the board.

When I had the honor of chairing the Global Commission on Internet Governance, our 2016 report highlighted these risks, and called for “a new Social Compact” to ensure that the Internet of the future will be accessible, inclusive, secure, and trustworthy.

Progress since then has been limited. Because efforts at the United Nations to establish global cyber rules have reached an impasse, alternative initiatives will have to drive the process forward.

Fortunately, the Global Commission on the Stability of Cyberspace recently issued an important “Call to Protect the Public Core of the Internet.” And the upcoming Global Internet and Jurisdiction Conference in Ottawa will provide another valuable opportunity for policymakers to continue working toward solutions.

Such technical and legalistic proceedings are essential for shaping the global transition from the industrial to the digital era. To avoid a legal arms race, policymakers will need to develop a smart approach to a variety of tricky issues, from mutual assistance frameworks for investigations to the role of domain-name administrators and service providers in addressing abusive speech online.

Achieving policy coherence across jurisdictions should be a top priority. Doing so will require direct, sustained interactions among all stakeholders. Only then can we create a framework to preserve the cross-border nature of the Internet, protect human rights, fight abuse, and sustain a truly global digital economy.

(Source: Project Syndicate)

Destroying the Iran deal while claiming to save it

Insisting on a “better” agreement, and threatening to walk away, is a recipe for no deal at all.

By Philip Gordon and Robert Malley

President Trump's recent “help-me-before-I-do-something-really-irresponsible” statement on the Iran nuclear deal could have been worse. But it should have been better. And it will almost certainly end badly.

Contrary to what many had feared, Trump didn't void the deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). While he imposed some new penalties on Iranian officials, they were not of the sort that put the deal in immediate danger. He nonetheless chose yet again to attack and undermine an international agreement that, by all accounts, is working, to which America's allies and partners are committed, and whose collapse would both severely undermine U.S. credibility and allow Iran to resume the nuclear activities it recently halted. By threatening to withdraw from the deal unless Congress and Europe implausibly and unilaterally alter its terms, Trump has put it on a path to collapse without any realistic plan for what to do if that happens.

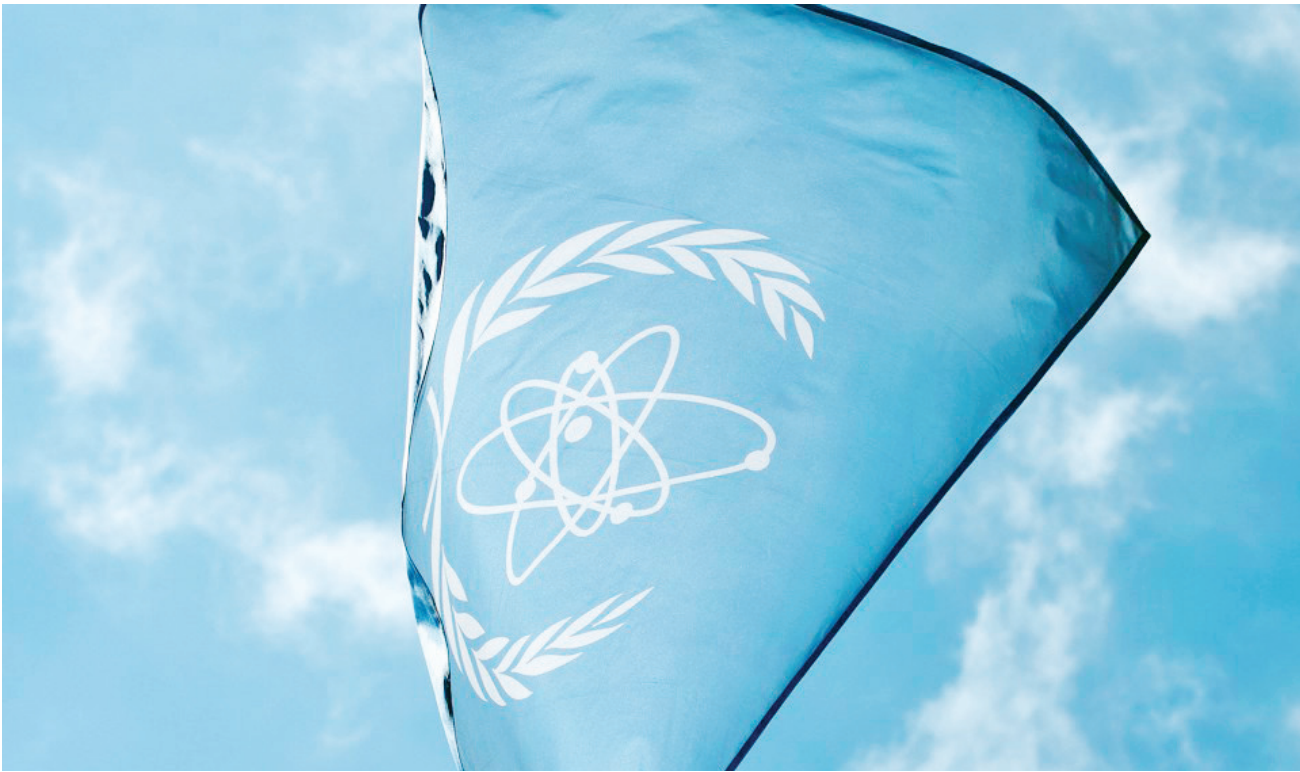
Having been closely involved in the JCPOA negotiations, we know it is not perfect; no negotiated deal ever has been or could be. Yet insisting on a “better deal” and warning that one will otherwise walk away is not a recipe for that better deal, but for no deal at all.

Trump's latest threats are part of what is now a familiar pattern: The president vows to “dismantle” the nuclear deal, walks up to the brink, and then announces a sort of reprieve that allows the deal's supporters to breathe a sigh of relief when he backs off. That happened last spring, when he waived sanctions for the first time, as the deal requires him to do every few months; in June when he said he was completing a policy review; in October when he “de-certified” Iranian compliance and demanded that Congress and Europe “fix” the deals alleged flaws; and again last week. This time, Trump waived the sanctions, but called into question the accord's future by pledging—this time for real!—to withdraw within 120 days unless Congress and Europe agree to restore nuclear sanctions if Iran fails to comply with Trump's new conditions.

Trump's gambit is problematic on two counts. First, relief at a potential catastrophe deferred desensitizes deal advocates to the actual injury inflicted. True, the JCPOA survives for now. But what was widely considered egregious a few months ago (an arbitrary decision to decertify the deal Trump had just certified three months prior, even though all U.S. allies and the International Atomic Energy Agency deemed Iran to be in compliance) barely registers when it is repeated. And each time Trump raises the specter of impending withdrawal, the deal's fate is thrown into greater doubt as potential investors and trade partners with Iran get colder feet. The deal was premised on a straightforward tradeoff: In exchange for rolling back, severely capping, and accepting unprecedented monitoring of its nuclear program, Iran would get some relief from the sanctions that were imposed for that purpose. But for how long will Tehran see merit in continuing to respect its obligations if—as a result of U.S. actions—it is no longer receiving its anticipated economic returns? In short, at each milestone in the JCPOA's implementation, the administration has weakened the deal's foundations and pushed it toward collapse.

The second problem is more serious. By threatening to walk away from the deal, the president is seeking to push Europe and Congress to try to save it—but in ways that could end up destroying it. There are many elements to Trump's list of demands, some more open to interpretation than others, but the essence is this: He wants to compel Iran to abide by all its nuclear restrictions not for the 10, 15, 20, or 25 years provided by the deal, but (as is the case for some of them already), forever. That's what critics of the deal call the sunset clause, the allegedly “fatal flaw” they want to eliminate.

To be clear about one thing: The time-bound nature of some of the constraints is not a flaw of the deal, it was a prerequisite for it. To call it a flaw is like saying your employment contract is “flawed” because it requires you to work in order to get paid. In that respect, it is no more a “flaw” than, from Iran's perspective, the facts that almost all U.S. national sanctions on Iran remain in place; the president has to waive sanctions every four months to keep the deal alive; and Washington can unilaterally “snap back” even international sanctions at any point



To be clear about one thing: The time-bound nature of some of the constraints is not a flaw of the deal, it was a prerequisite for it. To call it a flaw is like saying your employment contract is “flawed” because it requires you to work in order to get paid.

in time. Iran's negotiators strongly opposed all of those outcomes, and many critics in Tehran faulted them for accepting them.

The same is true for the so-called sunsets: The U.S. would have liked all restrictions to last in perpetuity, but that was never in the cards. During the years when the U.S. position was “zero enrichment forever,” after all, Iran mastered the nuclear fuel cycle, installed many thousands of centrifuges, and built a heavy-water reactor capable of producing enough plutonium to build multiple nuclear weapons (that reactor's core is now filled with concrete). The real choice in 2015 was between achieving a deal that constrained the size of Iran's nuclear program for many years and ensured intrusive inspections forever, or not getting one, meaning no restrictions at all coupled with much less verification.

To be clear about another thing: A legally binding commitment to violate the deal in the future is a violation of the deal today. Legislation, presently under consideration, that would automatically re-impose sanctions if Iran engages in behavior that is not barred by the JCPOA (for example, if it installs additional centrifuges in eight years, when the first of the restrictions expire) will be seen in Tehran as an immediate and one-sided modification of terms that were hotly contested—indeed, arguably as much as any other provision of the JCPOA. Iran's temptation will be great, and its political imperative arguably even greater, to reciprocate with a violation of its own. It could, for example, back out of its commitment to ratify and permanently implement the International Atomic Energy Agency's most intrusive inspections regime. It could void its commitment never to reprocess plutonium. Or it could even resume some of the deal's banned nuclear activities right away. In seeking some mechanism to ensure that Iran does not undertake certain activities starting in 2026 or 2031, in other words, Trump may well be ensuring that Iran

undertakes those activities this year. And then what?

None of this means, of course, that the issue of long-term time horizons cannot be revisited. Arms-control deals often have follow-on agreements. But they typically do so under three conditions, none of which the Trump administration has given any indication it is prepared to meet: The initial deal is implemented in good faith for some period; the follow-on agreement is negotiated among parties to the original one; and new measures accepted by one side are matched by steps taken by the other. In this instance, the administration is not fully carrying out its obligations under the deal; wants to unilaterally modify its terms; and is offering nothing in return to Iran (other, that is, than refraining from quitting the deal).

Giving the president something he can accept without violating the JCPOA will be tempting to those who want to keep the deal alive. It might not even be wholly out of the question. The president has issued a set of highly ambiguous demands that include “immediate inspections at all sites requested by international inspectors;” the assurance that Iran can “never come close to possessing a nuclear weapon;” and subjecting ballistic missile testing to “severe sanctions.” These are so imprecise and subject to interpretation that they have left not only critics but even allies of the administration confused.

That theoretically could leave room for negotiations. Europe and Congress might be able to agree, for example, to seek a negotiated follow-on agreement. They also might state that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) should be able to visit any suspected nuclear site in Iran (a requirement already provided for in the deal, incidentally), that they will penalize Iran's long-range missile development, and that Iran will never be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon. None of this is quite what the president asked for, but it would hardly be the first time Trump accepted far less than he

demanding and then sold it as precisely what he wanted. Congress could also agree to amend U.S. legislation so that it does not require the president to regularly and publicly “certify” a deal he obviously hates, but requires the administration instead to report to Congress only potential Iranian violations of the deal (which Trump would presumably relish).

Judging from the president's tone, however, and the degree to which he has rhetorically boxed himself in this time, the odds of achieving a JCPOA-consistent compromise with Congress and Europe seem long. If Trump truly means Iran can never expand its enrichment program (even for nuclear energy and under careful monitoring); that access to all Iranian sites including military bases needs to be “immediate” (something no country would contemplate allowing); and that U.S. law must equate ballistic missile developments with nuclear weapons development (the latter of which the United States says it will prevent by all necessary means, including military strikes), then he has set a bar that will simply not be reached. So the dilemma Europeans and members of Congress are likely to face is this: Is it better to submit to Trump's ultimatum while hoping Iran won't react in kind, or to rebuff his demands while risking that he will pull the plug outright?

It's perfectly understandable why Trump would want Europe and Congress to be partners or accomplices in his maneuver. But they should keep in mind that what he is effectively asking them to do is destroy the nuclear deal in order to save it. For he knows—or at least his advisers would have told him—that it would be far more difficult, and far less effective, for him to scrap the accord directly and on his own than by altering its terms with others by his side. If he doesn't have Europe, he probably doesn't have Congress, which means his renunciation of the deal would be seen for what it is: a politically motivated, unnecessary, and reckless move.

Paradoxically, the deal almost certainly would have greater odds of surviving a blunt unilateral American withdrawal than a joint U.S.-European attempt to rewrite it. A JCPOA violation with Congress's and Europe's imprimatur and consent would leave Iran with little choice but to reciprocate in ways that likely would kill the deal. A Trump administration violation over their objection might not. Having protected its credibility as a fair arbiter, Europe in particular would retain leverage to try to persuade Tehran to comply with its nuclear obligations despite U.S. violations, by pointing to the benefits of preserving strong political and economic Iranian/European bilateral ties that would be lost if Iran too disregarded its commitments.

The president's announcement in essence boiled down to this: Either kill the JCPOA with me, or I'll kill it on my own. That's a choice Congress and Europe should have no part of. If Trump wishes to undo the deal, the responsibility for doing so—and to come up with a viable alternative—ought to be his alone.

(Source: The Atlantic)



A JCPOA violation with Congress's and Europe's imprimatur and consent would leave Iran with little choice but to reciprocate in ways that likely would kill the deal.

Far-right groups fingerprints is clear in anti-Iranian statement of Trump: John Limbert

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — John Limbert, the former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for Iran, says much of Trump's position about Iran is "posturing for his base of Obama-haters. Iran is simply a tool to feed that base."

Limbert, also tells the Tehran Times that "The anti-Iranian language in the statement carries the fingerprints of those far-right groups both in the U.S. and elsewhere who oppose ANY engagement with the Islamic Republic."

Following is the text of the interview:

■ U.S. President Donald Trump approved the Iran nuclear deal only one more time before abandoning it if it is not changed. What are the changes that Trump emphasize on them?

A: If you read Trump's January 12 statement it's clear that he does not care about Iran and the JCPOA. His actual target is Obama, whom he criticizes twice in the statement. The only other people he mentions are "the leader" (once) and Bashar Asad (once). If he could sanction Obama, he would.

To put it mildly, Trump is obsessed with



Obama. He is upset that Obama's approval rating (50-60%) was much higher than his (about 35%). Notice his fixation on "crowd size" at his inauguration. Furthermore, Trump always presents himself as a master negotiator and he cannot admit that someone else would make an agreement that is good for the U.S. His whole being depends on

denigrating others' achievements.

The anti-Iranian language in the statement carries the fingerprints of those far-right groups both in the U.S. and elsewhere who oppose ANY engagement with the Islamic Republic. Their goal seems to be returning to the older pattern of non-relations and exchanges of threats, insults and accusations.

They opposed the JCPOA not because of its contents but because it represented a different way of dealing with Iran. They opposed the whole idea of diplomacy.

■ Mr Trump also wants Iran's ballistic missile programme to be addressed. Iran frequently has emphasized that ballistic missile is not related to JCPOA and will not negotiate about it. According to this, do you think that this condition meaning the end for JCPOA?

A: Much of Trump's position is posturing for his base of Obama-haters. Iran is simply a tool to feed that base.

He has given other members of the P5+1 and ultimatum: you renegotiate the agreement with Iran. They will not do it and the Iranians will not agree.

I suspect there are some expatriate Iranian hands involved in the statement. Some of them still blame Obama for the failure of the Green movement in 2009. Their extreme dislike of Obama corresponds with Trump's dislike. A poisonous mixture, in my opinion.

Remember that Trump's dislike of the JCPOA has nothing to do with its contents.

The popularity of Trump is reduced



By Saeed Sobhani

TEHRAN — The popularity of Trump has fallen again in recent days. This has been exacerbated by the closure of the US government.

The Rasmussen Reports daily Presidential Tracking Poll for Friday shows that 45% of Likely U.S. Voters approve of President Trump's job performance. Fifty-four percent (54%) disapprove. The latest figures include 30% who Strongly Approve of the way Trump is performing and 44% who Strongly Disapprove. This gives him a Presidential Approval Index rating of -14.

In other hand, As "abc" reported, A year in the presidential spotlight hasn't been kind to Donald Trump: His approval rating is the lowest in modern polling for a president at this point, with deep deficits on policy and personal matters alike. Strikingly, the public divides evenly on whether or not he's mentally stable.

That question aside, a lopsided majority, 73 percent, rejects Trump's self-assessed genius. Seventy percent say he fails to acquit himself in a way that's fitting and proper for a president. Two-thirds say he's harming his presidency with his use of Twitter. And 52 percent see him as biased against blacks - soaring to 79 percent of blacks themselves.

Just 36 percent of Americans approve of Trump's job performance, while 58 percent disapprove, essentially unchanged since midsummer. Next lowest at one year was Gerald Ford's 45 percent in 1975; average pre-Trump approval- since Harry Truman's presidency - is 63 percent.

Women are especially critical of Trump in this poll, produced for ABC by Langer Research Associates: A mere 29 percent approve of his work, vs. 44 percent of men. And a remarkable 55 percent of women doubt Trump's mental stability.

Trump's signature achievement, the new tax law, is unpopular; 60 percent say it favors the wealthy (even most well-off Americans say so), and the public by a 12-point margin, 46 to 34 percent, says it's a bad thing for the country. At the same time, a majority celebrates his most prominent failure, on Obamacare; 57 percent say the program's continuation is a good thing.

JUST IN: 36% approve of Pres. Trump, new @ABC News/WaPo poll finds, the lowest in modern polling for a president at this point.

A vast 87 percent support the DACA immigration program that Trump ended and whose fate in Congress is uncertain - including two-thirds of strong conservatives, three-quarters of evangelical white Protestants and as many Republicans, core Trump groups. And 63 percent overall oppose a Mexican border wall, essentially unchanged since before the 2016 election.

As reported Friday, Trump - and his party leaders - also are at greater risk in the event of a government shutdown, with Americans 20 points more likely to say they'd blame Trump and the Republicans in Congress than the Democrats in Congress.

MORE ISSUES - In a controversy that continues to cloud his presidency, half of Americans think members of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign colluded with Russia to try to influence the election. About as many, 49 percent, think Trump himself obstructed justice in the Russia investigation.

That said, far fewer, 26 percent, think there's been "solid evidence" of obstruction; the rest call it their suspicion only. And approval of Robert Mueller's handling of the investigation has ebbed, from 58 to 50 percent in 11 weeks.

Trump's ratings might be yet worse were it not for sharply improved economic sentiment. Fifty-eight percent say the economy is in good (or even excellent) shape, the most in 17 years. But just 38 percent say the Trump administration deserves credit; many more, 50 percent, credit the Obama administration. It's axiomatic that a successful economy doesn't guarantee presidential popularity, it merely makes it possible - and Trump's other challenges tie his shoelaces.

There's criticism for the Democrats, as well, in their response to Trump's unpopularity, but it's eased to some extent. In November, 61 percent of Americans said the Democratic Party's leaders were criticizing Trump without presenting alternatives; that's down to 53 percent. However, just 31 percent say the Democrats are offering alternatives, essentially unchanged from 28 percent last fall. Instead more now are simply unsure.

It's true, too, that some Trump initiatives, while unpopular, are not broadly opposed. Three divide the country about evenly: the federal crackdown on undocumented immigrants (46 percent say it's a good thing for the country, 47 percent a bad thing); reduced business regulations (44-42 percent); and a reduction in the federal workforce (44-43 percent).

Among other results, 60 percent say Trump's accomplished not much or nothing in his first year; Bill Clinton did as badly on that score, but still ended 1993 with an approval rating that's 22 points higher than Trump's today. Most, in another result, say Trump's policies haven't affected their own families, but more say they've been hurt (26 percent) than helped (20 percent).

APPROVAL - Trump's gone from 11 points under water in job approval last spring to 22 points today, a shift that occurred by July and has stabilized since. That's a vast swing from his 12 predecessors, who averaged 29 points to the positive after a year in the White House.

Four previous presidents - Barack Obama, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and Truman - were at 51 to 53 percent approval after one year; Bill Clinton saw 56 percent and the rest ranged from 63 percent (Richard Nixon) to 83 percent (George W. Bush, after 9/11). Ratings at one year don't predict a career trajectory. That said, a score in the 30s, this early in a presidency, is uncharted territory.

Indeed just six of the past 12 presidents ever went as low or lower in approval as Trump is now - Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson, Nixon, Carter and both Bushes - and all but Truman, much later in their presidencies.

Information dominance

By Sajad Abedi

TEHRAN — During a multi-screen inquiry in 1998, Joseph S. Nye pointed out that obtaining data and information is likely the new axis of U.S. international intelligence, replacing its military capabilities. The claim was based on a very simple deduction: gaining intelligence information will determine the objective of U.S. rivals and hence, will allow preemptive measures to deter hostile acts. In this scenario, America's allies must provide complete and necessary information to the United States in order for it to fulfill its national security objectives.

Today, the concepts of cyber security, cyber defense and cyber-bullying have replaced the notion of information dominance. Of course, there are no official American publications that describe the use of U.S. cyber security doctrines, but this concept has been introduced or revived in many recent White House documents.

In 2017, a documentary titled International Strategy for Cyber Space was released by the White House. International Strategy for Cyber Space addresses future cyberspace prospects and presents it as an open space with the ability to perform secure and reliable joint operations.

The documentary states that this can be achieved through

the application of norms based on known principles such as freedom of information and a right for privacy in order to provide a solid and sustainable atmosphere. According to the norms presented, there is a collective challenge that requires states to adopt "acceptable" and "responsible" behaviors in the United States. To achieve these norms, the United States intends to combine diplomatic and defense methods and develop a "thriving and secure" textbook for users of informatics techniques. One of America's top priorities is the development of an aggressive military sector that will, in return, produce 21st century security challenges. The document emphasizes that it must "consolidate military alliances to face potential cyber space threats."

It further explains that in order to increase collective security, there is a need for secure and reliable military networks cooperating with its allies and other international and national partners. In this context, the United States continues to "cooperate with its military and civilian opposition to its partners ... to develop cyber defense facilities and methods of defense."

Such partnerships reinforce collective deterrence and support the United States against state and non-state actors.

The document censored state-owned cyber-threats while preparing the United States to respond to them. It seems

that this approach does not come from a solitary perspective, but is collective in nature. Current advanced capabilities, especially in the field of assigning malicious acts and offensive equipment, are exclusively available to the United States. In the International Strategy for Cyber Space documentary, the United States has emphasized cyber security in its collective nature and the need for close cooperation with its allies.

The Pentagon also confirms this approach in the documentary. Strategic Clause #4 of Building Close Relationships with American Partners states: "The U.S. Department of Defense needs to bring its formal and informal collaboration into cyberspace to develop a collective self-defense concept and increase collective deterrence to expand partnerships and alliances."

While the development of cyberspace deterrence is necessary calling for preventive measures to the rapid development of threats, there are many challenges in creating it. Currently, only the United States has equipment and structures that allow them to master these challenges. However, Washington cannot exclusively operate such a system. Therefore, it seeks to expand its partnerships with its allies by invoking other state research facilities to facilitate the identification of authorities for a deep-seated attack and strengthen the deterrent policy that can be taken by its allies.

India's military operations with U.S. in Afghanistan unlikely: expert

➔ One major threat that Pakistan holds out is that it could block the ground and air links that the U.S. uses to supply its forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan has implemented this threat in the past. In such circumstances, with New Delhi's help the Trump administration might use an alternative, though more expensive and cumbersome, land route that India has helped build through an Iranian port. Trump, however, appears determined to reverse the process of readjustment in U.S.-Iran relations that was begun by the Obama administration.

■ Is Trump's strategy to play a greater role for India in Afghanistan to counterbalance China (China, which is expanding ties with Pakistan)?

A: China has promptly declared that it would stand by Pakistan, it's supposedly "all weather" friend. Beijing has for several years been developing closer ties with Islamabad, including opening a China Pakistan Economic Corridor as part of its Belt Road Initiative.



China sees clear advantages in such a close relationship that can keep India in check. It's not clear, however, that the Trump administration has an active strategy to use India as any sort of counterbalance to China's steadily expanding influence in the region. Meanwhile, Pakistan can continue to play the China card to caution the U.S. and rely on Saudi Arabia to back it up financially in case of a complete

breakdown in U.S.-Pakistan ties.

One problem with deciphering broad strategies of the current U.S. administration is that its leader, the president, is so unpredictable and uses Twitter often to express seemingly contradictory attitudes and positions.

■ The new strategy allocates more money to the U.S. army. Does this mean that the U.S. foreign policy will become more militarized

and the significance of the diplomacy will decline?

A: More money for the U.S. military in Afghanistan means a continued U.S. involvement and, perhaps determination, to root out the sources of terror that it now openly says are being nurtured and protected by Pakistan. The Afghan war has already become America's longest armed conflict and seems likely to extend well into the future. Currently, it does appear that a tough approach in the region is this administration's preferred option to continue if frustrating diplomacy. But it need not mean that diplomatic efforts to rein in Pakistan are not being made at the same time. Perhaps policy advisers in the U.S. administration feel that time for patience with Islamabad is running out fast and the U.S. should say so openly, as it in fact has. But behind the scenes diplomatic efforts with Islamabad, as well as Beijing and Riyadh and New Delhi, will hopefully continue.

Involving Syrian Kurds in settlement to limit U.S. influence: Logoglu

➔ It was definitely an act of provocation and was perceived by Ankara as a direct threat to its national security. Obviously, domestic politics are also strongly in play here. The whole situation has enabled President Erdogan, who is facing elections next year, to galvanize the public in support of the "Olive Branch" operation, thus bolstering his political standing at home in Turkey. These are among the reasons why Turkey started the Afrin operation at this time.

U.S. policy is based on the mistaken premise that to retain its influence in Syria and to counter-balance Russian presence there, America must continue to support PYD/YPG. It is a mistaken premise because when eventually there is a solution, the Syrian Kurds will be part of that settlement and American influence will be limited. By driving the Kurdish wedge between Turkey and the U.S. Russia paints U.S. into a corner with only the Kurds supporting the Americans. The winner will be Russia with greater influence on all the partners of the new Syria, including on the Kurds.

■ Is the U.S. real goal to fight ISIL or under this pretext the U.S. is after its own geopolitical interests?

A: The fight against ISIL, though not finished completely, is basically won. So it cannot really serve as a continuing priority for the international coalition despite American exhortations to this end. U.S. administration uses this argument to justify its decision to turn the SDG into an armed force, the core of which is the YPG. The U.S. seems to forget that states have one flag and one army only. Border security force against whom, whose border? Turkey? What the U.S. is aiming at is to bring the Turks and the Kurds into a full scale confrontation in Syria. This is a trap Turkey must definitely avoid by first ending the military operation at the earliest point in time possible while simultaneously using all avenues of diplomacy available to bring peace and stability to Syria.

■ So far the U.S. particularly in Trump's term has not been a trustworthy ally or partner for any of the country's allies

including Turkey. Will Americans be a trustworthy partner for Kurds, too?

A: Especially for the Trump administration there are no permanent friends or even allies. The corollary is also true: that there are no permanent adversaries. President Trump says, "America first". Everyone else is secondary. This was most dramatically illustrated recently with the abandonment of the Iraqi Kurds. KRG leader Barzani was given the red carpet treatment in Washington and was lead to believe that he would have American support, backing him in his independence drive. This did not happen and Barzani was left out in the cold with his referendum. The U.S. Government decided that being on better terms with Baghdad was more important for its interests than its relations were with Erbil. U.S. may also abandon the Kurds of Syria as well if and when Washington feels it is in its interest to do so. However, the difference between Syria and Iraq in this respect is that in Syria as there is no 'Syrian Abadi' option for Washington.

■ What is the Turkey's goal of hitting Afrin? To what extents the U.S. provocative acts forced Turkey to begin Olive Branch Operation?

A: Turkey has declared three main objectives for its Afrin operation. One is to ensure the security of its border. A second goal is to clear the area of terrorists, YPG and other terrorist organizations included. The third objective is to prevent the YPG to establish a continuous corridor of land under its control in the north of Syria. The Turkish Government has cited Article 51 of the UN Charter as the legal basis of its operation.

This is the article that refers to the right of legitimate self-defense of the UN member states. It is clear that Turkey has the right to secure the safety of its citizens against terrorist attacks from Syria.

Undoubtedly what in the Turkish Government's eyes was the U.S. failure to cooperate with Turkey in fighting the terrorists in Afrin and its latest move to establish a "border

security force" compelled Turkey to undertake this operation by its own means.

■ How successful can this operation be? Wasn't it better for Turkey to try to solve the issue via diplomacy first?

A: The military success of the operation is almost certain. Turkish armed forces have planned this operation with great care and as of this writing; things seem to be going well according to the plan. But for it to have lasting positive impact in political terms there has to be an exit strategy, one that has political, strategic as well as military components. In any case, the operation should be completed as soon as possible and all Turkish soldiers must be withdrawn from Syrian territory. However, latest statements by President Erdogan, Chief of Staff General Akar and the AKP government spokesperson signal that the duration of the military operation will probably be extended.

The longer the operation lasts, the more encumbered it will be by unforeseen difficulties and problems. To avoid dangerous complications down the road, a major step would be for the Turkish and Syrian Governments to start cooperating for the preservation of the territorial integrity of the country.

■ Will Turkey's operation affect Syria peace talks?

A: The Turkish operation should not affect the Syria peace talks, provided it does not last long and provided that Turkey, Iran and Russia pursue their cooperation. The issue of the participation of the Kurds will somehow be resolved. Turkey objects to the presence of the YPG as a terrorist organization.

But we must assume that the issue of the participation of the Kurds in the Sochi meeting will somehow be resolved by the Russians. As for the Geneva process, Turkey has supported it and there is no change in that policy. Once its security objectives achieved, Turkey must invest all its energies in the peace process because a peaceful, stable, secure Syria is the best guarantee for Turkey's national interests.

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AI start-up fundraising fans bubble fears over Chinese tech

Lin Yuanqing, a former executive with the artificial intelligence division of Chinese search engine Baidu, last month began what can be an onerous task: raising money for a start-up. In his case, though, the only challenge was deciding whose money to turn away.

His company, Aibee Beijing Intelligent Technology, which focused on the application of AI to the business world, attracted more than \$25m in a fundraising that valued the start-up at more than \$800m, two investors familiar with the matter said. In their view, Aibee's business plan lacked "clear products", and the company has just a few staff.



That was no deterrent. The fundraising lured the most prominent companies, including Alibaba, Baidu and Tencent. Sequoia, the U.S. venture capital firm, showed up, as did General Atlantic, a New York-based and highly respected tech investor, even if not everyone ending up investing.

Aibee is the latest case to fan concern that in many areas of Chinese tech — particularly in AI — a bubble is brewing. It reflects how much capital there is on the Chinese mainland, raising the danger that it is the sheer quantity of money available, rather than the quality of the investment opportunities, that will determine the outcomes.

While Aibee could prove a stellar investment, the clamor to invest in a company at such an early stage provides ammunition for those fearful of a bubble. There is so much money in the hands of investors in China that early stage financing opportunities are almost like a free option.

California-based Sequoia, for example, invested under \$2m, which is small change for the highly profitable company. Sequoia is a financial investor, but many others who showed up are also strategic investors, so a company like Aibee can potentially be core to their own businesses.

Nor is the sea of money likely to evaporate soon. For a start, controls on capital leaving China have tightened in the past 30 months, keeping more money at home.

"Bubbles are appearing at ever earlier stages because capital is being forced to stay onshore," says Richard Ji, a former tech analyst at Morgan Stanley and now head of Hong Kong-based All Stars, a tech investment group.

While Mr. Ji is a venture investor, he does not show up for the first fundraising because he believes they are too risky and the sweet spot is usually in the third or fourth round of fundraising.

What is more, the ever growing number of professional venture capitalists is just one source of capital for tech start-ups. There are also thousands of local Chinese government funds that control as much as Rmb3.6tn (\$562bn).

"They [the Chinese government funds] say we have no interest in returns, our purpose is to promote innovation," says Chen Zhiwu, a professor at Hong Kong University and head of that institution's Fung Global Institute, who taught many of China's best investors when he was at Yale. "But private equity and venture capital firms do well precisely because they care about returns. This dumb money is driving valuation up too far and making life difficult for others."

Lofty valuations at the start of a company's life bring dangers. There is the possibility of further rounds of fundraising, but at a lower overall valuation for a company. Businesses can shy away from going public to avoid such an outcome.

"They can be a challenge for those who don't think ahead when planning the fundraising and IPO process," Nick Norris, a senior M&A partner at the law firm Kirkland & Ellis in Hong Kong, says generally of high valuations.

However, the biggest drawback is that a surplus of capital encourages what used to be known as the spaghetti theory of investing: spray money indiscriminately and see what sticks. Given that they have so much to invest, investors focus on spreading their bets.

The former Baidu executive Mr Lin has told investors he chose the name "Aibee" because "Ai" is the Chinese for bee and he plans to pollinate companies across many industries. It may yet prove a world-beating company. But, at the moment, Mr Lin is just one of many entrepreneurs in some of tech's hottest areas, such as artificial intelligence, who are in demand before their companies start making proverbial honey.

(Source: Financial Times)

Technology will create new opportunities

New technology will make jobs obsolete but will also create a lot of opportunities, the CEO of Schneider Electric said Tuesday.

Speaking to CNBC at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Jean-Pascal Tricoire said that a few trends were accelerating.

One was the "absolute digitization of every facility," while the other was "Industry 4.0." Tricoire said the latter related to the "convergence of IT technologies with operational technology" as well as the "massive injection of artificial intelligence."

Boosting the efficiency of buildings was just one example of where human hands would still be required, he said.

"If you want to go back to those buildings with digital technology to make them far more efficient... (you will need) plenty of service, tech jobs on the ground to deploy those technologies. And that's new jobs," Tricoire said.

"And actually, when we put figures behind that we see a sector which is going to grow by 10 percent, at least, in Europe, for instance," he added.

(Source: CNBC)

Vague, imprecise ecosystem, wildlife management approach in Iran

By Farnaz Heidari

In the early 1800s, bird expert Alexander Wilson watched a single migrating flock of passenger pigeons darken the sky for over 4 hours. He estimated that this flock was more than 2 billion birds strong, some 386 kilometers long, and 1.6 kilometers wide.

Beginning in 1858, passenger pigeon hunting became a big business. In 1878 one professional pigeon trapper made \$60,000 by killing 3 million birds at their nesting ground. On March 24, 1900, a young boy in Ohio shot the last known wild passenger pigeon. By 1914 the passenger pigeon had disappeared forever. Is it possible to happen for gulls too?

Fifty years ago, beautiful Mediterranean gull seemed to be dwindling towards eventual oblivion, but recently its numbers have staged a remarkable recovery. This species spreads patchily in the coasts of Caspian Sea too. It is tricky bird to find among large numbers of more common gulls in some plumages, but breeding plumage adults are highly distinctive.

How could a species that was once common become extinct in only few decades and how could a species that was once rare become abundant? The answer is interaction between human and species. Unfortunately, human is considered as the main reason for the extinction of most species. Some species become extinct and some not. But traces of human in this process is remarkable.

Eventually, all species become extinct or evolve into new species, but humans have become the primary factors in the premature extinction of more and more species. Conservation biologists estimate that every day at least 50 (and perhaps as many as 200) species become extinct because of human activities and the debate is due in part to the strong unwitting exploitation and even emotional attachment to wildlife that many people have. Please do not forget: unwitting exploitation and emotional attachment can do harm to vulnerable wildlife.

■ We conserve what we love

Aldo Leopold was a famous American ecologist, conservationist and environmentalist. He said: "The last word in ignorance is the person who says of an animal or plant: 'What good is it?' ... If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part of it is good, whether we understand it or not... Harmony with land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left."



The high ambition of wildlife conservation in Iran was driven by concern over long-term populations' dwindling. Some of Iranian experts agreed to pursue efforts to go further because the common sense has been confirmed solid effects of worrying about losing a few more species. Persian leopard, Asiatic cheetah, great bustard, Iranian ground jay, marsh crocodile, loggerhead turtle, or some unknown animals or even plants in Iran becomes permanently endangered because of human activities. Most of conservationists fell under the spell of Iran's rich biodiversity but harsh conditions also offer a less uplifting lesson. The hardship of Iranian conservationists still didn't pay off, but they of course want to help it out. In fact, hordes of Iranian people pretend loving the environment but just handful of those environmentalists come up with a survey scheme.

Some believe that each wild species has an inherent right to exist. This view is based on the principle that humans have an ethical obligation to prevent premature extinction of wildlife by saving their habitats and not disrupting the complex ecological interactions that sustain all life. But the truth is we have to conserve wildlife because of the economic, medical, scientific, ecological, aesthetic, and recreational values of all species.



■ A real extinction crisis

Still some people question the existence of an extinction crisis caused by human activities. These people point to several problems in estimating species loss. We have to accept that urgent detailed estimations are needed to confirm extinction crisis but let's go further, even capable biologists and conservationists don't contend that their estimates are precise enough to make a firm prediction. Instead, they argue that there is ample evidence that we are destroying and degrading wildlife habitats at an increasing rate and that our actions certainly lead to a significant loss of species, even though the number and rate vary in different parts.

■ Wild species status in Iran

The book of complete fauna of Iran (2005) described 168 species of mammals, 514 bird species, 199 reptile species, 20 species of amphibians and 173 fish species. As the author said seventy of species or subspecies covered in this book are listed as globally threatened in the 2000 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species which comprises 34 mammals, 15 birds, 12 reptiles, two amphibians and seven fishes. But this list is not complete because e.g. there are more examples of reptiles that didn't assess in IUCN Red List. We still have not enough data then the result is crystal clear.

The researchers have to run more assessments on both scales (national and local). If



enough force is applied, conservation also will be going ahead in Iran. These underlying studies can lead to other more direct works. There are three main approaches to managing wildlife and protecting biodiversity. The species approach in Iran is highly addressed because Department of the Environment (DoE) focuses on it. Ecosystem approach and wildlife management approach are unknown in Iran despite their benefits.

The ecosystem approach aims to preserve balanced populations of species in their native habitats, establishing legally protected wilderness areas and wildlife reserves, and eliminate or reduce the population of nonnative species. The wildlife management approach also manages game species for sustained yield by using laws to regulate hunting, establishing harvest quotas, developing population management plans, and using international treaties to protect migrating game species which are not being adopted in Iran. Most conservation biologist and wildlife scientists contend that the approach of DoE has not been changed during the last decades and it may cause severe losses too. The truth is that current approach has had virtually no impact in the overall environmental and economic development. We should change our approaches, not just because of wildlife conservation but also for economic values of wildlife.

You spend nearly a whole day each week on the internet

It should come as no surprise to anyone that the internet is playing an increasingly important role in our lives since going mainstream, but the speed at which that transformation occurred might.

Since 2000, our time spent online each week has steadily increased, rising from 9.4 hours to 23.6 hours -- nearly an entire day, according to a recent report by the USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future. The internet has become an integral component of our home lives as well, with time spent rising more than 400 percent over that period from 3.3 hours to 17.6 hours each week, according to the report, which surveys more than 2,000 people across the U.S. each year.

The center's 15th annual Digital Future Report illustrates the internet's dramatic evolution since 2000 from a secondary medium to an indispensable component of our daily lives -- always on and always with us. It also comes as many fear for the future of the unlimited internet we have largely taken for granted over the past two decades.

Earlier this month, the FCC released the final text of



its order repealing net neutrality, the controversial Obama-era net neutrality regulations that held that all traffic on the internet should be treated equally and prohibited broadband and wireless providers from blocking or slowing online content.

NZ space industry reaching for the stars



© Youtube / Rocket Lab screenshot

Leaders of New Zealand's burgeoning space industry say the successful launch of a rocket at the weekend is a giant leap forward for the sector.

Rocket Lab successfully launched a rocket into orbit for the first time on Sunday, deploying three miniature satellites shortly after taking off from the Mahia Peninsula.

That makes New Zealand the smallest country, by population, ever to launch a rocket into space.

Chief executive Peter Beck said the race was now on to commercialize the rocket, which carried smaller satellites.

"We are ahead of the pack by a number of years, we are obviously the first to get there and what we offer with respect to technology and product is quite significantly advanced compared to what others are working on," he said.

Mr Beck said his company was now working to increase the frequency of the launches to once every two weeks in 2019.

Increasing the number of launches and decreasing the satellite size would dramatically reduce the cost of putting a satellite into space. Mr Beck expected it to cost less than \$10m each.

He said this would establish New Zealand as a leader in space business.

"Milk powder is great, but no one stands back and goes 'that's incredible'," he said.

"Historically you go to space to demon-

strate to the world that you are a super power, and if you look at the countries that have gone to space, they are all super powers."

New Zealand companies and organizations are keeping a close eye on developments in the space sector.

One of those is the government funded Centre for Space Science Technology, in Alexandra, which uses imagery from satellites to collect data on everything from

climate change to tourism.

Its chief executive Steve Cotter said it was now much more feasible for smaller organizations, such as his, to put up a satellite.

"If we identify a gap in the data or a business opportunity we would certainly jump on that," he said.

"Five or ten years ago these satellites that were built were ten sometimes hundreds of millions of dollars and it took ten

"From the beginning of our research in 1999, it quickly became clear that the internet was becoming a central part of everyday life -- even more vital than the telephone and telegraph were in their day," Jeffrey Cole, director of the USC Annenberg Center for the Digital Future, said in a statement.

"And just as those earlier technologies were regulated to support the public good, so too should the internet be regulated, which is a compelling reason why we should have net neutrality -- so everyone has equal access to this invaluable resource."

The report also found that the internet has had a dramatic impact on how we get our news. News consumption for all ages went from a print-to-online ratio of 85-15 in 2001 to a near even 51-49 in 2016.

Online social networks are also having an indelible effect on offline relationships, with 62 percent saying the internet was important or very important for maintaining social relationships.

(Source: cnet.com)

years to build ... now you are able to throw together these little cube-sats together with basically off the shelf components."

The government's space agency closely monitored launches, working with the Federal Aviation Administration in the United States and the United Nations.

Its head Peter Crabbtree said all rocket launches had to be signed off by the authorities, as well as any satellite that left New Zealand soil.

He expected New Zealand's space industry to grow rapidly.

"We are in a part of the planet that doesn't face congestion in the air or in the sea, it's favorable in terms of getting launch angles.

"New Zealand is a great place to do business, it's a low cost business environment but it's got high quality regulations and a stable environment in terms of international investment," he said.

"It ticks a lot of boxes."

Murray Mackay, the founder of space advocacy group Kiwispace, said a growing space industry provided another benefit - employment.

"It showcases some career options for New Zealand graduates, there's more opportunities now at the universities for people to get involved with developing satellites."

(Source: radionz.co.nz)

Earth’s internal heat melting Greenland’s ice sheets, scientists say

At a time when polar ice caps and glaciers around the world are already threatened by the effects of climate change, which has been exacerbated by human activity, scientists have found evidence of another factor — an entirely natural one — that is melting the ice sheets in Greenland. This factor is Earth’s internal heat, reaching up through the water deep below the fjords in northeastern Greenland.

The temperature of our planet’s core is estimated to be about 6,000 degrees Celsius, which is similar to the sun’s surface (the sun’s core is a blistering 15 million degrees Celsius and its atmosphere, called corona, is also millions of degrees hot). This heat is most evident on Earth’s surface in the form of volcanic eruptions and hot water geysers or hot springs.

Fjords, which are formed due to the abrasion of bedrock by the movement of a glacier, often have their bedrock below sea level. Researchers from the Arctic Research Centre (ARC) in Aarhus University, Denmark, and the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources studied fjord called Young Sound, which also has many hot springs, for over 10 years.

Glaciers slide

And they found that the heat coming from under the fjords is causing glaciers on the ice sheet to slide toward the sea.

“Northeast Greenland has several hot springs where the water becomes up to 60 degrees [Celsius] warm and, like Iceland, the



area has abundant underground geothermal activity ... there is no doubt that the heat from the Earth’s interior affects the movement of the ice, and we expect that a similar

The depth of the basin ranges between 200 and 300 meters, and the researchers measured the heating of deep water over 10 years.

heat seepage takes place below a major part of the ice cap in the northeastern corner of Greenland,” Soren Rysgaard of ARC, who headed the investigations, said in a statement Monday.

Estimating the amount of heat emanating from Earth’s interior — called geothermal heat flux — is tricky to do when it comes to localizing it below glaciers. The researchers chose the exact spot to study because the regions have several glaciers connected to the same ice sheet, and focused on an area which is an isolated basin within Young Sound.

The depth of basin

The depth of the basin ranges between 200 and 300 meters, and the researchers measured the heating of deep water over 10 years.

Based on the data they collected, the scientists estimated the heat absorbed by the fjord was about 100 megawatt per square meter, which “corresponds to a 2-megawatt wind turbine sending electricity to a large heater at the bottom of the fjord all year round.”

Heat from the fjord also heats up the bottom of the glacier, melting the underside, which allows them to slide more easily over the rough terrain on their otherwise slow and sluggish journey to the sea.

But this is only one of the factors affecting the loss of ice from the sheets in Greenland, Rysgaard pointed out.

(Source: IBT)

New study on black hole magnetic fields has thrown a huge surprise at astronomers

For the first time, scientists have studied the magnetic field of a black hole inside the Milky Way in multiple wavelengths - and found that it doesn’t conform to what we previously thought.

According to researchers at the University of Florida and the University of Texas at San Antonio, the black hole called V404 Cygni’s magnetic field is much weaker than expected - a discovery that means we may have to rework our current models for black hole jets.

V404 Cygni, located around 7,800 light-years away in the constellation of Cygnus, is a binary microquasar system consisting of a black hole about 9 times the mass of the Sun, and its companion star, an early red giant slightly smaller than the Sun.

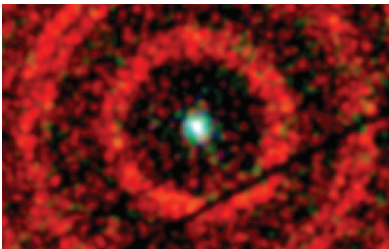
Black hole devoured material

In 2015, the system flared into life, and, over the course of about a week, periodically flashed with activity as the black hole devoured material from its companion star.

At times, it was the brightest X-ray object in the sky; but it also showed, according to NASA-Goddard’s Eleonora Troja, “exceptional variation at all wavelengths” - offering a rare opportunity to study both V404 Cygni and black hole feeding activity.

It was this period that the team, led by Yigit Dallilar at the University of Florida, studied.

When black holes are active, they be-



come surrounded by a brightly glowing accretion disc, lit by the gravitational and frictional forces that heat the material as it swirls towards the black hole.

As they consume matter, black holes expel powerful jets of plasma at near light-speed from the coronae - regions of hot, swirling gas above and below the accretion disc.

Previous research has shown that these coronae and the jets are controlled by powerful magnetic fields - and the stronger the magnetic fields close to the black hole’s event horizon, the brighter its jets. This is because the magnetic fields are thought to act like a synchrotron, accelerating the particles that travel through it.

Dallilar’s team studied V404 Cygni’s 2015 feeding event across optical, infrared, X-ray and radio wavelengths, and found rapid synchrotron cooling events that allowed them to obtain a precise measurement of the magnetic field.

Their data revealed a much weaker magnetic field than predicted by current models. (Source: sciencealert.com)

Artificially cooling planet may pose threat to plants, animals

Spraying chemicals into the Earth’s upper atmosphere to reflect more sunlight away from the planet could be one means of coping with runaway climate change, some scientists say.

But employing the controversial “geo-engineering” technique carries a range of risks - including that if such spraying was unexpectedly stopped, a rapid surge in heat on the planet would have “devastating” effects on plants and animals, according to a study.

“If geoengineering ever stopped abruptly, it would be devastating. So you would have to be sure that it could be stopped gradually, and it is easy to think of scenarios that would prevent that,” said co-author Alan Robock of the Department of Environmental Sciences at Rutgers University-New Brunswick.

Droughts or floods

“Imagine large droughts or floods around the world that could be blamed on geoengineering, and demands that it stop. Can we ever risk that?” the climate scientist added.

Research into “geoengineering” - technologies that could potentially deal with runaway climate change by artificially modifying how reflective the earth is, or sucking excess carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere - is on the upswing as the world edges closer to moving beyond what are seen as relatively safe levels of climate change.

Under the Paris agreement on climate change, countries have pledged to keep



global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius above industrial levels, with an aim of 1.5 degrees.

But unless national plans to curb emissions are ramped up quickly, the Earth is expected to warm by at least 3 degrees Celsius by the end of the century - a level expected to melt much of the world’s ice and spur worsening crop failures, extreme weather and sea level rise.

The earth has already warmed more than 1 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and this warming has been blamed for last year’s devastating hurricanes, droughts and floods.

Spraying sulphur dioxide

Spraying sulphur dioxide and other particles into the planet’s upper atmosphere would create a cloud of sulphuric acid that reflects some of the sun’s rays, cooling the planet, researchers say.

The largely untested technology mimics the effects of volcanic eruptions, and could be deployed with modified airplanes, balloons or other delivery devices, they say. (Source: Thomson Reuters Foundation)

Forfeiting Exports Financing Institute to Be Launched

Forfeiting Exports Financing Institute will be established in order to materialize objectives of incentive package, the Public Relations Dept. of Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) reported.

Given the above issue, Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) and Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) agreed with each other to set up Forfeiting Exports Financial Supply Institute in cooperation with the private sector.

For this purpose, a trilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was inked between chief



executives of the Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) and Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) as well as Pasargad Value Creators Group Company with the aim of helping developer and grow exports sector of the country in macroeconomic level, the report added.

Participating in syndicate loan of export-bound projects and making effort to provide cheap facilities to exporters have been cited as the main objective behind signing and sealing this Memorandum of Understanding, the Public Relations Dept. of EDBI concluded.

Alaedin Travel Shines in Spain FITUR Tourism Exhibition

Alaedin Travel Agency shined in FITUR Tourism Exhibition held in Spain, Madrid.

Given the above issue, ALAEDIN Tour and Travel Agency participated in this prestigious tourism exhibition from Jan. 17 to Jan. 21 in line with attracting more foreign tourists to Iran, bringing about foreign currency for the

country, introducing Iran’s tourist attractions, introducing Iranian hotels to foreign tourists, introducing flight routes to Iran, etc.

Moreover, ALAEDIN Tour and Travel Agency concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with foreign tour and travel agencies with presentation of

knowledge-based companies in the field of attraction of foreign tourists.

With its long years of experience in the field of offering worldly class tours, ALAEDIN Tour and Travel Agency is benefitted from a professional team, consisting 60 experts, and plays an important and constructive role

with foreign tour operators.

In the same direction, the new version of brochure for introducing Iran and scheduled programs of ALAEDIN Tour & Travel Agency were also unveiled in English and Spanish.

For further information, please visit ALAEDIN telegram.

EMSCO’s Net Economic Growth at 230% in Nine Months

With producing and selling more than five million tons of hot, cold and coated products, valued at more than 11,000 billion toman, Esfahan’s Mobarakeh steel company (EMSCO) managed to materialize 90 percent of its predefined objectives in the nine months of the current Iranian calendar year in 1396 (from March 21 to Dec. 23).

With due observance to the above issue, the company managed to earn 3,680 billion toman worth of net profit, the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

The report put the Equity per Share (EPS) of the company at 491 rials.

For his part, Amir-hossein Naderi Eco-

nomical and Financial Deputy of the company put the net profit growth of the company in the nine months of the current Iranian calendar year in 1396 (from March 21 to Dec. 22) at 230 percent.

However, the company managed to sell 3,799,000 tons of hot rolling products, 1,106,000 tons of cold rolling products and also 221,000 tons of coated products, totally amounting to 5,126,000 tons various types of product, showing a considerable 53 percent growth as compared to the last year’s corresponding period.

He pointed to the main reasons behind 53% growth in income rate of the company

and said, “taking advantage of expansion projects of the company including Die Casting equipment and machinery number 5, commissioning Sangan pelletizing factory, expansion project of Saba steel Complex and also controlling costs in line with economical production of products and also increasing rate of products in the current year, etc. have been cited as the most important reasons for materializing objectives of this growth.”

Also, Morteza Shabani Chairman of Stocks and Assemblies’ Affairs of the company pointed to the company’s return of stocks for shareholders and added, “stocks of company paneled at Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) is

considered as one of the most influential stocks of companies in fluctuations of stock index. With its consecutive growth of profitability and investment in projects and profitable stock-paneled companies, this prestigious company has managed to bring about considerable efficiency for shareholders.”

Turning to the new changes considered in type of reporting activities and performance of companies at Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), he reiterated, “according to the new decision taken at Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO), the form of reporting budget of the companies has changed considerably,” he concluded.

How climate change weakens coral ‘immune systems’

If this winter finds you stressed out and fighting a sinus infection, then you know something of what coral will endure in the face of climate change.

They don’t have sinuses, but these colorful aquatic animals do actually make mucus — “coral snot” is a thing — and the balance of different species of bacteria living in their mucus is very important, because it functions as an ad hoc immune system, keeping the coral healthy by keeping unfriendly bacteria at bay.



In a study appearing in the journal PLOS ONE, researchers at The Ohio State University and their colleagues have demonstrated how two separate effects of climate change combine to destabilize different populations of coral microbes — that is, unbalance the natural coral “microbiome” — opening the door for bad bacteria to overpopulate corals’ mucus and their bodies as a whole.

Good bacteria for health

“Just like we need good bacteria to be healthy, so do coral,” said Andréa Grottoli, Professor of Earth Sciences at Ohio State. “Coral don’t have immune systems like humans do, but the microbes living in and on their bodies can impart immune-like function. When that falls apart, they can become sickly.”

The goal of the study, she said, was to help guide conservation efforts in advance of the expected rise in ocean temperature and acidity by the end of this century, as forecast by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

“If we want to make good decisions about which coral populations are more resilient and which ones need more help, this study suggests that we have to take their associated microbial communities into account,” she added.

Many questions remain about how coral immunity works. Researchers are still piecing together the complex role that microbes in and on human bodies play in human immunity, and how those microbes respond to stress. But this study is the first to probe how the coral microbiome and physiology respond to simultaneous stresses of temperature and acidification.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Why don’t roosters go deaf from their own crows?

Rooster crows receive a fairly idyllic treatment in children’s books, but in real life they’re so loud they can actually deafen those who come too close. Which presents an interesting question — how do they not go deaf themselves?

To find out, a team of researchers from the University of Antwerp and the University of Ghent, in Belgium, attached microphone recorders to the heads of three roosters to measure the sound at its source, according to Discover.

As it turns out, at point-blank range a rooster crow can pass 130 decibels, which is roughly the same acoustic intensity you’d get from standing 50 feet from a jet as it takes off. One recorded crow reached 143 decibels, comparable to “standing in the middle of an active aircraft carrier,” according to Science.

That’s enough to damage and potentially shatter a human eardrum. The team then conducted micro-computerized tomography scans — tightly focused examples of what are more commonly known as CT scans — to study the features of rooster ears, as well as how they compared to hens’. A paper describing the research was published in the scientific journal Zoology.

The researchers discovered that a rooster’s ear is incredibly technically advanced. When their beaks are fully open, soft tissue moves to cover half their eardrum, while a quarter of the ear canal itself closes off.

Hens don’t get much louder than approximately 70 decibels, so they don’t need a similar protective mechanism to avoid being deafened by their own calls, according to Discover. The research points to the idea that rooster crows evolved to become louder over time, and that the shape and characteristics of their ear canals evolved in response; the louder the rooster, the more reproductively successful they stand to be. (Source: Newsweek)

Rare bristle worm fossil hints how modern earthworms developed their heads

Among the 20,000 fossils uncovered at Burgess Shale, one was found to contain soft tissue belonging to a 2-centimeter worm. It gave scientists strong evidence that in their early evolutionary stages, worms had a far different appearance.

Modern annelids, such as earthworms and leeches, actually originated from a 2-centimeter worm with hundreds of hairlike bristles. They lived underwater more than 500 million years ago.

This groundbreaking discovery was made after a research team with the Royal Ontario Museum examined a perfectly preserved fossil of a 2-centimeter worm with hundreds of hairlike bristles.

The rare fossil is among the 20,000 animal remains that were recovered from the Burgess Shale at Kootenay National Park, British Columbia, in 2012, 2014, and 2016.

Such massive amount of evidence documents an underwater landslide that buried and killed prehistoric creatures, explains University of Toronto and ROM researcher Karma Nanglu.

Among those animals that were trapped on the seafloor, over 500 have been described as new species, including the small worm named Kootenayscolex barbarensis.

The bristle worm fossil is considered a significant find, as the animal is far too uncommon in comparison to those with vertebrae, exoskeletons, and shells.

Because of such rarity, the evolutionary history of many annelids is not well-documented due to the lack of evidence regarding their original appearance and how it changed over time.

“You need to look to truly exceptional fossil deposits like those found in the Burgess Shale to find well-preserved body fossils. Even then, they’re quite uncommon and many of the currently described species there are still poorly understood,” says Jean-Bernard Caron, senior curator of invertebrate paleontology at the ROM. (Source: Tech Times)

Govt. to update truck fleet to ease air pollution

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani announced plans for renovating 70,000 clunker trucks annually within the framework of policies to combat air pollution.

In a live TV interview aired on Monday night, Rouhani talked about air pollution among other important domestic issues and regarded clunker vehicles as a key cause of this challenge.

He went on to say that nearly 230,000 clunker trucks are plying in Iran and the administration plans to do renovate them in a 3-year period.

Trucks will be produced by domestic car manufacturers, although their engines will be imported, added Rouhani.

He further noted that low-interest loans will be granted to clunker truck owners to actively encourage them to scrap their vehicles, adding, right after scrapping, new trucks will be delivered to them.

The renovation will lead to reducing diesel usage by 50 percent, said the president. The excess diesel will be exported and the oil ministry is tasked to finance part of this plan accordingly.

Developing public transportation, and providing standard fuels were among other measures which are being pursued by the administration to fight air pollution, added Rouhani.

■ SDS in southwestern provinces

Referring to sand and dust storms in southwestern provinces, particularly Khuzestan, he noted that trees have been planted in an area of some 5,000 hectares in the southeastern city of Ahwaz — as a source of sand and dust storms.

Till the end of the current [Iranian calendar] year (March 20), the area will increase to 30,000 hectares, he added.

Fighting sand and dust storms requires huge budget and cannot be done without the contribution of neighboring countries, highlighted Rouhani.

■ Rundown areas renovation to get underway

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rouhani highlighted that projects to renovate rundown areas will get off the ground by the end of the current [Iranian calendar] month of Bahman (February 19).

Unfortunately due to the low profit rate in this sector the private sector has not agreed to make any investment yet, Rouhani regretted, adding, however, as per a new scheme proposed by the administration those living in dilapidated buildings can have their houses renovated without having to pay anything.

Within the framework of this scheme people can live in another houses rent-free provided by the government while their houses are being reconstructed.

DOE against any withdrawal from fossil waters

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Department of Environment opposes any withdrawal from renewable or non-renewable fossil water resources until further notice, Mehr quoted DOE chief Isa Kalantari as saying on Monday.

Kalantari considered the lack of appropriate scientific knowledge and practical experiences regarding fossil waters — both domestically and internationally — and also, the potential negative effect of mere technical approaches on the environment — as has been proved in the past with projects like dam building and desalination — as the two main reasons behind this decision.

The country needs to place a primary focus on decreasing water usage and demand, rather than increasing the water supply through withdrawing water from new resources, emphasized the chief of environment.

Meanwhile, Kalantari called for more researches in this field to shed light on the possible environmental, economic and social consequences of removing fossil waters.

LEARN ENGLISH

Supermarket Cashier

A: Excuse me sir, this is the **express check-out lane** for people that have fifteen items or fewer. It looks like you have more than fifteen items there.

B: Oh, come on! I have sixteen items! **Cut me some slack**, will ya?

A: Fine! Please place your items on the belt and push your shopping cart through. Do you prefer paper or plastic?

B: Plastic. I also have a couple of coupons.

A: No problem, I'll take those. Sir, these coupons **expired** yesterday.

B: Darn! Oh, well. I guess **it's just not my day**. Thanks anyway.

A: Do you have a **club card** or will it be cash?

B: Yeah I got a club card. Here you go.

A: Will this be **debit** or **credit**?

B: Debit please. Also, could I get **cash back**? Fifty dollars would be great.

A: Yeah, sure. Your total is seventy-eight dollars and thirty-three cents. Here is your receipt. Have a nice day.

■ Key vocabulary

express: designed to help you move through a place more quickly
check-out lane: the place you line up to pay for the things you want
cut me some slack: don't be so strict, bend the rules

expire: to no longer be valid after a period of time

it is just not my day: a lot of bad things happened to me today

club card: a type of charge card that can be used to pay

for goods and services all over the world

debit: a decrease in the amount of money in a bank account, for example because you have taken money out of it

credit: an arrangement with a shop, bank etc. that allows you to buy something and pay for it later

cash back: charging more money to your card in order to receive cash back

■ Supplementary vocabulary

Stock: to supply (a shop) with merchandise

Warehouse: a place where goods are stored prior to their sale or distribution

Poultry: domestic birds, such as chickens, turkeys, ducks, or geese, raised for meat or eggs

bag boy: a person, usually a teenager that works at a supermarket and places groceries that a person buys in plastic or paper bags

bar code: an arrangement of numbers and parallel lines on a package, which can be electronically scanned at a checkout to give the price of the goods

(Source: irlanguage.com)

‘Caspian Sea water transfer more disastrous than nuclear explosion’

I → If the water desalination is carried out at the source, the Caspian Sea will be more salinized, threatening its ecosystem more than ever, he said, adding, “The pollution level of the sea is currently 40 times above the standard range, and it cannot withstand any further pollution.”

The second scenario is to do the desalination at the destination. This means that salty water is going to flow in pipelines through Hyrcanian forests, he added. “If due to an earthquake or chemical reactions or any other reason the pipe bursts, a true catastrophe will occur in the forests which can be even more disastrous than a nuclear explosion.”

He further noted that such programs need to be approved by other Caspian Sea littoral cities, adding, “They have a share in the sea water as well.”

Since fishing and tourism in the northern provinces crucially depend on the sea, any damaging project can negatively affect the economy of the regions, highlighted Darvish.

Due to the lack of water resources in the central regions of Iran and the ever increasing need for this vital element for development, ninth administration proposed a plan for transferring the Caspian Sea water to Semnan Province in 2005. Eventually the transferring project was approved in June, 2012.

Since then, the Department of Environment has delayed the project due to its potential environmental issues, however, it seems that the new environment chief is



showing the green light for this transfer.

“Why instead of pursuing the simpler solution of managing wastewater, we are eager to invest millions of dollars in water transfer?” phrased Darvish who

resigned from the Department of Environment in October 2017 to express his discontent over the changed policies of the department.

“We spend millions of dollars [for

these kind of projects] with the aim of improving the life quality of our people, but at the end of the day, we [actually] aggravate the living conditions, isn't that absurd?” he concluded.

Iran’s environmental body asserts its right to green tax

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Once again Iran’s environmental body has demanded its right to the green tax imposed on polluting industries but allocated to municipalities.

“Every year some 100 trillion rials (nearly \$2.2 billion) in green tax is collected which is distributed among the municipalities and none is laid out on environmental schemes,” an official with the Department of Environment (DOE) said on Tuesday.

Shina Ansari has explained that the green tax levied on polluting industries over the previous Iranian calendar year (March 2016-March 2017) amounted to some 130 trillion rials (nearly \$2.8 billion) but it was not spent on environmental projects.

DOE is only in charge of identifying polluting industries and is not concerned with the green tax expenditure, Tasnim news agency quoted Ansari as saying.

However, she continued, “we have suggested to spend the substantial sum on environmental affairs of the municipalities and even provide incentives for polluting industries [to become more eco-friendly].”

Mere collection of green taxes and not spending them for an environmental cause is absurd; the law makers have adopted the green tax law in order to mitigate and reduce



air pollution, she added.

Green tax, also known as ecological taxation, is imposed in activities which are proved to be harmful to the environment and as its name suggests must be spent on environmentally friendly activities.

The green tax law must act as a deterrent but the mechanisms must be reconsidered, Ansari noted, adding, the money must be spent on environmental affairs, “we do not intend to fight industrial development, we mean to reduce air pollution.”

Food festival flavored with Iran-Austria friendship

L I F E d e s k **TEHRAN** — Four Austrian cooks from Vienna offer their national food during a festival at Tehran’s Parsian Azadi Hotel, which runs from January 23 to 27.

The event is held within the framework of the Austrian-Iranian Jubilee Year 2018 celebrating 160 years diplomatic relations with Iran, 60 years Austrian Cultural Forum and 25 years Interreligious Dialogue.

The Austrian ambassador to Iran Stefan Scholz and the deputy director of Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization Mohammad-Hassan Talebian made speech during the opening ceremony on Monday.

Scholz made a short speech calling 2018 as the “golden year of Iranian Austrian relations” said that bilateral relationship between two nations lies in “extensive people-to-people ties.”

“These shared common bonds were first cultivated more than seven centuries ago and have been cemented over last few decades by the 30,000 people with Iranian roots in Austria and the 380 plus Austrian living and working in Iran.

“These informal ties, contribute to social development in both our countries and give rise to significant cooperation in business, research and academia, the medical field and tourism,” he added.

Scholz also talked about food history calling “animal husbandry” as one of the “best kept secrets” of their food history.

“Farming and know-how of using falling water for grinding wheat originated from this region. Later Iran exported to Europe new varieties of cereal grains and plants such as Persian walnut tree,” he added.

During his speech, Talebian, for his part, pointed to the increase in direct flights from Tehran, Isfahan and Shiraz to Austria during recent years.

He also named gastronomy as one of the most important fields of tourism industry in which, Iran can be a good destination with a wide range of local foods across the country.

At the ceremony, a hand woven carpet made by an Iranian artisan depicting Gustav Klimt’s famous painting of Adele Bloch as a motif was unveiled.



Austrian ambassador Stefan Scholz (L), Mohammad-Hassan Talebian (C), and an Austrian chef are tasting the food at the festival

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → €

Census reveals oldest Iranian aging 135

A 135-year-old man living in Saqqez, western province of Kordestan, is the oldest person living in Iran, the recent census has indicated.

Born on February 28, 1882, Ahmad Sufi is healthy and only suffers from hearing impairment which is pretty normal at this age, ISNA news agency reported.

Sufi has no children of his own but is a step father to his wife’s five children, the report added.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-ence, -ency”

■ **Meaning:** a word ending that indicates state, condition, or quality

■ **For example:** Much of the literature today tends to value **independence**, encouraging people to become liberated and do their own thing.

PHRASAL VERB

Fit somebody/something out

■ **Meaning:** to provide a person or place with the equipment, furniture, or clothes that they need

■ **For example:** The office had been fitted out in style.

IDIOM

Blow out of proportion

■ **Explanation:** if you exaggerate the importance of something, you blow it out of proportion

■ **For example:** The importance of the event was blown out of proportion by the media.

مسن ترین فرد ایرانی سرشماری شده ۱۳۵ ساله است

مسن ترین فرد سرشماری شده با ۱۳۵ سال سن در سقز استان کردستان زندگی می کند.

به گزارش خبرگزاری ایسنا احمد صوفی که متولد ۹ اسفندماه سال ۱۲۶۰ بیمار نیست و تنها به دلیل کهولت سن شنوایی اش دچار اختلال شده است.

بنا بر این گزارش صوفی خود فرزندی ندارد، اما با دومین ازدواجش پنج فرزند همسرش را سرپرستی کرده است.

Turkey's continued inconsistent policy

Fighting terrorists or 'support for terrorism'

By staff & agencies

Turkish troops have taken control of 11 Kurdish positions and created "safe zones" in neighboring Syria's northwestern region of Afrin, according to Turkish media.

Reports on Tuesday said the army, aided by Free Syria Army rebels, is pushing towards the southern part of the Syrian region with fronts on the west and the east.

The Turkish army, which launched the Afrin operation on Saturday, captured the villages of Shankal, Qorne, Bali and Adah Manli, as well as the rural areas of Kita, Kordo and Bibno and four other hills in Afrin, Turkish daily Hurriyet reported.

State-run Anadolu news agency said that the forces launched a second front towards Afrin from Syria's Azaz on Monday to squeeze the People's Protection Units (YPG) - a Syrian Kurdish force - from both west and east in order to advance on southern Afrin.

Turkey sees the YPG as a "terrorist group" that acts as the Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged a bloody three-decade fight against the Turkish state.

Reported casualties

Turkey's military announced its first fatality of the campaign after a soldier was killed in clashes with the YPG southeast of the border town of Gulbaba.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said a total of 22 Syrian civilians have been killed by Turkish attacks and two more by Kurdish fire during the operation.

It said 54 Syrian fighters were killed, including 19 Ankara-backed rebels, 26 Kurdish fighters and nine unidentified figures.



Ankara has denied inflicting civilian casualties, with Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu accusing the YPG of sending out "nonsense propaganda and baseless lies".

The UN Security Council discussed Turkey's offensive and the worsening humanitarian crisis in Syria on Monday but did not condemn or demand an end to the Turkish operation.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, while visiting London, said he was "concerned" about the offensive, and EU diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini said she would discuss the situation with Turkish officials.

But Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed impatience with US demands to set a clear timetable, saying

the campaign would be over "when the target is achieved".

"How long have you been in Afghanistan? Is that over in Iraq?" he said, referring to long-running US military presence in those countries.

Erdogan has previously indicated that once control is imposed in Afrin, Turkey wants to head east to defeat the YPG in the town of Manbij.

Meanwhile, Russia and Iran - who have a military presence in Syria and are working with Turkey on a peace process - have also expressed concern.

Erdogan insisted Turkey had discussed the operation in advance with Russia, and Moscow was in "agreement".

'support for terrorism'

Meanwhile, President Bashar Assad on Sunday condemned Turkey's offensive against Kurdish militia in the northern Syrian region of Afrin, saying it was part of Ankara's support for extremist groups.

Turkey and allied Syrian rebels entered the Afrin region on Sunday, a day after launching their offensive against the Kurdish-controlled area.

"The brutal Turkish aggression on the Syrian town of Afrin cannot be separated from the Turkish regime's policy from the first day of Syria's crisis, which was essentially built on supporting terrorism and terrorist organizations, whatever their names," Assad said in statements carried by state news agency SANA.

Since Syria's conflict broke out in 2011, the government has repeatedly slammed Ankara for its support of rebels, accusing it of funding extremist factions.

As Turkish threats of a potential attack escalated last week, Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad warned that Syria could shoot down Turkish warplanes used in an assault.

But the Damascus has also previously taken a hard line against the Kurdish authorities, which have implemented semi-autonomous institutions across parts of northern Syria, including Afrin.

On Saturday, a foreign ministry official denied claims by Turkish authorities that it had been informed of the Afrin offensive and called the attack "the latest move in Turkey's attacks on Syria's sovereignty".

Morocco allows women to take up public notary positions

Morocco has approved a motion allowing women in the country to become public notary officials, an occupation that has traditionally only been held by men.

King Mohammed VI endorsed the decision through a royal decree, which would amend an existing law.

The move authorises women across the country to perform a number of duties in accordance with Islamic law, including documenting marriages on behalf of the government.

As Islamic public notary officials - a profession locally known as the "adoul" - women can now also manage

inheritance cases, administer real estate transactions, and document witness testimonies required for trials.

According to local media reports, the Ministry of Justice opened up about 700 "adoul" positions for women to fill.

Separately on Monday, King Mohammed appointed five new ministers, according to a government statement.

In October, several officials were sacked for failing to improve the economy, as a five-year development plan was under way.

In the past few years, several legal amendments have been made to grant women more rights in the country,

including amending the nationality law to allow Moroccan women married to foreigners to pass on citizenship to their children.

Women in recent years have also taken up other positions that have commonly been dominated by men, such as police officers, in an attempt to increase their role in the public sector.

Several initiatives with the objective of empowering women in the country have also enabled Moroccan women to become active investors and entrepreneurs.

(Source: AFP)

North Korea, U.S. clash at disarmament forum



North Korea said on Tuesday it had a "powerful and reliable" nuclear deterrent to thwart any attack and accused the United States of deploying military assets nearby under the pretext of ensuring security at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

"This is a dangerous act of throwing a wet blanket over the current positive atmosphere of inter-Korean relations ... which could drive again into an extreme phase of confrontation," Han Tae Song, North Korea's Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, said.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in said on Monday a thaw in relations between the two Koreas ahead of next month's Winter Olympics presented a "precious chance" for the United States and North Korea to discuss the North's weapons programs.

North Korea is developing missile and nuclear technology amid regular threats to destroy the United States and Japan and in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Han, addressing the U.N.-sponsored Conference on Disarmament, said nuclear tests last year had allowed his country to "perfect a national nuclear force" in a transparent manner.

"Thus DPRK (North Korea) at last came to possess a powerful and reliable war deterrent," he told the Geneva forum.

"I am proudly saying that DPRK's nuclear force is capable of frustrating and countering any nuclear threats from the U.S. and it constitutes a powerful deterrent that prevents the U.S. from starting an adventurous war."

Han said as a "responsible nuclear power" North Korea could not resort to using the weapons unless hostile forces violate its sovereignty or interests.

U.S. disarmament ambassador Robert Wood said: "The United States will not recognize North Korea as a nuclear weapon state."

"If the North wishes to return and be in the good graces of the international community, it knows what it has to do, it has to take steps toward denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula."

In an earlier speech on Tuesday, United Nations disarmament official Izumi Nakamitsu welcomed an easing of tensions between North and South Korea but called for further steps toward removing nuclear weapons from the divided peninsula.

(Source: Reuters)

UN envoy for Yemen to step down after failure to broker peace



The UN says its envoy for Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed will step down by the end of his term next month after he repeatedly failed in his attempts to broker a diplomatic solution to the conflict in the Arab state.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric made the announcement Monday, saying the world body's Secretary General Antonio Guterres seeks to quickly appoint a new mediator.

"In this moment, his thoughts go first to the Yemeni people who are worn out by this conflict and are enduring one of the most devastating humanitarian crises in the world," said Dujarric.

"The special envoy remains committed to pursue through diplomacy an end to the violence and a political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Yemeni people, until a successor is named," he added.

Meanwhile, Al Arabiya on Tuesday cited "sources in New York" as saying that the UN had appointed British Martin Griffiths as Cheikh Ahmed's replacement.

Griffiths has served as the former deputy head of the UN Supervisory Mission in Syria (UNSMIS), in the position of assistant secretary-General, and the deputy to the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator in New York.

Cheikh Ahmed, a Mauritanian diplomat, was appointed to the position in April 2015, a month after Saudi Arabia and its allies intervened in the Yemeni conflict in March 2015 by launching an all-out military campaign against the Arab world's most impoverished country in favor of its former Riyadh-friendly government.

The offensive, which has so far killed some 13,600 people, is meant to crush Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement, which has been running state affairs in Sana'a in the absence of an effective administration.

Cheikh Ahmed's multiple attempts at enabling reconciliation between the opposing sides in Yemen have failed amid the Saudi-led coalition's aerial and ground attacks as well as Riyadh's support for the militants loyal to the former government operating on the ground against Houthi fighters and allied forces.

The last round of peace talks between Yemen's conflicting sides collapsed in 2016.

Concomitant with Cheikh Ahmed's tenure, the UN and leading human rights groups have repeatedly condemned the bloody Saudi-led campaign against Yemen, which has also the strong support of the U.S. and the UK.

(Source: al Alam)

'Democrats cave' on government shutdown: Trump

U.S. President Donald Trump says Democrats have surrendered in the fight over the government shutdown, after they joined Republicans in reopening the government that forced hundreds of thousands of workers to stay at home without pay.

Senate Democrats on Monday agreed with Republicans to end the government shutdown, after they received a promise from after Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to move on immigration bills including support for undocumented immigrants brought to America as children. The Senate voted 81-18 on a stopgap spending measure to fund the government through February 8.

In tweet early Tuesday, Trump touted a "big win for Republicans," hours after he signed the short-term funding

bill to reopen the government.

"Big win for Republicans as Democrats cave on Shutdown. Now I want a big win for everyone, including Republicans, Democrats and DACA, but especially for our Great Military and Border Security," Trump said.

The government shutdown, first in five years, went into effect shortly after Friday midnight, when Senate Republicans and Democrats failed to reach an agreement on the stopgap funding measure to continue government services.

The shutdown followed Congress' failure to reach a deal on the status of "Dreamers."

Dreamers are hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrants brought into America as children who were

protected from deportation until September 2017, when the Trump administration ended the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which was created by former U.S. President Barack Obama.

Democrats had insisted on including in any spending bill protections for those covered under the DACA program, but on Monday they signed onto the measure to fund the government without them.

"I am pleased that Democrats in Congress have come to their senses," Trump had said earlier in the day in a statement.

Trump and Republican leaders had refused to negotiate on Dreamers while the government remained closed.

(Source: USA Today)

Chaos in December: the defeat of the enemy



The reality of Iran and chaos

The Islamic Republic of Iran like other countries of the world has its problems, limitations, but in economic affairs it faces fewer problems than its west Asian and neighboring countries. In Iran food prices, shipping fees, medical care costs, educational fees and others are all less than those in its neighboring countries whereas per capita income of Iranian people is higher than citizens in the neighboring countries.

On the other hand, in comparison to previous regime the quality of life in Iran has much improved. Cost income curve in a fixed axis has moved toward being logical. Access of general population of Iran to opportunities and different positions which in the world are known as Development indicators shows that Islamic revolution and politics of Islamic republic has many positive effects on people's lives and although limitations against Iran has slowed its speed in some cases but has not stopped its ongoing. As far as about two months ago Imam Khamenei in a meeting with some foreigner guests clarified that Iran has passed difficult conditions and pressures are declining.

At the same time some of fault internal politics and their role in recent chaos should be mentioned. People in Iran are not satisfied with method that government of President Rouhani applies. Although policy of Inflation control of his government was successful but this policy was accompanied with downturn in economy. Government with the goal of setting up the economic wheels of country and to boost economic situation increased the costs of governmental services 50 to 100 percent that was illogical and was considered a shock. The policy of increasing costs of governmental services will improve the Economy of Tomorrow but it will challenge Today's Economy, hence even though economic experts assume it necessary and useful but people feel more economic pressure and start to resist against these policies.

It should be mentioned that political competition and party contradictions in a country which is managed on the base of selection and vote of people helps to magnify problems in the country and form the protests which demand for reforms. Intense focus of political competitors on the economic failures and inefficiency of management which during the last months and after Dr. Rouhani's reselection as president has increased and this has disappointed people from fast resolving of present problems and has shown a negative perspective of economic situation of country.

In the meantime, the U.S government paid special attention on domestic disagreements which were caused from economic situation in Iran. They believed that domestic disagreements has disintegrated the society of Iran and has caused conflicts inside Iran. From the perspective of the Americans economic pressures on Iran will make more problems for Iran and these problems will push opponents to more conflicts with the government. In the theory of Americans separation of Islamic republic system to two divisions is the condition of its collapse. In the meantime American officials have accounted on the experience of 2009 and are reviewing their policies about this. Trump and other American officials who think like him have emphasized several times that they cannot act like the past and to intensify social protests and to combine protests with destruction of public places in order to vitiating domestic security will use all their facilities.

The five days experience of chaos from December 28, 2017 to January 1, of 2018 showed that despite American expectation, Iran's economic pressure and social effects of democracy has not been able to damage the integration of Iranian society. The unity of Iranian officials in confronting the chaos and unrest in Iran as well as Iranian institutions showed an integrated picture of Iran.

The Leader of the Islamic revolution appreciated the role of people in rising up against the U.S. policies and their anti-Iran programs. He mentioned that against exaggerations of enemy in economic problems of Iran and negative image of Iranian officials but the improvement in economy of Iran is hopeful and governmental officials are seriously active to solve the current economic problems. He pointed to some social consequences of democracy and noted that he honestly accepts democracy and has always used my capacities on successes of president and representatives of people in parliament.

Palestinians go on strike amid Pence visit

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have gone on a general strike in protest at U.S. Vice President Mike Pence's visit to the Old City of Jerusalem al-Quds and Washington's decision to recognize the holy city as Israel's "capital."

According to the Palestinian WAFA news agency, the strike began on Tuesday as Pence was scheduled to visit al-Buraq Wall, located at the western boundary of the al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City, which is known by Israelis as the Western Wall. Both Muslims and Jews view the site as sacred.

Shops, government institutions, and businesses closed as part of the strike action. Public transportation unions also participated in the walkout action.

Hospitals and clinics as well as some educational facilities were excluded from the strike.

The Fatah movement and other Palestinian political forces called for the strike to protest U.S. President Donald Trump's globally-condemned decision to recognize Jerusalem al-Quds as the so-called capital of the Israeli regime and Pence's visit.

Pence landed at Tel Aviv's Ben-Gurion Airport on Sunday, marking the highest-level visit by a U.S. official to the region since Trump's decision. The visit comes as part of Pence's Middle East tour, which included Egypt and Jordan.

Last month, Trump announced his decision to recognize Jerusalem al-Quds as Israel's "capital" and relocate the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to the occupied city.

The dramatic shift in Washington's policy vis-à-vis the city triggered demonstrations in the occupied Palestinian territories, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, and other Muslim countries.

Pence met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday. He also addressed the Israeli parliament later in the day, announcing that Washington was planning to relocate the country's embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem al-Quds "by the end" of 2019.

Reaffirming Washington's unflinching support for the Tel Aviv regime, the U.S. vice president also called for the resumption of so-called peace talks between Palestinians and Israelis.

(Source: Press TV)

North Korea participation to highlight opening ceremony

North Korea’s participation at the next month’s Winter Olympics will form an integral part of an opening ceremony that will highlight a key message of peace, Games organizers said on Tuesday.

The 2018 Winter Olympics is being held in the mountainous resort town of Pyeongchang, 80 km (49.71 miles) from the heavily-fortified inter-Korean border, and kicks off with the opening ceremony on Feb. 9.

Song Seung-whan, who is serving as the executive creative director for the Pyeongchang ceremonies, said peace had been set as the main motif of the opening gala even before North Korea decided to join the Games.

“We have worked on all of our scenarios under the theme of peace,” Song, a renowned actor and producer, told a news conference in Pyeongchang.

“Although North Korea’s participation was decided belatedly, we think this will serve as a good opportunity for us to convey our message more clearly.”

North Korea’s presence at the Games had been speculated over for months amid heightened tensions surrounding Pyongyang’s contentious nuclear and ballistic missile programme.

However, in a dramatic turn of events, the Koreas agreed to parade together at the opening ceremony and form a unified team to compete in women’s ice hockey.

Lee Hee-beom, president of the Pyeongchang Organizing Committee, added that the ceremonies remained largely unchanged following the North’s decision to participate, except for a joint entrance of Korean athletes under a single flag.

The opening ceremony is expected to intertwine Korean history and tradition with aspects of modern culture, such as K-Pop.

(Source: Reuters)

Morocco plays up long-shot 2026 World Cup bid

Morocco is “fully mobilised” for its long-shot bid to host the 2026 World Cup, hoping to be a candidate “for the whole of Africa”, top sports officials said Tuesday.

The kingdom “is not a non-starter -- it’s a real candidate,” Moulay Hafid Elalamy said in his first public appearance as chairman of the country’s 2026 bid committee.

“We are going to put in all our energy,” he told a news conference in Casablanca, brushing off criticisms that the campaign had been delayed.

“Our record is and will be irreproachable.”

Morocco’s fifth bid, announced in August, faces fierce competition from a three-nation ticket of the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

Fouzi Lekjaa, head of the Royal Moroccan Football Federation (FRMF), said he hoped the North African country’s bid would be “a candidacy for the whole continent”.

“Between 1930 to 2030 -- 100 years -- the African continent has only organised the World Cup once,” Lekjaa said, referring to the 2010 tournament in South Africa, which beat a previous bid by Morocco.

“It should not remain on the margin.”

The committee has enlisted Ivory Coast legend and former Chelsea star Didier Drogba along with Cameroon international striker Samuel Eto’o to promote its bid.

The host will be chosen on June 13, but the way the choice is made marks a change by FIFA, the sport’s world governing body.

The decision used to be made by FIFA’s executive committee, but after suspicions over its selection of Russia and Qatar in December 2010, sparking a scandal that dethroned president Sepp Blatter, the committee was stripped of some powers and renamed the FIFA Council.

The new-look council must rubber-stamp the bids, but the final decision will be taken in a vote of the 211 national federations at a congress in Moscow.

Morocco’s bid committee hope to win support from the 53 members of the Confederation of African Football.

CAF president Ahmad Ahmad has urged the sport’s bodies across the continent to offer “free and massive support” to the kingdom.

The bid committee on Tuesday’s unveiled their leadership team, social media channels and logo: red leaves on a black and white football surrounding a star that symbolises “unity and brilliance”.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Argentina president hopes to come to Russia for 2018 FIFA World Cup

Argentina President Mauricio Macri said on Tuesday he hoped to come to Russia to watch matches of the 2018 FIFA World Cup, which kicks off this summer in 11 cities across the country.

“I hope to come to the world football championship together with my daughter Antonia,” Macri told journalists after his meeting in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“I also hope to come to the third final match as I hope that we (Argentina) will be playing in the final game,” the president of Argentina added.

On December 1, the State Kremlin Palace in Moscow hosted the Final Draw for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, which determined the group breakdown for the FIFA flagship event this year. A total of 32 national football squads were divided into eight groups with four teams in each.

Team Argentina was placed in Group D alongside with the national teams from Iceland, Croatia and Nigeria.

Russia selected 11 host cities to be the venues for the matches of the 2018 World Cup and they are Moscow, St. Petersburg, Sochi, Kazan, Saransk, Kaliningrad, Volgograd, Rostov-on-Don, Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg and Samara.

The matches of the 2018 World Cup will be held between June 14 and July 15 at 12 stadiums located in the 11 mentioned above cities across Russia. Two of the stadiums are located in the Russian capital.

(Source: TASS)

Agony for Nadal as he is forced to retire in fifth set in Australian Open quarter-final clash with Cilic

World number one Rafael Nadal retired hurt in the fifth set of an enthralling quarter-final against Marin Cilic at the Australian Open.

The top seed was in visible pain on court and Cilic of Croatia will now face British number two Kyle Edmund in the semi-finals following his 3-6 6-3 6-7 (5-7) 6-2 2-0 victory.

It was only the second time in 264 Grand Slam matches that Spaniard Nadal has retired - the last being against Briton Andy Murray in the quarter-finals of the 2010 Australian Open.

Speaking following the match, Nadal said he would provide an update on his injury after an MRI scan on Wednesday.

“Now is not the moment to say what’s going on or what’s not going on because we really don’t know yet,” said Nadal.

He did, however, repeat his assertion that players are suffering injuries because of the surfaces they play on.

“Somebody who is running the tour should think little bit about what’s going on,” he said. “Too many people are getting injured.

“I don’t know if they have to think a little bit about the health of the players. Not for now that we are playing, but there is life after tennis.

“I don’t know if we keep playing in this very, very hard surfaces what’s going to happen in the future with our lives.”

Nadal, 31, had looked in good form early in the match and took the first set 6-3 in a typically forceful manner.

Cilic, however, was a different player in the second as he channelled his frustration at being given a time violation by breaking back



at Nadal with a stunning forehand winner.

The third set was much more evenly contested and went Nadal’s way in a tie-break.

Cilic was dominant on his first serve - firing down 20 aces to his opponent’s three - but

Nadal was able to draw the 29-year-old Croat to the net on numerous occasions - the most memorable ending in a delicate drop shot

which left Cilic foundering.

Nadal’s injury became apparent in the fourth set and despite lengthy delays for treatment, he was unable to continue - retiring at 2-0 in the deciding set.

“It was an unbelievable performance from both of us and it’s really unfortunate for Rafa,” said Cilic.

“He always gives his best and it’s unfortunate for him to end this way.

“I was really paying attention to these first couple of games [in the final set] and trying to keep my intensity up. It was important for me to continue with my own game and not look across the net.”

(Source: Staff & Agency)

The UEFA Nations League: What’s it all about?



As if you didn’t have enough football to follow already, the European governing body has come up with something new. Here’s all you need to know ahead of the draw for the UEFA Nations League.

According to UEFA, the Nations League, which is to kick off during the international break in September 2018, is meant to rejuvenate international football in Europe by giving national teams more meaningful matches, while at the same time reducing the number of friendlies. However, it’s a bit complicated, so here we answer some of the questions that are bound to be raised by the advent of this new competition:

■ Who takes part?

In a word, everybody. All 55 UEFA member nations are to enter the Nations League, which is to be held for the first time in the 2018-19 season. The teams are to be divided into four leagues, which in turn are to be split up into four groups of either three or four.

The order for the inaugural “League Phase” stems from UEFA’s national coefficient rankings as of October 11, 2017. League A includes the top-ranked European nations, while League D is made up of the lowest rank teams; it’s a setup like a domestic league that has four divisions, and there will be relegation and promotion.

■ How will the winner be determined?

The winner can only come from League A. The winner is to be determined by a mini-tournament played in June, with semifinals, a game for third place and a final. In the lower leagues, the group winners are to be promoted, while the bottom teams are to be relegated.

■ How does the Nations League impact on qualifying for the European championship?

Twenty of the 24 teams to take part in Euro 2020 are to punch their tickets for the tournament by finishing first or second in the 10 qualifying groups. Qualifying

matches are to be held after the League Phase of the Nations League is completed.

The final four teams are to qualify through playoffs involving the winners of the four Nations League leagues – which are to be held after the regular qualifying matches have been completed.

■ When will Nations League matches be played?

The six League Phase matchdays are to take place between September and November, with the teams in groups of three paying on just four of the matchdays. The finals are to be held in June 2019 and the EURO 2020 playoffs in March 2020.

■ Will this mean jamming even more matches into an already packed football calendar?

No. UEFA says the Nations League will be played out during the existing international windows and reduce the number of friendlies.

■ Isn’t this just another cash grab on the part of UEFA?

No again, according to UEFA, which states on its website that “finances are not a driver for the new competition”. In the next sentence though, it states that “the competition will have the same centralized media rights as have recently been introduced for all European Qualifiers so associations will have even more stability in their income”.

■ How will Wednesday’s draw work?

The four top-ranked teams, Germany, Portugal, Belgium and Spain, are in Pot 1 for Wednesday’s League A draw, which is to be held in Lausanne, Switzerland, France England, Switzerland and Italy are in Pot 2, while Pot 3 is made up of Poland, Iceland, Croatia and the Netherlands. This means Germany could wind up in a group with two of their biggest traditional rivals, England or Italy, as well as the Netherlands. The draws for the groups in the other three leagues will follow a similar format.

(Source: Deutsche Welle)

Wenger: Arsenal are about values, not millions

Arsene Wenger says Arsenal want players at the club who focus on “values, not millions” but insists Alexis Sanchez was committed throughout his time in North London.

Sanchez completed his move to Manchester United on Monday in a swap deal that saw Henrikh Mkhitaryan join the Gunners.

Some reports claim the Chile star will earn as much as £350,000 a week at Old Trafford and Wenger last week suggested Arsenal had “no chance” of getting the player to sign a contract extension given the money on offer in the north west.

Wenger’s comments came despite the club being placed sixth in the latest Deloitte table showing the richest clubs in the world in terms of revenue in 2016-17.

The 68-year-old maintains Arsenal are still restricted in their spending due to the costs of the Emirates Stadium but says he will always favor bringing players through the youth system to ensure they have the right attitude to playing for the club.

“You can’t forget we have financial restrictions from the banks because of the stadium. We have to respect the financial plan,” he told a news conference.

(Source: Reuters)

(Source: Four Four Two)

No guarantee for winning medal: Igor Kolakovic

S P O R T S Iran national volleyball team head coach Igor Kolakovic says there is no guarantee to win a medal but they will do their best to earn the best results.

Iran national volleyball team has a busy year ahead. Team Melli will have to participate at the FIVB Volleyball Nations League in late May as well as the FIVB Volleyball Men's World Championship, which has been scheduled for September.

"First of all, I have to say we've had a good year and I hope to keep that going. It's an important year ahead for us, since Iran will take part at the 2018 FIVB Volleyball Men's Nations League in Argentina which kicks off on May 28 and runs to July 8. We will also take part at the 2018 FIVB Volleyball Men's World Championship in September," Kolakovic said.

"We need to build two teams to ease pressure on our players. The teams' players have not been chosen yet and we will announce their names after holding the training camps.

The young players are not involved in the competitions and can participate at the camps along with the senior players," the 52-year-old Montenegrin coach added.

"The 2018 Asian Games players is a good opportunity for us to field our young players. We will our main players for the Volleyball Men's World Championship which will be co-hosted by Italy and Bulgaria. It will be also a good opportunity for our young players to show their potentials for success," Kolakovic added.

Asked him if Iran has a chance to win a medal in this year, Kolakovic said, "Our players have shown true dedication and commitment but you can never guarantee that you will win medal. Brazil, as the best national volleyball team, cannot guarantee winning a medal."

Leaving the door open for Adel Gholami and Shahram Mahmoudi, he said, "Adel is allowed to join Iran national team, but it depends on his physical condition. I've talked to Mahmoudi but it seems he's reluctant to return to Team Melli."



Three Iranian athletes banned for doping



S P O R T S Three Iranian athletes have been suspended for doping offenses, the country's National Anti-Doping Organizations (NADOs) announced.

Football player Omid Abolhassani has been handed a four-year ban after testing positive for prohibited substance higenamine.

Higenamine, which also sometimes labeled as Nelumbo Nucifera Extract as well as Sacred Lotus, has been listed as a prohibited substance by WADA since 2017.

Wrestler Mostafa Ghiasi has been banned for testing positive for the banned substance clenbuterol.

Clenbuterol is an illegal beta-adrenergic. It's like ephedrine, except much more potent and stays in your body for a day rather than just 4 hours. It is a potent fat loss and muscle preservation agent with side effects.

Iranian woman runner Hadis Sharifi has been also banned for four years after she tested positive for a performance-enhancing substance stanozolol.

Wolverhampton eyes Iran's Saman Ghoddos



S P O R T S Iranian international forward Saman Ghoddos is a forward on the radar of English Championship club Wolverhampton Wanderers.

The 24-year-old was linked with a move in the summer but nothing materialized.

However he is likely to be the subject of further interest in January after Wolves, QPR and Fulham sent scouts to watch him in action for Swedish side Ostersunds in their Europa League defeat to Athletic Bilbao earlier this month.

Ghoddos has been in prolific form in 2017,

scoring 15 goals and setting up a further nine for Ostersunds who are managed by former West Brom and Birmingham City defender Graham Potter. Club director Daniel Kindberg told Swedish media last month that Ghoddos would be valued at around £4.6million, birminghammail.co.uk reported.

QPR are unlikely to be willing to part with that sort of cash due to Financial Fair Play concerns.

Wolves are known to be keen on adding a striker to their ranks next month to provide backup and competition for Leo Bonatini.

Iran fail to qualify for World Handball Championship



18th Asian Men's Handball Championship 2018

S P O R T S Iran failed to qualify for the 2018 Asian Men's Handball Championship after losing to South Korea on Tuesday.

Team Melli lost to the host 28-25 at the Suwon Gymnasium, Suwon.

Borut Macek's team had lost to Saudi Arabia 26-23 in Group 1 on Monday.

Iran will play Oman on Wednesday in their last match, while have no chance to advance to the competition's semis.

Iran had defeated Uzbekistan (37-18) and

Japan (37-32) in preliminary round.

The competition is being held at Suwon, South Korea from Jan. 18 to 28.

The teams from the Oceania region are competing in the event for the first time.

The championship acts as a qualifier to the 2019 World Men's Handball Championship which will take place in Denmark and Germany from Jan. 9 to 27.

The top four teams will qualify for the competition.

I want to make a strong comeback to football: Mehdi Taremi

Mehdi Taremi is raring to go in every sense of the word. The tall Al Gharafa striker cannot just wait for the QNB Stars League's Week 14 action to begin. And what better resumption of career could he have hoped for, as the Cheetahs will play host to 13-time champions Al Sadd this Thursday.

Taremi, who joined Al Gharafa in the winter transfer window along with Dutch great Wesley Sneijder, had to sit out of their Week 13 game against Umm Salal, which they won 4-2.

Taremi had been serving a FIFA suspension over a contract dispute with Turkish club Caykur Rizespor dating back to June, 2016, when the player reached an agreement to join them and later returned to Iranian league reigning champions Persepolis.

In an interview, the 25-year-old, who is playing club football for the first time outside his country and has scored 10 goals from 22 matches for the Iran national team, spoke in length about various topics.

■ How has your Qatar experience so far been?

I have been in Qatar for just more than a week and I feel happy. I am getting good support from the club officials and players. I just finished a four-month suspension over a contract dispute. I'm eager to hit the straps and looking forward to make a strong comeback to football with Al Gharafa.

■ How do you find your stint with Al Gharafa?

I am only starting my Al Gharafa stint competitively. I am thrilled that my first match in Qatar will be against a strong side like Al Sadd. The team spirit and dressing-room ambience at Al Gharafa are good. I gather the team has improved considerably and the back-to-back victories give all of us a sense of satisfaction.

■ Why did you choose Al Gharafa?

I had heard a lot about club football in Qatar and its high level of quality. My countrymen Ashkan Dejagah, who had a long stint with Al Arabi, and Masoud Shojaei, who himself played in Al Gharafa, had given me a fair idea about the prospects of pursuing my career in Qatar. But it was current Al Sadd player Morteza (Pouraliganji) and Al Khor's Soroush (Hosseini) who gave me a clearer picture of the situation here.

■ You are yet to play your first match with new team,



but what's the difference you find in Iran and Qatar?

■ You can't actually compare the game in Iran with that in Qatar. In our country, there's a bigger player pool even though the infrastructure isn't that high. In Qatar also, the quality of the game is high. So are the facilities.

■ How do you look at playing alongside Sneijder?

Sneijder is a great player. There's no doubt about it. He has famously represented Ajax Amsterdam, Real Madrid and Inter Milan. I have always liked his style of play. His presence will be good for Al Gharafa and Qatar football in general.

■ What're the prospects of Gharafa?

Al Gharafa is a big club with many achievements. This team has the quality and capacity to beat any side in the QNB Stars League.

■ How is it being under the tutelage of new coach Bulent Uygun?

I had heard about coach Bulent and his style of functioning even before I came to Qatar. He gives us specific training and I don't see any reason why Gharafa can't be a formidable force again.

■ How do you see your match against Al Sadd in Week 14?

Al Sadd are also a strong side, but I believe we can win the match. This Al Gharafa squad is functioning like a well-oiled machine. And why not? We can beat them. I joined Al Gharafa to help them win games. I wish to win one tournament with them.

■ What's your message to Gharafa fans?

We'll do our best to make the fans happy with many a good performance. Personally, I wish to delight them by scoring a lot of goals.

■ How about Iran's chances at the forthcoming FIFA World Cup?

Iran are clubbed along with Spain, Portugal and Morocco in strong Group B. Still, we hope to progress to the knockout round.

(Source: GulfTimes)

FIFA confirm video technology will be used at World Cup

FIFA executive Philippe Le Floc'h has confirmed video replays will be used in Russia at this year's World Cup finals.

It will be the first time VAR is used at the World Cup and it is understood FIFA are searching for sponsors for the system.

Le Floc'h said: "Definitely VAR will happen. I think it's great to have technology in football because this is also a fair(ness) thing."

"We are talking to various technological companies who are very interested with what

we are doing on the technology side of things."

The final decision on whether VAR is approved for use at the World Cup will be made by the International Football Association Board (IFAB), football's rule-making body, at their annual meeting

on March 2.

Referees can call upon the use of replays when there is a 'clear and obvious error' involving goals, penalty awards, red cards, and mistaken identity.

(Source: Talk Sport)

Mac Wilkins to arrive in Kish Island on Wednesday: Ehsan Haddadi

TASNIM — Iranian discus thrower Ehsan Haddadi says his American coach Mac Wilkins will arrive in Iran's southern Kish Island on Wednesday.

"Wilkins will be in Kish Island's training camp for three weeks. Afterward, I will travel to USA to continue my workout," Haddadi said.

Wilkins competed for the United States in the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal, Quebec, Canada in the discus throw, where he won the gold medal with a distance of 67.50 m to defeat Wolfgang Schmidt of East Germany.

He also won a silver medal in the discus throw at the 1984 Summer Olympics held in Los Angeles. He placed 5th in the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, Korea.

Top teams to compete in 2018 Takhti wrestling tournament

Press TV — President of Khuzestan Wrestling Association, Seyyed Hossein Marashian, says a total of twelve professional teams will participate in the 38th edition of International Senior Greco-Roman Wrestling Tournament 'Takhti Cup' later this month, which will be held in honor of late legendary Iranian freestyle wrestler Gholam Reza Takhti, who passed away half a century ago.

Marashian said on Monday that wrestling teams from Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Cuba, Finland, Georgia, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkey and Ukraine will compete in the forthcoming tournament.

The Iranian sports official added that three Iranian teams, comprising of 30 wrestlers, will take part in the event.

The 38th edition of International Senior Greco-Roman Wrestling Tournament 'Takhti Cup' will be held between January 25 and 26, 2018 in the southwestern Iranian port city of Bandar-e Mahshahr.

Takhti, the most famous wrestler in the Iranian history, died on January 7, 1968. The Iranian nation was stricken with deep grief, when the news of Takhti's death broke. Seven people reportedly even committed suicide because of unutterable sadness.

The legend was known for his chivalry and sportsmanship and continues to symbolize the essence of sports to the Iranian people.

Takhti claimed the gold medal in Melbourne 1956 Olympic Games, overcoming Boris Kulayev from the Soviet Union in the final contest of the 87-kilogram weight section.

He also claimed two Olympic silver medals in 1952 Helsinki and 1960 Rome.

Takhti won two World Championships gold medals in 1959 Tehran and 1961 Yokohama as well.

The Islamic Republic of Iran Wrestling Federation hosts an international wrestling tournament in memory of the renowned wrestler every year.

Russian short track skater Ahn to miss Winter Olympics

MOSCOW (Reuters) — Russian short track speed skater Viktor Ahn, biathlete Anton Shipulin and cross-country skier Sergei Ustyugov are not on the list of athletes eligible for next month's Pyeongchang Winter Games, the Russian Olympic Committee said on Tuesday. The committee's vice president, Stanislav Pozdnyakov, said in a statement the three had not been included in the pool from which Russian competitors will be invited to compete in Pyeongchang by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The IOC last month banned Russia from Pyeongchang over "systematic manipulation" of the anti-doping system at the 2014 Sochi Olympics, but left the door open to athletes with no history of doping to compete as "Olympic Athletes from Russia".

"Athletes like Viktor Ahn, Anton Shipulin and Sergei Ustyugov were not involved in the Oswald commission proceedings," Pozdnyakov said in the statement, referring to an IOC commission investigating alleged doping violations by Russian athletes at the 2014 Sochi Games.

"They were never involved in doping stories and the many tests they passed over their careers have showed that they are clean athletes. Nevertheless their names are absent from the list of potential Olympic participants."

The statement added that the Russian Olympic Committee would request explanations from the IOC regarding the exclusion of "national team leaders in a number of sports".

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow regretted that the three athletes were not considered eligible for Pyeongchang.

"We have heard this saddening news in the media. If this decision has indeed been made, we regret to hear it. We hope for clarity in this situation," Peskov told reporters on a conference call.

Inter make Sturridge loan offer

Inter Milan have made a loan offer for Daniel Sturridge that is still under consideration from Liverpool, a source has told ESPN FC.

Liverpool are prepared to sanction Sturridge's departure from Anfield in this transfer window, but only if it is considered to be a worthwhile offer.

Inter Milan have backed up their interest in the 28-year-old with the proposal of a loan that could potentially lead to a permanent transfer. La Liga side Sevilla are also monitoring the situation, sources have said.

Sturridge, who was not part of Liverpool's squad for the 1-0 defeat at Swansea City on Monday night, has made just five starts in all competitions for Jurgen Klopp's side this season.

With the World Cup on the horizon, the striker is looking for more regular game-time in an attempt to secure a place in Gareth Southgate's England squad.

Having dealt with illness and muscular injuries, the former Manchester City and Chelsea player last appeared for Liverpool on Dec. 6, but has since returned to full training.

(Source: ESPN)

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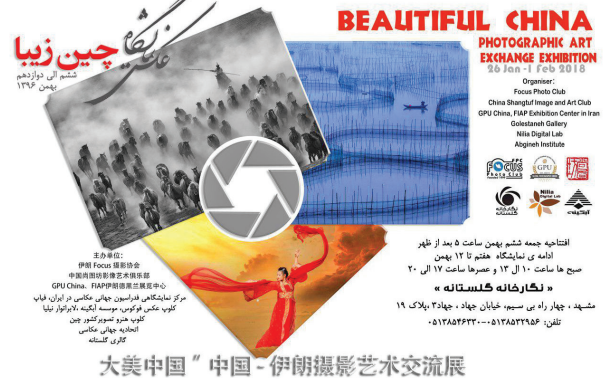
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Mashhad gallery to showcase “Beautiful China”

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – A collection photos depicting various aspects of life in China will be showcased in the northeastern Iranian city of Mashhad during an exhibition entitled “Beautiful China”.

The weeklong exhibition will open at Golestan Gallery on Friday, the gallery announced on Tuesday.



A poster for an exhibition of photos on China at Mashhad’s Golestan Gallery

The collection is composed of 50 photos by members of the China Shangtuf Image and Art Club, which will hold the exhibit in collaboration with Abgineh Institute and several other Iranian organizations.

The exhibition will be organized as an art exchange program between Iranian and Chinese photography centers such as Nila Digital Lab and the Focus Photo Club.

Italian translator Giacomo Longhi working on Persian novel

C U L T U R E d e s k **TEHRAN** – Italian scholar Giacomo Longhi is translating Iranian writer Mostafa Ensafi’s novel “You Will Return to Isfahan”.

Edizioni e/o, a Rome-based publishing house, will publish the book, Ensafi has announced in a post published on his Instagram.



The front cover of a Persian version of Mostafa Ensafi’s novel “You Will Return to Isfahan”

“You Will Return to Isfahan” centers on Eliza, a Polish girl who traces her grandmother back to Isfahan. Her grandma along with a number of Polish people and children took refuge in the central Iranian city of Isfahan during World War II.

A Persian version of the book was published by Qafaseh Abi Publications.

Longhi has previously translated books from Persian contemporary literature. Among them are Mahsa Mohebali’s “Don’t Worry” and Mohammad Toloei’s short stories, “Made in Denmark”.

Netflix takes \$39 million charge after Kevin Spacey scandal

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — A sexual misconduct scandal involving Kevin Spacey cost streaming video service Netflix Inc (NFLX.O) some \$39 million late last year as it stopped projects associated with the actor, a source with knowledge of the matter said on Monday.

Netflix said the charge, disclosed in its fourth-quarter earnings report, was related to “unreleased content we’ve decided not to move forward with.”

Spacey, who has had a successful career in film, television and theater, is one of a number of big names in the entertainment business to be accused of misconduct by people coming forward in the wake of allegations against movie producer Harvey Weinstein. The Netflix charge was one of the first public signs of financial cost to a studio or production company following allegations of sexual misconduct against an individual.

The source with knowledge of the matter said the charge was related to Spacey’s projects. Spacey’s representatives did not respond to a request for comment on Monday.

More than 30 men have accused Spacey of sexual misconduct. The Oscar-winning actor was written out of “House of Cards”, the Netflix political intrigue drama in which Spacey starred as U.S. President Frank Underwood. Netflix suspended production in November of the sixth and final season of the drama.

Reuters was unable to independently confirm any of the accusations.

Netflix also severed ties with Spacey’s other projects, including a movie about late author Gore Vidal.

In a post-earnings webcast, Netflix Chief Financial Officer David Wells said that while write-downs happened regularly, “we just hadn’t had one of this magnitude and related to the societal reset around sexual harassment.”

Iranian documentary play spotlights women drug abuse

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – A documentary theater focusing on the moral inferiority of homeless women caused by drug addiction and prostitution in a slum neighborhood in southern Tehran was staged at the 36th Fajr International Theater Festival last week.

Director Amin Miri with his cast and research team spent over 18 months interviewing 53 women living in the Darvazeh Ghar neighborhood in order to communicate on the subject.

To document their play, they also collected information about the issue from libraries. The information and interviews were transcribed in about 7000 pages that Miri handed to writer Sanaz Bayan to compose the play.

“We were in contact with each other until she completed the play named ‘Shelter’, which was warmly received by theatergoers,” Miri told the Persian service of ILNA on Monday.

He said that it was difficult to win the women’s trust at first. However, he found them quite agreeable after a while.

He also noted that it is a difficult task to get the official cultural organizations’ green light for staging a play and a documentary theater in particular.

“When you focus on a sensitive subject, everybody guards against it; they feel concern over what may happen as result of the performance,” he lamented.

Miri said that if the theater troupes working in documentary theater had the support of the government, everything would go well.

Miri’s troupe premiered “Shelter” at the Qashqai Hall of Tehran’s City Theater



A scene from Amin Miri’s documentary play “Shelter” (ISCA News/Mohammad-Javad Abjushak)

complex in February 2017.

He invited many MPs and directors of governmental organizations concerned with women’s issues in order to draw their

attention to the subject.

A number of the interviewees also watched a performance of the play at that time.

Miri is an old hand at documentary theater. In 2013, he staged “The Blue Feelings of Death” about a group of children and young adults who committed murder.

Retrospective to highlight Ali-Akbar Sadeqi’s inspiring ideas

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN – The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art will honor Iranian artist Ali-Akbar Sadeqi next week by organizing a retrospective of his inspiring artworks in painting, illustration, animation and sculpture.

The retrospective exhibition, which will open on January 28, has been organized to celebrate his 80th birthday.

Sadeqi and the curators Feresheh Musavi and Ali Bakhtiari attended a press conference at the TMCA on Tuesday to speak about the event.

“I never wanted to repeat myself as an artist. I was always very enthusiastic and bursting with ideas since I seriously began to paint at the age of 15,” Sadeqi said.

“Every now and then I have returned with new and fresh works. I began a different style of stained glass art that I invented myself, then I put it aside and followed creating commercial works and continued with book illustrations.

“I was filled with excitement in those years. Later on I got an offer from the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) to illustrate a book and it was then that the collaboration with the institute began.

“When the institute asked me to make an



Artist Ali-Akbar Sadeqi attends a press conference at the TMCA on January 23, 2018 to speak about his upcoming exhibit. (Mehr/Majid Haqdust)

animated movie, I was surprised, because I had no idea about animation and cinema but welcomed the idea, agreed and made ‘Seven Cities’ in 1971. It took one year. I next made ‘Flower Storm’ and on the whole I made six animated films,” he explained.

Establishing Sabz Gallery was the next step, a venue for the young artists, the

artist said.

Sadeqi’s sons, Afshin, Arash and Ashkan, have worked with him in some of his art projects. He said that his studio is always open to young artists and added, “I love the youth; they always give me good energy.”

Sadeqi is a graduate of art from the University of Tehran. His style of painting

is a kind of Iranian surrealism, based on traditional forms and compositions in paintings.

“I am 80 years old now and get up every morning with the love to commence my works. I work 7 hours a day now, of course I used to work 12 to 14 hours when I was younger,” he said.

The master also admitted that he is not good at teaching art to others.

“Teaching is not my career. Several times I practiced teaching but was not successful. However, I believe that students can learn the basics and industry of art through books. Creativity of art cannot be taught and must be found hidden within an individual,” he asserted.

He said that his love towards the youth have urged him to publish several books and collaborate with some students on their university theses.

The exhibition, which will run until April 14, will bring together 200 paintings, sculptures, drawings and illustrations done by the artist.

The exhibition will also display a collection of 300 red pieces of fabric bearing verses of poems from Sadeqi’s collection, “Confused”, curator Musavi said and added that the verses were inscribed by the master.

Six animated movies by Sadeqi will be screened during the exhibit.

Davos elite tap Cate Blanchett, Elton John, Shah Rukh Khan for human rights awards



Actor Cate Blanchett and actor Shah Rukh Khan pose for the media after receiving the Crystal Awards, with Hilde Schwab, Chairperson and Co-Founder, Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship and Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the WEF, at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland January 22, 2018. (Reuters/Denis Balibouse)

DAVOS, Switzerland (Reuters) — Film star Cate Blanchett, singer-songwriter Elton John and Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan received awards at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Monday for their work raising awareness about human rights issues.

Blanchett, an Australian, received a Crystal Award for her work with people who have fled their homes. British singer-songwriter John received his for his charitable work with his AIDS foundation. Indian Khan’s was in recognition of his work championing the rights of children and women in India.

The Crystal Award is given, by the WEF to artists who make a positive change in society.

The awards were presented at a ceremony in the village of Davos, in the

Swiss Alps, where some of the world’s top policy makers and executives have begun gathering for the annual meeting.

Blanchett, who has won two Oscars, was named a goodwill ambassador for United Nations refugee agency UNHCR in May 2016. As part of her role, the actor has traveled to Lebanon and Jordan to meet refugees displaced by the Syrian conflict.

She warned of the consequences if more was not done to help people forced to flee their homes.

“Lost generations of uneducated, disenfranchised and displaced children not only represent a vast loss of potential but also a threat for future global security and prosperity,” she said.

More than a million people have fled parts of Africa and the Middle East to Europe in the last few years.

Singer Neil Diamond diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, to retire from touring



Singer Neil Diamond performs on NBC’s “Today” show in New York, U.S. October 20, 2014. (Reuters/Brendan McDermid)

NEW YORK (Reuters) — U.S. singer-songwriter Neil Diamond, one of pop music’s all-time best-selling artists, has been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease and plans to retire from touring, his official website said on Monday.

The onset of the disease has made it difficult for him to travel and perform on a large-scale, a statement on the site said, adding he will be cancelling upcoming concert dates in Australia and New Zealand and offering refunds.

“It is with great reluctance and disappointment that I announce my retirement from concert touring. I have been so honored to bring my shows to the public for the past 50 years,” Diamond said in the statement, offering apologies to those who purchased tickets to his upcoming shows.

Diamond, known for hits including

“Sweet Caroline” and “Cracklin’ Rosie,” said he plans to remain active in song writing and recording.

Later this week, Diamond will turn 77 and on Sunday the Recording Academy plans to honor him with its Lifetime Achievement Award.

Diamond has sold more than 130 million albums worldwide and 38 of his singles have made it to the Top 40, according to the academy.

Grammy-award winner Diamond, a fixture in American pop music since he began recording in the 1960s, has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

“My thanks goes out to my loyal and devoted audiences around the world. You will always have my appreciation for your support and encouragement,” Diamond said.

“This ride has been ‘so good, so good, so good’ thanks to you,” he said.