

Zarif meets top Serbian officials in Belgrade **2**

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Saudi's Defeat in Yemen

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Iran slams Britain for 'dishonest' behavior at UN **2**

Labor riots subsided in post-Revolution Iran: Leader

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Leader has said that thanks to their insight, will, and religiosity, workers in the Islamic Republic have stood up against enemies' attempts to use them against the country.

"Anti-revolutionaries have failed to agitate workers against the Islamic Republic," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said during a meeting with executive staff

of a conference on labor martyrs which took place on February 5, but its report surfaced on Monday.

Enemies used to agitate workers to shut factories down, he said of the pre-Revolution days.

The Leader also underlined the sacrifices of the workers who rushed to the war fronts during the Iraqi war against Iran in the 1980s to defend the country.

Serbia named special guest of 2018 Tehran book fair

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — The Serbian ambassador to Tehran, Dragan Todorovic, has said that his country has been selected as the special guest of the 31st Tehran International Book Fair that will be held during May.

He announced the news on Monday during a visit to the Mehr News Agency.

"Culture and Information Minister Vladan Vukosavljevic will be taking part in the fair at the invitation of his Iranian counterpart," Todorovic told the Tehran Times.

A group of Serbian writers are scheduled to attend the book fair and two books from Serbian authors, which are currently being translated into Persian, will be introduced at the event, he added. **→16**

'Iranians always care about what they wear'

L I F E **TEHRAN** — "Iranians have never considered clothing as a mere covering. We always care about what we wear," Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Seyyed Mojtaba Hosseini said during the opening ceremony of 7th Fajr International Fashion and Clothing Festival in Tehran on Sunday.

"Our history is a great treasure that we

can use for our clothing in future. Since not only in our national history but also in our religion that is important that what we wear," he explained.

He called the festival as a great opportunity to conduct negotiation and interaction between designers, producers and people who use clothing as their 'visual identity card'. **→9**



PERSPECTIVE

By M.A.Saki
Deputy editor-in-chief

Water conservation is a must, not a choice

The Supreme Council of Water regularly holds sessions. It held its latest meeting on Saturday. The session, chaired by Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri, was attended by the ministers of energy, agriculture, industry, and director of the Environmental Protection Organization.

The photos of the Saturday meeting showed that there were some other figures, probably water experts, in the meeting.

Water is becoming the most serious issue in Iran because of climate change-related droughts, depletion of surface and underground water resources, and the increasing use of water in the agricultural sector.

It is true that Iran must recycle water and use the experience of other countries like Australia which have a similar situation like Iran, but training people, especially farmers, to use water efficiently is extremely important.

Isa Kalantari, the new chief of the Environmental Protection Organization who was agriculture minister for about a decade in the 1990s, is fortunately frank in sounding the alarm that Iran is facing serious water shortage and that the country should take "bitter decisions".

Now that the spring is arriving farmers must decide about spring crops. In certain regions of the country, especially in southwestern, western and northwestern parts of the country, some farmers have been growing water thirsty crops like rice, onion, and watermelon. Turning to water intensive crops in these regions started more than a decade ago. Growing such crops in these regions replaced less water intensive crops like wheat, barley, and cereals.

Still in these regions where there is still underground water, the profit-motivated farmers show great appetite for growing water intensive crops like rice and onion.

But what should be done to convince these farmers stop growing water thirsty crops or at least lower the amount of land under such cultivations. This issue must have been discussed in the Saturday meeting and Agriculture Minister Mahmoud Hojjati must have been providing some explanations about his ministry's strategy in this regard. **→13**

EU countries in tough spot with U.S. demands on JCPOA: professor

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Farhang Jahanpour, an adjunct professor in the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Oxford and a Middle East expert, says that all other signatories to the JCPOA, including the European Troika (the UK, France and Germany) have stated that they are for the nuclear accord, since Iran has remained committed to the deal.

"Nevertheless, EU countries are in a difficult position with the American demands," Jahanpour tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview. Jahanpour, also a former senior research fellow at Harvard University, says that Europe is playing a double game with Iran.

"On the one hand, they [European countries]

have stated openly that they support the JCPOA and have advised the U.S. to do the same. On the other hand, the Trump Administration is very critical of that agreement and has called on its European allies to fix it, so that President Trump can waive the sanctions."

Following is the full text of the interview with Professor Farhang Jahanpour:

■ Newly-leaked documents of the U.S. State Department show that the stance of the U.S. government towards the Iran nuclear deal has softened somewhat. According to these documents, the U.S. has outlined a course of action in which three European countries, Britain, France and Germany, would be "totally committed to improving" the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In return, President Trump would extend Iran sanctions relief, keeping the Obama-era nuclear deal alive. What

does this mean exactly?

A: I believe that one cannot rely too much on leaked documents, especially as the openly-stated stances of most U.S. officials are very hostile towards Iran. What one can say is that there is some disagreement among various U.S. officials about how to deal with the nuclear agreement. Many senior U.S. officials believe that as the JCPOA is an international agreement that has also been endorsed by the EU and the Security Council, it would be wrong for America to violate it, as no country would any longer trust any agreement reached with the United States. In a panel discussion at the recent Munich Security Conference in Germany, the former Secretary of State John Kerry spoke eloquently about the false statements that are made regarding the nuclear agreement. **→7**

Industrial units establishment permits up 19% in 10 months yr/yr

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN— The number of permits for establishing industrial units rose 19 percent in the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2017-January 20, 2018) from the same period of time in the past year, according to Deputy Industry Minister Mohsen Salehinia.

In a press conference on Monday, the official said 16,060 industrial units received establishment permits during the mentioned time span of this year, while the figure was 13,500 in the ten-month period of the previous year.

This number of permits has led to creation

of 362,000 jobs, with 21.5 percent growth from 298,000 jobs in the same time of the past year, and also a 16-percent rise in investment making year on year, Salehinia added.

The official also put the number of working permits issued for the industrial units at 46,500 during the ten-month period of this year, with 5.5-percent increase from 44,000 permits of the past year's same time.

He announced 17-percent growth in job creation and investment as the result of these permits in the first ten months of current calendar year compared to that of the preceding year.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the deputy

minister highlighted that production of most industrial products increased or had no change from the ten-month time of the past year, while there has been very low fall in terms of some products.

■ **Industrial sector to witness 5.6% growth in value added**

Salehinia further said that the industrial sector is expected to see a 5.6-percent growth in value added by the end of current calendar year (March 20, 2018).

The official said the figure was 4.5 percent in the first half of the current calendar year (March 21-Septembr 22, 2017). **→4**

Arya Sasol Polymer Co. Wins Golden Status as Top Green Industry

As one of country's top four green industries in the country, Arya Sasol Polymer Company won the golden status, the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

After its salient achievement in the past year and winning silver status at 18th edition of National Seminar of Green Services and Industrial Units, Arya Sasol Polymer Company managed to win golden statue of green services and industrial units at this year's edition of 19th Nationwide Green Services and Industrial Units.

The 19th edition of Nationwide Green Services and Industrial Units was held a couple of days ago in International Conferences Hall of Department of Environment (DoE) in the presence of Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Shariatmadari, Isa Kalantari Vice President and Head of Department of Environment (DoE), resident representative of UN Industrial Development Organization and also a number of senior managers and industrialists of the country.

In this edition of Conference, the annual environmental performance of large industrial and services' companies was assessed according to the relevant industrial criteria (such as improvement of pollutants' monitoring and controlling system, management of recycling the wastes, development of green space, optimal consumption of energy carriers and increase of productivity in the consumption of energy, setting up Health, Safety and Environment (HSE)



Unit, winning ISO and relevant certificates, deployment of instant monitoring system, adaptability with the clean production process and also replacement of clean energies), the report added.

Accordingly, four exemplary industrial units of country (including Arya Sasol Polymer Company in Bushehr, KAVAN Cement Production Company in Bukan, West Azarbaijan Province, Dairies Industries Company of Fars (PEGAH), and Fanavaran Khuzestan Petrochemical Company) were introduced as green services and industrial companies, the report added.

Nationwide Green Services and Industrial Units Seminar is held every year at the initiation of Department of Environment, UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Devel-

opment Company) and German International Cooperation Organization in line with protecting environment and for encouraging services and industrial units.

In the same direction, four services units of the country (including Isfahan city Center Complex, Shahrak-e Salamat (Health Township) Complex of Isfahan, Green Space and Parks Organization of Mashhad Municipality and District 5 of Gas Transfer Operation Unit of Far) were awarded with the golden statue.

In addition, 67 industrial companies and 22 services firms managed to win silver status of the Conference.

In general, a number of 11 industrial companies and 10 services company were appreciated.

Nationwide Conference of Green Services and Industrial Units is held every year at the initiation of the Department of environment, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and German International Cooperation (GIZ) in line with protecting and preserving environment and in order to encourage industrial and services units.

Dissemination of culture of environment among participating companies and transferring fruitful experiences of successful managers in the field of controlling and reducing environmental pollutants have been cited as the main objective of the Conference, the Public Relations Dept. of Arya Sasol polymer Company concluded.

More than 1,000 Palestinians in Gaza died from Israeli blockade

The Gaza Strip's collective of charitable organizations said more than 1,000 Palestinians have died as a result of the ongoing Israeli blockade on the coastal enclave.

The coordinator of the organizations, Ahmad al-Kurd, also said on Sunday that five premature babies born in the past few days died because of a lack of available medical treatment.

"Out of the 1,000 or so victims of the blockade, 450 died as a result of the collapse of the health situation in Gaza, such as the lack of medical supplies and the crisis of medical referrals for outside treatment."

Gazans continue to face a desperate situation because of the blockade with water and electricity shortages, as well as a lack of medicines and doctors unable to perform surgeries.

Kurd said the use of alternative electricity by residents of the Gaza Strip since 2006 has caused the deaths of 100 people.

"The use of candles, firewood or generators has resulted in house fires that claimed the lives of children and adults alike," he said.

Furthermore, the number of workers who were killed in the fields of agriculture, fishing and commercial tunnels has reached 350.

■ **Heinous crime**

Elsewhere, one fisherman was killed on Sunday after the Israeli navy fired at his boat. Two other fishermen were wounded.

The spokesperson of Palestine Fishermen's Union said the vessel was targeted as it made its way back to Gaza's port.

"The fisherman killed was 18-year-old Ismael Abu Riyaleh," said Nizar Ayyash, adding the other two, Ahed Abu Ali and Mahmoud Abu Riyaleh, were taken into Israeli custody.

According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), all Israeli attacks on Palestinian fishermen have taken place within the six nautical miles zone.

Hamas spokesperson Abdulatif al-Qanoo' said, "The killing of a Palestinian fisherman by the Israeli naval forces is a heinous crime that the Israeli occupation bears responsibility for."

In a statement, the Israeli army said the boat had breached the fishing zone.

"The naval force followed instructions to arrest the three suspects onboard, which included warnings and firing in the air and at the boat," the statement said. "One of the fishermen was seriously injured as a result and later died in hospital." **→13**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Judiciary chief orders immediate punishment for cult rioters

POLITICS TEHRAN — Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani has ordered the Tehran prosecutor general and the Tehran Justice Department to immediately punish those cults involved in the recent riots in the Pasdaran neighborhood of Tehran.

In a meeting of top judicial authorities on Monday, Ayatollah Amoli Larijani expressed grief over the killing of three police forces and a Basiji member by Gonabadi dervishes on Feb. 12.

“Unfortunately a number of rioters attempted to exploit the tolerance of the law enforcement forces and Basij,” he said, voicing gratitude to the two security forces for their efforts in dealing with the unrest.



No end to hostility against Iran, defense chief says

POLITICS TEHRAN — Defense Minister Amir Hatami said on Monday that the enemies will never end their hostility towards Iran, noting that they are doing all they can to undermine Tehran’s deterrence power.

On a visit to Malek Ashtar University of Technology in Tehran, Brigadier General Hatami said the defense industry needs to collaborate and interact more closely with scientific centers, Mehr reported.

He also said Malek Ashtar University can act as a bridge between universities and the defense industry, hoping that “we will witness significant advances in the field of defense industry.”



U.S.-Europe games won’t benefit Iran: Takht-Ravanchi

POLITICS TEHRAN — Majid Takht-Ravanchi, the current deputy director of the presidential chief of staff for political affairs who was on Iran’s nuclear negotiating team with great powers, has said that the games played by U.S. and Europe regarding the nuclear deal will not benefit Iran, urging European countries to take a clear stance on the issue.

In an interview with Jam-e-Jam newspaper published on Monday, Takht-Ravanchi, a former nuclear negotiator, said European countries should oppose Washington’s one-sided policies toward the nuclear accord, also called the JCPOA.

He also ruled out negotiations with Washington, saying further talks with the U.S. regarding the JCPOA is useless.

Zarif meets top Serbian officials in Belgrade

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held talks with Serbian president and foreign minister in Belgrade on Monday.

In the meeting with his Serbian counterpart Ivica Dacic, Zarif said Tehran and Belgrade can extend cooperation in the areas of oil, gas, petrochemistry, mines, communications and agriculture.

The chief diplomat added Iran intends to expand relations with Serbia “in all political, economic, cultural and parliamentary fields”.

Zarif also welcomed a decision passed by the Serbian government in August to lift visa requirements for Iranian nationals. The Iranian foreign minister also said establishment of a direct flight between the two countries would help increase trade ties considerably.

The two chief diplomats also discussed expansion of cooperation in areas of defense, science and technology, culture and art.

Dacic said Serbia is ready to expand relations with Iran in various areas, es-



Foreign Minister Zarif holding talks with Serbian counterpart Ivica Dacic (right)

pecially economy.

The Iranian foreign minister also held talks with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic during which he said Tehran is firm to deepen ties with Belgrade in political, economic and cultural fields.

For his part, President Vucic said, “As president of Serbia I declare that that we are ready to strengthen ties between the two countries in all areas and we see no limitations.”

Cooperation between Tehran and Belgrade at international bodies and crises in the West Asia region as well as the need to settle disputes in different parts of the world through diplomacy featured in the talks between Zarif and President Vucic.

Zarif also submitted a written message from President Hassan Rouhani officially inviting the Serbian president to pay a visit to Tehran.

Heading a political and economic delegation, Zarif visited Belgrade on Monday at the first step of a four-nation tour of Eastern Europe. Zarif would also travel to Bulgaria, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

U.S. seeking ‘covert infiltration’ into Iraq: Velayati

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said on Monday that the U.S. is seeking a “covert infiltration” into Iraq.

“The Iraqi people and government are against this infiltration and naturally cooperation between the two countries [Iran and Iraq] in regional policies will be strengthened,” Velayati told reporters after a meeting with a number of Iraqi Sunni scholars.

He said that the Iranians and Iraqis have good relations and the U.S. will not succeed in creating division between



the two countries.

Elsewhere, he dismissed claims of Iraq’s intermediary role in Iran-U.S. relations.

During the meeting with the Sunni scholars, Velayati said if it had not been for Iran’s cooperation, Iraq would have been disintegrated by “evil plots of enemies”.

“The Leader [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] is very determined in protecting Iraq’s unity and integrity. Steps should be taken in line with boosting peace and security in the region through expanding and strengthening relations,” he said.

Iran slams Britain for ‘dishonest’ behavior at UN

POLITICS TEHRAN — The British-drafted resolution against Iran at the UN Security Council over the Yemen conflict would be helping the “aggressors”, Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Monday, slamming the British government for its “dishonest” behavior.

The draft resolution, which is expected to be vetoed by Russia on Monday, is to condemn Iran for allegedly providing missiles

and drones to the Houthi fighters in Yemen.

“We do not send weapons to Yemen,” Qassemi said. “Such blame games are being played by those who are fanning the flames of war and bloodshed in Yemen.”

What is happening in Yemen, the spokesman continued, is the result of the U.S.-UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia which unleashed a bloody war on Yemen in March 2015 to restore its former Riyadh-allied government.

Thousands of civilians have been killed

and more than ten millions starved since the onset of the Saudi-led war against the poor country.

Qassemi also commented on the latest developments in Syria, saying the Islamic Republic wants a ceasefire across the country so that humanitarian aid could reach civilians.

Stressing the complexity of the Syrian issue, he said many actors have taken part in the issue, emphasizing that the

Syrian crisis is “not pleasant” for any of the parties involved.

“We hope the new resolution can bring about a ceasefire in all parts of Syria and that the circumstances improve through political channels,” he said.

He also hoped that calm would return to the Syrian capital and its Eastern Ghouta suburbs which have been the scene of government clashes with foreign-backed militants.

Second Announcement



INTERNATIONAL TENDER No. : 96 - K/175

1-Tender Holder: Security Paper Mill of Central Bank of I.R.Of Iran.

2-Tender Subject: Purchase wearing and spare parts of Claflin Refiner 111

3-Tender Deposit: an unconditional and extendable Bank guarantees from Iranian Bank for the amount of 16,800 Euro or 840,000,000 Iranian Rials.

4-Deadline for receiving tender documents:

Maximum 10 days after second advertisement

5-How to get document: Bidder can receive the tender documents by sending their written inquiry to Fax: +981143132566 or sending letter to email address info@takab-cbi.ir or refer to national database portal of Iran Tenders Information [http:// Iets. Mporg.ir](http://Iets.Mporg.ir)

6-Deadline for submitting offers:

Maximum until dated 07 April 2018 (97/01/18)

7-Validity period of financial offers:

The offers must be valid for 90 days after 07 April 2018 (97/01/18)

8- The offers no sign, conditional, altered and the offers that submit after the expiration of the period of bid submission will be considered as null and void.

9- Tender Holder reserves the rights to reject some or all of the offers.

10-The winner of tender must be submitting an unconditional and irrevocable performance bond guarantee equal to 10% of value of the contract.

11-All the cost of published advertisement must be paid by winner of tender

12-Place for receiving and submitting tender documents:

7th km Chamestan Road, Amol, Mazandaran, Iran, Security paper Mill-

Department of the commercial department building

13-Delivery time: 4 month after signing the contract for further information.

prospective bidder may contact us via the following

Tel: +981143132630 , 43133751 Fax: +981143132566

Web site: [http:// www.takab-cbi.ir](http://www.takab-cbi.ir) E-mail: info @ takab-cbi.ir

Second Announcement



INTERNATIONAL TENDER No. : 96 - K/168

1 -Tender Holder: Security Paper Mill of Central Bank of I.R.Of Iran.

2-Tender Subject: Purchase one set of Swimming Roll related to calender Machine

3-Tender Deposit: an unconditional and extendable Bank guarantee from Iranian Bank for the amount of 18.025 Euro or 775.000.000 Iranian Rials.

4-Deadline for receiving tender documents:

Maximum ten days after second advertisement

5-How to get document: Bidder can receive the tender documents by sending their written inquiry to Fax: +981143132566 or sending letter to email address info@takab-cbi.ir or refer to national database portal of Iran Tenders Information [http:// Iets. Mporg.ir](http://Iets.Mporg.ir)

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Chlorine attack reported in Syria after Russian warning

A suspected new chemical attack has reportedly hit the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta just after Russia warned that militants were planning a gas attack there to pin it on the Syrian government.

Militant sources were quoted as saying that several people suffered symptoms consistent with exposure to chlorine gas in the al-Shayfouniya area on Sunday, and one child was killed.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), which is sympathetic to militants, said 14 civilians had suffered breathing difficulties after a Syrian warplane struck the village in the Eastern Ghouta region.

The London-based center quoted victims, ambulance drivers and others as saying that they had smelt chlorine after “an enormous explosion” in the area.

“At least 18 victims were treated with oxygen nebulizing sessions,” Reuters news agency quoted an unidentified militant source as saying.

The Syrian government has consistently denied using chemical weapons in the foreign sponsored war that will soon enter its eighth year.

For years, foreign-backed militants have appeared to release chemical substances in the areas close to the site of government airstrikes and capture the aftermath on videos.

On Sunday, videos released by militants depicted a child’s corpse wrapped in a blue shroud, and several bare chested men and young boys appearing to struggle for breath, with some holding nebulizers to their mouths and noses.

The suspected gas attack came just after the Russian Defense Ministry warned on Sunday that militants were preparing to use toxic agents in Eastern Ghouta so they could later accuse Damascus of employing chemical weapons.

Last April, the United States fired 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Syria in response to what it claimed was a chemical weapons attack that killed more than 100 people.

The Syrian army is currently in the midst of an operation to drive violent Takfiri militants out of Eastern Ghouta from where they launch mortar attacks on Damascus.

A ceasefire announced by the United Nations Security Council on Saturday does not apply to the areas held by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh), al-Qaeda and al-Nusra Front along with “individuals, groups, undertakings and entities” associated with the terrorist groups.

On Sunday, Iran’s Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Baqeri said that the architects of the ceasefire had it passed



at the UN in order to forestall the Syrian army’s eradication of terrorists in the Damascus suburbs.

“The West and supporters of the terrorists insisted that this ceasefire be put in place,” he said of the resolution which demands a 30-day ceasefire across Syria to allow for humanitarian aid deliveries and medical evacuations.

“We will adhere to the ceasefire resolution; Syria will also adhere,” Baqeri said, while noting that parts of the suburbs of Damascus, which are held by the terrorists, are not covered by the ceasefire and clean-up operations will continue there.

The Syrian government surrendered its stockpiles of chemical weapons in 2014 to a joint mission led by the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

(OPCW), which oversaw the destruction of the weaponry.

Western governments and their allies however have never stopped pointing the finger at Damascus whenever an apparent chemical attack has taken place.

In April, a suspected sarin gas attack hit the town of Khan Shaykhun in the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib, taking at least 80 lives. Accusing Damascus, the U.S. then launched several dozen Tomahawk cruise missiles at a Syrian air base.

Earlier in February, French President Emmanuel Macron said if the use of chemical weapons against civilians were proven in Syria, “France will strike.”

(Source: Press TV)

Saudi regime starts to enlist female soldiers

The House of Saud regime has begun to permit women to join its armed forces as part of the kingdom’s Vision 2030 social program.

According to a statement released by the country’s General Security division, women can now apply for enrollment with the rank of soldier.

In order to be accepted the female candidates must fulfill 12 conditions, including being Saudi nationals brought up in the country. They also must be 25 to 35 years old, have high school education, and must pass a medical test. They must also be taller than 155 centimeters, with a suitable weight to height ratio.

Women married to non-Saudis, women who have a criminal record, and women with previous government employment history cannot apply.

The announcement comes as part of Riyadh’s social and economic reform push, dubbed “Vision 2030,” which was launched by the Saudi regime Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS).

In January, the House of Saud regime allowed women to enter stadiums to watch men’s football matches for the first time.

In September, Riyadh removed the driving ban on women as part of its recent reforms to undo the damage the ultraconservative kingdom has suffered for decades of human rights violations both inside and outside of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia was the last country in the world to permit women to obtain driving licenses.

The move came several days after women were also permitted access into a sports stadium, for the first time, to watch a concert.

Unveiled on 25 April 2016 by the then-Deputy Crown Prince bin Salman, the plan was touted as an assured way of transforming the country economically by the year 2030. The plan, he said, was aimed at ending Saudi Arabia’s “addiction” to oil, and it envisaged raising non-oil revenues from 163.5 billion riyals (43.6 billion dollars) in 2015 to 1 trillion riyals (267 billion dollars) by 2030.

Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi prince in charge of the economy, who was recently elevated to crown prince status, is also believed to have been the architect of the Yemeni war, as he holds the defense portfolio as well.

(Source: Press TV)

Four people confirmed dead in Leicester explosion

Four people have died and four others injured following an explosion that has left a building in the English city of Leicester in flames, police have confirmed.

Leicestershire Police initially asked the public to stay away from the street in Leicester where the explosion took place in the west of the city on Sunday night. Later on police described it as a “major incident.”

Police said one among the four injured was in critical condition, and that there may be more people unaccounted for and rescue efforts were continuing.

“There are four confirmed fatalities at this stage and a number of people still undergoing treatment in hospital,” said Supt Shane O’Neill. “The building consisted of a shop premises on the ground level and a two-story flat above it. We believe there may be people who have not yet been accounted for and rescue efforts continue in order to locate any further casualties.”

“Once the site is deemed to be safe a joint investigation with Leicestershire fire and rescue service will begin looking into the circumstances surrounding the incident, which at this stage is not being linked to terrorism.”

Video footages showed flames billowing into the night sky as the fire engulfed the building of convenience store. One video showed emergency services rushing to help people close to flames.

Eyewitnesses said there was thick smoke in the area. One neighbor told the Guardian: “There was a huge bang and the whole house shook. If there had been no bang, I would have thought it was an earthquake. I couldn’t believe it.”

“It looks like the fire is burning under control but there’s still a lot of smoke. The shop would have still been open so it’s awful. I will be really surprised if anyone has come out of it alive and people could have also been hurt at the bus stop,” he added.

The Leicestershire police department said hours after the incident there was no indication the explosion was an act of terrorism, and advised the news media not to speculate about the cause.

“The cause of the explosion will be the subject of a joint investigation by the police and Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service,” the police department said.

(Source: AP)

U.S.: Talks with N. Korea should include ‘denuclearization’

The United States is willing to talk to North Korea, but only if those talks will lead to an end of the North Korean nuclear program.

“We will see if Pyongyang’s message today, that it is willing to hold talks, represents the first steps along the path to denuclearization,” the White House said.

“In the meantime, the United States and the world must continue to make clear that North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs are a dead end,” the statement continued.

South Korea responded to the United States by saying the country should lower the threshold for North Korea talks.

“Recently, North Korea has shown it is open to actively engaging the United States in talks and the United States is talking about the importance of dialogue,” South Korean President Moon Jae-in said on Monday.

“There is a need for the United States to lower the threshold for talks with North Korea and North Korea should show it is willing to denuclearize. It’s important the United States and North Korea sit down together quickly,” he added.

The U.S. still wants South Korea to be part of a united front in dealing with what it sees as a potentially dangerous adversary.

Both the U.S. and South Korean responses come a day after North Korean officials said they are willing to sit down with representatives from the U.S.

That invitation by North Korea was made during the closing ceremony of the 2018 Winter Olympics, attended by two high-ranking North Korean delegates, Kim Yong-chol, a high-ranking party official, and Choe Kang-il, a diplomat in charge of relations between North Korea and the United States.

Ivanka Trump, U.S. President Donald Trump’s daughter, attended that ceremony for the U.S. However, according to several reports, she did not interact with the North Korean delegates.

During a meeting behind closed doors with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, the North Korean envoys voiced



their willingness to sit down with the U.S.

Al Jazeera correspondent Rob McBride said that despite the rapprochement by North Korea over the last few weeks, the country has not changed its stance on its nuclear program.

“North Koreans have given no indication they are willing to any concessions on their missile or nuclear programs,” McBride said.

“If talks are to proceed, the subject has to be addressed,” he said.

During their meeting with President Moon, the North Korean delegates also invited Moon to visit North Korea.

There is no indication yet of when Moon will travel to North Korea, but when he does, he will be the first leader to

meet Kim Jong-un since Kim became the leader of North Korea seven years ago.

The invitation comes days after the United States announced it would implement new sanctions on North Korea, in what it calls the “heaviest sanctions ever” in an attempt to prevent North Korea from further developing its nuclear program.

The measures - aimed at disrupting North Korean shipping companies and vessels - will heighten pressure on North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, a U.S. treasury department statement said.

Those new sanctions were heavily criticized by North Korea, which called them “an act of war”.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Macron to Erdogan: Syria truce also applies to Afrin

French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday told his Turkish counterpart that a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) call at the weekend for a ceasefire across Syria also applied to Syria’s Afrin region.

Turkey deployed police special forces to the northwestern Syrian region of Afrin on Monday for a “new battle” in its five-week campaign against the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG/Yekineyên Parastina Gel) militia.

“The President of the Republic stressed that the humanitarian truce applied to all of Syria, including Afrin, and should be implemented everywhere and by all without any delay to stop the ongoing spiral of violence that could lead to a regional explosion and push away any hope of a political solution,” Macron’s office said in a statement.

Macron told Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a phone call on Monday morning that France’s monitoring of humanitarian access and chemical weapons was “total and permanent”.

The Security Council voted unanimously to demand a 30-day truce to allow for aid access and medical evacuations. Yet while Moscow backed adopting the resolution, Russian UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia cast doubt on its feasibility.

Macron also told Erdogan that he was worried about recent events off the coast of Cyprus, stressing “the need to respect Cyprus’ sovereignty”, the statement said.

Cyprus accused Turkey on Friday of threatening to use force against a drillship chartered by Italy’s, in a standoff over hydrocarbons rights in the eastern Mediterranean.

(Source: Reuters)

‘Migrate or die’: Venezuelans flood into Colombia despite crackdown

The desert wind whipping their faces, hundreds of Venezuelan migrants lugging heavy suitcases and overstuffed backpacks trudged along the road to the Colombian border town of Maicao beneath the blazing sun. The broken line snakes back 8 miles (13 km) to the border crossing at Paragachon, where more than a hundred Venezuelans wait in the heat outside the migration office.

Money changers sit at tables stacked with wads of Venezuelan currency, made nearly worthless by hyperinflation under President Nicolas Maduro’s socialist government.

The remote outpost on the arid La Guajira peninsula on Colombia’s Caribbean coast marks a frontline in Latin America’s worst humanitarian crisis.

The Venezuelans arrive hungry, thirsty and tired, often unsure where they will spend the night, but relieved to have escaped the calamitous situation in their homeland.

They are among more than half a million Venezuelans who have fled to Colombia, many illegally, hoping to escape grinding poverty, rising violence and shortages of food and medicine in their once-prosperous, oil exporting nation.

The exodus from Venezuela - on a scale echoing the departure of Myanmar’s Rohingya people to Bangladesh - is stirring alarm in Colombia. A weary migration official said as many as 2,000 Venezuelans enter Colombia legally through Paragachon each day, up from around 1,200 late last year.

Under pressure from overcrowded frontier towns such as Maicao, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos announced a tightening of border controls this month, deploying 3,000 additional security personnel. But the measures are unlikely to stem the flow of illegal migrants pouring across the 1,379-mile (2,219 km) frontier.

At Paragachon, where a lack of effective border controls has long allowed smuggling to thrive, officials estimate 4,000 people cross illegally daily.

■ The Maduro diet

Some 3 million Venezuelans - or a tenth of the population - have left Venezuelan since late Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez started his Socialist revolution in 1999.

Despite four months of violent anti-government protests last year, Chavez’s hand-picked successor Maduro is expected to win a fresh six-year term at elections on April 22. The opposition, whose most popular leaders have been banned from running, is boycotting the vote. Migrants told Reuters they were paying up to 400,000 bolivars for a kilo of rice in Venezuela. The official monthly minimum wage is 248,510 bolivars - around \$8 at the official exchange rate, or \$1.09 on the black market.

Food shortages, which many migrants jokingly refer to as the “Maduro diet”, have left people noticeably thinner than in photos taken years earlier for their identification cards.

The shelter - where bunk beds line the walls of the bedrooms - provides food and shelter for three days and, for those joining family already in Colombia, a bus ticket onwards.

It will soon have capacity for 140 people a night - a fraction of the daily arrivals. Colombia is letting the migrants access public health care and send their children to state schools. Santos is asking for international help to foot the bill, which the government has said runs to tens of millions of dollars.

■ ‘No work’ for Venezuelans

At another shelter in the border city of Cucuta, some 250 miles (400 km) to the south, people regularly spend the night on cardboard outside, hoping places will free up.

The largest city along the frontier, Cucuta has borne the brunt of the arriving migrants. About 30,000 people cross the pedestrian bridge that connects the city with Venezuela on daily entry passes to shop for food. While many feel a duty to welcome the migrants, in part because Venezuela accepted Colombian refugees during that country’s long civil war, others fear losing jobs to Venezuelans being paid under the table. After locals held a small anti-Venezuelan protest last month, police evicted 200 migrants who were living on a sports field, deporting many of them.

Migrants are verbally abused by some Colombians who refuse them work when they hear their accents.

In Maicao, locals also worry about an increase in crime and support police efforts to clear parks and sidewalks.

They already have to cope with smuggled subsidized Venezuelan goods damaging local commerce, and have grown tired of job-seekers and lending their bathrooms to migrants.

Spooked by police raids, migrants in Maicao have abandoned the parks and bus stations where they had makeshift camps, opting to sleep outside shuttered shops. Female migrants who spoke to Reuters said were often solicited for sex.

Despairing of finding work, some entrepreneurial migrants turn the nearly-worthless bolivar currency into crafts, weaving handbags from the bills and selling them in Maicao’s park.

(\$1 = 28,927.5000 bolivar)

(Source: Reuters)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98098.5
IFX	1094.18

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	44,660 rials
EUR	54,560 rials
GBP	68,530 rials
AED	13,300 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	63.40/b
Brent	66.83/b
OPEC Basket	63.08/b
Gold	\$1,335.35/oz
Silver	\$16.65/oz
Platinum	\$1,002.75/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Iranian trade delegation to embark for Russia in early March

ECONOMY **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — A delegation from Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce will make a visit to Russia on March 4 and 5, 2018, the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) reported.

The delegation's visit to Russia will occur simultaneous with Iran-Russia Joint Economic Committee meeting and the two countries' business forum, the same report confirmed.

The removal of banking hurdles and expansion of financial ties have positively impacted the volume of transactions between Iran and Russia, as Iran's Minister of Economic and Finance Affairs Masoud Karbasian announced in a meeting with Russian Minister of Energy Alexander Novak in Tehran last November.



Over \$446m of facilities to be granted for mechanization of agriculture

ECONOMY **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Head of Mechanization Department of Iran Agriculture Ministry predicted that 20 trillion rials (about \$446.8 million) of facilities will be allocated for mechanization of domestic agricultural sector during the upcoming Iranian calendar year (starting March 21), IRIB news reported on Monday.

According to Kambiz Abbasi, 12 trillion rials (about \$268 million) of the facilities will be supplied via credit lines and the rest will be provided from implementation of the law of supporting expansion and creating sustainable jobs in this sector.

U.S. Treasury yields slip ahead of Fed remarks

U.S. government debt prices were higher on Monday.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note was lower at around 2.860 percent at 4:55 a.m. ET, while the yield on the 30-year Treasury bond was lower at 3.149 percent. Bond yields move inversely to prices. While investors remained on edge over the prospect of higher interest rates, U.S. government debt prices came under pressure Monday and during Friday's session, alleviating some concern.



Consequently, investors in the bond market will be turning their attention to the U.S. Federal Reserve and economic data, in the hope of any additional clues as to how the U.S. economy is performing.

The Chicago Fed's National Activity Index is due out at 8:30 a.m. ET, while new home sales is set to come out at 10 a.m. ET, followed by the Dallas Fed's manufacturing outlook survey at 10:30 a.m. ET.

Looking to the U.S. central bank, St. Louis Fed President James Bullard and Fed Governor Randal Quarles will be present at the 34th Annual NABE Economic Policy Conference in Washington, DC. This comes ahead of a testimony by the new Fed Chair Jerome Powell, due this week.

Elsewhere, the U.S. Treasury is set to auction \$51 billion in 13-week bills and \$45 billion in 26-week bills. The size of a four-week auction, set to take place Tuesday, will also be announced.

(Source: CNBC)

Industrial units establishment permits up 19% in 10 months yr/yr

1 → ■ Flourishing production in SMEs

Elsewhere in his remarks, the deputy industry minister referred to the plan for elevating production in the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and said in this due some facilities have been offered to such units, for example some bank loans as well as some exemptions.

Banks have offered 143 trillion rials (about \$3.177 billion) of loans to 20,000 units in the

framework of the production flourishing plan, he announced.

He also said that 4.8 trillion rials (about \$106.6 million) of renovation facilities have been paid to 140 units.

■ Car output in 10 months more than that of past year

Salehinia further put the car manufacturing in the first ten months of this year at 1.41

Iran, Kyrgyzstan ink MOU for co-op in free trade, economic zones

ECONOMY **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Chabahar Free Trade Zone Organization and the Kyrgyz Republic's Bishkek Free Economic Zone signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in Tehran for cooperation on transit, transportation, logistics and tourism areas.

The MOU was signed on the sidelines of the 2nd Inter-

national Summit for Presenting Investment Opportunities in Makran Shores (in southeastern Iran), which was commenced on Sunday and will wrap on Tuesday, IRNA reported.

Lying on the coast of the Gulf of Oman in Iran's south-eastern Sistan-Baluchestan Province, Chabahar is the country's only oceanic port and given its strategic location in

Germany's Merkel vows to avoid new taxes, work to strengthen EU

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Monday a new governing coalition she is seeking with the center-left Social Democrats would not allow new taxes or new public debt.

Merkel, seeking to stem growing criticism about her longtime leadership, underscored the core focus of her Christian Democratic party on economic conservatism, individual liberties and Christian humanism, while calling for efforts to recapture voters after heavy losses in the September national elections.

"We need orientation for our country, orientation for our party," Merkel said, citing public concerns about globalization, digitalization and unease about establish-

ment political parties. "It is our continuing responsibility as a party to give answers to these questions."

The chancellor, who needs approval from both political blocs to secure a fourth term in office, said her party would stick to its hardline stance against new tax increases and government debt, both at home and within the European Union.

"Reliability means being sensible with how you treat the money of the citizens," she said. "So we will stick to the clear line of the (conservatives): No new debts, no tax increases and at the same time, record investments in the big future areas."

Geely covets Daimler tech with \$9 billion stake, shares surge

Geely Automobile Holdings Ltd's (0175.HK) shares jumped on Monday after its chairman Li Shufu revealed he had built a \$9 billion stake in Daimler AG (DAIGn.DE), gaining leverage as he tries to convince the German carmaker to cooperate on technology.

The 9.7 percent holding makes Li Daimler's biggest shareholder and gives him a leg up to the negotiating table after the Mercedes-Benz owner knocked back a request from Geely late last year to issue new shares so it could buy a stake.

Li, 54, is expected to meet Daimler executives in Stuttgart on Monday and hopes to meet top German officials in Berlin.

But even so, gaining access to Daimler's technologies in areas such as autonomous driving and electric vehicles is not expected to be an easy task, particularly as Daimler already has a thriving joint venture partnership in China with BAIC Motor Corporation.

"It's one thing to be an investor, a significant investor, but it's another to be an alliance partner," said James Chao, Asia-Pacific chief of consultancy IHS Markit Automotive.

"I think this is the start of a process of negotiations to get something hammered out... Whether or not it will work, we'll see."

Geely Auto's stock surged 7 percent on Monday, giving it a market value of some \$29 billion, as investors cheered the Geely group's efforts to forge an alliance with Daimler. Shares



in Daimler edged 0.6 percent lower in early trade.

Li, who founded Zhejiang Geely Holding Group - the parent firm of the group - in 1986, said on Saturday that alliances were necessary to respond to the challenge from "invaders" in the global auto market, a reference to firms such as Tesla (TSLA.O), Google (GOOGL.O) and Uber.

Chinese carmakers are under particular pressure to jump several leaps forward in technology with Beijing bringing in new quotas from next year for the world's largest auto market that will require firms to hit strict targets for electric vehicle and hybrid electric plug-in vehicle sales.

Geely Auto said in a filing on Monday it was not directly

Euro climbs as traders eye political risk, central bank speeches

The euro gained on Monday as a fall in U.S. Treasury yields dragged down the dollar, but trading was relatively quiet ahead of speeches by central bankers and political developments in Germany and Italy this week.

With the dollar's bounce since it hit a three year-low on Feb. 16 fizzling out, the euro was able to rise 0.3 percent to \$1.2334 EUR=.

The currency has rallied this year on the

back of dollar weakness and expectations that the European Central Bank will tighten monetary policy but with the rally running out of steam as the dollar recovered, the euro remains 2 cents off recent highs of more than \$1.25. Analysts said investors were cautious about taking big positions this week due to political risks.

Italians vote in a national election on

Sunday, while the leading political parties in Germany, Europe's biggest economy, will decide on a coalition deal that could secure Angela Merkel a fourth term as chancellor.

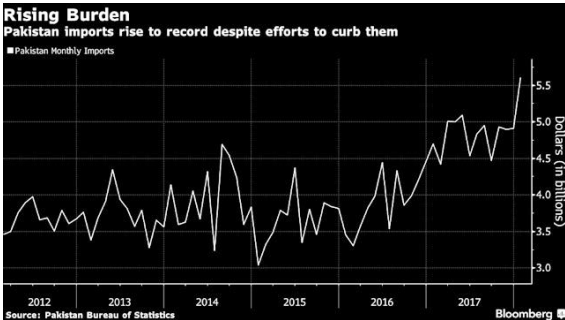
"We think the market may be underestimating the risks here - especially given that the euro's pro-cyclical and portfolio inflow-driven rally could run out of steam if political risks stay slightly elevated in the

near-term," ING said in a note.

Analysts pointed to weekly futures data that showed net long positions in the euro had fallen for a third week. European Central Bank President Mario Draghi's appearance in the European Parliament on Monday and euro zone inflation data due later this week also added to a nervous outlook for euro trading.

(Source: Reuters)

Pakistan's economic woes go from bad to worse ahead of elections



Five months before national polls Pakistan's government is struggling to fix its economy.

The South Asian nation of more than 200 million people devalued its currency in December and raised taxes in October to curb rising imports. Despite these moves both Pakistan's current account and trade deficits are hitting records while foreign exchange reserves continue to fall.

Pakistan's external sector indicators "signal a crisis and are going from bad to worse," said Uzair Younus, a South Asia director at Washington-based consultancy Albright Stonebridge Group LLC. "With elections around the corner, the government will simply kick the can down the road. The next government will face a balance of payments crisis and most likely go to the International Monetary Fund for yet another bailout."

Below are five charts that highlight the problem:

■ Record Imports

The nation's imports rose to a record last month despite the government increasing taxes on more than 700 items in

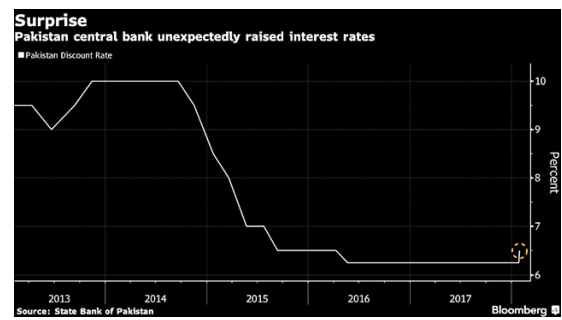
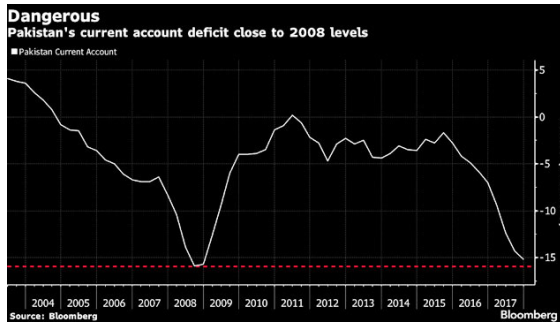
October. With the tax on almost half those products reversed this month, the import bill remains under pressure. The nation's economy is growing at 5.3 percent -- the fastest pace in a decade -- with import demand fueled by China's financing of power plants and road projects valued at more than \$50 billion as part of Beijing's flagship Belt and Road trade route.

■ Widening Deficit

The current account deficit has continued to widen after a currency devaluation in December, putting further pressure on the rupee and pushing authorities to borrow more. The government raised \$2.5 billion in November in an international debt sale. The current account gap reached 4.7 percent of gross domestic product in the seven months ending January, compared with 3.5 percent a year earlier.

■ Dollar Reserves

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have continued to decline after the last IMF loan program ended in September 2016. While the nation raised dollar-denominated



debt in November to bolster reserves, outflows since then have almost wiped out that amount. Some economists are predicting the nation will need its 13th bailout since 1988 later this year to shore up its finances.

■ Rate Hike

Pakistan's central bank unexpectedly increased its interest rate for the first time in more than four years last month. State Bank of Pakistan Governor Tariq Bajwa said the regulator is "pre-empting signs of the economy overheating and trying to keep inflation under control."

■ Rising Risk

Pakistan's financial risk in January rose the most since Bloomberg started compiling data in 2015. Pakistan's benchmark stock index has dropped 18 percent since a peak in May last year with foreigners selling shares after the country was upgraded to emerging market status by MSCI Inc. Political turmoil following the ousting of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in July spurred further drops.

(Source: The Economic Times)



million and highlighted that the figure is more than the total car output of the past year which was 1.365 million.

He also announced that the figure is expected to reach 1.55 million by the end of current cal-

endar year.

The official said manufacturing of trucks has risen 18.5 percent to 14,000 in the ten-month of this year from 11,900 in the ten-month of past year.

Oil steady after hitting three-week top; Saudis to keep output below cap

Oil steadied around its highest prices in three weeks on Monday, supported by comments from Saudi Arabia that it would continue to curb shipments in line with the OPEC-led effort to cut global supplies.

Brent crude was last down 8 cents on the day at \$67.23 a barrel at 1005 GMT, after having risen almost 4 percent last week in its largest weekly gain since late October.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude for April delivery eased 5 cents to \$63.50 a barrel after rising 3 percent last week. Both contracts earlier rose to their highest since Feb. 7.

A cold snap across Europe has encouraged some refiners to delay maintenance, which could support demand and help to put an end to a mild bout of profit-taking, analysts said.

“There is a bit of a bearish twinge to everything ... but we believe in the second half (of the year), you’ll see demand pull the market back up again,” Natixis oil analyst Joel Hancock said.

“Our view is demand will be strong enough, but we don’t see a big breakout. \$60 to 70 is the range we’re seeing for this year.”

Prices did draw some support from Saudi Arabian oil minister Khalid al-Falih,



who on Saturday said the country’s crude production in January-March would be well below output caps, with exports averaging less than 7 million barrels per day.

Saudi Arabia hopes OPEC and its allies

will be able to relax production curbs next year and create a permanent framework to stabilize oil markets after the current agreement on supply cuts ends this year, Falih said.

“A study is taking place and once we know exactly what balancing the market will entail, we will announce what is the next step. The next step may be easing of the production constraints,” he told reporters in New Delhi.

“My estimation is that it will happen sometime in 2019. But we don’t know when and we don’t know how”.

U.S. energy companies last week added one oil rig, the fifth weekly increase in a row, bringing the total count up to 799, the highest since April 2015, Baker Hughes energy services firm said on Friday.

Hedge funds and money managers upped their bullish wagers on U.S. crude oil for the first time in four weeks, data showed on Friday.

A powerful 7.5-magnitude earthquake struck Papua New Guinea’s Southern Highlands province early on Monday, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) said, prompting oil and gas companies to immediately suspend operations in the energy-rich interior.

Meanwhile, Libya’s National Oil Corp said on Saturday it had declared force majeure on the 70,000 bpd El Feel oilfield after a protest by guards closed the field.

(Source: Reuters)

China's oil imports seen constrained by tax revamp fear

Oil purchases by some refiners in the world’s biggest crude importer are being constrained as the firms assess the potential impact of a new tax system in China.

A revamped tax rule that’ll be implemented in March is spurring concern among the nation’s independent processors, known as teapots, that it would erode margins, according to Shanghai-based commodities researcher ICIS-China. The new regulation is seen as a government effort to close a loophole that allowed oil traders to profit from beefing up more expensive fuels by blending it with cheaper chemicals.

The refiners -- which have risen to prominence in the oil market over the past two years as they helped lift Chinese crude imports past the U.S. -- are now holding back as uncertainty swirls over the fallout from the complicated new levy system, according to Li Li, an analyst with ICIS-China. That may drag down import volumes in the first quarter, though double-digit growth is still expected for the full-year period, Li said.

At least four of the teapots clustered in the eastern province of Shandong and southern region of Guangdong haven’t issued letters of credit for financing their purchases since the start of this year, according to officials from five buyers and suppliers. The cargoes were originally scheduled to



be delivered in the first quarter, they said, asking not to be identified. Apart from the new tax system, they also cited volatile global benchmark prices for stalling purchases.

“There are some purchase agreements being paused from the buyer side after prices and volumes were preliminarily settled,” ICIS-China’s Li said, citing her discussions with the refiners. “We might have a clear picture after March when the new taxation system starts operation.”

Still, crude shipments from overseas into China in 2018 will probably be higher than last year’s levels as more refining capacity is added, she said. Purchases are seen growing 10 percent, backed by more imports to replace falling domestic output and build strategic storage, according to BMI Research.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Japanese firms to bring LNG to Australia’s east coast amid gas shortage

A consortium including Japan’s JERA and Marubeni is planning to import liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Australia’s east coast, aiming to supply industrial gas users and possibly a new power plant.

This is the second proposed LNG import terminal for Australia, the world’s number 2 LNG exporter, looking to fill a supply gap at a time when the country’s gas producers have locked in long-term contracts to supply LNG to Japan, China and South Korea.

A final investment decision is expected this year on the project to import up to around 2 million tonnes a year of LNG starting in 2020 into a market where energy prices are soaring, said a spokesman for Australian Industrial Energy.

“This market is desperate for new gas,” James Baulderstone, a former Santos executive who is leading Australian Industrial Energy, told Reuters.

This comes after reports last year that Australia was experiencing a shortfall of affordable gas on its east coast amid rising LNG exports and declining production.

Australia is one of the world’s largest gas exporters but the government’s liquefied natural gas (LNG) ambitions and slowing output are hitting the eastern region’s supplies and driving up prices.



The LNG receiving terminal would be able to meet up to three-quarters of the gas needs of Australia’s most populous state, New South Wales.

The proposed new LNG import terminal would be located at one of three ports that are being considered.

Australian Industrial Energy’s investors are mining billionaire Andrew Forrest’s Squadron Energy, Marubeni and JERA, the world’s biggest LNG buyer, which is a joint venture of Tokyo Electric Power and Chubu Electric Power.

General Electric is providing technical support and design services for development and construction of a gas-fired power plant.

A JERA spokesman declined to comment.

(Source: CNBC)

Three surprising outcomes of higher oil prices

Two years ago, in February 2016, the price of oil was in the low \$30 per barrel range. Predictions of doom and gloom abounded. At that time, the IEA warned that, “Unless something changes, the oil market could drown in over-supply.” One third of all oil companies were at risk of bankruptcy. Economic indicators from China showed the slowest growth in 25 years, and despite multiple calls for OPEC to cut production, the organization did nothing.

Fast forward two years and oil has doubled in price. It is very likely that the price of WTI will finish February somewhere above \$60 per barrel. Here are three surprising outcomes of the two year gains in oil prices.

Shale oil investors are still waiting to see profits. The shale oil industry has undergone a period of consolidation. Companies that did not go bankrupt have rid themselves of much waste. In general,

shale companies in the U.S. have become more efficient and employed new drilling practices at lower costs. Nevertheless, all but the very largest have not been able to show a decent return on investment. This continues, despite the higher oil prices and record production in the United States.

In 2016, pundits and analysts rushed to declare OPEC a dead organization. OPEC was seen as irrelevant, incapable of taking action and lacking the combined will to cut production and raise the price of oil. Many observers in 2016 criticized former Saudi oil minister Ali al Naimi, who refused to entertain production cuts in 2014 and 2015 without serious commitments from every OPEC and some non-OPEC countries. Now that the price of oil has doubled, OPEC has suddenly become relevant again to industry and financial firms. In late 2016, Saudi oil minister Khalid al Falih negotiated a

production cut agreement with OPEC and key non-OPEC producers like Russia and Kazakhstan. This agreement seems to have played an important role in drawing down the excess oil on the market and pushing up prices. Falih has even managed to wrangle Russia into compliance, and now the group may be working toward establishing a more permanent OPEC-Non-OPEC “super-group.” Suddenly, the strategy of Naimi and Falih strategy doesn’t seem so misguided anymore.

Venezuela and Iran have not improved their economic situations and have, in fact, become worse. Venezuela’s economy was the first to feel the negative impact of lower oil prices. The effects were particularly acute since Venezuela’s oil is very costly to produce and its state-run economy is highly dependent on oil revenue. Despite the fact that oil prices are now double what they were two years ago, Venezuela’s

economy continues to sink rather than show even modest signs of recovery. Venezuela is so starved of cash that it cannot even afford to produce enough oil to meet its OPEC quota. There are now reports that oil workers in Venezuela are unable to perform their jobs due to acute hunger. Iran’s economy has also failed to recover despite higher prices and sanctions relief. Iran struggles to find international partners to help improve its energy infrastructure. International oil and gas companies are not operating in Iran because the government won’t offer contracts, insists of unreasonable negotiating terms and scares away foreigners with capricious arrests and detentions. For both Iran and Venezuela, the governments failures have meant that even with today’s higher oil prices, their economies are not recovering.

(Source: Forbes)

Major quake halts oil and gas operations in Papua New Guinea

At least one company began evacuating non-essential personnel after a powerful 7.5 magnitude earthquake hit Papua New Guinea’s energy-rich interior on Monday, causing landslides, damaging buildings and closing oil and gas operations.

The tremor hit in the rugged, heavily forested Southern Highlands about 560 km (350 miles) northwest of the capital, Port Moresby, at around 3.45 a.m. local time (1545 GMT Sunday), according to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

A spokesman at Papua New Guinea’s National Disaster Center said by telephone the affected area was very remote and the agency could not properly assess damage until communication was re-established.

He said there were no confirmed casualties, although the International Red Cross (IRC) in Papua New Guinea said some reports indicated there were “fears of human casualties”.

“It’s a very serious all across the Southern Highlands and also all over the western highlands. People are definitely very fright-



ened,” Udaya Regmi, the head of the IRC in Papua New Guinea, said by telephone from Port Moresby.

The PNG government also said it had sent disaster assessment teams. At least 13 aftershocks with a magnitude of 5.0 or more

rattled the area throughout the day, according to USGS data, but no tsunami warnings were issued.

“The Papua New Guinea Defense Force has also been mobilized to assist with the assessment and the delivery of assistance to affected people as well as the restoration of services and infrastructure,” Isaac Lupari, the chief secretary to the government, said in a statement.

ExxonMobil said it had shut its Hides gas conditioning plant and that it believed administration buildings, living quarters and a mess hall had been damaged. It also said it had suspended flights into the nearby Komo airfield until the runway could be surveyed.

“Due to the damage to the Hides camp quarters and continuing aftershocks, ExxonMobil PNG is putting plans in place to evacuate non-essential staff,” the company said in an emailed statement.

Gas is processed at Hides and transported along a 700 km (435 miles) line that feeds a liquefied natural gas plant near Port Moresby for shipping.

(Source: Reuters)

S&P Global Platts bags Asian LNG price benchmark

Asia’s booming liquefied natural gas (LNG) market has seen exchanges and commodity price agencies vie to become the region’s leading price benchmark.

That race seems over with S&P Global Platts emerging the winner, over rivals including other price reporting agencies and exchanges.

With over 70 percent of global LNG consumed in Asia, and growth concentrated in this region, it adds a potentially lucrative business to the company’s already profitable operations providing oil price assessments.

Platts says LNG swaps volumes, settled against its Japan Korea Marker (JKM) LNG price assessments, quadrupled in 2017 to 50,266 lots, equivalent to around 170 tankers of LNG and the growth has continued this year.

“January 2018 was a record month for JKM derivatives with over 9,500 lots cleared, equivalent to over 31 standard-sized LNG cargoes,” said Dave Ernsberger, head of energy pricing at S&P Global Platts.

Platts provides price assessments of spot LNG cargoes traded in Asia and analysts and traders estimate the vast majority of deals are priced using its benchmark.

The Intercontinental Exchange, which operates financial and commodities markets, also provides a swaps contract for LNG that uses the Platts benchmark as the price for the underlying asset. More than 9,000 LNG lots were traded in January. Each lot is over 10,000 million British thermal units (mmBtu).

“The contract is increasingly seen as the benchmark... for LNG in Asia,” Gordon Bennett, managing director of utility markets at ICE, said in a client note.

The CME Group, which operates derivatives markets, has a similar arrangement, although only 265 lots were traded in January on its platform.

Early starter advantage - Platts started its JKM in 2009 – and the tie-up with ICE seems to have won Platts the race to be the main supplier of the price marker in Asia, creating critical liquidity that is crucial for any market to develop, according to several senior traders.

Other price reporting agencies and exchanges, including Japan’s Tokyo Commodity Exchange (Tocom) and the Singapore Exchange (SGX), have vied for a slice of the price-assessment pie but have struggled for significant market share.

TOCOM declined to comment, while SGX said there was “strong interest” in its Middle East and India LNG derivatives contract, known as the Dubai/Kuwait/India.

A sudden growth in spot trading of LNG in Asia has also been fortuitous for Platts.

Most LNG is traded via multi-year supply contracts, but spot trading took off from 2016 and made the need for a price assessment to settle trades more urgent.

China’s imports rose rapidly and some newer suppliers to the market were willing to break with traditional long-term supply contracts and provide spot cargoes instead.

“Flexible volumes from the U.S. and new supplies from Australia, Papua New Guinea and Africa increased the number of spot transactions,” said U.S. LNG firm Tellurian (TELL.O) in a note to clients this month.

“The number of participants... increased to around 45, compared with 20-30 at the start of 2017,” Tellurian said.

■ Liquidity attracts liquidity

The increased liquidity will fuel further volumes of trading activity, people in the market say.

“The ability to enter and more importantly exit trades is critical when trading in financial markets,” said Tobias Davis, head of LNG-Asia at brokerage Tullett Prebon, which also facilitates trade in JKM swaps.

“As the JKM benchmark has become more widely adopted, liquidity in the paper (swaps) market has grown exponentially,” he added.

China’s surge in demand has ironically left the JKM, named after the dominant LNG importers when it was launched, somewhat misnamed given China’s rise.

While Japan remains the world’s biggest LNG importer, China overtook South Korea to become the No.2 buyer last year, and most analysts say it is only a matter of time before China surpasses Japan.

Most traders say Platts’ current success is based on the link between its price assessments and the swaps trading on ICE.

But if history is a guide, the assessments could lose favor over time as the Asia market develops, Saul Kavonic, principal analyst at energy consultancy Wood Mackenzie, argues.

“If and when a true Asian LNG trading hub and platform evolves, then price discovery will move toward being based on an exchange, and futures will move to exchange-based derivatives contracts, as we’ve seen in Europe and North America where exchange prices like the U.S. Henry Hub or Britain’s National Balance Point, not Platts, dominate the market,” he said.

Australian energy and mining giant BHP (BHP.AX) said this week in its annual outlook that a future global gas market would be “potentially harmonized around the Henry Hub” as U.S. producers export LNG based on this benchmark.

Thomson Reuters competes with S&P Global Platts in providing energy news and market data.

(Source: Reuters)

Japan’s Inpex wins Abu Dhabi oil stake for \$600 million

Japan’s Inpex Corp. extended development rights for offshore oil fields in Abu Dhabi as the Middle Eastern producer seeks to replace a concession expiring next month.

Abu Dhabi National Oil Co. awarded Inpex a 10 percent stake in the Lower Zakum offshore oil field in return for a payment of \$600 million, the companies said Monday. The 40-year contract starts March 9. The Japanese producer was also awarded a \$250 million, 25-year extension of the Satah and Umm Al Dalkh concession and through that agreement has been awarded an additional 28 percent interest in the Umm Al Dalkh oil field, they said.

The deal is the third in as many weeks for the government of the largest sheikhdom in the United Arab Emirates. Spanish refiner Cia Espanola de Petroleos SA paid \$1.5 billion for a 20 percent stake in the Sateh Al Razboot and Umm Lulu fields in a deal announced Feb. 18, and a group of Indian companies paid \$600 million for rights to 10 percent of the Lower Zakum field on Feb. 10. Japan is the largest buyer of oil from Abu Dhabi, followed by India.

“We have been involved in this project for 45 years,” Hiroshi Fujii, Inpex’s managing executive officer, told reporters in Tokyo. Lower Zakum is the largest of the fields for which Abu Dhabi is offering partnership rights and has a target output capacity of about 450,000 barrels a day, Inpex said in its statement, without providing a date for the production goal.

(Source: Bloomberg)

The threat of regional conflagration in Syria

ISIL has been as deadly a proponent of asymmetric warfare as al-Qaeda, with an unrivalled propaganda machine that drew extremists from across the world. Its battlefield capabilities proved greater than any terrorist group has achieved. Yet the demise of the quasi-caliphate the group set up in Syria and Iraq is proving every bit as destabilizing as its original rise. Events during the past month have borne out what regional experts long warned: that the single issue approach to the civil war in Syria — focusing exclusively on eliminating ISIL, pursued first by former U.S. president Barack Obama and more recently by the administration of President Donald Trump — was at best short-sighted.



Beaten into retreat, ISIL fighters are now restricted to a few pockets outside urban zones. Yet, the past month has been one of the most deadly and dangerous in the war. The Turkish army pushed further into neighboring territory in a bid to drive Kurdish militias backed by Washington further from its border. The carnage has been of a more savage intensity even than the siege of Aleppo. Without a common enemy, rival regional and global powers sucked into the civil war have been trading blows on multiple fronts indirectly and through a bewildering array of proxies. Each clash brings with it the danger of open confrontation as competing interests are brought into irreconcilable relief. The contradictions inherent in the U.S. position are no more tenable.

Washington originally backed Syrian Kurdish militias because they were the most effective local force in the fight against ISIL. But they are seen by Ankara as a proxy for domestic Kurdish insurgents. A miscalculation on the ground could now lead to direct fighting between NATO members. In this explosive context the 30-day ceasefire, which the UN Security Council agreed to on Saturday, is welcome. But it is little more than a sticking plaster, if it sticks at all.

It might provide brief respite for civilians caught in the crossfire and pause the accumulation of atrocities. In the absence of an international forum through which a longer term truce might be pursued, it will do little to resolve underlying tension. Seven years after the start of the civil war, these threaten to turn what remains of Syria into an arena for a regional conflagration.

(Source: FT)

The demise of ISIL threatens yet more dangerous times to come.

Helping the world’s largest group of homeless

The UN and Europe have put out a plea to assist 4.1 million displaced people in Congo. Such aid might help the country become Africa’s next democratic success story.

Despite the media attention on them, neither the Syrian civilians who have fled war in the Middle East nor the Rohingya Muslims who have fled repression in Myanmar are the world’s largest group of displaced people. That record goes to 4.1 million people dislodged in Congo.



The little-noticed crisis in the heart of Africa has worsened over the past year to the point that the European Union and the United Nations announced last week that they are seeking to double foreign aid to the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is four times as large as France. An estimated 7 million Congolese are considered to be “food insecure.” Only 1 in 7 earns more than \$1.25 a day. Last October, the UN refugee agency declared a Level 3 emergency in parts of Congo, the highest possible ranking.

The country’s woes stem from two major conflicts less than two decades ago that have left a governance vacuum. Some 120 rebel groups are fighting either for ethnic dominance or to control the country’s vast mineral wealth, which is estimated at \$24 trillion.

Yet the biggest crisis is whether President Joseph Kabila, who has ruled for 16 years and remains very unpopular, intends to hold elections and step down as he has promised. In recent months, his forces have killed nearly a dozen people in peaceful protests called by the Roman Catholic secular leaders. Another protest is called for Feb. 25. (Also last week, Switzerland imposed sanctions on 14 allies of Kabila who might have stashed ill-gotten wealth in Swiss banks.)

Both the political crisis and the violence of the militias make it difficult for foreign groups to reach the millions of people in need. The situation in Congo is not the image that Africans want to project to the world just when they are hailing the version of a fictional and wise African nation, Wakanda, in the Marvel movie “Black Panther.”

In recent weeks, the continent has seen two democratic successes with the ouster of corrupt presidents in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Now it may be Congo’s turn. Its people have a strong national identity and a desire for duly elected leaders. With more foreign assistance, they might be able to be the next success story in Africa.

(Source: The CSM)

Will the U.S. help the Saudis get a nuclear weapon?

The last thing the Middle East needs is another country with the potential to build nuclear weapons. Yet that could happen if the United States mishandles Saudi Arabia’s plans to enter the nuclear power business and erect as many as 16 nuclear reactors for electricity generation over 25 years.

The Saudis aren’t saying they want to become the second country, after Israel, to have a nuclear arsenal in the increasingly unstable region. They insist the reactors would be used only to generate energy for domestic purposes, so they can rely on their huge reserves of oil to generate income from overseas.

Still, there are growing signs that the Saudis want the option of building nuclear weapons.

Obama administration efforts to negotiate an agreement on transferring civil nuclear technology — required before a country can buy American nuclear technology — faltered over the Saudis’ refusal to make a legally binding commitment to forgo uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing, which could be used to produce fuel for nuclear weapons. The United Arab Emirates made a commitment like that in its 2009 agreement, setting the nonproliferation “gold standard” for civil nuclear cooperation deals.

Now new negotiations are being pursued under a president who caters to the needs of American business and aggressively courts Saudi leaders. In theory, Trump is well-placed to cajole the Saudis to accept the gold standard. He can argue that it makes more sense for Riyadh to buy enriched fuels for the reactors from relatively low-cost foreign suppliers than to produce it in Saudi Arabia. Such an agreement will further cement ties with the United States, which has promised to protect the kingdom from its enemies.

But there are questions about what limits the Trump administration would require, and the Saudis would accept, as part of the agreement the two sides are about to start negotiating.

Insisting on strict conditions could force the Saudis to buy instead from Russia or China, which don’t impose such nonproliferation rules, or from France and South Korea, thus penalizing a moribund American nuclear industry eager for the lucrative new business. Westinghouse and other



Saudi officials are still insisting that they have a right to enrichment and reprocessing under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which guaranteed nations access to such technologies if they forsake nuclear weapons.

American-based companies are discussing a consortium to bid on the multibillion-dollar project.

However, a failure to incorporate crucial restrictions in any deal would leave the Saudis free to repurpose the technology for nuclear weapons. That would undercut decades of American-led efforts to prevent the spread of these arms.

The United States has long been a leader in nuclear technology with its sales to other countries governed by bilateral civil nuclear agreements that require adherence to nine nonproliferation criteria.

They include guarantees that none of the nuclear materials provided by the United States will be used for nuclear explosives, that none of the technology or classified data will be transferred to

third parties without American consent, and that the country involved in the agreement will not enrich uranium or reprocess plutonium.

But Saudi officials are still insisting that they have a right to enrichment and reprocessing under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which guaranteed nations access to such technologies if they forsake nuclear weapons.

If these disagreements stalemate negotiations, the United States could lose the opportunity to impose any nonproliferation, nuclear security and nuclear safety conditions on the Saudi program at all.

That is why a compromise proposed by Robert Einhorn, a former American nuclear negotiator, may be worth considering, but only if efforts to set stricter standards fail. It would require the Saudis

to make a legally binding commitment to forgo enrichment and reprocessing for 15 years, not indefinitely, thus kicking tough questions down the road.

Ultimately, Congress must assert its right to have the final say on a deal, and set strict conditions if the administration does not. Those should include intrusive inspections of Saudi nuclear facilities.

Given Trump’s flip attitude toward nuclear weapons, Congress’s responsibility affects the nuclear future of not just Saudi Arabia, but the decisions that Turkey, Egypt and other countries make about acquiring nuclear power. Lawmakers need to put protections in place so more countries don’t edge closer to having nuclear weapons.

(Source: The NYT)

Europe wants Egypt to drop death penalty

By Hagar Hosny

The European Parliament issued a resolution Feb. 7 condemning the use of the death penalty by the Egyptian government. It urged the government to issue a stay of execution for those on death row and to review all cases of pending death sentences to ensure respect for fair trial standards.

On Jan. 29, a memo was addressed to the UN secretary-general by 13 Egyptian human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) calling for the United Nations to immediately intervene with the Egyptian government to suspend the imminent execution of 26 Egyptians and to urge President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to replace the death penalty with another sentence. The NGOs also called on the Egyptian government to voluntarily suspend the death penalty in any new cases, in preparation for the abolition of this penalty.

Mohamed Zaree, the director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, told Al-Monitor that calls for the abolition of the death penalty relate to the fact that it cannot be reversed in cases where it is later discovered the accused was innocent. “The state must abolish the death penalty and replace it with freedom-depriving penalties such as 25 years or life imprisonment,” he said.

The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) published its Position on the Death Penalty on Oct. 10, 2017. It stated, “More than 100 crimes are punishable by death under Egyptian laws. These include 35 crimes set forth in the Penal Code, such as harming domestic and foreign national security and harming individuals, and another 10 crimes included in the anti-drug law. Most of the crimes punishable by death are found in the Code of Military Justice, which sets forth at least 41 capital crimes. In addition, the counterterrorism law of 2015 sets forth at least another 15 crimes punishable by death by hanging.”

In a phone conversation with Al-Monitor, Zaree said, “Death sentences have been issued against a large number of defendants in recent times, mostly in military trials that lack integrity. The aim of any punishment is to achieve public deterrence and to rehabilitate the offender. This can only be achieved through freedom-depriving sanctions.”

A report issued by EIPR on Jan. 31 stated, “Criminal courts sentenced 260 defendants to death in 2017 for 81 cases, of whom 224 are in custody.”

Hafiz Abu Saada, a member of the National Council for Human Rights, told Al-Monitor that it is difficult to abolish the death penalty now in light of the terrorist attacks witnessed by Egypt. He noted, however, that the death sentence could be limited to the most dangerous crimes.

In 2017, Egypt was shaken by seven major terrorist attacks that killed dozens of civilians and police and



The NGOs also called on the Egyptian government to voluntarily suspend the death penalty in any new cases, in preparation for the abolition of this penalty.

army members.

Abu Saada added, “It is also necessary to take the appropriate sufficient time before issuing death sentences. In cases of terrorist crimes, only those who actively participated in the crimes should be handed the death sentence and not everyone who joins a terrorist group.”

Commenting on the timing of the European Union resolution, he pointed out that it coincided with the campaign against the death penalty launched by the 13 local NGOs, asserting that this resolution is not binding on Egypt and will not affect Egyptian-EU relations. “The repercussions of Egypt retaining this penalty would be felt on its image abroad,” he said.

Of note, Europe is one of Egypt’s biggest importers and one of its major donors, with the total amount of ongoing EU assistance to Egypt reaching around \$1.6 billion.

In a press statement issued Feb. 11, member of parliament Alaa Abed, the head of the parliamentary Human Rights Committee, responded to the demands for the abolition of the death penalty, saying, “Egypt has not signed the 1989 Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. This means that the death penalty would be in line with the rules of international law, which allows the use of the death penalty to the most serious crimes and in a public trial.”

He explained that the application of the death penalty is in accordance with the principles of Islamic law, which is a source of legislation in Egypt, noting that over the past three years the death penalty has been used only against

81 people, while the remaining judgments are not final.

Article 2 of the Egyptian Constitution of 2014 states that Islam is the religion of the state and that the principles of Islamic law are the main source of legislation.

In this context, Mohammad al-Shahat al-Jundi, an Islamic Sharia professor at Al-Azhar University and a member of the Islamic Research Council, told Al-Monitor, “Islamic law clearly specifies that the death penalty aims to achieve punishment in murder cases.” He quoted the Quran’s Surah al-Baqarah verse 179, which states, “People of understanding, there is life for you in retribution that you may guard yourselves against violating the law.”

Jundi added, “Islamic law resolves every doubt in favor of the accused. If there is 1% doubt of innocence, the judge must take this into account and issue a softer sentence against the accused instead of the death penalty. The death penalty cannot be abolished under Islamic law, instead, efficient legal guarantees could be provided in favor of the accused, such as a reducing the number of crimes punishable by death.”

The former head of Cairo’s criminal court, Rifat al-Sayed, ruled out the possibility of Egypt dropping the death penalty and replacing it with softer penalties under the pretext of the possibility of a false judgment.

In a telephone conversation with Al-Monitor, he said, “There are guarantees set forth by the criminal legislator in Egypt. These procedural guarantees aim to ensure the correctness of judicial rulings ordering the death penalty and to minimize the possibility of mistakes.”

Sayed explained, “The death penalty is issued by virtue of a unanimous decision of three judges in the Criminal Court. This judgment is then challenged by the Public Prosecution before the Court of Cassation. Also, the nonbinding opinion of the country’s grand mufti must be obtained on every issued death sentence. When the judgment is pronounced, a memo shall be sent from the Ministry of Justice to the president of the republic for ratification, or for reducing the sentence or obtaining amnesty.”

He added, “These guarantees reduce to almost non-existent the possibility of a false judgment. The implementation of the death penalty is in accordance with the provisions of Islamic law. This approach is followed by most Muslim countries. Also, some foreign non-Muslim countries still uphold the death penalty.”

A 2017 Amnesty International report noted that 141 countries had completely abolished the death penalty by the end of 2016, equivalent to two-thirds of all countries. At the end of 2016, the Death Penalty Information Center noted that seven countries abolished the death penalty for ordinary crimes, and 57 countries retained the death sentence, including Arab countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and foreign countries such as the United States and China.

(Source: Al Monitor)

EU countries in tough spot with U.S. demands on JCPOA: Professor

1 → He stressed that there are no sunset clauses, that even after an initial period when Iran has agreed to stop enrichment activities, as a confidence-building measure Iran would still remain a member of the NPT, and as Iran has also joined the Additional Protocol it will remain under stringent inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency, like other NPT members. Therefore, the propaganda against the nuclear agreement is not well founded.

■ Citing a senior U.S. official, Reuters has reported that there was some hope to “Fix the Iran Deal” by reaching an agreement on modifying some of the JCPOA’s contents, endorsing a supplementary agreement or referring it to the UN Security Council. If European countries accept U.S. demands, is there a possibility that nuclear talks with Iran, Russia and China will resume?

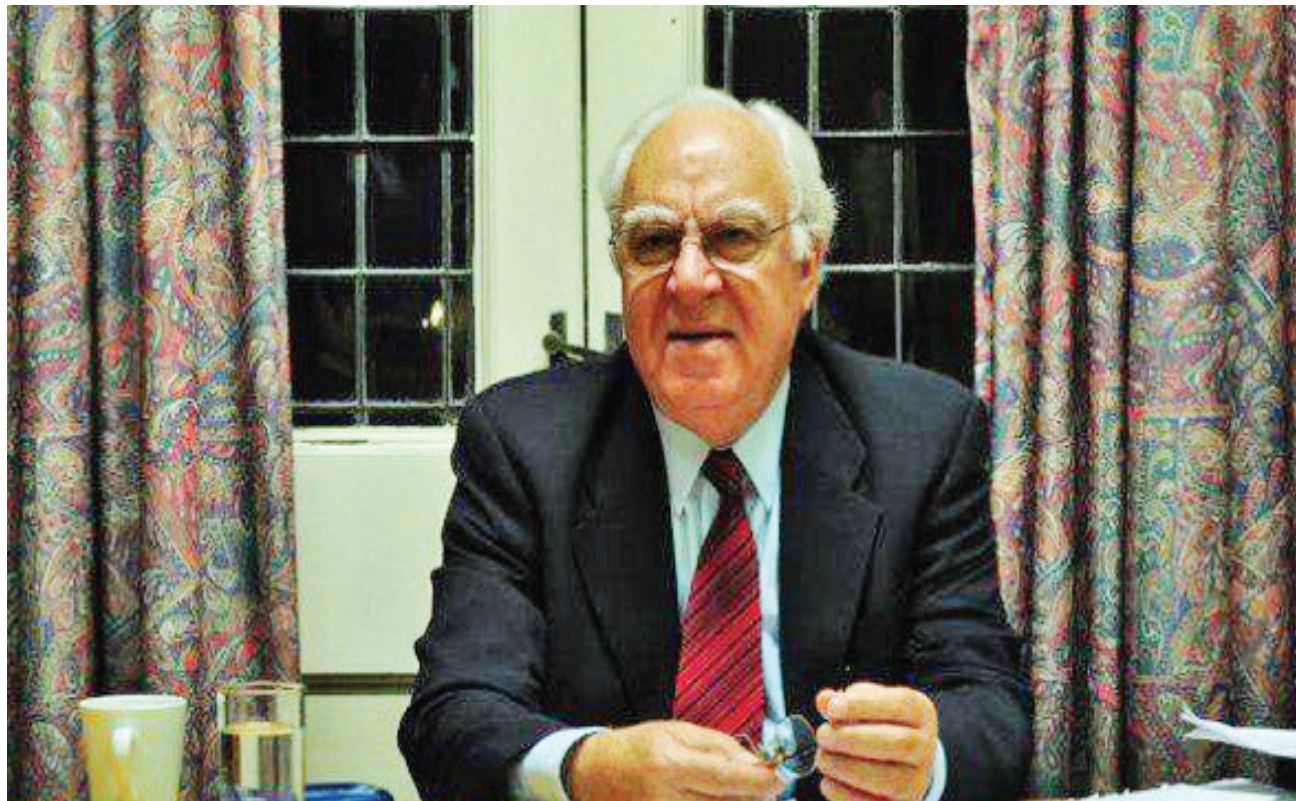
A: All other signatories to the JCPOA, including the European Troika (UK, France and Germany) have stated repeatedly that they are in favour of honouring the agreement, especially as Iran has complied fully with all commitments. Nevertheless, EU countries are in a difficult position vis-à-vis the American demands. On the one hand, they have stated openly that they support the JCPOA and have advised the U.S. to do the same. On the other hand, the Trump Administration is very critical of that agreement and has called on its European allies to fix it, so that President Trump can waive the sanctions.

The point is that even if the EU were to join the United States to undermine the agreement, China and Russia would continue to support it. So, the three EU countries are between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, they wish to protect this international agreement, while on the other hand, if they ultimately have to choose between Iran and the United States, they would have to opt for America.

However, as Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a speech at Chatham House in London on 22 February 2018 and in a long interview with the BBC, the reason why EU countries wish to abide by the agreement is not merely for economic reasons, but it is mainly due to the fact that this is the best and the strictest non-proliferation agreement reached between the West and any country, and it can serve as a blueprint for future agreements with other countries that want to develop nuclear energy. He added that the violation of this agreement would mean the belittling of an international agreement, which would erode trust between countries.

He further said that Iran will withdraw from the nuclear deal if there is no economic benefit and if major banks continue to shun dealing with Iran. The whole point about the agreement was that Iran would accept major restrictions on her nuclear programme in return for the lifting of the sanctions and reaping its economic benefits, but big banks have continued to stay away for fear of falling foul of remaining U.S. sanctions. This is against both the letter and the spirit of the agreement.

■ Some believe that there are three possible



Iranian officials have stated strongly that they are against any modification to this agreement or any supplementary agreement, because this is a complex agreement that was reached after many years of intense talks between Iran and the P5+1, with the help of some of the greatest experts from Iran and the West.

solutions to the Iran deal: 1. Modifying the current agreement, 2. Holding talks to reach a supplementary agreement, or 3. Following up with a new Security Council Resolution in order to add new changes. In your opinion, which one of these options is the most likely outcome?

A: Iranian officials have stated strongly that they are against any modification to this agreement or any supplementary agreement, because this is a complex agreement that was reached after many years of intense talks between Iran and the P5+1, with the help of some of the greatest experts from Iran and the West. If you try to amend it and change any part of it, the whole agreement would unravel. There really is no quick fix approach to the nuclear agreement.

When one listens to U.S. critics of the nuclear deal, it is clear that their objection is not precisely to the clauses of the agreement, but that they are unhappy about a whole host of other issues, including Iran’s missile programme and what they call Iran’s “behaviour” in the region. These are separate issues and should be addressed separately.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mr. Zarif has

repeatedly said that the nuclear deal was supposed to serve as a base for future agreements and not as a ceiling. However, if Iran were to take part in new talks on other issues the most important requirement would be that Iran should be able to trust the other side. The violation of the JCPOA has greatly eroded trust in the West, and there is a need for a new approach and a restoration of trust.

■ So, what kind of agreement do you think can resolve the issue?

A: As everyone knows, the entire Middle East is like a tinderbox. Most Middle Eastern countries have suffered enormously as the result of foreign invasions or civil wars during the past few decades. The problems in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen have not been resolved and there is a danger of new wars between Israel and her neighbours while the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is still unresolved.

Under these circumstances, any true statesman should try to resolve some of these problems and bring calm to the Middle East, while also respecting the national interests of different countries. Instability in the region will not only affect the Middle East but will

cause major problems for Europe and beyond. The present course of action will only lead to a regional war that might develop into a global war.

Therefore, all major powers and especially the United Nations should try to find a regional solution that will prevent a global conflict. It should be clear to all the regional countries that no one country can rule the region, and that even the hegemony of the superpowers is coming to an end.

The Middle East needs a regional security pact that would bring all the countries together in order to resolve their differences through dialogue and compromise, rather than through the use of force. None of the conflicts in the region has a military solution.

It would be better for the United States to join the EU, Russia and China and the countries in the Middle East to establish, if not an actual union, at least some form of compromise enabling them to concentrate on peace and reconstruction rather than on new conflicts. When the French foreign minister visits Iran in March, Iranian officials should stress the need for a comprehensive regional agreement, rather than tampering with the JCPOA.

“The potentials of cultural diplomacy in Iran- Belgium relations”

By Yahya Fozl

Member of faculty in research center for humanities and cultural studies

Term ‘Diplomacy’ stands for guiding of relations between individuals, groups, and nations and it is one of political terms used in the field of international ties. Under current conditions in the world, rather than the subjects which have proposed on diplomatic discussion between various countries such as commercial relations and cultural and scientific ties, this concept plays important role in improvement of world peace and international security. Basically, diplomacy is an important tool for realization of national interests within political, economic, and cultural relations between nations and diplomacy requires for adaption of special and professional forms of interaction between agents of nations in various fields e.g. politics, trade, and cultural ties etc. so that it is discussed about political diplomacy, economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and public diplomacy and the like.

The cultural diplomacy is deemed as one of the efficient and important techniques in relations between nations that aim to improve cultural, scientific and educational relations which will be consequently led to enhancement of political and economic relations as well. This type of diplomacy looks for deepening of cultural relations among the countries and improvement of relation and interdependence between them and upgrading of level of recognition and perception of various international environments and it is implemented through different tools such as educational and academic relations and holding of various conferences and academic communications, exchange of teacher and students, educational and researching cooperation, artistic exchanges (cinema and theatre etc.), games and sports, festivals and holding of book fair etc. and currently this type of diplomacy has devoted high capacity at the international arenas.

Principally, Iran and Belgium are two important and influential countries in two Asian and European continents and improvement of communication between these two countries may

lead to strengthening of relations among Europe and Asia and the Middle East.

Due to geographic situation, high population (over 75million), wide economic market, cultural and civilization potentials, and power for influence in Islamic world, Iran enjoys high potential effect in Asia, the Middle East, and Islamic world and at the same time Belgium is a country with approximately 11million peoples is also deemed highly important in Europe for the following reasons: Firstly, the presence of several wide road arteries, great ports and significant airports has converted Belgium into a transit hub at Europe; furthermore, this country enjoys the annual volume of foreign trade up to 700billion Euros and possesses advanced industries including in the field of transportation etc. secondly, this country is the headquarter of European Union (EU) and the related institutes and for this reason it is called as European capital ‘therefore, it highly influences in Europe EU. At third place, Belgium is presently the fifth trading partners for Iran among EU countries where the existing potentials can be developed.

The scientific and cultural cooperation is the complementary dimension for these potentials which may have synergic effect on relations between two countries and cultural diplomacy id the foremost tool in such communications. One of important examples of these potentials is the educational and researching relations between two countries as well as holding of joint meetings, conferences and workshops and exchanges of cultural and artistic products for which this diplomacy may prepare the ground for improvement of relations other cooperation fields. Accordingly, in addition to contribution to interests of both countries, such diplomacy can pave the way for more extensive relations among Europe and Iran and even under current conditions when the world suffers from insecurity, extremism, and terrorism, such scientific and cultural relations and interaction and communications between elites of two nations can contribute to creation of common perception of threats to which the world peace and symbiosis is exposed in order to strengthen moderate and peaceful discourses among Islamic world and the west.

Saudi’s Defeat in Yemen



By Mohammad Ghaderi

TEHRAN — About three years has passed since Saudis and their allies started war and bloodshed in Yemen. Today, after this long time, Yemen has become the symbol of Saudi Arabia’s defeat in West Asia. However, according to Colin Powell, the former U.S. Secretary of State, Saudi regime was supposed to seize Yemen in 14 days and destroy the country’s revolution. But now, Riyadh is facing the increasing costs of its failure in various Yemeni cities.

Most regional analysts and experts agree that Riyadh and its allies are the losers of the Yemen war, and this is what scares «Mohammed bin Salman», the crown prince of Saudi regime and other agents of the Yemen war most. Saudi regime leads the military alliance against Yemen, consisting of nine Arab countries.

Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Senegal and Sudan also belong to this military alliance. However, today, the cost of Saudis’ defeat in Yemen has involved other members of the coalition too. Undoubtedly, these countries have to be held responsible for their crimes against the Yemeni people, and they must be condemned to pay the heavy costs of this failure in the future.

In any case, it has been three years now that the defenseless people of Yemen are living under the aggression of al Saud and its allies. These three years of Saudi aggression led to Riyadh’s heavy defeat, the death of a large number of aggressive forces and, most importantly, the survival of the Yemeni revolution. Sanaa and Aden and Ma’rib have become the symbols of the defeat of Al-Saud in Yemen.

Saudi regime has even lost the power to regulate its relations with its allies in Yemen. The controversy that has formed between Riyadh and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen can be analyzed in the same vein. These conflicts are the result of the erosion of the Yemeni war and the joint defeat of Saudi regime and the United Arab Emirates.

Another point to consider is that Saudi regime, even using al Qaeda’s aid, has failed to defeat the revolution of the Yemeni people and to destroy this massive popular movement. The death of hundreds of Saudi and Emirati military forces in this war marks the rise of the Yemeni nation’s stronghold against Al-Saud and its aggressive allies. It is a nation that has been able to humiliate Al-Saud and exacerbate existing gaps between the Saudis.

Now the situation of Saudi regime and its ally countries is so disordered that even the Western rivals of Riyadh can no longer close their eyes to the heavy defeat of Saudis in Yemen. They can no longer justify this great frustration. Here is another point that requires attention:

Despite the extensive support of the United States, and in particular Trump’s government of Saudi regime, this country has failed in Yemen. During the last year, Trump sold a massive amount of weapons to Saudi regime to make money for the U.S. Treasury, and to achieve one of its regional goals (the destruction of the Yemeni revolution).

However, the U.S. President’s aids to the Saudi leadership couldn’t rescue the Saudi family in Yemen war. At present, Saudi regime has no choice but to declare its failures in Yemen. An issue that is still hard to understand for Riyadh and its supporters. However, it is clear to everyone that, the later the official announcement of this defeat, the higher the cost of Saudis’ defeat in Yemen.

■ **UN failure in the bloody test of Yemen**

The next important issue that needs to be taken into consideration in the Yemeni war, is the failure of the United Nations, and especially the Security Council, in the face of this bloody war. The killing of the Yemeni people, especially women and children, the spread of cholera among a large number of Yemeni children and the blockade of Yemen’s food was among hundreds of right violations that the UN not only closed its eyes on, but also left the Saudi regime open-handed in continuing this trend.

The United Nations doesn’t play an effective role in the developments happening in Yemen, but rather attempts to defeat the Yemeni revolution. The strong attachment of both former and current Secretary-Generals of the United Nations (Ban Ki-moon and Guterres) to Washington and Tel Aviv has strengthened this trend. During Ban Ki-moon time, we even witnessed the withdrawal of Saudi Arabia’s name from the list of war criminals: A truly flagrant action that put the UN’s role in dealing with humanitarian crises under question.

■ **The crimes of Western countries in Yemen**

As noted above, the United States and two of the permanent members of the Security Council (along with Germany), have played a major role in supporting the assassination, violence, and the killing of children in Yemen. Undoubtedly, the role of European countries can’t be ignored in this equation. One of the main reasons that Washington, Paris, London and Berlin are calling for the continuation of the Yemeni war and massacre of the people of this country, is their arms exports to Saudi regime.

Obviously, in the wake of the crisis, Western arms exports to Riyadh will increase, and this will make huge money for these countries! The publication of a recent shocking report about the amount of German weapons sold to Saudi regime and its allies has contributed to the dark background of the European authorities.

During the last year, countries participating in the Yemeni war, received weapons worth more than a billion Euros from Germany. According to the German Ministry of Economy, the report has been published as a response to the parliamentary request by the Green Party. Accordingly, in December 2017, the German government approved an estimated 1.3 billion Euros worth of arms exports to the Yemeni War Alliance.

Ultimately, the «Yemeni war» has revealed the joint defeat of Saudi regime, the coalition members, and their Western and Zionist supporters. Obviously, in the near future, we will witness the expulsion of countless crimes of Saudis and their supporters in Yemen. Although Saudi regime, and in particular the king and the crown prince of this country are considered the main agents of the Yemeni war, the direct and indirect role of the supporters who Ignored Saudis’ children massacre in Yemen can’t be in no way ignored.

Pre- bid notice for assessment of potential bidders

Kavand Nahan Zamin Co. (KNZ) intends to bid sale and/or investment in the Borley mine (located in Kazakhstan with reserve of 5.8 Mt oxide ore; mean grade of 0.35% Copper; and 194 Mt Sulfur ore; mean grade of 0.37% copper).

Bidders with mining or Copper processing background, and financial potentials; are invited to announce their readiness in writing; within 15 days of this pre - bid notice; for purchase of the share in the company, that owns Subsoil Usage Right of the Borly mine (as the first priority); and/or project implementation in the forms of: BOT, BOO, BUY-BACK and submit following supporting documents to 1th floor, No. 49, Haghtalab Gharbi Street, Saadatabad, Tehran:

1-Latest copy of company’s charter and registration documents (codes, or any other applicable referrals in the country of registration)

2-A brief description of company’s financial capabilities and references

3- A brief description of company’s mining or copper processing background with global involvements

Others:

1-Kavand Nahan Zamin owns 80% participatory interest in the company that owns Subsoil Usage Right of the Borly mine and 20% belongs to Kazakh partner.

2-Companies approved by KNZ in writing; will be invited to purchase bid documents for a price of RLS 100,000,000; through account to be announced.

3-Provisions of documents do not set any rights for applicants.

For further information, please call +98 910 9923 270 from 8:00 AM to 18:00.

America needs to get back to the basics in foreign policy

By Ted Galen Carpenter

An especially pernicious idea regarding U.S. foreign policy was Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's assertion that the United States was the world's "indispensable nation." It would have been bad enough if that statement had been a content-less expression of national narcissism. However, that same arrogant assumption has been the guiding principle of Washington's foreign policy since the end of World War II — and especially since the end of the Cold War. The belief led to strategic overextension, as the United States embraced security obligations, both explicit and implicit, around the world.

Moreover, the problem of America's strategic overextension is getting worse, not better. During the Cold War, Washington maintained a military presence in Western Europe and East Asia, and

pursued a policy of primacy in both regions. U.S. leaders also adopted an activist, although lower-profile, role in the Middle East. And, of course, the United States took repeated steps to prevent attempted Soviet penetration of the Western Hemisphere. There were also some relatively low-key geopolitical ventures in Africa. Nevertheless, there was a sense of limits to dangerous, high-profile missions the United States was willing to undertake.

Both the scope and intensity of Washington's security obligations and initiatives have expanded markedly since the end of the Cold War. During the first decade of the post-Cold War era, the United States pushed to transform NATO from a defensive alliance confined to Western Europe and North America into a much larger, offensive alliance. Washington lobbied to admit new members from the defunct Soviet satellite empire in Eastern Eu-

rope, eventually moving the alliance right up to Russia's western border. Given that expansion, Washington now has a treaty obligation to defend twenty-seven NATO member countries, most of which have minimal strategic value to America. With U.S. prodding, the alliance embarked on "out-of-area" missions, meddling in two civil wars in the Balkans (Bosnia and Kosovo) and dispatching troops to Afghanistan.

■ Expanding military presence

The United States also greatly expanded its own military presence and security obligations in the Middle East. The U.S.-led Persian Gulf War to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait marked the start of a substantially more activist role. Previously, Washington had maintained a naval presence in Middle East waters, and occasionally conducted short-term interventions — as in Lebanon in 1958

and 1982—but it did not try to micromanage the region's turbulent affairs on an ongoing basis. That changed after the Persian Gulf War, and escalated further with the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

It now seems as though no region is beyond the scope of Washington's determination to pursue primacy. The fastest growing military command is AFRICOM, which has responsibility for a rapidly increasing number of security missions in Sub-Saharan Africa. The United States now has at least 6,000 troops in more than a dozen countries on that continent, involved in a variety of operations.

Such a lengthy roster of security commitments costs a great deal of money. President Trump's proposed military budget for the 2019 fiscal year is a whopping \$716 billion. That amount is some four times greater than China's spending (the country with the second largest outlays) and nearly as much

as the next eight countries combined. Even more troublesome, the extent of Washington's security ventures puts American military personnel — and potentially the American homeland itself — at risk in a bewildering array of situations.

It is imperative to re-think the notion of America as the indispensable nation responsible for resolving security problems in every region of the world. The policy implications of the indispensable notion thesis were bad enough when they were largely confined to Europe and East Asia, and to a more limited extent to the Middle East. A predominant American security role also made some sense in the immediate aftermath of World War II, when the international system was badly disrupted, and the United States was the only power capable of thwarting Soviet expansionist ambitions. ➔13

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‘Iranians always care about what they wear’

L I F E Several officials and fashion designers and activists in apparel industry attended the ceremony. “Cultural officials should support national apparel industry and Iranian brands as a national honor,” the secretary of ministry of culture’s Fashion and Clothes Management Workgroup Hamid Qobadi said.

He said that a reformation is needed in the field of design and fashion.

“We plan to hold ‘Tehran Mode’, as a fashion event, is planned two held twice a year at Tehran’s Golestan historic palace, which would be a great help for Iranian fashion industry,” he added.

He said that textile industry and fashion design in Iran still can compete with similar foreign products.

“The festival aims to introduce innovations and novel concepts proposed by the young generation to the society,” he said.

It provides an opportunity to reconnect designers, people and officials to each other, he added.

At the ceremony, MP Fartemeh Zolqadr, who is member of the Majlis culture committee, talked about the importance of the festival. “In fact, the Islamic Revolution made changes in clothing and fashion in Iran and it is great that a festival focuses on these issue on the anniversary of the revolution,” she said.

The Fajr festivals, which are held in the different fields of cinema, theater and visual arts, held annually on the occasion of the Islamic Revolution in February.

“Iran is proud of a rich culture and civilization and cities like Yazd, Kerman and Kashan are pioneers in production of beautiful



Dresses on show at 7th Fajr International Fashion and Clothing Festival, which is currently underway in Tehran (Tehran Times/ Maryam Kamyab)

textiles,” she explained.

She said that Iran parliament, Majlis, supports the culture ministry’s Fashion and Clothes Management Working group in their activities to promote Iranian textile and fashion.

For the first time, the festival plans to take up an impressive collection of clothes with the concept of a historical monument, Golestan Palace, in the competition section.

The fashion and textile designers submit their works revolving around the Golestan

Palace during the festival, which runs from February 25 to March 4 in Tehran.

All fashion designers, clothing industry managers and those who are interested in the clothing and fashion industry can attend the event free of charge.

Best etiquette tips for giving graciously

Being a gracious giver is something that seems to come natural to some people, but chances are, they have worked on it to get to that point. By nature, when we do something nice for other people, we want to be noticed and acknowledged. However, the kindest way to give is to do so without calling attention to yourself. And if possible, do it anonymously.

There are some steps you can take to become a gracious giver.

■ Consider the recipient

When you give someone a gift—whether it’s time, money, food, or an item they need or want—think about the other person rather than what you would want. What do they like? What do they need?

● Does this person struggle each month to pay the bills? A gift card to a grocery store will be appreciated. Although it might not seem exciting to you, the recipient will enjoy grocery shopping without the worry of whether or not she

can afford something she needs.

● Is the person doing fine financially but rarely does anything for herself? This is the kind of person you might consider gifting with a spa day. If you don’t think she will like something that lavish, offer her a gift card to a bakery, the local florist, or other business where she can splurge on something she wants.

● Do you want to give a family something special that they can enjoy together? Whether you were a guest in their home for a weekend or you just want to give the new family next door something to welcome them, you might consider giving them a photo album, tickets to a local venue, or a gift basket with foods they can all enjoy.

■ Expectations

Gift giving should come without any expectations or strings attached. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be considered a gift. Offer

your gift without expecting something in return, and you won’t be disappointed. The very act of giving should bring you pleasure because it is done out of the kindness of your heart. If not, you might want to take a look at your motives.

■ Gift exchange

Have you ever spent quite a bit of time and money on a gift for an exchange at the office or with family members, only to be disappointed in what you received? I think that has happened to almost everyone.

Remember that not everyone has as much time or money as you. Or for that matter, some might have more of both, but they have other things to spend it on. Accept the fact that whatever you get may be small in comparison to what you brought and move on. Be happy that you were able to do something nice for someone.

(Source: thespruce.com)

28 simple and natural ways to detox your body



#12. Turn to probiotics to get rid of the bad bacteria and welcome in the good kind:

You may have heard of probiotics or perhaps you don’t know much, but these powerful substances help to naturally eliminate bad bacteria in the body. Knowing that they work in this way, it’s time to put probiotics to work for you.

You have probably heard of probiotics in certain foods such as yogurt and they are continuing to grow in popularity.

In its natural form, probiotics are a natural and good bacteria that help to regulate and balance out the balance of organisms.

The most notable application for pro-

biotics is in the digestive system where harmful bacteria and other organisms can grow over time.

You can turn to certain foods for probiotics and you can also find them in supplement form.

They can be of great help in not only helping to regulate the bacteria that builds up in your intestines, but also in your ability to get rid of these harmful substances once and for all.

Since the digestive tract is the most obvious area where these substances can build up, probiotics are an obvious and very helpful tool to assist.

(Source: bembu.com)

How to choose the best bed sheets for a good night’s sleep,?



■ Is thread count that important?

Yes and no. Thread count is often used as the barometer of a sheet’s smoothness and durability. However, this measurement—which should refer to the number of threads woven into a square inch of fabric—isn’t always reliable. High thread count is a factor, but the type of cotton can be more significant.

Egyptian cotton’s long fibers produce sheets that are thin and sumptuous yet extremely strong and long-lasting. Pima cotton is also soft and less likely to pill than upland cotton.

■ What’s Better, Percale or Sateen?

Neither. It’s a matter of taste. Percale is a plain, matte weave that has a crisp, cool feel,

so it may be sensible for people who tend to get overheated when they sleep. Sateen is slightly heavier and very soft, with a lustrous, smooth finish that’s almost satiny—hence the name. If you’re not sure which you prefer, look for fabric swatches on display for a touch test.

A cotton-polyester blend, often marketed as “easy care,” is a smart choice, since it withstands frequent washings well. A little poly is all you need—a 90/10 blend is durable, looks crisp right out of the dryer, and is still soft and cozy. But don’t go above 30 percent synthetic: The sheets won’t feel great and could make the sleeper sweat.

(Source: Real Simple)

Things you should never, ever vacuum



■ Used coffee grounds

All coffee drinkers know the struggles of cleaning out the old coffee maker, unless you’ve given into the coffee-pods craze. Wet coffee grounds are a pain to clean, but don’t make that a job for your vacuum. They can clog pipes, ruin the motor, and spurn mildew growth inside the machine.



■ Wet foods

Some kitchen spills can be cleaned with a vacuum, like sugar and salt. Others, like fresh produce, baked beans, and potato salad, cannot. They can clog the vacuum just based on their size and damage the motor because of their moisture. What’s worse, the foods could spoil inside your vacuum and start to smell. You don’t want to be stuck cleaning up that mess.



■ Plant debris

Dead leaves and flowers that fall off houseplants could easily clog your machine. Pick them up by hand instead.



■ Fireplace ash

Sucking up fireplace ash with a vacuum is basically the opposite of cleaning. The particles are so fine that they could get blown out the back of the machine and right into the air. Good Housekeeping suggests covering them with wet coffee grounds before sweeping them up so you don’t inhale any potentially harmful dust.



■ Construction dust

Home renovations are a big undertaking, but don’t try to breeze through the cleanup with a vacuum. Like fireplace ash, construction debris is made up of fine particles that can burn out the motor or get released back into the air. Sweep it all up to keep your vacuum—and yourself—safe.



■ Coins and small toys

Flat view pennies. United States currency penny, many old new dirty clean viewed from directly above. The penny is the lowest denomination coin in the U.S. currency.

(Source: Reader’s Digest)



101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

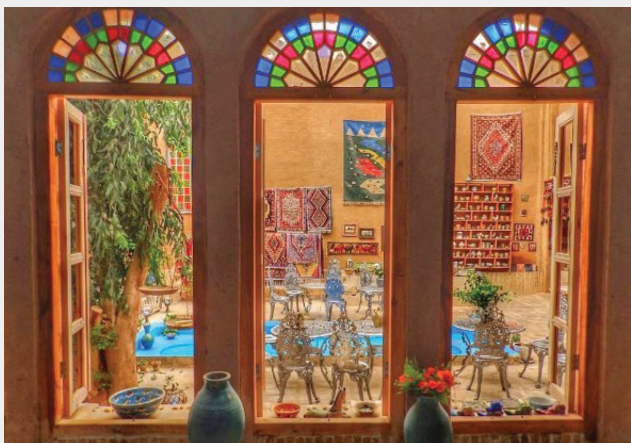
#40. Join a social etiquette class

In today’s world where first impressions are increasingly important, be it in professional settings or social settings, it’s more important than ever to be socially adept and to know how to present ourselves. This is where joining a social etiquette class will help! You don’t have to be a celebrity, be of the royal family, or be a member of the high society to join a social etiquette class; anyone can join and benefit from it. Be it learning about fine dining, gender-specific mannerisms, work etiquette, or social mannerisms, there’s something to learn for all of us. Here we share 101 items to consider for your bucket list. Look through the list — any item that resonates with you? Take the items that resonate with you and use them for your own list!

(Source: personalexcellence.co)



#IRANIANLIFESTYLE



A view from Rafieeyan historical house in Yazd (Instagram/@mustseeiran_insta)

Iran to help Oman in archaeology, cultural heritage arenas

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Iran will provide Oman with expertise in archaeology, promoting handicrafts and restoring cultural heritage sites, CHTN reported.

Based on a fresh agreement Iran will share its experience on handicrafts and archaeology with Oman, Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization Director Ali Asghar Mounesan said on Saturday.



CHHTO Director Ali Asghar Mounesan (R) and Omani Minister of Tourism Ahmed bin Nasser Al Mahrizi attend a press conference in Tehran, February 24, 2018.

In the near future a team of Iranian experts will be dispatched to the neighboring country, the official added.

Mounesan made the comments after holding talks with the visiting Omani Minister of Tourism Ahmed bin Nasser Al Mahrizi at the Sadabad Cultural-Historical Complex in Tehran.

The officials also exchanged views on broadening tourism ties as well, the report said.

“Regarding their close relationship, the two neighbors should make their utmost effort to enhance tourism ties in the best form possible,” Mounesan said.

Expansion of maritime transport and medical tourism were amongst other issues discussed during the meeting.

In response to a question about travel expenses, Al Mahrizi explained “Oman is a cheap destination and travel to this country is not expensive for tourists.”

Heading a tourism delegation, Al Mahrizi visited various tourism spots in Tehran, Qazvin and Fars provinces from Saturday to Monday.

In 2016, the two neighboring countries launched a cruise route, connecting Oman's port city of Khasab to Iran's Persian Gulf island of Qeshm.

Iran aims to take advantage of southern coasts by means of developing hospitality infrastructures, diversifying sea routes, and drawing private sector investors.

Cologne's tourism figures continue to climb

The year 2017 was the best in Cologne's tourism history, with a total of 3.59m arriving guests and 6.24m overnight stays.

According to official registration records, there were 7.3 percent more arrivals and 8.1 percent more overnight stays in hotels compared to the previous year. The increases for visitors from abroad were even greater, with an 8.9 percent increase of arrivals and a 9.2 percent increase of overnight stays.

A new study published by the tourism consulting company dwif confirms the increased value creation that tourism brings to Cologne.

In the past five years, the number of overnight stays by tourists in Cologne has increased by 23.2 percent — far more than the corresponding increase for tourists in Germany as a whole (11.2 percent) and the average increase in overnight stays in the ten biggest German cities (17.9 percent).

(Source: exhibitionworld.co.uk)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Sangha Trinational

Sangha Trinational is a transboundary conservation complex in the North-western Congo Basin where Cameroon, the Central African Republic and the Republic of Congo meet.

A World Heritage, Sangha Trinational encompasses three contiguous national parks totaling a legally defined area of 746,309 hectares. These are Lobeke National Park in Cameroon, Dzanga-Ndoki National Park in the Central African Republic and Nouabale-Ndoki National Park in the Republic of Congo.

Dzanga-Ndoki National Park is comprised of two distinct units. The parks are embedded in a much larger forest landscape, sometimes referred to as the TNS Landscape.



A buffer zone of 1,787,950 hectares has been established in recognition of the importance of the broader landscape and its inhabitants for the future of the property. The buffer zone includes Dzanga-Sanga Forest Reserve in the Central African Republic, which connects the two units of Dzanga-Ndoki National Park.

Natural values and features include the ongoing ecological and evolutionary processes in a mostly intact forest landscape at a very large scale. Numerous and diverse habitats such as tropical forests comprised of deciduous and evergreen species, a great diversity of wetland types, including swamp forests and periodically flooded forests and many types of forest clearings of major conservation importance continue to be connected at a landscape level.

This mosaic of ecosystems harbors viable populations of complete faunal and floral assemblages, including top predators and rare and endangered species, such as Forest Elephants, Gorillas, Chimpanzees, and several antelope species, such as the Sitatunga and the emblematic Bongo.

(Source: UNESCO)

Sistan-Baluchestan seeking foreign expertise to boost tourism

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — In addition to utilizing domestic resources, tourism authorities of Sistan-Baluchestan are seeking foreign expertise to unlock maximum potential of the vast southeastern province.

“Education and training of human resources is a valuable asset in the field of tourism... which will lead to the development of tourism industry in Sistan-Baluchestan, a matter we are pursuing scientifically,” CHTN quoted Mojtaba Mirhosseini, a provincial tourism official, as saying on Sunday.

“Given the fact that the province has an enormous potential in the fields of ecotourism, maritime and cultural tourism, expanding knowledge and empowering local communities will open up ample opportunities for tourism growth.”

To give an example, Mirhosseini pointed to an upcoming 30-day event in Japan, during which provincial representatives will participate in training courses about ecotourism and environmental issues.

Sistan-Baluchestan is home to several distinctive archaeological sites and natural attractions, including two UNESCO World Heritage sites, namely Shahr-e-Soukhteh (Burnt City) and Lut Desert, shared between it and Kerman Province.



Holidaymakers hike across a desert route in Sistan-Baluchestan province, southeast Iran.

Switzerland eyeing more Iranian travelers

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Switzerland is seeking to attract more Iranian tourists with an eye to at least 40 percent rise year on year, Mehr reported on Monday.

In 2017, Iranians made up only 0.5 percent of travelers to the European country with 16 thousands of Iranian nationals applied for Swiss visa, said Federico Sommaruga, director of the Emerging Markets & Special Projects at Switzerland Tourism.

Switzerland pays attention to even its small travel markets considering such low figures and the fact that Sommaruga has traveled to Iran for 13 times to promote tourism, the report said.

Highlighting efforts being taken to introduce Switzerland to Iranians,



A view of Zurich, Switzerland

Sommaruga said: “We have published a Persian-language brochure in which Swiss attractions, destinations and tours have been included.”

“We also work with five tourism agencies in Iran. Furthermore, we held a familiarizing tour for employees of certain Iranian agencies.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, the official hailed the notion of establishing new direct flight services, saying the launch of non-stop flights will lead to boom in mutual commerce, tourism and ultimately a prosperous future.

Looking beyond the chocolate and cuckoo clocks, contemporary Switzerland, which is famed as the land of four languages, has many to offer its visitors in terms of historical monuments, natural landscape and ecotourism.

Make a career out of hospitality

By Dilip Puri

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC) 2017 Global Impact Report, one in 10 of the jobs worldwide fall under the travel and tourism umbrella.

Only last year, the travel and tourism industry as a whole outperformed the global economy-for the sixth year in a row. Over the next decade, travel and tourism is set to successfully continue its rapid expansion, overtaking global economic sectors including communications, manufacturing, retail and distribution, as well as financial and business services, and provide 23 percent of all jobs worldwide.

It's a promise of immense growth and professional opportunities for aspirants keen to pursue a career in the hospitality industry.

■ Be open to change

The steady growth within the industry has made hospitality education a popular choice for students. With potential career opportunities available, it's easy to see why it's such a glamorous choice for learners, who are choosing hospitality and its flexibility over other traditional paths.

■ Meet challenges head on

Hospitality and its allied sectors aren't fields where you can expect to have a monotonous and fixed routine on a daily basis. It's an ever-changing world, with new developments and happenings every few minutes, making it crucial to know how to anticipate, adapt and excel.

■ Know how to communicate

From building a better synergy with your team to the way you conduct yourself

in professional meetings and a good grasp on communication is worth its weight in gold.

■ Think critically

There's no guidebook to life and there certainly isn't one that can cover all the scenarios the world of hospitality can throw at you. That's why critical thinking is one of the most invaluable skills hospitality management can teach you. Recognize the formula and learn to assess the situation.

■ Learn to lead

Leadership is about more than just calling the shots. Hospitality management graduates are encouraged to build their teamwork skills throughout their curriculum, enabling them to build good relationships with their co-workers and know how, and when, to take the initiative.

(Source: India Today)



Dilip Puri, founder and CEO of Indian School of Hospitality, Gurgaon

A cultural compendium of what's new

A hotel that moves with the seasons, logo tees on the runway — and more.

What is a hotel for? For most of history, it did only what it had to: provide a home when you were away from yours. Then, in the last century, a hotel became a place meant not just for shelter, but a destination; a place that embraced its not-homeness by being better than your home could ever be.

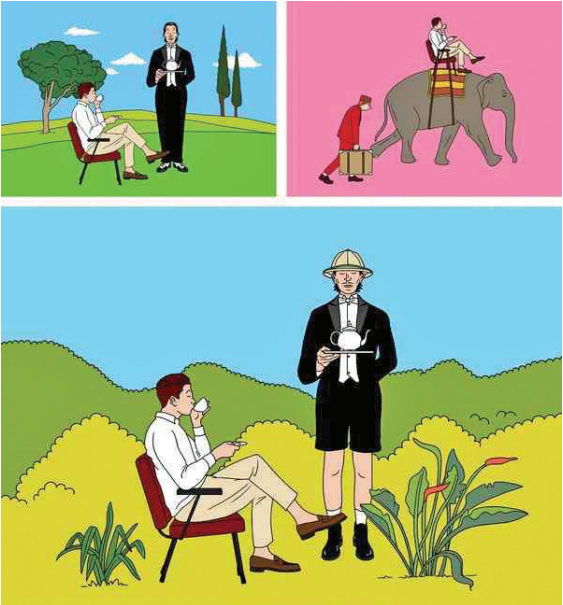
Now, a new project is defining the hotel anew. In September, 700,000 Heures will become the world's first nomadic hotel. The idea is that a hotel is not an actual structure, but a state of mind, a series of experiences, a respite from your life.

Every six months, 700,000 Heures (the approximate length of an average human life in the developed world) will change locations, occupying different buildings in different places — sometimes an existing building will be reimaged or refit for the hotel's needs; other times, it might even be built from scratch.

First up will be a four-room, 19th-century stone palazzo in Gagliano del Capo, a small town in Salento, Italy, known for its wild beaches and groves of knotted olive trees. Then, after this trial run, the palazzo will be returned to its owner, and 700,000 Heures will move to northwestern Cambodia, where guests will stay in a series of locations, among them an ancient Buddhist temple.

Most of the structures the company inhabits will be small — likely no more than eight rooms in any one location — and first priority will be given to its several hundred members, who'll pay an annual 500 euro fee and will be able to opt into destinations as they please. (Those wanting to join can apply through one of 700,000 Heures' 50 approved travel agents.)

The company is the invention of a French hotelier named Thierry Teyssier, who over the years has operated small, exquisite hotels in Morocco, Portugal and Brazil. “I want to be able to spend real time with my guests,” he says. “700,000



Credit: Illustrations by Jean-Michel Tixier

Heures is personal. It's the hotel I would like to find, if I were the traveler.”

Although 700,000 Heures will be the first impermanent hotel, it finds its origins in a dining and hospitality culture that has become ever more attracted to the ephemeral, the rootless and the rare. The past decade or so has seen a proliferation of pop-up restaurants and shops — Teyssier made his own contribution to this trend in the form of a pop-up

hotel in Paraty, in southern Brazil, which operated for six months in 2014 before shutting down. At the same time, there's been an embrace of what might be called subscription-based hospitality: In London, there's Carousel, a restaurant with a constantly rotating series of guest chefs and a set menu each night for which tickets must be purchased in advance, or the membership-based Soho House, which now has 18 locations worldwide. Teyssier's company speaks to a certain kind of traveler's desire for both novelty and consistency — the location might be different, but the mood must always feel familiar.

One of the ways 700,000 Heures plans to achieve this is through Teyssier's presence; indeed, he'll act less as hotelier and more as impresario, remaining on-site through each of the hotel's incarnations, and organizing excursions and events for all of the guests.

In Salento, this might mean a fishing-boat ride through hidden coves along the Adriatic, or a sunset picnic at Santa Maria di Leuca, a little-known Roman sanctuary. In Cambodia, destinations will include Tonle Sap Lake, a biosphere reserve with a floating village of wooden houses, or the French colonial city of Battambang, where travelers can train with acrobats at the renowned Phare Circus.

The goal, Teyssier says, is for the guest to feel like an actor in a theatrical production: the natural outgrowth of an age in which vacations are presented like biopics on social media. And, as for an actor, 700,000 Heures also provides props: Along with the physical spaces, Teyssier has created a series of leather trunks — each filled with objects to create a different mise-en-scène, from cocktail bar to art studio — that will appear at all of the hotels and will provide an aesthetic through line. The hotel will also present members with a mock passport, which will be stamped after each trip. “Some people make sculpture,” Teyssier says. “I'm in the business of creating memories.”

(Source: The New York Times)

Surgery and anesthesia may affect immediate memory, study finds

Can anesthesia and surgery really cause memory issues? Researchers found that patients who have had surgery may score lower on memory tests.

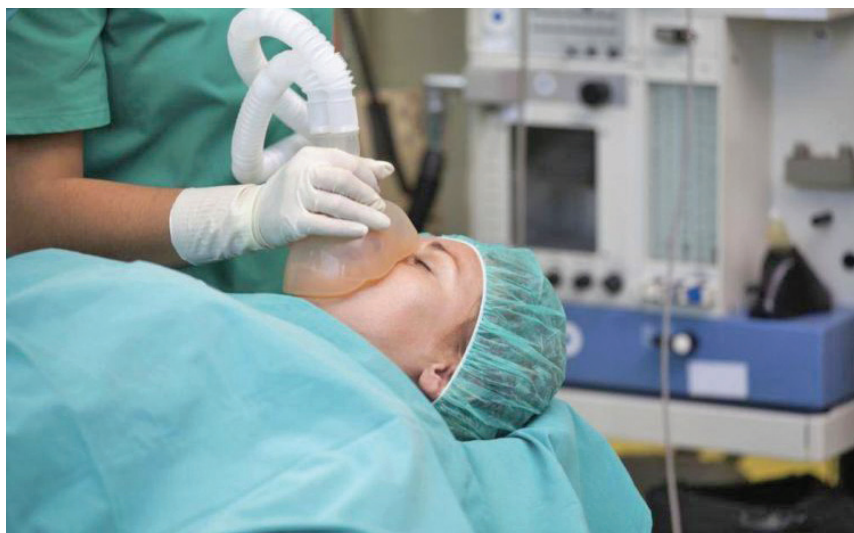
Some people are afraid of going under the knife for various reasons, and a lot of them are anesthesia-related. Is there really a cause for concern when it comes to anesthesia? A new study shows that it's possible to have some memory issues after surgery and anesthesia.

In order to gather their findings, researchers tested the memory and executive function of 964 participants and again after four years when 312 had had surgery while the remaining 652 had not. The mean age of the participants at enrollment period was 54 years old, and participants who were diagnosed with dementia or mild cognitive impairment were not included in the study.

■ Immediate memory

Results showed a decline in immediate memory among the participants who had one or more surgeries, but no other differences in measures of executive function and memory were observed. Immediate memory is the memory for events of information gathered in the last few hours or days. Often, brain damage that limits the capability to store new memory alters immediate memory, but not memory of the distant past.

Basically, the results suggest that the



patients who have had surgery and anesthesia are more likely to experience a decline in immediate memory compared to those that have not. Although the changes are small, they are still considered significant.

The “cognitive changes we report are highly statistically significant in view of the internal normative standards we employ, and the large sample size of the control, or non-surgery, population. But the cogni-

Immediate memory is the memory for events of information gathered in the last few hours or days.

tive changes after surgery are small — most probably asymptomatic and beneath a person's awareness,” said Dr. Kirk Hogan of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health, senior author of the study. He further states that it is too early to recommend any changes in clinical practice, as they are still awaiting results of follow-up investigations.

■ Anesthesia-related fears

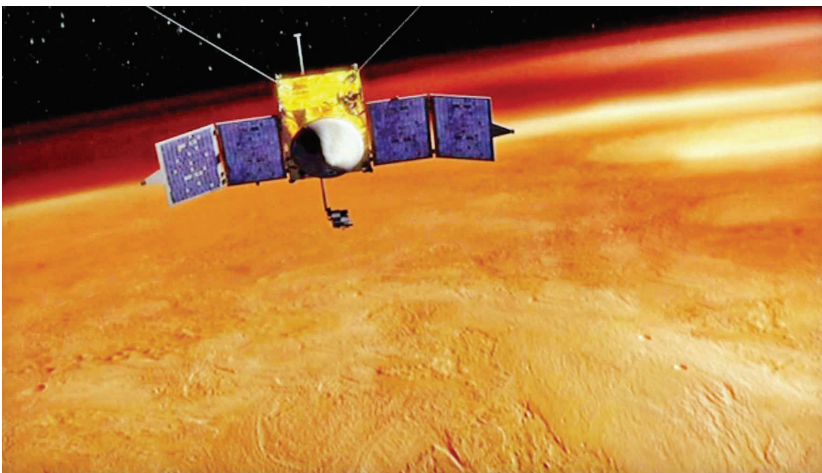
A 2016 study revealed that a majority of patients going for surgery have anesthesia-related fears. Researchers then found that among the 400 participants, women, especially those over 40, were seen to be more likely to have anesthesia-related fears before surgery.

Specifically, the top causes for their fear were postoperative pain, intraoperative awareness, and postoperative sleepiness. In fact, people were less afraid of the needles in the operating theater, the prospect of possibly revealing personal information under general anesthesia, and not waking up after surgery.

To be clear, serious risks caused by anesthesia during routine surgeries are small, with mortality rates of less than 1:100,000. That said, minor complications such as nausea, vomiting, sore throat, and incision pain are quite normal and fairly predictable.

(Source: Tech Times)

Methane-sniffing orbiter finishes ‘aerobraking’ dives through Mars’ atmosphere



The Trace Gas Orbiter (TGO) — part of the European-led, Russian-assisted ExoMars exploration program — just wrapped up a nearly yearlong “aerobraking” campaign, during which it used the drag from Mars’ atmosphere to lower and circularize its orbit.

“Aerobraking works only because we spent significant time in the atmosphere during each orbit, and then repeated this over 950 times,” European Space Agency (ESA) flight director Michel Denis said in a statement. “Over a year, we’ve reduced the speed of the spacecraft by an enormous 3,600 km/h [2,240 mph], lowering its orbit by the necessary amount.”

When TGO arrived at Mars in October 2016, it slipped into a highly elliptical four-day-long orbit, which brought it as close to the Red Planet as 124 miles (200 kilometers) and took it as far away as 60,900 miles (98,000 km). The aerobraking campaign, which ran from March 2017 through Tuesday (Feb. 20), brought the most-distant point down to a mere 650 miles (1,050 km) while keeping the closest approach the same, ESA officials said.

■ Thruster firings

There's still work to be done, however: TGO's final path is a circular one that's 250 miles (400 km) above the Martian surface. If all goes according to plan, the spacecraft will achieve this orbit by mid-April after a series of thruster firings.

TGO will begin checking out its instruments in mid-March, while these maneuvers are still going on, so the orbiter will be ready to start making science observations on April 21.

“Then, the craft will be reoriented to keep its camera pointing downwards and its spectrometers towards the sun, so as to observe the Mars atmosphere, and we can finally begin the long-awaited science phase of the mission,” Håkan Svedhem, ESA's project scientist, said in the same statement.

The science phase will involve the characterization of low-abundance gases in the Martian air, including methane, which could be a sign of life. About 90 percent of Earth's atmospheric methane is produced biologically, and astronomers have detected apparent plumes of the stuff in Mars' air several times in the past decade or so.

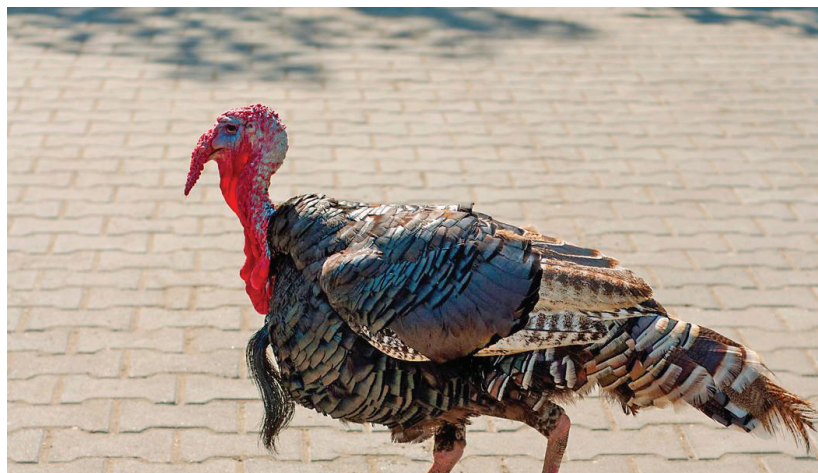
■ Tiny Martians

Methane can also be produced abiotically, however, so such plumes by themselves are not evidence of tiny Martians. Scientists hope TGO can help them figure out just where the Red Planet's methane is coming from, and what's generating it.

TGO also has several other tasks, including hunting for buried water ice and serving as a data relay for the life-hunting ExoMars rover, which is scheduled to touch down in 2021.

(Source: space.com)

Brave birds run around racetrack to teach us about dinosaurs, scientists find



In a quest to learn how two-legged dinosaurs moved, scientists watched their descendants — birds — run around on a race track. After all, chickens were once carnivorous dinosaurs that stalked the Earth on giant drumsticks.

For all the movies that show dinosaurs chasing after humans, we don't actually know much about what a walking or running dinosaur looked like. Footprints and fossils, for example, can't tell us whether a dino strode or strutted. “They're static records of an animal or its movement,” says Peter Bishop, a scientist at the Queensland Museum. For movement, he says, “That's when you've got to study animals that are living today.”

Only, there aren't any dinosaurs wandering around anymore. So Bishop and his colleagues turned to the next best thing: birds, the only surviving descendants of two-legged dinos called theropods. Bishop and his colleagues rounded up a dozen species from cute little quail and turkeys to long-legged ostriches and emus. Then they sent the birds walking and running down a racetrack.

■ Birds' hips moved

The researchers filmed the birds with a two-camera setup kind of similar to the motion-capture technology used for movies. They recorded 3D measurements like how high the birds' hips moved during

each stride, and reported them Wednesday in the journal PLOS ONE. The tracks were also outfitted with special platforms, so the team could measure the force of their steps.

These measurements helped the research team develop models that use the bird's size and speed to predict key aspects of its movement — like stride length and general bounciness. They found that body size has a big influence on how birds — and, probably, their dinosaur ancestors — moved, Bishop says.

■ Smaller birds

Smaller birds scurry in more of a crouched position, and bigger birds' legs stretch out to create a more upright pose.

The eventual aim is to use these equations on dinosaurs, too — but they're still a work in progress. So Bishop hasn't received any phone calls from Steven Spielberg yet, he says. “But I'm waiting by the phone.”

Bishop speculates that a T. rex probably wasn't a very graceful runner. “Like a big turkey or ostrich, just moving with a lot more effort,” Bishop says. “At the end of the day, he's trying to move basically the size of an elephant on two legs instead of four.” Somehow, imagining a T. rex as a lumbering turkey with teeth doesn't make it any less terrifying.

(Source: theverge.com)

Artificial eye automatically stretches to simultaneously focus and correct astigmatism

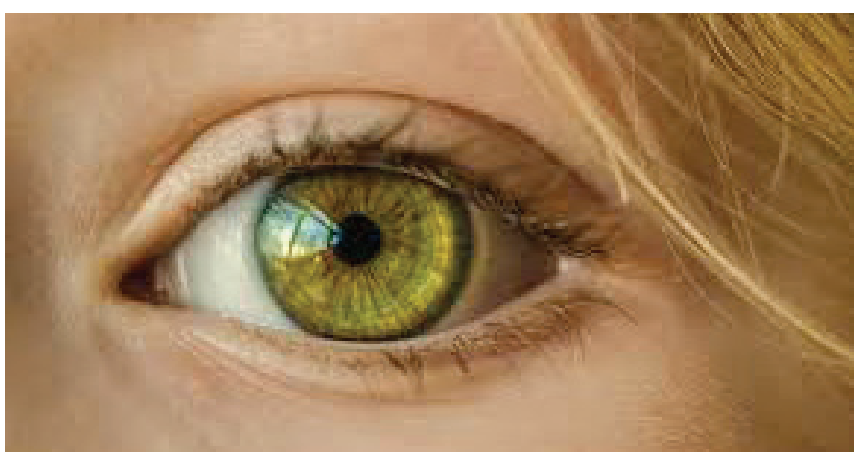
Inspired by the human eye, researchers have developed an adaptive metalens that is essentially a flat, electronically controlled artificial eye. The adaptive metalens simultaneously controls for three of the major contributors to blurry images: focus, astigmatism, and image shift.

This is a photo of the metalens (made of silicon) mounted on a transparent, stretchy polymer film, without any electrodes. The colorful iridescence is produced by the large number of nanostructures within the metalens.

Inspired by the human eye, researchers at the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS) have developed an adaptive metalens, that is essentially a flat, electronically controlled artificial eye. The adaptive metalens simultaneously controls for three of the major contributors to blurry images: focus, astigmatism, and image shift.

■ Creating tunable metalens

“This research combines breakthroughs in artificial muscle technology with metalens technology to create a tunable metalens that can change its focus in real time, just like the human eye,” said Alan She, a graduate student at SEAS and first author of the paper. “We



go one step further to build the capability of dynamically correcting for aberrations such as astigmatism and image shift, which the human eye cannot naturally do.”

“This demonstrates the feasibility of embedded optical zoom and autofocus for a wide range of applications including cell phone cameras, eyeglasses and virtual and augmented reality hardware,” said Federico Capasso, Robert L. Wallace Professor of Applied Physics and Vinton Hayes Senior

Research Fellow in Electrical Engineering at SEAS and senior author of the paper. “It also shows the possibility of future optical microscopes, which operate fully electronically and can correct many aberrations simultaneously.”

The Harvard Office of Technology Development has protected the intellectual property relating to this project and is exploring commercialization opportunities.

“Because the nanostructures are so small,

the density of information in each lens is incredibly high,” said She. “If you go from a 100 micron-sized lens to a centimeter sized lens, you will have increased the information required to describe the lens by ten thousand. Whenever we tried to scale-up the lens, the file size of the design alone would balloon up to gigabytes or even terabytes.”

■ New algorithm developed

To solve this problem, the researchers developed a new algorithm to shrink the file size to make the metalens compatible with the technology currently used to fabricate integrated circuits.

“This research provides the possibility of unifying two industries: semiconductor manufacturing and lens-making, whereby the same technology used to make computer chips will be used to make metasurface-based optical components, such as lenses,” said Capasso.

Next, the researchers needed to adhere the large metalens to an artificial muscle without compromising its ability to focus light. In the human eye, the lens is surrounded by ciliary muscle, which stretches or compresses the lens, changing its shape to adjust its focal length.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

How much salt do you need to survive?

The constantly-debated question: How much salt do you actually need to be healthy? On one hand, your body needs the nutrients in salt to survive — particularly sodium.

“Sodium is the most important extracellular electrolyte,” Dr. Paul Whelton, a professor of global public health at Tulane University, told Live Science. “It plays a role in many, many health functions.”

Electrolytes are tiny substances that dissolve in water to create positively- and negatively-charged ions that conduct electricity. A proper balance of these charges inside and outside of your cells is crucial to regulating many bodily functions, including hydration, blood pressure, and proper functioning of nerves and muscles.

And yet, as important as sodium is, most Americans consume way too much of it. According to the federal government's official dietary guidelines, the average American adult should ingest a maximum of 2,300 milligrams of sodium every day — a far cry from the estimated 3,400 mg the average person actually consumes. High-sodium diets like these have been widely linked to hypertension (high blood pressure), which can increase your risk of suffering a heart attack or stroke.

The “minimum in a country like the United States is probably about 1500 mg a day,” Whelton said. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), this is about the amount adults with high blood pressure should aim to consume each day. It's also the daily amount the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends for babies under three years old.

Other organizations suggest that full-grown adults can get away with far less. According to the American Heart Association (AHA), the minimum physiological requirement for sodium is less than 500 mg a day — or less than the amount in one quarter of one teaspoon of table salt.

(Source: Live Science)

Motherhood can make a woman's cells ‘older’ by as much as 11 years

Childbirth inevitably results in significant changes to a woman's mind and body, but the ultimate lifelong consequences of motherhood could be far greater than we ever realized.

A new analysis of DNA collected from nearly 2,000 reproductive-age women in the U.S. reveals that those who had given birth showed evidence of altered genetic markers suggesting they'd undergone significantly accelerated cellular aging.

“We were surprised to find such a striking result,” epidemiologist Anna Pollack from George Mason University told New Scientist.

Pollack and her team analyzed data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) — a broad cross-sectional study charting the wellness of people in the U.S. over time.

When they examined data from the period 1999–2002 — years in which the survey included measurements of a genetic marker called telomeres — they noticed something unusual.

Telomeres are molecular regions that act as caps on the ends of our chromosomes, helping to protect the genetic information in our cells from deteriorating over time — and, hypothetically, from exposure to things that are harmful to our health.

In that vein, telomere length is taken as a marker of how old we are on a cellular level, with longer telomeres considered better to have, since shorter telomeres have been associated with outcomes like cancer, heart disease, and cognitive decline.

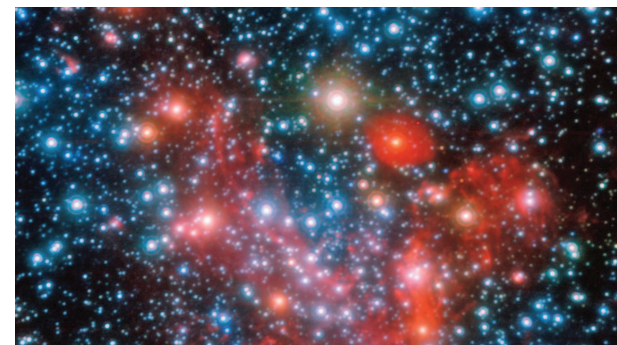
Now, we might have something new to add to that list: childbirth.

In the study, the team found that once they'd adjusted for things like age, ethnicity, education, smoking status, and so on, women who had given birth to at least one child had telomeres that were 4.2 percent shorter on average than those of women who had not borne children.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

New research reveals clearest infrared image yet of the center of our galaxy

A research team has published a new study lead by Pat Roche, professor of astrophysics at The University of Oxford, and Chris Packham, associate professor of physics and astronomy at The University of Texas at San Antonio. It reveals a new high resolution map of the magnetic field lines in gas and dust swirling around the supermassive black hole at the center of our galaxy. The team created the map, which is the first of its kind, using the CanariCam infrared camera attached to the Gran Telescopio Canarias on the island of La Palma.



“This collaborative work is an exciting step forward in our collective efforts to gain a greater understanding of our own galaxy and the super-massive black hole at the center of it. It also demonstrates the importance of access to the largest telescopes using advanced cameras/techniques,” Packham said.

Black holes are objects with gravitational fields so strong that even light cannot escape their grasp. The center of almost every galaxy appears to host a black hole, including the Milky Way, where we live. Stars move around the black hole at speeds of up to 800 million kilometers an hour, indicating that it has a mass of at least a million times our Sun. Depending on how the material flows, some of it may eventually be captured and engulfed by the black hole.

Visible light from sources in the center of the Milky Way is blocked by clouds of gas and dust. Infrared light, as well as X-rays and radio, more freely passes through this obscuring material, so astronomers use this to see the region more clearly. CanariCam combines this with a polarizing device, which preferentially filters light with the particular characteristics associated with magnetic fields.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Iran to commemorate Women’s Week

W O M E N d e s k **TEHRAN** — From March 3 to 10 is commemorated in Iran as the Women’s Week to honor women and their valuable position in the society. The week also marks the birth anniversary of Hazrat Fatemeh, the daughter of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).



The presidential department for women and family affairs has assigned different subjects for each day of the week. This year, the days of the week have been named after the following subjects:

Saturday (March 3): Women, self-believe, skillfulness, production and employment

Sunday: Women, empowerment, multi-role, social responsibility, tolerability

Monday: Women, Resistance Economy, political contribution, social invest

Tuesday: Women, interaction between generations, balance of job and family

Wednesday: Women, joyfulness, spirituality, valuing both family and society

Tuesday: Women, social contribution, hope and prosperity, world citizenship

Friday: Women, the manner of Hazrat Fatemeh (SA), strengthening the foundation of family, Iranian-Islamic life-style.

RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Schwarma

“A wrap done by Middle Eastern street vendors - the recipe is surprisingly easy, not a lot of exotic ingredients, and good. The most difficult part is cutting the meat very thin! These can also be made with beef or lamb.”

Ingredients:



- 1 cup plain yogurt
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon hot pepper sauce
- 1 tablespoon white vinegar
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon finely minced onion
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1/2 teaspoon ground mace
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 pounds skinless, boneless chicken breast halves, thinly sliced
- Condiments
- 8 (6-inch) pita breads, warmed
- 1/2 cup plain yogurt (optional)

- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 1 large tomato, diced
- 1 cucumber, thinly sliced
- 1 cup Ranch dressing

Directions:

To make the marinade, stir together 1 cup yogurt, lemon juice, hot pepper sauce, and vinegar. Stir in the garlic, onion, pepper, red pepper flakes, mace, and salt. Marinate the chicken overnight in the refrigerator.

Place oven rack in the top position, and turn oven on to Broil. To cook, drain the marinade from the meat, and place on a slotted broiler pan. Broil on top rack of preheated oven, turning after a few minutes, until cooked through, about 5 minutes.

To assemble the schwarma, spread each pita with a tablespoon of plain yogurt, and layer with onion, tomato, and cucumber. Pile on the broiled chicken, and dress with Ranch dressing.

LEARN ENGLISH

Cancelled Flight

A: Good afternoon Sir, may I please see your passport and **reservation**?

B: Here you go.

A: I’m sorry sir, this flight has been **cancelled** due to some mechanical problems.

B: Cancelled! So what am I supposed to do now?

A: We apologize for any **inconveniences** that may be caused by this. If your flight is **urgent**, I can put you on a waiting list for another flight this evening, but it’s on the first come first served basis, so there is no guarantee that you will be able to take that flight. B: What’s my other option?

A: If you can wait until tomorrow, we will put you up in a hotel for today and you can take **scheduled** flight for tomorrow morning. B: That’s fine. I’ll do that then.

A: Thank you for your understanding sir. I will book your flight now.

Key vocabulary

reservation: an arrangement to secure accommodations at a restaurant or hotel

cancel: to decide that something will not happen

inconvenience: he quality or state of being inconvenient

urgent: important

scheduled: planned at a specific time

Supplementary vocabulary

route: a customary or regular line of passage or travel

diversion: the act of diverting or turning aside, as from a course or purpose

delay: to put off to a later time

depart: to go away, leave

refund: to give back, especially money; return or repay

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Administration to improve gender equality: VP Ebtekar

W O M E N d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Iranian administration is making attempts to promote women’s presence in the society and improve gender equality in different arenas, said the vice president for women’s and family affairs, Masoumeh Ebtekar.

The administration is determined to take measures for gender equality and creating equal access to social services and job opportunities for women, the female VP made the remarks in a meeting on Saturday in Urmia, adding that women currently occupy 40 percent of governmental positions.

According to the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (2016-2021), in order to reach a balanced society in policy-making and to achieve a healthy society, the gender equality should be observed, ISNA quoted Ebtekar as saying.

She further noted that women and family have always been an important issue after the Islamic Revolution and women’s share in the society cannot be ignored.

However, Ebtekar went on to add, Iranian women have a far smaller share of management positions compared to their population.

Presently, women comprise 60 percent of the country’s university students and 50 percent of university graduates. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate among women is two times more than men.

According to Ebtekar, President Hassan Rouhani’s administration has developed plans to allocate at least 30 percent of management positions to women.

The bills on ending violence against women, child abuse, and reforming the law as well as improving social security of women are supported and pursued in earnest by the Vice-Presidency of Women and Family Affairs, she concluded.

UK mosques must make space for women – not turn us away

On Sunday more than 200 mosques invited the public through their doors to boost community relations and diffuse tensions over a cuppa. It’s the fourth annual Visit My Mosque day, led by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), growing steadily in popularity and reach over the years. But less well known is the Open My Mosque campaign, a social media project led by British Muslim women who are challenging and encouraging mosques to open spaces to women.

Of the 1,975 mosques in Britain, 28% do not offer facilities for women, and up to 50% of all South Asian-run mosques do not accommodate them. When mosques do offer it, the access is restricted, and often does not even include a prayer space, but rather a teaching space, such as a girls’ madrasa.

If you’re a woman, it’s far less likely you’ll get a foot in the door, let alone munch a samosa with the imam

The 36-year-old activist Anita Nayyar established the Open My Mosque initiative in 2015, which highlights how, if you’re a woman, it’s far less likely you’ll get a foot in the door, let alone munch a samosa with the imam. Nayyar has been documenting experiences of women across Britain who use words like “frustrated”, “isolated” and “humiliated”. Her team receives hundreds of calls, emails and social media messages from women (and men) who are grateful to have a platform to express their grievances.

“Women who feel excluded from the mosque face more exclusion than their non-Muslim counterparts,” says Nayyar. “If they cannot participate in religious life, then they can’t get involved in community life, and that increases the already existing lack of inclusion of Muslim women in public life.”

Being denied access to the mosque is an uncomfortably familiar experience for me, too. I once tried entering a mosque in Soho to perform the evening prayers, but out popped a man from a cupboard, shaking his head, and crying “No women!” I attempted theological reasoning but after a “computer says no” situation, I was forced to leave.

The “no women” remark has been hurled at me before, and it’s hauntingly reminiscent of “No Irish, no blacks, no



Mosques are opening their doors to the public, but too many keep them closed to practicing women. The Open My Mosque campaign aims to change this.

dogs”. And even when there is space for women, it’s often cramped, fails health and safety regulations, or involves descending flights of stairs into a dodgy basement – which also ignores the needs of elderly and disabled people.

One response to the woeful lack of women’s prayer spaces came out of Bradford, when the UK’s first women-run mosque was established in 2015. Bana Gora, chief executive of the Muslim Women’s Council, sought to cater to local needs for a spiritual sanctuary open to all, as well as challenge the patriarchy that was stifling women’s religious growth. This is not new-age feminism, but age-old rights. Women-run mosques have been part of Muslim communities in China

for centuries. Moreover, 1,435 years ago, Muslim women were intrinsic to Prophet Muhammad’s first mosque and to the dynamic community. But in 21st-century Britain, many mosques tell a less inclusive story. In this case, regression would be a good thing.

But it isn’t all doom and gloom, there are shining examples that tell me things can and have to be better. The Masjid Khadijah (Khadijah mosque) in Peterborough prides itself for having women on the committee board and for being an open, flourishing hub catering for all; in Cambridge, women have been heavily involved in the design of the UK’s first eco-mosque. And East London Mosque has a building dedicated to the increasing number of female worshippers, as well as offering sermons in British Sign Language for deaf Muslims. Then there is the welcome move by the MCB, which has launched a nationwide consultation on how to create better mosques.

Imam Qari Asim of Leeds Makkah Mosque welcomes the changes, but says more must be done. “Women shouldn’t only participate in prayer, but we also need to create spaces where they are driving the activities and life of the mosque. It’s not even a theological issue, what we need is a cultural shift. When mosques offer space for women, they should see it as a right, not a favor.”

Asim is spot on, I don’t want to be grateful there’s a facility for women, I want it to be religiously constitutional. In fact it’s already Islamically forbidden to ban women from the mosque.

“My right as a religious minority is protected in the workplace,” says Nayyar, “but how is my right as a woman protected when mosques are turning me away? We need bodies like the Charity Commission and the Equality and Human Rights Commission to challenge how these mosques govern their spaces. As British Muslims, the only way for us to move forward is by a commitment to equal rights.”

This is why Open My Mosque is so important to women like me.

(Source: The Guardian)

Iraq court sentences 16 Turkish women to death for joining IS

BAGHDAD (Reuters) — An Iraqi court has sentenced 16 Turkish women to death by hanging for joining Islamic State, a judiciary spokesman said on Sunday.

Iraq is conducting the trials of hundreds of foreign women who have been detained, with hundreds of their children, since August by Iraqi forces as Islamic State strongholds crumbled.

The central criminal court issued the sentences “after it was proven they belong to the Daesh terrorist group and after they confessed to marrying Daesh elements or providing members of the group with logistical aid or helping them carry out terrorist attacks,” said Judge Abdul-Sattar al-Bir-

dar, referring to the militant group using an Arabic acronym.

Thousands of foreigners have fought on behalf of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria since at least 2014. Many foreign women came - or were brought - from overseas to join the militants.

More than 1,300 women and children surrendered to Kurdish Peshmerga in August, after government forces expelled the jihadist group from the northern Iraqi city of Tal Afar. Their numbers have since swelled to about 1,700 as more foreign nationals surrendered or were captured during operations to root out the militants, according to aid officials.



Another Turkish woman was sentenced to death last week and 10 others of various nationalities to life in prison, all for alleged Islamic State membership.

A German woman was sentenced to death

last month for belonging to the group and a Russian fighter was also sentenced to death in Iraq last year for joining the hardline group.

Iraq has handed over to Russia four women and 27 children suspected of having ties to the group, the foreign ministry said on Thursday, adding that they were “tricked” into joining the militants.

Iraq declared victory in December over Islamic State, which had seized control of nearly a third of the country in 2014. The group has been driven out of all population centers it once controlled on both sides of the Iraqi-Syrian border, but members have continued to carry out bombings and other attacks in Iraq.

Iranian female basketball fans welcomed at Azadi sports complex

W O M E N d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian women have attended a basketball match in Tehran’s Azadi Hall

watching a victorious game between Iran national basketball team and the national team of Iraq, played on Sunday.

Female basketball fans observing the Islamic dress code and waving flags took the majority of seats at the 12,000-seat Azadi Hall located at the Azadi sports complex.

Samad Nikkhah Bahrami, a member of Iran’s national team, expressed his happiness of the presence of female basketball fans and welcomed women’s presence besides men, Varzesh 3 website quoted the captain of the national team as saying.

Women’s presence at the stadiums is a big lesson that proves women along with men can support the players, Bahrami said, adding, “Today was the day of women’s peace with basketball.”

“I always wished to play in front of my family and this wish came true on Sunday,” Varzesh 3 quoted Hamed Haddadi, the basketball player of national team in the center position, as saying.

“The great number of basketball fans in the hall made us excited,” he added.

Iran national basketball team took revenge on Iraq in the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 Asian Qualifiers, defeating Iraq 83-53 in Group D.



Merkel's CDU votes on German coalition deal after new cabinet picks

German Chancellor Angela Merkel urged her Christian Democrats (CDU) on Monday to approve a coalition deal with the Social Democrats (SPD), a step that would bring her closer to a fourth term.

The more formidable hurdle to ending a five-month political impasse in Europe's largest economy comes next week, however. On March 4, results of a binding postal vote by members of the center-left SPD will be announced and they are far less certain.

The CDU party congress follows Merkel's announcement of her picks for a new, younger cabinet intended to revive the party, which has been riven by disagreements over how to respond to the Alternative for Germany (AfD) since losing votes to the far right party in national elections in September.

The CDU's youth wing has called for the party to renew itself in the wake of its worst election result since 1949 in September and Merkel, 63, stressed in her speech to delegates at Monday's CDU meeting that younger faces were in the new team.

She asked her party to vote in favor of the deal, which is expected to go through easily, as a poll showed support for both her conservative bloc - which also includes the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) - and the SPD rising.

"We want to make our contribution to forming a stable federal government that



is capable of acting," Merkel said, adding that most people in Germany and beyond expected this.

"The fact we're voting on a coalition treaty today five months after the election shows that we're dealing with a difficult situation that we've never faced before."

She reassured delegates that the new German government would not take out

any new debt, avoid tax increases, seek to renew the European Union, ensure fast internet is available everywhere in Germany by 2025, boost research spending, create 8,000 nursing jobs and take a "zero tolerance" policy on security.

Merkel said conservatives secured wins in coalition talks with the SPD, including preventing what she called the "aberration"

of a single health system that the SPD had demanded to replace the current dual public-private system.

■ Merkel's authority waning

Merkel disappointed many conservatives by agreeing to give the SPD the powerful finance ministry in a new government. She said it was a "painful" loss but added that it was right not to let negotiations fail due to portfolios rather than substance.

She also underscored the importance of the economy ministry - which the CDU will retake after years in SPD hands.

The conference will also vote on the appointment as CDU general secretary of her close ally Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, widely seen as her preferred successor. Dubbed "mini-Merkel" by some media, the Saarland state premier, 55, shares some but not all of Merkel's views.

Her Catholic, western German background contrasts with Merkel's Protestant, eastern roots. While socially conservative and known for opposing gay marriage, Kramp-Karrenbauer is a strong supporter of the minimum wage and workers' rights.

After 12 years as chancellor and almost 18 years in charge of her party, Merkel's authority is waning and on Sunday, she responded to growing calls for new blood at the top of the CDU.

(Source: DPA)

China pushes back against criticism of plan for Xi to stay in power

China's plan for President Xi Jinping to remain in office indefinitely has sparked social media opposition, drawing comparisons to North Korea's ruling dynasty and charges of creating a dictator by a Hong Kong pro-democracy activist.

The social media reaction late on Sunday quickly saw China swing into a concerted propaganda push by Monday, blocking some articles and publishing pieces praising the party.

The ruling Communist Party on Sunday proposed to remove a constitutional clause limiting presidential service to just two terms in office, meaning Xi, who also heads the party and the military, might never have to retire.

The proposal, which will be passed by delegates loyal to the party at next month's annual meeting of China's largely rubber stamp parliament, is part of a package of amendments to the country's constitution.

It will also add Xi's political thought to the constitution, already added to the party constitution last year, and set a legal framework for a super anti-corruption super-body, as well as more broadly strengthen the party's tight grip on power.

But it seems the party will have its work cut out trying to convince some in China, where Xi is actually very popular thanks in part to his war on graft, that the move will not end up giving Xi too much power.

"Argh, we're going to become North Korea," wrote one Weibo user, where the Kim dynasty has ruled since the late 1940s. Kim Il Sung founded North Korea in 1948 and his



family has ruled it ever since.

"We're following the example of our neighbor," wrote another user.

The comments were removed late on Sunday after Weibo, China's answer to Twitter, began blocking the search term "two term limit".

In an unusual step amid intense international media attention, China's foreign ministry, which normally only comments on diplomatic matters, said amending the constitution was a matter for the Chinese people.

Since 1954, when the constitution was first adopted, everybody can see that it has been "continuously improved", spokesman Lu Kang told a daily news briefing.

"I hope everyone can acknowledge the voice of all the Chinese people."

■ Jokes and memes

State media has added its voice too.

Widely read state-run newspaper the Global Times said in an editorial the change did not mean the president will stay in office for ever, though it did not offer much explanation.

"Since reform and opening up, China, led by the Communist Party, has successfully resolved and will continue to effectively resolve the issue of party and national leadership replacement in a law-abiding and orderly manner," it said, referring to landmark economic reforms that began four decades ago.

The party's official People's Daily reprinted a long article by Xinhua news agency saying most people supported the constitutional amendments, quoting a variety of people proffering support.

"The broad part of officials and the masses say that they hoped this constitutional reform is passed," it wrote.

The WeChat account of the People's Daily, after initially posting a flurry of positive comments under its article, then disabled the comments section completely late on Sunday. It was back again by Monday, complete with remarks lauding the party.

The overseas edition of the same paper's WeChat account removed entirely an article focusing on the term limits, replacing it with the lengthy Xinhua report summing up all the amendment proposals.

(Source: Reuters)

Saudi regime prepares to auction detained billionaire's real estate, cars

The House of Saud regime authorities are preparing to auction billions of dollars of real estate and cars belonging to billionaire Maan al-Sanea and his company as they look to hasten an end to one of the kingdom's longest-running debt disputes.

The planned sale is the latest signal that the Saudi regime is serious about holding its elites to account. In an anti-corruption crackdown last November, authorities detained scores of senior officials on charges of alleged graft. Most have been released after being exonerated or agreeing to give the state money, assets or real estate.

The al-Sanea case is separate from the main

anti-graft campaign. The businessman -- in 2007 he was ranked by Forbes as one of the world's 100 richest people -- was detained by authorities late last year for unpaid debt dating back to 2009 when his company, Saad Group, defaulted on debts.

Creditors have spent the past nine years pursuing Saad, which is based in the city of Khobar in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, for debt that some estimate to be between 40 billion riyals (\$10.67 billion) and 60 billion riyals.

Investors see the case as a litmus test of the Saudi regime Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's (MBS) commitment to reforms. Etqaan Alliance, the consortium appointed

by the Saudi regime authorities to liquidate assets owned by al-Sanea and the company in an effort to repay creditors, plans to begin selling the company's assets in Saudi Arabia, according to several sources familiar with the matter. The sales will happen in the coming weeks, the sources said.

The liquidator has produced a slick video that it has posted on YouTube with the tagline "the sale everyone has been waiting for in Khobar" featuring some of the properties and land to be sold.

A brochure accompanying the sale includes a list of 20 plots of land owned by Saad Trading, part of Saad Group, and al-Sanea.

The properties are mostly located in Khobar. The largest unit is a 484,407 square meter plot of land that includes buildings and a sewage water treatment plant.

The brochure does not include valuations, but the sources said the real estate was valued at around 4.4 billion riyals, based on an official list of real estate provided to authorities.

A source at the Ministry of Justice confirmed to Reuters an auction would be launched this month to sell vehicles, equipment, a large quantity of building materials and some property before the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, which starts in May.

(Source: Reuters)

Nigeria confirms 110 girls missing after militant raid on Dapchi school

Nigeria has confirmed another mass kidnapping of schoolgirls in the militancy-riddled northeast, saying it has deployed extra troops and planes to search for over 100 girls, who remain missing following a Boko Haram raid on their school last week.

Militants on February 19 drove into the town of Dapchi in northeastern Yobe State in trucks and attacked the school, causing students and teachers to flee into the surrounding bush.

It is not known how the girls were abducted, but witnesses say some of the attackers were camouflaged, making the students mistake them for army soldiers.

Government and police officials have been giving contradictory figures of those missing, with estimates ranging from 50 to 100.

The Yobe State government also added to the confusion on Wednesday, when it said dozens of the abducted girls had been rescued, prompting many locals, including the parents of the missing girls, in Dapchi to celebrate.

The next day, however, the local administration apolo-

gized for the "erroneous" statement, which it said had been based on inaccurate information.

Finally, the Nigerian Information Ministry on Sunday put an end to confusion and acknowledged that 110 girls are missing in a statement based on numbers obtained from parents who said their girls had not returned home since the school raid.

"The federal government has confirmed that 110 students of the Government Science and Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe State, are so far unaccounted for, after insurgents believed to be from a faction of Boko Haram invaded their school on Monday," the statement said.

The statement said 906 students were in the school on the day of the attack.

Information Minister Lai Mohammed said additional security officials have been deployed to schools in the state.

The Nigerian Air Force also said the chief of air staff had "directed the immediate deployment of additional air assets and Nigerian Air Force personnel to the northeast with the sole mission of conducting day and night searches for

the missing girls" in coordination with the ground forces.

The latest kidnappings have revived the painful memories of another mass abduction in April 2014, when Boko Haram militants attacked a girl school and kidnapped 294 girls in Chibok, Borno State. Many of the girls were released after negotiations, but more than 100 remain in captivity, their whereabouts unknown.

There has been growing anger among locals over the government's handling of the recent incident as well as reports that soldiers had been withdrawn from key checkpoints in Dapchi last month.

The Nigerian government has claimed in the past that Boko Haram was defeated, but the Takfiri outfit continues to vex especially in the country's restive northeast.

The Takfiri Boko Haram militant group has killed more than 20,000 people and forced two million to flee their homes since the onset of its terror campaign in 2009. It pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Syria/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist outfit in 2015.

(Source: agencies)

Top Bahraini court upholds death sentence against anti-regime activist

Bahrain's supreme court of appeals has upheld a death sentence against a Shia anti-regime activist as the ruling House of Khalifah regime presses ahead with its heavy clampdown on political dissidents and pro-democracy activists in the kingdom.

On Monday, the Court of Cassation found defendant Hussein Marzouq guilty of involvement in the 2016 bombing in the eastern village of Sitra, located five kilom-

eters south of the capital Manama, which targeted regime forces.

Bahraini authorities said at the time that a woman lost her life and her three children sustained injuries in the incident.

The court also handed down a life sentence to the second defendant and gave lengthy jail terms to six others. All eight had their Bahraini citizenship revoked as well.

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have

held demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the country in mid-February 2011.

They are demanding that the House of Khalifah relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established.

Manama has gone to great lengths to clamp down on any sign of dissent. On March 14, 2011, troops from the House of Saud regime and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were

deployed to assist Bahrain in its crackdown.

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the House of Khalifah regime's crackdown. On March 5, 2017, Bahrain's parliament approved the trial of civilians at military tribunals in a measure blasted by human rights campaigners as being tantamount to imposition of an undeclared martial law countrywide.

(Source: Press TV)

EU agrees to prepare sanctions on Myanmar generals over Rohingya plight

European Union foreign ministers have agreed to prepare sanctions against senior Myanmar military officers over "serious and systematic" rights abuses against the country's Rohingya Muslim community.

In a statement issued on Monday, the ministers tasked the bloc's diplomatic chief Federica Mogherini with drawing up a list of names to be hit with EU travel bans and asset freezes.

They called for "targeted restrictive measures against senior military officers of the Myanmar armed forces responsible for serious and systematic human rights violations without delay."

The EU ministers pointed to widespread abuses by the Myanmar military, "including rape and killings," against the Rohingya in the Southeast Asian country and called for an extension to the EU's embargo on weapons and equipment that can be used for political repression, imposed in the 1990s.

No names of generals to be targeted for sanctions have been yet discussed. One EU diplomat, however, said the EU's list was likely to include more than just one senior military officer.

The United States said in December it was sanctioning Major General Maung Maung Soe, who is accused of the crackdown on the Rohingya minority in Rakhine.

(Source: Press TV)

More than 1,000 Palestinians in Gaza died from Israeli blockade

➔ Under the Oslo Accords, Palestinians are permitted to fish 20 nautical miles from Gaza's coast, yet for years Israel has shrunk the zone to six nautical miles.

It is estimated there are 4,000 fishermen in Gaza who provide for 50,000 people.

■ Disaster area

Kurd described the Gaza Strip, where two million Palestinians live, as the world's largest prison.

"Gaza is a disaster area in all areas - health, environmental, social, and energy," he said.

Solutions must be found to the crisis of power cuts that last between 18-20 hours a day, he added.

The Palestinian government "must provide the needs of the Gaza Strip regarding medical supplies, social assistance, pay the salaries of government employees, and exert pressure to open the border crossings," Kurd said.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Water conservation is a must, not a choice

➔ During the last few years, the Agriculture Ministry has asked farmers to lower the use of water by growing less water thirsty crops but the calls have fallen on deaf ears. The answer for such refusal is simple: First because farmers who grow rice or onion make good profits, and secondly because of power subsidies for agriculture.

In fact, there is no limit to how much underground water one can extract and that the electricity used to pump water is almost free.

In view of these facts and since irrigation system is mostly traditional or let's say inefficient, it is extremely expected that the minister of agriculture and energy take the warnings about the water shortage seriously and draw up short-term plans to limit water consumption until "hopefully" officials feel obliged to draw up a comprehensive plan for water consumption in agriculture as well as households and industries.

America needs to get back to the basics in foreign policy

8 ➔

■ U.S. policy, an absurd caricature

But that world changed a long time ago. Instead of offloading regional security responsibilities onto others -- especially the revived, prosperous major powers in Europe and East Asia, along with the new, rising powers in those regions -- U.S. policy moved in precisely the opposite direction, undertaking even more obligations. The current arrangement is an absurd caricature of what a normal, healthy international system should look like.

That situation needs to change, and change now. Columnist Pat Buchanan asked a pertinent question in an April 2017 article: "Why is Kim Jong Un our problem?" Indeed, one would think that North Korea's neighbors -- Japan, South Korea, China and Russia -- would have primary responsibility for dealing with Pyongyang's disruptive behavior. Instead, the United States, a nation thousands of miles away, is expected to resolve the North Korea crisis -- at growing risk to its own homeland.

A similar situation exists in Europe. If the European nations truly regard Russia as an expansionist threat, they should take the lead in confronting that threat -- including by significantly boosting their anemic levels of defense spending. Instead, they continue to free-ride and rely on the United States to protect them, if the security situation worsens. It is well past time that the European powers take responsibility for their continent's security.

Indeed, those powers should have primary responsibility for developing and implementing policies to address disorders in the Middle East. They are far closer than the United States to that turbulent region, and they are far more impacted by developments there, not the least being the massive flow of Middle East refugees coming into the nations of the European Union.

To make the essential policy changes that reduce America's security obligations and the growing risks they entail, U.S. leaders and the American people must adopt a more restrained perspective and national self-image. Albright not only asserted that America was the indispensable nation, she intoned: "We stand tall. We see further into the future." Such an arrogant attitude is national narcissism on steroids. It should be deeply offensive to other proud, capable democratic nations, including such powers as Japan, India, Britain, France and Germany. The physical and geopolitical wreckage wrought by World War II disappeared long ago, and so should the attitude that the United States is the only nation capable of deterring aggression or thwarting the unlimited expansion of tyrannical regimes. We need a new foreign policy attuned to the realities of a multipolar world in the twenty-first century.

(Source: nationalinterest.org)

UEFA President will fight tooth and nail to restore balance

UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin will fight tooth and nail to restore competitive balance to European club football, he told the European soccer ruling body's annual Congress on Monday.

He said, however, that he could not promise a return to the days when teams from Eastern Europe could dream of winning the flagship Champions League competition.

European club football has become increasingly dominated by a handful of elite clubs and the Champions League has included some embarrassingly one-sided matches this season.

The round of 16 first-leg ties played this month featured two matches ending in 5-0 scorelines and one 4-0.

"We must dare to rethink our models, in particular to establish greater competitive balance, one of the greatest challenges facing the future and present of football," Ceferin said.

"The club game still requires our serious attention. We must dream big but I cannot promise you the moon because I am not a merchant of dreams and I am not a politician.

"I will fight tooth and nail to introduce measures which restore some balance but I cannot claim that this will result in a club such as Steaua Bucharest or Red Star Belgrade being next to have their name engraved on Champions League trophy."

Both clubs won the old European Cup.

"UEFA is not a bank, Switzerland has enough banks already..... What is the point in generating record-breaking revenues, if it is just an accumulation of wealth?," Ceferin said.

He also warned of competition from esports.

"We face competition from other sports and other activities that capture the imagination of the next generation," he said.

"Esports and video games are all our competitors, the world our youngsters inhabit is as virtual as it is global. We would be naive not to notice that."

(Source: Guardian)

Neymar's ankle in heavy strapping after Classique injury

Neymar posted a photo on social media of his ankle in heavy strapping after being taken off on a stretcher in tears during Paris Saint-Germain's 3-0 win over rivals Marseille on Sunday.

The Brazil international was carried from the Parc des Princes pitch during the latter stages of the convincing Classique victory.

PSG were already 3-0 up and had used all of their substitutes when Neymar rode a tackle from Marseille's Bouna Sarr and then appeared to roll his right ankle when planting his foot on the ground. Replays showed the Brazilian's ankle made a sudden awkward movement as it came into contact with the turf.

The sight of Neymar being carried off on a stretcher will have caused panic among PSG fans, with their Champions League round of 16 second leg clash against Real Madrid coming up on March 6. However, coach Unai Emery did suggest in his post-match news conference that he does not expect Neymar to miss that outing, with a serious injury ruled out following the forward's visit to hospital.

He did need some significant strapping on his ankle, though, and he posted a photo of it on his official Instagram story early on Monday.

(Source: Soccerway)

Usain Bolt: I've signed for a football team

Athletics great Usain Bolt claims he has signed for a football team and will announce the club in question on Tuesday.

Bolt, who brought his glittering sprint career to an end following the 2017 IAAF World Championships in London, has frequently talked up his footballing prowess and revealed last month he was set for a trial with Borussia Dortmund in March.

The 31-year-old Jamaican has also repeatedly expressed an interest in turning out for Premier League giants Manchester United, the club he supports, while he also recently offered his services to David Beckham's new Major League Soccer franchise, Futbol Miami. On Sunday, Bolt announced on Twitter that an update was on the way regarding his bid to carve out a footballing career. "I've signed for a football team," wrote the winner of eight Olympic gold medals. "Find out which one this Tuesday at 8am GMT."

Bolt has previously talked up his footballing talents, claiming that he could become as good as Wayne Rooney if he put some work in. According to his agent, he has had 12 different teams chase him for a trial.

(Source: Goal)

Federer reveals what he eats before matches against Nadal and Djokovic

Roger Federer has opened up on what he eats before matches against the likes of Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

Federer is currently world No 1 after leapfrogging Nadal at the top of the ATP Tour rankings earlier this month.

The 36-year-old continues to defy those who wrote him off by not only regaining his place at the summit of the sport, but also winning the Australian Open last month.

Federer remains an inspiration for many tennis hopefuls with the Swiss maestro setting the standard when it comes to behaviour on and off the court. And the superstar has now opened up on what he eats ahead of big matches against the likes of Nadal and Djokovic. "I try to eat in a balanced way and try to experiment with different foods on days I don't have to play in," Roger Federer said. "I am a lover of Italian, Japanese and Indian restaurants, while in winter, I like fonduta and raclette a lot.

"Two hours before every match, I eat a pasta plate with light sauce, and I don't say this only because now I am in the Barilla campaign. "I have been doing it for 20 years, that's why this partnership is real."

Federer's longevity has stunned many pundits and former professionals.

(Source: Express)

The Brutal reality is Guardiola represents what Wenger once was



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola looked out on a sea of celebration at one end of Wembley while his Arsenal counterpart Arsene Wenger was met by thousands upon thousands of empty seats at the other.

The Carabao Cup final was drawing to its inevitable conclusion as City led 3-0 and the contrasting scenes at either end of the stadium took on almost symbolic significance as Guardiola prepared to celebrate his first trophy as Manchester City manager while Wenger saw the old glories he once enjoyed retreat even further into the distance.

In many ways, Guardiola now represents what Wenger used to be when the Frenchman arrived at Arsenal in 1996 to change the face of the game in England with his revolutionary methods and a purist approach.

Guardiola is the manager and visionary Wenger once was and that must be a cold and brutal reality for the 68-year-old whose continuously optimistic messages about Arsenal's future and hopes of achieving the big successes are increasingly at odds with the evidence.

Guardiola is now the younger modernizer and the vast gulf between City and Arsenal, the difference that could almost be measured by those swathes of red open spaces, suggest Wenger looks increasingly like yesterday's man.

Wenger, of course, deserves credit for taking Arsenal to another major cup final after three FA Cup successes in the past four seasons, but the odd animated gesture and words of defiance carried a hollow ring on a painful and passionless day for the club.

The ease with which City, without ever needing to be near their best, dealt with Arsenal must be chastening for Wenger as all the signs are that the Gunners continue to drop further off the pace when their progress - if indeed they are progressing - is placed alongside what is taking place at Etihad Stadium.

Guardiola has his first, tangible evidence of the new era.

City are 13 points clear at the top of the Premier League with a game in hand and have effectively confirmed their place in the last

eight of the Champions League as they take a 4-0 lead into next month's last-16 second leg against Basel.

There is the sense of limitless potential, helped by financial power of course, and a club where things can only get better.

Arsenal?

Once the misery of this day is wiped away, they have a 10-point gap to make up to Tottenham for place in the Premier League's top four, although they do have a game in hand.

Meanwhile, a potential route into the Champions League is blocked by the not inconsiderable obstacle of AC Milan in the last 16 of the Europa League.

It is not just for 90 minutes of this League Cup final that City and Arsenal appear to be on entirely different levels.

Wenger was given a new two-year contract at the start of the season and, as always, retains the backing of Arsenal's board and owner Stan Kroenke, but this would have made grim viewing for the club's hierarchy who still harbour ambitions of challenging City and others contesting the big prizes.

If, as is a distinct possibility, Arsenal miss out on Champions League football once again, then Wenger will have even more difficulty painting a positive picture for a frustrated fan base.

Arsenal are in danger of finishing outside the top four for a second successive Premier League season. Having ended 2016-17 in fifth, they are sixth in the table - 10 points behind fourth-placed Tottenham with 11 games to play.

When David Silva's 65th-minute shot flashed past Arsenal keeper David Ospina to put City three up, many of the Gunners fans decided enough was enough and made their way towards the exits.

Who could blame them? This was something they had seen before.

Arsenal's players looked to have given up, strolling around and barely contesting a challenge after Vincent Kompany's second for City, so why shouldn't they?

One young Arsenal fan was caught on camera inconsolable in floods of tears. It was hard not to feel his pain as his side gave all the appearance of simply waiting for the final whistle without having too much more damage inflicted on them.

(Source: BBC)

Toro Rosso expect trouble-free year with Honda



Toro Rosso began their new Formula One partnership with Honda in optimistic fashion on Monday, with team principal Franz Tost looking forward to proving the doom-mongers wrong.

Honda's engine has been the least reliable and slowest on the starting grid for the past three seasons, with the Japanese company's reputation badly damaged by the failed relationship with McLaren.

McLaren have now switched to what should be a more competitive Renault power unit, with Red Bull-owned Toro Rosso leaving the French manufacturer to become Honda's sole partner.

"We won't have any troubles," Tost told reporters after presentation of the team's new STR13 car in the Barcelona pit lane ahead of pre-season testing.

"The power unit is working quite well. I am convinced that Honda has the capacity and the know-how to develop the engine and that we will be where we all expect to be."

The Austrian added that Honda had made great progress in terms of reliability and performance. "we are all looking forward to the season," he said.

A limited-mileage filming day at Misano

in eastern Italy last week went smoothly and the team reported that the engine fired up first time without a glitch.

Toro Rosso have New Zealander Brendon Hartley and Frenchman Pierre Gasly as their driver line-up, both starting their first full seasons.

Hartley was the first on track on Monday, queuing at the pit lane exit to get the session started ahead of all the rest.

Honda's Toyoharu Tanabe, a Formula One veteran, told reporters that the company had suffered a hard time since returning to the sport but had learned a lot from the tough McLaren experience.

"We have used that knowledge for this year on reliability and performance as well," he said, adding that the engine concept remained unchanged.

Toro Rosso were seventh overall in 2017. But with a manufacturer fully devoted to them for the first time, they hope to move higher in a 21-race championship that starts in Australia on March 25.

"The target for Toro Rosso has to be in the front part of the midfield, around fifth place," Tost said.

(Source: Reuters)

Japan return to hero's welcome after best winter medal haul



Japan's Olympic team returned to a hero's welcome on Monday after its best-ever showing at a Winter Games, with 13 medals - more than half by women - beating a previous record of 10 two decades ago.

Fans came out in large numbers at the airport in Narita, east of Tokyo, waving placards and banners saying "Thank you for gold medal" and "Fly High Yuzu", in reference to figure skater Yuzuru Hanyu.

"I took the bullet train from Kobe (western Japan) to see them. It was worth a trip," said a middle-aged woman.

The showing was a welcome boost for Japan, with Tokyo hosting the Summer Games in 2020.

Hanyu took gold in the men's singles competition, reasserting his dominance after being off the ice for weeks having injured his ankle in a training fall in November. "It was tough to win a second consecutive Olympics. The fact that I won with support of everyone made this gold medal even more valuable," Hanyu told a joint news conference.

The win, ahead of compatriot Shoma Uno, who took silver, made the 23-year-old Hanyu the first man in 66 years to defend

an Olympic title.

Speed skater Nana Takagi won gold in the women's mass start for her second gold at Pyeongchang after an earlier win in the team pursuit.

Her younger sister, Miho, who was part of that team, also won silver and bronze in the 1,500 and 1,000 meters speed skating, while Nao Kodaira took gold in the 500 meters.

"I have put my life on skating since I missed Sochi Olympics four years ago. I wanted to share courage with everyone, so I'm happy that I could do that even a little bit," Miho said.

After Kodaira's win over South Korean defending champion Lee Sang Hwa, the Japanese athlete hugged and comforted her rival in a show of friendship and sportsmanship between athletes from the two countries, whose ties remain strained due to a shared past in which Japan colonized the Korean peninsula from 1910-1945.

"I realized that we can spend a wonderful time in life if everyone extends a circle of friendship. These 17 days have become an unforgettable moment," Kodaira said.

(Source: Reuters)

Di Biagio expects Buffon to return to Italy squad



"With the other players, without going into detail, I spoke with many of them. Barzagli and De Rossi will not be there, Chiellini yes. "We want to relaunch the team with enthusiasm." even if Buffon does not extend his international career beyond March, Di Biagio is confident about Italy's goalkeeping

options in the future, with Gianluigi Donnarumma, Mattia Perin and Alex Meret among those vying for the position.

"We're doing well with goalkeepers when you look at the next 20 years," he said. "When Buffon stops, we'll still have our backs covered.

"Gigi's story doesn't have to end with that Sweden game." Di Biagio also hinted at a possible recall for Mario Balotelli next month.

The striker has not played an international match since the 2014 World Cup but has turned his career around somewhat in Nice, scoring 13 goals in 19 Ligue 1 appearances this term.

"I follow him constantly," he said. "When the time comes for the call-up, we'll assess whether we want to take him or not.

"We haven't made any decision yet. We're in a difficult position and there isn't a lot of choice, but we have to create the right enthusiasm after the disappointment of the World Cup."

(Source: Four Fout Two)

Tehran derby the Asian biggest derby: Branko Ivankovic

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Branko Ivankovic **d e s k** says the football match between Iranian giants Persepolis and Esteghlal is the biggest derby in Asia.

Iran Professional League (IPL) leaders Persepolis will face Esteghlal on Thursday and just a draw against the arch-rivals will steer them to the title for the second successive year.

The Croat says it can be considered as the biggest derby in Asia and even most enthusiastic game in the world.

“We are very happy for the match against Esteghlal and are proud of playing in Tehran derby. Esteghlal have advanced to the Hazfi Cup final and they moved up to the third place and and it explains they are a better team compared to the start of the season,” Ivankovic said.

“Persepolis’s players will do their best against Esteghlal and we are well-prepared for the match. I think it’s the biggest derby in Asia and also is the world’s most enthusiastic match,” the former Iran coach added.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino has been invited to Tehran to attend the match at the Azadi Stadium.

“I’m very happy that FIFA President is going to watch the match in the stadium and it shows how important the match is. I hope that we will have a good performance in front of the President,” Ivankovic concluded.



FIFA President Infantino to share pitch with ex-Iranian stars

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — FIFA President Gianni Infantino will show off his skills in a futsal match with the former Iranian stars in Tehran.

The Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) has invited Sepp Blatter’s successor to come to Tehran on Thursday.

The FIFA President will share the pitch with some Iranian football luminaries – including Ali Daei, Khodadad Azizi, Mehdi Mahdavi, Karim Bagheri, Sirous Dinmohammadi, Javad Nekounam, Farhad Majidi and Hamid Estili.

Infantino will also attend Tehran derby between Persepolis and Esteghlal in his two-day visit, where Persepolis will most likely win the Iran Professional League for the second

successive year.

The Swiss-Italian will also participate in a ceremony to celebrate 100-year anniversary of Iran football federation as well as Iranian women’s festival.

Iranian media reports suggest that Infantino is going to meet with President Hassan Rouhani and Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Masoud Soltanifar.

In the fifth FIFA Executive Football Summit in 2017/2018 series which was held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands in January, FFIRI President Mehdi Taj invited Gianni Infantino to travel to Iran.

Infantino visited Iran two years ago when he was seeking the Persian Gulf country’s support for his bid to become FIFA President.

AC Milan working harder under Gattuso than Montella - Franck Kessie



Franck Kessie said a new work ethic under Gennaro Gattuso is the key to AC Milan’s recent surge in form as he claimed predecessor Vincenzo Montella did not make them work hard enough.

Milan have moved to within seven points of fourth-placed Inter Milan, whom they meet in the Derby della Madonnina next weekend, off the back of an 11-game unbeaten streak in all competitions that includes six wins and seven clean sheets.

Montella was sacked in November, although Milan were in the same position in the table as they are now. Nevertheless, Kessie believes Milan are finally going places under Gattuso.

“He’s making us work harder,” Kessie told Mediaset. “With Montella, we were not working much, but it’s different with Gattuso. Things have changed now and you can see the results on the field.

“We’ve got the same players in the

dressings room as before. The difference now is that we’re working more. It’s like being part of a family here and the results are finally arriving.”

Gattuso’s first game in charge was a 2-2 draw at Benevento, who picked up their first point in Serie A after a league-record 14 straight defeats with a last-minute goal by goalkeeper Alberto Brignoli.

Milan then beat Bologna before losing to Hellas Verona and Atalanta and drawing at Fiorentina, which left them 11th with a deficit of 14 points on fourth-placed Roma.

But that gap has been cut to just six points in the past seven games with Milan’s fading hopes of qualifying for any European competition now revived and even a challenge for the Champions League starting to look possible.

After hosting Inter next Sunday, Milan travel to Genoa and host Chievo Verona before a trip to Juventus on March 31.

(Source: ESPN)

Manchester United striker Romelu Lukaku demands ‘more respect’



Manchester United striker Romelu Lukaku believes he deserves “more respect” for his goalscoring record.

Lukaku joined from Everton for an initial £75m fee in the summer window but has faced criticism since arriving at Old Trafford from leading pundits, including former United defender Gary Neville, for his poor record against the bigger teams in the Premier League.

However, the Belgium international answered his critics with a well-taken goal, his first against a top-six side this season, and a man-of-the-match performance as United beat Chelsea 2-1 on Sunday.

“I just need to keep working hard,” said the 24-year-old, who has now scored 98 goals in the Premier League. “I think I have got a nice record. I’ve scored a lot this season and I just want to keep going.

“I know that I can improve, and I want to improve and really work hard.

I want to win trophies. We are still in the fight in two competitions. It’s not going to be easy but it’s a nice challenge.”

When asked if he believes people forget how young he is, the 24-year-old said: “Yeah, because I’ve been in the game for so long.

“I started playing when I was 16. Year in, year out people expect 20 goals from me. I’ve been doing it for 10 years straight, so I think I’ve proved myself.

“You expect a bit more respect but it’s the situation we’re in. I don’t listen to it. I just want to improve and show the people what I can do on the pitch.”

Lukaku says he is more interested in helping the team to silverware this season than collecting individual accolades.

“As long as I win, and I lead my team to winning that’s when I will be really satisfied,” he said.

(Source: Sky Sports)

Iran team men’s sabre runner-up at World Cup

TASNIM — Iran men’s sabre team finished in second place at the World Cup Sabre de Wolodyjowski 2018 on Sunday.

The Iranian team lost to South Korea 45-31 in the final match. Team Melli started the campaign with a hard-fought 45-43 win over Ukraine and beat Italy 45-40.

Iran eased past Hungary 45-37 in semifinal.

Iran consists of Mojtaba Abedini, Ali Pakdaman, Farzad Baher Arasbaran and Mohammad Rahbari in the completion in Poland.

Ali Pakdaman had won a bronze medal on Saturday in the men’s sabre.

Iranian boxers finish Bulgarian tourney with three medals

MNA — Iranian representatives at the 69th International Boxing Tournament ‘Strandja’ in Sofia, Bulgaria finished their work with winning two silver and once bronze medals.

Iranian boxer Sajjad Kazemzadeh at 69kg lost to a Russian boxer in the final match to take a silver medal.

Before him, another Iranian boxer Sardar Gholami at 91kg lost to a boxer from the host country and pocketed the silver.

The other Iranian team member Shahin Mousavi had already taken bronze medal.

Therefore, the seven-member Iranian team finished the international tournament with two silvers and one bronze medals.

The ongoing 69th International Boxing Tournament ‘Strandja’ in Sofia, Bulgaria started on February 18 and finished today February 26.

Man United’s Matic ‘didn’t have anything to prove’ to Chelsea

Nemanja Matic insists he had nothing to prove to Chelsea and only wanted to show he “deserves” to wear the Manchester United shirt at Old Trafford.

Matic left Chelsea for United in a £35 million deal in the summer after winning two Premier League titles at Stamford Bridge, with United winning the meeting between the two sides 2-1 on Sunday.

“I played for Chelsea for three-and-a-half years and I gave my best to win against them and show my quality again,” Matic said. “I didn’t have anything to prove to them. I wanted to show my new club that I deserve to wear this Manchester United shirt.

“This was a big win and I hope the team will continue like this because every game in this league is a war.”

There was speculation in the summer that Matic wanted to leave Chelsea because he did not feel appreciated despite playing his part in lifting four major trophies. However, he is still staying tight-lipped about the reasons behind his move.

He added: “I don’t want to speak about why I left Chelsea. I will keep that to myself. I’m happy in Manchester and that’s it. Moving to United was good for me. I play for a big club.”

(Source: Soccer.net)

Boxer Scott Westgarth dies after winning fight against Dec Spelman

The boxer Scott Westgarth has died in hospital after winning an English title eliminator against Dec Spelman in Doncaster.

The 31-year-old light heavyweight collapsed in his dressing room at The Dome on Saturday following his victory on points over 10 rounds against Spelman.

Stefy Bull, his promoter, said on Twitter: “To promote a boxing show and a young man doing a job he loves losing his life, I have no words. RIP lad thoughts go out to your family and your team, it’s been the hardest few days I’ve had to endure.”

Westgarth suffered a knockdown in the fight but finished victorious and appeared to be in pain as he took part in post-match interviews. He then fell ill, leading to the cancellation of the night’s other bouts.

His devastated opponent Spelman paid tribute to Westgarth. He tweeted: “Absolutely heartbroken and lost for words. I’ll continue to pray for Scott’s family and the people close to him rest easy my friend.”

Westgarth, who was considered the underdog for the bout with Spelman, had a record before the fight of six wins, two losses and a draw.

(Source: Guardian)

Liesette Bruinsma targeting successful season

Teenage swimming sensation Liesette Bruinsma is looking to make 2018 another successful year in the pool.

The two-time Rio 2016 gold medallist will kick off her season by competing at the 2018 World Para Swimming World Series in Copenhagen, Denmark, between 2 and 4 March, which will be fundamental in her reaching her top form ahead of future events.

“I want to apply my focus on the training and the competition. I will learn a lot of things in the races for the next competitions,” she said.

“I motivate myself to give everything every time I swim a race. The biggest challenge is to improve myself every time, because I swim my own race. I also don’t underestimate my opponents.”

After a successful inaugural season in 2017, the World Series will return this year with competitions in six countries across Europe and the Americas.

Bruinsma broke onto the international scene by winning three gold medals, one silver and a bronze at the 2016 Europeans in Funchal, Portugal. In Rio, she won two golds, one silver and two bronze to gain newfound celebrity in her homeland.

“I am the same person as the time before the Paralympic Games. More people talk to me on the street, but most of the things are the same. There is also more media attention,” she said.

The added attention also includes being the subject of a documentary following her up to the 2020 Paralympic Games in Tokyo, Japan.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

‘Old men’ of Scandinavia show the game has changed

PYEONGCHANG, South Korea (Reuters) — Alpine skiing was once a young man’s game won by racers from the nations that gave the sport its name but at the Pyeongchang Olympics the old order was overturned with the two specialist events won by Scandinavian men aged 35.

Norwegian Aksel Lund Svindal claimed gold in the men’s downhill and Sweden’s Andre Myhrer won the slalom as experience came to the fore in the pressure cooker atmosphere of the Games.

Both men had tasted Olympic success in the past with Myhrer winning slalom bronze in Vancouver eight years ago where Svindal claimed gold in super-G, silver in downhill and bronze in giant slalom.

The fact that no man has successfully defended an Olympic title in downhill or slalom illustrates how the sport has produced many champions who were unable to last through several Olympic cycles.

In the past, a major knee injury could end a career but improvements in medical science have allowed skiers like Svindal to come through multiple surgeries and still compete at the very top.



“I think coming into an Olympics it is good to have routine,” Myhrer told reporters.

“This is my fourth Olympics. Being third in Vancouver, coming into this, it is good to have some experience.”

Svindal became the oldest man to win a gold medal in Alpine skiing but had to come through plenty of

pain to achieve his goal.

“I realize now that age doesn’t matter,” he said.

“Since the last Games, I haven’t had a single season where I have finished without injury. This is the first time I have skied in February for four years – I have been in hospital every other year.”

Austrian Marcel Hirscher, who has won the World Cup overall title for the last six years, entered these Games without an Olympic gold and - at the age of 28 - he ended that anomaly.

Hirscher, stunningly smooth between the gates, danced his way to the giant slalom title and the combined gold although he failed to finish his first run in the slalom.

Once upon a time that would have been that but now it would not be a major surprise if he were to return in Beijing at the age of 32 and claim that missing gold in his favorite event.

Another Austrian, 27-year-old Matthias Mayer, won the super-G title to add to his downhill gold from Sochi, not a bad return for a man who has only four World Cup race wins to his name.

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New York Anthology Film Archives holds Mehrdad Oskui retrospective

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Anthology Film Archives in New York is organizing a retrospective for the Iranian documentarian Mehrdad Oskui.



A scene from “Starless Dreams”

His feature-length and short films are being reviewed in the program “Documentary, Iranian Style: the Films of Mehrdad Oskui”, the organizers have announced.

“Nose, Iranian Style”, “The Other Side of Burka”, “Starless Dreams” and “It’s Always Late for Freedom” are among the films selected for the program running until February 28.

The Anthology Film Archives is an international center for the preservation, study and exhibition of films and videos with a particular focus on American independent and avant-garde cinema.

Migration story goes around at Tehran theater

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Shahrzad Gilakipur is staging a play based on Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s “One Hundred Years of Solitude” about migration at Tehran’s Baran Theater.



A poster for “But... No... If... Maybe... Now... Ok... You... It’s Late”

“But... No... If... Maybe... Now... Ok... You... It’s Late” is about a family that leaves the homeland in a dream of making a new life, but they face new problems in their exile, the publicist of the play said in a press release on Monday.

Gilakipur is also the writer of the play, which is being performed by a cast of 13 actors, including Mahshid Kazemi and Mohammad Bahmanzadeh.

“One Hundred Years of Solitude” always appeals to Gilakipur. In September 2016, she directed “One Hundred Years of Solitude, Narrated by Aureliano” based on the novel at Tehran’s 3-Noqteh Amphitheater.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Iranian director makes love story in Azerbaijan

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Ali Abdali has made a love story in Azerbaijan.

A cast of Iranian and Azerbaijani actors has collaborated in “Border: Arpachai, a Song of a Separation”, which is in the final stages of post-production, the publicist of the movie announced in a press release on Monday.

The music for the film is being composed by the renowned Azerbaijani musicians Alim Qasimov and Rubail Azimov.

Special visual effects for the movie have recently been completed in Ukraine.

George Harrison remembered by fellow Beatle on 75th birthday

LONDON (AP) — Paul McCartney and George Harrison’s widow and son have publicly remembered the late Beatle on what would have been his 75th birthday.

“Happy Birthday Georgie. Wonderful memories,” McCartney tweeted Sunday along with a black and white photograph of the two of them taken during the Beatlemania days.

Harrison died of cancer in 2001 at age 58.

His widow, Olivia Harrison, and his son, Dhani Harrison, tweeted an invitation for fans to celebrate George’s birthday by watching a video of Billy Preston and Eric Clapton performing the Harrison song “Isn’t It a Pity” at the star-studded Concert for George in 2002.

Serbia named special guest of 2018 Tehran book fair

1 → Iranian publishers have acquired rights to the Serbian books “An Atlas Traced by the Sky” by Goran Petrovic, “The Russian Window” by Dragan Velikic, and “Hamam Balkanija” by Vladislav Bajac, two of two of which will be put on display at the fair.

“A movie screening program and performances by some folk groups will be organized during the event,” said Todorovic, adding that a special Serbia day and Serbia night will also be arranged.

“Young people like to know and read modern things and some others like traditional things. There are many ways to promote books. It is important to translate books from Iran into Serbian, especially new ones that will bring new things for the people of Serbia,” he said.

He called the fair a good opportunity to introduce his country through books. He also said that his country is ready to help translate books from Persian into Serbian.

The 31st Tehran International Book Fair will be held at Imam Khomeini Mosalla from May 2 to 12.

Todorovic also talked about the cultural activities and the plans his country is pursuing.

He has recently met National Library and Archives of Iran director Ashraf Borujerdi who pledged to set up a section at the library to offer books on Serbian studies.

“The national library of my country will send a collection of books and we will arrange them here,” he remarked.



Serbian Ambassador to Iran Dragan Todorovic talks to the Tehran Times on February 26, 2018. (Mehr/Maryam Kamyab)

He also said that an agreement for further cooperation between the two

libraries is currently being negotiated.

and Belgrade have also been discussed by Organizing joint cultural weeks Tehran Iranian and Serbian officials, he concluded.

Leader praises “Imam Khomeini’s Little Soldier”

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, has praised “Imam Khomeini’s Little Soldier”, the memoirs of veteran Mehdi Tahanian, in a commendation published on Monday.

As an Iranian volunteer, Tahanian was captured by Iraqi forces during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war when he was at the age of 16.

In a video released by Iraq in 1983, Tahanian, held in Iraq’s Camp Ramadi, refused to give an interview to an Indian journalist until she wore a hijab.

“The story of this brave, intelligent and patient adolescent in the [Iraqi] camps of war prisoners is one of the wonders of the Sacred Defense. The story of a thirteen or fourteen-year-old boy who first experienced the war and then the resistance field against the cruel Ba’th forces with his amazing behavior and spirit and was triumphant in both,” the Leader wrote in the commendation



for the book.

“In this book, the signs of wickedness and vulgarity in the behavior of the Ba’th forces are more obvious than other similar books that I have read so far,” he added.

Fatemeh Doostkami is the writer of “Imam Khomeini’s Little Soldier”, which has been published by Payame Azadegan.

Michelle Obama to release memoir in November

NEW YORK (AP) — Michelle Obama’s memoir, one of the most highly anticipated books in recent years, is coming out Nov. 13.

The former first lady tweeted Sunday that the book, to come out a week after the 2018 midterm elections, is called “Becoming.” By Sunday night, her memoir was in the top 20 on Amazon.com.

“Writing ‘Becoming’ has been a deeply personal experience,” she said in a statement. “It has allowed me, for the very first time, the space to honestly reflect on the unexpected trajectory of my life. In this book, I talk about my roots and how a little girl from the South Side of Chicago found her voice and developed the strength to use it to empower others. I hope my journey inspires readers to find the courage to become whoever they aspire to be. I can’t wait to share my story.”

She and her husband, former President Barack Obama, last year reached a joint agreement with Penguin Random House for their respective books. The deal is believed to be well in excess of \$30 million. “Becoming” will be released in the U.S. through the Crown Publishing Group, a Penguin Random House division that has published works by both Obamas.

Memoirs by former first ladies usually sell well, with notable works including Laura Bush’s “Spoken from the Heart” and Hillary Rodham Clinton’s “Living History.” Michelle Obama’s memoir is expected to be a major commercial and cultural event. She is admired around the world and has never told her story at length. Her only previous book was a 2012 work on gardening, “American Grown.”

The book will be published simultaneously in 24 languages, from Swedish to Arabic, and Michelle Obama expects to promote “Becoming” in the U.S. and overseas. She will also narrate the audio version. According



In this May 12, 2017, former first lady Michelle Obama smiles while speaking at the Partnership for a Healthier American 2017 Healthier Future Summit in Washington. The former first lady tweeted Sunday, Feb. 25, 2018 that her memoir, one of the most highly anticipated books in recent years, is coming out Nov. 13, 2018, and is called “Becoming.” (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

to Crown, Obama is working with a team of assistants, but that every word in the finished text will be hers.

“As first lady of the United States of America — the first African-American to serve in that role — she helped create the most welcoming and inclusive White House in history, while also establishing herself as a powerful advocate for women and girls in the U.S. and around the world,” Crown said in a statement.

“In her memoir, a work of deep reflection and mesmerizing storytelling, Michelle Obama invites readers into her world, chronicling the experiences that have shaped her from her childhood on the South Side of Chicago to her years as an executive balancing the demands of motherhood and work, to her time spent at the world’s most famous address.”

Barack Obama, who has written the million-sellers “Dreams from My Father” and “The Audacity of Hope,” has not yet scheduled his memoir. He is expected to focus on his eight years in the White House.

Fajr theater festival to hold photo, poster exhibition next week

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 36th Fajr International Theater Festival is scheduled to showcase collections of photos and posters in an exhibition, which will open at Tehran’s Qasr Garden Museum on Saturday.

The posters and photos are of plays performed, or theatrical events organized, in Iran over the past year, the secretary of the photo section, Amir Esmi, said in a press conference at the City Theater Complex on Sunday.

Over 160 posters created by 57 artists will be competing at the exhibition.

A jury composed of several foreign experts, including Markus Weisbeck from Germany, Siam Attariya from Thailand and Sebastian Kubica from Poland, will be judging the posters.

Iranian experts Majid Baluch, Reza Abedini and Javad Atahsbari are also members of the panel.

In addition, about 100 photographers will be showcasing their works in the photo competition section.

A selection of 465 photos will be judged by



Posters for the 36th Fajr International Theater Festival

Iranian experts, including Seifollah Samadian, Mahmud Kalari, Ebrahim Sisan and Masud Pakdel.

Several experts from England, Italy, Australia, Poland and the Netherlands are also among the members of the jury for the section.

“Black Panther” rules with \$108 million in second weekend

LOS ANGELES, (Variety.com) — Disney-Marvel’s “Black Panther” is dominating the box office with an astounding \$108 million at 4,020 North American locations -- the second-highest second weekend ever behind “Star Wars: The Force Awakens”.

“Black Panther”, starring Chadwick Boseman, has now grossed \$400 million domestically in its first 10 days. Only “The Force Awakens” has reached that milestone faster. It’s also grossed \$304 million internationally.

The superhero film, the 18th in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, declined only 46 percent from its opening Friday-Sunday -- underlining the film’s massive appeal among moviegoers. “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” set the second weekend record with \$149 million in 2015, and “Black Panther” topped the second weekends of 2015’s “Jurassic World” at \$106.6 million, and 2012’s “The Avengers” with \$103 million.

“Black Panther,” directed by Ryan Coogler, has caught on with moviegoers this month in a way that few other titles have in Hollywood’s recent history -- blowing past last month’s tracking that showed it would open in the \$100 million to \$120 million range. It’s notched an A+ Cinemascore -- becoming only the second Marvel film to do so -- and has dazzled critics with a 97 percent “fresh” score on Rotten Tomatoes. The film also stars Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong’o, Danai Gurira, Martin Freeman, Daniel Kaluuya and Letitia Wright.

ComScore’s PostTrack scores of the audience for the second weekend show support among moviegoers far above average with 69 percent rating the film as “excellent” and another 23 percent as “very good.” And it’s done so outside the traditional summer and holiday season corridors for blockbusters, noted Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst with comScore.

“Black Panther” continues to elevate the month of February to summer-style blockbuster status with a second weekend that represents only the third time that a film has posted a \$100 million plus weekend performance during the month (behind only its \$202 million debut and ‘Deadpool’s’ \$132



A group of students from the Capital Preparatory Harlem School watch a screening of “Black Panther” on its opening night at the AMC Magic Johnson Harlem 9 cinemas in Manhattan, New York, February 15, 2018. (Reuters/Andrew Kelly)

million opening in 2016),” he said. “And with a North American come through Sunday of \$400 million, it is the highest grossing film ever released in the month after just 10 days in theaters beating the long-standing \$370.3 million record held by 2004’s ‘The Passion of The Christ.’”

Demographics of the second-weekend audience were 33 percent African-American, 37 percent Caucasian, 18 percent Hispanic, 7 percent Asian and 5 percent others. The opening weekend was 37 percent African-American, 35 percent Caucasian, 18 percent Hispanic, 5 percent Asian and 5 percent other.

Thanks to “Black Panther” and Sony’s “Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle,” 2018 domestic box office has increased by an eye-popping 12.5 percent to \$1.91 billion as of Sunday, according to comScore.

Warner Bros.-New Line’s opening of R-rated “Game Night”, starring Jason Bateman and Rachel McAdams, finished a distant second with \$16.6 million from 3,488 locations. The film is directed by John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein, and follows Bateman and McAdams as couple whose regular game night suddenly turns into a murder mystery. Critics have given “Game Night” strong support, helping draw an 82 percent “fresh” rating on Rotten Tomatoes.