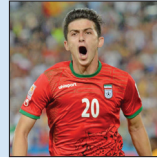




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ARTICLE
By Maryam Qarehgozlou
Head of the Tehran Times social desk

Car-free Tuesdays or car-packed Tuesdays

Car-free Tuesdays campaign, aimed to promote cycling and public transport, seems to be losing momentum most probably because of the inefficient infrastructure in the country.

Entered into its 117th week on Tuesday, the campaign was kicked off in 2016 by Mohammad Bakhtiari, majored in architecture and a member of a local NGO with 1,000 members known as "the guardians of the environment of Arak city".

Within months the campaign was officially launched by the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs.

The campaign aims to decrease the number of private cars in the cities hence mitigate air pollution, YJC quoted Mohammad Darvish, the former head of the public participation office at the Department of Environment (DOE), as saying on Tuesday.

The truth, however, is that urban transportation systems in most developing cities, such as Tehran, are far from ideal. The most visible and frequently mentioned transport problem of a city is traffic congestion, and it is well known that high levels of congestion create significant impact on air quality.

Accessible, affordable and eco-friendly public transport service as well as safe infrastructure for non-motorized transport such as cycling and walking are lacking in most developing country cities. The number of private vehicles has been increasing continuously and dominates the roads. Therefore, the transportation sector is heavily responsible for public health issues in cities such as air pollution, noise, greenhouse gas emissions, and road accidents.

"According to the surveys conducted by the Sharif University some 42.3 percent of the private cars in Tehran are used by one person and this is something that can be true for other metropolises of Iran to some extent."

Chief of Tehran department of environment Mohammad Hossein Bazgir has said that citizens of the capital consume some 12 million liters of gasoline each day, while on average Iranians consumed 79.7 million liters of gasoline over the first 9 months of the current Iranian calendar year started on March 21, 2017, so Tehraners alone account for almost one seventh of gasoline consumption of the country. **→12**

Kimball calls Trump's assumptions about JCPOA 'flawed'

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington, is the opinion that "Trump's demand that Congress and the EU3 address what he describes as 'flaws' in the agreement is based on flawed assumptions." "Conditioning continued U.S. participation in the agreement on achieving changes through unilateral action is unworkable," Kimball tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

Following is the full text of the interview:
President Trump has announced that removing time limitations for Iran's nuclear activities, unrestricted inspections and relating Iran's missile program to the JCPOA are necessary for the US not to withdraw from the JCPOA. Will the Europe accept these conditions? What about Iran?

A: Trump's demand that Congress and the EU3 address what he describes as "flaws" in the agreement is based on flawed assumptions. Conditioning continued U.S. participation in the agreement on achieving changes through unilateral action is unworkable.

Additional inspections authorities dictated by Congress of the U.S. and the EU3 are unnecessary and risk undermining the independence and integrity of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Under the JCPOA, key nuclear activities in Iran are subject to continuous monitoring to verify Iran is abiding by the deal. The IAEA also has timely access to both declared and undeclared sites. Declared sites, whether they are consider "military sites" or are nonmilitary sites, can be visited on short notice and key sites can be inspected on a daily basis if requested by the agency.

Unilaterally demanding an extension of

JCPOA's nuclear-related restrictions on Iran under threat of reimposing sanctions would violate the deal. The JCPOA requires that the United States seek the statutory lifting of sanctions eight years after adoption day. If Washington intends to threaten automatic reimposition of sanctions in perpetuity if Iran resumes certain nuclear activities, Congress cannot make a good faith effort to statutorily lift the measures.

Furthermore, the United States does not need to seek a basis now in order to respond to future, hypothetical Iranian actions. If national intelligence or evidence obtained by the IAEA were to emerge in the future that Iran had resumed nuclear-weapons related activities in violation of its NPT commitments, the United States should work multilaterally, as it did leading up to the JCPOA, to pursue a response supported by the international community. **→7**

Supporting TAPI Saudi Arabia tries to decrease Iran's regional role: expert

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — Commenting on Iran's weak energy diplomacy Omid Shokri Kalehsar, Senior Energy Security Analyst says Saudi Arabia tries to weaken Iran's regional role by supporting TAPI gas pipeline.

The long-awaited mega gas pipeline project of Turk-menistan, Afghanis-tan, Pakis-tan and India (TAPI) connecting the energy-rich Central Asian nation with the South Asian countries was inaugurated couple of days ago, with leaders of the four countries attending

its groundbreaking ceremony in Serhetabat followed by another in Herat.

Considering the facts on the ground including political differences of the involved countries in the project and also insecurity and instability in the region many experts believe the successful realization of the project will depend on the ability of the project participants to maneuver through among others geopolitical, financial and technical challenges.

To discuss the issue, we reached out to Omid Shokri Kalehsar, Senior Energy Security Analyst in Washington.

Following is the full text of interview with him:

Considering the differences between India and Pakistan and instability and insecurity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, how successful do you see the future of this project?

A: The 1,814-kilometer gas pipeline will pass through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. At least 816 kilometers of the pipeline will pass through the territory of Afghanistan. Transport or transit security is an important part of pipeline project beside of security of supply and demand security, financial guarantee and financial sources are another key factors in any pipeline project. **→7**



© Tehran Times / Anin Berenikar

National handicrafts exhibit underway in Shiraz

A woman seating opposite a carpet loom practices weaving a rug during her visit to a national handicrafts sales exhibit in Shiraz, southern Iran, on February 27, 2018.

The exhibit showcases a variety of souvenirs, woodwork, miniature, textile printing, enamel, leatherwork, calligraphy, metalwork, mirrorwork, marquetry, illuminated manuscripts, potteries, ceramics, and rugs amongst others.

Hundreds of artisans, craftspeople and exhibitors from across the country are promoting their works at the event, which will be running through March 2.

Saudi regime fires top army chiefs

Saudi Arabia's King Salman has fired the kingdom's military chief of staff and several other high ranking military officers.

Citing several royal decrees, the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) announced "the termination of the services of General Abdul Rahman bin Saleh al-Bunyan, Chief of Staff"

on Monday night.

It added that Fayyad al-Ruwaili will be appointed as the new chief of staff.

Prince Turki bin Talal - the brother of Alwaleed bin Talal - a billionaire businessman who was detained for months by the government on allegations of corruption - was also appointed to a deputy governor position. **→13**

Serbia underlines development of trade ties with Iran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic in a meeting with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif called for expansion of Tehran-Belgrade trade ties, the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) reported.

The Serbian minister expressed his country's keenness to strengthen all-out relations with Iran, particularly in trade and economic fields underscoring that the two countries' value of bilateral trade stood at \$20 million in previous year, which is

not satisfactory.

Zarif, for his part, named oil, gas, petrochemicals, mines, agriculture and IT as some areas appropriate for expansion of ties between the two countries.

Heading a politico-economic delegation, comprised of Iranian entrepreneurs from ICCIMA and the chamber's Head Masoud Khansari, the Iranian minister arrived in Belgrade on Monday at the first step of a four-nation tour of East Europe i.e. Serbia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Tehraners exhaust water supplies, says mayor

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Water supplies in Tehran are being exhausted as consumption in the capital city is three times the carrying capacity, Tehran Mayor Mohammad Ali Najafi said on Tuesday.

"While the carrying capacity of Tehran water resources are 250 million cubic meters we consume some 750 million cubic meters

which has caused land subsidence in the city," Mehr news agency quoted Najafi as saying.

The growing population, unsustainable use of water, climate change and the current life style have all led to challenges in urban management, Najafi explained.

If not addressed water shortage can result in collapse of civilizations in cities, the country or even the region, the mayor warned.

Zarif says U.S., Europe aware of Iran's regional influence

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The United States and Europe consider Iran as an influential country in the region, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Monday, adding that Iran is the safest country in the region despite all problems.

Zarif, heading a delegation comprised of a number of CEOs of Iranian enterprises from both private and public sectors, left Tehran on Monday for Serbia's capital city of Belgrade – the first stop of his Balkans region and Eastern European tour.

Addressing a conference attended by Iranians in Belgrade, he said, "We need to know why we were able to reach that great amount of power and security despite all the oppression and sanctions over the past forty years," Mehr reported.

He underlined the important role the Iranian nation play in boosting national power, saying, "It was the people who made the Islamic Republic of Iran so powerful."

Iranians, from every religion and ethnicity, love Iran from the bottom of their hearts and are ready to sacrifice their lives for the country, the foreign minister said.

He also pointed to the nuclear agreement, saying, "The guy [Donald Trump] who wanted to rip it to shreds as his first priority and considered it the worst deal in American history, has not been able to do so after a year and two months for fear of possible expenses."

On Tuesday, Zarif met with Serbian Premier Anna Bronabic discussing various aspects of bilateral relations and exchanging views on international and regional issues.

The issue of Kosovo, strengthening economic and cultural relations, preparations for expanding parliamentary, military, scientific, cultural, academic exchanges, agriculture, and advanced technologies were among the key issues for the talks.

Zarif also met with Maja Gojkovic, speaker of the Serbian Parliament, on Tuesday.

During the meeting, the chief Iranian diplomat expressed satisfaction with the growing trend of bilateral relations in all fields, especially in the economic and commercial areas.

He welcomed the expansion of parliamentary cooperation between the two countries, saying Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani will pay an official visit to Serbia in the current year. **→2**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



VP says insufficient dialogue between factions is problematic

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri has called for national dialogue to resolve the problems, saying the pressure Iranian nation is experiencing is due to the insufficient amount of dialogue in the country.

“Unfortunately, conversation has been replaced with objection,” Jahangiri said on Monday, the Hamshahri newspaper reported.

He said everyone who is fond of Iran should strive so that the atmosphere of dialogue will stay alive in the country.

The vice president also expressed regret that the government has not had enough dialogue with political groups including reformists and principlists, emphasizing that the government's relations with political groups should be strengthened.



Saudi military shakeup aimed to empower MBS: ex-minister

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Former Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehqan said on Tuesday that Saudi Arabia's military shakeup is aimed at paving the way for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) to sit on the throne.

They dismiss anyone who is not loyal to their rule, Dehqan said in reference to King Salman and his son Mohammed bin Salman, ISNA reported.

The state-run Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said King Salman replaced a number of top military commanders in a late-night political reshuffle on Monday that saw the country's monarch issue 39 royal decrees.



Iranian MP voices concerns over return of terrorists to Europe

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Iranian Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has voiced concerns over the return of terrorists to their countries in Europe, saying the issue is the greatest challenge that Europe is facing.

Boroujerdi made the remarks in a meeting with Miodrag Vukovic, a member of the Iran-Montenegro parliamentary friendship group, in Tehran on Tuesday.

The lawmaker said terrorism is the world's biggest problem and needs a strong resolution from all countries to defeat it.



An offshoot of Gonabadi Dervishes linked to Mossad, CIA, lawmaker says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has said that an offshoot of the Gonabadi Dervishes has links to Mossad and the CIA, Mehr news agency reported on Tuesday.

“Due to the nature of this dangerous, Daesh-like group, which is affiliated with Mossad and CIA, the three branches of government, especially the Judiciary, as well as security forces and police must not show the slightest tolerance towards them,” Abolfazl Hassan Beigi said.

The lawmaker further said there are three branches of Dervishes, adding that one of them has resorted to armed rebellion against the Islamic Republic.

In a riot in northern Tehran on Feb. 19, a member of the cult group rammed a bus into security forces killing three policemen.



Lavrov: Revising Iran deal ‘extremely dangerous’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — It would be “extremely dangerous” to revise the Iran nuclear deal, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Tuesday, calling for discussing all issues on the basis of consensus and with the participation of Tehran.

“Just like France, we believe it is necessary to fully implement the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA),” Lavrov said after talks with his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian in Moscow.

“If there is a desire to discuss some other issues concerning Iran in this format or in another format, this should be done with Iran's mandatory participation and on the basis of consensus rather than through ultimatums,” TASS cited Lavrov as saying.



French FM to visit Iran next week

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian will visit Iran next week, the British Broadcasting Corporation said on Tuesday, quoting an informed source.

The trip was scheduled to take place in January 2018 but it was postponed for some reasons, the report said.

In the course of his visit to Iran, French Foreign Minister Le Drian will inaugurate an exhibition dubbed “Louvre Museum in Tehran-Treasures of French National Collections” as well.

Concurrent with the Louvre exhibition in Tehran, it is supposed that an exhibition of Iranian art works of the Qajar era would be held in France as well, the report added.

UK-US duplicity fails at UN



Vassily Nebenzia



Abbas Araqchi



Gholam Ali Khoshroo



Hamid Baedinejad



Baharm Qassemi

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The United States and United Kingdom, backed by a whole gamut of other allies, failed on Monday to pass a resolution at the UN Security Council which sought to legitimize accusations that Iran is responsible for arming Houthi in Yemen.

A UK-drafted resolution gained 11 favorable votes at the 15-member Security Council but was halted by a Russian veto.

“We cannot concur with uncorroborated conclusions and evidence which requires verification and discussions within the sanctions committee,” Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told the Council.

Earlier in the month, Britain circulated a draft resolution that would renew sanctions on Yemen for another year and also “condemns” Iran for allegedly breaching the 2015 arms embargo on the country by “failing to take the necessary measures to prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer” of short-range ballistic missiles, UAVs and other military equipment to Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement.

The draft resolution, backed by France, called for unspecified measures in response to the UN report about Iran's alleged role in Yemen, stressing that the council will take “additional measures to address these violations,” and that “any activity related to the use of ballistic missiles in Yemen” is a criteria for sanctions.

A group of UN experts monitoring the sanctions on Yemen reported to the Security Council in January that it had “identified missile remnants, related military equipment and military unmanned aerial vehicles that are of Iranian origin and were brought into

Yemen after the imposition of the targeted arms embargo.”

The UN experts, however, said they were unable to identify the supplier.

Iran's envoy to the United Nations condemned the anti-Iran move.

The draft resolution was an attempt to deflect the international community's attention away from the war crimes being committed by the Saudi regime in Yemen, Gholam Ali Khoshroo said in a statement on Monday.

The envoy rejected the allegations that his country had been supplying weapons to the Ansarullah movement.

Khoshroo also reiterated Tehran's stance on Yemen, stressing that only a political solution and intra-Yemeni dialogue can put an end to the country's conflict.

In Tehran, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi described the move against Iran as “biased”.

“I think it is quite clear that these accusations and the way the Yemen Committee expert report and that of the Security Council were drafted were biased.”

Referring to the UK, Araqchi said, “They had made up their minds before they even had to come to Iran and hear us. Accordingly, they were seeking through a one-sided report to pass a resolution at the Security Council.”

“But of course now the Americans have failed and this is not their first in the past years.”

“Over the past year, the American government has tried to drag Iran to the Security Council over issues such as missile tests, domestic protests, or the Yemeni issue. But this shows America's isolation,” Araqchi said. “We will continue our policies in the region and

what benefits the interests of governments.”

After they failed to pass the resolution, the United States threatened unilateral action against Iran.

“If Russia is going to continue to cover for Iran then the U.S. and our partners need to take action on our own. If we're not going to get action on the council then we have to take our own actions,” U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley told reporters during a visit to Honduran capital Tegucigalpa.

Haley did not specify what kind of action could be taken.

Western sources saw the Russian veto as a defeat for the United States, which has been lobbying for months for Iran to be held accountable at the United Nations, while at the same time threatening to quit a 2015 multilateral nuclear deal with Iran.

Iranian Ambassador to the UK Hamid Baedinejad also saw the story as a failure for the U.S. and the very person of Haley.

In a message on Monday night, the ambassador expressed pity that the Security Council had turned into a scene to stage political differences rather than to find a way to stop the human crisis in Yemen and force Saudi Arabia to stop bombarding the country.

“Regarding a resolution that was about Yemen, America took no note of Yemen,” Baedinejad wrote, underlining that Washington was instead following three objectives: To name Iran as a violator of sanctions on Yemen, involve Resolution 2231 on Iran's missiles in the case and thereby re-introduce the issue of Iranian missiles at the Council, and finally accuse Iran as violator of international resolutions and thereby pave the way for fresh sanctions on Tehran.

The Iranian foreign ministry spokesman also issued a statement on Tuesday calling the move against Iran at the UN “childish scenario”.

Bahram Qassemi said the U.S. and UK in the past three years have failed to play a constructive role over the Yemeni crisis and have instead tried to legitimize the aggressors.

Refuting any accusation that Iran sends missile to Yemen, Qassemi said, “We have already responded to this false, baseless and unsubstantiated claim many times. We have to emphasize that Yemeni army and Popular Committees don't need foreign weaponry aid.”

He said Yemeni people's defense of their national dignity is the main cause of the Saudi-led attack on their country.

“All states, including the aggressors, know this fact very well that despite the tight blockade imposed on Yemeni people, who are suffering from famine... as well as many chronic diseases, they have resisted fiercely to the airstrikes conducted by Saudi Arabia's warplanes on a daily basis.”

Qassemi underlined that amid such a situation, the claim that Iran is sending missiles to Yemen is “a childish, naive and false scenario which cannot contribute at all to efforts to acquit the aggressors of the country.”

The spokesman further called for an immediate halt to the arms sale by the U.S. and European countries to Saudi Arabia and other aggressive and war-mongering states in the region, saying they use the weapons to kill tens of defenseless men, women and children in Yemen on a daily basis who are suffering from a growing poverty and insecurity day by day.

Austria has strong stake in preserving JCPOA: ambassador

‘Definitely’ there will be no security problem if U.S. quits nuclear deal, Scholz says

By M.A. Saki

TEHRAN — Stefan Scholz, Vienna's ambassador to Tehran, believes that the 2015 nuclear deal will continue to stand even in the most unwanted event that the United States withdraws from it, provided that Iran continues to fulfill its obligations, thus enabling European countries to follow suit.

Ambassador Scholz, whose country hosted the nuclear talks between Iran and other parties including the European Union, tells the Tehran Times that “Austria has a strong sense of stakeholdership for maintaining and preserving” the nuclear agreement, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Following is the text of the first part of the exclusive interview:

■ Question: Mr. Ambassador, Donald Trump has threatened to withdraw from the international nuclear deal. Don't you think in that case the world would be pushed toward “anarchy” and “insecurity”, especially as the agreement is being endorsed by the UN Security Council and the IAEA just last week once again has confirmed that Iran is abiding by the agreement?

Answer: Austria is fully committed not only to the letter but also to the spirit of the agreement and is doing its very best to make sure that the lifting of nuclear related sanctions has a positive impact on trade and economic relations with Iran, including benefits for the Iranian people through inclusive growth.

Moreover, Austria has been the leading figure in the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and partnering with Iran was instrumental in the creation of the landmark Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted in July 2017.

Not only for this reason but also because my country is the seat of the IAEA and has had the honor to host the nuclear talks leading to the JCPOA. Therefore, Austria has a strong sense of stakeholdership for maintaining and preserving the JCPOA.

We are painfully aware that the JCPOA has reached a critical juncture. So far the JCPOA has fulfilled its non-proliferation objective and this exclusive non-proliferation focus of the agreement should not



The JCOPA is one of the two biggest achievements of the European Action Service.

be diluted.

At present we all still hope that all sides will abide by the agreement. If the U.S. decided to leave the JCPOA much would depend on the reaction by the Iranian side and whether or not Iran is willing to continue to uphold its part of the deal in case that Russia, China and the EU already have signaled that they are willing to stick to it as well. We would encourage our Iranian partner to exercise strategic optimism and to adopt a “YES WE CAN” approach.

It will be decisive that Iran doesn't let itself get provoked into a course of actions which then can be qualified by the IAEA as a breach of the nuclear deal.

If Iran keeps up with the spirit and the letter of the agreement it could happen that eventual non-compliance of other parties becomes an issue.

It is also clear to us that any Iranian reaction would be related mainly to the extraterritorial application of U.S. primary sanctions, punishing European companies active in Iran. Here some work already has

been done with countries like Austria at the fore.

Austria, followed by Denmark and Italy recently concluded sovereign investment guarantee schemes which serve as examples how to shield companies from the negative effects of possible unilateral extraterritorial sanctions. Another idea that has been floated is that European financial institutions provide credit line extensions to this effect. Europe and Iran have agreed to ensure that investments can flow into the country and that the economic relations get strengthened.

For the time being we do hope that our joint efforts to convince the U.S. Congress and the U.S. administration about the benefits of the JCPOA will bear fruit. So let's cross the bridge when we come to the water.

Whether or not the JCPOA would survive a U.S. abrogation is not clear to any of us at this stage.

■ Don't you think that a U.S. abrogation of the nuclear deal would humiliate the European Union as a key party to the multilateral agreement?

A: I do not think that this question should be put to the European Union given all the efforts that we have launched.

Therefore, and allow me to reiterate this once again, Europe has been willing and continues to be willing to stick to the JCPOA as long as Iran abides by it.

As an important bloc in the world we are obviously rising to the challenge. The JCOPA is one of the two biggest achievements of the European Action Service that they have achieved so far. This is part of the track record for the success of doing things jointly together on the foreign diplomacy side.

Why should the European Union be humiliated because of honoring its international obligations? Therefore, at this stage we should be forward looking and positive and not engage into hypothetical discussions.

■ Don't you think that we will face another serious dispute and security problem if the nuclear deal is killed?

A: Definitely not. A U.S. pullout of the JCPOA does not automatically mean the end of this important agreement.

The nuclear deal will continue to stand even in the most unwanted event that the United States withdraws from it, provided that Iran continues to fulfill its obligations, thus enabling European countries to follow suit.

We still hope to convince our U.S.-friends of the benefits of the agreement. If they leave the JCPOA it can still be upheld by Iran and the other signatories to it, signaling to the whole world that Iran, the region and the international community at large has chosen to stick to the peaceful path outlined in the JCPOA. We therefore urge all parties most urgently to continue to fully implement this agreement.

Since you put the question twice to me, my answer with the common saying is that let's cross the bridge when we come to the water.

■ How can Iran, the EU along with Russia and China protect the nuclear deal without the U.S.?

A: The question is not “how” we can do it but “whether we are willing to do it”.

The European Union is certainly willing to hold up its part of the deal, ideally together with the U.S.

Zarif says U.S., Europe aware of Iran's regional influence

➔ The foreign minister also met and talked with Serbia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Trade, Tourism, Telecommunications Rasim Ljajic.

In the meeting, the two sides discussed various dimensions of trade and economic relations between the two sides, as well as ways to remove obstacles to the expansion of the relations between Iran and Serbia.

Energy sector, banking co-operation, consular coopera-

tion, and tourism were among the issues discussed during the meeting.

Zarif is also expected to visit Bulgaria, Croatia and Bosnia as other legs of his Eastern European tour.

Meeting with foreign ministers and other top officials of those countries as well as holding joint conferences between Iranian businessmen and their Eastern European counterparts are on Zarif's agenda during his tour.



Terrorists in Eastern Ghouta blocking civilians' exit: Russia

'UK may strike Syria if gas attack claims proven'

Russia's military says terrorists are blocking civilian evacuations from Syria's Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta by shelling the route out of the area hours after a humanitarian pause went into effect to help the residents flee the militant-held area.

Russia President Vladimir Putin on Monday ordered the implementation of a daily five-hour ceasefire in Eastern Ghouta from Tuesday and the creation of a humanitarian corridor through which civilians can leave the militant-held area.

However, the chief of the group controlling the de-escalation zone in the area, Viktor Pankov, said Tuesday that not a single civilian had been able to leave the area via the corridor in the settlement of Vafidin, Russian news agencies reported.

"On February 27 at 9 a.m. a humanitarian corridor was opened for the civilians' exit from the de-escalation zone. Now intense fire is underway from the militants' side and no civilians have left," he said.

Syrian government forces, helped by the Russian military, have created the necessary conditions for civilians to be safely received in Vafidin and that medical care was available nearby if necessary, according to Russian news agencies.

They said buses to carry civilians to the destinations where they could be temporarily housed were on standby.

The so-called Jaish al-Islam Takfiri militant group stationed in the Damascus suburb denied the recent shelling.

The United Nations also said fighting raged on in the eastern Ghouta district of Syria on Tuesday, despite the five-hour truce.

"Clearly the situation on the ground is not such that convoys can go in or medical evacuations can go out," UN humanitarian spokesman Jens Laerke told a briefing in Geneva.

The ceasefire came three days after the United Nations Security Council unanimously voted in favor of a resolution demanding a 30-day truce in Syria "without delay" to allow aid access and medical evacuations.

The resolution was adopted by 15 votes



to none, after several delays and a flurry of last-minute negotiations.

Eastern Ghouta, a besieged area on the outskirts of Damascus which is home to some 400,000 people, has witnessed deadly violence over the past few days, with foreign-sponsored terrorists launching mortar attacks on the Syrian capital in the face of an imminent humiliating defeat.

Western powers, however, blame the Syrian government and Russia for the crisis.

■ **Gas attack** mid a renewed Western push to blame Syria

for "chemical attacks" against civilians, the UK says it will start "seriously" considering joining US military strikes against the Arab country if such claims are ever established.

"If we know that it has happened, and we can demonstrate it, and if there is a proposal for action where the UK could be useful then I think we should seriously consider it," Britain's Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson told the BBC on Tuesday.

On Monday, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is sympathetic to anti-Damascus militants, said 14

civilians had suffered breathing difficulties after a Syrian warplane struck the village in the Eastern Ghouta region in the Syrian capital's suburbs.

The report came just after Russia warned that militants were planning a gas attack there to pin it on the Syrian government.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, however, dismissed the report as "bogus stories," stressing that government forces have attacked foreign-sponsored Takfiri terrorists there.

(Source: agencies)

South Korean prosecutors seek 30 years' jail for ousted Park as supporters demand her release

South Korean prosecutors on Tuesday sought a 30-year jail term for former President Park Geun-hye who was ousted last year amid an influence-peddling scandal as supporters braved the winter cold outside the Seoul court demanding her immediate release. Park, 66, was dismissed in March after being impeached and is standing trial on charges of bribery, abuse of power and coercion in a case that rocked the country's business and political elite. She denies wrongdoing.

The prosecution's recommendation came two weeks after Choi Soon-sil, a longtime friend of Park who was at the center of the scandal, was jailed for 20 years for taking bribes from "chaebol", or conglomerates, including electronics powerhouse Samsung and retail giant Lotte.

Prosecutors are also seeking a 118.5 billion won (\$127.1 million) fine for Park, who has been detained since March 31 last year. Park Seung-gil, a lawyer representing

the former president, tearfully pleaded before Seoul Central District Court for mercy, saying Park had tried her hardest in leading the country "day and night".

Park's trial began in May and a verdict is expected on April 6 in a case that brought scrutiny to the cozy ties between South Korea's political leaders and its largest chaebol, the so-called "Republic of Samsung".

"(Park) brought a national crisis by letting a person who has never been involved in state management rule the country," a prosecutor said. "She and Choi took tens of billions of won in bribes and yet denied her crimes and obstructed efforts to establish the truth."

Receiving bribes carries a penalty of up to life in jail.

Hundreds of supporters gathered outside the court, proclaiming Park's innocence. "Immediately release our president," they chanted. The Liberty

Korea Party, a conservative opposition party formerly led by Park, condemned the call for jail.

"What the prosecution is demanding is harsher than the death penalty," the party said in a statement.

Seoul Central District Court had also sentenced Shin Dong-bin, chairman of the country's fifth-largest conglomerate, Lotte Group, to two years and six months in prison in the same case.

Seoul High Court suspended a prison sentence for Samsung Group heir Jay Y. Lee in early February - a surprise decision that sent shockwaves through political and business circles.

The court sentenced Lee to two and a half years in jail on charges including bribery and embezzlement - reducing the original term by half - but suspended the sentence for four years, meaning that he is unlikely to serve any more time in jail.

(Source: Reuters)

Czech court releases Salih Muslim, preventing Turkey extradition

A court in the Czech Republic has released Salih Muslim, a former Kurdish Syrian leader, despite Ankara's official request for him to be extradited. Muslim, a prominent former leader of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria, was arrested in the Czech capital of Prague on Saturday at Turkey's request.

"We are very satisfied because the judge did not consider it necessary after hearing the arguments to decide to retain the custody of our client. Our client has promised that he would be at the disposal of the court. It is traditional this way as the proceedings have only started. It will take some time," Miroslav Krutina, Muslim's lawyer, told Al Jazeera.

"The crucial question was if our client should wait during the procedure in custody because of some kind of concern that he might disappear or not cooperate. In the end we agreed this very peaceful person would probably not be a threat to the public and he, himself, promised to be at the disposal of the court."

Turkey had asked authorities in Prague to extradite him with a file explaining the arguments for the request, Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag said on Monday.

"Turkey expects Salih Muslim - who is a leader of a terrorist group and is still actively plotting terrorist attacks against Turkey - to be extradited to our country in line with legal requirements between our countries," Bozdag said.

Turkey's interior ministry had offered a bounty of nearly \$1m for the arrest of Muslim, who is listed by Ankara as a "most wanted terrorist".

■ Charges against Muslim

According to state-run Anadolu news agency, the file for extradition recalls that a high court in Ankara had filed a case against Muslim for a deadly attack carried out in the capital in 2016.

The charges against him include damaging national unity



and integrity, deliberate murder, damaging public property and transferring dangerous materials, according to Anadolu. The March 2016 attack at a popular shopping area in central Ankara had been carried out by an explosive-laden vehicle and left 37 people dead and dozens more injured.

The court had also issued an arrest warrant for Muslim and requested that Interpol issue a red notice against him.

Turkey considers the PYD and its armed wing, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) "terrorist groups" with ties to the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) active in Turkey.

The PKK has waged a decades-long armed fight against the Turkish state that has killed tens of thousands of people.

The arrest came after Turkey called on the Czech Republic to arrest the former co-leader and sent warrants for his arrest to Prague, Turkish officials said. Turkey - together with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) rebel group - last month launched an air and ground offensive into Afrin in the northwest of Syria to defeat the U.S.-backed YPG fighters near its border.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Saad Hariri accepts invitation to visit Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has extended an official invitation to Lebanon's Prime Minister, Saad al-Hariri, in what would be his first visit since his rescinded resignation from Riyadh in November.

Saudi envoy Nizar al-Aloul, who is on four-day visit to Lebanon, delivered the invitation in a meeting with Hariri on Monday.

The latter described the talks with the envoy as "excellent" and said he would conduct the visit as soon as possible, according to the prime minister's office. Aloul, who was accompanied by the kingdom's new ambassador to Lebanon, Walid al-Yaacoub, is the first high-ranking Saudi official to visit Lebanon since Hariri's abrupt resignation from Riyadh last November. Hariri's televised address had then sparked outrage in Lebanon over what was publicly perceived as the abduction of a sovereign state's prime minister by another country. The 47-year-old cited concern for his safety and Iranian meddling in his home country for the sudden decision but returned to Lebanon weeks later and agreed to retract his resignation. Hariri on Monday reiterated statements made earlier about Saudi's stabilizing role in the troubled country.

"Saudi Arabia's main objective is for Lebanon to be sovereign. It is also keen on the full independence of Lebanon and we will see how to cooperate with the kingdom regarding the upcoming international conferences."

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Japan suspects yet another N. Korea sanctions breach at sea

Japan has discovered another North Korean tanker it suspects of transferring goods with a vessel in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions, the Foreign Ministry said Tuesday.

It was the fourth time Japan has suspected such an illegal transfer in recent weeks and comes as the Trump administration and key Asian allies prepare to expand interceptions of ships suspected of violating sanctions on North Korea.

North Korea last year conducted dozens of missile launches and its sixth and largest nuclear test as it pursues its goal of developing a nuclear armed missile capable of reaching the United States, triggering deeper UN Security Council sanctions.

The North Korean-flagged tanker "Chon Ma San", designated by the United States as a sanction target, was spotted by a Japanese surveillance plane with the Maldivian-flagged tanker "Xin Yuan 18" some 250 km east of Shanghai Saturday, the Foreign Ministry said in a release. "Judging from the fact that the two vessels lay alongside each other with their lights turned on at night, both vessels could have been engaged in some type of activity," the release said.

"Following a comprehensive assessment, the government of Japan strongly suspects that they conducted ship-to-ship transfers" banned by UN Security Council resolutions, it said.

(Source: Daily Star)

Copper Cathode & Copper Blister Bid Notice National Iranian Copper Industries Company



National Iranian Copper Industries Co.

Grade A Copper Cathode :

Quantity: 10,000 MT (ten thousand) +/- 2% (plus minus two percent) in Seller's option.

Quality: Fresh produced LME registered Electrolytic Copper cathode grade A (SXEW excluded).

Physical & Chemical Specs plus cargo photos: Shall be advised by seller in tender offer.

Shipment: In partial shipment in lot sizes of max 5000 MT +/- 2% (Seller's option) during calendar months of April till August 2018. (The exact time of shipment shall be agreed upon by buyer & seller at the time of contract settlement)

Delivery: CFR CY Bandar Abbas / Iran.

Price: The price per metric ton of the material shall be based on the official LME cash settlement price for Copper Grade 'A' in USD as published in London Metal Bulletin, Price fixed during the quotational period.

Quotational Period: The quotational period shall be on the unknown date in buyer's option during the month of actual shipment, buyer may wish to extend the Q/P by one or two additional months without cost.

Copper Blister :

Quantity: 6,000 (six thousand) MT +/- 10% (plus minus ten percent) in Seller's option.

Quality: Copper Blister with minimum Cu assay of 98% and with least Ag & Au assay.

Silver & Gold analysis range shall be advised in a limited range close to the real analysis of the commodity.

Copper Blister without Ag & Au content is preferable.

Physical & Chemical Specs plus cargo photos: Shall be advised by seller in tender offer.

Shipment: In partial shipment in lot sizes of Max 3000 MT +/- 10% (Seller's option) during calendar months of April till August 2018. (The exact time of shipment shall be agreed upon by buyer & seller at the time of contract settlement)

Delivery: CFR CY Bandar Abbas / Iran

Price: Full final copper content subject to a deduction of 0.5 (zero point five) unit shall be paid at the official LME cash settlement price for copper grade 'A' in USD as published in London Metal Bulletin, price fixed during the quotational period.

Quotational Period: The quotational period shall be on the unknown date in buyer's option during the month of actual shipment, buyer may wish to extend the Q/P by one or two additional months without cost.

Payment Procedure:

A. Once the cargo is being delivered to buyer in discharge port i.e. Bandar Abbas, Iran by the seller to the buyer, buyer shall pay 90% (ninety percent) of provisional invoice value amount in Euro or AED, prompt net cash payable by telegraphic transfer to a bank which is nominated by seller and acceptable to buyer against original shipping documents. Provisional invoice amount shall be calculated based on provisional price which is average of five consecutive working days prior Bill of Lading date and typical analysis mentioned in the contract.

B. The final balance, if any, between the provisional payment made by buyer and the final value of the material shall be paid by the owing party by telegraphic transfer against seller's presentation of final invoice within five working days from the date of the final invoice.

Note: The seller is obliged to provide the buyer with one set of original shipping & any other related documents prior vessel arrival to discharge port enabling the buyer to proceed with import formalities & custom release in due course.

Important Notes:

- Offers must be presented to NICICo Sales Dept. only through email sent to sales-tender@nicico.com till end of Saturday March 10th, 2018 local time. It is very important that offers shall be definitely sent to the sales-tender@nicico.com and the ones sent to any other email addresses won't be regarded as the tender participants and won't be evaluated subsequently.
- NICICo reserves the right to reject the offers which will be sent after the validity due date.
- NICICo reserves the right to reject any one or all offers, cancel or prolong the deadline.
- NICICo reserves the right to purchase part or whole quantities of above mentioned commodities from one or several potential sellers.
- In case the offer is accepted by NICICo, it will be advised via email by return.
- The offers shall be definitely sent through corporate email addresses and the personal ones through which the offers are to be sent by participants such as gmail, yahoo, hotmail or any other personal or general email addresses are not accepted at all.
- The following information re companies of attendees shall be definitely provided as well:

- 1- Full Company Name (Both Local & English dictation) :
- 2- Company national ID :
- 3- Registered Number :
- 4- Registered Date :
- 5- Company Type : Private or State-owned
- 6- Registered Country :
- 7- Registered City :
- 8- Ownership Type: A) Public B) Joint Stock,
- 9- Company Field of Activity :
- 10- Company Address :
- 11- Tel :
- 12- Fax :
- 13- Company Website Address:

National Iranian Copper Industries
Sales & Marketing Department
Tel No. : +98 21 8213 8231

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98100.8
IFX	1091.81

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	44,760 rials
EUR	54,560 rials
GBP	68,770 rials
AED	13,300 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	63.64/b
Brent	67.11/b
OPEC Basket	64.16/b
Gold	\$1,328.00/oz
Silver	\$16.56/oz
Platinum	\$995.35/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Seminar on Iran’s investment opportunities held in S. Korea

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** – Concurrent with the opening of Iran-South Korea Joint Chamber of Commerce a seminar on Iran’s investment opportunities was held in Seoul on Monday.

According to IRNA, the event was attended by Iranian ambassador in Seoul, Hassan Taherian and representatives and managers of several renowned Korean companies.

Speaking at the seminar Taherian noted that Iran has great capacities and potentials for foreign investors.

The official also underlined the two countries’ long history of trade, inviting South Korean companies to contribute in major Iranian projects even more than before.

IME plans to start trading iron ore pellet, concentrate

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) plans to start trading domestically produced iron ore pellet and concentrate, IME Managing Director Hamed Soltani-Nejad announced.



In a press conference on Monday, Soltani-Nejad added that IME also plans to trade imported iron ore in the future, the local media reported.

Iran’s iron ore imports were insignificant, however, though a market analyst said Monday that they were expected to grow as steel production capacity increases, Platts reported on Tuesday.

Golgohar, Iran’s largest iron ore miner, is the first company to be approved by IME for trading, Managing Director Naser Taqizadeh was quoted as saying on the exchange’s website.

“At this stage, a portion of Golgohar’s pellet and concentrated iron ore output will be traded on IME in lots of 50,000 million tons [each], but in the next stage the company is going to trade sponge iron through IME,” Taqizadeh said.

German firms doing business in UK gloomy about Brexit

German businesses that trade in Britain are pessimistic about their prospects there, and some are planning to move operations to other markets, a survey by Germany’s DIHK Chambers of Industry and Commerce showed on Tuesday.

The survey, to which some 900 German firms operating in Britain responded, showed just 12 percent expected an improvement in business prospects there, with 36 percent expecting a deterioration. Fifty two percent expected no change.

“Almost a year before the departure from the EU, the consequences of Brexit are a barely calculable risk,” DIHK President Eric Schweitzer said in a statement. “That is unsettling many German businesses.”

The exact consequences of Brexit for their businesses were still unclear to half of the firms in the survey, added Schweitzer, who appealed to the British government to set out reference points for a future relationship as soon as possible.

Eight percent of those surveyed with investments in Britain already planned to move operations elsewhere due to Brexit. Schweitzer attributed this to firms perceiving a risk of rising costs due to customs levies and new layers of bureaucracy.

“In my estimation, the sword of Damocles of a no deal still hangs menacingly over our bilateral economic relations,” he said, adding:

“In addition to swift clarity on Brexit, the EU and the (German) government must also ensure that the internal market for the remaining EU 27 countries is further strengthened.”

Britain’s trade minister Liam Fox will warn on Tuesday that staying in a customs union with the EU after Brexit would leave the country in a worse position than now, calling such a prospect “a sellout of Britain’s national interests.” (Source: Reuters)

Yerevan hosting Iran-Armenia Joint Economic Committee meeting

ECONOMY **TERHAN** — The 15th Joint Economic Committee meeting between Iran and Armenia inaugurated in the Armenian capital on Tuesday, IRNA reported.

As reported, Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian, Armenian Minister of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources Ashot Manukyan, Prime Minister of Armenia Karen Karapetyan, Armenian Nature Protection Minister Artsvik Minasyan, and a delegation from Iran’s power industry are participating the two-day event to discuss the third electricity transmission line between

Iran and Armenia, participation of Iranian companies in power projects in Armenia, environmental issues affiliated with Aras river, as well as other commercial, transit, and customs cooperation between the two countries.

Addressing the meeting, Ardakanian named Armenia Iran’s gateway to the 180-million people market in Eurasia region saying that the two countries seek expansion of bilateral economic ties.

“Iranian energy ministry as the Iranian head of the joint committee, hardly tries to develop mutual ties with Armenia in

North-South Energy Corridor to start operating in August 2019

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — The North-South Energy Corridor which connects the electricity networks of Iran, Russia, Armenia and Georgia is due to start operating in Shahrivar month of Iranian calendar year of 1398 (August 23-Septemehr 22, 2019), IRNA quoted Iranian Energy Minister as saying on Tuesday.

Speaking to the press on the sidelines of the Iran-Armenia Joint Economic Committee



Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian (4th R), Armenian Minister of Energy Infrastructures and Natural Resources Ashot Manukyan (3rd L) at the 15th Iran-Armenia Joint Economic Committee meeting

various fields, including the third electricity transmission line between Iran and Armenia, reaching an accord over creation of a south-north energy corridor among Iran, Russia, Georgia, and Armenia, coming to an agreement about cooperation on road

and railway corridor, increasing exports of Iran’s gas to Armenia, cooperating on health care affairs and holding further joint meetings and exhibitions, and also expansion of collaboration on customs, cultural, and scientific affairs”, he added.

IMF chief tells countries to get ready for changes even amid strong global growth

International Monetary Fund Managing Director Christine Lagarde said on Tuesday the global economy was showing broad-based growth, but the landscape was shifting with heightened risks of trade disputes, monetary policy normalization and technological change.

Lagarde, speaking to an IMF conference in Jakarta in preparation for the Fund’s annual meetings in Bali in October, said the IMF was expecting global growth to reach 3.9 percent in 2018 and 2019.

This is unchanged from the IMF’s forecast in January and up from 3.7 percent in 2017. She said Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries were preparing for higher interest rates in advanced economies such as the United States and Europe, but cautioned

that policymakers need to stay vigilant about its effect on financial stability and volatile capital flows.

“We know this will have spillover effects across the world. We have known for some time that it’s coming,” Lagarde said.

“It remains uncertain how this transition is going to affect other countries, companies, jobs, incomes.”

ASEAN countries need to embrace new growth models that put a greater emphasis on domestic demand, regional trade and economic diversification and prepare for technological changes such as increased factory automation, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, new financial technologies and digital currencies.

Euro zone economic slack may be bigger than thought: Draghi

Slack in the euro zone economy may be bigger than previously estimated and this could slow the rise of inflation but only temporarily and prices will eventually climb, European Central Bank President Mario Draghi said on Monday.

The factors slowing the rise of inflation will wane as growth continues and the traditional relationship between growth and inflation remains intact, even if their correlation has been weakened in recent years, Draghi told the European Parliament’s committee on economic affairs.

His comments suggest the ECB remains confident that inflation is finally on

an upward trend, supporting market expectations for the bank to finally end its bond purchase programme this year, satisfied that inflation will eventually hit its nearly 2 percent target.

“Given the uncertainty surrounding the measurement of economic slack, the true amount may be larger than estimated, which could slow down the emergence of price pressures,” Draghi told a regular committee hearing.

“This is particularly visible in the labour market.”

“Nonetheless, these factors should wane as the economic expansion continues and

While these could eliminate some jobs, it was important for countries to boost efforts to educate workers to better prepare them to take advantage of new technologies.

“Many jobs will be affected one way or another. Some of them will disappear, but many more will be affected because of automation. So we need to think about the future of work,” Lagarde said, adding that there was no single approach, and many countries will forge their own path.

She highlighted Go-Jek, the fast-growing motorcycle hailing and delivery service in Indonesia as an example of a country-specific technology innovation targeted to the country’s needs and workforce.

(Source: CNBC)



unemployment further declines,” Draghi said. “Looking ahead, we anticipate that headline inflation will resume its gradual upward adjustment, supported by our monetary policy measures.”

ECB board member Benoit Coeure argued on Friday that the bank already holds enough bonds to keep borrowing costs low, an argument taken as further evidence that the ECB is preparing investors for the end of its unprecedented asset purchases.

Launched three years ago to fight off the threat of deflation, the ECB’s 2.55 trillion euro (\$3.14 trillion) bond purchase

program has kept borrowing costs low to induce spending and investment, all with the ultimate aim of generating inflation.

Repeating the bank’s standard policy message, Draghi said the currency bloc’s strong growth momentum has strengthened his confidence in the inflation outlook but that patience and persistence with ECB policy were still needed.

This rise in inflation remained conditional on ECB stimulus, while financial market volatility, particularly the euro’s recent rise, is a source of concern and requires close monitoring.

(Source: CNBC)

China’s export machine is taking on a stronger yuan, and winning

China’s exporters are shrugging off the surging yuan, even as it nears its strongest level since 2015.

Growth in outbound shipments is expected to build on January’s double-digit increase to climb 6 percent in 2018, though the yuan has posted a 9 percent gain over the past year. While a rising domestic currency over time makes exports more expensive, trade isn’t suffering yet.

Things that can explain trade’s robust performance despite the relative costliness of the yuan: strong external demand, active hedging and a shift toward more high-tech products. Resilience in exports is much needed, as a deleveraging drive and deteriorating China-U.S. trade relations still threaten the sustained expansion of the world’s second-largest economy.

“Strong external demand is the dominating factor supporting China’s exports growth, which will remain resilient throughout this year thanks to global economic recovery,” said Nathan Chow, senior economist at DBS Bank Hong Kong Ltd. “As long as the yuan’s appreciation is orderly and gradual, it will not dent outbound shipment significantly.”

The yuan traded at 6.3050 per dollar late Monday in Shanghai, close to a level it had last visited in 2015 before China rocked global markets through a surprise devaluation of the currency.

Demand to stay strong

Some of China’s largest trading partners, including the

U.S., Japan and Germany, have been enjoying a strong economic recovery, with the three nations’ manufacturing purchasing managers indexes climbing in the past year, showing expansion. The growth momentum will continue to boost China’s exports this year, providing that a recent sell-off of global stocks and bonds doesn’t return with a vengeance, according to DBS’s Chow.

Peers are rising too

The yuan’s rally against the currencies of its main trading partners, apart from the dollar, hasn’t been that steep, meaning China’s exported goods are actually not becoming as pricey everywhere. The Bloomberg replica of the CFETS RMB Index, which measures the Chinese exchange rate against 24 peers, climbed 1.2 percent this year, trailing the currency’s more than 3 percent appreciation versus the greenback. The yuan is still weaker against peers than it was at the start of 2016.

“In trade-weighted terms, it has not moved a lot,” said Louis Kuijs, chief Asia economist at Oxford Economics in Hong Kong. “The competitiveness of Chinese exporters against their key competitors globally has not worsened much.”

Exporters hedge more than ever

China’s exporters have become more adept at using hedging tools to defend their profits. Jake Tai, a manager at a winter footwear maker in the eastern city of Nanjing,

would not be rushed into making any big alterations.

“We can tell the difference between feedback about a genuine technical flaw and generalized lobbying for lighter-touch regulation,” Woods told the annual conference of the Association of British Insurers.

And the industry should not lose sight of the policyholder, who has been saddled with past failures like Equitable Life.

There is “no convincing evidence” to show that the EU rules had crushed profitability or growth of British insurers, or driven up premiums for policyholders, Wood said, although implementation of the directive could work better.

The PRA is exploring how to make it easier for new

insurers to get a license in a bid to boost competition, he said.

Woods was emphasizing how the PRA could change the way it enforces some of the Solvency II rules, rather than changing the rules themselves, a step that could trigger opposition from other regulators in the bloc.

Britain is leaving the EU next year, with trading terms uncertain for financial firms who may have to rely on a system of “equivalence” for access to the bloc’s market.

Actually changing the substance of EU rules could make it harder for Britain to argue equivalence, an insurance regulator from elsewhere in the EU told Reuters.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil prices give up earlier gains as rising U.S. supply outweigh signs of demand gains

Oil prices on Tuesday erased earlier gains as investor concerns about rising U.S. oil output offset signs of stronger demand and faith in the ability of OPEC production curbs to curtail supply.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for April delivery was down 13 cents, or 0.2 percent, at \$63.78 a barrel by 0753 GMT. The contract on Monday rose to its highest since Feb. 6 at \$64.24.

Brent crude in London was down 12 cents, or 0.2 percent, at \$67.38 a barrel.

Soaring U.S. production is upending global oil markets, coming at a time when other major producers - including Russia and members of the Middle East-dominated Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) - have been withholding output to prop up prices.

The United States will overtake Russia as the world's biggest oil producer by 2019 at the latest, the International Energy Agency (IEA) Executive Director Fatih Birol said on Tuesday.

"U.S. shale growth is very strong, the pace is very strong ... The United States will become the No.1 oil producer sometime very soon," he told Reuters separately.

U.S. output was 10.27 million barrels per



day (bpd), according to weekly government data released last Thursday, higher than the latest figures for Saudi Arabia, the world's largest exporter, and just below Russia.

Earlier on Tuesday prices gained, extend-

ing multi-day rises for both crude futures. Last week, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) said there was a surprise draw on oil stockpiles amid a drop in imports and a surge in exports.

"It's the dwindling Cushing inventories that continue to resonate with oil traders, while another supply disruption in Libya has provided that extra fillip," said Stephen Innes, head of trading for the Asia-Pacific region at futures brokerage Oanda in Singapore.

He was referring to Libya's National Oil Corp's declaration of force majeure on Saturday for the 70,000-bpd El Feel oilfield after it was closed by a protest by guards.

"Given last week's Cushing collapse in oil stockpiles, traders are keenly awaiting this week's U.S. inventories data," Innes added. Cushing, Oklahoma, is an oil storage hub and the delivery point for the WTI futures contract.

U.S. crude inventories are forecast to have risen by 2.7 million barrels last week, a preliminary Reuters poll showed on Monday.

Gasoline stocks are expected to fall by 600,000 barrels, while distillate inventories, which include heating oil and diesel fuel, may decline by 700,000 barrels.

The American Petroleum Institute is scheduled to release its weekly data later on Tuesday, followed by the EIA on Wednesday. *(Source: Reuters)*

Shell warns of future LNG supply crunch

Tens of billions of dollars of new investment is needed in liquefied natural gas projects to avoid a supply crunch in the 2020s, Royal Dutch Shell has warned.

The global market is still absorbing supplies from a wave of LNG megaprojects built in Australia over recent years, as well as the emergence of the U.S. as a net gas exporter for the first time in more than half a century.

But Shell, one of the world's largest suppliers of LNG, said renewed investment was needed to meet surging demand from China and other developing countries.

Steve Hill, head of Shell's gas trading and marketing business, said the LNG market was absorbing "quite comfortably" an unprecedented increase in supplies from new projects such as Chevron's Gorgon and Wheatstone developments in Australia.

Shell, Chevron and other big LNG producers such as Total and ExxonMobil have put the brake

on further investment because of concern that the Australian projects, together with rising U.S. gas exports, would lead to a supply glut.

LNG prices have fallen sharply since 2014 in parallel with oil but both markets have staged a partial recovery over the past year and Hill indicated that Shell was beginning to refocus on the case for renewed expansion.

While 50m tonnes per annum of LNG supply has come on stream in the past two years stemming from investment decisions made years earlier, only 7 million tons of additional capacity has been approved for development during the same period, Hill noted.

"We've had a hiatus in the past two years," he said. "Something needs to happen to avoid a supply crunch in the next decade."

Maarten Wetselaar, director of Shell's integrated gas business, said an extra 200m tons per annum of LNG capacity was needed by 2030 — equivalent to about 20 large projects,

each of which has typically cost about \$10bn to develop in the past.

These liquefaction facilities condense gas into a supercooled liquid form which can be transported long distances by ship. Shell has proposed LNG plants awaiting investment decisions in the U.S. and Canada as well as projects at an earlier stage of planning in Indonesia, Tanzania and Australia.

Wetselaar acknowledged that Shell had capacity to embark on new projects as it neared the end of its existing development program with the planned start of production from the Prelude LNG facility in Australia later this year. However, he said Shell was still working to reduce the cost of future projects before approving them.

Global gas demand will grow at an average 2 percent per year between 2017 and 2035, double the rate of overall energy demand, according to Shell's latest outlook for the LNG market issued on Monday. In Asia, gas demand will grow at

an average 3 percent over the period.

Gas demand from China increased 15 percent last year alone and LNG imports rose 50 percent, reflecting the push by Beijing to tackle air pollution by replacing coal with cleaner sources of energy.

Shell and other big LNG investors are counting on demand for gas outlasting other fossil fuels because it emits less carbon dioxide and pollutants than coal or oil when used to generate electricity or to fuel trucks and ships.

Wetselaar acknowledged that the LNG market was becoming more competitive with proliferating sources of supply, including low-cost U.S. shale gas, and technological disruption from renewable power. This was causing a shift to shorter-term supply contracts and spot pricing which gave LNG developers less certainty than they have had when making investment decisions in the past.

(Source: Financial Times)

Total interested in building 150,000 bpd Iraq oil refinery: sources

French oil major Total is interested in bidding to build the greenfield 150,000 barrels per day Nassirya oil refinery in Iraq, according to two sources familiar with the matter.

Last year, the Iraqi oil ministry said Petrochina was also interested in the refinery project.

The refinery project was originally envisioned with a 300,000 barrels per day capacity that would be integrated with development of the Nassirya oilfield.

Russia's Lukoil and Petrochina were initially interested in the integrated project.

Bids are still open for the project and international oil companies interested in the project would be bidding as refiners only, the Director General of Iraq's Dhi Qar Oil Co Ali Warid Hammood told Reuters on the sidelines of CWC's Iraq Petroleum Conference in Berlin.

He said that Dhi Qar has now taken on the development of the field by itself.

The field is currently producing 80,000-100,000 barrels per day and the company plans to double production capacity to 200,000 bpd within the next three years. But production levels are expected to remain stable this year.

(Source: Reuters)

Saudi Arabia's timetable on OPEC oil cuts seems to creep again

Saudi Arabia's expectations for how long OPEC will need to persevere with production cuts seem to be shifting once again.

Last month, Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said that although a surplus in global crude markets could persist into 2019, "I personally believe we'll be rebalanced by the end of 2018."

That fits with the current policy of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and Russia: their agreement to reduce supply is set to expire at the end of this year, with a gradual return of production after that.

Yet the minister's remarks in New Delhi over the weekend indicated a subtle change. Asked when the output curbs will conclude, Al-Falih's belief in a 2018 rebalancing seemed to be lacking: "My estimation is that it will happen sometime in 2019, but we don't know when and we don't know how."

It certainly didn't sound as if the kingdom expects to start unwinding the production cuts when the current deal ends on Dec. 31.

Delaying the phase-out of the cuts could put more strain on the oil producers' alliance as Russian oil companies are eager to press on with new projects, while OPEC members such as Iraq, Iran and Libya want to restore or expand capacity they've lost.

If the kingdom's calendar for the initiative is slipping, it wouldn't be for the first time: in January 2017, Al-Falih said he expected the effort would be wrapped up in six months.

(Source: Bloomberg)

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The West won't stop the horrors in Syria even if it could. We simply don't care

By Nick Paton Walsh

Saying there are “no words” to describe a horror is infuriating. But now not saying anything has become the new way to talk about the world’s nastiest war.

It is essentially the job of the United Nations to find the words -- to articulate the savagery being again unleashed on the people of Syria. Instead, they put out a statement saying that “No words will do justice to the children killed, their mothers, their fathers and their loved ones” following yet another day of brutality in Ghouta.



It’s not as if the carnage escapes the boundaries of language -- it doesn’t. But the “no words” statement alluded to two things that are far more chilling.

First: after seven years of condemning violence in the “strongest possible terms,” the UN -- the main mediator and supplier of aid -- has instead concluded that saying it can only say nothing about something is the only way in which it can grab attention.

The second, more chilling conclusion from the statement, is that the UN effectively accepts it no longer has a role in Syria. Russia’s UN Security Council veto stymies any meaningful resolution -- which is often dismissed by the Assad regime that stands accused of using sarin gas again, despite a resolution demanding they surrender all chemical weapons.

Where the peacemakers and diplomats should have a mechanism for de-escalation and mercy, now there is a deliberate blank space.

Hot on the heels of the UN’s well-meaning intransigence comes the U.S. State Department, who only a few weeks ago articulated a multi-point strategy for Syria so wide and all-encompassing that it essentially committed the U.S. to a more or less permanent presence in the country -- as well as Assad’s departure.

The U.S. State Department spokeswoman insists the administration is “fully engaged” when it comes to the situation in Ghouta. Yet when pushed as to what the U.S. is explicitly doing, she says, exasperatedly, to a hall full of reporters: “I don’t know what some of you expect us to do.”

It is in of itself a very strange statement. It presupposes that the need for a clear and plain response to Ghouta is some wild media fantasy. Yet it is also wildly honest. What really -- outside of Tillerson’s long and studied dream sequence of strategy -- can the U.S. really be expected to do?

Even when Angela Merkel says Germany “must do everything we can to end the massacre,” she then proposes calling one of its co-sponsors, Russia.

The truth of these overreaching and underwhelming statements is they recognize the reality. Unless the West is prepared to blow Russian-backed jets out of the sky over Ghouta to impose a no-fly zone, its hands are tied.

This isn’t a new series of tactics by the regime and Russia: they have previously talked about a cease-fire, before bombing, besieging and pursuing their military objectives -- eventually demanding that all human life leave an encircled area.

This is what they do. And confused, powerless atrophy is what the outside world does in response.

This kind of massacre didn’t register enough when it began in 2012. I saw nine children’s bodies pulled out from one rocketed house, one survivor alive only because she was breastfeeding and protected by her mother’s corpse.

It didn’t register in 2013 when the savagery grew so fierce that we saw exasperated Syrians allow al Qaeda to dominate some areas and a group called ISIS marched into Raqqa.

In Homs, Hama, Aleppo’s east, even with sarin gas use in Ghouta in 2013 and Khan Sheikhoun in 2017, the crimes are never enough to elicit a serious and committed Western response. So far, Assad has lost an airfield to 59 cruise missiles and finds international banking transactions tricky. Nothing else.

It is distressing to conclude that the repeated discussion of “never again” and bemoaning Western indifference hides the real issue at stake here. We simply don’t care. The Western world will act only if the crucible of Syria generates a horror so extreme its militants threaten our own cities. The illusion that our disgrace and outrage may slow the massacre is giving the people of Ghouta false hope. The West’s efforts are best put to aid in the aftermath.

We aren’t minded or able to do anything. But where would you like us to send the flowers?

(Source: CNN)

KRG intelligence chief: Baghdad must give us our rights

By Amberin Zaman

Defying warnings from Baghdad, the United States and regional heavyweights Turkey and Iran, the Iraqi Kurds held a referendum on independence on Sept. 25, 2017, that was approved by an overwhelming majority of the Kurdish people. But what was slated to be a grand leap toward realizing the Kurds’ long cherished dreams of statehood rapidly descended into a debacle as Iraqi troops moved against Kurdish peshmerga fighters in territories claimed by both sides, including the oil-rich province of Kirkuk. With oil fields in Kirkuk under central government control, revenue from crude sales has been halved.

In a bid to bolster his nationalist credentials ahead of parliamentary elections in May, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi signed off on shutting Iraqi Kurdish airspace to international flights and continues to withhold the Iraqi Kurds’ share of the national budget. Many blame Massoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) who stepped down as president soon after the referendum, and his eldest son, Masrour Barzani, the powerful chancellor of the Kurdistan Region Security Council, because they were the main drivers of the referendum. But would the Iraqi army have regained full control over Kirkuk without the collusion of the KDP’s age-old archival, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)? What if the United States had not sided so openly with Baghdad? Al-Monitor put these questions to Masrour Barzani, who is currently in Washington for meetings with senior Donald Trump administration officials, including national security adviser H.R. McMaster.

The following is a transcript of the interview, his first with the Western media since the referendum..

■ Are your dreams of an independent Kurdistan over?

A: Well, as a nation I don’t think that dream will ever die out. We just have to be realistic about what is possible. We believed it was important for the world and the Iraqi government also should know what the desires of the Kurdish people are. This is why we did the referendum the way we did. We had some concerns about the future of our people. We wanted to make sure there would be no confrontation, that we would have peaceful and stable relations with Baghdad in whatever structure that we could agree on and based on mutual interests. Unfortunately, I believe the intentions of our people were deliberately misinterpreted because expressing a desire doesn’t mean that it should necessarily lead to confrontation. And that is when things went wrong and we are not really responsible for the consequences.

■ Holding the referendum was signaling a clear intent for a popular mandate for declaring independence. That is what your father, Massoud Barzani, certainly said. Assessing the reaction you had from the main stakeholders, would you say the world is not ready for an independent Kurdistan?

A: Well, obviously it wasn’t. But expressing a desire for the will of a nation of how they want to live is not a crime. This is what our people did. Whenever there were negotiations about future relations between the Kurdistan Region and Baghdad, the response was that this [the view articulated by the Kurdish side] did not necessarily reflect the will of all the Kurds so it was necessary to know what the Kurdish people want. Now we do know what they want: 92% voted “yes” in favor of independence.

■ Do you believe you can continue as part of Iraq given how dysfunctional this relationship has been and seems to continue to be?

A: When a nation expresses its desire for the way of life they want to have and to secure and guarantee the future of their children, that is what matters above all else. But when the world doesn’t accept this and reacts the way it did, this flies in the face of all the values and the principles and the charter of the United Nations that gives every nation the right of self-determination. The referendum was a peaceful and civilized exercise in democracy. I don’t think the Kurdish people should be held responsible or punished for saying how they want to live.

■ It’s often argued that had you left Kirkuk out of the referendum, we would not have been where we are today. Looking back, do you think it was a mistake to include Kirkuk?

A: There were two views on that. Some believed that the referendum should solely cover the current administrative region of the Kurdistan Regional Government [KRG]. Others argued that since no definitive decisions about drawing, imposing new borders, were being made, it made no difference. If an Iraqi Kurd living in Germany or elsewhere can vote in the referendum, why would a Kurd living in the disputed territories be denied that right?

■ Why did the United States come out so harshly against the referendum?



We are not allowed to be Kurds and need to be Iraqis we need to have full Iraqi rights, full constitutional rights and we needed to establish a united Kurdish bloc.

A: I don’t know. You have to ask them. When we were weighing all their concerns we concluded there was nothing wrong with the referendum and would not have any negative consequences.

■ Do you think in the absence of Kirkuk you could still have a viable independent Kurdistan?

A: The whole idea of independence is not just about a city or a region. It’s the desire of a nation wherever they may be. Kirkuk is important and it’s historically been a part of Kurdistan. Now it’s disputed. But what did the Iraqi government do to implement Article 140 of the constitution since 2005? What a future Kurdish entity would include is subject to negotiation and we have a mechanism for settling what belongs to whom and where. But the notion of independence itself was rejected.

■ Do you believe the current situation in Iraq makes it easier for ISIL to make a comeback?

A: The whole world is making a huge mistake thinking that the military defeat of ISIL will eradicate its ideology. They lost territory and were military defeated but they were not eliminated. They are still out there and regrouping, attacking. You have to look at the root causes that lead to the rise of such terrorist organizations. Has there been any real attempt to address them? No. Discrimination, exclusion of different communities. Not accepting them as equal partners. Tell me where in Iraq is stable, is safe, where services are provided? Where is water, where is electricity? Where is all the money going? Iraq is a very rich country. It’s the mismanagement of its wealth and resources and the discrimination against certain groups that fractured the country. Kurdistan was and remains by far the most secure and stable part of Iraq. Everyone who knows Iraq accepts this. But the military attacks against Kurdistan last year have cast a shadow and beg the question of why anyone would want to destabilize the most stable part of the country.

■ What happens when a new version of ISIL re-emerges and the United States comes knocking on your door for help again?

A: Our commitment to fight terrorism has nothing to do with our political relations with any country. We will fight terrorism no matter what. Had we been fighting on behalf of somebody else when we were being deprived of weapons, then we would not have fought. We fought against an enemy that brought Baghdad to its knees. We saved the country.

■ So the United States can continue to count on you as an ally?

A: Of course, we are allies even if we have disagreements on certain issues, but when it comes to the fight against terrorism, we are very important and active members of the coalition against terrorists.

■ Is there a lesson here for Syria’s Kurds?

A: The situation of the Kurds in Syria is far more complex. There are other internal issues in Syria and among the Syrian Kurds themselves. But overall there is no political agreement between the Kurds in Syria and any other country in the coalition against ISIL. The Kurds by nature are good fighters and I think the entire world gives them credit for that, be they in Syria or Iraq. The Syrian Kurds fought well against ISIL and so far

they are just being supported to continue that fight. Whether or not there will be political relations between the Syrian Kurds and the rest of the world is another matter. We don’t know and so far we haven’t seen much movement on that front.

■ Now they are fighting the Turkish army as well and we recently saw a parliamentary delegation from the KRG that included representatives from the KRG travel to Afrin to show solidarity. Is there a rapprochement between the KRG and the Rojava administration?

Barzani: Let me be clear. The Kurds are not related to one particular party or group. Turkey is saying they are fighting one particular group and not the Kurds per se. The solidarity shown by the KRG has nothing to do with political disagreements or alignments with one group or the other.

There are huge numbers of civilians who are caught in the middle of this conflict. Many of these people have affiliations with us, sympathize with us [the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq]. We have historical and political relations with them. We are one nation. The solidarity is shown with the Kurdish people. These innocent civilians need humanitarian support and we are ready to provide any assistance we can to ease their suffering. We are against war and issues that can be resolved peacefully should be addressed as such.

■ In the past you used to say that you wanted the PKK out of Sinjar. Does that still hold true?

A: Yes, we believe that if any Kurdish group or faction is from a different country they should focus on their own problems in their own country. Exporting their problems to a different country will only make things more complicated.

■ We saw Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani travel to Tehran recently and this spurred speculation about a recalibration of your relations with regional countries, neighbors. Is that happening?

A: We are surrounded by Iran, Turkey and Syria and of course in Iraq we have our own issues. We have no intention of fueling animosity between our people and these countries that are our neighbors. We have always extended the hand of friendship based on mutual respect and interests to them. As long as these countries do not pose a threat or undermine our constitutional rights we are ready to work with them to promote stability, prosperity and peace in the region.

■ Is it true that your father was invited by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Ankara recently and that he refused to go because of the Afrin operation?

A: I haven’t heard anything about that.

■ How do you assess your relationship with Turkey in the aftermath of the referendum? What has changed?

A: Turkey has been a critical partner for the KRG. Economically it’s been the corridor between Kurdistan and the rest of the world. Throughout the turbulence around the referendum Turkey never sealed its borders, and that helped prevent a humanitarian crisis in Kurdistan. It was a very important gesture. Sure, there are always tensions, ups and downs, in relations, but let’s look at the bright future we have together.

■ Turning to your own domestic agenda, when are you going to be holding presidential and parliamentary elections?

A: The KRG was for early elections, at least the KDP, the dominant party, was calling for early elections even before the Iraqi [parliamentary elections on May 12] so that the Kurds would come out united and would have much more influence in Baghdad. Now that we are not allowed to be Kurds and need to be Iraqis we need to have full Iraqi rights, full constitutional rights and we needed to establish a united Kurdish bloc. This is what the KDP was pushing for. But unfortunately other parties in Kurdistan, some for political reasons, believing that creating their own coalition would win them more votes, created their own. And the PUK was not ready to take part in elections before the Iraqi ones because of their own internal issues. That is why they didn’t come forward and they were a critical partner. They had to be on board for any decisions we made to hold elections. Now it’s too late because the Electoral Board needs to be given advance notice before any elections are held and the deadline has expired. Right now the closest time to our elections would be the first week of September.

■ Who is going to run for president? Do any candidates leap to mind?

A: The issue of the presidency is negotiable. This parliament is not ready to discuss. We need to elect a new parliament that will have a mandate to legislate the new structure of the government. This includes debating the role of the presidency and whether it’s needed at all and if so how the president should be elected -- directly by the people or by the parliament.

■ So can the Kurds forge a common front ahead of the Iraqi parliamentary elections?

A: I think the Kurdish people expect leadership from the Kurdish parties. If any party tries to hold their own personal interests and agendas above those of the people, they will be held accountable. People expect the parties to set aside their quarrels and to come together. I think there is a real chance this could be achieved. There are ongoing talks and the environment is much more promising for unity than before. Even if they run from different slates or groups, there is a chance that they can form a common front. The most important part of these Iraqi elections will be post-election coalitions that are formed and there will be lots of people knocking on the Kurds’ door.

■ Finally, the economy, what is going on with the airports and how will you survive with the loss of Kirkuk oil revenue, among other things?

A: Shutting the airports was an unnecessary sanctioning of the Kurds. It was done out of revenge and spite, I believe. And it’s unconstitutional because airports should not be shut down for political reasons. There have been negotiations to reopen Erbil and Sulaimaniyah airports between Baghdad and the KRG. There were talks about sharing data and information, as part of an integrated data system, and we agreed. Then there was the matter of immigration, visas and customs. The KRG agreed to go along with any demands from Baghdad that were constitutionally justified. But when Baghdad ran out of excuses for not reopening the airports, it came up with objections about security saying the airports were a national port of entry that fell under the jurisdiction of the federal authorities. The KRG accepted that the local units currently controlling and securing the airports report directly to the federal authorities. There are no more excuses left to not reopen the airports. It’s all political and it’s part of the government’s election campaign so an entire nation is being penalized just for the sake of securing its victory at the polls by playing the Iraqi nationalist card. We met recently with Prime Minister Abadi and other officials and he promised that the airports would be open soon. We have heard the word “soon” used many times before. Let’s see if they keep their promise.

In terms of revenue sharing from oil, etc., this is all laid out in the Iraqi Constitution and if Baghdad had honored its side of the deal we would not be where we are today. Every month that passes without Kurdish civil servants being paid their salaries by the central government, without the KRG’s share of the national budget being disbursed, the question of where those funds are going becomes ever more pressing. Will that accumulated money be repaid to the Kurds? There is no escrow account. Has anyone asked Baghdad where does that money, which has remain largely unpaid since 2014, go?

■ What about the internally displaced Iraqis, is the government not sending any funds to support them?

A: No, they are not, and by the way, why are people still fleeing the rest of Iraq and still coming to live in tents, in camps in Iraqi Kurdistan? It’s because of the continuing lack of services and security in their hometowns and villages. Because Kurdistan is still the safest, freest and most secure part of Iraq. (Source: Al Monitor)

Kimball calls Trump's assumptions about JCPOA 'flawed'

1 → Thus far, Congress has wisely refrained from pursuing legislation that would violate the JCPOA or seek to change its terms. Legislation that violates the agreement by unilaterally attempting to extend or alter the nuclear restrictions on Iran poses just as great a risk as Trump revoking the waivers, which would put the United States in material breach of its JCPOA commitments.

It is abundantly clear that Washington's P5+1 negotiating partners, (China, France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom) reject Trump's proposals. Instead, the EU3 argue, there may be an opportunity to negotiate with Iran arrangements that build upon the JCPOA, but that will only be possible, they say, if all side fully implement and respect the original 2015 deal.

Over the past 3 month the European states have made lots of efforts to convince the US congress and administration that a better agreement with Iran cannot be possible made on the ruins of the JCPOA. Will the EU and the US congress be able to reach an agreement on the JCPOA that can meet Trump's demands? What can be like such a possible agreement?

A: It may be possible that the Trump administration and the EU3 can agree to work together on a plan to address certain issues outside the scope of the JCPOA, such as Iran's support for militias and military forces in the greater Middle East region and to address concerns that Iran may seek to develop and test long-range ballistic missiles that can be used to deliver nuclear weapons. It may also

Iran has strongly said that it will not accept any changes to the JCPOA and will not accept any limitation on its missile program. And from the other side EU is under Trump's pressure. How can EU meet Trump's demands so that at the same time allow Iran to get benefit from the JCPOA?

A: While the JCPOA does not cover Iran's ballistic missile activities, the UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorses the deal, calls upon Iran to refrain from testing ballistic missiles designed to be nuclear-capable. While this is a nonbinding condition, the eight-year prohibitions on selling or purchasing certain ballistic missiles and related technologies without prior approval from the Security Council are absolute.

Since the Iran nuclear deal was implemented in January 2016, the UN secretary-general has issued four reports assessing the implementation the resolution. Several of the reports, including the most recent in December 2017, call into question Iran's compliance with the restrictions, noting several allegations of illicit transfer of ballistic missile systems.

The JCPOA does not rule out missile-related sanctions. The United States and Europe could cooperate on further sanctions to address Iran's ballistic missile activity, but given Iran's own security concerns and the current U.S.-Iranian



tensions, such an effort is unlikely to affect Iran's missile programs and plans in a significant way.

What may be a more useful would be for the EU to engage with Iran in discussions on region-wide missile limits and for Iran to reiterate, and perhaps formalize, its existing commitment not to develop or pursue ballistic missiles to a range of 2,000 kilometers or more. A region-wide agreement limiting ballistic missile numbers and payload capacity could be an important way to reduce tensions and improve security in the region.

What can be the EU alternative, if the US withdraws from the JCPOA? If the US withdraws, the situation for investment and working in Iran will worsen. In this case what real guarantees can be offered to Iran by the EU?

A: If Trump backs out of the accord and tries to reimpose nuclear-related sanctions absent clear evidence of Iranian violations, the United States would be blamed, international support for new sanctions would be soft or non-existent. If Iran chose to respond by exceeding the nuclear limits set by the deal or by taking more aggressive military action in Syria or Yemen or elsewhere, international investment and trade with Iran would dry up and the Iranian economy would suffer. This would be a lose-lose scenario for everyone.

If Trump decides not to reimpose nuclear-related sanctions against Iran that were lifted under the terms of the JCPOA, European entities, which would be subject to secondary

U.S. sanctions, will likely try to take precautions to insulate their commercial and financial entities with exposure in Iran from such U.S. penalties.

EU can ask EBRD bank to monitor the small and medium companies' exchanges in order to not let the remaining sanctions be evaded. What bank guarantees can EU offer to Iran?

A: Yes, it is possible for the European Union to create a "safe channel" for trade and investment with Iran to continue. Another option would be for the European Union to put in place regulations to protect its firms doing business in Iran if the United States withdraws from the 2015 nuclear deal and restores extraterritorial sanctions. This could sustain major trade and investment that was opened up when the JCPOA was implemented, but there would still be a cloud of uncertainty about the future of the JCPOA that could impede foreign trade and investment. It may also be a difficult decision for the Europeans because it would create a major rift with the United States and could limit European firm's access to the U.S. banking system.

The bottom line is that there is no realistic option for scrapping the agreement and negotiating a "better deal." The best approach, by far, would be to continue to implement and vigorously enforce the multilateral nuclear deal and seek to build global support for the widespread adoption of its most innovative verification and nonproliferation measures.

Supporting TAPI Saudi Arabia tries to decrease Iran's regional role: Expert

1 → The Turkmen economy has been fueled primarily by natural gas. Turkmenistan holds 32 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, the world's fourth-largest reserves. With a small domestic market, Turkmenistan has been able to export the majority of what it produces. With regard to increasing energy demand in India, this country needs diversify energy supply, gas resources in Central Asia especially in Turkmenistan would be one of these resources. This project also would be beneficial for both Pakistan as consumer and transit country and for India as importer. There is a political tension in India and Pakistan relations and maybe TAPI would have positive effect of regional cooperation, stability and security. TAPI may be key factor in India- Pakistan relations to decrease tensions and develop bilateral relations. TAPI natural gas pipeline -which aims to connect Central Asian energy to South Asian consumers -each involve a high degree of intra-regional cooperation. Pakistan will gain transit fee from this project and also will consume natural gas imported by it.

How can this project affect the economy and security of the region particularly Afghanistan?

A: According to contract, Afghanistan will import gas via this project to meet its domestic demand and will gain \$400000 to \$500000 annually transit fee. This will help Afghanistan to gain more and partly recover its damaged economy. TAPI project will help Afghanistan to be an actor in regional energy market. The pipeline will pass through the provinces of Herat, Farah, Nimroz, Helmand and Kandahar. Taliban control these provinces. In statement which Taliban sent to local media, this group declared that they will not allow any group or state to disrupt this project. As Taliban controls this region, security threats against TAPI project in this part of Afghanistan will decrease and security concern will down.

Why Saudi Arabia supports the project? A: These countries hold major oil reserves in the region and are trying to play an important role in OPEC and world energy market as well. Current tensions in bilateral relation forced countries to use any means to decrease counterpart role in regional security stability. Saudi Arabia has expressed support for the TAPI transnational gas pipeline. Saudi's financial support for TAPI would help Pakistan not to need Iranian gas. And it means that

Iran will lose Pakistan natural gas market if TAPI materialize project. Last decade India was interested to buy Iran natural gas via Peace Pipeline, but due to US pressure this project did not materialize. It seems that when TAPI comes to online, India no more will be interested to Iran natural gas. Pakistan and Afghanistan are Iran electricity buyer, during inaugural ceremony Pakistan and Turkmenistan agreed to export electricity from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and maybe in near future if this electricity export project materialize, Pakistan decrease electricity volume which imported from Iran.

What are the challenges and opportunities of the project for Iran?

A: Iran has plans to export natural gas to its neighbors, according to Iran 20 years development plan, Iran has to increase its share from world natural gas to %10. Iran signed agreement with Pakistan, Oman, and Iraq to export gas. At present only Iran-Iraq pipeline near to officially open. Pakistan is planning to import more LNG from Qatar, and last week Russian giant Gazprom announced that it is considering the potential of delivering liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies to Pakistan by October 2017, Pakistan and

Russia signed an intergovernmental cooperation agreement for the delivery of liquefied natural gas in October last year. Pakistan currently has two LNG import terminals in operation in Karachi, however, with a total capacity of around 9.5 mtpa, a significant supply shortfall of 19 million tons of LNG per annum is still expected. It seems that if TAPI will be successful and Pakistan import more LNG from Qatar and Russia there is no more need for Iran natural gas and Iran-Pakistan pipeline.

How do you evaluate Iran's energy diplomacy?

A: Energy diplomacy is a reaction to geopolitical threats and limits. In other words, using diplomatic mobility, economic planning, developing technical capacities and using economic resources to provide all conditions required for activating energy diplomacy. Iran's share in the world energy market is insignificant. Iran could play a more active role in the world energy market, and mobility in production, export, marketing, exploration and extraction in the energy sector could create a special position for every country. Iran must be more active in foreign diplomacy to eliminate problems with its neighbors.

Ceasefire in Syria: What should come next?

TEHRAN (FNA) — On Saturday, February 24, the UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution, demanding a 30-day ceasefire across Syria to allow for humanitarian aid deliveries and medical evacuations.

Upon requests from Iran, Russia and Syria, however, amendments were made to exclude ISIL, Al-Qaeda and Nusra Front along with "individuals, groups, undertakings and entities" associated with the terrorist groups from the ceasefire. It is precisely under these amendments that Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri said a day later that both Tehran and Damascus would comply with the month-long Syria ceasefire, but that attacks would continue in some Damascus suburbs held by terrorists.

Maj. Gen Baqeri also said the architects of the ceasefire (a reference to the United States and its allies) had it passed at the UN in order to forestall the Syrian army's eradication of terrorists in the Damascus suburbs. In his words, "This time again, like in the past, those who do not want security and peace in Syria took up the banner of ceasefire in order to support terrorists after they saw the Syrian army and government were cleansing the Damascus suburbs."

Few points could be said in this respect:

- There is no official statement from the US government on what happens after the month-long ceasefire, because there is no resignation to the idea that the US occupying troops and their Qaeda-allied proxies are going to withdraw from Northern Syria, much less put down their arms and stop attacking the Syrian government and its allies.

- This is potentially a very complicated matter. The presence of the US troops potentially makes it difficult to Damascus and its Iranian-Russian allies to finish off the remnants of terrorist groups in the remaining territories inside the country. Moreover, the presence of US troops makes it difficult for



Syria to send troops to resist the Turkish invasion of Kurdish regions, as the US has intentionally tended to kill Syrian pro-government forces, in rather large numbers, whenever they get close to US deployments. Mind you, Syria doesn't support the US having troops in their country.

- The US is assisting the Kurds to provoke them into independence, while it also continues covert and somehow over aid to Qaeda-allied rebels, and at this dangerous point it's not at all clear how they can co-exist in the occupied territories in post-ISIL Syria. Worse still, though US commanders have said they are ready to fight if Turkey starts attacking, the US and Turkey have also made a deal to try to avoid a fight over Manbij, one which Turkey hopes will end with US and Turkish troops in the city and the Kurds kicked out.

- As long as this is the case, Syria will see no lasting peace, let alone a permanent ceasefire. The US will continue to hype Syrian government attacks against terror-held areas to justify new UN resolutions while downplaying

the effects of its own coalition air strikes against civilian objects, which undermines the legitimacy of human rights advocacy. Nevertheless, Tehran and Damascus will still adhere to the ceasefire resolution – although parts of the suburbs of Damascus, which are held by the terrorists, are not covered by the ceasefire and clean-up operations will continue apace.

As is, under International Law and the UN Charter, the Syrian army has every right to drive out Qaeda-linked Al-Nusra terrorists from Eastern Ghouta which has become a festering ground for foreign-backed terrorist groups launching mortar attacks on Damascus. Lest we forget, the UN resolution also allows the Syrian government to continue similar operations against terrorists in Idlib province, the country's largest remaining militant stronghold.

Moreover, with or without a lasting ceasefire agreement, all US occupying troops must leave the country at the earliest. The US should stop supporting its separatist Kurds and terror proxies with air cover and military support. It cannot and should never be allowed to use the ongoing ceasefire to reorganize its infamous proxies for fresh attacks against the Syrian government and its allies. Last but not the least, America's favorite terrorists cannot and should never be allowed to have a say or play any role in the ongoing peace talks organized by Iran, Russia and Turkey.

Anyone genuinely concerned with saving lives should urge the United States to end its regime-change bloodshed in the Arab country and join in UN-backed peace talks, rather than boycotting them. Above all, the United Nations can and should exert pressure on the US to stop its reckless campaign of encouraging the overthrow of authority in post-ISIL Syria. The bitter experience in Iraq and Afghanistan tells us the vacuums will always be filled by warlords, foreign mercenaries, and Wahhabi-Takfiri death cults.

UK pundit calls British UN resolution against Iran, Yemen 'politically-motivated'

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A prominent political analyst based in London denounced a UK-drafted United Nations Security Council resolution against Iran and war-torn Yemen as "politically-motivated" and said Britain, itself, is profiteering from the ongoing Saudi war on the Arabian Peninsula country.

"The London-drafted resolution, which, undoubtedly, has come from the Americans, is a politically-motivated one which seeks to ensure that Saudi Arabia, a key friend and ally of the UK and US, is allowed to continue prosecuting a most horrific war against Yemeni civilians..." Marcus Papadopoulos said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

"Furthermore, the British are keen for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen to continue because this will mean that vast sums of money will continue to pour into the bank accounts of British defense companies, which are supplying the Saudis with the weapons which the Saudi military is using in Yemen against civilians," he said.

Papadopoulos is an expert on Russia and the publisher and editor of Politics First, a non-partisan publication for the UK Parliament. He earned his MA in Modern History and his Ph.D. in Russian history from Royal Holloway, University of London. His comments and interviews have appeared in various news outlets, including RT, Al Jazeera, Rossiya 24, TASS and RIA Novosti.

The following is the full text of the interview:

As you may know, the United Nations Security Council is expected to vote Monday on a British-drafted resolution that would renew anti-Yemen sanctions and also seeks a "condemnation" of Iran for allegations of violating an arms embargo on the war-torn Arabian Peninsula state. Iran has repeatedly dismissed as "baseless" claims about arms supply to Yemen. In a Wednesday meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Iran's permanent representative to the world body, Gholam Ali Khoshroo, warned the UNSC that its support for any unilateral measure can aggravate the situation in Yemen. Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebeniza recently said that he opposed the draft, saying it should be about renewing the work of experts monitoring sanctions against Yemen, not condemning Iran. What do you think about the resolution and whether it would be approved?

A: Britain should be condemned by international humanitarian organizations across the world for the atrocious resolution, which it has put before the United Nations Security Council. The London-drafted resolution, which, undoubtedly, has come from the Americans, is a politically-motivated one which seeks to ensure that Saudi Arabia, a key friend and ally of the UK and US, is allowed to continue prosecuting a most horrific war against Yemeni civilians to ensure that Riyadh - and, ultimately, the US - is the dominant foreign power in Yemen. Furthermore, the British are keen for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen to continue because this will mean that vast sums of money will continue to pour into the bank accounts of British defense companies, which are supplying the Saudis with the weapons which the Saudi military is using in Yemen against civilians. It is believed that Britain has sold more than six billion pounds worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia for usage in Yemen, with BAE Systems and Raytheon being the main suppliers. Once again, Britain is profiteering from war and murder; the UK economy has the blood of Yemeni civilians up to its neck. I have long considered British Foreign Policy to be one of the most murderous and depraved in the world - and Yemen simply reinforces my conviction.

The UN children's agency has recently said the ongoing Saudi aggression against Yemen has killed or injured more than 5,000 children and left another 400,000 severely malnourished and fighting for their lives. UNICEF said nearly 2 million Yemeni children were out of school, a quarter of them since the start of the war. In the meantime, the Saudi-led war on Yemen has led to a cholera epidemic in Yemen, which is one of the worst ever recorded in the world. The epidemic is likely to surge again around March, according to media reports. What do you think about the Saudi crimes in the Arabian Peninsula country? Why does the UNSC not impose sanctions against Riyadh?

A: If there was any justice in this world, the Saudi establishment would be hauled before a court of law and tried for its monstrous crimes against humanity in Yemen. It defies belief that the Saudis have been able to continue, unimpeded, with their annihilation of Yemeni civilians for three years now. Where are the liberal and conservative politicians and journalists in Britain and in America who have bestowed on themselves the title of guardians of civilization in the world? Why are they not castigating Saudi actions in Yemen? Why are they not calling on their respective governments to cease selling arms to Riyadh? And why are they not on the side of Yemeni babies and children who have been, literally speaking, torn to shreds by British and American weapons? Those British and American politicians and journalists are abominable.

I yearn to see the day when the UNSC imposes sanctions on Saudi Arabia but, regrettably, I will have to keep on waiting. Because all five permanent members of the UNSC have extensive dealings with the Saudis, in particular the US and the UK but also Russia, which is a grave disappointment especially when you consider that the Saudis helped to finance both Chechen wars and sent many Saudi and non-Saudi fighters to Chechnya to kill Russian soldiers and Russian and Chechen civilians. One such despicable Saudi who committed heinous crimes in Chechnya was Ibn al-Khattab.

Whilst countries are dependent on Saudi Arabia for their oil and/or want to make money from the Saudis, such as by selling them arms, then Riyadh will remain untouchable at the UNSC. That is a terribly depressing reality.

Some Western countries that claim to be champions of human rights are pursuing double-standard policies on Saudi Arabia's atrocities. How do you see the role of Washington and London in the Riyadh regime's heinous crimes against Yemen?

A: The US and the UK are the two biggest violators of human rights in the world, followed closely by Saudi Arabia. The case of Yemen is just one example of that - the list is endless, ranging from Vietnam to Chile to El Salvador to Cyprus to Palestine to the former Yugoslavia to Iraq to Syria to Yemen and so on and so on. In the case of the UK, if there was a free and independent press in this country, then the British public would know the truth about Britain's behavior on the international stage and how British taxpayers' money is spent, such as on bankrolling terrorism, which includes the White Helmets in Syria. But, alas, that will not happen because he who controls the media is able to mold public opinion. That said, however, there may be a glimmer of hope, should Jeremy Corbyn become the next Prime Minister of the UK. As Mr. Corbyn has said in regard to Britain's unfree press: "Change is coming."

Rohingya refugees have to know they will be safe before they can return

By Farah Kabir

"It was really difficult for me to get here. We came from really far away. We ran and ran and somehow got here. Even when I think about it now, it makes me want to cry," Normeen told me.

Normeen is from Myanmar's Rohingya community. Her family were shrimp farmers in Rakhine state. They had recently built a house, after years of saving up. Last month I met her in Cox's Bazar, at one of the hastily built refugee camps in Bangladesh. Six months ago, at the start of the violence, Normeen's house was burned to the ground. She and her family narrowly escaped out of a side door. She remembers "lots of gunfire".

Over the past six months more than 600,000 Rohingya people have experienced the same terrifying journey as Normeen. In nearly 15 years working on humanitarian disasters, I have never seen a crisis like this. Since last

August I have visited camps in Bangladesh regularly, to speak to the women and girls who have borne the brunt of the crisis in many ways. Many have experienced appalling sexual violence and lost children in Myanmar. I have heard from women whose husbands disappeared without explanation. Some led their families through rivers and mud for days. Some gave birth while on the journey. Many were malnourished by the time they crossed the border.

Half a year on from the violence that led them to flee, women like Normeen are struggling with the trauma of what they have seen and experienced. They're concerned for their safety in the crowded camps. And they're deeply afraid of what might come next.

Solving the crisis

I would go back only if I could be assured a good life, and if I could sleep without fear

governments, including the UK's, are understandably keen to solve this crisis; and in Bangladesh, pressure is growing to send the refugees back to Myanmar. This week it emerged that the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar have agreed to start repatriating some 6,000 refugees.

Yet before anyone is returned it is essential to listen to the refugees – and women in particular. The human rights violations that led Normeen and hundreds of thousands of others to flee Myanmar are still a threat.

The Myanmar government still refuses to allow humanitarian and human rights organizations into Rakhine state – fuelling fears that the atrocities could be continuing.

The UN has already said that the abuses visited upon the Rohingya people look like a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing". The UN security council has heard

from refugee experts that Rohingya people are still fleeing Myanmar – and that because of violations there the "conditions aren't right" to return them.

Preventing camp violence

Women in the camps have told us their priorities include community watch groups, to prevent violence in the camps; private toilets for women and girls, so they aren't afraid of sexual attacks; and spaces where women and girls can talk, and process the horrors they have witnessed. We have also heard of their fear of being forcibly sent back, without assurances that they will be safe. In the words of one woman, who didn't wish to be named: "I would go back only if I could be assured a good life, and if I could sleep without fear."

These fears are entirely understandable. To be sure, a camp is not somewhere that anyone would want to stay permanently. I have seen the conditions for myself;

entire families are confined to makeshift tents, made of tarpaulin and bamboo frames.

Many thousands of people are living without electricity, and with inadequate washing facilities and sanitation. Women and their families badly need some form of livelihood, so they can live in dignity.

Still, it would be unconscionable for people like Normeen to be returned over the border against their will.

The UK's Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, has said repeatedly that the Rohingya people must be allowed to return to their homes only voluntarily, under international oversight. He must now urgently hold Bangladesh and Myanmar to these words. The Rohingya people, and no one else, should be allowed to decide their future.

(Source: The Guardian)

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Al-Khalifa not providing Bahrainis with a modicum of democracy: ex-U.S. diplomat

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — An American author and former diplomat slammed the Bahraini regime for its continued human right violations and crackdown on dissent in the Persian Gulf country, saying the Bahraini people are deprived of “even a modicum of democracy”.

“The Al-Khalifas ignore the basic needs of their people and refuse to provide them with even a modicum of democracy,” Michael Springmann, the former head of the American visa bureau in Saudi Arabia, said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

“The government uses force to attempt to control its populace—and fails,” he said, adding, “If anything, the king’s iron boot on his people’s neck intensifies and hardens dissent, a dissent that has been growing for seven years.”

“When the end comes, hopefully, sooner than later, it will be bloody and the Al Khalifas might not have time to flee to Saudi Arabia, another of its patrons,” the former diplomat said.

J. Michael Springmann served in the US government as a diplomat with the State Department’s Foreign Service, with postings in Germany, India, and Saudi Arabia. He left federal service and currently practices law in the Washington, DC, area. Springmann’s works and interviews have been published in numerous foreign policy publications, including Covert Action Quarterly, Unclassified, Global Outlook, the Public Record, OpEdNews, Global Research and Foreign Policy Journal.

The following is the full text of the interview:

■ As you may know, Bahraini regime forces have recently attacked protesters in several cities and villages across the Arab country, several days after large crowds of people marked the seventh anniversary of the February 14 revolution in the Persian Gulf kingdom. The protesters chanted anti-regime slogans and underlined that they will continue protests until their demands are met. What is your assessment of the latest protest rallies and the Manama regime’s crackdown on dissidents?

A: My assessment of the almost daily protest rallies and the Manama regime’s crackdown on dissidents is that little will happen until the American and European Main Stream Media (MSM) begin to report on them. For seven years, Sunni and Shiite have demonstrated against the excesses of the Al Khalifa government. Now, they have even taken their protests about repression to Munich, where a Security Conference was held. Gathering outside the hotel Bayerischer Hof, the conference’s site, demonstrators symbolically put their case to more than 30 heads of state and government and over 100 cabinet ministers from across the globe. (The meeting’s purpose was to come together for



discussions on major international security challenges.) That is it in a nutshell. “Major international security challenges” apparently do not exist in Bahrain or Yemen or anywhere else that the Munich conference attendees don’t deem important. And they do not deem them important because Bahrain’s capital, Manama, is the base for the US 5th Fleet, there evidently to protect the undemocratic members of the (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council from Iran.

The United States and Europe are also apparently entranced by the prospects of arms sales and training of Bahrain’s so-called security forces. In September 2017, the American State Department approved nearly US\$4 billion in weapons sales to King Khalifa. Additionally, according to the September 29, 2016, Irish Times, “an international human rights organization has called for a Northern Ireland company to stop training security forces in Bahrain amid concerns about torture.”

Moreover, on March 25, 2016, Independent, a British newspaper, reported: “The revelation that elite Royal Navy commandos are running week-long training courses for Bahraini personnel has outraged human rights campaigners, who accuse the regime of using snipers to target protesters during anti-government protests in 2011.”

■ Given the increasing number of death sentences and life imprisonment verdicts issued on trumped-up charges against Bahraini human rights activists and protesters, it seems that the Manama regime is not going to ease tensions in the tiny island country, what do you think about the verdicts and how do you see the future of the country?

A: The verdicts, of course, are appalling. No democratic, enlightened government relies on trumped-up charges to execute or hand down life sentences to legitimate protesters against repression. While, at present,

the Bahraini government has the support of the United States and the United Kingdom, a concerted human rights campaign in those countries and others could create future problems for the government of that unhappy land. Withdrawal or curtailment of funds propping up the despotic King might enable the freedom fighters there in Bahrain to make more headway against the so-called “security” forces. Also, withdrawing all or part of the 5th Fleet from Manama would deprive Bahrain of a good bit of its income from US government expenditures and the funds flowing from the roughly 20,000 sailors and civilians serving there.

As I have noted a number of times before, I see the Bahraini King’s position analogous to that of the French absolute monarch Louis XVI. That unfortunate man did not take heed of the changes sweeping through 18th Century France. Nor did he recognize and act upon the widespread discontents affecting his people. In the end, this brought on revolution and the lopping off of the king’s head.

I believe something similar might happen in Bahrain. The Al Khalifas ignore the basic needs of their people and refuse to provide them even a modicum of democracy. The government uses force to attempt to control its populace—and fails. If anything, the king’s iron boot on his people’s neck intensifies and hardens dissent, a dissent that has been growing for seven years. When the end comes, hopefully, sooner than later, it will be bloody and the Al Khalifas might not have time to flee to Saudi Arabia, another of its patrons.

■ What do you think about the Al Khalifa regime’s recent attempts to normalize ties with Israel? Don’t you think that the Saudi lobby is behind such attempts and the ongoing crackdown on the Shiite majority in Bahrain?

A: In my view, the Saudi government is not behind efforts to improve Bahrain’s relations with Israel. Certainly, that would help

Saudi Arabia gain allies to use against Iran. However, I see this to be strictly Israel’s plan, which has the advantage of further dividing the Arab world. For example, Israel is deeply into Northern Iraq and the Kurdish people there, seeking to split Iraq and posture as the patron of repressed peoples everywhere—except in Occupied Palestine.

While there are no formal relations between the Zionist entity and Bahrain, there is and has been plenty of behind-the-scenes contact and cooperation. In December 2017, Al Jazeera reported “(a Bahraini delegation) arrived in Israel with a goal to “send a message of religious tolerance and coexistence”... In turn, the same article noted that a group from the Israeli Wiesenthal Center (a far-right Zionist organization) would visit Bahrain in 2018 “to start normal contacts.” But this is nothing new.

“Way back in 2011, the Washington Times ran a story (April 11) saying “The Persian Gulf kingdom of Bahrain has had secret contacts with Israel’s Mossad intelligence service, according to a leaked US diplomatic cable.”

“The cable reportedly was sent to Washington from the US Embassy in Manama, the capital of Bahrain, after a Feb. 15, 2005, meeting between then-US Ambassador William Monroe and Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa.”

“(The king) revealed that Bahrain already has contacts with Israel at the intelligence/security level (ie with Mossad) and indicated that Bahrain will be willing to move forward in other areas,” the cable said.

Certainly, the Saudis are and have been providing aid to their brutal sister “state” since their 2011 invasion to restore order. However, we should also look to the United States for facilitating these Israeli-Bahraini contacts. The Electronic Intifada reported December 15, 2017 “An adviser to Donald Trump may be playing a key role in forging an alliance between Israel and Bahrain.”

“An investigation by the research group Bahrain Watch published this week reveals that the “interfaith” organization This Is Bahrain has close ties with Johnnie Moore, an “evangelical adviser” to the US president, the report said.

“Moore runs a public relations firm that caters to governments and his efforts appear aimed at whitewashing human rights crimes by Bahrain’s authorities during and since a 2011 uprising, as well as normalizing ties with Israel.”

“Moore also backed the president’s decision this month to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

“This week Moore personally shepherded a This is Bahrain “interfaith” delegation on a tour of Jerusalem.”

Turkey turning the tables on Iran, Russia, Syria: U.S. analyst



TEHRAN (Tasnim) — An American counter-terrorism analyst said Turkey’s ongoing offensive in Syria’s northwestern region of Afrin sends a clear message to Iran, Russia, and Syria that they should make big concessions in exchange for their political-military alliance with Ankara over the Arab country.

“Turkey is simply generating political and military capital in the form of territorial conquest, that it will use to gain concessions and agreements and treaties and partnerships at the Istanbul conference with Russia, Syria, and Iran. Turkey intends to push as far and deep as it can into Syria, so that it can retreat on its own terms and for a price,” Scott Bennett, from San Francisco, told the Tasnim News Agency.

Turkey will demand land from in exchange for its political-military alliance with Russia-Syria-Iran, he added.

Bennett is a US Army Special Operations Officer (11th Psychological Operations Battalion, Civil Affairs-Psychological Operations Command), and a global psychological warfare-counterterrorism analyst, formerly with defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton. He received a Direct Commission as an Officer, held a Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmentalized Information (TS/SCI) security clearance, and worked in the highest levels of international counterterrorism in Washington DC and MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida. He has developed and managed psychological warfare theories, products, and operations for US Special Operations Command, US Central Command, the State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism, and other government agencies.

The following is the full text of the interview.

■ Earlier on Thursday, the Syrian daily al-Watan reported that some 500 Syrian popular forces had entered the Afrin region since Tuesday. The pro-Damascus fighters will defend the Syrian city against Turkey’s military operation. The Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) confirmed that hundreds of pro-government fighters had been deployed on the frontlines in Afrin to help counter the Turkish offensive. What’s your take on this?

A: What is emerging is the new alliance between the Syrian government forces and the Kurdish forces to stand against Turkey’s invasion into Syria and attempt to confiscate land in an attempted resurrection of the “Ottoman Empire”. The classic saying, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend”, is the strategic calculus determine the Kurdish and Syrian government choices in these matters, and ultimately they will push both Turkey and the United States completely out of Syria. As much as the Kurds may enjoy the idea of an independent region, it will not be allowed by any other region bordering it, so automatically it becomes “null and void” and unrealistic. The Kurds not only know this, but they know the United States has no loyalty or intention of honoring the Kurds for their own sake, but rather only using the Kurds for the benefit of the United States. This “political prostitution” has been exercised against Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Kurds have learned not to fall into the same trap.

■ A pro-Damascus demonstration in Afrin came one day after Ankara’s warning to consider any group coming to the help of the Kurds in the Syrian city as a “legitimate target” for the Turkish military. Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said Wednesday that any force in Afrin, including the Syrian government, would be targeted by Turkish troops if they assist the YPG. What do you think about Turkey’s warning?

A: Turkey is simply generating political and military capital in the form of territorial conquest, that it will use to gain concessions and agreements and treaties and partnerships at the Istanbul conference with Russia, Syria, and Iran. Turkey intends to push as far and deep as it can into Syria, so that it can retreat on its own terms and for a price. Turkey is isolating and rejecting the United States in exchange for a renewed alliance with Russia and Iran. Syria is simply the “neutral zone” that Turkey will demand land from in exchange for its political-military alliance with Russia-Syria-Iran. As much as Turkey is troubled with its own extreme radical jihadist strain, it has the political ruthlessness to deal with them, and it will use this to pressure Russia-Syria-Iran to allow Turkey a limited territorial expansion. This is the political gamesmanship of our modern theater.

■ What might the future hold about Afrin? Will Turkey withdraw its forces? What’s your prediction? Some experts say that it is the worst strategic mistake Syria has made all through the process of the conflict? Do you believe so?

A: Afrin will be returned to Syrian control by Turkey with the condition that Turkey does not suffer any attacks or disruptions by the Kurds—anywhere. Syria will agree to police its own territory and the Kurds will agree to be subjugated by the Syrian government and not attack or disrupt Turkey, in order to Turkey to retreat from Afrin and surrender its territorial gains. As part of this Russia will agree to be a stakeholder in the peace between Turkey, the Kurds, and Syria. Of course, what will also occur as a result of this new political agreement is Israel will increasingly launch “false flag attacks”, “drone strikes”, and other military operations to disrupt this peace agreement. Israel may also try and facilitate “false flag attacks in Europe” to try and goad France and Britain into reacting and taking action against Syria. Of course, new chemical attacks may also be planted by Israel and Saudi Arabia and the American CIA and UK MI6 to cause disruption. This should be countermeasured by massive diplomatic-informational-public relations attacks against Saudi Arabia’s Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. Only by forcibly taking the fight directly into the political circles of Israel and Saudi Arabia, can their foreign interference be frustrated. The same kind of informational “revelations” should be initiated against US Vice President Mike Pence, and a campaign to expose him as the leading “warmonger” and “threat” against world peace, citing Pence as the author of the “North Korean”, “Iranian”, and “Russian” aggression, in order to force President Donald Trump to abandon the Pence foreign policy and explore options for a new Vice President in the 2020 election.

The American people voted for President Trump because he promises to end the destructive “regime change” and “global war” policies of G.W. Bush and Obama. It is time to demand he honor their vote and fulfill that promise.

Afrin incursion reveals ‘real face’ of Turkey: Belgian analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A Belgian political analyst and writer described Turkey’s military operation in Syria’s Afrin region as a “declaration of war” against the Arab country, adding that the ongoing incursion shows Ankara’s “real face” under President Recept Tayyip Erdogan.

“The threats of the Turkish government towards Syria that ‘any force in Afrin, including the Syrian government, would be targeted by Turkish troops if they assist the YPG’ and that ‘any group coming to the help of the Kurds in the Syrian city is regarded as a legitimate target’ is very close to a declaration of war and shows the real face of the Turkish regime under President Erdogan,” Kris Janssen, head of a Belgium-based Syrian Friendship Association, told the Tasnim News Agency.

Following is the full text of the interview.

■ On Thursday, the Syrian daily al-Watan reported that some 500 Syrian popular forces had entered the Afrin region since Tuesday. The pro-Damascus fighters will defend the Syrian city against Turkey’s military operation. The Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) confirmed that hundreds of pro-government fighters had been deployed on the frontlines in Afrin to help counter the Turkish offensive. What’s your take on this?

A: There is no doubt that a considerable number of Syrian popular forces, allies of the Syrian Arab Army but not part of it, arrived at the borders of the Afrin region. It is not possible to confirm the exact number but several sources, including the YPG, spoke of 500 troops and the number of videos, pictures and snapshots tend to confirm this mentioned number of 500.

I think that the purpose of this action was to send a message to the Erdogan regime. When the Syrian popular forces arrived, they were not immediately deployed on the frontlines of Afrin or within the city. The message to Turkey was dual: the Syrian Kurds were, are and will stay in the first place, Syrian citizens. If Turkey attacks in a barbaric way Syrian citizens, the Syrian government will react and defend its citizens. The second part of the message is that the Syrian government will never accept that foreign armies (American, Turkish or ...others) are present and occupying Syrian territory without the approval of the Syrian government. In contrast, the Iranian advisers and Russian air force and support personnel are in Syria because the Syrian government welcomed and invited them. Iran and Russia are present in Syria with full consent of the Syrian government. But this case, the Turkish invasion, and occupation of parts of Syrian territory, is unacceptable for the Syrian government and the 500 Syrian popular forces are a signal to Ankara. Of course, if Ankara does not understand the message or does not want to understand it, the Syrian government has to make a statement and carry out its responsibilities, meaning activating the forces into combat mode and defend Afrin



and its Syrian Kurdish citizens.

■ The pro-Damascus demonstration in Afrin came one day after Ankara’s warning to consider any group coming to the help of the Kurds in the Syrian city as a “legitimate target” for the Turkish military. Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said Wednesday that any force in Afrin, including the Syrian government, would be targeted by Turkish troops if they assist the YPG. What do you think about Turkey’s warning?

A: The threats of the Turkish government towards Syria that “any force in Afrin, including the Syrian government, would be targeted by Turkish troops if they assist the YPG” and that “any group coming to the help of the Kurds in the Syrian city is regarded as a legitimate target” is very close to a declaration of war and shows the real face of the Turkish regime under President Erdogan. This statement from the Turks came not really as a surprise but nevertheless I think it created some slight confusion for the Syrian popular forces (about whether) to stay on the borders of the city of Afrin and the region or engage by entering the city and take up strategic military positions. Also for the Syrian government, it is a balancing act. I have no doubt that the Turkish occupation troops will indeed open fire and attack the popular forces just as they attack the Kurds. The Turkish army is not going to differentiate between the Kurds and the popular forces and although the Turkish military operations are not going as smooth as planned, their army is strong, numerous and equipped with very modern and powerful weapons. I doubt that a relatively small contingent of 500 popular forces is enough to stop the Turkish aggression. I fear that for really stopping the Turkish forces much more manpower and military equipment are necessary.

■ What might the future hold about Afrin? Will Turkey withdraw its forces? What’s your prediction?

A: The future of Afrin is difficult to predict. We have to differentiate between short-term and long-term cir-

cumstances. On the short term, the Turkish regime will do everything in its might to achieve her objectives. Even if the losses on the Turkish side are ending up much higher than they predicted, The Turkish army will go to the end to succeed in its mission. I do not see Turkey immediately withdrawing its forces before achieving her objectives as this will lead to a massive, even unacceptable, loss of face for Turkish President Erdogan. However, the situation in Afrin is extremely explosive and in these situations, everything can happen and situations can change by the day. Imagine that the Syrian government decides to massively increase the number of popular forces with a huge cache of weapons. Or will send in the Syrian Arab Army.... How far is Turkey willing to go in swallowing her losses? Losses that will have its repercussions on the home front, especially on the political field. How high does Turkey want to bet in this gambling game? The same problem also applies to Syria. How far is Syria, at this moment, willing to go to confront Turkey and the Turkish army in Afrin? Also for Syria, the Afrin case is a high-risk situation with one wrong decision leading to a catastrophe. On top of that, it is well possible that the highest political and military command in Damascus has other priorities for the Syrian Arab Army to finish first before sending all its assets to Afrin. For example, finishing the problems in the Eastern Ghouta region.

By explaining what is happening in Afrin it is extremely important to stress that the Turkish invasion into Syria is not just a territorial conflict but it is upon the Syrian government to defend its citizens, in this case, the Syrian Kurdish population. Moreover, the Syrian government is not only carrying out her duties to protect the population but we also have to mention that the Kurds themselves called upon the government in Damascus for support in their role as Syrian citizens. The statement of the Kurdish leadership that they are above everything Syrian citizens is a strong statement clearing up a cloud of confusion. For a long time during the Syrian war, the Kurdish YPG has been allied with the US army, who at their turn is also illegally occupying Syrian territory and killing scores of innocent civilians by their criminal actions. The Kurds are fighting side by side with the Americans which raises the question what exactly the Kurdish position is with regard to their place in the Syrian State. Do the Kurds want to declare independence and break up the country backed by American military support? Are they on the brink of unilaterally proclaiming a federal state without plebiscite or elections? Many questions are on the table with regard to the Kurdish issue.

Now, with the outbreak of the crisis in Afrin, it is very interesting to observe that the Kurdish leadership is calling upon the Syrian government for military support and protection because “they are in the first place, Syrian citizens”. I hope that this statement is sincere and that the Kurds will

This is how cell phones have changed human communication

In 1973, Motorola changed the face of communication forever. Ten years later, the first commercially available cell phone was released to the public. Naturally, the first phones weren't as high-tech as the multi-use devices we have today. You could only talk for a half hour before the phone needed to be recharged. In weight, size, and design, the first mobile phones more or less resembled bricks. Though not very aesthetically pleasing, the first cell phone was pretty revolutionary. Regardless of its hefty price tag at \$3,995, as you can imagine, people were all over the cell phone.



At this point, you can get a simple flip phone for cheap. Top of the line smartphones and gadgets are more like small computers. Actually, they're more like personal assistants who can help you automate your work.

Technology is always evolving. There are new challenges modern technology adapts to face on the daily. The modern cell phone combines features of music players, computers, gaming systems, document editing tools, and internet browsing. They're single tools that can do pretty much anything you need it to. Cell phones have opened the doors for constant communication. But that means the landscape of language and communication are constantly changing, too.

Advances in modern technology have made it so the simple hand-held phone we began with has become a complex device capable of an impressively wide variety of functions.

You can use a cell phone to make phone calls, send text messages, take pictures, and even conduct business. Mobile phones have made other pieces of technology obsolete. Notice how there are few digital cameras advertised. Calculators, cameras, credit cards, and even face-to-face communication have all essentially been replaced by cell phones. There's no need for multiple devices when you can do it all on the go.

It's hard to imagine what we'd do without our cell phones, especially since they've become so popular in the last 15 years. While they might have been around for 35, it's only fairly recently that cell phones have become an integral part of our lives. Cell phones have changed the way the world works. Accompanying these changes, however, is new etiquette we need to consider in order to function well alongside of our treasured devices.

And now, we can't live without them. Our phones have quite literally changed how human relationships are formed, and even how social rank is created. No longer do we spend hours chatting on front porches. We Facetime, sitting by ourselves. Our contact and communication is becoming more and more depersonalized.

How much of your life do you conduct through your phone? Do you have conversations with text messages? Keep up your Snapchat streak? Would you break up by sending a text message?

These questions raise another question: how should we conduct ourselves through our mobile communication? A recent survey by SimpleTexting.com shows 57% of respondents have broken up with someone via text message. The millennial generation in particular admitted to breaking up with someone via text message. An overwhelming 69% of millennials said they've broken up with someone in a text message.

Texting etiquette is necessary, especially if we're going to establish long lasting relationships and nourish our existing ones. What is acceptable to say in a text message?

Here are 5 things to keep in mind in your mobile communication.

■ **Consider who you're chatting with**
Changing your tone based on who is receiving your text message is something to keep in mind. It's very easy to send a text to the wrong recipient, so you should be sure to double check who you're texting before hitting send. This practice can save you a lot of grief later on.

■ **Respond quickly**
While you don't know when the recipient will receive your text message or have a moment to read it, it's a good practice to reply quickly. If you're in a hurry to receive a reply, you can state this in your message. You can always shoot a quick text to let them know you'll reply later, or give them a phone call.

■ **Be patient**
Many people work during the day, which means they'll be distracted from their phones. Some are in class, some are in meetings, and some aren't attentive to their cell phones. That means it's important to be patient when you're awaiting a reply. Should you need a faster response, you should give the recipient a phone call instead.

■ **Say what you mean clearly**
Texting lingo is easily misunderstood. Although shorthand is really useful when you're sending quick messages, it's important to realize not everyone understands it. When you're texting, make sure to be clear and concise. Stating what you mean will absolutely help others understand where you're coming from, especially because you can't hear tone of voice through a text. That is, unless you're using voice messaging.

■ **Don't text and drive**
This one might be a given, but texting and driving is extraordinarily dangerous. Not only is it illegal, but it is one of the leading causes of accidents. 1.6 million crashes per year are caused by doing this!

Technology seems to advance daily. New pieces of technology are always being released, and new gadgets are invented to solve our everyday problems. It's clear our cell phones aren't going away, so we should abide by texting etiquette to help us navigate mobile communication.

(Source: tgdaily.com)

Children struggle to hold pencils due to too much tech, doctors say

Children are increasingly finding it hard to hold pens and pencils because of an excessive use of technology, senior paediatric doctors have warned.

An overuse of touchscreen phones and tablets is preventing children's finger muscles from developing sufficiently to enable them to hold a pencil correctly, they say.

"Children are not coming into school with the hand strength and dexterity they had 10 years ago," said Sally Payne, the head paediatric occupational therapist at the Heart of England foundation NHS Trust. "Children coming into school are being given a pencil but are increasingly not be able to hold it because they don't have the fundamental movement skills.

"To be able to grip a pencil and move it, you need strong control of the fine muscles in your fingers.. Children need lots of opportunity to develop those skills."

Six-year-old Patrick has been having weekly sessions with an occupational therapist for six months to help him develop the necessary strength in his index finger to hold a pencil in the correct, tripod grip.

His mother, Laura, blames herself: "In retrospect, I see that I gave Patrick technology to play with, to the virtual exclusion of the more traditional toys. When he got to school, they contacted me with their concerns: he was gripping his pencil like cavemen held sticks. He just couldn't hold it in any other way and so couldn't learn to write because he couldn't move the pencil with any accuracy.

"The therapy sessions are helping a lot and I'm really strict now at home with his access to technology," she said. "I think the school caught the problem early enough for no lasting damage to have been done."

Melissa Prunty, a paediatric occupational therapist who specializes in handwriting difficulties in children, is concerned that increasing numbers of children may be developing handwriting late because of an overuse of technology.

"One problem is that handwriting is very individual in how it develops in each child," said Prunty, the vice-chair of the National Handwriting Association who runs a research clinic at Brunel University London investigating key skills in childhood, including handwriting.



"Without research, the risk is that we make too many assumptions about why a child isn't able to write at the expected age and don't intervene when there is a technology-related cause," she said.

Although the early years curriculum has handwriting targets for every year, different primary schools focus on handwriting in different ways – with some using tablets alongside pencils, Prunty said. This becomes a problem when same the children also spend large periods of time on tablets outside school.

But Barbie Clarke, a child psychotherapist and founder of the Family Kids and Youth research agency, said even nursery schools were acutely aware of the problem that she said stemmed from excessive use of technology at home.

"We go into a lot of schools and have never gone into one, even one which has embraced teaching through technology, which isn't using pens alongside the tablets and iPads," she said. "Even the nurseries we go into which use technology recognize it should not all be about that."

Karin Bishop, an assistant director at the Royal College of Occupational Therapists, also admitted concerns. "It is undeniable that technology has changed the world where our children are growing up," she said. "Whilst there are many positive aspects to the use of technology, there is growing evidence on the impact of more sedentary lifestyles and increasing virtual social interaction, as children spend more time indoors online and less time physically participating in active occupations."

(Source: The Guardian)

The universe is expanding faster than we thought, Hubble data suggests



Recent Hubble Space Telescope findings suggest that the universe is expanding much faster than expected — and astronomers say the rules of physics may need to be rewritten in order to understand why.

Scientists use the Hubble Space Telescope to make precise measurements of the universe's expansion rate. However, observations for a new study don't match up with previous predictions based on the universe's trajectory following the Big Bang, according to a statement from the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI).

"The community is really grappling with understanding the meaning of this discrepancy," Adam Riess, Nobel laureate and lead researcher on the study describing the new findings, said in the statement. Riess is an astronomer at STScI and a professor at Johns Hopkins University.

The Hubble Space Telescope measures the distance to other galaxies by examining a type of star that varies in brightness. These stars, called Cepheid variables, brighten and dim in a predictable way that lets researchers judge the distance to them. This data is then used to measure the universe's expansion rate, known as the Hubble constant.

The new findings show that eight Cepheid variables in our Milky Way galaxy are up to 10 times farther away than any previously analyzed star of this kind. Those Cepheids are more challenging to measure than others because they reside between 6,000 and 12,000 light-years from Earth. To handle that distance, the researchers developed a new scanning technique that allowed the Hubble Space Telescope to periodically measure a star's position at a rate of 1,000 times per minute, thus increasing the accuracy of the stars' true brightness and distance, according to the statement.

The researchers compared their findings to earlier data from the European Space Agency's (ESA) Planck satellite. During its four-year mission, the Planck satellite mapped leftover radiation from the Big Bang, also known as the cosmic microwave background. The Planck data revealed a Hubble constant between 67 and 69 kilometers per second per

megaparsec. (A megaparsec is roughly 3 million light-years.)

However, the Planck data gives a constant about 9 percent lower than that of the new Hubble measurements, which estimate that the universe is expanding at 73 kilometers per second per megaparsec, therefore suggesting that galaxies are moving faster than expected, according to the statement.

"Both results have been tested multiple ways, so barring a series of unrelated mistakes, it is increasingly likely that this is not a bug but a feature of the universe," Riess said.

One possible explanation for the discrepancy is that dark energy — the mysterious force known to be accelerating the cosmos — is driving galaxies farther apart with greater intensity. In this case, the acceleration of the universe may not have a constant value but rather may change over time.

Also, it's possible that elusive dark matter, which accounts for 80 percent of the matter in the universe, interacts more strongly with visible matter or radiation than once thought, the researchers said.

Another possible explanation includes a new kind of subatomic particle that travels close to the speed of light and would be affected only by gravity. Researchers named the superfast particles sterile neutrinos, and collectively, these particles are called dark radiation, according to the study, which has been accepted for publication in The Astrophysical Journal.

"Any of these scenarios would change the contents of the early universe, leading to inconsistencies in theoretical models," STScI representatives said in the statement. "These inconsistencies would result in an incorrect value for the Hubble constant, inferred from observations of the young cosmos. This value would then be at odds with the number derived from the Hubble observations."

The team plans to use data from the Hubble Space Telescope and ESA's Gaia space observatory to measure the precise positions and distances of stars and to further refine estimates of the universe's expansion rate.

(Source: space.com)

Humans will hear from intelligent aliens this century, physicist says



Humans will make contact with aliens by the end of the century, theoretical physicist and futurist Michio Kaku told Redditors last week. However, Kaku said he wasn't sure whether we'd be able to communicate directly with this unknown extraterrestrial society — one that could run the gamut from hostile to pacifist, according to Kaku.

In his AMA on Reddit, Kaku responded to a question about alien civilizations, saying, "Let me stick my neck out. I personally feel that within this century, we will make contact with an alien civilization, by listening in on their radio communications. But talking to them will be difficult, since they could be tens of light years away. So, in the meantime, we must decipher their language to understand their level of technology. Are they Type I, II, or III??? [These represent three categories in the Kardashev scale, measuring technological achievement in civilizations based on their level of energy use for communication.] And what are their intentions. Are they expansive and aggressive, or peaceful?"

Kaku added, "Another possibility is that they land on the White House lawn and announce their existence. But I think that is unlikely, since we would be like forest animals to them, i.e. not worth communicating with."

Futurists and theoretical physicists, among others, have proposed a range of ideas for when and how Earthlings could "hear from" E.T., with one astronomer's calculation predicting it would happen within 1,500 years and another suggesting we'll find intelligent alien life by 2040.

Though a recent survey suggests humans would be cool with alien interlopers, many scientists and thinkers have warned about the risks involved. Famed physicist Stephen Hawking has voiced his concern several times, saying that intelligent aliens would have no problem wiping out the human race. That said, the same futurists and theoretical minds also fear that the same fate could be dished out to us by human-created artificial intelligence.

■ **Why radio signals?**
When Kaku mentions humanity's eavesdropping on extraterrestrial "radio communications," he is likely referring

to what alien hunters call narrow-band signals, or those that are spread over only a very small part of the radio extent of the electromagnetic spectrum — no more than a few hertz wide. By comparison, noise emanating from galaxies, quasars, pulsars and other cosmic entities typically extends across a wide swath of the spectrum. Narrow-band noise could therefore be "the mark of a purposely built transistor," according to the SETI Institute.

"Alien life" can refer to anything from little green men to microbes. But when Kaku refers to extraterrestrial life that is capable of communication that traverses light-years, he is clearly talking about more advanced beings. As a civilization grows and becomes more sophisticated, it will inevitably use more energy. As a way of measuring how advanced a society is, Russian astrophysicist Nikolai S. Kardashev in 1964 proposed using this energy as a proxy. The Kardashev scale moves from Type I, a civilization that can harness all the energy of its home planet (Earth is just about at this level); to Type II, which can use all the energy from its parent star (a Dyson sphere is the most common example), to Type III, a civilization that can control all the energy from its home galaxy.

Narrow-band signals "pack a lot of energy into a small amount of spectral space, and consequently are the easiest type of signal to find for any given power level. If E.T. intentionally sends us a signal, those signals may well have at least one narrow-band component to get our attention," according to the SETI Institute.

In his new book "The Future of Humanity" (Doubleday, 2018), Kaku paints a picture of what these aliens might be like, based on interviews with experts in exobiology. They'd have three traits: stereovision (needed to hunt prey), grasping appendages like opposable thumbs, and their own language, according to news reports.

If these "little green men" with opposable thumbs make contact, what happens next? That would depend on the beings' level of intelligence, experts have said.

(Source: Live Science)

Beech booming as climate changes, and that's bad for forests, say scientists

Beech trees are dominating the woodlands of the northeastern United States as the climate changes, and that could be bad news for the forests and people who work in them, according to a group of scientists.

The scientists say the move toward beech-heavy forests is associated with higher temperatures and precipitation. They say their 30-year study, published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Applied Ecology*, is one of the first to look at such broad changes over a long time period in the northeastern U.S. and southeastern Canada.

The changes could have major negative ramifications for forest ecosystems and industries that rely on them, said Dr. Aaron Weiskittel, a University of Maine associate professor of forest biometrics and modeling and one of the authors.

Beech, often used for firewood, is of much less commercial value than some species of birch and maple trees that can be used to make furniture and flooring.

Future conditions

"There's no easy answer to this one. It has a lot of people scratching their heads," Weiskittel said. "Future conditions seem to be favoring the beech, and managers are going to have to find a good solution to fix it."

The authors of the study, who are from the University of Maine and Purdue University, used U.S. Forest Service data from



1983 to 2014 from the states of Maine, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont to track trends in forest composition. They

found that abundance of American beech increased substantially, while species including sugar maple, red maple and birch

Beech, often used for firewood, is of much less commercial value than some species of birch and maple trees that can be used to make furniture and flooring.

all decreased.

That's a problem not only because of beech's lower value, but because of the spread of beech bark disease, which causes the trees to die young and be replaced by newer trees that succumb to the same disease.

The authors found that the rise of beech and the decline of other species is associated with "higher temperature and precipitation" in the forests.

Dominance of beech

The dominance of beech was also especially notable in some key tourist areas — the White Mountains of New Hampshire, the Adirondack Mountains of New York and the Green Mountains of Vermont.

And beech has the possibility to grow even more because it's not a favorite food of deer, which will eat more seedlings of other trees, Weiskittel said.

The paper echoes other work that shows environmental changes are squeezing out important tree species, said Dr. Martin Dovciak, an associate professor in the Department of Environmental and Forest Biology at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry who was not involved with the study.

"It's important to realize that the species composition that we are used to, in terms of forest management, might be different in the future," he said.

(Source: AP)

British astronaut hails 'groundbreaking' Airbus satellite

British astronaut Tim Peake on Monday hailed a "ground-breaking" satellite being built by Airbus which its developers say will bring an unprecedented level of flexibility to space telecommunications.

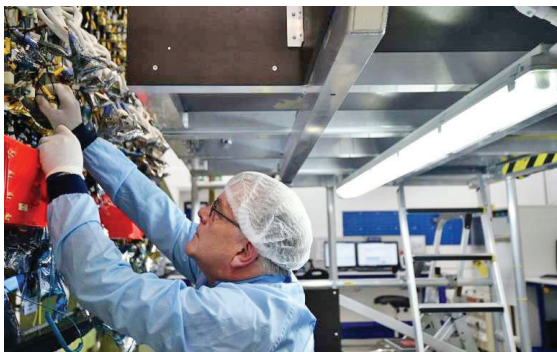
The Eutelsat Quantum satellite is being put together by the multinational company in Portsmouth, on the south coast of England, where it was unveiled Monday ahead of transfer to France for testing later this year.

When launched in 2019 it will for the first time allow a commercial satellite to be fully reconfigurable while in orbit, with operators able to change key elements in real time, such as its frequency and which parts of the Earth it covers.

"What is really new is the level of flexibility that the satellite will provide and so this will be thanks to a combination of technologies that we will put on board the satellite," said Yohann Leroy, deputy CEO of French satellite operator Eutelsat.

Life span of satellites

Leroy said the new technology also allows operators to adapt to different regulatory constraints around the world and adjust to changing market conditions in the 15-year life span of the satellite.



"There can be much faster change in market demand, seasonal demand or even daily demand," he told AFP.

Allowing passengers to connect to the internet while flying over the Pacific Ocean is just one example of innovative satellite use, with demand changing according to flight schedules, Leroy added.

Visiting the Airbus site astronaut Peake — who in 2015

became the first British European Space Agency (ESA) astronaut to visit the International Space Station — said the enterprise was an example of British innovation in space.

"It's a European Space Agency-led program but being built here in the UK," said Peake, noting the antenna array is coming from Spain.

Small satellites

"So there's international partnership from small satellites to major space stations, and I think the UK will continue to do well to look globally for those partnerships."

Cooperation on such pioneering projects will continue beyond Britain's upcoming departure from the European Union, predicted Peake, adding that membership of the ESA is not dependent on being part of the block.

Graham Turnock, chief executive of the UK Space Agency, said Britain needed to "be at the forefront of innovation" in order to retain a leading position in the space industry.

"So this new satellite ... I think is really exciting and it gives us the ability to be at that particular part of the leading edge," he told AFP.

(Source: phys.org)

Crop-saving soil tests now at farmers' fingertips, researchers find

Soil pathogen testing - critical to farming, but painstakingly slow and expensive - will soon be done accurately, quickly, inexpensively and onsite, thanks to research that Washington State University scientists plant pathologists are sharing.

As the name implies, these tests detect disease-causing pathogens in the soil that can severely devastate crops.

Until now, the tests have required large, expensive equipment or lab tests that take weeks.

The soil pathogen analysis process is based on polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests that are very specific and sensitive and only possible in a laboratory.

Conducting soil tests

The new methods, designed by WSU plant pathologists, are not only portable and fast, but utilize testing materials easily available to the public. A paper by the researchers lists all the equipment and materials required to construct the device, plus instructions on how to put it all together and conduct soil tests.

"We've heard from many growers that the time it takes to obtain results from soil samples sent to a lab is too long," said Kiwamu Tanaka, assistant professor in WSU's Department of Plant Pathology. "The results come back too late to be helpful. But if they can get results on site, they could make informed decisions about treatments or management changes before

they even plant their crop."

Some diseases from soil pathogens may not be visible until weeks after the crop has sprouted, Tanaka said. That could be too late to treat the disease or could force farmers to use more treatments.

WSU graduate student Joseph DeShields, a first author on the paper, said it took about six months of work to get their device to work in the field. It relies on magnets to capture pathogens' DNA from the soil.

"It turns out, it's really hard to separate and purify genetic material from soil because soil contains so much material for PCR tests," said DeShields "So we were thrilled when we made that breakthrough."

Rachel Bomberger is a WSU plant diagnostician who helped with the concepts of the machine testing. She said she's impressed by what Tanaka and the team accomplished.

The testing systems

"We removed a huge stumbling block when it comes to soil testing," said Bomberger, one of the co-authors on the paper. "We found the missing piece that makes the testing systems work in the field without expensive lab equipment or testing materials."

"It's a really versatile method," he said. "You could use it for nationwide pathogen mapping or look at the distribution of



pathogens around the country. We started small, but this could have huge implications for testing soil health and disease."

Tanaka said it was important for this discovery to be available in an open-access video journal.

"We're always concerned about helping every grower and the industry as a whole," Tanaka said. "We want everybody to look at this and use it, if they think they'll benefit from it."

(Source: eurekaalert.org)

Prestigious Domestic and Foreign Firms to Attend 2nd Intl. Congress of Exploration and Production

The 2nd International Congress and Exhibition of Exploration and Production will be held in IRIB Conferences Hall on March 3-4, 2018 in the presence prestigious domestic and foreign companies in the presence of industrial activists in upstream industry of oil with the aim of clarifying dimensions and frameworks of "New Paradigms of Business in Upstream Industry of Iranian Oil and Gas" as well as reviewing the latest outlooks

and developments on IPC (Iran Petroleum Contracts) and EPCF (Engineering, Procurement, Construction and Financing) projects.

This prestigious Conference includes 30 strategic, management and specialized panels and more than 100 scientific articles will be presented by the most prestigious domestic and foreign lecturers.

It is worth mentioning that more than 1,200 indus-

trial activists and key beneficiaries of downstream and upstream oil and gas industries [including managers of public and private companies and prestigious international companies] have seized this opportunity to clinch separate contracts with the Islamic Republic of Iran especially after the implementation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action inked in mid-July 2015, the report added.

Post Bank of Iran Invites Notices for Designing and Implementing Cryptocurrency

Post Bank of Iran intends to design and launch ecosystem of digital currencies (cryptocurrencies) in the country in cooperation with the activists and elite in the field of cryptocurrencies, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

For this reason, all real and legal entities and elite, having enough

knowledge and experience in technical economic, social, cultural fields, are cordially requested to forward their information and request of cooperation in the following four sections:

1- General information of applicants willing to cooperate in this invitation notice, 2- resume and background related

to research, executive and technological activities in the field of digital currencies (software and hardware), 3- history of experience related to the management and implementation of macro projects in the financial and IT fields, 4- name of key and effective individuals in implementation of project.

Therefore, interested applicants may send their request of cooperation latest by Feb. 14, 2018 to the following website address: cryptocurrency@postbank.ir and/or post to the following address: Central Building of Post Bank of Iran, No. 229, After Sarafraz St., Motahari Ave., Tehran.

Bank Pasargad, Sole Iranian Bank among Top 10 Banking Brand in MD

According to the evaluation of prestigious "The Banker" Institute, Bank Pasargad of the Islamic Republic of Iran once again managed to stand at 116th rank among top 500 banking brands in the world in 2018, Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

As the sole Iranian bank, Bank Pasargad stood at the top bank among top 10 banking brands in the Middle East region.

Brand Finance Group of the prestigious "The Banker" Magazine, affiliated to the Financial Times' Publishing Group embarks on assessing world's top banking brand every year according to the qualitative and quantitative indexes including process of creating brand, incomes, revenues and power of brand, etc.

In its latest ranking published in "The Banker" Magazine in Feb. 2018, Bank Pasargad of the Islamic Republic

of Iran in a tight competition with the international banks managed to stand at 166th rank, climbing nine steps as compared to the same period of last year.

It should be noted that the financial value of Bank Pasargad brand is estimated at \$1,170 million, showing 19.6 percent growth as compared to the same period of last year, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank concluded.

Climate change threatens to kill 1.6m breeding pairs of king penguins by 2100

A study published on February 27, in *Nature Climate Change* revealed that if climate change models continue to develop at their current pace, the results could be disastrous for 1.6 million king penguins. Roughly 70 percent of king penguin breeding pairs would be forced to relocate by the end of the century.



Failure for these king penguins to relocate away from their homes in islands around Antarctica would likely result in death.

"If global warming continues at its current pace, the species may disappear," Celine Le Bohec, co-author of the study and scientist from the University of Strasbourg, told Agence France Presse.

Most scientists consider greenhouse gas emissions from humans as the main cause behind the melting polar ice caps and the disappearing Arctic sea. This entire process is warming the oceans and endangering animals like king penguins across the planet.

Unlike other species of penguins, these animals typically avoid living on ice-based lands. Although melting ice doesn't directly impact king penguins, it does impact their food chain.

Their main source of food is fish. When climate change warms up the ocean, the fish will move further south to colder water. Adult king penguins will be forced to swim farther just to reach their food.

With adult king penguins traveling to new places to get their food, their offspring will be left alone longer. This decreases the king penguins' chances of setting up an established mating colony. It also increases the chances of their offspring perishing.

"If no actions aiming at halting or controlling global warming, and the pace of the current human-induced changes — climate change, overfishing — stay the same, the species may disappear in the near future," Le Bohec added.

(Source: Tech Times)

MIT engineers have built a device that pulls electricity out of thin air

Temperature changes large and small are happening around us all the time, and scientists have come up with a machine that can convert those fluctuations into electricity, potentially powering sensors and communication devices almost out of thin air.

The energy harvesting is done through what's called a thermal resonator: a device that captures heat on one side and radiates it over to the other.

According to the team from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the new thermal resonator could keep remote sensors or any off-grid devices powered up for years, just by using temperature swings — like the natural ones between night and day, for instance.

"We basically invented this concept out of whole cloth," says one of the researchers, Michael Strano. "We've built the first thermal resonator."

"It's something that can sit on a desk and generate energy out of what seems like nothing. We are surrounded by temperature fluctuations of all different frequencies all of the time. These are an untapped source of energy."

Generating power from changes in temperature has been tried before through various different techniques such as pyroelectrics, but this new method is both more efficient than previous efforts and the first that can be tuned to adapt to specific periods of temperature variation.

Where the team of scientists really made headway is in the combination of materials used for their thermal resonator: metal foam, graphene, and a special wax called octadecane, which changes between a solid and a liquid as the temperature goes up and down (technically a phase-change material).

That gives the new device an optimal level of thermal effusivity — a combination of thermal conduction (how fast heat can spread through a material) and thermal capacity (how much heat can be stored in a material).

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Huge deposit of crocodile-like fossils found

Paleontologists have discovered an enormous deposit of reptile fossils in Bears Ears National Monument — one of the parks for which President Donald Trump has pledged to shrink protection.

The deposit "may be one of the world's richest caches of Triassic period fossils," according to a Wilderness Society press release.

Paleontologists have extracted only a small portion of the Bears Ears find, but have already found that it's dense with fossilized remains. So far, they've found teeth and bones from several phytosaurs, which are related to crocodiles and look similar.

Snout of the Triassic phytosaur *Pravusuchus*, part of a specimen looted from Bears Ears National Monument in the 1990s and recovered as part of the remains found in Bears Ears.

In late 2016, Utah's Bears Ears park, where these fossils were found, was named a national monument. But in early December, Trump announced he would shrink protection for the 1.35-million-acre monument by 85 percent, in an effort to encourage industry.

Without the protection, "NeCrocPolis" could be lost to mining, off-road vehicle use or looting, The Wilderness Society worries.

The Triassic period, during which these animals lived and died, occurred between 199 million and 251 million years ago, and was the time of some of the first-ever dinosaurs. Also around were diverse relatives of modern alligators and crocodiles, such as the phytosaurs, which were long, sharp-toothed, and short-legged, just like modern versions.

Paleontologist Rob Gay, who led the dig, said the find could yield some incredible discoveries. "If this site can be fully excavated, it is likely that we will find many other intact specimens," he said in a press release. "And quite possibly even new vertebrate species."

(Source: Newsweek)

Car-free Tuesdays or car-packed Tuesdays

1 → However, such movements towards cleaner transport options entail appropriate infrastructure such as bike lanes to ensure safety improvements and higher ridership numbers, as well as efficient, low emission public transport.

Put two and two together: with the increasing gas price and the maintenance costs of a car it makes more sense financially to take public transport had it been efficient. Additionally, during hot days of summer, using a bike might perfectly suit those whose workplaces are not very far had it been safe to ride a bike in a city like Tehran.



Nonetheless, with almost half the Tehraners using their private cars the public transit is not sufficient to meet the needs of the citizens.

Maybe the problem is not failing to solicit public participation to join such campaigns to fight air pollution, the biggest problem lies with the municipality's impotence in planning and developing new urban public transport systems and also providing proper space for cycling.

According to the Shanghai Manual A Guide for Sustainable Urban Development in the 21st Century by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) the lack of comprehensive planning of transport systems, without due consideration to social, economic, environmental and cultural elements of the city, can result in physical breaks in the fabric of communities and reinforce social exclusion. The impact on quality of life and the environment cannot be underestimated.

‘Iran-Germany Science Day’ begins in Tehran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — ‘Iran-Germany Science Day’ began in Tehran’s University of Science and Technology on Tuesday.

The two-day event is being held with 60 faculty members from Germany and 150 Iranian scientists in attendance, ISNA reported.

A set of scientific projects have been defined which will be discussed in the event to further facilitate the scientific cooperation of the two country.

The scientific and educational ties between Iran and Germany have a long 100-year history, said German Ambassador to Iran Michael Klor-Berchtold who took part in the inauguration ceremony of the event.

From 2015 (after signing the JCPOA also known as the nuclear deal), the two nations have tried hard to revive their relations, said Klor-Berchtold, adding that it’s time to enter a new phase of cooperation especially in science and research areas.

LEARN ENGLISH

Making Food from Scratch

Ann: I’m so excited to have the entire family coming for a visit. For our first family dinner next Friday, I’m making everything **from scratch**. I’m **pulling out all the stops**.

Walt: But have you ever made anything from scratch?

Ann: Sure I have, plenty of times.

Walt: If you say so, but our **pantry** is full of **canned foods** and **jars**, and nearly everything we’ve cooked in the past year has been **pre-mixed**. Are you sure you’re **up to** cooking a dinner for 12 from scratch?

Ann: How hard could it be? I just need to make sure that the **ingredients** I buy are **fresh**, follow the **recipes closely**, add plenty of fresh **herbs** and spices, and **multitask**.

Walt: You mean do a **juggling act**. It’ll take a lot of work and organization **to pull this off**.

Ann: I’m up to the **challenge**. And I have a **backup plan**.

Walt: And that is?

Ann: Have you ever heard of the **raw food movement**?

■ **Key vocabulary**
from scratch: if you start something from scratch, you begin it without using anything that existed or was prepared before
pull out all the stops: to do everything you possibly can to make something happen and succeed

pantry: a very small room in a house where food is kept; larder
canned food: food preserved by putting it into a metal container from which all the air is removed

jar: a glass container with a wide top and a lid, used for storing food such as jam or honey, or the amount it contains

premixed: mix in advance

be up to: to be doing something

ingredient: one of the foods that you use to make a particular food or dish

fresh: fresh food has recently been picked or prepared, and is not frozen or preserved

recipe: a set of instructions for cooking a particular type of food
closely: very carefully

herb: a small plant that is used to improve the taste of food

multitask: to do several things at the same time

juggling act: a situation in which you are trying to do several different types of work at the same time

pull something off: to succeed in doing something difficult

challenge: something that tests strength, skill, or ability, especially in a way that is interesting

back up plan: a plan in case things go wrong or something bad happens

raw food movement: the dietary practice of eating only uncooked, unprocessed foods

(Source: [eslpod.com](#))

Attack on national lands “colossal, unforgivable mistake”: environmentalist

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — The recent **d e s k** directive issued by the Supreme Council of Environment on changing the boundaries of protected areas is a colossal and unforgivable mistake, environmentalist Mohammad Darvish has said.

The recent directive which is clearly giving consent to shrink the boundaries of protected areas for drilling, mining, logging, etc. activities is rolling back the previous efforts made for the past decades to conserve the precious national treasures.

“I’m sorry that such is a directive is issued by an administration which claims to be concerned with environment, the directive is fraught with problem,” the board member at Research Institute of Forests and Rangelands told Mehr news agency.

The areas protected by the DOE constitute 8.2 million hectares which fall into four categories of national parks (11 sites), wildlife refuges (25 sites), protected areas (47 sites), and national nature monuments (5 sites).

Additionally, the Forests, Range and Watershed Management Organization affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture, manages 131 reserves with a total area of 111,000 hectares of these 19 are natural forest parks, 91 are forest reserves, and 21 are natural parks.

Lately, Hamid Zohrabi, caretaker for DOE’s natural environment directorate, has said that following the approval of the directive some 28 areas constituting 77,000 hectares, which are “not very much valuable ecologically” and were causing “too many social and economic problems for the public” are



Qori-Gol wetland, a protected area in northwestern Iran

“I’m sorry that such is a directive is issued by an administration which claims to be concerned with environment, the directive is fraught with problem,” Darvish said.

reevaluated for changing their status from protected to unprotected.

“The lack of transparency and the fact that the administration suppose that the

public don’t grasp the serious implications of such a directive is very much disturbing for the environmentalists,” Darvish highlighted, adding, saying that the protected

Green startup weekend holds second pre-event workshop



ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — The second **d e s k** pre-event workshop of the ‘environment and urban management’ startup weekend was held on Sunday in Tehran’s Amirkabir University of Technology.

The ‘Environment and urban management’ startup weekend will be held by Tehran Municipality from February 28 to March 2 in Tehran’s Shahid Beheshti University.

Mentors and participants of this startup

weekend discussed different business models, urban management and environmental topics, and how to generate ideas.

Traffic management, air pollution and sustainable resource management and creating sustainable incomes are the 4 main topics of this event, Mehr quoted the secretary of the event Ra’na Noruzi as saying.

The first pre-event was held on February 19 in Shahid Beheshti University.

Iranian, French universities to increase joint scientific activities



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iran’s **d e s k** Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences and Paris Descartes University signed a memorandum of understanding in a bid to boost their scientific ties, Fars reported on Tuesday.

The MOU was signed during the visit of Mohammad Haji-Aqajani, the chancellor of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical

Sciences, and his deputies to France’s top medical universities.

Conducting joint research projects and training courses and exchanging of professors and students are among the main purposes of this MOU.

After discussing the curriculum of ‘emergency medicine’, the officials reached an initial agreement for running joint training courses on this medical specialty.

Health minister in Europe, eying increased co-op

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — In an attempt to foster greater cooperation with Europe, Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi has traveled to Europe to meet with health officials of Belgium and Hungary.

Heading a delegation of public and private sectors, the minister entered Brussels on Monday at the official invitation of EU’s Health Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis.

Joint statements will be released following the meeting of the officials, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

Qazizadeh-Hashemi will also meet with Belgium’s Minister of Social Affairs and Health Maggie De Block, planning to ink a memorandum of understanding on developing electronic



medical records for patients.

Furthermore, a conference on ‘economic opportunities of health sector’ will be held with the Iranian delegation and top Belgium medical companies, said Mohsen Asadi Lari, Iranian deputy health minister in international affairs.

The next destination of Hashemi will be Hungary where he will meet with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, Minister of Human Capacities Zoltán Balog and Minister for National Economy Mihály Varga.

Numerous MOUs will be inked by the officials of the two country, on various topics including medical equipment, education and food safety among others.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Iranian charity foundation to create jobs for 100,000 underprivileged

The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation is going to create employment opportunities for 100,000 underprivileged, the foundation’s CEO has said. “Last year we spent some 14 trillion rials (nearly \$400m) on creating 120,000 jobs for the deprived help seekers,” Parviz Fattah said, YJC reported on Tuesday.

“Our fundamental principle is to help those in distress to stand on their own feet and become self-supporting and no longer live on charity,” Fattah highlighted.

Mentioning 650,000 job opportunities created so far he stated that the foundation prefers jobs in good-producing sector rather than service-producing sector.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-th, -eth”

■ **Meaning:** a word ending that indicates an ordinal number

■ **For example:** Delays of almost two years in the publication of the **fifth** book prompted fears that she was suffering writers’ block.

PHRASAL VERB

Forge ahead

■ **Meaning:** to make progress, especially quickly

■ **For example:** Jo’s forging ahead with her plans to write a film script.

IDIOM

Miss the boat

■ **Explanation:** if you miss the boat, you fail to take advantage of an opportunity because you don’t act quickly enough

■ **For example:** I managed to get my order through before the end of the special offer - but I nearly missed the boat!

Saudi regime fires top army chiefs

1→ Prince Turki bin Talal - the brother of Alwaleed bin Talal - a billionaire businessman who was detained for months by the government on allegations of corruption - was also appointed to a deputy governor position.

No official reason has been given for the overhaul, but it comes as Saudi Arabia faces growing criticism against the military coalition it leads in the Yemen war.

The developments also come amid a series of changes led by country's 32-year-old Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman (also known as MBS), who has vowed to transform both Saudi Arabia's culture and economy.

MBS was appointed crown prince in June 2017 when King Salman, his father, implemented a major government shake-up.

'MBS is coming soon'

Mahjoob Zweiri, a professor of Arab politics, said that while many see a link between the Saudi reshuffle and the war in Yemen, the move signals changes to come within the kingdom's internal politics.

"This development tells us one thing: the new king [MBS] is coming sooner rather than later," Zweiri told Al Jazeera.

"It seems that he's setting the platform for his son to rule - we've witnessed serious changes to the economy, attempts to fight



corruption and so on," he added.

Zweiri further explained that Saudi Arabia has a strategy it is following in Yemen and that a government reshuffle does not necessarily mean its policy in the war would change.

Saudi Arabia entered the Yemen war in 2015 when it launched a military offensive after Houthi rebels took over the capital,

Sanaa, and large swathes of the impoverished country a year earlier.

Due to the high civilian death toll, the kingdom has been under fire to alter its strategy in the war.

Repairing Saudi's image?

Commenting on the appointment of Alwaleed's brother, Zweiri said he believes Saudi may be trying to repair its image,

after it launched an arrest campaign of royal family members, ministers and top businessmen in November 2017.

"It's all political - they're trying to send a message that we're not against him [Alwaleed] - and that despite what we did, he's still one of us," said Zweiri.

More importantly, said Zweiri, the government reshuffle is aimed at bringing those closer to MBS to power in a bid to promote "a new way of thinking".

Since MBS' appointment as crown prince, Saudi announced it would end its long-standing ban on allowing women to drive, and major economic reforms seeking to privatize the economy have been introduced.

"I think we are going to see more changes in personnel both within [the] military as well as civilian administration, simply because he is putting in his own people and he wants to project a certain image of the kingdom," James Dorsey, senior fellow at the S Raja Ratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, told Al Jazeera.

"One has to keep in mind that in effect the crown prince has changed the government structure of Saudi Arabia," he said, adding that it's a one-man rule as opposed to the past when decisions were taken by consensus.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

EU: All Israeli settlements 'illegal, obstacle to peace'

The European Union (EU)'s top diplomat, Federica Mogherini, has stressed that all Israeli settlements are illegal, condemning them as "an obstacle to peace."

"We have stressed, repeatedly, that all settlements are illegal and are an obstacle to peace," High Representative Mogherini said before talks between EU and Arab League foreign ministers in Brussels on Monday, which she said would focus on "how to bring the Middle East peace process forward."

About 600,000 Israelis live in over 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds.

Mogherini also commented on the recent closure of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Old City of Jerusalem al-Quds in protest against Israeli measures, saying "The special status and the character of the city [Jerusalem al-Quds] must be preserved and respected by all."

"We hope that a solution can be found quickly, Jerusalem is a holy city to the three monotheistic religions," she added.

For his part, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi, who arrived in Brussels for talks on the so-called Middle East peace process, stressed that the only solution "is to reach a lasting peace that again will ensure that East Jerusalem [al-Quds] is the capital of a Palestinian State."

Mogherini expressed the EU's readiness to "offer the redeployment of our mission

EUBAM Rafah (the European Union Border Assistance Mission in Rafah)," a Palestinian city and refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip and to "support even more the economic development of Gaza and obviously also increase our humanitarian aid with the specific focus on hospitals in Gaza."

Safadi said, "We must also make sure that UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) continues to deliver its vital services to millions of refugees across its five areas of operation."

In a rare move, church leaders in Palestine decided on Sunday to close the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Old City of Jerusalem al-Quds until further notice to express dissent against new Israeli tax measures and a proposed property law that they say is an attack on Christians.

Recently, the municipality of Jerusalem al-Quds canceled a tax exemption it had granted to the church-owned commercial property in the city.

Furthermore, Israeli lawmakers have proposed a bill that would allow the regime to expropriate land in Jerusalem al-Quds sold by churches to private real estate companies in recent years.

Church officials, however, say such a law would make it more difficult for them to find buyers for church-owned land-sales that contribute to operating costs of their religious institutions.

(Source: agencies)

Saudi, Emirati officials bribe NGOs to whitewash rights abuses

An independent European organization, monitoring developments in the Middle East, says Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been bribing a number of international NGOs to cover up their gross human rights records at home and abroad.

Euroscope for Middle Eastern Affairs released on Tuesday a list of 15 Arab officials, including Saudi and Emiratis, accused of corruption, money laundering and bribery.

It says these countries have been engaged in unethical lobbying efforts such as the organizing of events to undermine the credibility of any NGOs that criticize their rights conditions.

It also cites investigations by the Independent United Nations Watch (IUN Watch) into financial crimes committed by these people in Geneva, using human rights to advance their political goals.

It names the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) as one of the bodies that have received bribes.

Abdelwahab el-Hani, a member of the UN Committee against Torture, is said to have received 40,000 Swiss francs in mid-February to pave the way for the participation of certain human rights organizations in forums organized on the sidelines of the UNHRC annual conference, according to the European organization.

He had also received 17,000 Swiss francs to convene a summit to downplay Saudi

Arabia's systematic rights violations both at home and in neighboring Yemen.

Hani, however, has denied any wrongdoing.

The European organization also named Ahmad Thani al-Hamli, the head of the Arab Federation for Human Rights, saying he gave thousands of francs to NGOs and activists to distract attention from human rights issues.

He is using the UNHRC platform to cover up war crimes in Yemen and elsewhere, it added.

Euroscope for Middle Eastern Affairs also accused the listed Arab individuals of distributing cash to activists and NGOs -- some even going as far as "selling" the rooms of the human rights council to political lobbyists for more than 50,000 Francs per hour.

The Saudi war on Yemen was launched in March 2015 in support of former Riyadh-friendly government and against the Houthi Ansarullah movement, which has been running state affairs in the absence of an effective administration.

The UAE is a key ally of Saudi Arabia in its military campaign on Yemen, which has so far killed more than 13,600 people and led to a humanitarian crisis.

At home, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi also stand accused of violating human rights by suppressing dissent and discriminating against citizens.

(Source: Press TV)

With eye on U.S., China to revamp top tier of diplomats

China is expected to announce a reshuffle of its top diplomats at an annual meeting of parliament in March, aiming to deal with U.S. President Donald Trump's growing suspicion of Beijing, several sources familiar with the plan said.

The sources, including foreign diplomats, told Reuters that Wang Qishan, a close ally of President Xi Jinping, will likely become vice president with a portfolio specifically focused on handling ties with Washington. He would report directly to Xi.



Current Foreign Minister Wang Yi will probably become a state counselor, replacing current top diplomat and State Councilor Yang Jiechi, who has been promoted to the Communist Party's 25-member politburo, the sources said.

State counselors, who report to the Cabinet, are more senior than the ministers responsible for the same portfolio.

Wang Yi could also keep the foreign minister portfolio, the sources said.

Another possibility was that Song Tao, head of the Communist Party's international affairs department and close to Xi, could become foreign minister, the sources said. Song is a career diplomat who has worked in India and the Philippines and speaks good English, diplomats who have met him say.

Yang, who joined the politburo in October, could become a vice premier with responsibility for foreign affairs, or become a deputy head of China's parliament, which would mean he could deal directly with the U.S. Congress, the sources said.

Effectively Wang Qishan will be China's senior-most diplomat, then Yang and then Wang Yi.

"There will be three top diplomats," one of the sources told Reuters, referring to the three officials. "The United States will be a focus."

The sources cautioned that last minute changes are still possible and the positions won't become finalized until parliament nears the end of its annual session around mid-March.

All the sources spoke on condition of anonymity, either because they were not authorized to speak to foreign reporters or because of the sensitivity of discussing personnel appointments, considered secret until they are announced.

Neither the Communist Party's Organization Department, which oversees personnel decisions, nor the State Council Information Office, which doubles as the party spokesman's office, responded to questions about the new diplomatic appointments.

Tensions with Trump

Despite a largely controversy-free visit by Trump to China in November, tensions, especially over trade, have worsened.

Trump has long sought a way to a more balanced trade relationship with China and threatened to impose a big "fine" against Beijing to protect American intellectual property. Trump has also been discussing imposing a tariff on imports of steel from China and other countries.

The role of Wang Qishan, who is not related to Foreign Minister Wang Yi, has been subject to intense speculation since he stepped down from the party's Standing Committee, the apex of power in China, in October.

Close to Xi and the man in charge of Xi's sweeping anti-corruption crackdown over the past five years, Wang Qishan, at 69, had reached the age at which top leaders technically have to step down.

As he's such an experienced politician, Xi is going to keep him on though, the sources said.

Known as "the firefighter" for his central role in tackling issues like corruption and domestic financial problems over the years, Wang also has experience dealing with the United States in his former role as a vice premier who led annual economic talks with Washington.

"Wang Qishan is a heavyweight. And the Americans respect him," a source with ties to the leadership told Reuters. "Hopefully he will be able to temper American hostility."

Diplomatic and U.S. business sources say the United States has all but frozen a formal mechanism for talks on commercial disputes, because it is not satisfied with Beijing's efforts at opening its economy.

Any effort by China to elevate formal exchanges on trade issues, for example from a cabinet to vice presidential level, would require the White House's consent too.

State Councillor Yang is not seen to have achieved any breakthroughs in his unofficial role as China's special envoy to the Trump administration, despite speaking fluent English and being a former Chinese ambassador in Washington.

This is partly the reason Liu He, a top economic adviser of Xi's, is visiting Washington this week, said a senior Asian diplomat, citing conversations with Chinese officials.

"Yang will remain a senior diplomat but maybe with less of a United States role," said the diplomat.

Double role

Wang Yi has been increasingly outspoken in his defense of Beijing's interests in recent years and is unusually media friendly for a Chinese official. The possibility he could take up two positions concurrently is unusual but not without precedent.

Defense Minister Chang Wanquan, for example, is also a state counselor.

There are currently four state counselors - one was sacked on Saturday for corruption - who have specific areas of responsibility, such as defense or foreign policy.

As a state counselor, Wang would also have responsibility for another tricky issue - self-ruled Taiwan, claimed by China as its own and which Beijing fears is on the road to formal independence.

Wang however has less experience dealing with the United States, and is a Japanese speaker rather than an expert in English.

"Promoting Wang would be a reward for him," said a Western diplomat, referring to Wang's spirited public defense of Chinese positions, ranging from the disputed South China Sea to rejecting accusations of Chinese spying on the African Union.

(Source: Reuters)

Austria has strong stake in preserving JCPOA: ambassador

2→ Austria is doing its fair share for the implementation of the JCPOA by promoting deep and comprehensive economic ties aimed at fostering a high-employment economy delivering social cohesion.

We do hope that Iran too sees the continued merits of this agreement, again ideally with the U.S. on board as well.

On the very personal note, I also think completely separated from the nuclear agreement. I would like to say a few words on regional issues. I personally would see a number of opportunities to seek out whether there are possibilities for cooperating on selected areas of common interest in the region.

We first need to identify low profile civilian tasks such as humanitarian assistance or improving resilience for the protection of cultural property in armed conflict or for Heavy Urban Search and Rescue missions. This would help build trust, predictability and confidence, creating a new culture of doing things jointly - this would be extremely important for our political narrative.

We appeal to Iran - independently from the nuclear issue - to act constructively and responsibly by joining - as a first step - existing informal, working level networks of government, multilateral, and international partners aimed at sharing experiences and deepening practical field oriented international cooperation in developing civilian capabilities for stabilization and peace-building. Austria has just started such an engagement with Iran in partnering on a whole-of-government approach to Heavy Urban Search and Rescue.

The dynamics of the conflicts are difficult and complex but I have seen most recently instances where Iran has played a mediating role which went largely unnoticed. This happened for example in the crisis following the Kurdish independence referendum, where Iran helped to prevent an escalation through diplomatic means. Any of these positive stories can create an entry point which should be widened. And we should aim at doing things in ever more focus areas jointly.

I personally would start with migration

A U.S. pullout of the JCPOA does not automatically mean the end of this important agreement.

management as Europe needs a strong partner in the region. This would include building perspectives for Afghan youth to return or to stay in their home country in the first place. This kind of cooperation could be expanded also to the coordination on the civilian stabilization and reconstruction of the ISIS-liberated areas in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The longer-term goal should be to adapt our respective policies and practice to new priorities and to the evolving context and to balance hardline stances that we see on all sides with more pragmatic forms of cooperation.

Iran has been complaining that major European banks are reluctant to enter transactions with Iran. What steps are needed to remove this problem?

A: I have a few things to say on this matter. One is to congratulate Iran on two most recent moves on it has taken.

I'd like to warmly congratulate all the Iranians and particularly the economic team headed by President Rouhani on the upgraded credit rating, which is well deserved and has been supported by Austria in the respective OECD [the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] committee meeting of Export Credit Agency Group.

This happened in January. Iran was upgraded from level 6 to level 5 which also means that credits will be made less expensive for Iran and it's a sign of hope that things are improving.

Also I congratulate the Iranian parliament, Majlis, on passing legislation for Iran becoming member of the Convention against

Transnational Crime. It's a very significant move. Austria stands ready to partnering with Iran on the joint implementation.

These two measures create security for evaluation of Iran's performance regarding anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism financing by the FATF (Financial Action Task Force). The FATF just last week recognized the progress Iran has made on its reform path and decided to continue the suspension of counter-measures while urging the Iranian partner at the same time to address the remaining items by completing and implementing necessary reforms.

But one key remaining problem is that Iran's regulatory framework for banking and financing -- because of decades-long financial sanctions - urgently needs upgrading and adaptation to current standards in the international banking system, and this includes, inter alia, the urgent adoption of the banking bill that has been sitting in Majlis for some time. In addition, Iranian banks in terms of compliance, which is the key parameter, have to upgrade their internal technical rules to international compliance requirements. In the EU, for example, the so-called MIFIR III regulation just went into effect, which will introduce drastic changes to the rules of the game for financial institutions and the level of protection for consumers of financial products - especially in terms of informational materials and the sale of investment products.

Austria as all so often in Iran has had a trail-blazer function that has served as a model for other countries to follow.

Iranian banks in terms of compliance, which is the key parameter, have to upgrade their internal technical rules to international compliance requirements.

U.S. Education Dept. to probe Michigan State over sex abuse scandal

The U.S. Department of Education will investigate how Michigan State University handled reports of sex abuse made by female athletes against former USA Gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar, the department said on Monday.

Nassar, who worked at the East Lansing school and treated athletes there, has pleaded guilty to molesting female athletes under the guise of medical treatment. He was sentenced in January and February in two separate hearings to 40 to 175 years and 40 to 125 years in prison.

Around 200 women, including Olympic gold medal-winning gymnasts Aly Raisman and Jordyn Wieber, gave courtroom statements at the sentencing hearings about Nassar's abuse, leading to the resignation of the USA Gymnastics' board.

Michigan State's president and athletic director have resigned. The Department of Education said in a statement that its probe would centre on whether Michigan State met requirements under Title IX, a federal law that bars sexual discrimination in schools that receive federal funding.

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said that a civil rights team would soon arrive on the East Lansing campus and that she was committed to ensuring that all students were secure from sexual misconduct.

"All institutions that fall short will be held accountable for violations of federal law," DeVos, a Michigan native, said in a statement.

The university said in a statement that it had been informed last week about the Title IX probe. "As we have been, MSU is cooperating fully with this and all investigations," it said.

Michigan State is also facing probes by the National Collegiate Athletics Association, U.S. Senate, Michigan House of Representatives and the state's attorney general, Interim university President John Engler has said.

The Department of Education is conducting a related investigation into whether Michigan State met federal rules on reporting on-campus crime and security information.

(Source: Reuters)

North Korea to send athletes to next month's Paralympics in South Korea

North Korea plans to send athletes to compete in next month's Paralympic Games in South Korea, following its high profile participation in the Olympic games that wrapped up on Sunday, Yonhap news agency said.

Officials from North and South Korea met on Tuesday at a village along the heavily fortified border to discuss logistics for the Paralympics, which begin on March 7.

South Korean leaders see Pyongyang's participation in the Games as key to lowering tensions on the peninsula and possibly leading to diplomatic negotiations over the North's nuclear program.

(Source: Reuters)

Soccer Aid: Usain Bolt joins celeb football match at Old Trafford



Usain Bolt will finally make his footballing debut at Old Trafford.

The eight-time Olympic gold medalist will captain a team of celebrities and footballers for the Soccer Aid match on 10 June.

"It's my dream to make it as a professional footballer. To play against some of football's biggest legends is going to be remarkable," the Jamaican sprinter said.

Robbie Williams will captain rivals England for the Unicef match.

Usain has spoken previously about wanting to get into professional football after retiring from athletics last year.

And over the weekend he put out a cheeky tweet - which led to much speculation - hinting he'd been signed to a club.

"Robbie and his England team better watch out as I won't be going easy on them," said Usain, adding that he's got a "special celebration" planned should his team win.

The 31-year-old is a Manchester United fan, and once even made a surprise call to MUTV, its TV channel.

"I always said that I want to cope in more of a team sport because the track is individual," he told the football club.

"I catch along easily and understand what I need to do when I get a job. When I get instructions, I can carry them out really well," he said.

The Soccer Aid game at the team's home ground will see celebrities and former world-class footballers playing together on the same team.

The event, which takes place biannually, has raised £24 million to help children since its launch in 2006.

The match has seen the likes of footballers Maradona, Alan Shearer and Ronaldinho play alongside celebs like Mark Wright, Jack Whitehall and Olly Murs.

Will Ferrell, Gordon Ramsay, Mike Myers and Craig David have also played in previous years.

"Reclaiming the title for England this year is going to taste so much sweeter with Usain leading the Soccer Aid World XI," said Robbie Williams, who co-founded Soccer Aid.

"I can't wait to lead out the England team."

(Source: BBC)

‘Football needs to decide what its fans are worth’



■ Deeper concerns

On a basic level, the supporters' concerns are purely practical. "People have to work on Tuesday and they have to get up early," said Joanna, a fan who had taken advantage of the unusual availability of tickets to attend her first game – perhaps a positive aspect of the boycott. But the concerns also go much deeper. For many, the addition of Monday night games is just the latest in a string of developments which match-going supporters feel are threatening their fan culture.

"It's not just about Monday nights; lots of issues are coming together at the moment," explained Thilo Danielsmeyer, a social worker and researcher with the Dortmund Fan Project, responsible for organizing trips to away games as well as dealing with social issues concerning fans in Dortmund.

"We have the debate around investors and the 50+1 rule. We have the DFB (German Football Association) wanting to allow a Chinese national team to play in the regional league. There's a huge discussion

about commercialization in German football at the moment."

■ ‘More than just sport’

Danielsmeyer's comments echo those of supporters across the country who feel that those at the top of the game are more interested in television audiences and have failed to understand the wider importance of football in peoples' lives.

Indeed, for many Dortmund regulars, the game against Augsburg wasn't just a chance for BVB to restore their three-point lead over rivals Schalke. It's never just about points or the league position.

"Football is about more than just sport, especially here in the Ruhr region," Danielsmeyer continued. "Football is culture, football is tradition. It's what Dortmund stands for."

The approximately 10,000 fans who had taken their place on the towering south stand, which usually holds 25,000, initially did their best to get behind the players. But, without the hardcore ultras leading the singing, the chants quickly dissolved into Mexican Waves – usually a feature of meaningless friendlies – as a blunt BVB were forced to settle for a 1-1 draw. Had the muted atmosphere affected the players at all? "We're pretty spoiled here in that we always play in front of sellout crowds," World Cup winner Mario Götze told DW. "But that's not a factor that influenced us."

Could he understand why so many fans had chosen to stay away? "Of course, I have a certain understanding for that, yes."

(Source: Deutsche Welle)

Neymar could still face Real, no operation planned: Emery



Neymar still has a "small chance" of playing against Real Madrid in the Champions League and there are no plans for an operation on his cracked bone, Paris Saint-Germain coach Unai Emery said on Tuesday.

"For Neymar there has been no decision to have an operation," said Emery, denying an earlier report in the Brazilian press that the world's most expensive player would go under the knife to fix the cracked bone in his foot.

"Neymar is the first to want to play every match, he's very focussed on Real. I think there's a small chance that he'll be ready for the match," added Emery.

PSG trail 3-1 from the last 16 first leg in Madrid two weeks ago and the loss of Neymar would be a huge blow to their chances of overturning that deficit at the Parc des Princes on March 6 and reaching the Champions League quarter-finals.

Neymar suffered a cracked metatarsal in his foot and a twisted ankle in an innocuous looking incident against Marseille on Sunday night.

And while Spaniard Emery said there is a possibility he'll recover by next week, he was more pessimistic than he had been on Sunday night.

"Today, after analysing Neymar, it looks less likely than it did on Sunday that he'll

be ready for this match," said Emery.

However, he was clear in his dismissal of a report published by Brazilian media outlet Globo Esporte on Tuesday morning that claimed a decision had already been reached for Neymar to undergo an operation, and that he would be out until May.

"Last night (Monday) the club issued an official statement: it said how the player was medically," added Emery.

"Things (like operations) aren't decided like that," he added, clicking his fingers.

"You need discussions with the doctor, the player, his entourage.

"To make such an important decision you need tranquility and a bit of patience.

"Right now, I don't think you need anything else. There's a lot of information from outside, but the truth is what I told you, which is what the doctor told me."

While PSG's primary concern is having the world's most expensive player available for their Champions League match next week, in Brazil it is Neymar's participation at the World Cup that is most important.

The 26-year-old captained Brazil to their first ever Olympic gold medal 18 months ago on home soil and is seen as crucial to their hopes in Russia in June and July.

(Source: AFP)

Renault will hold Red Bull to May deadline on 2019 engine



Renault will hold Red Bull to a May deadline to decide what Formula One engine they will use in 2019, the French manufacturer said on Tuesday.

Renault are supplying McLaren and Red Bull this year as well as their own factory outfit, but Renault Sport F1 managing director Cyril Abiteboul said going down to two teams would be no problem.

"We've always said that to be an engine supplier is a very bad business," he told reporters during testing at the Circuit de Catalunya. The Formula One sporting regulations stipulate that the four power unit manufacturers must inform the governing FIA in May of the preceding season which teams they have a supply agreement with.

Anyone without an agreement will be supplied by the manufacturer with fewest teams - which effectively means Honda since the Japanese company only supplies Red Bull-owned Toro Rosso at present.

Mercedes and Ferrari both supply three teams.

Red Bull won four titles in a row with Renault engines between 2010 and 2013 but the relationship soured with the introduction of the current V6 turbo hybrid units and an era of Mercedes domination.

It was strained almost to breaking point in 2015 and Red Bull, who have Australian

Daniel Ricciardo and Dutch youngster Max Verstappen as drivers, then re-branded the Renault engines as Tag Heuer.

"We are not going to hang around forever," Abiteboul said. "I know what (Red Bull team boss) Christian (Horner) is referring to when he says that he has options. He's absolutely right. But one thing that is clear is planning. "At the end of May there needs to be some clarity as to who is supplying which team. As far as we are concerned, that will be our deadline."

The season starts on March 25 in Australia but Horner has expressed concern, despite his car being fastest when testing started on Monday, after Renault said they would put reliability before performance for the first few races.

Abiteboul said being an engine provider was an often thankless task but the rules, with a driver's allocation reduced to three units from four, made reliability even more important.

"It's a no-brainer that this is what you have to put as a priority," he said.

"The key message is that the fact of being reliable opens up more options in terms of performance. The two go together. When you work on reliability, you actually work on performance also," added the Frenchman.

(Source: Eurosport)

Arsenal pick candidates to replace faltering Arsene Wenger

It's time to play the "Arsene Wenger successor" game again, as the Arsenal manager finds himself under renewed scrutiny.

Arsenal's dismal 3-0 loss to Manchester City in Sunday's Carabao Cup final has increased speculation that Wenger could be shown the door this summer unless the team somehow manage to qualify for the Champions League. That, of course, raises the question of who would be brought in to replace the Frenchman, who has been in charge since 1996.

A trio of English newspapers -- the Mirror, Daily Mail and Telegraph - reported on Tuesday that Arsenal are eyeing Monaco's Leonardo Jardim, Germany's Joachim Low and Celtic's Brendan Rodgers as the top potential candidates. That's in addition to a host of names that have been mentioned previously, some of which have been discarded and some that could still resurface.

Here's a closer look at five of the potential candidates and how they would fit in at Arsenal.

Leonardo Jardim - Monaco

At Monaco, Jardim has succeeded in implementing the same blueprint Wenger tried to perfect for many years: building a title-winning team by developing young talent while playing an attractive brand of football. Granted, Jardim hasn't quite managed to replicate last season's title-winning triumphs, but given the players he lost last summer (including star man Kylian Mbappe) it's still impressive to sit second in Ligue 1.

At 43, Jardim is still young enough to bring a new level of energy to the club, while still experienced enough to back



that up with authority. And perhaps he could also bring Arsenal target Thomas Lemar with him.

Joachim Low - Germany

Low led Germany to win the World Cup in 2014 and will try to repeat that feat this summer, but he would still be a surprising choice given that he has never managed a top club.

After leading Stuttgart to the Cup Winners' Cup final in 1998, he had stints in Turkey and Austria before joining the national team set-up in 2004. He might be a popular choice among Arsenal's German-speaking contingent -- and especially Mesut Ozil -- but he is totally untested when it comes to delivering a top league title.

Brendan Rodgers - Celtic

Rodgers would be an even more surprising choice than Low, especially since Arsenal should be able to choose from

the top managers around Europe.

True, Rodgers nearly led Liverpool to the Premier League title in 2014, and he mimicked Arsenal's "Invincibles" by leading Celtic to an unbeaten season last year. But there's still a feeling that Rodgers' career has stalled, while there are plenty of others whose star is on the rise.

Carlo Ancelotti - no club

The Italian veteran is widely seen as the safe choice for Arsenal, especially if they want someone to come in and run the ship with a steady hand during the inevitable transition period after Wenger's departure.

Ancelotti has won titles everywhere he's gone and owns one of the most impressive managerial records in football. He's not young, but at 58 he still has a good decade left in him at the top level. Of the people on this list, he's the closest thing to a guarantee that Arsenal will at least be a regular contender for a top-four spot. And perhaps best of all: he's available and wouldn't require prising away from any club.

Max Allegri - Juventus

Allegri was widely tipped as the No. 1 candidate for Arsenal this past summer had Wenger not been given a new contract. And given Antonio Conte's immediate success at Chelsea, it would be interesting to see if Allegri could have a similar impact if he moved from Juventus to the Premier League.

His emphasis on a solid defense would be a big departure from Wenger's traditional approach, but it is also sorely needed at the club.

(Source: ESPN)

Team Melli have chance to advance to World Cup next stage: Sardar Azmoun

S P O R T S Iran striker Sardar Azmoun **d e s k** says that they are not underdogs in the 2018 World Cup and have a chance to qualify for the second round.

Team Melli have been drawn along with one-time World Cup champions Spain, UEFA titleholders Portugal and Morocco in Group B.

Carlos Queiroz's men will kick off the competition with a match against Morocco on June 15.

Iran, meanwhile, face Spain in Kazan on 20 June before meeting Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal in Saransk five days later.

In an exclusive interview with onzemandial.com, Azmoun explains Iran national football team will participate in the tournament as a favorite to qualify for the next stage.

"I'm looking forward to the World Cup and I'm very excited. We will play against big teams. I'm proud of being in the tournament and I think we can achieve something there. We're going to play in Russia and it's great for me. Russia is my second country because I joined the country's league after leaving Iran. In addition, the match against Spain will take place in Kazan, my stadium," Rubin Kazan striker said.

"Nothing is impossible in football. Rostov defeated Bayern Munich in the UEFA Champions League and only Manuel Neuer was absent. How did we win? If you are following your heart, then you can do everything. Iran are not afraid of any team. God always help the people who do their best," Azmoun went on to say.



Alireza Faghani named Tehran derby referee



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Alireza Faghani has been appointed to take charge of Thursday's Tehran derby between Esteghlal and Persepolis at the Azadi Stadium.

The Referee Committee of Iran Football Federation announced on Monday that Faghani will officiate the match.

He will be assisted by Reza Sokhandan and Mohammadreza Mansouri in the derby.

Esteghlal and Persepolis have played against each other 85 times, with Esteghlal winning 25 games, Persepolis taking 21

victories, and 39 matches ending in a draw.

The Tehran derby was chosen as the most important in Asia and the 22nd important derby in the world on June 2008 by the World Soccer Magazine.

With six weeks remaining, Persepolis sit at top of Iran Professional League table with 57 points, while Esteghlal are third with 38 points.

Persepolis will lift the Iran league title with a win against their arch-rivals.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino will attend the match.

Esteghlal can defeat Persepolis in Tehran derby: Winfried Schafer



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Esteghlal coach Winfried Schafer says that they are capable of beating their arch rivals Persepolis in Tehran derby.

Esteghlal have lost to Persepolis 1-0 in the first half of Iran Professional League season and now are determined to take revenge on them.

"First of all, I liked to face Persepolis in Iran's Hazfi Cup final but they failed to advance to the final. It could be a special game in Iran and even in Asia," the German

coach said.

"When I took charge of Esteghlal we were in 15th place but we are in the third place now and it shows we've progressed," Schafer said.

Schafer is asked about who he thinks will win the derby, he said, "Esteghlal can defeat Persepolis."

The match has been scheduled to take place in Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Thursday.

Persepolis will win Iran Professional League title with a win.

Irish boxer handed four-year ban for doping



Irish amateur Michael O'Reilly has been banned for four years after a failed drugs test on the eve of the 2016 Olympic Games.

Middleweight O'Reilly returned a positive test for banned substance methandienone and was provisionally suspended on the day the draws were made for the boxing tournaments in Rio de Janeiro. The 24-year-old, whose ban will run until July 2020, is a previous gold medal winner at the European Games and clinched a bronze medal at the 2015 World Championships in Doha.

O'Reilly appealed against the initial recommendation of a four-year ban, which was made by Sport Ireland, and claimed the offence had been unintentional.

His final hearing took place in December 2017 and the Irish Anti-Doping Disciplinary Panel has now confirmed the ban will stand.

A statement read: "The panel has concluded that Mr O'Reilly has not discharged the burden of proving that his admitted anti-doping rule violation was not intentional.

"In those circumstances, the period of ineligibility which must be imposed is a period of four years under Article 10.1.1 of the Rules.

"The panel is not satisfied that there is any basis for reducing or eliminating that period of ineligibility on any grounds put forward on behalf of Mr O'Reilly."

(Source: Skysports)

Ghoddos reportedly attracts major interest

Ostersund striker Saman Ghoddos is reportedly attracting major interest.

Ostersund's remarkable Europa League journey came to an end on Thursday night, heading out of the competition despite a 2-1 win at Arsenal, as they headed out 4-2 on aggregate. Graham Potter – who has led the side from the fourth tier of Swedish football to the last 32 of the Europa League in less than seven years – saw his side turn in a superb display at the Emirates Stadium, capping off a campaign which has seen them beat Galatasaray, PAOK, Zorya Luhansk and Hertha Berlin.

The problem for the Swedish side now

is that their meteoric rise is sparking interest in key players, as ESPN reports that five Premier League clubs – Brighton and Hove Albion, Leicester City, Southampton, West Bromwich Albion and West Ham United – all scouted striker Saman Ghoddos on Thursday.

Ghoddos, 24, has hit 31 goals in 70 games for Ostersund since signing from Syrianska, and after notching two assists against Arsenal on Thursday, another club who should join the race are Celtic.

The Bhoys do have strikers right now, but the widespread view is that Moussa Dembele will leave the club this summer for a Premier League side, whilst it seems unlikely

that Celtic will break their transfer record in order to sign loanee Odsonne Edouard permanently this summer.

That may well mean that Celtic are in the market for another striker this summer and given their budget and the lure of Champions League football, a player like Ghoddos fits the bill for Rodgers.

Diminutive and quick with a penchant for long-range and even acrobatic goals, Ghoddos is more in the mould of Griffiths than Dembele but would provide Celtic with another major goal threat either in behind defences or on the end of crosses.

Celtic were interested in Rubin Kazan's

Sardar Azmoun (The Scottish Sun), but a move for his Iranian international teammate Ghoddos also makes sense as a somewhat under-the-radar striker with the potential to get even better and can be signed without breaking the bank, fitting Celtic's transfer policy in recent years.

Ghoddos will seemingly be on the move this summer, and whilst targeting a player off the back of Europa League success could be a gamble, his record in Sweden speaks for itself, and Celtic should at least consider rivaling Premier League clubs for his signature if Dembele moves on.

(Source: HITC)

Man United fans offer changes to improve Old Trafford atmosphere

Manchester United supporters are leading an initiative to improve the atmosphere at Old Trafford for Brighton's visit in the FA Cup next month.

Manager Jose Mourinho has been critical of United's home fans since arriving at the club and branded Old Trafford a "quiet stadium" following the 2-0 win over Huddersfield Town in the Premier League.

The Manchester United Supporters Trust (MUST) have been pushing the club to make changes to the seating at Old Trafford in a bid to improve the atmosphere.

And ahead of the FA Cup sixth-round tie with Brighton, they have agreed to let fans request to sit in L Stand, the section of the stadium usually reserved for away supporters.

"It is an experiment to show the club that if we can get groups of mates who want to be vocal sat together we can create the atmosphere we say we can," said Ian Stirling, vice chair of MUST and fans forum representative.

Old Trafford has included a permanent "singing section" in J Stand since the start of the 2014-15 season.

If the Brighton trial goes well, MUST are hopeful the club will allow more groups to be accommodated throughout the stadium.

"There are other things that need to happen, like moving the executive seats from the center of the Stretford End, but we think that if we can get groups of like-minded fans sat together we can improve the atmosphere," Stirling said. "It's about showing the club we can deliver the atmosphere we say we can if they help us."

(Source: ESPN)

Iran fourth in FIH Indoor World Rankings



Iran sit fourth in the International Hockey Federation (FIH) Hero Indoor World Rankings.

The Iranian team won the first ever medal in the World Cup after beating Australia in the bronze medal match.

Austria men became the number one ranked indoor team following its dream start to 2018. That included a golden double - the EuroHockey Indoor Championship and the Indoor Hockey World Cup titles.

It replace Germany in the rankings.

Czech Republic's men meanwhile made a giant leap from sixth to third while Iran are the highest ranked Asian team as they also move up the rankings from seventh to fourth.

The two biggest beneficiaries of finishing with an Indoor Hockey World Cup placing above their rankings are Belgium and Trinidad & Tobago.

Belgium's sixth place finish in Berlin see them move from 16th to 10th, while Trinidad & Tobago move from 18th to 12th on the back of their 10th place finish.

(Source: FIH)

English leagues in ongoing discussions over midseason break

The Football Association, the Premier League and English Football League remain in talks over the prospect of introducing a midseason break in English football, with sources telling ESPN FC that "discussions are ongoing" over the move.

Leading figures within the English game, including managers and players, have called for a winter break in recent years in order for the Premier League to mirror the rest of Europe's major leagues by having a temporary shutdown of domestic fixtures.

The lack of a midseason break has often been cited as a factor in England's poor performances at major tournaments, with the players suffering from fatigue as a result of the long, unbroken Premier League campaign.

But while sources have told ESPN FC that there is an appetite and determination to come to an agreement over a winter break, discussions between the key stakeholders -- the FA, Premier League and EFL -- are yet to reach a conclusion and agreement.

The prospect of staging the fifth round of the FA Cup during midweek, rather than the weekend as it currently is, is one proposal being considered to ease the fixture congestion that has previously blocked the possibility of a shutdown.

And many leading figures within the game would also welcome the end of two-legged semifinals in the League Cup, instead having the tie staged as one game at a neutral venue.

Pep Guardiola, Jose Mourinho and Jurgen Klopp have all questioned the need for two-legged semifinals in the League Cup in recent seasons.

(Source: ESPN)

Saudi Arabia cruise to win over Moldova



Jeddah: Saudi Arabia kickstarted their FIFA World Cup Russia 2018 preparations with an impressive 3-0 win over Moldova in a friendly match on Monday.

In what was head coach Juan Antonio Pizzi's first match in charge since assuming the post last October, Saudi Arabia impressed at the King Abdullah Sport City Stadium with a scintillating display.

The Green Falcons opened the scoring in the 10th minute through Omar Hawsawi, who found the back of the net with a scorching shot to the top of the net after Moldova failed to clear a corner.

Although Saudi Arabia did not widen their lead in the remainder of the first half, they were never threatened as Pizzi's team controlled possession.

Taisir Al-Jassim extended their lead 12 minutes into the second half with a superb effort from 25 yards out.

Substitute Muhannad Assiri then completed a good night for Saudi Arabia by scoring the third in the 88th minute.

Saudi Arabia continue their preparations for the FIFA World Cup Russia 2018 with a friendly against Iraq in Basra on Wednesday.

The Green Falcons, drawn in Group A at the FIFA World Cup 2018 Russia, will take on hosts Russia in the tournament opener on June 14. They then face Uruguay on June 20 and Egypt on June 25.

(Source: AFC)

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Ahmad Dehqan’s “Bearing 270 Degrees” published in Italy

CULTURE TEHRAN — Ahmad Dehqan’s “Bearing 270 Degrees”, a novel about the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, has recently been published in Italian by the Jouvence Publication. Published under the title “Viaggio in Direzione 270”, the book tells the story of a young adult soldier fighting on the war fronts.

Image of the front cover of the Italian version of Ahmad Dehqan’s “Bearing 270 Degrees”

The front cover of the book showcases the writer in one of the war fronts during Iran-Iraq war. An English translation of “Bearing 270 Degrees” by U.S. translator Paul Sprachman was released in 2006. Neyestan has recently republished the Persian version of the book.

Bollywood’s Sridevi drowned in bathtub after losing consciousness: Dubai police

DUBAI (Reuters) — Indian actress Sridevi died from drowning in her hotel room bathtub, police in Dubai said on Monday following a post-mortem. Media reports had earlier said the 54-year-old, who had been in Dubai for a family wedding, had died of cardiac arrest on Saturday. “Following the completion of post-mortem analysis, Dubai Police today stated that the death of Indian actress Sridevi occurred due to drowning in her hotel apartment’s bathtub following loss of consciousness,” Dubai Police said on their Twitter account. “Dubai Police has transferred the case to Dubai Public Prosecution, which will carry out regular legal procedures followed in such cases,” it added, without elaborating. In a career spanning five decades, Sridevi acted in 300 films and was awarded the Padma Shri, India’s fourth-highest civilian honor in 2013. Born Shree Amma Yanger Ayyapan in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, she started acting at the age of four, appearing in several Tamil-language films in the 1960s and 1970s, and eventually dropping out of school for a career in the movies. Sridevi made her Bollywood debut in 1979 with “Solva Sawan” (16th spring), but it was in 1983, with Balu Mahendra’s “Sadma” (Shock) that she made her mark in the Hindi film industry. That year, she also acted with Jeetendra in K. Raghavendra Rao’s blockbuster “Himmatwala” (The Courageous One), cementing her place as one of Bollywood’s top actresses. Sridevi was known for her on-screen vivacity and energy, playing memorable characters in films such as “Chaalbaaz” (Trickster) and Shekhar Kapur’s “Mr India” in the 80s and 90s. She charmed audiences in female-centric hits at a time when the Indian film industry relied on male actors for box-office success. Sridevi took a break from films soon after she married producer Boney Kapoor in 1996. She made a successful return to the big screen 15 years later in Gauri Shinde’s “English Vinglish” (2012), playing a housewife taking English-language lessons. Her last screen appearance was in “Mom” (2017), as a mother avenging her daughter’s rape. Sridevi’s death triggered an outpouring of tributes from Bollywood luminaries and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Filmmaker Kevin Smith suffers ‘massive heart attack’

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Director and actor Kevin Smith, best known as the laconic sidekick “Silent Bob” of his 1990s cult comedies, said on Monday that he suffered a “massive heart attack” after taping a standup comedy show in the Los Angeles suburb of Glendale. The 47-year-old “Dogma” filmmaker said on Twitter that he fell ill after completing the first show of two scheduled performances on Sunday evening. “The doctor who saved my life told me I had 100% blockage of my LAD artery (aka ‘the Widow-Maker’),” Smith said. He was referring to the left anterior descending artery, or left coronary artery, which is considered the most important for blood supply to the heart. “If I hadn’t canceled show 2 to go to the hospital, I would’ve died tonight. But for now, I’m still above ground!” Smith said on Twitter. Smith, who currently stars in the AMC TV reality series “Comic Book Men”, earned critical praise for his satires on suburbia, romance and religion. He rose to prominence with his 1994 raunchy low-budget cult comedy “Clerks” about a day in the life of two convenience store workers. He won a screenwriting Independent Spirit Award for 1997’s “Chasing Amy.”

National Museum of Iran to showcase Louvre visitors in Kiarostami’s photo collection

A R T TEHRAN — A selection of photos from the “Look at Me” series by auteur Abbas Kiarostami during his many visits to the Louvre Museum will go on display at the National Museum of Iran next week. The photos will be displayed on the margins of the Louvre Museum exhibit opening in the National Museum of Iran on March 5, the museum has announced. Kiarostami has made use of his inclinations toward documentaries and the social sciences, creating an endless regression of picture-within-picture, registering and revealing the visitors’ relationship to the images. He visited the museum many times from 1996 to 2012, where he took the photos of the visitors. He slipped unrecognized among the tourists and captured the photos with an almost sociological attention. “Snow White” and “Roads” are among other praiseworthy photo series of the auteur. Kiarostami had been involved from 1940 in over forty films, including shorts and documentaries. He attained critical acclaim for directing “Close-Up”, “Taste of Cherry”, “The Wind Will Carry Us”, “Certified Copy” and “Like Someone in Love”. A winner of the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1997 for his “Taste of Cherry”, Kiarostami died July 2016 at the age of 76. The Louvre collection to be exhibited in National Museum of Iran contains some 35 select of pieces associated with various cultures such as Greece, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. It will embrace several ancient Iranian objects as well.

A photo from the “Look at Me” series by Abbas Kiarostami

Second collection of underglaze ceramic plates featuring designs by artists, cineastes to be displayed

A R T TEHRAN — The second collection of underglaze ceramic plates, which have been painted by a number of Iranian artists and cineastes, will go on display in the Surface Art Space on Friday. The week-long exhibit is the second part of the project “1001 Underglaze Ceramic Plates”, in which 1001 artists display their paintings in four different exhibits. “The ceramic plates have been painted using the underglaze technique,” curator Azadeh Shuli has said in a press release published by the center on Tuesday. Underglaze is a method of decorating

pottery, in which the decoration is applied to the surface before it is glazed. Because the glaze will subsequently cover it, such decoration is completely durable, and it also allows the production of pottery with a surface that has a uniform sheen. In the first phase of the project, 250 works by 250 artists displayed their works in the Shirin Gallery in 2016. A box containing a ceramic plate and painting tools were given to each participant and they had 15 days to paint the plate based on their personal taste. Among the participants of the second phase of the project are singer Homayun Shajarian, actresses Leila Hatami and

Sahar Dolatshahi, calligrapher Esrafil Shirchi and composer Loris Tjeknavorian. Sculptor Parviz Tanavoli, late actor Davud Rashidi, animator Bahram Azimi, graphic designer Ebrahim Hariri, make-up designer Abdollah Eskandari and theatrical figure Marzieh Borumand were the participants in the first phase. Part of the sale will be dedicated to the Sobheruyesh, a charity school for child laborers. The first charity exhibit was organized to raise funds for the Children’s Medical Center in Tehran. The center is located in Hadish Mall on Musavi St., Heravi Square, in the Pasdaran neighborhood.

A poster for “1001 Underglaze Ceramic Plates”

The Weinstein Company says it will file for bankruptcy

Harvey Weinstein speaks at the UBS 40th Annual Global Media and Communications Conference in New York, NY, U.S. on December 5, 2012. (Reuters/Carlo Allegri)

NEW YORK (Reuters) — The Weinstein Company said late on Sunday that the U.S. film studio, whose ex-chairman Harvey Weinstein has been accused of sexual harassment and assault, planned to file for bankruptcy in the coming days after talks to sell itself collapsed. Filing for bankruptcy protection creates more uncertainty about how women who allege they are victims of Weinstein could be compensated. The scuppered deal had a provision for a victims’ fund, but in bankruptcy the women may now be treated as unsecured creditors that can recoup only pennies on the dollar for their claims. The Weinstein Company had been close to inking an agreement this month to be taken over by investors led by former Obama administration official Maria Contreras-Sweet for more than \$500 million, but a lawsuit filed by New York’s Attorney General Eric Schneiderman on Feb. 11 complicated the negotiations. Schneiderman had wanted any deal to provide adequate compensation to women who said they were victims of Weinstein, protect the company’s employees and to not reward executives who allegedly knew of the abuse. Schneiderman’s office said in a statement on Monday it was disappointed in the collapse of the deal discussions, which included a commitment from the buyers for up to \$90 million in victim compensation, and that it would continue to investigate alleged abuse by Weinstein. More than 70 women have accused

Oscars so scandalous: leading movies hit with backlash

A scene from “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri”. (Reuters/Fox Searchlight)

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — For some, “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri” is a movie about an angry mother seeking justice. But others cannot get past its racist cop, who they feel is unfairly redeemed. “Call Me By Your Name” is hailed as a heartbreaking romance, but some are puzzled that the filmmakers cast two straight actors to play the lead roles. While recent years have seen the Oscars attacked for under-representing women or people of color, this year’s contenders have been plagued by backlash and scandals ranging from accusations of plagiarism, sexual misconduct, and criticism from African-American communities. “Every main contender seems to have a knock on it,” said Dave Karger, special correspondent for movie database IMDB.com. Hollywood’s three-month-long awards season, culminating in the Oscars ceremony on Sunday, along with the influence of social media, has fueled such criticism. Fantasy “The Shape of Water”, which has a leading 13 nominations, was hit with a copyright infringement lawsuit last week alleging that its plot about a mute cleaner who falls for a mysterious river creature was lifted, without credit, from a 1969 play by late American playwright Paul Zindel. Studio Fox Searchlight (FOXA.O) said the claims are “baseless (and) wholly without merit.” 20th Century Fox’s press freedom movie “The Post” has seen sniping over misperceptions that The Washington Post broke a story in 1971 about the classified Pentagon Papers study of the Vietnam War, and not the New York Times. The loudest complaints have been leveled at Fox Searchlight’s best picture front-runner “Three Billboards.” Critics feel the dark comedy’s portrayal of a dim-witted and small-town racist cop, played by Sam Rockwell, is an affront to deep-seated prejudice that still exists in the United States and have called it “tone-deaf” and “hopelessly bad on race.” British director Martin McDonagh, who also wrote the screenplay, has defended the film. “I don’t think his (Rockwell’s) character is redeemed at all. He starts off as a racist jerk, he’s pretty much the same at the end, but by the end he’s seen that he has to change,” McDonagh told Entertainment Weekly in a February interview. “It’s supposed to be a deliberately messy and difficult film. Because it’s a messy and difficult world,” McDonagh added. The backlash has not so far derailed the path of “Three Billboards” to best picture wins at the Golden Globes, Screen Actors Guild and British BAFTAs, as well as multiple awards for Rockwell and lead actress Frances McDormand. “People often latch onto the Oscars as a way of promoting their causes,” said Tim Gray, awards editor at Hollywood trade publication Variety. The #MeToo movement likely benefited Christopher Plummer, who got a supporting actor Oscar nod after replacing Kevin Spacey last November in Sony Pictures (6758.T) kidnapping drama “All the Money in the World.” Spacey’s scenes were reshot after he was accused by multiple men of sexual harassment. He apologized for one incident and has retreated from public life.