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Macron's violence against protestors



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Isfahan hosting UIC 22nd regional assembly for Middle East

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Aiming for developing cooperation among the member countries, the 22nd International Union of Railways (UIC) regional assembly for Middle East (UIC RAME) kicked off in Iran's city of Isfahan on Monday, the portal of Iranian Roads and Urban Development ministry reported. Addressing the assembly, the Managing Director of Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (known as RAI) Saied Mohammadzadeh called for establishment of an integrated railway network in the region saying, "Iran expects this regional assembly meeting to focus on establishing an integrated network and a coordinated management in order to achieve higher efficiency." →4

Iran warns EU hesitation will put JCPOA in jeopardy

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs told a high-ranking meeting with EU officials that the bloc's hesitation to introduce its mechanism for trade with Iran after Washington's unilateral withdrawal from the nuclear deal will make the international pact face serious challenges. "Hesitation in meeting the commitments will put this significant diplomatic achievement [JCPOA] to serious challenge, in which case the Islamic Republic of Iran will make decisions in line with its own independence and interests," Abbas Araqchi said on Monday during the fourth round of political dialogue between Iran and the European Union in Brussels. The Iranian official held meetings on Monday morning and afternoon with the EU Deputy Foreign Policy Chief Helga Schmid. →2

Buildings in Kermanshah withstand massive 6.4 quake

SOCIETY TEHRAN — While a powerful quake measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale rocked the western city of Sarpol-e Zahab in Kermanshah province on Sunday, almost all buildings withstood the temblor, local media reported. Over 700 people were reportedly injured and except for a small number many were discharged from the hospitals within hours. No one was injured or died because of being buried under heap of rubble; almost all of them sustained injuries while running away terrified at the temblor. That was while on November 12, 2017 a destructive magnitude 7.3 earthquake hit Sarpol-e Zahab. →12

ARTICLE
Hanif Ghaffari
 Political analyst

Trump's challenge on defending Bin Salman

Many U.S. sources have recently condemned the position taken by President Donald Trump on Khashoggi's murder by Mohammad bin Salman, calling for a White House appeal against the Saudi Crown Prince. Even some Republican senators such as Lindsay Graham asserted that they have been disappointed with Mohammad bin Salman, despite their initial optimism, and demanded his withdrawal from power. They believe that the presence of bin Salman in Riyadh, and subsequently the continued support of Donald Trump and other White House officials for him, would be costly for Washington in the international system. However, it seems that Trump doesn't intend to stop supporting the young prince of Saudi Arabia!

Trump is now looking to ignore the murder of Jamal Khashoggi so that it won't disturb the Washington-Riyadh relationship. This is while the U.S. President's defense of Saudi Arabia, whose leaders have denied knowledge of the brutal murder of Khashoggi while acknowledging that its agents carried it out, marks another instance of the American authorities' violation of human rights.

In a recent article, the Washington Post has once again called into question the Trump government's approach to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. This source noted that while the U.S. government should try to maintain strategic relations with Saudi Arabia, Trump should stop supporting bin Salman.

This is while Trump avoided blaming Mohammed bin Salman, despite the CIA's findings that the Saudi crown prince had ordered the assassination. When the U.S. President was asked that who should be held accountable for Khashoggi's murder, Trump said; "Maybe the world should be held accountable, because the world is a vicious place."

As the Washington Post has pointed out, Trump's concerns over the Khashoggi's case is about the strategic relationship that exists between Washington and Riyadh, an issue that even the U.S. Department of State has referred to. That's why Donald Trump, under the influence of these strategic relationships, is unwilling to approve the CIA's investigation of bin Salman crimes. →7

MEK sources of funds are Iran's regional rivals: ex-CIA official

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
 By Javad Heirani

TEHRAN — Professor Paul Pillar, who was CIA intelligence analyst for 28 years, tells the Tehran Times that "A rationale for removing the MEK from the U.S. terrorism list was that in recent years the group has not been involved in killing Americans."

Pillar says terrorist group is still a terrorist group even if the blood it spills is not

American blood. The MEK certainly has been involved in lethal political violence since 2009.

He also adds that "The sources of funds always have been unclear. The most likely sources are states that are regional rivals of Iran."

Following is the text of the interview:

■ Why Obama administration removed Mujahedin-e Khalq from a U.S. terrorism list and Trump administration seriously support of this terrorist group. Why?

A: This is not the first time—nor will it be the last—that decisions to add or remove groups from the U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations have reflected politics and policy and have not been the result of an objective examination of the nature of the group. The MEK's removal from the list came after a prolonged and well-financed lobbying campaign that succeeded in swaying politicians in both major parties, including many who have at most only slight knowledge of what the MEK has done. →7

Politics, main reason behind division among Muslim states: Brazilian activist

By Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

TEHRAN (MNA) — The division which is now seen among some Islamic states is mainly because of politics, said Muslim Brazilian activist Garcia Gomez.

Gomez, who is a pro-Palestinian activist in South America, made the remarks in an interview with Mehr News Agency on Saturday on the sideline of the 32nd Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran.

Here is the full text of the interview:

■ What is your opinion about this conference and what are the barriers in route to achieve unity among Islamic countries?

A: It is important for Muslims and the world of Islam to understand the importance of unity because if you do not be united, it would be easy for enemies to defeat Islamic countries. In my opinion, the Muslim community needs to be gathered together to acknowledge the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) because I see now in the Islamic communities too much difference in

opinions; 'I'm Sunni', 'I'm Shia', mainly because politics have divided people. It is very important for the Muslims to understand that unity is key to continuing existence.

■ And how do you see measures adopted by the Islamic Republic of Iran in creating unity among Islamic countries?

A: Sure, it's so excellent. The media have programs to lie about Iran and Shia community. The conference here is very a very compelling measure to bring about unity among Islamic states.

Al-Khalifa regime threatened people to vote in elections: Bahraini cleric

By Fatemeh Salehi

TEHRAN (MNA) — The Director of Bahrainis Seminary in Iranian holy city of Qom Sheikh Abdullah Al-Daghagh condemned the recent elections in Bahrain as a farce, saying that the Al-Khalifa regime had threatened the people to vote.

Sheikh Abdullah Al-Daghagh, who previously served as the representative of prominent cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim in Iran, told Mehr News Agency

(MNA) correspondent that the Saturday's parliamentary elections in Bahrain was a 'farce' as the Al-Khalifa regime had threatened the people to turn out to vote otherwise they would face big problems living in the country.

He said that the people of Bahrain boycotted the polls because the situation in Bahrain had got worse than ever, adding that the elections would not be real unless the Bahraini authorities reach a real agreement with the people.

"The opposition groups boycotted the elections with the hope of a reaching rule of law and a national reconciliation. But the ruling system seeks to establish a parliament through which they can implement their plans and programs and carry out all of their actions in the name of the Bahraini people," he said, stressing "the Bahraini opposition and the people of this country will never accept this." →7



© Tehran Times/Malid Asgarpour

Tehran University hosts seminar on Allama Iqbal

TEHRAN — A commemoration seminar on Allama Muhammad Iqbal was held at the University of Tehran here on Tuesday in connection with the 141st birth anniversary of the famed Pakistani poet and philosopher. The Pakistani envoy to Tehran, cultural officials, scholars and academia delivered lectures at the conference, organized by the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures in collaboration with the embassy of Pakistan. Born on November 9, 1877 in Punjab, India [now in Pakistan], Iqbal is widely known as the spiritual father of Pakistan and a leading Persian and Urdu poet of the first half of the 20th century. He was knighted in 1922.

ARTICLE
Martin Love
 Political analyst from North Carolina

Bold counter moves even if naïve are worth marginal examination at least

President Rouhani and other leaders in Iran have lately been appealing for unity among all Muslims to counter the threats posed by the Israelis and the U.S. and the Saudis to sow yet more chaos in the Middle East. No one can argue against the idea of such unity, but aside from a few discrete periods in Islamic history the effective unity of the "ummah" has been and seems to remain a chimera, a least when viewed from any purely political angle.

In the lands where Islam as a religion has expanded and dominated since the Umayyad and later the Abbasid caliphates, even in periods when the "West" was not meddling and forcing its imperialistic pretensions, as especially in the past century when the last serious Muslim "empire", the Ottoman one, dissolved, Islamic polity has rarely been unified as an entire, powerful bloc.

The Middle East and beyond to the Far East has been too ethnically and politically diverse to realize the grand ideal of true Islamic unity at least as regards the kind of unity that could not be disrupted and split politically by internal factions and frictions and the impositions of Western imperialism.

Rouhani has recently claimed that the U.S. is "more isolated than ever" over its multitude of sanctions and not just on Iran, and that the sole answer to it all must be Muslim solidarity, and that includes solidarity with the Saudis who he says are perceived by Iranians as "brothers" whom Iran is ready to help defend against "terrorism, aggressors and superpowers".

It certainly has not escaped President Rouhani, and should not escape anyone, that the Trump Administration looks primarily like an extortion racket. For example, the price tag for Trump not punishing the Saudis and specifically Muhammad bin Salman, the idiot "prince", for what appears to be a direct order to murder Jamal Khashoggi back in early October, is an expenditure eventually by the Saudis of \$450 billion in additional purchases of U.S. goods, particularly arms, to enrich the coffers of the U.S. Military Industrial Complex (and Trump's domestic standing) which has become a big but bad part of the entire U.S. economy — exactly what President Eisenhower warned against in 1961. →7

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



'Fake deal of century' will not be realized: Larijani

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Monday that the "fake deal of century" will not be realized in the Middle East.

"We will stand against the Israeli regime and will not let it rule over the region and make fake deal of century," he said during a speech at the 32nd International Conference on Islamic Unity.

He noted that the resistance front is gaining power increasingly and the "deal of the century" will not be struck.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei also said in June that "deal of the century" will not come true.



Zarif meets Afghan chief executive in Geneva

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Afghanistan's Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah sat for talks on Tuesday in the Swiss city of Geneva, the Foreign Ministry website reported.

During the meeting held on the sidelines of the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan, the two sides exchanged views on the agenda of the meeting and the latest developments in Afghanistan including the peace process and fight against terrorism.

Organized by the UN and the government of Afghanistan, the Geneva conference kicked off on Tuesday with high-ranking officials from over 60 countries as well as a large number of representatives from international bodies in attendance.



'Respecting human rights is a national security requirement'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Tuesday held talks with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on the sidelines of the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan.

During the meeting, Zarif said Iran relies on domestic support as the only sustainable factor in preserving its national security. He added respecting the principles of human rights is not only an ethical commitment but also a national security requirement, the Foreign Ministry website reported.

He then expressed regret over the instrumental use of human rights and the abuse of the UN's human rights mechanism as a means of exerting pressure on independent states.



Majlis committee finishes review of CFT bill

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has finished reviewing the CFT bill and has sent the bill for final decision to the parliament, the committee's spokesman said on Tuesday.

Ali Najafi Khoshroudi said the committee modified some parts of the bill which were found faulty by the Guardian Council and did not change some other parts, IRNA reported.

Last week, the committee held a meeting to discuss the CFT. It was attended by Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, Vice President for Legal Affairs Layla Joneydi and Guardian Council spokesman Abbasali Kadkhodaei as well as a delegate from the Expediency Council.



Senior advisor voices regret over Aleppo terror attack

POLITICS TEHRAN — Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian parliament speaker, on Monday expressed regret over the loss of lives in a recent terrorist chemical attack in Syria's Aleppo, Mehr reported.

"Iran and Russia have constantly focused their efforts on a political solution to Syria as well as to Yemen, but unfortunately there are countries who see their interests in continuing conflicts," Amir Abdollahian said in a meeting with Russian Ambassador to Tehran Levan Szhagaryan.

He added that the recent terrorist chemical attack on Aleppo was also handled by warmongers and supporters of insecurity in the region.



Iranian diplomat elected as deputy chairman of UNIDO

POLITICS TEHRAN — Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, was elected as deputy chairman of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) for one year.

UNIDO, one of the specialized agencies in the UN with 168 members, was established in 1966 with the goal of industrial development in developing countries, poverty eradication and sustainable and environmental development.

The organization, headquartered in Vienna, includes a general conference, an industrial development board, and a program and budget committee.

The 53-member industrial development board is responsible for reviewing the implementation of UNIDO's work plan and making executive decisions.

Iran says to export aircraft in near future

POLITICS TEHRAN — The managing director of the Iran Aviation Industries Organization (AIO) has said Iran will export planes fully designed and manufactured inside the country in the near future, the Tasnim news agency reported on Monday.

Pointing to the 9th International Iran Air Show which opened on the southern island of Kish on Monday, Brigadier General Abdolkarim Bnitarafi said the objective of the air show is to present advances in aviation industry and set the ground for closer cooperation between foreign and domestic companies in this field.

During the international event, services and equipment provided by the Iran Aviation Industries Organization are also planned to be introduced, he said.

The official further said Iran has signed contracts with China, Russia and Indonesia



to export aviation industry equipment.

He added that in the 10th International Iran Air Show, the AIO is expected to receive its first orders for training planes from foreign countries.

Back in August, Iran unveiled the first state-of-the-art fighter jet designed and manufactured by domestic military experts.

The homegrown aircraft dubbed "Kowsar" was unveiled ahead of the National Day of Defense Industry, which was marked on August 22.

The advanced fighter jet has been manufactured following extensive research and efforts by the Iranian Defense Ministry's experts.

It enjoys capabilities such as a highly integrated architecture and a fire control system using the fourth generation of the digital data networks.

The aircraft is capable of carrying various weapons and is used for short aerial support missions.

Imam Khomeini changed the world for the better: German activist

By Mohammad Homaeefar

TEHRAN — Imam Khomeini not only changed the Muslim world, but he also changed the entire world for the better through his movement, says Jurgen Grassmann, a Shia German peace activist based in Berlin.

Grassmann made the remarks in an interview with the Tehran Times on the sidelines of the 32nd International Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran on Sunday.

"Imam Khomeini woke up the Islamic Ummah, not just the Shia Muslims, but even the Sunni Muslims," said Grassmann, who had attend the conference in Tehran.

He said despite more than a thousand years of Islamic distortion through Wahhabism and other dogmatic ways, Imam Khomeini made Islam the right way.

"He established velayat-e faqih (rule of the supreme jurist) and that's why Iran is the only Islamic country in the world," he remarked.

The peace activist said he is very proud of the Islamic Republic of Iran because of its Islamic nature.

The Islamic Republic is also a truly democratic country whose regional and international policies are commendable, he added.

Grassmann also said he regularly visits Iran to attend similar events and has developed a special liking for the Islamic Republic because of velayat-e faqih. "Without velayat I will never come to Iran again."

"Velayat is the only path in this world that I can follow deeply," he said, describing velayat-e faqih as the most important point in the Islamic world.

He went on to express his admiration for Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution,



"Terrorism is built one hundred percent by America, Israel and Saudi Arabia," German peace activist says.

and highlighted his important role as the true leader of the Islamic Ummah.

Following Ayatollah Khamenei should be the first priority for all Muslims, Grassmann suggested.

Asked about his take on the first day of the conference, he said President Hassan Rouhani's speech was the best and also the most important one made in the conference.

"Mr. Rouhani tried his best and although I am not a follower of him, I should say that he made the best speech at the conference," he stated.

He further praised the event for gathering lots of people from around the world, but added that the number of participants is not that important. Instead, he said, such a conference should focus on attracting a much more diverse crowd.

On the most significant problems that the Muslim world is facing today, Grassmann hinted at the destructive policies of the Zionist regime, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, calling on all Muslims to spare no efforts to free Mecca, Medina and Palestine, which he described as the three key places for Muslims.

"The Zionists work and plan for the future. I'm sure they know that Saudi Arabia will not exist so long, because they (the Saudis) are too stupid. And that's why we should liberate Mecca, Medina and Palestine, since they belong to us," he said.

He added that the Saudi rulers are just a family of gangsters and non-believers, who have created their own nonsensical version of Islam in Saudi Arabia.

"Who created terrorism?" he asked rhetorically in response to a question about the threat of terrorism. "Everybody knows; terrorism is built one hundred percent by America, Israel and Saudi Arabia," he explained.

Pointing to the future of the Islamic world, the German activist said young people need to take the wheel and build a better future through a revolutionary mindset.

"For me, Islam has to be revolutionary, especially in this era," he concluded.

Air Force conducts drill over Persian Gulf

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) held a maneuver over the Persian Gulf on Tuesday.

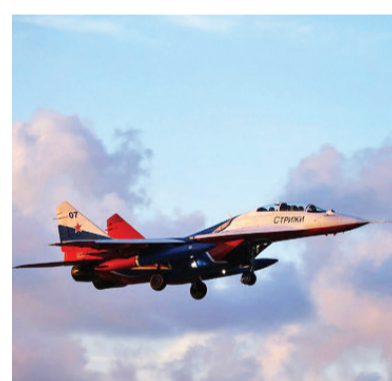
Two Thunder, three F-4 and two F-14 fighter jets and one PC-7 trainer aircraft were involved in the exercise over the geostrategic waterway.

The drill was held on the second day of the 9th International Iran Air Show, which was launched on Kish Island on Monday.

The air show was attended by Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami and some other military and civilian officials.

The four-day exhibition is the most important event in Iran's aviation and aerospace industries. It is being held every two years. It provides a platform for participants to showcase the latest achievements in aviation and aerospace industries.

The airshow secretary, Bijan Bonak-



dar, said on Monday that 105 Iranian and 10 foreign companies are participating in the event, according to Press TV.

He added that the participants are showcasing their newest advances in aviation and aerospace industries at a time that the U.S. is mounting pressure on other countries to abide by its policies on Iran.

U.S. Treasury leading media war against Iran: general

POLITICS TEHRAN — Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the aerospace division of the IRGC, said on Tuesday that the U.S. Treasury is leading a media war against Iran through its support of foreign intelligence services.

Speaking at a ceremony, the general said it is necessary to increase vigilance in the face of media war.

"Today's war is simpler, because the Iranian nation is powerful and they cannot apply methods they used to adopt in early years after the revolution. So, they have activated all of their capacities in media war against Iran, however, they have not been successful. We should not ignore this issue and absolute vigilance is essential," he stated.

Noting that psychological warfare against Iran is not something new, Hajizadeh said necessary strategies should be adopted to counter it.

"Today's war requires wiser strategies, because during the imposed war [1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war], the enmities were obvious



but currently a tiny wave can turn into a tsunami. So, all should be vigilant about the enemies' moves to prevent abuses of the hegemonic system," the general remarked.

Hajizadeh also said that the enemies will fail to achieve their plots against Iran due to the people's awareness and the wise strategies of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

France, Germany may host payment channel aimed at bypassing sanctions on Iran

France and Germany will likely host the Special Vehicle Purpose (SPV), a special payment channel created by Europe as part of its efforts to keep trade flowing with Iran in defiance of U.S. sanctions, senior diplomats told the Wall Street Journal.

The Monday report said the governments participating in the payment channel will directly manage the company (mechanism) in order to prevent the US from putting direct sanctions on it.

According to the diplomats, British officials are also mulling over joining France and Germany in order to rescue the European attempt to circumvent the sanctions and salvage the Iran nuclear deal following the U.S. withdrawal in May.

The report said if France plays host to the SPV, Germany will take the helm, and vice versa.

According to the report, the mechanism is not finalized yet and finishing touches will be discussed on the sidelines of the 2018 G20 Buenos Aires summit, scheduled to begin on November 30.

The move comes after Luxembourg and Austria, under the U.S. pressure, refused to host the SPV, with Luxembourg officials being warned that hosting the mechanism could damage the country's place as a major financial center hosting many international investment funds, European diplomats said.

Iran warns EU hesitation will put JCPOA in jeopardy

During the talks, Araqchi stressed the significance of the JCPOA for the peace and safety of the Middle East region and the entire world.

Araqchi highlighted the fact that the most recent report of the International Atomic Energy Agency has conceded to Iran's complete compliance to its undertakings.

He called for facilitating an efficient and undeviating implementation of commitments made by the remaining signatories to the JCPOA, in particular, the European countries.

In this round of talks, a delegation of Iranian parliamentarians alongside a team from the Foreign Ministry and the heads

of European Union's different institutions were present.

In the meetings, Iran and EU negotiators discussed bilateral cooperation in agriculture, education and research, commerce, energy and climate change, transportation, banking issues, refugees, drug, natural disasters, and human rights, as well as fighting terrorism.

Both sides talked about their last year's performance in the various arenas of concern, and agreed upon how to further their upcoming plans.

Part of the talks was allocated to discussing the regional issues.



Schmid: Iran should enjoy dividends of nuclear deal

In the meeting, Schmid said that according to the JCPOA, Iran should enjoy the dividends of lifting sanctions in an "effective manner". Schmid said the seminar indicates the EU's

strong support for the JCPOA, adding that all the 28 members of the EU are committed to the implementation of the nuclear deal.

She further noted that as long as Iran honors its undertakings, the EU will stay committed to fully implementing the agreement.

As an instance of the EU's commitment and its practical support, she referred to European countries' recent statement in support of the JCPOA as well as their attempts to develop the trade mechanism of the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV).

She added that the deal has led to cooperation between Iran and the EU in some areas which were formerly not feasible to do.

Tunisians say no to Mohammed bin Salman visit

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman requested to meet Erdogan: Turkish FM

By staff & agencies

The House of Saud regime Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, commonly known by his initials MBS, has requested to meet Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the upcoming two-day G20 summit in Argentina, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said.

"Yes, he has asked Erdogan on the phone, whether they could meet in Buenos Aires. Erdogan's answer was 'Let's see'," Cavusoglu told German daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung in an interview published on Tuesday.

"At the moment there is no reason not to meet with the crown prince," Cavusoglu said, adding that the request was made during a phone call.

Erdogan and Prince Mohammed, will attend the G20 meeting in the Argentinian capital, Buenos Aires, on November 30-December 1.

The relations between the House of Saud regime and Turkey have been strained by the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul last month.

After offering numerous contradictory explanations, Riyadh finally admitted that Khashoggi had been killed and his body dismembered in a "rogue operation".

Riyadh has repeatedly said MBS had no knowledge of the killing, which Turkey says was carried out at the kingdom's consulate by a 15-member hit squad with links to MBS's security team.

Erdogan has said the killing was ordered by the highest level of the Saudi regime leadership but ruled out that it had come from Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, putting the spotlight instead on the 33-year-old crown prince.

United States President Donald Trump said last week Washington would remain a "steadfast partner" of Saudi Arabia despite saying that Prince Mohammed may have known about the plan to murder Khashoggi.

Asked if he knew for sure who in Riyadh gave the order to kill Khashoggi, Cavusoglu said that the team would not have acted on its own, but could not say anything else without proof.

Cavusoglu said Riyadh had offered to send identikit photos of local helpers who assisted in the cover-up. "Why identikit pictures? The Saudis know the names," he said.

Turkey says it has recordings related to the killing which it shared with Western allies. Cavusoglu said he had listened to the recordings and that Khashoggi was killed within seven minutes.

"It was premeditated murder," he told the German newspaper, rather than a last resort after they failed to convince him to return to Saudi Arabia.

"It can be heard how the forensics expert instructs the others: they should listen to music while he cuts up the body. One notices how he enjoys it."

Argentina mulling charges against Saudi crown prince over Yemen war, Khashoggi murder

Meantime, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has formally requested Argentine judicial authorities to use a domestic constitutional clause to arrest and prosecute Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for war crimes in Yemen and the murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi when he enters Argentina later this week to attend a G20 summit.

The New York-based rights group filed a submission with an Argentine federal prosecutor on Monday, presenting its public findings on violations of international law during a



Riyadh-led military campaign against Yemen and bin Salman's possible complicity in serious allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of Saudi citizens, including Khashoggi.

Argentina's constitution recognizes the principle of universal jurisdiction for war crimes and torture. As a result, its judicial authorities are able to probe and prosecute such crimes regardless of where they were committed, who carried them out or who the victims were.

"Argentine prosecutorial authorities should scrutinize Mohammed bin Salman's role in possible war crimes committed by the Saudi-led coalition since 2015 in Yemen," HRW Executive Director Kenneth Roth.

"The crown prince's attendance at the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires could make the Argentine courts an avenue of redress for victims of abuses unable to seek justice in Yemen or Saudi Arabia," Roth said.

The writ presented by HRW was received at the court of federal judge Ariel Lijo, who forwarded it to federal prosecutor Ramiro Gonzalez, who must now decide if the principle of universal jurisdiction applies in the case of bin Salman.

"A decision by Argentine officials to move toward investigation would be a strong signal that even powerful officials like Mohammed bin Salman are not beyond the reach of the law," Roth said. "And Mohammed bin Salman should know that he may face a criminal probe if he ventures to Argentina."

Bin Salman is expected to attend a meeting of leaders of the world's major industrialized and emerging economies, known as G20, in Buenos Aires on November 30.

Argentine officials believe that it is extremely unlikely that the inquiry might produce an arrest warrant for bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, before the gathering.

Tunisians say no to Mohammed bin Salman visit
Elsewhere, dozens of Tunisians gathered on the capital's main avenue on Monday evening to protest against a planned visit by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Prince Mohammed, is expected to arrive in Tunisia on

Tuesday afternoon as part of a regional tour as he makes his way to the G20 summit set to take place in Argentina at the end of the month.

It is also MBS's first overseas tour after the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi regime consulate in Istanbul two months ago. The murder - widely seen as orchestrated by the crown prince - created an international firestorm against Saudi Arabia that continues to reverberate.

While the Saudi Royal Court did not clarify the official visit's program, Tunisia has long been a recipient of Saudi aid money. The two countries' air forces held their first ever-joint exercises in October, signaling tighter relations.

MBS' trip to Tunis, made known last week, has generated widespread condemnation among civil society for days.

On Monday, the Tunisian Journalists' Syndicate (SNJT) announced it planned to file a lawsuit against Prince Mohammed at an international court for "war crimes committed by the Saudi regime in Yemen".

In an open letter addressed to President Beji Caid Essebsi days prior, the union slammed MBS as a "danger for the safety and the peace of the region and the world, and a real threat to freedom of expression".

A giant poster of the Saudi prince holding a chainsaw has been hung outside the group's office. "No to the desecration of Tunisia, land of the revolution," read the banner.

In another symbolic move, a group of 50 lawyers announced they too filed a lawsuit with a Tunisian court to pressure the government to cancel the crown prince's visit.

MBS's involvement in Yemen - in addition to his alleged role in Khashoggi's killing and the detention of the female activists - has put the country's ties with Western allies under tight scrutiny.

It remains to be seen which leaders shake hands and pose for photos with the crown prince at the G20 in Buenos Aires later this week.

Rights groups: U.S. prolonging Yemen war by supporting Saudi, UAE

The U.S.' continued military support for Saudi Arabia and the UAE is prolonging the war in Yemen, leading human rights groups have said.

In a joint statement, OXFAM, Care, the International Rescue Committee, Save the Children and the Norwegian refugee Council called for America to halt its military support for the Gulf states as this is leading to the famine in the war torn country.

"By providing such extensive military and diplomatic support for one side of the conflict, the United States is deepening and prolonging a crisis that has immediate and severe consequences for Yemen, and civilians are paying the price," reads the statement.

The U.S. must cease "all military support for the Saudi-UAE coalition in Yemen in order to save millions of lives", they added, and to "back up its recent call for a cessation of hostilities with genuine diplomatic pressure."

Impoverished Yemen has remained in a state of civil war since 2014, when Houthi rebels overran much of the country, including the capital Sana'a.

In 2015, Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies launched a massive air campaign aimed at reversing Houthi military gains and shoring up Yemen's embattled government.

Since the coalition intervened in 2015, Yemen has become the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, according to the UN. Some 10,000 people have been killed in the war, while more than 11 per cent of the country's population has been displaced.

Twenty-nine million civilians are in need of humanitarian aid while 14 million are at risk of famine as a result of the war and subsequent sieges which the Saudi-led coalition has imposed on a number of cities in an effort to starve and force Houthi fighters out of them.

(Source: Middle East Monitor)

Trump attacks May's Brexit deal, says it may harm U.S.-Britain trade



The United States President Donald Trump said on Monday that British Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit agreement with the European Union (EU) may hamper trade between Washington and London.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, Trump said the deal that May struck with Brussels "sounds like a great deal" for the EU.

"I think we have to take a look at, seriously, whether or not the UK is allowed to trade, because you know right now, if you look at the deal, they may not be able to trade with us," he said.

"That wouldn't be a good thing. I don't think they meant that, I don't think the prime minister meant that, and hopefully she'll be able to do something about that," Trump said.

May's office rejected the statement saying that the agreement allowed Britain to sign trade deals with countries around the world, including the U.S.

"We have already been laying the groundwork for an ambitious agreement with the US through our joint working groups, which have met five times so far," said a spokesperson for the office.

On Sunday, the 27-member bloc approved the withdrawal agreement and political declaration on the future EU-Britain relations.

A very turbulent period now lies before the members of Britain's parliament, as they will vote on the deal in the coming weeks.

On Monday, May made a blunt appeal to skeptical legislators to back the deal: It isn't perfect, but it's all there is, and the alternative is a leap into the unknown.

In essence, she urged parliament: Let's agree and move on, for the sake of the voters.

May confirmed that British lawmakers will vote on December 11, after several days of debate, on whether to approve or reject the agreement.

Scores of legislators - from both the opposition and May's governing Conservative Party - have vowed to oppose it.

Rejection would plunge Britain into a political crisis and potential financial turmoil just weeks before it is due to leave the EU on March 29.

"No one knows what would happen if this deal didn't pass," May told the House of Commons.

"Our duty as a parliament over these coming weeks is to examine this deal in detail, to debate it respectfully, to listen to our constituents and decide what is in our national interest."

Before then, May plans a frantic two-week cross-country campaign to convince both the public and legislators that the deal delivers on voters' decision in 2016 to leave the EU "while providing a close economic and security relationship with our nearest neighbors".

But May's defense of her hard-won deal in parliament was followed by a torrent of criticism, from hard-core Brexit-backers, pro-EU legislators and previously loyal backbenchers alike.

During Monday's debate in parliament, legislators again expressed their deep unease, if not hatred, of the deal that keeps Britain outside the EU with no say, but still subject to the rules and the obligations of membership at least until the end of 2020 while a permanent new relationship is worked out.

Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn said the "botched deal" would leave Britain worse off, with "no say over EU rules and no certainty for the future".

"Plowing on is not stoic. It's an act of national self-harm," he said.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Putin voices 'serious concern' over martial law in Ukraine

The United Nations has held an emergency session on what Ukraine has called "an act of aggression" off the coast of Crimea, following the seizure by Russia of three Ukrainian ships during a naval clash in the Black Sea.

The Security Council meeting on Monday came just a few hours before the Ukrainian parliament passed a proposal by the country's president to impose martial law for 30 days.

Addressing the council, Nikki Haley, the United States ambassador to the UN, warned Russia that the seizure of the ships on Sunday in the Sea of Azov was an "outrageous violation" of Ukraine's sovereign territory and urged the international community to condemn Russia's "arrogant" act.

Haley said such "outlaw actions" are preventing normal relations from developing between Washington and Moscow.

Russia has said the three ships - two small armored artillery vessels and a tugboat - entered Russian territorial waters illegally.

Dmitry Polyansky, the Russian deputy representative to the UN, accused Ukraine of concocting a Russian threat in the Sea of Azov with Western support.

"Our country has never struck the first blow, but it can stand up for itself," he told the council, adding: "The population of the Crimea, as well as other regions of Russia, is under reliable protection."

Referring to Sunday's incident, Polyansky said Ukraine had planned the "provocation" in advance with the coordination of Western states, which he said had given the Ukrainian government "carte blanche".

Kiev has said its vessels did nothing wrong and has accused Russia of military aggression.

Volodymyr Yelchenko, Ukraine's ambassador to the UN, called Russia's claim that Ukrainian ships violated Russia's borders "an outright lie" and warning that rising tensions with Moscow "constitute a clear threat to international peace and security".

Also on Monday, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Chief Jens Stoltenberg called on Russia to release the Ukrainian ships and sailors, saying there was no justification for Moscow's actions.

"What we saw yesterday was very serious," Stoltenberg told a news conference after an emergency meeting of the western military alliance held on Ukraine's request.

"There is no justification for the use of military force against Ukrainian ships and naval personnel, so we call on Russia to release immediately the Ukrainian sailors and ships it seized yesterday."

Earlier, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signed a decree imposing martial law in response to the naval stand-off with Russia. The move was approved by parliament on



Angela Merkel, Petro Poroshenko, and Vladimir Putin at Normandy D-Day celebrations in November 2014.

Monday night.

Poroshenko ordered an emergency session of Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's lower house of parliament, to take place on Monday during which legislators voted on the decree.

The law will be imposed for 30 days from Wednesday onwards. Addressing fears of heightened tensions between Kiev and Moscow, the 53-year-old also said on Monday that the step did not mean a declaration of war against Russia.

"Ukraine is not planning a war against anyone," he told the National Security and Defense Council.

Poroshenko also said Ukraine would stick to the Minsk Agreements, peace deals his government inked with Russia and pro-Russian separatists in southeastern Ukraine that were designed to stop a war that claimed more than 10,000 lives since 2014.

The conflict began after pro-West protesters overthrew pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014, after months of violent protests in the capital, Kiev.

The separatists claimed the new, fiercely anti-Russian government planned a "genocide" of ethnic Russians in eastern regions, Ukraine's rust belt and Yanukovich's support base.

Putin voices 'serious concern' over martial law in Ukraine

Meantime, Russian President Vladimir Putin has voiced "serious concern" over Ukraine's recent move to impose martial law in the country following the seizure of three intruding Ukrainian military vessels in Russian waters.

Putin conveyed his concern in a phone call to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the Kremlin announced in a Tuesday statement. Putin "expressed a serious concern over Kiev's decision to put its armed forces on alert and to introduce martial law," read the statement, which said the Russian president also urged Merkel to restrain Ukrainian authorities from engaging in further provocation and military measures.

The Russian leader further told Merkel that he hoped "Berlin could influence the Ukrainian authorities to dissuade them from further reckless acts."

According to local press reports, while Merkel has stressed the need for dialog, the European Union, Britain, France, Poland, Denmark, and Canada have all censured what they referred to as Russian aggression.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	167199.8
IFX	1816.33

Sources: tse.ir, ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,607 rials
GBP	53,838 rials
AED	11,430 rials

Source: iribnews.ir

COMMODITIES

WTI	\$51.93/b
Brent	\$60.97/b
OPEC Basket	\$60.27/b
Gold	\$1,216.85/oz
Silver	\$14.22/oz
Platinum	\$840.80/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Copper cathode production up 70% in H1

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Production of copper cathode in Iran during the first half of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-September 22) rose 70 percent compared to the first half of the past year, IRIB reported on Tuesday citing the data released by the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade.

Hitting the production amount of 115,000 tons, copper cathode stood among the products with the highest increase of production during the six-month period of this year.

Isfahan hosting UIC 22nd regional assembly for Middle East

The official further praised UIC's supports for Middle East railway activities stressing the needs for acceleration of co-operation and strong support for regional programs and projects.

According to Mohammadzadeh, due to its strategic location, Iran has a privileged position which makes it potent for becoming a transit hub in the region.

Having several free trade zones, especially in the Persian Gulf region, the existence of a wide network of roads in the country, low prices for fuel and energy carriers in Iran, and a suitable rail transport network in the country, are some of the country's advantages.

Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE are members of UIC regional assembly for Middle East. The 22th assembly will wrap up on Wednesday.

Qatar Airways announces more flights to Iran weeks after U.S. sanctions reimposed on Tehran

Qatar Airways will add more flights to Iran from January, the state-owned airline announced on Monday just weeks after the United States re-imposed sanctions on Tehran.

President Donald Trump has threatened to bar companies that continue to do business with Iran from the U.S. market.

Qatar Airways will add two weekly flights to its existing Doha-Tehran route and add three weekly flights on its Shiraz service in January. It will also launch two weekly flights to Isfahan in February.

"These latest launches are further evidence of Qatar Airways' commitment to Iran, as well as the expansion of our network in this thriving market ...," Qatar Airways Chief Executive Akbar al-Baker said in a statement. (Source: Reuters)

China's economy 'may be bending,' but it's not 'breaking,' JP Morgan says

The world's second-largest economy remains on track to be one of the fastest-growing globally, according to Jing Ulrich, managing director and vice chairman for Asia Pacific at J.P. Morgan Chase.

"The important thing to note is the Chinese economy may be bending. It is not breaking," Ulrich said Tuesday at CNBC's East Tech West conference in the Nansha district of Guangzhou, China.

She said the firm expects China's economy to slow from 6.6 percent to 6.1 percent next year. Beijing's efforts to reduce reliance on debt for growth, an increase in uncertainty among consumers and an investment slowdown in areas such as real estate are all contributing to the slowdown, Ulrich said.

However, a growth rate above 6 percent would still mark one of the fastest in the world, and would top the U.S., which grew at a 3.5 percent annual rate in the third quarter.

Ulrich added she expects the U.S. economy to slow next year, as corporate profit growth slows and the stimulative effects of tax cuts wear out.

On top of those factors are concerns about trade tensions between China and the U.S. The two countries have announced tit-for-tat tariffs on billions of dollars' worth of goods from one another as the White House seeks to reduce the U.S. trade deficit with China and change how foreign companies are treated by Beijing. (Source: CNBC)

NIGC supplies nearly 130 bcm of gas to national network in 8 months: official

ECONOMY TEHRAN — National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) has supplied near 130 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas for household subscribers and also power plants across the country during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 22 – November 21), Shana reported quoting Saeid Momeni, NIGC's gas distribution director.

"Since in the mentioned timespan the number of towns and villages newly connected to the national gas network increased significantly, the amount of gas delivered to different sectors has also grown compared to the previous years", Momeni said.

According to the official during the mentioned period 55 bcm of gas has been supplied to the power plants across the



country.

"As the second main consumers, major industries have also received 26.3 bcm", he added.

Momeni also put the figure for the gas consumed by households, businesses and small-scale industries at 47.7 million cubic meters.

Iran's exports to Indonesia rise 43% in 7 months

ECONOMY TEHRAN — "According to the latest data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Iran's exports to Indonesia, during the first seven months of the present Iranian calendar year (March 21- October 22, 2018), has increased 43 percent in terms of value compared to the

same time in the preceding year," the public relations department of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) quoted Iran's Commercial attaché to Indonesia as saying.

"Iran exported \$402 million of goods to Indonesia in the said period, which shows 43 percent growth in comparison with its previous \$280 million in the year before,"

Anvar Kamari said.

"In terms of weight, the seven-months-exports registered 10 percent increase," he added.

As the commercial attaché said, the mostly exported goods to Indonesia in the said time span included \$220 million of iron and steel, with the growth of 74 percent year-on-year,

\$160 million of fuels and mineral oils, \$10.3 million of chemicals, and \$6.2 million of plastic products.

Iran's exports to Indonesia in the last Iranian calendar year 1396 (ending on March 20, 2018) stood at \$660 million and the figure is expected to reach \$900 million by this yearend, the same report confirmed.

Shahid Rajaei Port capacity at 100m tons per annum

ECONOMY TEHRAN — "Annual loading and unloading capacity of Shahid Rajaei Port, in south of Iran, stands at 100 million tons, 25 percent of which belongs to minerals, the head of Hormozgan Province's Ports and Maritime Department announced on Tuesday.

"Some 80 million tons of cargos were loaded and unloaded at the port in the preceding year with minerals accounting for 20 million tons of the amount," Allah-Morad Afipour added.

Informing about the construction of a mechanized terminal in this port, the official said that the project needs about 40 trillion rials (\$952 million) of



investments and related negotiations are being done with an investor from the private sector to implement it.

Specialized committees hold meetings in Iran's intl. cooperative conference

ECONOMY TEHRAN—On the second day of the 13th ICA-Asia and Pacific Regional Cooperative Conference, which is being held in Tehran, nine specialized committees held some meetings.



The committees were in the fields of agriculture, human resources development, university cooperation, consumers, gender, forestry, credit and banking, young people cooperation, and research, as announced by Iran Chamber of Cooperative.

Some 170 representatives from 25 countries are participating in the five-day event which kicked off on Monday.

As reported, over 300 Iranian participants will also take part in this gathering of ICA (International Cooperative Alliance) organized by Iran Chamber of Cooperative.

Participating countries include China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Argentina, Belgium, Kenya, Jordan, Palestine, Malaysia, Turkey, Italy, Canada, France, Poland, etc.

ICA is a non-profit international association established in 1895 to advance the co-operative social enterprise model. The Alliance is the apex organization for co-operatives worldwide, representing 284 co-operative federations and organizations across 95 countries. The members of the Alliance are national level co-operative federations, individual co-operative organizations and government offices concerned with co-operatives.

German banks must build up buffers for worse times: Bundesbank

German banks have enough capital but should still build up buffers for the next economic downturn, Bundesbank director Joachim Wuermeling told Reuters.

Two German banks - Deutsche Bank (DBKGN.DE) and Nord-LB - scored in the bottom 10 in the latest round of pan-European stress tests, published earlier this month.

That added to investor concern about the two weak links among German banks, just as the euro zone's largest economy began to slow and financial markets were in turmoil.

Wuermeling, who is responsible for banking supervision at the German central bank, did not name any firm. But

"on average, we see the capital levels of German banks as quite okay," he said in an interview.

The Bundesbank shares responsibility for overseeing German banks with the country's financial watchdog, Bafin.

Both are part of the European Central Bank's Single Supervisory Mechanism, created after the latest financial crisis to centralize oversight of top banks.

Nord-LB would be left with capital worth just 7.07 percent of its risky assets after three years of economic and financial stress, Deutsche with 8.14 percent, according to the results of the European Banking Authority's latest stress tests published on Nov 2. (Source: Reuters)



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ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING

INTERNATIONAL TENDER NO. 97-08/186

Second Announcement

Tender Holder:
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING (IRIB)

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Deadline of Receiving Documents:
As of publishing second announcement of advertisement latest by the business hour dated on **Monday December 03, 2018.**

Place of Receiving Documents:
Secretariat of Tenders' Commission, Technical Purchasing (KALA) Dept., Media Technology and Development Deputy Office, Bldg. No. 2, IRIB, Jam-e Jam St., Vali-e Asr Ave., Tehran

Type and Amount of Guarantee for Participating in Tender:
The amount of **USD 116,930** which should be in the form of extendable bank guarantee

Time and Place of Delivering Priced Bid:
The sealed A, B & C packages/envelopes should be submitted within one main envelope marked with tender number no later than **15 p.m. on Wednesday January 02, 2019** and submitted to the Secretariat of Commission of Tenders.

Time and Place of Opening Envelopes
The date of opening envelopes A&B is at **8:30 a.m. on Sunday January 06, 2019** in the office of Vice President of IRIB Planning and Financial Resources and opening of envelope C will be after technical evaluation.
It should be noted that bidders should hold license from the authorized bodies.

For more information, please contact the following phone numbers: **0098-21-22166313**
It is obvious that cost of publishing two advertisements shall be borne by the winner of tender.

Public Relations Dept. of IRIB

Oil falls on record Saudi output; eyes G20 and OPEC

Oil prices fell on Tuesday, depressed by record Saudi Arabian production even as the kingdom tried to persuade other exporters to agree output cuts ahead of an OPEC meeting next week.

Brent crude oil was down 70 cents a barrel at \$59.78 by 0838 GMT, still above a 13-month low of \$58.41 reached on Friday. U.S. light crude was 75 cents lower at \$50.88.

Saudi Arabia raised oil production to an all-time high in November, an industry source said on Monday, pumping 11.1 million to 11.3 million barrels per day (bpd) during the month.

Oil prices have lost almost a third of their value since early October, weighed down by an emerging supply overhang and widespread financial market weakness.

"The oil price correction has become a rout of historic proportions," U.S. investment bank Jefferies said in a note on Tuesday.

"The negative price reaction is as severe as the 2008 financial crisis and the aftermath of the November 2015 OPEC meeting, when the group decided not to act in the face of a very over-supplied market," the bank said. Norbert Ruecker, head of commodity



research at Swiss bank Julius Baer, said oil had buckled after "a surprisingly swift and pronounced change in the market mood from shortage fears to glut concerns" while the world economy was also slowing down. Traders are now awaiting the outcome

of the Group of 20 (G20) meeting in Buenos Aires and also the result of a meeting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Leaders of the G20, the world's biggest economies, meet on Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, with

the trade war between Washington and Beijing at the top of the agenda. But with the top three crude producers - Russia, the United States and Saudi Arabia - all present, oil policy is also expected to be discussed.

OPEC meets in Vienna on Dec. 6 to discuss output policy together with some non-OPEC producers, including Russia.

Saudi Arabia has been pushing for an OPEC cut, indicating it may reduce supply by 500,000 bpd.

U.S. President Donald Trump has put pressure on Saudi Arabia, OPEC's de-facto leader, not to cut production, but most analysts expect OPEC to start withholding some supply soon.

"We suspect that producers will start to withhold exports in the coming months, putting a floor under prices," said Capital Economics.

Fereidun Fesharaki, chairman of energy consultancy FGE, said a failure by OPEC and Russia to cut supply significantly would mean crude prices would "fall further, perhaps (with) Brent at \$50 per barrel and WTI of \$40 per barrel or less".

(Source: Reuters)

Australian oil, gas producer Santos completes Quadrant Energy acquisition

Australian oil and gas producer Santos said Tuesday that it had completed its \$2.15 billion acquisition of Quadrant Energy.

"The acquisition of Quadrant is value accretive for Santos shareholders and is consistent with our strategy to build and grow our core assets around existing infrastructure and become Australia's leading domestic natural gas supplier," Santos Managing Director and CEO Kevin Gallagher said.

The move sees Santos increase its ownership and become the operator of a high-quality portfolio of low-cost, long-life conventional Western Australian gas assets with stable cash flows, he added.

"The portfolio also includes a leading position in the highly prospective Bedout Basin, including the recent significant oil discovery at Dorado," he said.

Quadrant holds an 80 percent interest in the Dorado joint venture with Australia-listed Carnarvon holding the rest.

Dorado's initial production rate was earlier pegged at 50,000 b/d, but RBC Capital Markets analyst Ben Wilson said earlier this month that it could be in the range of 80,000-100,000 b/d.

Santos said in a presentation in September that an appraisal program comprising 2-3 wells was planned for 2019 for the Dorado development with FEED targeted for 2020.

Wilson said first oil could be expected by around 2023.



Santos holds a 25 percent interest in the northern Australia Barossa-Caldita joint venture and is also a partner in Darwin LNG with 11.5 percent interest as well as a 13.5 percent stake in PNG LNG.

Gallagher said that the acquisition lowered the company's proforma free cash flow breakeven oil price to about \$32/b (\$23/b).

On completion of the acquisition, Santos paid \$1.93 billion, comprising the purchase price of \$2.15 billion less completion adjustments and cash acquired, the company said.

Quadrant is one of Australia's leading oil and gas companies, with a primary focus on the Exmouth and Carnarvon basins offshore north Western Australia, where, as of December last year, it had an interest in 21 exploration permits, 10 retention leases and 16 production licenses.

It is the largest single contributor to the Western Australian domestic gas market and accounts for a significant proportion of the nation's oil production, it added.

(Source: Platts)

Russia crude supply to China surges to record

Russia shipped record volumes of crude oil to China in October as independent refiners continued to fill import quotas, while Iranian oil shipments fell on uncertainty over Washington's imposition of sanctions on Tehran, data showed on Monday.

China's imports from top supplier Russia jumped 58 percent from a year earlier to 7.347 million tons, according to the General Administration of Customs data, marking the highest ever and equivalent to about 1.73 million barrels per day (bpd).

For the first 10 months, Russian imports were at 57.91 million tons, or 1.39 million bpd, up 16.6 percent.

Chinese customs last month began updating an online database with commodity imports by country of origin, replacing a service that had until March only been available to clients. Percentage changes with year-earlier figures were calculated by Reuters.

China's crude import demand hit an all-time high in October and is expected to stay strong to year-end as independent refiners snap up cargoes to use up their import quotas.

The strong demand from China's so-called "teapot" refiners has helped to push spot premiums for popular grades such as Russian ESPO Blend and Oman crude to their highest in more than four years. Iranian shipments, however, tumbled



64 percent in October from the year-ago month to 1.0496 million tons, about 247,160 bpd, ahead of U.S. sanctions that came into effect on Nov. 4.

China is one of eight countries that have been granted a waiver to continue buying some crude oil from Iran. The world's largest energy consumer is allowed to buy 360,000 bpd of oil from the Islamic Republic for at least 180 days from the imposition of sanctions, Reuters reported. Saudi Arabia's shipments last month were 4.77 million tons, or 1.12 million bpd, up 3.4 percent from October 2017.

Imports for the first 10 months from the top producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) inched up 0.2 percent to 43.2 million tons, or 1.04 million bpd.

Chinese firms stopped importing U.S. crude oil around August and September due to a growing trade spat between Washington and Beijing.

(Source: Reuters)

Look for OPEC to cut oil production by 1 to 1.5 million barrels at next meeting, says analyst

An oil production cut is expected when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) meets in Vienna next week amid worries over a U.S.-China trade war, a supply glut and demand slowdown, according to Johannes Benigni, chairman and founder of consultancy JBC Energy Group.

"OPEC will probably manage to stabilize the oil market by choosing the right language," Benigni told CNBC's Sri Jegarajah. "They will indicate a cut of between 1 million and 1.5 million, and that will do, the market probably

will stabilize."

Saudi Arabia raised oil production to an all-time high in November, Reuters reported on Monday, pumping 11.1 million to 11.3 million barrels per day (bpd) during the month.

The market is cautiously awaiting the outcome of the G-20 meeting when finance leaders meet in Buenos Aires on Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 to resolve a trade dispute between Washington and Beijing. OPEC leaders will gather in Vienna on Dec. 6 to discuss how to manage the oil output, supply glut and

demand slowdown.

"What really are in oversupply are the light crude barrels which are coming out of the U.S.," Benigni said. "So the expectation or the hope for OPEC right now would be that prices go lower, and demand may come back."

Politics is adding to the pressure with U.S. President Donald Trump pushing for low oil prices with his tweets and urging OPEC to reject output cuts that will increase prices when the group meets with producers, including Russia, which is a non-OPEC

member and the world's second-largest crude oil producer and exporter.

Oil prices clawed back on Monday, rising close to 3 percent, but concerns remained following news of Saudi Arabia adding to the glut in November. Prices had hit their lowest since October 2017 last Friday.

Brent crude oil futures rose 2.9 percent to close at \$60.48 a barrel.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose 2.4 percent to close at \$51.63 a barrel. (Source: CNBC)

\$50 oil puts shale to the test

U.S. oil production has skyrocketed this year, leaving even the most optimistic forecasts in the dust. But, the recent crash in oil prices could do what the much-hyped pipeline bottlenecks could not - slow down shale production.

Between 2015 and 2017, shale drilling activity fluctuated with oil prices (though on a several-month lag), with drillers deploying rigs and adding output when prices rose, and scrapping rigs and dialing back on activity when prices dipped. Drilling and production has always fluctuated with prices, but the much shorter lead times for shale compared to conventional drilling, meant that the oil market was responding much quicker to price changes.

The ebb and flow of drilling activity gave rise to the "shale band" theory, which dictates that oil prices had an upper and lower bound, largely decided by shale output. Whenever prices tested one of those limits, U.S. shale would steer them back into the middle of the range.

More specifically, if prices rose to, say, \$60 per barrel, shale activity would ramp up and new supplies would come online, dragging prices back down below that threshold. If prices fell to \$40 per barrel or below, drilling dried up and the drop (or slowdown in growth) tightened the market just enough to push prices back up.

Since late 2017, when the OPEC+ production cuts really began to bite, Brent prices reliably rose above \$60 per barrel and stayed there. While prices bounced around this year, they did so above the roughly \$40-\$60 price range that dominated the oil market over the last several years. As such, U.S. shale continued to grow rapidly and consistently. Outages elsewhere in the world,



combined with OPEC+ action, kept prices from falling.

Until this past month. The crash in oil prices - down more than a third since October - could make the shale band theory relevant again. WTI is down in the low-\$50s per barrel, and is starting to flirt with levels that could impact drilling operations. At \$50 per barrel, "we generate enough cash to still grow our production single digits within our cash flow," Whiting Petroleum's CFO Michael Stevens said at an industry conference this month, according to the Wall Street Journal. "So \$50 is an important floor for us."

Moreover, while many shale drillers have cut their breakeven prices over the past few years, pressure from shareholders on capital discipline is much stronger than it used to be. In years past, shale drillers could pile on the debt, promising to eventually be profitable, and investors went along. That is no longer the case.

That means that the pressure to cut back in order to preserve profitability is potentially higher than it used to be.

On top of that, some shale regions are still suffering from discounts because of pipeline issues. So, while WTI is now in the low-\$50s, some shale operators might be fetching even less. Earlier this year, Permian discounts exceeded \$10 per barrel. The Bakken is expected to see its discount worsen as pipelines fill up. The flip side is that drilling techniques have advanced considerably over the last few years, boosting production rates and lowering cost. That could allow E&Ps to weather the current downturn - should it stick around - much better than last time.

As the WSJ notes, the shale industry is in the midst of putting together drilling plans for 2019. Up until now, very few industry insiders or analyst forecasts had prices falling below \$60 per barrel next year. The recent plunge could force a rethink. If the industry goes in a more conservative direction, shale output might not grow as much as previously thought.

With all of that said, OPEC+ could put an end to the latest slide in prices as early as next week. Rumors of a large production cut began circulating a few weeks ago, and the lower prices go, the more likely it is that the cartel will take action. At this point, with expectations of some sort of action largely priced in, inaction would likely drag prices down much farther. As such, it seems highly unlikely that OPEC+ will do nothing.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Falling oil prices put new pressure on U.S. energy sector

Throughout the U.S. shale oil and gas boom of the past 15 years, one of investors' greatest concerns has been that the exploration and production companies needed continual infusions of cash to finance their investment programs.

After the rise in crude prices this year, it looked as though those fears could be put to rest: in the third quarter of this year the U.S. E&P sector was able to cover its capital spending from its operating cash flows, if only barely. The plunge in oil prices over the past two months is bringing those concerns gushing to the surface again.

In the third quarter, a sample of 50 of the largest listed U.S. E&P companies in aggregate reported operating cash flows that were higher than their capital spending, for the first time since 2011. ExxonMobil and Chevron, the country's largest oil groups, also reported healthy profits from their U.S. operations, which lost money in 2017.

However, those results were achieved during a quarter in which the benchmark U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude price averaged \$73 a barrel. WTI has fallen steadily since the beginning of October, and after a slight rebound on Monday morning was trading at about \$51.50 a barrel.

One of the key factors driving prices down has been a surge in supply. U.S. oil output has soared over the past two years, and this year, the country has become the world's largest crude producer. Russia and Saudi Arabia are also pumping oil at record rates. Meanwhile, concerns over the world economy, in part because of tensions over trade, have led to diminished expectations for global demand growth.

Over the weekend, President Donald Trump again claimed credit for the fall in oil prices, writing on Twitter: "So great that oil prices are falling (thank you President T)."

His administration has contributed to the decline in prices by easing off on the reinstated sanctions on Iran, allowing the country's biggest customers including China and India to continue buying some of its crude. Trump has also put pressure on Saudi Arabia not to back oil production cuts when ministers from OPEC and its allies meet in Vienna on December 6, linking the kingdom's policy to the U.S. response over the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Jason Bordoff of Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy said the outlook was similar to the position in 2014, which led to a crash in prices and a sharp downturn in the oil industry worldwide.

"In some respects, we are seeing 2014 play out all over again," he said. "Opec and its allies are going to have to decide how they want to respond."

The improvement in the aggregate financial position of the U.S. E&P sector reflects the health of a handful of the stronger companies, including ConocoPhillips, Occidental Petroleum, Marathon Oil and Devon Energy. Many others, meanwhile, are still raising cash from asset sales and external financing to support their investment programs.

Of the 50 leading E&P companies, only 15 could cover their capital spending from their operating cash flows in the third quarter. The recent rise in natural gas prices, and U.S. producers' use of derivatives to lock in revenues at higher levels for oil, will help support their finances. But the sharp decline in the price of crude will pressure their cash flows and increase their reliance on financing from banks and bond and share sales.

Over the past decade, U.S. E&P companies have borrowed about \$300bn from bond sales and \$780bn in bank loans, while raising about \$140bn from share sales, according to Dealogic.

Since last year, investors have been signaling that they do not have unlimited patience for sustaining those capital inflows. Executives at E&P companies typically stress their intention to live within their means by paying for their investment programs out of operating cash flows, in the near future if not always immediately. Some such as Devon and Anadarko Petroleum have been using available cash to buy back shares, rather than to drill and complete more wells.

Richard Dealy, chief financial officer of Pioneer Natural Resources, told investors at a Bank of America Merrill Lynch conference this month the company was expecting "extra cash flow in 2019", and would be looking at "what is the right form for that to??.?.?return money to shareholders".

At the same event, Michael Stevens, chief financial officer of Whiting Petroleum, said: "Disciplined growth, free cash flow, that's the big story here."

But the fall in crude prices, if sustained, will mean that some of those companies' plans for future free cash flow may have to be deferred.

(Source: Financial Times)

First LNG shipment from Russia's Arctic to arrive in Northern Europe

Independent Russian gas producer Novatek has announced the first delivery of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Yamal project in the Arctic to an area near the port of Honningsvåg in northern Norway.

"The Arc7 ice-class LNG tanker 'Vladimir Rusanov' successfully reloaded an LNG cargo delivered from the Yamal LNG facility at Sabetta to the lower ice-class designated tanker 'Pskov', which will deliver the reloaded cargo to customers in North-West Europe," Novatek said.

"The first ship-to-ship LNG transshipment is a very important commercial milestone for us," said Novatek's Deputy Board Chairman Lev Feodosyev. He explained that it allows for the optimization of transport costs "by decreasing the travel distance of the Arc7 ice-class tankers and to ensure timely offloading of LNG from Yamal LNG project."

Novatek earlier announced future large-scale LNG transshipment projects in Kamchatka and the Murmansk regions.

The \$27 billion Yamal LNG project began operations last December and has already shipped two million tons of the liquefied fuel. The LNG plant is expected to have three trains with an annual capacity of 16.5 million tons per year when fully operational.

Currently, Novatek ships LNG from two trains with a total capacity of about 11 million tons per annum. The launch of the third stage with a capacity of 5.5 million tons per year is planned for the beginning of 2019.

In September, Novatek announced plans for one additional line able to produce a million tons of LNG per year. Besides Novatek, Yamal LNG's shareholders also include France's Total, China's CNPC and the Silk Road Fund.

(Source: RT)

Why the 'Yellow Vests' are a red flag for France's Macron —and the EU

By Judah Grunstein

How do you respond to a protest movement that has no organized leadership, began a month ago with one overriding demand but has since morphed into an expression of generalized discontent, and is grabbing headlines around the world? If you have an answer, French President Emmanuel Macron would almost certainly like to hear from you.

For the second weekend in a row, protests by the Gilets Jaunes—or "Yellow Vests"—blocked roads and retail centers in cities around the country. Though the protesters' numbers fell compared to the previous weekend, the images of pitched battles between demonstrators and police on the Champs Elysees were more striking and perhaps more disruptive this time around, when the streets of Paris were packed with holiday shoppers.

Much remains murky about the origins and nature of the Yellow Vests movement, if it can be called that. It emerged in October with apparently spontaneous and decentralized expressions of outrage on social media by motorists opposed to gas tax hikes. A movement of regular, everyday working people soon took shape and, true to French tradition, baptized itself: The Yellow Vests moniker was taken from the fluorescent yellow safety vests that French motorists are required to keep in their cars in the event they break down on the highway or in other hazardous traffic conditions; the vests were worn in many of the earliest videos posted to social media. The name echoes the 2013 Bonnets Rouges—or Red Bonnets—protests against ecological toll charges on commercial transport in the northwestern region of Brittany that eventually forced then-President Francois Hollande to back off from the green measures.

Macron's gasoline taxes were similarly part of ecological efforts to reduce France's carbon emissions. But they ignored the ways in which penalizing auto use would disproportionately burden inhabitants of rural and exurban regions where cars are the principle mode of transportation and not easily replaced. If the gas taxes continue to figure centrally in the Yellow Vests' protests, the movement has grown since its inception into an amorphous clamor of grievances, with no organized leadership, and but one thing in common: a violent rejection of Macron.

Such a crowd-sourced uprising is a perfect reflection of France's atomized political landscape and the lack of a viable opposition since Macron's stunning and overwhelming victories in presidential and parliamentary elections in 2017. The Yellow Vests have kept the established parties at arm's length, refusing any political affiliation or sponsorship. But even if the protesters had not put up any barriers, both Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally—formerly the National Front—and the far-left France Unbowed of Jean-Luc Melenchon, though keen to latch onto the criticisms of Macron, would find co-opting the movement a risky endeavor, if for different reasons: Le Pen fears discrediting the movement and its narrative of a spontaneous mass mobilization by associating it with her party, while Melenchon fears being discredited by the movement should its shadowy origins prove to be driven by unseemly—read, far-right—interests.

Macron, too, has struggled to find an appropriate response to the movement and its grievances. If he seems to have taken one lesson from the many failures of his predecessor, Hollande, it is to never retreat in the face of popular resistance, as Hollande did in 2013 with the Bonnets Rouges, but also at other key moments in his presidency. By contrast, Macron has faced down the unions over several of his labor code reforms already, and seems intent on doing the same now with the Yellow Vests. The problem for Macron is that his stubbornness, accompanied by a narcissistic self-confidence, has won him a reputation for arrogance and monarchical disregard for the impact of his policies on the common people, which has become a central focus of the protesters' sloganeering.

The entire situation sums up the dangers now facing Macron, which lay not so much in the beleaguered political opposition, but in the popular opposition to both his political agenda and his political persona. Having never run for public office before winning the presidency, and with no firm party allegiances among his government, that self-invented persona is his only real source of political capital. His Republic on the Move, or LRM, party materialized out of the grassroots networks that powered his presidential campaign to victory. It represents less a political formation than a fan club, one that probably would not survive Macron's political demise intact.

For now, it will continue to allow Macron to advance his legislative agenda, because of the nature of France's parliamentary system and because the traditional counterweights that have historically checked French presidents—the political opposition and organized labor—are no longer effective brakes on his power. That leaves only one thing that might stop him: an unaffiliated popular mobilization. It should come as no surprise, then, that this is what has emerged. The public disavowal comes just as Macron is poised to launch his campaign for the European Parliament elections, meaning the Yellow Vests are bad news not just for Macron, but for the European Union more generally. At a time when the French president has presented himself as the EU's champion, ready to take on illiberal populist critics like Hungary's Viktor Orban, he runs the risk of being exposed as a paper tiger.

The EU has historically depended on the Franco-German partnership as its motor. Over the past decade, Germany has been the stronger partner, increasingly willing to translate its stronger economic performance into political influence. After German Chancellor Angela Merkel emerged from last year's general elections hobbled, I wondered what the EU would look like with a strong France and a weak Germany as the new normal at its heart. The Yellow Vests might not yet represent a mortal threat to Macron. But they do raise the question, one sharpened by Brussels' many current challenges, of what the EU would look like if both Paris and Berlin are out of action.

(Source: WPR)

Are EU troops on the way?

By Carl Bildt
former Sweden's foreign minister

Between U.S. President Donald Trump's bluster and the United Kingdom's impending withdrawal from the European Union, Europeans have as much reason as ever to worry about their collective defense. Yet, for all the excitement over new proposals to establish a joint defense force, a true European army remains a distant aspiration.

Suddenly, the debate about creating a joint European Union army has gained real momentum. After French President Emmanuel Macron recently proposed the idea, U.S. President Donald Trump disparaged it (in a tweet, of course), but German Chancellor Angela Merkel endorsed it (while urging caution).

The issue came to the fore this month with the centennial of the end of World War I, which naturally focused Europeans' attention on matters of war and peace. While touring WWI battlefields, Macron observed that "peace in Europe is precarious," and that "we will not protect Europeans unless we decide to have a true European army."

The goal of establishing a European army dates back to the earliest stages of European integration after World War II. In 1954, the French parliament refused to ratify a treaty that would have established a European Defense Community and joint military force comprising West Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. After that, the structures of integration that would eventually underpin today's EU tended to be more economically oriented, and territorial defense was left to NATO and the U.S. security umbrella.



But over the last few decades, there has been more movement toward establishing a common EU foreign and security policy, and new structures and institutions have been developed with that goal in mind. Still, today's discussion of European defense is truly novel. Until now, the EU has primarily fostered cooperation in the area of research and development, while various country groupings have worked to establish different defense and security capabilities. In the next seven-year budget, there will likely be substantial funding for such projects.

Macron is right to think that the EU's strategic environment has become increasingly fragile. Europeans today are confronted with a disruptive U.S. Although the U.S. has expanded its military capabilities in Europe in recent years, it has previously regarded the continent primarily as a platform for operations in other theaters. And now that Trump has cast doubt on America's commitment

to defend Europe, renewed proposals for a European army should come as no surprise. Still, Europe is home to only three countries with a robust strategic culture: France, the United Kingdom, and Russia. All three have a deep-seated institutional understanding of geopolitical power dynamics and the use of military force. Indeed, Russia's own program of military modernization suggests that it is becoming increasingly reliant on hard power to pursue its interests.

Meanwhile, France has launched the European Intervention Initiative, a new framework uniting countries with real defense capabilities and a willingness to use them. Most important, this new grouping will include the UK even after it leaves the EU. That said, Macron's vision of a European army under a central EU-level command will remain aspirational for the foreseeable future, for the simple reason that countries seldom give up their armies voluntarily.

Nonetheless, it is worth considering Macron's broader goal, which extends well beyond immediate concerns such as Trump and Brexit. In short, Macron is calling on Europe to develop a more coherent and autonomous strategy for pursuing its security and defense interests in the twenty-first century.

Needless to say, this project will encounter many hurdles. The French and the British don't like to admit it, but their nuclear arsenals are simply insufficient. Beyond nuclear deterrence, the U.S. will also likely remain at the center of command, control, and intelligence when it comes to continent-wide operations.

Moreover, Europeans will also have to resolve a number of internal tensions. Germany will insist that all new programs be housed within EU structures, while demanding parliamentary approval for all operations. But the British will no longer belong to the EU, and will remain skeptical of French talk of strategic autonomy, which could imply a weaker NATO. The same goes for eastern EU member states, which are even less willing to countenance a delinking from NATO or the U.S.

Despite these difficulties, there is an emerging consensus on the need to restructure European defense. The uncomfortable reality is that renewed interest in military integration also reflects the erosion of Europe's strategic position as a result of Brexit and, in some respects, Trump.

I expect that a French army—not a European one—will be marching down the Champs Elysees on Bastille Day for decades to come. But I also expect European countries to become more assertive in defense of their sovereignty, and to act collectively when it comes to security.

(Source: Project Syndicate)

Saudi crown prince on goodwill tour as royal family frets

By Bruce Riedel

The premeditated murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul last month was an act of terrorism. The Saudis are desperately trying to salvage the reputation and credibility of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who undoubtedly ordered the assassination. The Donald Trump administration is colluding with Riyadh. But revelations about the prince continue to emerge, further sully his brand. At home there is unease in the royal family about what his tarnished reputation means for the kingdom.

The prince has done a tour of the kingdom with his father to shore up support at home. It concluded in Tabuk near the Gulf of Aqaba with billions of dollars in new projects and investment promised for the remote province. It is rumored in Riyadh that King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud may retire to Tabuk if his health deteriorates further. He has recently built a new palace in the region.

Next is a regional tour starting in Abu Dhabi with a visit to the prince's closest ally, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed. MBZ, as he is called, has staked the Emirates future on the Saudi crown prince, who is also known as MBS. The Emirates is potentially the biggest loser if his Saudi protegee continues to implode. Already Saudis have become resentful of the outside influence the Persian Gulf leader has in the kingdom.

The prince is also visiting two Saudi clients, Bahrain and Egypt, both with horrendous human rights records. Bahrain has been occupied by the Saudi National Guard since 2011. The Saudis played a key covert role in the 2013 coup that brought Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to power. MBS is assured of fawning receptions on the tour. Stops elsewhere are likely to be less harmonious.

The prince is also scheduled to represent the kingdom at the G20 summit in Buenos Aires at the end of the month. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will keep his distance.

Desperately seeking rehabilitation, the crown prince is hoping the world will forget about Khashoggi and move on. So is Trump. But the reality is that the Saudi leader has a closet full of skeletons and horrors that won't be shut.

The war in Yemen tops the list. After more than three years of war, 18,000 coalition airstrikes and the crippling blockade, 18 million Yemenis are at risk of malnutrition and disease. Save the Children estimates that more than



Despite the campaign to rehabilitate MBS' image, there is mounting evidence that the royal family is concerned about how his actions have damaged the kingdom.

85,000 children under the age of five have already starved to death in the war. The coalition is pouring weapons in to the country, arming various fractious militias. There are so many weapons in the country that Yemen is an exporter of small arms to other countries in the region.

The Yemeni catastrophe is MBS's signature policy initiative, and he has been the biggest obstacle to a cease-fire. According to several sources, MBS threw a temper tantrum when the British suggested a truce earlier this month. His outburst did not stop London from proposing a new UN Security Council resolution and pressing for a cease-fire. The Labor opposition wants to go further and bring war crime charges against the Saudi and coalition leaders, specifically naming MBS as the man most responsible for the war and the humanitarian catastrophe.

At home, new revelations about the torture of female dissidents and advocates of gender equality were uncovered last week by several human rights groups. The exposure is

undermining the prince's carefully crafted image of a reformer who gave women the right to drive. Some human rights advocates say that they have deliberately held back some details of the abuses for now. The truth is bound to leak.

In the United States, Trump has tried to exonerate the prince by claiming that the evidence of his involvement in the murder is not conclusive. Few believe him. Congress is looking for ways to distance the country from the Saudi prince and his policies. One that is likely to enjoy widespread support is to deny the kingdom access to nuclear power.

The crown prince has publicly said he would pursue nuclear weapons if Iran does. Since the Saudis encouraged Trump to violate the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action that curbs Iran's nuclear arms project, his statement should be taken as an admission of intent. Moreover, the idea of nuclear weapons in the hands of a reckless and impulsive murderer is unthinkable.

Despite the campaign to rehabilitate MBS' image, there is mounting evidence that the royal family is concerned about how his actions have damaged the kingdom. The mass incarceration of royals and entrepreneurs last year at the Ritz-Carlton shakedown alienated important branches of the family, including the sons of former Kings Fahd and Abdullah. The clerical establishment is also uncertain about the crown prince's behavior. His intense anti-Shiism is a plus but some of his reforms are the opposite.

The security establishment has been embarrassed by the failure in Yemen. The all-powerful Interior Ministry was the stronghold of the Nayef wing of the family and now former Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef is under house arrest. The foremost counterterrorism leader in the country is incommunicado.

The crown prince rules by terror, not consensus. His ascent to power has been entirely the work of his father, and the king seems determined to stick with his son. Nonetheless, the region is rife with speculation about the kingdom's future and how it will play out. Will the king retire early? Will the family accept MBS? Will the security apparatus turn on the crown prince if he executes officials who were doing his bidding?

The only certainty is that the crown prince is likely to remain a reckless and dangerous player. Istanbul will not be the last debacle he leads the kingdom into.

(Source: Al Monitor)

Elections in Libya: Challenges to democratic choice, security and political stability

By Amal S Obeidi

The Libya Conference in Palermo has ended in a renewed push for elections in the crisis-ridden country. Is Libya really in a fit state to deliver on this commitment though?

Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, Libya has had three distinct electoral experiences, which have in turn given birth to three political institutions: the General National Congress (GNC), the Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) and the House of Representatives (HoR). However, neither the elections themselves nor the institutions that they created have stabilized the country in any meaningful way. The former faced serious security and participation issues. Minorities, such as the Amazigh (Berbers), Toubou and Tuareg, were underrepresented and boycotted the electoral process, and in regions and cities controlled by extremist organizations like Daesh—Derna in the East and Sirte in the central region, for example—people were unable to vote. The institutions, meanwhile, soon failed to live up to public expectations and did not restore trust in politics on a more general basis.

In fact, the GNC that was elected on 7 July, 2012, only exacerbated the existing politi-

cal divide within the country by refusing to step down after the official expiration of its term of office. Even though the HoR was created as part of an initiative set forth by a GNC-committee itself, it did not eventually replace the GNC as was envisioned. Rather, the elections in June 2014 led to the rule of two opposing governments in Libya. The HoR moved to the city of Tobruk in the East and the GNC was reinstated in Tripoli. Additionally, the UN-brokered Skhirat agreement that was signed in December 2015 and aimed at a reunification of the Libyan governments worsened the situation, albeit unintentionally.

As a result of the agreement, even more political bodies and institutions were created, the most important of which was the Presidential Council, whose nine members under chairman Fayed Al-Sarraj presided over the newly founded Government of National Accord. At the same time, the HoR that supposedly acted as the country's legislative body refused—and still refuses—to recognize the cabinet nominated by the Presidential Council and, moreover, allied itself with Khalifa Haftar, the Commander of the Libyan National Army.

For the past two years, a number of international initiatives have tried to resolve

the confusion and the political chaos created by all of this. The most prominent proposal has been the call for early presidential and parliamentary elections, which has also been echoed in the resolutions of the Paris meeting of May 2018, in the course of which most of the important Libyan actors pledged to facilitate new elections by next month. To achieve that, the relevant institutions in Libya are supposed to be supported by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

Similarly, the Palermo conference that was held earlier this month resulted in a new road map that envisions elections in the spring of 2019. However, these plans have been criticized by various commentators as being too vague and utterly unrealistic in the face of a myriad of political and societal obstacles.

As outlined in the BTI country report on Libya, the country's "immediate challenges are security, the proliferation of militias and the expansion of violence, fuelled by economic crisis, rivalries between forces in the east and west, and by regional powers." Given that "the conflict is intensifying, blocking potential for stabilizing the economy and revitalizing state institutions," a call for early elections might in the end be utopian at best.

What's more, these are not the only challenges facing potential future elections. A central obstacle might be presented by the absence of any clear-cut legislative framework. As argued by Elhadi Buhamra, a member of the CDA, "There can be no elections without constitutional rule, because the constitutional declaration of 2011 has exhausted its amendments." In that respect, Buhamra has suggested two solutions: "Amend the constitutional declaration to allow a fourth transitional phase", which would in turn need a two-thirds majority in the HoR; and hold a referendum on the constitution.

Given these fundamental hurdles to a meaningful electoral process in Libya, international conferences alone, such as those in Paris and Palermo, will most likely not be able to overcome the political crisis in the country. While they are part of a potential solution, a sustainable resolution of the political divide and the security unrest gripping the country since the fall of Gaddafi's regime, will certainly require the cooperation of politically relevant elites inside Libya. After all is said and done, initiating a more decisive Libyan-Libyan dialogue with UN support might be the only way to move forward.

(Source: Middle East Monitor)

Syrian general claims liberation of the Golan is coming

By Mohammad Fatemizadeh



TEHRAN — At a joint press conference in the Russian city of Sochi, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan agreed to create a demilitarized zone in Idlib on Sep. 17, 2018.

The Turkish defense minister and intelligence chief visited Russia's coastal city of Sochi on Nov. 20 for high-level talks with officials on Syria's Idlib.

The Russian defense minister, Sergey Shoigu, highlighted that Moscow and Ankara needed to act swiftly to support a demilitarized zone in Idlib.

Mehr News Agency sat with Syrian military strategist and Major General (ret.) Muhammad Abbas, to discuss the extent of these developments, especially the liberation of Idlib and the Turkish program for military operations in eastern Syria.

Following is the full text of the interview:

Q: In past years, there have been Turkish military operations in Syria, they have always been condemned by Damascus. Turkey has intended to launch new military operation in the eastern bank of the Euphrates River in northern Syria. What's your assessment of the objectives of the Turkish authorities and the reaction of the Syrian army?

A: First of all, it is important to say that, strategically, violation of Syria territory is, an American act.

The U.S. wants to change the identity of the Syrian people and make them part of Turkey's Justice and Development Party. Talking about the "New Middle East" project and Erdogan's leadership, we find that Erdogan is key player of the American plan.

The contradictions and differences between Ankara and Washington are thus tactical conflicts. Turkey is looking out for its own interests and towards re-occupation of the Arab region.

Turkey's incursion into the eastern Euphrates area will also depend on coordinating with the U.S., to dominate the region and undermine Syria's stability. In the case of ending the Idlib operation by Syria and its allies, they will continue on to the liberation of the northeastern parts of the country,

and the U.S. and its devices will not exist east of Euphrates. Because this is Arab and Syrian territory and its identity will remain Syrian. The U.S. project for the region is incomplete and we know when to begin the liberation of Idlib.

Q: Do you think the way to liberate Idlib is by diplomatic measures like the Sochi Summit or by military operations? Why have Sochi achievements in the field not been realized and when will Idlib be liberated by the Syrian army?

A: The operation to liberate Idlib province will continue. The Damascus government seeks to bring displaced people back to the area through awareness and vigilance. Similarly, national reconciliation will have been achieved with a positive approach.

On the other hand, the terrorists have kidnapped the Syrian people in Idlib and used them as human shields for their own purposes, and we should find a solution to this problem. For this reason, the Syrian government has delayed this operation so that it would take back Idlib and the citizens without war and bloodshed.

Q: When the Syrian crisis began, some Arab states stood in front of Damascus and supported the opposition and adversaries, and sometimes the terrorists, but now we are seeing that they seek a better deal with Syria. In this regard,

Jordan, Egypt and the UAE have recently made positive moves. How do you evaluate their changes of position?

A: The fact is that a large number of Arab countries are struggling to reunite with Syria. But the Syrian government to welcome these actions has clear, strategic demands and stances in this regard.

This normalization of relations is in fact a declaration of failure, but on the other hand it may be seeking to achieve goals through diplomacy. The U.S. war is not over and in past years a book was published about ways to overthrow the government in Iran by Westerners, in which it was mentioned that one of its ways is to attack Syria. The domination of Syria is the prelude to the domination of Iran.

Now, the U.S. is also seeking to bring terrorists to Iran through the borders of Pakistan, Iraq and the Republic of Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. So today, when Arab countries are seeking to normalize ties with Syria, they are also seeking to influence the country through an agreement after the defeat of their military plans.

Q: In recent months, we witnessed clashes between Syria and Israel. Zionists caused Russian casualties, causing Moscow to supply Syria with S-300 surface-to-air missile systems. Since then, Zionist operations have been reduced. How will the Syrian army contain Israel's response, especially in the occupied territories, if the conflict between Tel Aviv and Damascus re-emerges?

A: Our conflict with the Zionists is a battle for identity. More recently, Bashar al-Jafari, the Syrian representative to the United Nations, told the Zionist representative that the Golan is in the hearts of the Syrians. In the past weeks, our people in the occupied Golan Heights, have also returned to protest and disagree with the holding of elections in this region indicating their emphasis on their true national identity.

Like other areas of Syria, the Golan is on the agenda of the government and the army for liberation, and I can say that today we are getting closer to the liberation of the Golan. Today, in Syria we have a strong leader, a strong army and loyal people. Strong allies who are standing next to us. Probably Syria will regain the Golan.

Bold counter moves even if naive are worth marginal examination at least

1 → President Rouhani

apparently, and rightly so, considers this extortionist demand by Trump little more than a "humiliation" and not just of the Saudis, but of Muslims generally. He cited a cynical statement by Trump a couple years ago that Saudi Arabia was a "milk cow" for U.S.



interests. Rouhani is exactly correct in his attempt to point out to the ignorant Saudis that they have also been played by the U.S. as well as by the Israelis, who seem to be directing U.S. foreign policy like never before in the Middle East.

But this is all destined to eventual failure, because just as the U.S. grows more isolated worldwide, so also does Arabia under the Saudis. The utter absence of a moral compass in the U.S. under Trump, in Israel under the Likud maniacs, and in Saudi Arabia under MBS, reminds one of the words of Martin Luther King during the Civil Rights struggle in the U.S. who said that while the arc of history is long, it bends (ultimately) towards "justice". Maybe the arc of history does not bend towards complete and full "justice", but justice does present itself to some extent at least in time as history has proven.

But so much remains unclear. Dealing with this is tortuous. Will Iran be able to suffer through this sanction period and maintain some level of acceptable internal unity and stability? Will Europe and China and Russia manage to erect alternative economic mechanisms to dilute the effect of sanctions and not just those burdening Iran? Will the U.S. economy enter another recession soon and expose Trump's wild claims of "success" as President as falsehoods, which they are?

Will even the expanding Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against the Zionists eventually force Israel towards real democracy and the dismantling of "apartheid" in somewhat the same manner that abhorrence of South Africa's apartheid led to its dissolution there? These and many other questions remain to be answered and answers are eagerly awaited.

In any event, Trump and those who are advising him on Mideast policy, are certainly insane. If, for example, the aims of the Trumpists are in fact a change of government in Iran and submission to U.S. demands, why in the Hell are they championing a known terrorist cult, the MEK? Do they really believe, or can they believe, that the MEK would ever be an acceptable alternative to Iranians? This alone spells out what Trump and his Zionist pals really seem to want: disorder and chaos, not eventual harmony among nations.

And one must wonder what Iran might do going forward to best counter and further expose the U.S. IF U.S. actions and postures are as claimed based on concerns about international or just national "security", what if, say, Iran's leaders came right out and stated, backing up President Rouhani's gestures of goodwill to Muslim "brothers", that its policies have been and will remain entirely defensive in character. Additionally, with acceptable quid pro quos (such as lifting sanctions and that just for starters), Iran might reduce its presence in Syria and Iraq and even its support of Hezbollah and as well reduce its defensive efforts with rocketry (as it did with the JCPOA with regard to nuclear technology).

No question any such bold suggestions or moves would be starkly courageous and perhaps even dangerous to Iran, but it seems a certainty that the U.S. Zionists and Saudis and others would have to respond positively — or else become so further "isolated" as to lose ALL credibility and respect worldwide. Yes, obviously, ideas such as these may be quite naive and preposterous, but at the margin they may be worth study.

MEK Sources of funds are Iran's regional rivals: ex-CIA official

1 → Trump administration support terrorist group Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) as a democratic alternative to the current Iranian political system. Why Trump administration support a group that have not any social base among Iranians and Iranian know them as a terrorist group?

A: The Trump administration's policy toward Iran consists of using every means available to hurt and pressure Iran, while paying little attention to the nature of the means used or to the negative effects of using them.

Although some of the administration's rhetoric sounds as if greater democracy in Iran is one of its objectives, democracy plays little role in the administration's decisions—as indicated, for example, by its strong siding with the regime in Saudi Arabia, which is decidedly non-democratic.

If the MEK is opposed to the current political order in Tehran, that's all that matters to the Trump administration.

Q: As you mentioned in your article in LobeLog many activities of Mujahedin-e Khalq need much money. Which countries



or group may help to them?

A: The sources of funds always have been unclear. The most likely sources are states that are regional rivals of Iran.

Q: Mujahedin-e Khalq ideology is mixture of a version of Islam and Marxism. They also operate as a terrorist group. Why U.S. as a leading democratic country

in the world support such a group? This is controversial when we consider that foreign policy according to the liberalism is the continuation of domestic policy and U.S. domestic policy is based on free values and liberalism. How U.S. government solve this contradiction?

A: The Trump administration clearly is

not worrying about such things, because it has given ample other indications that it gives little importance to such values in conducting foreign relations. This became quite clear recently with its reaction to the killing of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi, in which President Trump in effect said that such a murder can be excused as long as the Saudis buy U.S. weapons.

Q: According to the RAND report, Mujahedin-e Khalq terrorist activities have continued by 2009. But U.S. acclaimed that there are no terrorist activity by this group in 10 last years ago. Which one is right?

A: A rationale for removing the MEK from the U.S. terrorism list was that in recent years the group has not been involved in killing Americans.

The law governing the list could be construed that way, although more often, decisions on listing and delisting are not made from such a narrow perspective. A terrorist group is still a terrorist group even if the blood it spills is not American blood. The MEK certainly has not been involved in lethal political violence since 2009.

Trump's challenge on defending Mohammad Bin Salman



1 → The article reads: "Congressional Republicans continued to line up this weekend to criticize President Trump over his defense of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who the CIA believes ordered the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi"

"I disagree with the president's assessment," Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press." "It's inconsistent with the intelligence I've seen. The intelligence I've seen suggests that this was ordered by the crown prince."

The Washington Post also wrote: "The White House has been struggling to square a widespread sense that the crown prince directed the killing with a desire for Saudi support for its foreign policy priorities and the need to manage close relationships between bin Salman, the Trump administration and members of Trump's family"

According to this source, Trump, while referring to Saudi Arabia's influence over the oil

price, said that abandoning Saudi would be a "terrible mistake", and that he's not going to destroy the U.S. economy over bin Salman's crimes!

"In any case, our relationship is with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They have been a great ally in our very important fight against Iran." Said Trump.

The highlight of the Washington Post's analysis is the part it confesses to the failure of "Trump-bin Salman" alliance in confronting the Islamic Republic of Iran and the regional power of our country. Accordingly, the U.S. reliance on bin Salman to face Iran didn't work.

This is what many other sources had to acknowledge besides the Washington Post. However, the tensions raised in the U.S. political atmosphere regarding Mohammed bin Salman is an indication of the disagreements over U.S. foreign policy. This is what makes the situation harder for Trump and his companions.

Al-Khalifa regime threatened people to vote in elections: Bahraini cleric



1 → With the regard to human rights situation in his country, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Daghaigh said "the prisoners in Bahrain are in a terrible condition. Al-Khalifa regime's forces are escalating crackdown on the people.... A former Bahraini MP who had asked a question on boycotting the elections in a tweet on his Twitter account is in jail now. Everyone in the country who speaks out against injustice is put behind bars."

The Bahraini cleric said that some parts of the society turned out to vote in the elections because they were under immense pressures from the authorities.

With regard to the silence of the international community against the Al-Khalifa regime's actions, he said that the international community with the United States at the top are supporting the Saudi kingdom and Al-Khalifa regime and their call for respecting human rights is just words and no actions as they only care about their own interests.

He said that Al-Khalifa regime is the Western countries' strategic ally and they will not cut their support for it unless their interests requires them to do so.

With respect to attempts by Arab countries, especially Bahrain to normalize relations with Israel, Al-Daghaigh said "we condemn the process of normalizing relations and the so-called Deal of the Century...Palestine is our number-one issue. Any country seeking to normalize relations with Israel is a traitor because Israel is an illegitimate government and a cancerous tumor that colonists created in the Arab world.... Anyone who participates in this process will be thrown into the dustbin of history."

He touched upon Iran's role in supporting the resistance movement, saying "Iran deos a lot in support of religious and press freedom. It tries to send the message of our oppressed people to the world, and this is done through television networks and media programs."

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Tehran intl. congress to unveil knowledge-based stem cells products

HEALTH TEHRAN—The 3rd National Festival and the International Congress on Stem cells and Regenerative Medicine takes place from November 28 to December 1 in Tehran, according to the secretary of the council for stem cell sciences and technologies.

Introducing new science-based products made by Iranian companies is among the congress priorities, ISNA quoted Amir Ali Hamidieh as saying.

During the congress, 70 knowledge based companies will display their products; moreover, a tech market of stem cells products will be held where innovators can discuss their ideas with 10 major investors, he said.

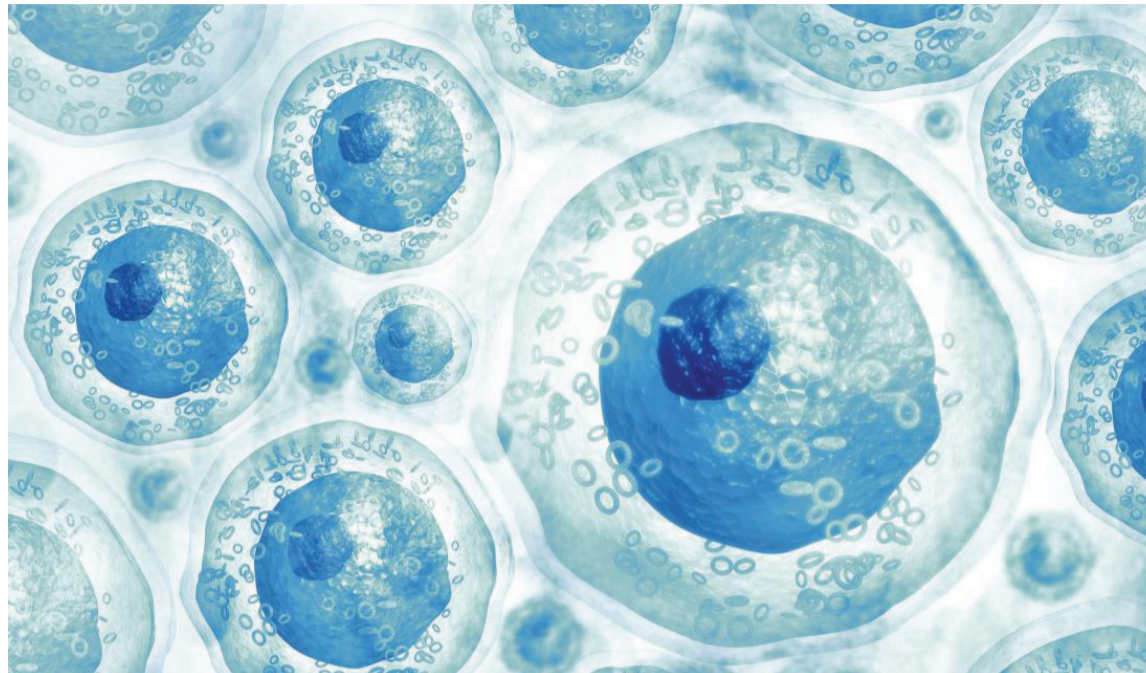
Technologies used in stem cells projects, immune cell therapy, gene therapy and gene editing, disease modelling with organoids, biomaterials, tissue engineering, cell banks, cell signaling and commercializing the products made based on regenerative medicine and cell science are among topics discussed in the conference, he said.

Over 3,000 researchers and students take part in this congress, said Hamidieh.

Scientists from the Netherlands, France, Japan, Italy, Switzerland, the U.S., Canada and Russia will attend the congress, he added.

The congress also included a separate event on November 26 and 27 which was devoted to start ups and rewarded the best among such companies.

According to Hamidieh, stem cell technology has led to creation of many jobs in the country. Some one hundred experts are now working in the field of stem cell technology and About 100 companies manufacture stem cell products, out of which, 80 are knowledge-based ones.



Moreover, in each stem cell company 20 experts are working on average, which has resulted in generation of more than 1,400 jobs.

According to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, stem cell technology is a rapidly developing field that combines the efforts of cell biologists, geneticists, and

clinicians and offers hope of effective treatment for a variety of malignant and non-malignant diseases.

Stem cells are defined as totipotent progenitor cells capable of self-renewal and multilineage differentiation. Stem cells survive well and show stable division in culture, making them ideal targets for in vitro manipulation.

Iranian, Indian ministries ink MOU on traditional medicine

HEALTH TEHRAN—A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed between the Iranian Health Ministry and the Indian Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH), ISNA reported on Monday.

The MOU was signed when Rajesh Kotecha, the secretary in the Ministry of AYUSH visited Tehran on November 26 and 27.

Mohsen Asadi Lari, the Iranian deputy health minister for international affairs, Mahmoud Khodadoust, head of the Iranian traditional medicine department at the Ministry of Health and Prof. Asim Ali Khan, director general of Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine (CCRUM) at AYUSH were the other officials who signed the document.

Sharing technical science, cooperation between academic centers of the two countries, establishing a technical committee



to examine new potentials in furthering scientific and economic exchanges in the field of medicine, the exchange of professors, students, books and resources as well as

research results and articles were the main topics that the two sides agreed on, according to Dr. Arman Zargarani, counselor of the Iranian traditional medicine department

at the Ministry of Health.

The two sides also discussed signing an agreement between Tehran University of Medical Sciences and AYUSH Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine (CCRUM) in near future as well as Indian government's plan to fund the development of a new course on Indian traditional medicine at Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), traditional herbal medicines are naturally occurring, plant-derived substances with minimal or no industrial processing that have been used to treat illness within local or regional healing practices. Traditional herbal medicines are getting significant attention in global health debates.

Medicinal plants still form the basis of traditional or indigenous health systems and are reported by WHO to still be used by a majority of populations in most developing countries including Iran.

Global cost of diabetes pandemic could double to almost \$3 trillion by 2030



The global cost of treating diabetes is set to double to US\$2.12 trillion (US\$2.91 trillion) by 2030 compared with that in 2015. Proportionally, the figures represent 1.8 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP).

But if further preventive measures are not taken, the global cost is likely to rise even higher to US\$2.45 trillion, or about 2.2 per cent of global GDP.

These figures were cited by Dr Enis Baris, the World Bank's practice manager for East Asia and the Pacific region, during a ministerial conference on diabetes on Monday (Nov 26).

But this is just the healthcare cost of treating diabetes patients, Dr Baris noted, warning that the true cost is greater.

This would include the indirect costs on society and the global economy, such as threats to life expectancy, worker productivity and economic competitiveness.

With rising childhood obesity, the global incidence of diabetes is expected to continue to go up.

Mr Tharman told the conference at the Grand Waterfront Copthorne hotel on Monday that human psychology is a problem, as the pleasures of chocolate cake are immediate while costs to health are hidden and set in later.

But how diabetes will affect future generations varies among and within countries, said Professor Rifat Atun of Harvard University.

In India, diabetes rates are lowest among the rural poor and highest among the urban rich, he said.

But in Brazil, the situation is reversed, with rates of diabetes falling among the

rich and more educated people, but rising among the poor and less-educated.

"We need to go back to the drawing board and reflect on how to respond to the challenge of diabetes," Prof Atun added.

Agreeing, Professor of diabetology Hanno Pijl, from Leiden University in the Netherlands, said most healthcare systems in the world are outdated.

"The nature of disease has changed significantly. In the 19th and early 20th century, we were primarily faced with infections, which are relatively simple diseases with a single cause," he said.

But non-communicable diseases like diabetes are, with no exception, extremely complex multi-factorial, multi-system disorders, he added. Pills do not address the root cause of Type 2 diabetes; they merely treat symptoms.

The solution may lie in transforming the environment, including identifying the social and commercial factors that contribute to diabetes. The low cost and availability of food and beverages with high sugar content, and shifting social realities such as globalization and urbanization are some such factors.

Patients need to be better informed about the nature and origin of their disease and the possibilities for tackling the root cause through lifestyle changes, said Prof Pijl.

Such lifestyle intervention would act as a complement rather than an alternative to traditional medicine and should be integrated into the conventional care system, he added.

(Source: straitstimes.com)

World Aids Day 2018: Everything you need to know about the annual HIV awareness campaign



World Aids Day marks its 30th anniversary on 1 December.

The date has been observed by UN member states every year since 1988, a show of support for those currently living with HIV and a chance to remember those killed by Aids-related illnesses.

The recent release of the Queen biopic Bohemian Rhapsody coincided with the 27th anniversary of the death of the band's much-missed frontman Freddie Mercury in 1991, a timely reminder of the devastating impact of the disease.

The virus was only identified in 1984, when it sparked a huge international scare and was wrongly assumed to only affect members of the LGBT+ community, but has already killed 35m people and infected 78m around the globe.

While significant scientific advances have been made over the last 34 years, sufferers continue to face stigma and discrimination as a result of ignorance about the nature of the condition.

In the UK, approximately 101,000 people currently suffer from HIV out of an estimated 36.9m worldwide, with 5,000 new cases diagnosed in Britain annually.

World Aids Day was first conceived of in August 1987 by World Health Organization (WHO) publicists James W Bunn and Thomas Netter, but has been run by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) since 1996.

The Pope, the president of the United States and other world leaders all use the occasion to reaffirm their commitment

to eradicating the disease, a goal the UN hopes to achieve by 2030.

The White House has proudly displayed a 28-foot red ribbon from its North Portico since 2007, stressing the Oval Office's commitment to combating Aids in the wake of George W Bush introducing the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), providing support for those afflicted around the world.

Events taking place around the world last year included president Emmanuel Macron of France taking an HIV test at the Delafontaine Hospital in Saint-Denis, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle visited Nottingham's Terrence Higgins Trust while Mariah Carey headlined a concert in Los Angeles. Famous monuments were lit up with red lights in cities from Mexico City to Shanghai.

Every year UNAIDS, the WHO and a collection of grassroots NGOs agree on the theme for the day, drawing attention to different aspects of the condition.

In 2018, that theme is "Know Your Status", encouraging people to undergo medical testing to ascertain whether or not they have the virus and to ensure anyone with a positive diagnosis is put in touch with the quality care and prevention services they need.

Those wishing to show support for the cause in the UK on World Aids Day can make a donation to the National Aids Trust online or by buying a lapel ribbon online or in MAC Cosmetics stores and select branches of Morrisons and HSBC. (Source: The Independent)

Implants 'made of your own cells' could end back pain

Back and neck pain are often the result of the progressive damage of the discs that separate the spinal vertebrae. Thanks to new multidisciplinary research, we may soon have a better solution to this problem: bioengineered discs grown out of a person's own cells.

Will researchers be able to create new spinal discs from stem cells?

Intervertebral disc degeneration is a common problem that affects a large segment of the population.



Typically, healthy intervertebral discs function by absorbing stress placed on the spine as we move and adjust our posture in a similar way to a car suspension.

If those discs wear out, it can cause pain in various areas of a person's back or neck.

So far, treatments for intervertebral disc degeneration include spinal fusion surgery and replacing the damaged discs with artificial ones.

However, these approaches bring limited benefits because they cannot restore full function of the intervertebral discs they replace.

Now, a multidisciplinary research team from the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine, School of Engineering and Applied Science, and School of Veterinary Medicine is aiming to solve this issue by developing bioengineered intervertebral discs made out of an individual's own stem cells.

Stem cells are undifferentiated cells that have the potential to "transform" into any specialized cells. That is why they have become the focus of multiple medical research studies, including the current one.

The researchers at the University of Pennsylvania have been working for the past 15 years on bioengineered disc models — first in laboratory studies, then in small animal studies, and most recently in large animal studies.

"This is a major step: to grow such a large disc in the lab, to get it into the disc space, and then to have it to start integrating with the surrounding native tissue. That's very promising," says Prof. Robert L. Mauck, co-senior author of the current study.

"The current standard of care does not actually restore the disc, so our hope with this engineered device is to replace it in a biological, functional way and regain full range of motion," he adds.

Studies in animal successful so far
Previously, the researchers tested the new discs — called "disc-like angle ply structures" (DAPS) — in rat tails for 5 weeks.

In the new study, whose results appear in the journal Science Translational Medicine, the team developed the engineered discs even further. They then tested the new model — called "endplate-modified DAPS" (eDAPS) — in rats again, but this time for up to 20 weeks.

The new structure of the bioengineered disc allows it to retain its shape better, and integrate more easily with the surrounding tissue.

Following several tests — MRI scans and several in-depth tissue and mechanical analyses — the researchers found that, in the rat model, eDAPS effectively restored original disc structure and function.

This initial success motivated the research team to study eDAPS in goats, and they implanted the device into the cervical spines of some of the animals. The scientists chose to work with goats because, as they explain, the cervical spinal discs of goats have similar dimensions to those of humans.

Moreover, goats have semi-upright stature, allowing the researchers to bring their study one step closer to human trials.

'A very good reason to be optimistic'
The researchers' tests on goats were also successful. They noticed that the eDAPS integrated well with the surrounding tissue, and the mechanical function of the discs at least matched, if not surpassed, that of the original cervical discs of the goats.

"I think it's really exciting that we have come this far, from the rat tail all the way up to human-sized implants," says Dr. Harvey E. Smith, co-senior author of the study.

"When you look at the success in the literature from mechanical devices, I think there is a very good reason to be optimistic that we could reach that same success, if not exceed it with the engineered discs."

The researchers say that the next step will include conducting further, more extensive trials in goats, which will allow the scientists to understand better how well eDAPS works.

Moreover, the research team plans to test out eDAPS in models of human intervertebral disc degeneration, thus hopefully getting one step closer to clinical trials.

"There is a lot of desirability to implant a biological device that is made of your own cells," notes Dr. Smith, adding that, "Using a true tissue-engineered motion-preserving replacement device in arthroplasty of this nature is not something we have yet done in orthopaedics."

"I think it would be a paradigm shift for how we really treat these spinal diseases and how we approach motion sparing reconstruction of joints," he continues.

(Source: Medical News Today)

Startups can develop aerospace industry tech in Iran: VP

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — Iranian knowledge-based companies and startups can develop aerospace industry technology, the vice president for science and technology said, ISNA reported.

Sourena Sattari made the remarks during his visit to the 9th Iran Airshow, which is underway from November 26 to 29 in Kish Island.



Such exhibitions provide opportunity for private sector and investors to get introduced with aerospace achievements in this field.

The active presence of startups and knowledge-based companies create added value and job for private sector, he said.

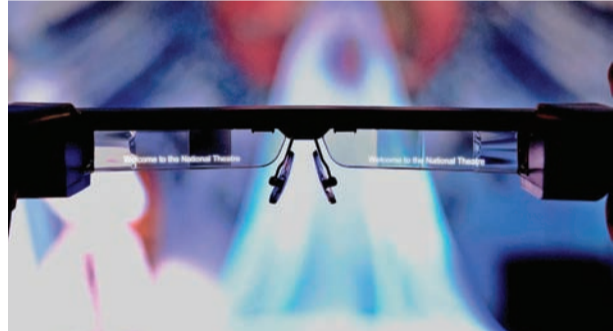
Iran's achievement in aerospace industry would be developed by an appropriate entrepreneurship ecosystem, he added.

Startups can introduce different aspects of space industry to ordinary people, he said.

Some 110 Iranian and 10 foreign companies are taking part in the four-day event, showcasing their latest achievements in the aviation industries.

Smart glasses for the hard of hearing are changing theater in London

Aunt Nicki is hard of hearing. Although there are many enhanced listening devices available to help her, such as an Assistive Living amplifier or a closed captioning screen that sits in a cup holder, she tells me they don't work well enough.



When I recently tried on the new "smart caption glasses" at the Royal National Theatre, I had her on my mind. The theater is testing a pilot program for the technology for all performances of Hadestown and War Horse through October. It plans to make the glasses available for all of its performances during the 2019 season.

The headset, manufactured by Epson in partnership with the Royal National Theatre, is heavier than normal reading glasses but much lighter than bulky virtual reality headsets like the Oculus Rift. The lenses look like a typical pair of glasses, but they fit inside a large gray casing that sits on the sides of your head. When you look through the glasses, closed captions scroll across the bottom of the augmented reality lenses.

A handheld keypad is attached to the glasses via cable to allow each user to customize the color, size and position of the closed captions. Changing the positioning of the text is key for user comfort.

The biggest challenge is finding the sweet spot of balancing the captions in the foreground with the theater performance in the background.

Here's how it works: The script from an opening-night production is fed into speech software, which follows the performance and adjusts the captions accordingly. This process is refined using sound, video and lighting cues.

"If a performer jumps a few lines, the system will react," said Jonathan Suffolk, the technical director for the Royal National Theatre. "It will take a second or two but the system will react and it will recognize where it is."

Suffolk said some hard of hearing users wear it so they can read lips at the same time as reading the captions.

The glasses are free for attendees and available at every performance. It's a major improvement on existing open captioning, which unlike closed captioning are always in view. This typically includes large screens displaying captions.

"The response has been overwhelmingly positive for deaf theater-goers who would like to come into the theater anytime they want," Suffolk said of its recent trial. "It's really fundamental that organizations like the National Theatre -- in its really privileged position -- does this type of work for the entire sector."

Richard France -- who works for a group called Deafinitely Theatre, which creates performances for both the deaf and hearing communities -- has worked with many different technologies but calls the smart glasses a potential game changer.

"I'm used to going to the theater with captions in it, but it's much more enjoyable with the glasses because I can follow the movement of the actors on the stage, and they feel more inclusive," France said.

The technology has been successfully used in US movie theaters, but the Royal National Theatre's challenges are greater because their performances are live.

Advocates for the deaf caution there's no single device or system that will work for all members of the deaf community, but say the availability of this type of device at every Royal National Theatre performance is as much a game changer as the actual technology.

Sarina Roffé, the former president of the National Cued Speech Association, believes it's a solid step toward making live performances more inclusive.

"This new technology allows the deaf and hard of hearing to have complete access," Roffé said. "It's really amazing how far we've advanced and how it has positively affected the quality of life for people who are deaf and hard of hearing."

So perhaps the next time Aunt Nicki comes to London, we'll be able to catch a show together.

(Source: cnn.com)

Iran starts issuing smart cards for gasoline purchase

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — Iran started issuing smart cards for purchasing gasoline on Monday through "Mobile Government" - the first phase of e-government services project which came on stream in May.

Applicants can register through the application or the website of Mobile Government, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said, Mehr reported.

Through the project, the gasoline smart cards, which were used for rationing fuel in past years, is now connected to the bank cards for easy payment, he said.

In gas stations, 55 percent of fuel nozzles are connected to the Mobile Government system and the rest can be paid by POS payment, he added.

The government save 3.3 trillion rials (some \$78.5m) through issuing the smart card by the Mobile Government, he said.

In June 2007, Iran began rationing gasoline and the Oil Ministry has allocated each private motorist 100 liters per month at about 11 cents per liter.

Under this plan, which continued until 2016, gasoline was only supplied through smart card, an initiative taken by the former President Mahmud Ahmadinejad to stop lavish fuel consumption -- 73 million liters daily -- by over seven million cars nationwide.

After two years hiatus, the ICT ministry plans to use the smart cards for e-payment.



ICT ministry urges Majlis to help develop e-government

TECHNOLOGY TEHRAN — The Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has asked Majlis (the Iranian parliament) to help expand e-government in state-run organization, Mehr reported on Monday.

Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi discussed the issues during the visit of Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani to the ICT ministry on Monday morning.

The ICT ministry asked Majlis to order organization to register any credit or revenue resulted from information exchange on National Information Network (NIN), the head of Information Technology Organization of Iran (ITO) Amir Nazemi who also attended the meeting announced.

The National Information Network is an ongoing project to develop a secure and stable infrastructure network in the country.



"The Majlis should obliged the state-run organization to offer their online services for more than 100,000 users at the NIN," he said.

The e-services provided by the judicial system of Iran,

Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation and municipalities across Iran should be also under the laws of e-government, he added.

The ministry also urged Majlis to order organization to offer all online bill payment and all e-services through the Mobile Government, otherwise it violates citizen privacy, he added.

The first phase of e-government services project in Iran officially came on stream under the title of 'Mobile Government' in mid-May 2018.

The project aims to facilitate some government services, reduce unnecessary expenses and ease traffic jam, which is the main cause of air pollution in big cities.

It is based on the National Information Network, an ongoing project to develop a secure and stable infrastructure network in the country.

How to avoid scams when shopping online

Cyberattacks are on pace to jump by nearly 60% this holiday season, compared to other months throughout the year, according to a new report published by Carbon Black, a cybersecurity provider based in Waltham, Mass.

"During the holiday season, there is often a ton of noise in the online world and attackers do everything they can to take advantage of that," Tom Kellermann, Carbon Black's chief cybersecurity officer, notes in the report. "This applies not only to consumers who shop online, but also to businesses as well, many of which are understaffed and, in the case of retailers, approaching the busiest time of the year."

When analyzing last year's data, the firm concluded that there was a spike in cybersecurity alerts on Black Friday and Cyber Monday, and these levels remained elevated throughout the remainder of the year. Interestingly, the highest spike dur-

ing last year's holiday season occurred in the days following Christmas Day, when shoppers were looking to take advantage of post-holiday shopping deals.

While the majority of these cyberattacks were the result of commodity malware, which is often delivered through spear-phishing campaigns, there's also the lingering risk of attacks that target major retailers, often through supply chain partners.

Below are some best practices for online shoppers to take into consideration during the holiday season—and at any time of the year.

Evaluate an email's "basic hygiene." If you spot poor grammar, misspelled words or suspicious URLs, keep in mind that you could be reading a spear-phishing email, which is a scam that targets a specific individual or business. With this type of email, a cybercriminal may attempt to steal data or install malware on the

target's personal computer.

"Downloading an attachment from anyone other than a verified, trusted source is perhaps the quickest way to get yourself in trouble when it comes to a phishing scam," Carbon Black's report notes. If you receive an unexpected email from your bank, a shipping provider or even a friend, you should verify that it was sent by the institution or individual.

Shop at established websites from brands you trust. "If a random website is offering an 80%-off deal on the toy of the season, there's a good chance they're just looking to take your credit card information," Kellermann says. Shoppers can also look for the https in a retailer's website, rather than http. "The 's' stands for secure and means all communications between your browser and the website are encrypted," he explains.

Avoid using public Wi-Fi when shopping online. When using public Wi-Fi, anyone

with a computer acumen can view what you are browsing and steal your personal information, Kellermann warns. Avoid public, unsecured networks in places like coffee shops or stores. If you're in a public area, it's safer to use your Wi-Fi hotspot or your smartphone's network connection.

Use a credit card, rather than a debit card. It's always better to use a credit card when shopping online, since the money isn't taken directly out of a checking account like it would with a debit card. "Credit cards offer the best liability protection against potential fraud," Kellermann says.

Keep your electronic devices up to date. Make updates to all software on your computer, make sure you are using the latest version of your browser (Firefox is a great option) and make sure all of your online passwords are truly random and truly unique, Kellermann advises.

(Source: forbes.com)

Annoying? Yes. Dangerous? Maybe. But electric scooters are still the future

As electric scooters roll out in more and more cities across the country, Elon Musk told Recode editor Kara Swisher recently that the electric scooter "lacks dignity." The Tesla CEO noted that Swisher was "laboring under an illusion" if she really thought she looks great while riding one.

Musk's reaction may come as a surprise to some observers, but let's be honest: Musk is a car man. Sure, he wants us all to switch from using internal combustion engines to batteries, but at his core Musk believes that automobiles should continue to dominate the transportation system. That flies in the face of growing recognition that truly sustainable mobility — which will be necessary to avoid the worst-case climate-change scenarios — will require far more than simply switching to electric cars.

Truly sustainable mobility — which will be necessary to avoid the worst-case climate-change scenarios — will require far more than simply switching to electric cars.

Remember that Musk doesn't like public transportation — he's called it "painful" and said that other passengers could be serial killers — and wants to build a system of tunnels that could be "10, 20, 30 layers deep (or more)" below Los Angeles so people can keep using cars without getting stuck in traffic. There are a lot of questions about this proposal — the cost savings he promises only he can deliver have already been achieved in other developed countries and his proposed car elevators seem like they would create terrible bottlenecks — but what about the human cost of continuing on an auto-dominated path of development? We accept the status quo because, in most cases, it's all we know, but it actually has terrible impacts on our health.

Between 1980 and 2014, the average commute increased nearly 20 percent to 26 minutes each way and the number of "megacommuters" — people who travel 60 to 90 minutes each way — has increased 64 percent since 1990. The longer the commute, the worse the health impacts. Driving more than ten miles each way has been associated with higher blood sugar, cholesterol and depression, according to a report in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine; while the U.K.'s Office of National Statistics linked commutes of more than 30 minutes each way to higher rates of anxiety, lower levels of happiness



and less life satisfaction.

And that's before we even start talking about the lethal outcomes. In 2017, more than 40,000 people were killed in collisions with cars — more than the number of Americans who were killed with guns in 2016 — and that doesn't even count the additional 53,000 premature deaths attributed to tailpipe emissions. It's shocking how little outrage there is about vehicle deaths when compared to the growing coalition for gun control.

Nevertheless, shifting away from automobile dominance in urban centers is becoming ever more realistic. Over the past year and a half, electric bikes and scooters (collectively part of the micro-mobility movement) were dumped on the sidewalks of cities across the country. In some places, there was backlash, and rightfully so. Few cities have dedicated lanes for bikes and scooters, yet all of a sudden there were far more people using them, usually in the very limited space allotted for pedestrians. Anger was to be expected, and government action soon followed.

But whereas Uber and Lyft fought local governments tooth and nail to escape regulation, dockless bike and scooter companies have been generally more cooperative — it's a lot easier to send a municipal employee around in a truck to impound a bunch of scooters than to do the same to Uber drivers.

As a result, cities have been able to better regulate these new companies to limit the number of bikes and scooters on their streets, set speed limits, and demand trip data that they've had so much difficulty getting from ride-sharing companies. Cities have also been adapting to the new

forms of mobility in their midst: Santa Monica installed special parking spaces for dockless bikes and scooters to ensure they aren't cluttering sidewalks. Hopefully in the near future, cities will install more bike lanes.

Making streets safer for dockless bikes and scooters could also have benefits for underserved communities. Black residents of Washington, D.C. are far more likely to use dockless bikes than the city's docked bike-share service, according to mobility data company Populus, which also found that women and people with low incomes may be more likely to use scooters in major U.S. cities. Electric bikes, which are often part of these dockless services, have also been shown to be particularly attractive to drivers in Australian, Canadian, and U.S. cities in a review of recent research by Elliott Fishman and Christopher Cherry, and switching from cars to e-bikes would result in significant health benefits.

It makes sense though. E-bikes require less work than a conventional bike, meaning fewer riders need a shower afterward, they make conquering hills much easier, and they're faster than regular bikes (and cars stuck in traffic) so riders can use them for longer trips. Plus, the environmental footprint of a bike or scooter — electrified or not — is far smaller than a car, and when the City of Copenhagen measured the cost to society of transportation, including things like safety, tourism and health, it found that every kilometer (0.62 miles) of cycling produced a 26-cent economic gain for society, while each kilometer driven cost 14 cents. In the Netherlands, high rates of cycling prevent 6,500 premature deaths every year and save the country \$23 billion, according to a study in the American Journal of Public Health.

The United States holds freedom as its highest value, but forcing people to use cars to get around isn't freedom at all.

Of course, the Netherlands has both fewer people and higher rates of cycling than the United States, but that doesn't mean U.S. cities can't change. In the 1960s, the Dutch government razed neighborhoods in Amsterdam and other cities to make way for the automobile, following in the footsteps of their American counterparts. However, activism in the early 1970s forced the government to reconsider this strategy.

(Source: nbcnews.com)

Spraying aerosols into the sky to cool the planet is 'technically possible', Harvard scientists find

If humans are able to spray millions of tons of sulfate aerosol into the sky, we could create a sort of chemical canopy that reflects heat from the Sun and takes the edge off global warming.

This kind of atmosphere-hacking could be dangerous, but as catastrophic climate change increases its grip on the planet, researchers at Harvard are beginning to take the idea of solar geoengineering more seriously.

The "fact that researchers at one of the world's top universities are costing the deployment of such a radical scheme shows how urgent the climate change problem has become," Peter Cox, an expert in climate system dynamics at the University of Exeter, told *The Guardian*.

The most detailed analysis of such a scheme to date has now revealed that while aerosol injection is highly uncertain and ambitious, it is "technically possible" from an engineering perspective.

Cooling the planet

It would also be "remarkably inexpensive" to fund. Using a fleet of specially-designed aircraft to periodically spray sulfate particles into the lower stratosphere, the Harvard research suggests we might be able to cool the planet at a price well within the reach of several nations.

If the program was launched in 2018, the authors predict it would cost about US\$3.5 billion, with an extra \$2.25 billion



every year for program maintenance. To put that in perspective, the world currently spends about \$500 billion a year on green technologies — an investment of far greater magnitude.

"Around 50 countries have military budgets greater than \$3 billion, with 30 greater than \$6 billion."

To realize this radical plan, one of the biggest expenses would be creating a new

fleet of streamlined, sulfate-spewing jets.

The only cheap and reasonable option for distributing the aerosol is by aircraft. But an aircraft that can travel 20 kilometers high while also carrying a massive payload of aerosol? Nothing like that currently exists. And it needs to, if we want the sulfate particles to stick around in the atmosphere for more than a year.

Because of this, the researchers designed

The researchers have designed an entirely new plane that could serve such a purpose, featuring a narrow body and disproportionately large wings, as well as two extra engines.

an entirely new plane that could serve such a purpose, featuring a narrow body and disproportionately large wings, as well as two extra engines.

Starting with a fleet of just eight jets — and ultimately ending up with almost 100 planes — a sulfate injection program would be able to complete over 60,000 missions a year in just 15 years.

Symptoms of climate change

But while this technology may help mask some of the symptoms of climate change, it won't solve the issue completely, leaving ocean acidification and other consequences to worsen. What's more, none of this even touches on the uncertainties and risks of deploying such a plan.

While solar geoengineering is often described as "fast, cheap, and imperfect", the Harvard study only supports the first two claims. Today, the imperfections of this technology remain unclear and, potentially, very dangerous.

Pumping enough sulfate into the atmosphere to mimic a volcanic eruption is risky business. It's also one of those solutions that, once started, cannot be stopped.

If the program is terminated for whatever reason, scientists think the rate of global warming would probably come back with a vengeance, rapidly raising global temperatures and leaving human society and ecosystems even less time to adapt.

(Source: *sciencealert.com*)

Scientists decode mechanism of remembering — and forgetting

It's a common expression to say that your brain is full. Although the brain doesn't literally fill up, in recent years researchers have discovered that the brain does sometimes push out old memories in order to take up new ones.

Now, a team at Scripps Research has shown for the first time the physiological mechanism by which a memory is formed and then subsequently forgotten.

The research, which was done in fruit flies, looked at the synaptic changes that occur during learning and forgetting. The investigators found that a single dopamine neuron can drive both the learning and forgetting process.

"We believe this system is set up to remove memories that are unimportant and not necessarily supposed to last a long time," says first author Jacob Berry, Ph.D., a postdoctoral associate in the Department of Neuroscience on Scripps Research's Florida campus. "I find it elegant that all of this is done with the same neuron. Our paper highlights exactly how this is achieved."

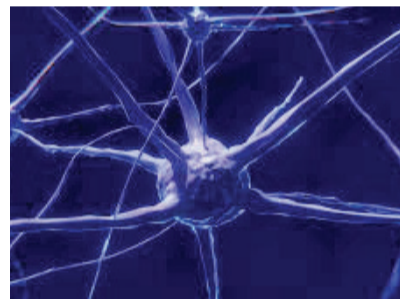
With an electric shock

To study memory in flies, the insects are conditioned to associate a particular odor with an electric shock. Once they've been trained, scientists observe that they subsequently avoid that odor, which confirms that the memory has been made.

By monitoring the activity of neurons in the brain before and after the conditioning process, scientists can get an inside look at the physiological underpinnings of memory formation.

In earlier work, the Scripps Research team showed that there are specific dopaminergic circuits that are involved in both the formation of memory and the removal of memories.

In the current study, the investigators used imaging techniques to look at the process in more detail. They discovered that when a behavioral memory is degraded, the cellular changes made during the



learning process are reversed by the same dopamine neuron that helped form the changes in the first place.

Forming a new memory

The researchers also found that when this dopamine neuron is recruited to form a new memory, it also works to degrade older memories. "Whenever you learn something new, you're simultaneously forming a new memory while potentially interfering with or erasing old ones," Berry says. "It's a very important balancing act that prevents you from becoming overloaded."

"For decades now, neuroscientists studying learning and memory have focused on how the brain acquires information and how that information is made to be stable memory, a process called memory consolidation," says first author Ron Davis, Ph.D., a professor and chair of the Department of Neuroscience at Scripps Research. "Only recently have neuroscientists grasped the importance of active forgetting and begun to unravel the processes that causes the brain to forget."

Berry adds that this learning-and-forgetting process helps to explain retroactive interference, a common observation in psychology. Retroactive interference describes the situation when more recent information gets in the way of trying to recall older information — for example, calling your former boss by your current boss's name.

(Source: *phys.org*)

Extreme weather is turning the Arctic brown, researchers find

In recent years the Arctic has experienced an increasing number of extreme weather events, which are causing significant dieback of plants in the region.

Now a team of researchers from the University of Sheffield in the UK has found that dieback following these events could significantly reduce the ability of Arctic ecosystems to mitigate the impacts of climate change, according to a paper published in the journal *Global Change Biology*.

The team have described this dieback — a condition in which a plant begins to die from the tip of their leaves or roots — after certain extreme events as "Arctic Browning."

"Arctic browning is declining biomass or productivity in Arctic regions," Rachael Treharne, from the Department of Animal and Plant Sciences at Sheffield, told *Newsweek*. "Extreme events linked to winter weather—such as abrupt periods of extreme warmth — are among the key drivers of Arctic browning. These events can cause sudden plant damage across huge areas."

Range of extreme events

"Over the last few years we've seen a range of extreme events driving browning across thousands of square kilometers," she said. "We've even seen these events causing record browning across entire Arctic regions (in this case, the Nordic Arctic Region). Many of the events causing this damage to plant communities are happening more frequently due to climate change, which is progressing exceptionally rapidly in the Arctic—twice as fast as the global average."

According to the researchers, Arctic browning could have an influence over whether climate change will slow down or accelerate in the future.

"Our results show that Arctic browning causes massive reductions in the ability of Arctic ecosystems to take up carbon," Treharne said. "This reduces the ability of these ecosystems to help tackle climate



change."

For the study, the researchers looked at heathland in the Lofoten archipelago of the Norwegian Arctic region, finding that the area had been affected by two extreme climatic events. One caused the death of the dominant evergreen vegetation, while the second generated an extensive "stress response," which manifested itself in high-levels of protective red pigments known as anthocyanin in shoots and leaves.

"Arctic browning driven by extreme climatic events halves the ability of widespread Arctic heathlands to take up carbon dioxide," Treharne said.

Dominated by stress

"In more detail, net CO₂ uptake — the primary measure of ecosystem carbon balance — was reduced by 48 percent in vegetation dominated by mortality, and 50 percent in that dominated by stress," she said.

The next step for the team is to conduct further research and develop methods to scale up the results to cover the entire Arctic in order to understand the role that extreme events are playing in broader browning trends.

"It is almost impossible to overstate the seriousness of climate change impacts on the Arctic," Treharne said. The "Arctic's climate is warming more than twice as fast as the global average and has been described as shifting to 'a new state.'

(Source: *Newsweek*)

Team explains how ancient viruses got cannabis high

World's first cannabis chromosome map reveals the plant's evolutionary past and points to its future as potential medicine.

THC and CBD, bioactive substances produced by cannabis and sought by medical patients and recreational users, sprung to life thanks to ancient colonization of the plant's genome by viruses. U of T researchers have found.

The finding is only one of the insights revealed by the long-awaited cannabis genome map detailing gene arrangement on the chromosomes, published recently in the journal *Genome Research*. Among other revelations are discovery of a gene responsible for the production of cannabichromene, or CBC, a lesser known cannabinoid, as the active substances in cannabis are known, and new insights into how strain potency is determined.

The "chromosome map is an important foundational resource for further research which, despite cannabis' widespread use, has lagged behind other crops due to restrictive legislation," says Tim Hughes, a professor in the Donnelly Centre for Cellular and Biomolecular Research and co-leader of the study. Hughes is also a professor in the Department of Molecular Genetics and Senior Fellow at the Canadian Institute for Advancement of Research.



The researchers expect the map will speed up breeding efforts to create new strains with desired medical properties as well as varieties that can be grown more sustainably, or with increased resistance to diseases and pests.

Three-part collaboration

The study was a three-part collaboration between Tim Hughes' team and those of Jonathan Page, of Aurora Cannabis and

the University of British Columbia, and Harm van Bakel, of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mt Sinai in New York.

Hughes, Page and van Bakel first got together in 2011 when they released the first draft of cannabis genome which was too fragmented to reveal gene position on chromosomes.

The new map reveals how hemp and mar-

ijuana, which belong to the same species *Cannabis sativa*, evolved as separate strains with distinct chemical properties. Cannabis plants grown for drug use ("marijuana") are abundant in psychoactive tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, whereas hemp produces cannabidiol, or CBD, popular of late for its medicinal potential. Some people use CBD to relieve pain and it is also being tested as a treatment for epilepsy, schizophrenia and Alzheimer's.

The enzymes making THC and CBD are encoded by THCA and CBDA synthase genes, respectively. Both are found on chromosome 6 of the ten chromosomes the cannabis genome is packaged into. There, the enzyme genes are surrounded by vast swaths of garbled DNA which came from viruses that colonized the genome millions of years ago. This viral DNA, or retroelements as it is known, made copies of itself that spread across the genome by jumping into other sites in the host cell's DNA.

The researchers believe that gene duplication of the ancestral synthase gene and expanding retroelements drove ancient cannabis to split into chemically distinct types. Humans subsequently selected for plants containing desirable chemistry such as high THC.

(Source: *eurekaalert.org*)

NASA's InSight successfully lands on Mars

After months in space, the NASA InSight probe has successfully touched down on Mars shortly before 00:08 P.M. GMT on Monday after a nail-biting descent that started when the spacecraft slammed into the Martian atmosphere at 12,300mph and ended minutes later with the probe settled on the ground, its thrusters quiet.

The long-awaited landing came with the usual "seven minutes of terror" while signals from Mars crawled back to Earth at the speed of light. There was nothing to fear this time, though. NASA reports that InSight's automated landing sequence performed perfectly and the probe is conducting systems checks in preparation for science operations.



Landing on Mars is no easy feat, not even for a small stationary robot like InSight. Mars has an atmosphere thick enough to incinerate or deflect an incoming spacecraft. InSight had to hit the atmosphere at an angle of 12 degrees exactly.

Three and a half minutes after entering the atmosphere, InSight deployed its parachute and ejected the heat shield. The atmosphere is thick enough to generate dangerous heat, but it's not thick enough for parachutes to work all the way down.

While InSight slowed itself with its parachute, it was too heavy to reach a safe landing speed. The answer, as with Curiosity, was a bank of small rockets. Forty-five seconds before touchdown, InSight jettisoned its chutes and activated the rockets for a nice, gentle landing. The team was extremely happy with the landing, as you can see in the tweet below.

InSight confirmed it was on the surface with a quick pulse shortly after 2 PM ET, making this the first NASA Mars landing in six years. InSight followed up its brief hello with an image of the landing site. The probe isn't designed to take a lot of impressive photos, so you won't learn anything new from the photo. However, it shows InSight is sitting level on a smooth area called Elysium Planitia. That's important as NASA prepares to deploy InSight's solar panels later today. As long as those work after the tumultuous landing, it should be smooth sailing for InSight.

(Source: *extremetech.com*)

Extreme heat increasing in both summer and winter

A new study shows extreme heat events both in the summer and in the winter are increasing across the U.S. and Canada, while extreme cold events in summer and winter are declining.

A new study in the *Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres*, a publication of the American Geophysical Union, examined absolute extreme temperatures -- high temperatures in summer and low temperatures in winter -- but also looked at relative extreme temperature events -- unusually cold temperatures and unusually warm temperatures throughout the year.

The new study found both relative and absolute extreme heat events have increased across the U.S. and Canada since 1980. This upward trend is greatest across the southern U.S., especially in the Ozarks and southern Arizona, as well as northern Quebec. That means there are more extremely hot days during the summer as well as more days that are considered extremely hot for the time of year, like abnormally warm days in the winter.

The new research also found both relative and absolute extreme cold events are decreasing, most notably in Alaska and Northern Canada, along with patches along the U.S. Atlantic coast. In these areas, there are fewer instances of temperatures that are extremely cold either compared to the normal range, like in winter, or for the time of year, like unusually cold days in the summer.

Global mean surface temperature, the most frequently cited indicator of climate change, has been steadily increasing since the 1970s. However, temperature extremes pose a greater ecological risk to many species than average warming, according to the study's authors.

(Source: *sciencedaily.com*)

A new AI system that can tell how old people really are from a photograph

Researchers have unveiled a new AI system that can predict how old you are simply by looking at a photo of your face.

And, in what may not come as much of a surprise to many, the experts say the corners of your eyes are the biggest giveaway.

The new technique tested on more than 8,000 photos could pave the way for more precise age estimations even when just a small portion of the face is visible, and lead to more personalized skin care treatments.

According to the researchers from Haut.AI, the skin near the corners of the eye, and the general eyelid area, were the most effective in predicting age.

According to the researchers from Haut.AI, the skin near the corners of the eye, and the general eyelid area, were the most effective in predicting age. They say the information could be used to create more personalized treatments.

In a new study, researchers from AI skin care firm Haut.AI used 8,414 anonymized high-resolution images to test the accuracy of their system.

They found the skin near the corners of the eye, and the general eyelid area, were the most effective in predicting age.

This type of information can be used to evaluate different factors that affect aging, including lifestyle, medical, and cosmetic interventions.

The "future of consumer business is in personalization and I hope that this study will lay the foundation for AI-powered consumer skincare and healthcare," said Anastasia Georgievskaya, CEO of Haut.AI.

According to the researchers, the work is a step toward AI-driven 'aging clocks' that could measure every step of the aging process.

(Source: *dailymail.co.uk*)

Iran seeking possible inclusion of Aq-Qeshlaq wetland on Ramsar List

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Iran is seeking to register Aq-Qeshlaq wetland in the northeastern North Khorasan province on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, the provincial department of environment chief has said.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, also known as the Convention on Wetlands, is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. It is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the Convention was signed in 1971.

The List of Wetlands of International Importance included 2,331 Ramsar Sites in May 2018 covering over 2.1 million square kilometers.

"Despite the area is facing water scarcity, the wetland and its surroundings are filled with water," ISNA quoted Eskandar



Gordmardi as saying on Tuesday.

The main purpose of applying for the list of sites on the Convention on Wetlands is to protect the wetland and prevent it from drying, he added.

If the wetland does not receive the necessary care, the area will become a hotspot generating sand and dust storm, which will threaten the city of Bojnord and its surrounding villages, he lamented, adding, so we tried to register the wetland on the Convention in order to conserve it.

Referring to the most important plant species in the wetland, he noted that due to the Tamarix (salt cedar) trees growing around the wetland, it requires a special protection.

The wetland is mostly home to aquatic birds and birds inhabiting marine environments, he concluded.

Charity foundation to create 1,000 jobs for the underprivileged in 3 months

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Berekat Foundation will generate over 1,000 job opportunities for the underprivileged in Lorestan province, western part of the country, by the end of the eleventh Iranian calendar month of Bahman (February 20), Fars reported on Monday.

The job opportunities will be opened up in cities of Delfan, Poldokhtar, Koohdasht and Rumeskhan in Lorestan province, the report added.

According to the report, each job seeker is granted loan amounting to 250 million rials (nearly \$6,000) to facilitate job generation, so far, some 350 job opportunities in the field of livestock breeding have been generated by the aforesaid loans and some 700 jobs will be created as well by the next three months.

Berekat Foundation offers social services to the underprivileged, along with creating sustainable jobs and granting facilities. It is affiliated to the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order and has been established on December 11, 2007, in order to act as an organization to uproot deprivation, to realize economic and social empowerment and to carry out public affairs.

Buildings in Kermanshah withstand massive 6.4 quake: report

1 → Some 90,000 houses were partly or completely damaged by the tremor in urban and rural areas leaving many displaced. Sadly, the quake took over 660 lives and left more than 10,000 injured.

After the tragic magnitude 7.3 quake of last year many organizations including Islamic Revolution Housing Foundation affiliated to Transport and Urban Development Ministry as well as Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps along with volunteer groups joined hands in rebuilding the quake-hit areas since last year.

While many were worried about the resistance of the newly-constructed building against another earthquake the powerful quake of Sunday night was solid evidence of the buildings seismic resistance.

Houshang Bazvand, Kermanshah Governor general told Sobh-e No daily newspaper that as a result of the earthquake, 729 individuals referred to healthcare centers and only 18 were hospitalized.

"This indicates that many were only terrified of the earthquake as they have been dealing with recurrent earthquakes over the past year, it is pretty normal for them to feel this way," Bazvand suggested.

The earthquake was pretty huge and occurred at a shallow depth of 7 kilometers and is the biggest quake after last November's temblor, he added.

But thankfully no one died as all the houses were either reconstructed or retrofitted, he highlighted.

Omid Rostami one of the residents of Sarpol-e Zahab also told Sobh-e No daily newspaper that once the earthquake hit, people were scared stiff, but the houses



were not damaged except for five of them which didn't go through any retrofitting process over the last year.

Rostami also highlighted that only 7 individuals who sustained injuries were transferred to Kermanshah to receive professional medical care.

Mehrbano, another residents of Bazmirabad, a village in Sarpol-e Zahab, also said that the quake only moved the furniture around and didn't cause any damages to the

houses in the village. Even the windows are not broken, she added.

What has happened in Kermanshah over the past year have a clear message: retrofitting and reconstruction of rundown areas is a must for all cities and villages nationwide as Iran, located in the Alpine-Himalayan orogenic belt, where more than 95 percent of the world earthquakes occur is a seismic country.

Chemical waste leachate raising cancer worrisome: expert

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN —The leachate produced from hazardous chemical waste penetrating into the soil after rainfall pollutes water with harmful toxic substances and causes cancer, which has raised concern in northern provinces of the country, an environmental expert has said.

Although, a huge amount of toxic waste is generated in households, it is not given any consideration and no measures have been taken to prevent them from producing harmful leachate and polluting the water, which have been a problem in northern provinces of the country, ISNA quoted Aziz Abesi as saying on Tuesday.

Some household waste can be categorized as hazardous waste including old batteries, shoe polish, paint tins, old medicines, and medicine bottles.

Batteries contain hazardous materials such as lead, nickel, and cadmium, which will be mixed with domestic wastes due to improper waste landfills and lack of segregation at source, Abesi said, adding that the waste releases chemical carcinogenic substances and hazardous leachate and reacts when exposed to rain and poses threats to the environment and the residents' health.

Referring to common types of wastes, he noted that wastes are classified in five categories including industrial, agricultural, biomedical, municipal (household) and toxic waste, and our problem is municipal waste management.

Industrial and medical waste are also considered hazardous as they contain toxic substances, so managing them requires investigation and proper disposal facilities, he added.

He went on to explain that waste generated at health



care facilities is highly infectious and can be a serious threat to human health if not managed in a scientific manner, adding, almost all hospitals in the country have a waste incinerator, while medical clinics put their waste into the municipal waste bin.

Abesi further addressed reduction of waste generation and separation of waste at source as the two major processes in waste management and highlighted that less use of plastic will greatly help waste reduction.

When wastes are separated at source, dry waste can be recycled and bring income, while wet waste (organic waste) can be used to produce compost, buried in informal landfills or disposed in waste incinerators, he concluded.

Earlier in September, Khabaronline reported that the

amount of waste generated in the three northern provinces of Mazandaran, Golestan and Gilan, is snowballing at a rate of over 7,000 tons a day, holding accountable for 14 percent of the total daily 50,000 tons of waste production in the country.

Sirous Vatankhah, secretary of energy technologies development headquarters at Science and Technology Vice-presidency told ISNA that there is a significant relationship between the prevalence of various diseases and the amount of waste generation, which must be considered a "danger sign" that needs urgent measures to contain the issue.

On the other hand, a large part of these thousand tons of waste is ending up in the Caspian Sea and the forests, which can lead to many changes in the environmental cycles, he added.

Moreover, Hossein Niaz Azari, member of the parliament, said that some 104 aquatic species have been living in the Caspian Sea in the past years, while most of them have gone extinct due to the high amount of waste entering the sea.

On top of that, although Mazandaran forests have a long history of rare species, in recent years, due to improper dumping of waste in these forests, some precious species are extinct and can only be found in the history books, he regretted.

Deputy environment chief Masoud Tajrishi has referred to the poor waste disposal in the coastal cities of the country, saying that "Unfortunately, we face not only the problem of identifying a proper place for waste disposal, but sewers being discharged into all rivers and lakes.

Greenhouse gas levels reach record highs, UN says

Greenhouse gas levels have reached new record highs, prompting experts to warn "the window of opportunity for action is almost closed" to tackle climate change.

Average concentrations of carbon dioxide hit new highs of 405.5 parts per million (ppm) in 2017, up from 403.3 ppm in 2016 and 400.1 ppm in 2015, levels not seen for millions of years.

Levels of other key greenhouse gases methane and nitrous oxide in the atmosphere also rose, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said.

In its annual bulletin on greenhouse gas levels, the WMO also warned of a resurgence in a potent greenhouse gas and ozone-depleting substance known as CFC-11.

There is no sign of a reversal in the trend in increasing greenhouse gas levels, which



is driving climate change, sea level rises and more extreme weather and making oceans more acidic, the UN experts warned.

WMO secretary general Petteri Taalas: "The science is clear. Without rapid cuts in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, climate change will have increasingly destruc-

tive and irreversible impacts on life on Earth. "The window of opportunity for action is almost closed.

"The last time the Earth experienced a comparable concentration of carbon dioxide was 3-5 million years ago, when the temperature was 2-3 degrees warmer and sea level was 10-20 metres higher than now."

The latest findings come after a report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) found net emissions of carbon dioxide must reach zero by around 2050 to keep temperature rises to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels and reduce the risks of climate change.

IPCC chairman Hoesung Lee said: "The new IPCC special report on global warming of 1.5C shows that deep and rapid reductions of emissions of carbon dioxide and other

greenhouse gases will be needed in all sectors of society and the economy.

"The WMO greenhouse gas bulletin, showing a continuing rising trend in concentrations of greenhouse gases, underlines just how urgent these emissions reductions are."

Prof Corinne Le Quere, director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at the University of East Anglia, said she was "not surprised but I am very concerned" that the major greenhouse gases are rising unabated.

"It seems the urgency and extent of the actions needed to address climate change have not sunk in.

"Low-carbon technologies like wind, solar, and electric transport need to become mainstream, with old-fashion polluting fossils pushed out rapidly," she said.

(Source: irishtimes.com)

LEARN ENGLISH

Sending A Quote Via

Tracy: Melanie, can you help me with something? We need to finalize the account with the Mexican Embassy and, I need some advice on phrasing this letter correctly in English. Melanie: Sure Tracy, let me just get my laptop. all set.

Tracy: Okay, so... to Whom I May Concern, I am writing. Melanie: Um, Tracy? I think that's a little too formal. I know you want to be polite but you've already made contact with them, so in English you can be more relaxed in the opening. ...

Tracy: Okay, more relaxed. Got it... Hey Sally, what's up? It's Tracy here, just.

Melanie: Okay Tracy, now it's too relaxed! You've still got to show some respect. How about starting with "Dear Ms. Cooper. I'm writing to confirm...?"

Tracy: Great, okay. "Dear Miss Cooper, I'm writing to confirm the final quotation for the full page back cover color advertisement you requested for the spring issue of Voila magazine.

Melanie: That's great...

Tracy: "The final **costing**, including advert design and production, comes to forty-five thousand six hundred RMB. We want payment ten working days before publication or we will cancel the ad. Thanks for..."

Melanie: Woo, okay back up a second Tracy. That's too direct. Can I suggest you say, "**please note that** final payment is due two working weeks before publication? You don't want to offend her.

Tracy: Oops okay. You are right. Then I can just end with "All the best, Tracy"

Melanie: Hmmm, maybe, but I'd **play it safe** and just finish with "Yours Sincerely". That's more professional.

Tracy: Oh, Melanie you are a life saver, thank you!

Key vocabulary

I am writing to: introduction

quotation: a statement of the price of an item or service

costing: charge, make someone pay

please note that: being informed of something

play it safe: go with the safest option

Supplementary vocabulary

cargo: freight of a ship, airplane

link: a word icon, etc., on which a user may click to move to another part of or different website, document

attachment: something attached, as a document added to a letter, or a picture in an email etc.

etiquette: conventional requirements as to social behavior; proprieties of conduct as established in any class or community or for any occasion

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

14% of total waste in Iran produced in northern coastal cities: report

The amount of waste generated in the northern provinces of the country, neighboring the Caspian Sea, is snowballing at a rate of over 7,000 tons a day, holding accountable for 14 percent of the total daily 50,000 tons of waste production in the country.

In the past few years, the amount of waste produced in the three northern provinces of Mazandaran, Golestan and Gilan has risen sharply to alarming rates, Khabaronline reported.

۱۴ درصد زباله ایران، در کنار دریا و در شهرهای شمالی تولید می شود

به گزارش خبر آنلاین، روزانه در کل ایران، ۵۰ هزار تن زباله تولید می شود، که زباله های تولیدی سه استان شمالی کشور برابر است با روزانه ۷۰۰۰ تن زباله که ۱۴ درصد کل زباله های کشور را شامل می شود.

در چند سال گذشته در استان های مازندران، گلستان و گیلان میزان تولید زباله به شدت افزایش پیدا کرده و به وضعیت قرمز رسیده است.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"allo-, allelo-, alleo-"

Meaning: alternate or other

For example: At very high pressures carbon forms an **allotrope** called diamond.

PHRASAL VERB

Lie down

Meaning: to rest

For example: I'm going to lie down for a few minutes before we have to go out.

IDIOM

Clean the way

Explanation: to allow something to happen by removing what was preventing it

For example: Opening universities to women cleared the way for them to have a career and participate actively in today's society.

Macron's violence against protestors

French president says he won't bow to thugs behind fuel tax protests

By staff & agencies

Embattled French President Emmanuel Macron has said he will not abandon a controversial fuel tax, as he set out France's future energy strategy.

The so-called yellow vests protests have seen thousands take to the streets across France over fuel prices.

But Macron struck a conciliatory tone, saying he was open to ideas and revising how the fuel tax was applied.

He also announced that France would close all coal power stations by 2022, along with a number of nuclear plants.

In his speech on Tuesday, Macron said: "I am not confusing the rioters with citizens who want to convey a message."

"I sympathize with my fellow citizens, but I will not give in to violence."

He said "you cannot be pro-environment on Monday and then when Tuesday comes be against rising fuel prices".

But in a concession, he said the controversial tax could be adjusted when fuel prices soared to ease the burden on motorists.

He pointed to decades of French policy encouraging citizens to move farther from cities and travel by road.

"We pushed them into this situation... they are the victims of this situation, they have not created it," he said.

"We should listen to the social alarm and protests, but there is also an environmental alarm."

He acknowledged that many citizens felt the policy was being imposed on them without consultation. After his speech, French



broadcaster BFMTV reported that the ecology minister would meet with representatives from the yellow vests movement later on Tuesday.

France is heavily dependent on nuclear power, which Macron pledged to reduce to 50% of the national energy mix by 2035 by closing 14 of the country's 58 reactors. None, however, will be closed before 2022 with the exception of Fessenheim on the German border.

That is on top of the closure of all four of France's remaining coal-fired power plants and investment of billions of euros into re-

newable energy.

Macron's approval rating has fallen steadily in recent months, with his deeply unpopular fuel tax increase adding to his political woes.

The gilets jaunes rallies were originally about fuel tax increases. Protesters donned the yellow vest required to be carried in every vehicle by law and blocked roads, causing widespread traffic jams.

But the protests have now spread to encompass rising anger at high taxes and living costs, and span the entire political spectrum - even the far right, which the

government blamed for violence in Paris at the weekend.

Those protests saw the famous Champs-Élysées packed with 5,000 people with thousands more spread across the rest of the capital.

Tear gas and a water cannon were used to disperse crowds after barricades were erected on the capital's streets and a small number of protesters tried to break a security cordon.

Most demonstrators have remained peaceful. But one person died during the protests when they were struck by a panicked driver. A few days later, a motorcyclist was also killed when they were hit by a van making a sudden turn in the traffic chaos.

But Macron is also facing opposition from the political class.

On Tuesday, 12 of France's 13 regional leaders called on Macron to reconsider the fuel tax.

In the letter, published in French newspaper L'Opinion, the regional presidents called for a moratorium on the tax, writing that it would be a "serious mistake" to characterise the widespread protests as an extremist movement.

Instead, they wrote, it was indicative of widespread anger of citizens forced to live further and further from their place of work and spend more on travel.

The collected presidents also added that they were not against environmental taxes, but rather in favor of taking the time to improve the proposals.

Soros foundation to close in Turkey after being bashed by Erdogan

The United States billionaire George Soros's Open Society Foundation said it has decided to cease operations in Turkey, days after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused the philanthropist of trying to divide nations.

The organization said that it was no longer possible to work in Turkey after it became the target of "baseless claims" in the media and a renewed investigation by Turkish authorities into mass protests against Erdogan's government five years ago.

It said the Turkish interior ministry was renewing attempts to prove that the Soros foundation was behind the 2013 anti-government Gezi Park protests, one of the biggest political challenges to Erdogan's 15-year rule.

The foundation denied any link to the protests. Erdogan denounced Soros last week while speaking of the detention of 13 activists and academics accused of supporting attempts by jailed businessman and rights advocate Osman Kavala to revive the Gezi protests.

"The person (Kavala) who financed terrorists during the Gezi incidents is already in prison," Erdogan told a meeting of local administrators on Wednesday.

"And who is behind him? The famous Hungarian Jew Soros. This is a man who assigns people to divide nations and shatter them. He has so much money and he spends it this way."

One of the 13 people detained on November 16 was Hakin Altinay, who helped establish the Open Society Foundation in Turkey. Others were staff members of Kavala's Anadolu Kultur center, which campaigns for human rights and cultural diversity.

All but one of the detainees were later released after the European Union and the U.S. expressed concern about their cases.

Ankara's Western allies have repeatedly criticized the arrest of tens of thousands of people since a failed military coup in Turkey in July 2016.

Kavala, in detention for more than a year, said on Monday in a statement posted on his website that he was still waiting for an indictment to be prepared so that he could prove that the claims he had helped to direct and finance the Gezi protests and wanted to overthrow the government were "unfounded".

Soros, a U.S.-based financier and philanthropist, and



his Open Society Foundation have also come under fire in Hungary.

Prime Minister Viktor Orban accuses Soros and the liberal causes he backs of trying to undermine Europe's Christian culture by promoting mass migration, a charge the financier denies.

(Source: TRT)

Myanmar seizes more Rohingya Muslims fleeing Rakhine

Myanmar's authorities have intercepted a boat with 93 Rohingya Muslims who were fleeing apartheid conditions at internal displacement camps in Rakhine State and heading to Malaysia.

Moe Zaw Latt, director of the government office in the southern coastal town of Dawei, said on Tuesday that Myanmar's navy had seized the vessel and detained the 93 people on board on Sunday after they received a tip from fishermen about a "suspicious" vessel.

According to the official, the 93 people said they had come from the Thae Chaung camp in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State.

"They said they ran away from the camp. They said they intended to go to

Malaysia," said Moe Zaw Latt.

The official added that the authorities were preparing to send them back to Sittwe on Tuesday.

For years, the persecuted Rohingya in Myanmar have embarked on dangerous journeys aboard rickety vessels to Thailand and Malaysia, fleeing state-sponsored violence. Most of the voyages have taken place in the dry months between November and March, when the sea is calm.

The United Nations refugee agency has urged Myanmar to "address the root causes of displacement," including the lack of citizenship for the minority Rohingya Muslims in the majority-Buddhist country.

Tens of thousands of Rohingya have been languishing in internal displacement camps since a previous wave of violence in 2012.

Thousands of Rohingya Muslims were killed, injured, arbitrarily arrested, or raped by Myanmar's soldiers and Buddhist mobs mainly between November 2016 and August 2017, when the surviving members of the community started fleeing to Bangladesh en masse.

The Rohingya Muslims, who have lived in Myanmar for generations, are denied citizenship and are branded illegal emigrants from Bangladesh, which likewise denies them citizenship.

Government officials from Bangladesh and Myanmar announced last month

that they had struck a "very concrete" repatriation deal for the return of the Rohingya refugees who have fled the military crackdown. UN officials and aid agencies have condemned the plan, saying the Muslims still faced violence in Myanmar.

The boat seized on Sunday was the third to be intercepted in less than a month.

Last week, over 80 people were arrested off the coast of southern Rakhine as they were trying to reach Malaysia. On November 16, Myanmar arrested 106 Rohingya Muslims on a boat near Yangon who were also heading to Malaysia. All of the detainees were returned to camps.

(Source: Daily Star)

Ex-Trump aide Manafort violated plea deal by lying: prosecutors

The United States President Donald Trump's former campaign manager Paul Manafort has been accused of breaching a plea deal by lying to federal prosecutors, signaling a potential setback to the special counsel's probe into Russia's meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

In a court filing on Monday, lawyers working on Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into the alleged Russian interference said Manafort had nullified their agreement to cooperate - charges denied by the 69-year-old.

In the latest filing, Mueller's team said Manafort "committed federal crimes" by lying about "a variety of subject matters" even after he agreed to truthfully cooperate with the investigation, which has been ongoing since 2017.

Prosecutors said they will detail the "nature of the defendant's crimes and lies" in writing at a later date to the judge.

Manafort, who pleaded guilty in September, denied lying and breaching his plea agreement, saying he "believes he provided truthful information" during a series of sessions with Mueller's investigators.

But both sides agreed the court should move ahead and sentence him for his crimes.

The surprise development comes at a critical time for Mueller, who is expected to finalize a report in the coming months on the findings of his 18-month probe into Russia's election meddling and possible collusion with the Trump campaign.

While not a fatal blow, the dissolution of Manafort's plea agreement means Mueller is losing the contributions of a witness with deep ties to Russia and who



ran the Trump campaign as it took off in mid-2016.

Manafort, who remains jailed, had been meeting with the special counsel's office since he pleaded guilty in September to a conspiracy against the United States - a charge that included a range of conduct from money laundering to unregistered lobbying. He also admitted that he tried to tamper with witnesses.

He cut that deal to head off a second trial after being convicted last summer of eight felony counts related to millions of dollars he hid from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in offshore accounts.

Manafort already faces up to five years in prison on the two charges in his plea agreement. In his separate Virginia case, Manafort's potential sentencing under federal guidelines has not yet been calculated, but prosecutors have previously said he could face as

much as 10 years in prison on those charges.

Manafort was a long-time Republican political consultant who made tens of millions of dollars working for pro-Kremlin politicians in Ukraine before joining the Trump campaign in March 2016, promising to work for free.

Manafort attended a meeting at Trump Tower in June 2016 with a group of Russians offering "dirt" on Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, who lost in an upset to Trump in the vote that November.

His long-standing relationship with an oligarch close to Russian President Vladimir Putin was another reason Manafort's cooperation was seen as important to Mueller's probe.

Manafort's lawyers said he met the government on several occasions and made "an effort to live up to his cooperation obligations," according to Monday's joint filing, which was submitted to the U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson in Washington.

Rudy Giuliani, who represents Trump in the Russia probe, said Mueller's team had crossed an ethical line between the search for the truth and exerting too much pressure on Manafort.

"They are trying not to get a witness to sing, but to compose," he said in an interview with Reuters on Monday night.

Mueller, a lawyer and the head of the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) from 2001 to 2003, was appointed as special counsel to the U.S. Justice Department to investigate possible Russian meddling in the 2016 US presidential election on May 17.

(Source: agencies)

Sanders to pursue Senate vote on ending U.S. involvement in Yemen

The United States Senator Bernie Sanders has announced his intention to push for a Senate vote ending the U.S. involvement in Yemen in the upcoming days.

In an email addressing supporters, Sanders announced "this week I will go to the floor of the United States Senate [to force the vote]," revealed The Hill on Tuesday.

"Despite Trump's venal support for the Saudi regime, I am confident that we now stand an excellent chance to win this vote which I plan on bringing back to the Senate floor this week," added Sanders. A spokesman for the politician further confirmed that Sanders is negotiating a Wednesday or Thursday vote with Senate leadership.

The vote may seek to introduce a resolution similar to a previous one brought up in March which called for a halt in the U.S. intervention in Yemen.

The resolution, proposed by Sanders and Republican Senator Mike Lee, was blocked by a 55-strong vote despite gaining 44 favorable votes.

A new vote will further increase pressure on US relations with the oil-rich kingdom, given the added controversy over the killing of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi along with Saudi Arabia's prolonged bloody onslaught on Yemen.

The announcement comes as the Senate has been exploring different means to punish the Saudi government in recent weeks.

On November 15, a bipartisan group of senators introduced a bill seeking to halt the U.S. arms exports to Saudi Arabia.

The measure came on the same day the U.S. Treasury Department had imposed economic sanctions on 17 Saudis allegedly involved in Khashoggi's murder.

Later this week, Defense Secretary James Mattis and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo plan to brief the Senate on Saudi Arabia, in what may be a last attempt to defend the Trump administration's positive relations with Riyadh in the Upper House.

The House of Saud regime and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating military campaign against Yemen in March 2015, with the aim of bringing a former Riyadh-friendly government back to power.

Bin Salman, who is also Saudi Arabia's defense minister, is known as the architect of the Yemen war.

According to a new report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, the Saudi war has claimed the lives of around 56,000 Yemenis so far.

The Saudi regime-led war has also taken a heavy toll on the country's infrastructure, destroying hospitals, schools, and factories. The United Nations has already said that a record 22.2 million Yemenis are in dire need of food, including 8.4 million threatened by severe hunger. According to the world body, Yemen is suffering from the most severe famine in more than 100 years.

Save the Children says for every child killed by bombs and bullets, dozens are starving to death amid the brutal war and blockade led by Saudi Arabia.

A number of Western countries, the U.S. and Britain in particular, are also accused of being complicit in the ongoing aggression as they supply Riyadh with advanced weapons and military equipment as well as logistical and intelligence assistance.

The war in Yemen has been the focus of international attention since the assassination of Khashoggi at Riyadh's consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, in October, which is widely believed to have been ordered by MbS.

There have been numerous calls over the past weeks for the U.S. and its allies to end its military support for the Saudis.

■ **Aid groups urge end to U.S. support for Saudis**

In another development, five international aid groups on Monday called on the United States to suspend all military support for the Saudi regime-led coalition, saying this will save millions of lives.

The International Rescue Committee, Oxfam America, CARE U.S., Save the Children, and the Norwegian Refugee Council said in a joint statement that 14 million people are at risk of starving to death in Yemen if the parties to the conflict do not change course immediately.

"Starvation must not be used as a weapon of war against Yemeni civilians," the statement said. "All warring parties, and those fueling the conflict through arms transfers, are implicated in this totally man-made humanitarian crisis."

(Source: agencies)

Afghan militia commander freed after 'several killed' in protests

An Afghan commander arrested over allegations of human rights abuses has been released following two days of violent protests in which several demonstrators were allegedly killed and dozens of policemen wounded.

Alipur's release, as President Ashraf Ghani flew to Geneva to attend a United Nations conference on Afghanistan, was confirmed by Vice President Sarwar Danish's office on Monday, according to a report by Reuters news agency.

Alipur, an anti-Taliban commander from the mainly Shia Hazara minority, was detained in the capital Kabul weeks after an earlier attempt to arrest him in the western province of Ghor ended in a shoot-out that killed 12 people.

Known widely as "Commander Sword", Alipur was accused of serious abuses mainly against ethnic Pashtuns in the Maidan Wardak region, west of Kabul.

In conflict-ridden Afghanistan, Hazaras have felt especially targeted. There has been growing resentment among many Hazaras against Sunni Pashtuns, the country's dominant ethnic group.

Alipur's arrest triggered violent protests, in which dozens of police were wounded by thrown rocks, at least eight security checkpoints and recruiting centers were burned down, and 19 vehicles damaged, according to the interior ministry.

"We have not received the number of casualties of the protesters in Kabul over the past two days but that 48 security force members were wounded," Deputy Interior Minister General Akhtar Mohammad Ibrahim said on Monday.

Demonstrators and eyewitnesses, however, told Al Jazeera the police opened fire "indiscriminately" to disperse the crowd, which allegedly resulted in the death of several protesters.

"The police opened fire on people. In two days, seven people were killed and 70 others wounded in the firing. I witnessed the senseless barbaric action," Amir Yaga, a protester, alleged.

"The government officials are lying and not giving the exact figure." Ibrahim rejected claims of any deaths by police gunfire. "No live ammunition was used against demonstrators. No one was killed during the protest in Kabul," he told a press conference.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Borussia Dortmund bus attacker sentenced to 14 years for attempted murder

The man who carried out a bomb attack on the Borussia Dortmund team bus last year has been sentenced to 14 years in prison for attempted murder. The 29-year-old, known only as Sergej W in keeping with German privacy law, was found guilty of 28 counts of attempted murder, causing an explosion and two counts of serious bodily harm in the attack on April 11, 2017.

Last week, public prosecutor Carsten Dombert had called for a life sentence. The defendant's lawyers had urged a sentence of less than 10 years, arguing that Sergej W, who pleaded guilty on the second day of his trial, had not wanted to kill those on the bus.

"He believed he could control the bombs," Carl Heydenreich, one of two lawyers representing him, said last week.

Sergej W, a German citizen who was born in Russia, set off three devices filled with metal bolts as Dortmund left their team hotel for a Champions League home match against Monaco.

He had hoped to profit from a drop in the club's share price as a result of the attack.

During the trial, prosecutors said Sergej W -- who claimed to have come up with his plan following the 2015 Paris terror attacks -- could have made a profit of €506,275.

The attacker misled first responders by leaving notes that purported to be written by Islamist extremists claiming responsibility.

The attack left defender Marc Bartra requiring surgery for an arm injury. In January, after appearing as a witness in the trial, Bartra left Dortmund for Real Betis.

It also injured a policeman who has not been able to resume work since. The policeman was present in court as judge Peter Windgatter read out the verdict.

(Source: ESPN)

River president blasts Boca chief over final 'betrayal'

River Plate president Rodolfo D'Onofrio hit out at his Boca Juniors counterpart on Monday accusing his rival of "betrayal" following the postponement of the weekend's Copa Libertadores final due to an attack on the Boca team bus by River fans.

In a humiliating weekend for South American football, the second leg of the final was postponed twice amid scenes of violence and confusion.

The match had been scheduled for Saturday but the two presidents agreed to delay the continental showpiece by 24 hours after some Boca players suffered cuts from broken glass and the effects of smoke inhalation when their bus came under fire from River fans throwing sticks and stones and spraying pepper spray.

Yet the game did not take place on Sunday either as Boca said they faced a "sporting disadvantage" due to their players' injuries and Boca president Daniel Angelici said he would petition competition organizers Conmebol to award the tie, and hence the trophy, to Boca. "I'm struggling to believe he cannot keep his promise," D'Onofrio fumed on Radio Mitre.

"We signed a document and we shook hands. Then I find out he's petitioned Conmebol and asked for them to be declared champions." Speaking on Sunday, Angelici revealed he was lodging a challenge with Conmebol's independent disciplinary commission.

"Matches are won and lost on the pitch, that's my personal perspective, but I have a responsibility as club president and that's why I have to stick to the statute," Angelici said at a press conference. He was referring to Conmebol's Article 18 which includes provisions for a number of possible punishments, including the forfeiture of a result.

(Source: Eurosport)

Ex-England defender Cole released by LA Galaxy

Former England left-back Ashley Cole has been released by LA Galaxy after his contract at the Major League Soccer club expired.

The club decided not to exercise an option to re-sign Cole, 37, along with seven other players.

The former Arsenal and Chelsea defender joined LA Galaxy in 2016 and was named captain in March, two months after signing a one-year contract extension.

Cole scored three goals in 86 appearances for the club. Striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic was one of 16 players named in LA Galaxy's squad for the 2019 MLS season, which is scheduled to start in May 2019.

(Source: BBC)

Mick Schumacher confirmed at Prema in Formula 2 for 2019

Mick Schumacher will step up to the FIA Formula 2 championship in 2019 with Prema Racing after being confirmed by the team on Tuesday ahead of post-season testing.

The son of seven-time Formula 1 world champion Michael Schumacher, Mick won the FIA European Formula 3 title in 2018 with eight wins and seven poles to his name.

Schumacher will continue his long-running partnership with Prema in 2019 when he joins its F2 operation, and is the team's first confirmed driver for next season.

"I'm really looking forward to contesting my next season with Prema in FIA Formula 2 - a logical step on my sporting path in my view, because I want to further improve my technical experience and driving skills," Schumacher said.

"For me, it was very clear to go into Formula 2 with Prema. I can't thank the Prema family enough for what we achieved together as a team, especially this year, how we continued to develop together.

"I'm also really excited to drive the Formula 2 tests in Abu Dhabi."

Prema team boss Rene Rosin added: "We are proud to welcome Mick to our Formula 2 operation for 2019. He is an extremely talented and dedicated racer, working with him is a pleasure and we can't wait to begin this adventure together."

(Source: Mirror)

Diego Maradona leads Dorados de Sinaloa to brink of promotion in Mexico

He shocked the world with his crazed, wide-eyed appearance at the World Cup in Russia, leaving many viewers concerned about his health.

His middle-finger salute to the crowd after Lionel Messi's goal against Nigeria was followed by an emergency transfer to a local hospital. But now, rather than making headlines for all the wrong reasons off the pitch, Diego Maradona is making headlines on it for his performances as manager of Mexican club Dorados. His appointment in September attracted its fair share of surprise and cynicism, viewed by many as little more than a publicity stunt.

After all, the Argentina legend held just two managerial jobs in the eight years since he left his post in charge of the national team in 2010 -- Emirate clubs Al-Wasl and Fujairah SC. But he and his players have proved their doubters wrong, earning a place in the Ascenso MX playoff final and are now just two games away from promotion to Mexico's first tier, Liga MX.

Maradona and his players have developed a bond along the way, too, celebrating their success in the changing room with songs and dances, which have gone viral on more than one occasion.

"Hard work has been the key," Maradona told the Dorados website after reaching the final, which will be played against Atletico San Luis over two legs Friday and Monday.

"The players train hard and they have a winning mentality. To give joy to our fans, there is nothing better. That's our secret to being where we are.

"I'm grateful to my players and to all Dorados who believed in me. We worked hard and we achieved it."

Health

After appearing to be in rude health during the post-match celebrations, Maradona again caused concern when he appeared to slur his words and struggled to answer questions



in an interview Sunday.

The 58-year-old has no cartilage left in his knee due to severe osteoarthritis - which can cause severe pain and swelling - according to a report by the Associated Press.

He is regularly pictured arriving at matches or training using a crutch.

Despite his apparent struggles with communication, Maradona has masterminded a remarkable change in fortunes for Dorados.

Toiling in seventh place and with no win in eight matches when he joined, he recorded a win and a loss in his first two matches before going on a nine-game unbeaten run.

That streak came to an end after Sunday's 1-0 defeat by Juarez but, having won the first leg 2-0, it meant little as Dorados secured its place in the final.

Could this unlikely success story yet have one last chapter to write?

(Source: CNN)

Argentina pushes anti soccer hooligan bill after Boca-River melee



Argentina's president on Monday called for Congress to pass a bill in special session that would crack down on soccer hooliganism after a weekend melee derailed the final leg of the region's main club tournament.

President Mauricio Macri wants a law that would more severely punish the kind of violence that over the weekend shut down the second leg of the Copa Libertadores soccer final between River Plate and Boca Juniors.

The riot was especially embarrassing to the country as it prepares to host a summit of the G20 bloc of nations on Friday.

A visibly angry Macri went on television to denounce criminal soccer fan organizations, called 'Barras Bravas', that are known for dealing drugs, extorting rank-and-file fans and demanding protection money from small businesses located near stadiums.

"We reject the mafias that are often behind this type of violence," Macri said. "I hope that after this embarrassment, we can get a law passed in extra sessions of Congress."

Security Minister Patricia Bullrich said the law would stiffen penalties against violence related to soccer matches.

Later on Monday, the security minister for the city of Buenos Aires, Martin Ocampo, resigned over the fiasco.

The decisive leg of the tournament had been set to be played on Saturday, but was

suspended until Sunday after Boca players were injured when their bus was attacked by River fans outside Monumental stadium in Buenos Aires.

Some of Boca's players had not sufficiently recovered by Sunday, so the game was again postponed. The heads of both clubs were expected to meet on Tuesday to decide when to reschedule.

Macri said the incident was particularly "sad and frustrating" because it happened five days ahead of a meeting of the G20 bloc of industrialized nations in Buenos Aires, which he has touted as part of the country's effort at attracting foreign investment despite its high rate of inflation and recession.

He also said he was incensed that the 23 people arrested in Saturday's melee had already been set free.

"I don't understand in the name of all Argentines," Macri said in a raised voice. "I don't understand the reaction of the justice system."

The Copa Libertadores is South America's equivalent of Europe's Champion's League. This year marked the first time Argentina's two biggest clubs had met for the title.

The cross town showdown had been billed as the greatest final in the competition's 58-year history.

(Source: Reuters)

WADA opens Moscow stage of Russian doping investigation



A team of experts sent by the World Anti-Doping Agency will meet Russian officials in Moscow on Wednesday to begin the process of recovering data from the era of institutional doping.

On the eve of the opening meeting, WADA had not revealed either the names of the three scientific and technical experts WADA has selected, nor the location of their meeting with the representatives of the Russian authorities.

The face-to-face meeting will prepare the ground for the process, which could take days or even weeks, of extracting doping data from the former Moscow laboratory.

WADA suspended Russian doping agency RUSADA in November 2015, after investigations, including one by Canadian lawyer Richard McLaren, found that, between 2011 and 2015, Russia organised massive doping fraud centred on a Moscow testing laboratory.

WADA made access to the lab a prerequisite of reinstating RUSADA.

After a long stalemate, WADA agreed, in September, to reverse the steps: declaring RUSADA "compliant" before the recovery from Moscow of raw data from drug tests between 2011 and 2015.

Widely criticised for the decision, WADA has promised it will impose new sanctions if Russia does not cooperate by December 31.

Since the start of the Russian affair,

international sports bodies have faced the problem of the lack of original data.

In February, the Court for Arbitration in Sport over-turned the punishments of 28 of the 43 Russians suspended by the International Olympic Committee for the Winter Games in Pyeongchang for benefiting from state doping at Sochi four years earlier.

"What we need to exonerate an athlete, or to sanction an athlete, is the original screening data, and this is what we will get from the Moscow lab," Guenter Younger, WADA's Director of Intelligence and Investigations, told AFP.

Those screenings, along with the lab database and the McLaren findings, could help build stronger cases.

"In order to complete our cases and to be sure that we have positive cases or not, we need all the data, and then we have a chain of evidence," Younger said.

But, according to several anti-doping sources, the destruction or falsification of the raw data mean the investigation are likely to result in far fewer cases than suggested by McLaren, who estimated that 1,000 athletes, in thirty disciplines, benefited from the system.

"The challenge is for most of them, we don't really have samples, because they were destroyed at that time," said Younger.

(Source: AFP)

Rollercoaster F1 season leaves highs and lows at Mercedes

Mercedes Formula One boss Toto Wolff joked at Sunday's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix that he would be booking himself into rehab after a rollercoaster season that ended with his team winning both titles for the fifth year in a row.

If he did, the Austrian might find one of his drivers there already. Valtteri Bottas started the year determined to fight, and beat, team mate Lewis Hamilton to the title but the Finnish driver ended it mentally drained and further away than ever from his goal.

"He said to me he just wants to disappear back home, recharge the battery, forget, recover and recuperate and then come back next year," Wolff told reporters. "I can understand the frustration."

Mercedes have hailed Bottas as a team player, a driver who does not play politics, and Hamilton has said they could be Formula One's best pairing ever. The statistics are less complimentary, however.

Bottas, who was testing again in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday, was alone among the top three teams' drivers in failing to win a race in 2018, the first winless in a Mercedes since Michael Schumacher in his final 2012 season.

Since the V6 turbo hybrid era began in 2014 Mercedes have always had both drivers finish the season in the top three -- until Bottas.

The Finn ended up fifth overall, a slide from third last year, and dismissed by some as no more than a useful wingman for Hamilton -- even if he did take the award for most



fastest laps. "It's been a mentally pretty tough year so I need a break," Bottas, who has no guarantee of staying in his coveted seat beyond next year, said on Sunday.

CAN DO BETTER

Some of it is down to bad luck, Hamilton's genius and the rise of Ferrari and Red Bull as challengers in the toughest season yet for Mercedes as the team to beat, but there were also painful mistakes.

"Confidence is not at the highest and he needs to try and pick it up again in the winter, because he can do better," said retired 2016 world champion Nico Rosberg, the man Bottas replaced, after the Finn finished fifth on track on Sunday.

"We've seen him do better and I hope he can find his way again."

Hamilton won more than twice as many races as anyone else this year but Mercedes had their least dominant showing of the last five seasons. They won 11 of 21, compared to 12 in 2017, 19 in 2016 and 16 in 2015 and 2014.

Ferrari won six, their biggest tally since 2008, while Red Bull's four was their most since 2013.

Hamilton made the difference -- equalling his best ever season's haul of 11 wins, for a career tally of 73, with 11 poles. He also became the first driver to score more than 400 points in a campaign and won the title with two races to spare.

The Briton signed off with a victory and intends to start next season in similar fashion, when he will be chasing a sixth world crown and closing in on Schumacher's all-time record of 91 wins.

The bad news for Bottas is that Mercedes have seen a change in their champion, which will not make the Finn's task any easier. "He's actually driven stronger after winning the driver's title," Wolff said.

"I feel he's just so embedded in the team and integrated that the driver's title felt incomplete, which for a driver is really strange.

"When you look at his face, there was almost more relief and happiness about sealing the constructors' title (than the drivers')."

(Source: Reuters)

Iran Football Federation warns Persepolis head coach about speaking against Queiroz

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iran Football Federation in a letter to Persepolis club, requested the club to help Iran national football team to be in good mood for 2019 AFC Asian Cup and also warned Persepolis head coach -Branko Ivankovic- not to speak against Carlos Queiroz, Iran national team manager.

In a letter signed by Mohammad Reza Sabet - general secretary of Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran – it is mentioned that Branko Ivankovic has talked against Team Melli and Carlos Queiroz in a press conference before Persepolis match against Peykan in The Persian Gulf Pro League and that his talks led to divisions between football fans in Iran.

Branko had criticized one of the Queiroz's assistants in national team for celebrating after Persepolis defeat against Kashima Antlers in the final encounter of the AFC Champions League 2018 at Azadi stadium in Tehran. However, Carlos Queiroz and Iran Football Federation denied this issue, which was claimed by Mehrdad Masoudi, an Iranian member of FIFA media staff.

Mohammad Reza Sabet asked Persepolis not to enter the 'suspicious streaming against national team' and requested them to help Team Melli to keep their mood for 2019 AFC Asian Cup which will be held in the United Arab Emirates from 5 January to 1 February 2019.

The general secretary of Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) also has warned that future interviews against Carlos Queiroz by Persepolis head coach will lead to legal action by Iran Football Federation against the club and the coach.



Ansarifard should be full of 'confidence' – and ready to play his part for Nottingham Forest



The former Olympiacos player is yet to get a proper taste of the action with Nottingham Forest – but Aitor Karanka believes he is mentally and physically prepared.

Karim Ansarifard should be full of confidence following his international exploits with Iran, says Aitor Karanka – who has no concern over the striker's fitness.

The former Olympiacos player made his second appearance for his new club, coming off the bench in the 2-0 win at Hull as an 86th minute substitute, as a replacement for Lewis Grabban.

Ansarifard's main source of match minutes this season has been on international duty, with Iran, while he waited for work permit issues to be resolved – and allow his move to the City Ground to go ahead.

The 28-year-old was again away playing for his country during the last break, playing 77 minutes and scoring the only goal against Trinidad and getting 25 minutes of action as a sub, in a 1-1 draw with Venezuela – which was played in Qatar.

But Reds boss Aitor Karanka believes the chance to get some minutes under his belt with his country will have done Ansarifard good, as

he looks to find his feet in the Championship. "Qatar is a nice place to be at this time of year, surely, when you look at the weather here?" said Karanka. "No, I think he is fine. "When you have not been playing with your club and you go away with your national team, score a goal in your first game and then come back here, you will be more motivated than anyone.

"He will be motivated and I will need to choose between him and Daryl for a place in the squad." Karanka would have liked the chance to work more with Ansarifard during the international break at the Nigel Doughty Academy – but believes that was balanced out by the time he got on the pitch with Iran.

"Karim is very good. It is a shame for me that he could not work with us, but it is good for him to be with his national team," said Karanka.

"When he arrived I said he is a player who is going to help us a lot, because of his experience. He has scored a goal for Iran in one of the games, which will give him more confidence.

(Source: Nottinghampost)

Redemption for Iran or Qualification for Australia?



TEHRAN (FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 Asian Qualifiers) - In a rematch of FIBA Asia Cup 2017 finalists, will Iran get payback against Australia, or will the Boomers finally qualify for the World Cup?

Iran will be playing without much of their established stars in the fifth window. Hamed Haddadi, Samad Nikkhab Bahrami, Arsalan Kazemi and even Sajjad Mashayekhi will all miss this game against Australia, and one of the guys expected to step up is veteran floor general Aren Davoudi. The 32-year-old point guard has played in 5 Asian Qualifiers games so far, playing mostly off the bench behind Mashayekhi, but he will need to take charge here, especially since he will be ranged against Australia's Jason Cadee. The 27-year-old Boomers playmaker has been one of the most efficient in the Asian Qualifiers, averaging 4.4 assists and just 0.3 turnovers per game. If Davoudi can hold Cadee's production down, Iran may have a shot at an upset.

X-factor: Australia's Cam Gliddon has been one of the best three-point shooters in the NBL this season, and he is expected

to play a big role for the Boomers in the fifth window. He hits close to 2 triples per contest, and his shooting will put a lot of pressure on Iran's perimeter defenders to really close out hard and challenge Gliddon and Co. If the 6ft 6in (1.97m) shooter catches fire, Australia can easily break this game open.

Iran outlook: Iran had a brilliant run in last year's FIBA Asia Cup only to flame out in the Final against a deep and determined Australian side. Team Melli are certainly aiming for a measure of payback here, though that'll be easier said than done with so many of their elite guys missing in action. Aside from the aforementioned Davoudi, other players expected to carry the load for Iran are Mohammad Jamshidi, Meisam Mirzaei, Behnam Yakhchali and Mohammad Hassanzadeh. Make no mistake, Iran are underdogs here – and they're playing on the road too – but their size and experience still make them a legitimate threat to pull off a stunner against the Boomers.

(Source: FIBA)

Borussia Dortmund's struggling Kagawa eyes Spain move

Attacking midfielder Shinji Kagawa, one of Japan's most successful footballing exports, on Tuesday made a passionate plea for a transfer to Spain as he struggles with German outfit Borussia Dortmund.

Kagawa was a key part of the celebrated Dortmund side that won back-to-back Bundesliga titles at the start of the decade but has found himself unable to get regular first-team football under Lucian Favre.

And the 29-year-old told Nikkan Sports: "Over the past two to three years, I have always been thinking

about what I can do to go to Spain.

"I cannot end my career as a football player without going to Spain. I absolutely want to achieve that."

The Japan international had a brief spell at Old Trafford but also found himself on the fringes so returned to Dortmund in 2014 hoping to rebuild his confidence.

But injuries and an influx of younger talent have left him out of favour at the high-flying west German side, which sits on top of the Bundesliga table unbeaten

with nine wins out of 12.

"I want to find a solution to this situation. One is to change teams," Kagawa said.

"I have this growing sense of wishing to change my environment and take on new challenges," he said.

"I have nothing to lose. I am confident that I can shine in the next stage of my career," he said of a possible transfer to Spain, adding that a spell in La Liga would be "the biggest challenge of my career."

(Source: AFP)

La Liga pursues 'hardcore' fans in China after Ronaldo's exit

Spanish teams have generally reigned over English sides in European competition and now La Liga wants to harness that success to challenge the Premier League's supremacy in the lucrative China market.

European football leagues are vying for popularity in China, the world's second biggest economy and home to a growing number of football fans among its 1.4-billion population.

There are no reliable overarching figures, but the English Premier League is undoubtedly the market leader, with La Liga, Germany's Bundesliga and Italy's Serie A in its wake.

However, Spain -- home to Lionel Messi at Barcelona and Champions League holders Real Madrid -- is chasing down the Premier League, said La Liga Greater China Managing Director Sergi Torrents.

"La Liga is catching up very fast and is in second position over the other leagues here, especially because of the victories that the Spanish teams had in the last years in

"Chinese fans -- like everywhere in the world -- are following the winners, and La Liga teams have been winning." Sports marketing experts agree that -- thanks mostly to Barcelona and Real -- La Liga is comfortably second to the Premier League in China, albeit a distant way off.

Torrents declined to estimate the number of Spanish football fans in China, but on the Twitter-like Weibo platform, La Liga has about 1.6 million followers.

The Premier League's account has 3.6 million followers while the Chinese Super League -- the country's domestic



competition -- has five million.

Torrents says that surveys and analysis of social media show that La Liga is particularly strong in the 16-30 age bracket.

He admits it is likely that La Liga lost followers to Serie A after Cristiano Ronaldo's 110-million-euro transfer from Real to Juventus in July.

But it would have been far more damaging just a few years ago, he said.

"La Liga has created a brand and in five or six years this competition has grown a lot," he said.

'Game in China?' La Liga was the first European football league to open an

office in mainland China, in Beijing in 2014, said Torrents. It added Shanghai in 2016, now the headquarters, and the Spanish league is pursuing "hardcore" followers.

Torrents does not expect Chinese fans to dump their Chinese teams, but La Liga wants to be first choice for those supporters backing European sides.

One way it does that is through social media, to go with the staple of matches -- 12 regional stations in China show two free-to-air games a weekend. There is also live-streaming of matches.

La Liga does not divulge audience figures or how much it earns from media rights in China, but will get 897 million euros (\$1.02 billion) per season from overseas markets from 2019 to 2022 for rights.

Pre-season tours are another way to bring fans closer to their heroes, with Barcelona scheduled to visit China next summer.

China, along with the United States, is La Liga's biggest overseas market, said Torrents.

The league sparked controversy earlier this year with its plan to stage a game between Girona and Barcelona in Miami in January 2019 -- a move that some argued would risk disturbing the balance and integrity of the competition and hurting football in the US.

So will China one day stage a competitive game? "Not soon. This is something that is part of our plan in the US. In China we do not have this plan today," said Torrents.

(Source: AFP)

Iran U-23 to Play Two Friendlies with Syria

TASNIM — Iran's U-23 football team will play Syria in two friendly matches in December.

The Iranian team is going to hold a training camp on Kish Island from December 16.

Zlatko Kranjcar's boys will face Syria on December 18 and 21 on the Persian Gulf island.

The friendly matches will be held as preparation for the qualification phase for the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) U-23 Championship 2020.

Iran has been drawn along with Iraq, Yemen and Turkmenistan in Group C.

The AFC U-23 Championship 2020 is scheduled to take place in Thailand. It will act as the AFC qualifiers for the men's football tournament at the 2020 Olympics.

Iran to host 2018 World Wrestling Clubs Cup

MNA — Iranian cities of Babol and Ardabil will respectively host the freestyle and Greco-Roman competitions of 2018 World Wrestling Clubs Cup in December.

The fifth edition of freestyle World Wrestling Clubs Cup will kick off on December 12 in the city of Babol, Mazandaran province. The two-day event will be conducted under UWW world cup regulations in 10 senior weight categories of 57-61-65-70-74-79-86-92-97-125 kg (a tolerance of 2kg is acceptable).

Also, the fifth edition of Greco-Roman World Wrestling Clubs Cup will be held from December 20 to 21 in the city of Ardabil, Ardabil province. Wrestlers will compete in 10 senior weight categories of 55-60-63-67-72-77-82-87-97-130 kg (a tolerance of 2kg is acceptable).

World Wrestling Clubs Cup was initiated in 2014 upon the proposal of Islamic Republic of Iran Wrestling Federation. Teams from Iran, USA, Turkey, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan annually participate in the event.

Iranian teams of Easy Pipe Kashan and Bimeh Razi won the titles Greco-Roman and freestyle events respectively in the 2017 edition of the games.

100,000 spectators at Asian Cup final honorable

IRNA — Asian Football Confederation President (AFC) commended the presence of 100,000 spectators in AFC Champions League final between Iran's Persepolis and Kashima Antlers of Japan in Tehran as an honor for the ancient continent.

The Best AFC Football Awards ceremony is held in Muscat at 19:30 on Tuesday.

"The presence of 100,000 spectators at Azadi Stadium to watch the match between Persepolis and Japanese Antlers showed the world's high football position on the continent, and it was a pride for all of us," said President of the Asian Football Confederation Sheikh Salman who is in Muscat to attend the ceremony.

He also explained about holding the Best of Asia, "Anybody who is granted the awards tonight, leaves a great legacy."

Olympics - North Korean sports minister allowed into Japan for meetings

North Korea's sports minister will be allowed to travel to Japan to attend Olympic meetings in Tokyo this week, the Japanese government said on Tuesday.

North Koreans are banned from entering Japan as part of sanctions imposed for its missile and nuclear tests.

Kim Il Guk, who also serves as the president of the North's Olympic committee, will travel to Japan to take part in the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) General Assembly on Wednesday and Thursday.

"International sports and the Olympics charter share this notion of no discrimination against any nationalities," Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said at his regular briefing on Tuesday.

"On the basis of that, it is an exception that we have allowed minister Kim Il Guk, who is planning on coming to this week's General Assembly. We have allowed him to enter the country as an exception."

This is not the first time Japan has waived the ban in the name of sports. In February 2017, North Korean athletes and officials were granted permission to enter the country for the Asian Winter Games in Sapporo. North Korea also plans to attend the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

(Source: Reuters)

Manchester United scouring Asia for the next Park Ji-sung, Shinji Kagawa

Manchester United are continuing to search for the next Park Ji-sung or Shinji Kagawa, according to their East Asian scout.

Kei Tamura covers Japan and South Korea for the English giants and, after recommending a teenage Kagawa to Cerezo Osaka in 2006, the Japan-based talent spotter would love nothing more than to take a new generation of superstars from the region to Old Trafford.

"I am looking hard for the second Park Ji-sung and the successor to Kagawa," Tamura told Sports Seoul during a visit to watch Pohang Steelers take on Jeonbuk Motors in the K-League.

"I keep track of players who can be as good."

The scout added that he is part of a global network of talent-finders, tasked with hunting down players with specific characteristics that United boss Jose Mourinho is searching for.

"We are looking for players that meet the specific criteria of head coach Jose Mourinho," he said. "The scout team leader meets with Mourinho and is presented with detailed instructions."

Tamura admitted that finding the next Asian superstar would not only help Manchester United challenge at the top of the Premier League, but there would also be off the pitch benefits.

"There is no doubt that signings Korean and Japanese players can have a positive effect in the Asian market," Tamura added.

"That is not why they are selected however, the first thing we consider is skill."

(Source: ESPN)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603
www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433
Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
Printed at: Rooztab - ISSN: 1017-94

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Beware of adding a year's worry to your day's anxiety. When you suffer in one day is enough for you. If only on year remains of your life, know that for each day of it God will grant you a new share, and if you do not last one more year, why do you worry about what is not yours? No one has the power to take away your share, and no one can prevail over you and rob you of it. What is destined for you, will come to you in its own time.

Imam Ali (AS)

Pirated "Everybody Knows" surfaces on Persian websites

A R T TEHRAN – Iranian director Asghar Farhadi's latest movie "Everybody Knows", which is currently on screen in several countries, has been pirated.



Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz act in a scene from Asghar Farhadi's "Everybody Knows".

A high-quality copy of the film with Persian subtitles is available for download on several unofficial Persian websites, Farhadi's publicist, Samin Mohajerani, announced in a post published on Farhadi's Telegram channel.

The illicit release of the film will damage the international distribution of the movie, she said, and added that the producers of "Everybody Knows" are disappointed over the downloading and copying of the movie before the end of its international screenings.

She also announced a plan to sue those people involved in the piracy.

Starring the Oscar-winning Spanish couple, Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz, "Everybody Knows" was shot in Spain in 2017.

A Memento Films production, the psychological drama is about a family wedding interrupted by a shocking crime and some long-buried secrets.

Cinéma Vérité unveils international lineup

A R T TEHRAN – Twenty-six movies from 20 countries will compete in the various categories of the international competition of the 12th Cinéma Vérité, Iran's major documentary film festival, the organizers announced on Tuesday.

Ten documentaries have been selected for the full-length films section. Among the films are "Alicia" by Maasja Ooms from the Netherlands, "Angels Are Made of Light" by James Longley, "Facing the Dragon" by Sedika Mojaddidi and "A Thousand Girls Like Me" by Sahara Mani, all from the U.S.



A poster for the Cinéma Vérité festival.

"Each and Every Moment" by Nicolas Philibert from France and "From Music into Silence" by Farshid Akhlaghi from Australia will also be shown in the section.

Seven films, including "Raghu Rai, an Unframed Portrait" by Avani Rai from India, "The Mount of Ants" by Riccardo Palladino, "Alganesh" by Lia and Marianna Beltrami, both from Italy, and "Marceline, A Woman, A Century" by Cordelia Dvorak from France will compete in the mid-length film category.

A lineup of nine documentary films, including "Some of These Days" by Vincent Forster from Germany, "Hekim" by Yavuz Ucer from Turkey and "Lumiere" by Hristina Belousova from Uzbekistan will be screened in the short films competition.

The Documentary and Experimental Film Center is the organizer of the Cinéma Vérité festival, which will take place at Tehran's Charsu Cineplex from December 9 to 16.

Iran's Sacred Defense cinema celebrated at Resistance festival

A R T TEHRAN – Films on the Iran-Iraq 1980-1988 war, which is called "Sacred Defense" in Iran, and those filmmakers active in this field were honored during the opening ceremony of the 15th International Resistance Film Festival (IRFF) at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on Monday evening.

During a program titled "40 Years of Resistance Cinema", three winners were selected in each category in a public poll.

"The Glass Agency" (1998) directed by Ebrahim Hatamikia, "The Outcasts" (2007) by Masud Dehnamaki, and "Track 143" (2013) by Narges Abyar were picked as best films.

The opening ceremony was attended by Islamic Revolution Guard Corps Commander Mohammad Ali Jafari, Basij Commander Gholamhossein Gheybparvar, and a number of cultural officials and filmmakers.

Speaking at the ceremony, Major General Jafari said that Islamic resistance is the only way to save the region, and added, "The Ulema and artists are more responsible for deepening the resistance."

The awards ceremony then went on with honoring Hatamikia, Dehnamaki and Rasul Mollaqlipour as best directors.

"I will never forget this kindness of the people," Hatamikia said after accepting his award.

He dedicated the honor those Iranian directors who have made films on the Iran-Iraq war and added, "I consider myself a representative of those filmmakers who produced films on the Sacred Defense, among whom is my master Bahram Beizai."

Dehnamaki also dedicated his award to Hatamikia for his 1990 war drama "The Scout" and Monir Qeidi for her debut feature "The Villa Tenants".

"This choice of people was not unpredictable," he noted.



This combination photo shows filmmakers Ebrahim Hatamikia (L), Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian (C) and Narges Abyar after being honored during the 15th International Resistance Film Festival (IRFF) at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on November 26, 2018. (Mehr/Majid Haqdoost)

The honor was posthumously awarded to for Mollaqlipour who died in 2007.

Parviz Parastui, the star of several movies by Hatamikia, was among the best actors. Hadi Hejazifar, the star of "Damascus Time", Hatamikia's latest movie on Daesh

extremism, was also honored.

Actress Merila Zarei also received an award as best actress. In "Track 143", she portrays Olfat, a woman who is waiting for her son, who has been missing in action since the Iran-Iraq war. She also starred

as the wife of a bodyguard in Hatamikia's "Bodyguard".

Hatamikia, Abyar and Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian, the director and writer of "Standing in the Dust", were also honored for their achievements in writing.

Andreyev State Russian Orchestra to perform pieces by Keyvan Saket



Iranian tar virtuoso Keyvan Saket performs in an undated photo.

A R T TEHRAN – The Andreyev State Russian Orchestra in St. Petersburg is scheduled to perform a repertoire of pieces by Iranian composer Keyvan Saket during a concert next week, the Persian service of ILNA reported on Tuesday.

The concert will be held at the St. Petersburg State Capella Concert Hall on December 2, said Saket who will accompany the orchestra during the performance that

will be conducted by Dmitry Hochlov. "This is the second time I have been invited to perform in St. Petersburg," he noted and added, "I will perform in the orchestra as a tar soloist."

Pieces have been selected for the repertoire to present the nature of Iranian music, he stated.

Saket is scheduled to leave Tehran for St. Petersburg today to join the rehearsals for the concerts, which will begin tomorrow.

Nicolas Philibert to promote "Each and Every Moment" at Cinema Verite



French documentarian Nicolas Philibert in an undated photo.

A R T TEHRAN – French documentary filmmaker Nicolas Philibert will attend the 12th edition of Cinéma Vérité to promote his latest film "Each and Every Moment" during the Iranian international festival of documentary films in Tehran, the organizers announced on Tuesday.

The documentary takes an in-depth look at the training of nurses

in France. "Louvre City", "In the Land of the Deaf", "To Be and to Have", "Back to Normandy" and "The House of the Radio" are among Philibert's credits.

Philibert's "Nénette" won the best film award at the 4th edition of the Cinéma Vérité festival in 2010.

The Cinéma Vérité festival will take place at Tehran's Charsu Cineplex from December 9 to 16.

Julia Roberts backs London store selling presents for refugees

LONDON (Reuters) – A pop-up charity shop backed by Julia Roberts has opened in London, letting shoppers buy food, clothing and even schooling for refugees around the world.

The "Choose Love" store, run by the Help Refugees charity, opened just off the capital's Carnaby Street - with a second

one due to follow on West Broadway, New York on Tuesday.

"You come in and you buy the blanket or the life jacket and you leave with nothing, but just have a real feeling of warmth and love," said Josie Naughton, the charity's chief executive.

'Help Refugees' said all the money raised there would go to refugees - as the shop space was given free of charge

and the staff were volunteers.

"Pretty Woman" star Roberts has helped by wearing a 'Choose Love' T-shirt at red carpet events and posting footage of her modeling it on social media.

The London store, which will open until January, raised more than 750,000 pounds (\$963,000) in its debut last year.

"The Rider" tops Gotham Awards, kicking off awards season

NEW YORK (AP) – In the first major soiree of Hollywood's awards season, Chloe Zhao's elegiac, lyrical Western "The Rider" took best feature film at the 28th annual Gotham Awards.

It was a surprising, but far from baffling conclusion to the Gothams, the New York-based gala for independent film, held Monday night at Cipriani's Wall Street in downtown Manhattan. The awards were generally spread around, including a pair of prizes for Bo Burnham's coming-of-age directing debut "Eighth Grade" and Paul Schrader's impassioned Catholic drama "First Reformed."

But the night's final honor went to "The Rider," the second feature by the Chinese-born Zhao, despite no previous awards on the night and only one other nomination: an audience award nod alongside 14 other films. Some may have forgotten it was eligible. Having first premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2017, "The Rider" was nominated by the Gotham's West Coast corollary, the Independent Film Spirit Awards, in February as one of last year's best.

Zhao, too, wasn't in attendance (she is prepping her next film). And few looked more surprised than the producers — Bert Hamelinck and Mollye Asher — who accept-

ed the award. "This is going to be the worst acceptance speech," stuttered Hamelinck.

Yet "The Rider," filmed with Lakota cowboys on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation, persevered over a few Oscar favorites, including Yorgos Lanthimos' period romp "The Favourite" and Barry Jenkins' James Baldwin adaptation "If Beale Street Could Talk."

"The Favourite" still went home with two honorary awards: an award for its acting ensemble, led by Olivia Colman, Emma Stone and Rachel Weisz; and a tribute to Weisz. Jenkins applauded the choice of "The Rider" with a standing ovation and a retweet of his earlier praise of the film, in which he called it "ravishing, sublime imagery paired with deeply earnest storytelling."

Unpredictability pervaded the ceremony, especially for the winners, themselves. When the Fred Rogers documentary "Won't You Be My Neighbor" won the Gothams' audience award (not typically a category for documentaries but "Won't You Be My Neighbor" proved a modest summer blockbuster), its director Morgan Neville was stunned, partially since he had already lost best documentary to RaMell Ross' "Hale County This Morning,

This Evening."

"To say this was a surprise would be an extreme understatement," Neville said. "Since I didn't know we were nominated."

As an Oscar bellwether, the Gothams, presented by the not-for-profit Independent Film Project, are of little value. Their nominees are chosen by small juries of filmmakers and film critics before some of the fall's films have been seen.

But in the early going, any momentum helps an underdog Oscar campaign, and that seemed especially true of "First Reformed" and "Eighth Grade" — both releases from A24, the indie distributor of "Moonlight" and "Lady Bird."

"First Reformed" star Ethan Hawke took best actor and its 72-year-old writer-director Schrader ("Taxi Driver," "Raging Bull") won best screenplay.

"Fourteen years. Best attendance. Sunday school," said Schrader, who chose filmmaking over the seminary but remained gripped by his Calvinist upbringing. "I earned this award."



Actor Ethan Hawke accepts the Best Actor Award at the 28th annual Independent Filmmaker Project's Gotham Awards at Cipriani Wall Street on Monday, Nov. 26, in New York. (Andy Kropa/Invision/AP)

system or something," began Fisher, who said she had been considering giving up on acting before Burnham cast her. "Me from two years ago would be really proud of me right now."