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“Salvation” named best novel at Jalal awards

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Iran, Russia call for supporting private sectors in sanctions era

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) and president of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation stressed the need for supporting the two countries' private sectors in the sanctions era.

As reported by the portal of ICCIMA, during the meeting which was held in Tehran on Saturday, the two sides also

discussed the necessary arrangements for the holding of the Iran-Russia business forum.

Emphasizing the important role of Iran-Russia business forum in consolidating the economic relations between the two countries, Sergey Katyrin said, “We are planning the next event to be held with a maximum presence from the Iranian side, including the private sector.” **→4**

Tehran insists it backs inter-Yemeni dialogue

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Foreign Ministry on Sunday reiterated the long-held position by Tehran that Iran supports inter-Yemeni talks without any foreign interference.

Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said the current talks in Sweden are “Yemeni-Yemeni”.

The remarks came after it was reportedly claimed that Iran had sought to send a high-level official to the Yemen peace talks.

Qassemi said Iran fully and transparently supports the UN role in pursuing a political strategy as the only way to settle the Yemeni crisis. **→2**

Paris: Trump must not interfere in French politics

The French government on Sunday urged the United States President Donald Trump not to interfere in French politics after the U.S. president posted tweets about the protests rocking the country and attacked the Paris climate agreement.

“We do not take domestic American politics into account and we want that to be reciprocated,” Jean-Yves Le Drian

told LCI television.

“I say this to Donald Trump and the French president says it too: leave our nation be.”

Trump had on Saturday posted two tweets referring to the “yellow vest” anti-government protests that have swept France since mid-November and sparked rioting in Paris. **→13**

Qatar withdrawal from OPEC may increase Iran’s production share: Zaccara

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — Dr. Luciano Zaccara says Qatar’s withdrawal from OPEC may increase the quota (of power and production) that OPEC may allocate to Iran, which is not in line with the US policy towards Iran.

Qatari Energy Minister Saad Sherida al-Kaabi announced recently that his country will withdraw from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

The decision to quit the bloc of 15 oil-producing countries that account for a significant percentage of the world’s oil production was confirmed by Qatar Petroleum, the state oil company, last Monday.

To know more about the issue we reached out to Dr. Luciano Zaccara, research assistant

professor in Qatar University.

Here is the full text of the interview:

■ What are the reasons behind Qatar’s decision to withdraw from OPEC? Is it a politically and economically right decision?

A: Qatar is only producing 600,000 barrels per day, but it is the first exporter of LNG. Economically speaking it will not affect Qatar’s income coming from oil export, neither the overall OPEC production, since altogether it is producing 32.5 million barrels daily. At this point it seems logical for Qatar to focus on gas production and marketing, moreover having in mind Doha is hosting the GECF and shares one of the biggest gas fields with Iran, without having any constraints on their oil production from the OPEC cartel.

■ Is there any relation between Qatar’s decision and the Saudi policy in the organization?

A: The timing of the decision, just few days before the 9th December PGCC Riyadh summit, seems to show the decision is somehow related to the current diplomatic rift between the two states and the fact that Qatar’s influence in the decision making process of the organization is very limited. Mainly controlled by Saudi Arabia with the required consensus with Iran and Iraq, but also with non-OPEC members such as Russia, remaining within OPEC seems now not very in line with the general foreign policy and economic goals of Qatari government. However, remaining in OPEC did not prove to be harmful for Qatar either. **→7**

China summons U.S. ambassador over Huawei arrest

China summoned the United States ambassador on “unday to protest the “extremely bad” arrest of telecom giant Huawei’s chief financial officer in Canada and demand that the United States drop its extradition request.

“The Chinese side firmly opposes this and strongly urges the United States to attach great importance to China’s solemn and just position,” the foreign ministry said in a statement after Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng called in Ambassador Terry Branstad.

China also warned Canada on Saturday that there would be severe consequences if it did not immediately release Huawei Tech-

nologies Co Ltd’s [HWT.UL] chief financial officer, calling the case “extremely nasty”.

Meng Wanzhou, Huawei’s global chief financial officer, was arrested in Canada on Dec. 1 and faces extradition to the United States, which alleges that she covered up her company’s links to a firm that tried to sell equipment to Iran despite sanctions.

The executive is also the daughter of the founder of Huawei.

If extradited to the United States, Meng would face charges of conspiracy to defraud multiple financial institutions, a Canadian court heard on Friday, with a maximum sentence of 30 years for each charge.

No decision was reached at the extradition

hearing after nearly six hours of arguments and counter-arguments, and the hearing was adjourned until Monday.

In a short statement, China’s Foreign Ministry said that Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng had issued the warning to release Meng to Canada’s ambassador in Beijing, summoning him to lodge a “strong protest”.

Canada’s arrest of Meng at the request of the United States while she was changing plane in Vancouver was a serious breach of her lawful rights, Le said.

The move “ignored the law, was unreasonable” and was in its very nature “extremely nasty”, he added. **→13**



ARTICLE

Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

Will there be another referendum over Brexit?

Brexit continues to be an implicit term in the Britain’s political equations. Complicating the process of the British withdrawal from the European Union is a joint measure taken by the British government and European authorities. At the same time, the British government, with its widespread negative propaganda against the Brexit, is seeking to re-arrange a referendum. In other words, the European authorities are trying to direct the public opinion about the Brexit.

Recently, some western news sources are speaking of an issue called “repeating the Brexit referendum”, and name it as a possible option! An option that had been previously denied by British authorities, including Theresa May, the Prime Minister of the country. According to the France news agency, regarding the increasing doubt about the British Prime

Minister’s efforts to conclude an agreement with the United Europe, the possibility of holding a second referendum on Brexit has multiplied.

This source has also announced that there are major obstacles on the way of confirming this agreement between Theresa May and European leaders, which has in turn intensified this trend. The existence of legal complexities in this agreement made its implementation difficult for both sides. Meanwhile, it is possible that the members of the parliament will vote in favor of Theresa May’s decision.

Although it seems that Theresa May is trying to convince legislators to give a positive vote to this agreement, but not only members of the Labor Party, but also some members of the Conservative Party are opposing it. The MPs argue that the Brexit is basically contrary to the interests of the UK.

Meanwhile, supporters of the “People’s Vote” campaign, who are now very active in England, believe that the parliament’s negative vote will pave the way for a new referendum on the Brexit. This issue is no way contrary to the demands of Theresa May and the Conservative Party, but it’s secretly supported by them. The negative propaganda of the Theresa May’s government against the Brexit since 2016 is known to everyone. **→7**



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Migratory birds winter in Karun River

Migratory birds have winged their ways to Karun River, southwestern province of Khuzestan, once again this year.

The area is hosting various bird species including large white-headed gulls, herons, and cormorants every year with the onset of cold seasons. The birds normally will stay until late April.

Over the past few years low precipitation amounts and long-term drought spells have resulted in decreased population of migratory birds.



REPORT

Fatemeh Salehi
Mehr News Agency
journalist

Fragile alliance in the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council

Qatari Energy Minister Saad al-Kaabi announced a few days ago that Qatar intended to leave the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) starting from January 1, 2019. This news has fomented worldwide reactions.

However, Qatari officials said the decision was quite technical and was divorced from political analysis. But it is clear that Qatar’s withdrawal from OPEC in the wake of the continuing Doha crisis with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf and the allegations of Qatar’s possible withdrawal from the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council strongly suggests that Doha’s goals and motivations are more than just “technical”.

The Deputy Prime Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, delivering a speech at a meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York on Friday, said that what is happening in the PGCC is unfortunate because it has been one of the most stable organizations in the Middle East. When the Qatar blockade began, perceptions of the PGCC Council changed and it became clear that this council had become ineffective.

He added: “I do not want to be pessimistic, but I do not believe that the PGCC can play its role again in the future. We hope that this council will once again serve as a strong and successful organization in the Arab world, but I am not confident that we can move forward in the current situation.”

The PGCC has not taken any effective steps since the Persian Gulf crisis and has become an organization like OPEC in recent years. The shared aspect of both organizations is the presence of Saudi Arabia and its efforts to guide the goals and priorities of OPEC and the PGCC on the basis of its own interests.

Qatar’s withdrawal from OPEC has triggered a massive wave of social networks calling for similar action regarding the PGCC. If a major crisis within an organization between the Persian Gulf Arab states, such as the Qatari crisis, has failed to force the PGCC to take any action, no other incident can do so. It appears that staying in the PGCC looks like a waste of time and energy. **→7**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Supreme Court upholds death verdict against Baqeri Darmani

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Judiciary spokesman Gholam Hossein Mohseni Eje'i announced on Sunday that the Supreme Court has confirmed the death sentence against Hamid Baqeri-Darmani for bribery and fraud which was issued in a lower court.

In October, the Judiciary announced that Baqeri-Darmani and Vahid Mazloumin, a mogul known as the lord of gold coins in Iran, had been sentenced to death. Mazloumin was executed in November.

Speaking at a press conference, Mohseni Eje'i also said the special courts for economic crimes have handed down prison sentences to a number of individuals for disrupting the economy, ISNA reported.



Raisi criticizes government's economic performance

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ebrahim Raisi, the custodian of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS), on Sunday criticized the Rouhani administration's economic performance.

"Not all of our problems are the result of foreign sanctions ... There would have been fewer problems if there were less mismanagement," he said.

Raisi, who was President Rouhani's leading contender in the 2017 presidential election, further criticized the administration for seeking political solutions to the country's economic problems, Mehr reported.

"We believe that political solutions are not suitable for economic problems," he added.



We need stronger region not strongmen, Zarif tweets

POLITICS TEHRAN — A stronger region, rather than strongmen, is needed by regional countries, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Sunday.

"Our region has had far too many strongmen who have only caused war & misery. What we need is a stronger REGION rather than strongmen," Zarif tweeted.

"For this we need dialogue, respect for international law, inclusion, security networking, economic cooperation, and more people-to-people contact," he added.

The foreign minister also retweeted part of President Rouhani's message to the Regional Parliament Speakers' Conference in Tehran on Saturday, in which he called for multilateral efforts for a stronger region.



'Basij has reduced sanctions effects'

POLITICS TEHRAN — The chief of Imam Hossein Cadet College said on Sunday that the impact of U.S. sanctions on Iran has been reduced due to efforts by the Basij Organization.

Brigadier General Ali Fazli made the remarks at the Basij Forces' Knowledge and Research Exhibition in Tehran.

"If Basij was not involved, the sanctions would be effective, but with the involvement, mindset and thinking of Basij, the sanctions have had minimal impact," General Fazli said, Mehr reported.

The general added that by strengthening the valuable outlook of Basij, the different stages of sanctions can be overcome.



Parliament Research Center to review retirees' recruitment ban

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Parliament Research Center plans to hold meetings this week to review the law on prohibition of the employment of retirees.

Kazem Jalali, chairman of the research center, said on Sunday that the law will be discussed with executive and supervisory bodies so that a clever decision can be made in revision process, Mehr reported.

Prohibiting employment of retirees is intended to involve the younger generations in top state jobs and provide job opportunities for others.

Earlier this month, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the law will "break the closed management circle", but also suggested that it should be revised.



MP underlines importance of NGOs, associations

POLITICS TEHRAN — The NGOs and associations should be empowered so that they produce skilled personnel who form the backbone of the country's administration, vice chairman of the Majlis Social Committee suggested on Sunday.

"Worldwide experience shows that the existence of strong associations, NGOs and parties is necessary for a country, as they can nurture [competent] personnel," ISNA quoted Mohammad Reza Badamchi as saying.

Underlying the need to find ways to boost the private sector, Badamchi added that individuals should be nurtured in their workplace to become flexible in order to become entrepreneurs in the future.

Iranian Navy plans to stage drills in Indian Ocean



The Iranian Navy successfully test-fires Nour cruise missile in the Strait of Hormuz, southern Iran, on January 29, 2016. (Photo by ISNA)

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian naval forces plan to stage a large-scale drill in the Indian Ocean to boost and put on display the country's military prowess, according to a senior commander.

The maneuver will be held this winter within the perimeters of Iran's southern territorial waters and high seas, Deputy Navy Commander for Coordination Rear Admiral Hamzeh Ali Kaviani told IRNA on Saturday.

The commander added that the Navy's state-of-the-art equipment, including two Ghadir-class submarines that recently joined the naval fleet, will take part in the drill.

The two Ghadir-class submarines, capable of launching subsurface-to-surface missiles, torpedoes and mines, joined the fleet on November 29.

The Ghadir-class submarines are designed to cruise within the shallow waters of the Persian Gulf to ensure peace and security of maritime borders.

Kaviani further said that various destroyers, including Sahand, would also take part in the Navy's military exercise.

On December 2, Iran launched its most advanced military destroyer, Sahand, which has radar-evading stealth properties and can sustain voyages lasting five months without resupply.

The vessel has a flight deck for helicopters, torpedo launchers, anti-aircraft and anti-ship guns, surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles and electronic warfare capabilities.

The Sahand is the third of Mowj-class frigates built by Iran after the Jamaran and the Damavand, but its enhanced operational capabilities and size make it twice stronger in terms of offensive and defensive features.

JCPOA cannot protect Iran's interests: ex-nuclear negotiator

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's former chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili said on Sunday the 2015 nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is not an agreement that can protect Iran's interests, Mehr reported.

"Barjam (Persian acronym for the JCPOA) is not a strong structure as some had claimed," said Jalili, an outspoken critic of the JCPOA, which was clinched under his 2013 presidential election rival, Hassan Rouhani.

He said the Europeans, despite being present at the nuclear negotiations, failed to condemn U.S. withdrawal from the deal back in May.

"The Europeans are seeking to salvage Barjam at the expense of the Iranian nation, but this dream will not come true," Jalili remarked.

Criticizing Washington's sanctions against Iran, the former negotiator said the U.S. knows that its options to counter



the Iranian nation is further restricted day by day.

He added, "It is because of Trump's stupidity that he uses this tool (sanctions) yet again."

Jalili also criticized the idea of entering new rounds of negotiations with the U.S., saying, "Today, certain individuals want to set aside the ideals while spouting fictional and romantic slogans. For instance they say if you continue negotiations with America, Trump will grant you significant concessions."

Javad Larijani says Iran is greatest democracy in West Asia

POLITICS TEHRAN — Mohammad Javad Larijani, secretary of the High Council for Human Rights in Iran, said on Sunday that his country is the "greatest democracy" in West Asia.

"The Islamic Revolution of Iran showed that a civil

system with democratic mechanisms can be established based on Islamic jurisprudence," he said during a meeting in Kerman.

The human rights chief said it is the people who appoint officials in Iran, which is a great achievement that the West is frightened by.

10 suspects arrested over Chabahar attack

Key agent identified



Ansar al-Furqan claimed responsibility for the attack.

General Ashtari said the suicide attack was "unsuccessful", praising "vigilance" by police for preventing an attack with high casualties.

Rahmdel Bameri, governor of Sistan-Baluchestan province, said on Thursday a bomb-filled vehicle was used to target the police station by the suicide attacker.

"Police stopped the explosive-laden car and started firing at the driver ... who then set off the explosion near the police headquarters in Chabahar," Bameri explained.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that the terrorists behind the suicide attack and their masters will definitely face punishment.

"Foreign-backed terrorists kill & wound innocents in Chabahar. As we've made

clear in the past, such crimes won't go unpunished: In 2010, our security services intercepted & captured extremists en route from UAE. Mark my words: Iran WILL bring terrorists & their masters to justice," Zarif tweeted hours after the attack.

Key agent identified

On Sunday, the deputy interior minister for security and law enforcement said that the key agent of the terrorist attack had been identified.

Hossein Zolfagari, who was speaking to the Iran Labor News Agency, said authorities are fast upon pursuing such cases because they not only threaten the



place as a major financial center hosting many international investment funds.

Iran and the European side have been discussing ways to conduct non-dollar trade in order to offset the U.S. sanctions.

President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. unilaterally from the JCPOA in May and ordered sanctions against Iran. The first round of sanctions went into force on August 6 and the second round, which targets Iran's oil exports and banks, were snapped back on November 4.

He also said that the Zionist regime of Israel and the Western countries that support it have engineered comprehensive plots against Iran.

"One of them is economic plot and the other is portraying the system as inefficient. We should know the enemies' plots and their language."

Tehran insists it backs inter-Yemeni dialogue

1 -> "Iran's position has been and is announced while the U.S. adopts unilateral, biased, destructive, and unbalanced policy which led to an inhumane and destructive war against the Yemeni people and one of the worst human disasters," Qassemi stated.

He noted that Iran hopes the Yemenis would adopt an independent and peace-seeking approach within the

framework of national and inter-Yemeni dialogue to end the war in their country.

UN-brokered peace talks between the warring parties in Yemen's conflict began on Thursday in Sweden.

The Saudi-led war in Yemen started in March 2015 as an attempt to crush the Houthi movement in the country and restore former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi.

UN envoy hails Iran's anti-corruption campaign

The representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Iran has praised the country's progress in campaign against crimes and corruption.

In a speech at the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA), Alexander Fedulov said this year the UNODC celebrated the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, Tashm reported on Sunday.

He added that the office is worried about the effect of corruption on citizens of countries around the world because it has targeted the security of the nations.

The ambassador further said Iran is a signatory to the UN convention and supports the international campaign on corruption.

Fedulov went on to say that the convention has been approved by the Iranian parliament, which proves that Tehran is resolved to combat corruption.

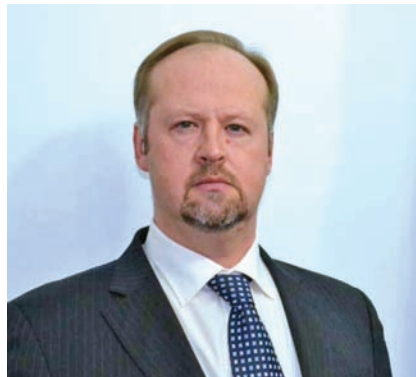
Since late August, the Iranian Judiciary has begun to hold public trials of individuals involved in major economic corruption cases.

The names of defendants were made public after Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei permitted Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani to take special measures in order to

confront economic corruption and called for "swift and just" legal action against financial crimes.

Earlier, the Leader described "outright and unequivocal" treatment of economic corruption as one of the Judiciary's major duties, stressing that confronting economic corrupts must be decisive and effective.

The Leader urged the Judiciary to fully inform people about its measures to tackle economic corruption, saying the judicial system should let people realize the authenticity of its anti-corruption measures and turn the threats into opportunities.



Turkey rejected U.S. call to discontinue efforts with Russia and Iran to end war in Syria

Turkey rejected a United States call to discontinue efforts with Russia and Iran to end the war in Syria and called on its Western allies to instead support the process as the region's best chance at quelling the violence.

The debate over the so-called Astana peace process, named for the Kazakh capital where leaders from Russia, Iran and Turkey first met to tackle the imbroglio, comes ahead of a visit to Ankara by James Jeffrey, Washington's special envoy on Syria, to discuss a slate of the U.S.-Turkish divisions over Syria.

On Monday, Jeffrey called the Astana process "rather strange" and a "stalemate" for its failure to make progress on establishing a constitutional committee for Syria. "The U.S. view is, 'Let's pull the plug on Astana,'" he said at a briefing in Washington.

But Turkey has embraced the initiative, especially since its Western allies have all stepped back from a robust peace effort for Syria. Ankara enjoys warm ties with Moscow and Tehran, despite their backing of President Bashar al-Assad, while Turkey is the main supporter of opposition fighters who have sought to topple him.

On Wednesday, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu described Jeffrey's remarks as "very unfortunate." "If we can still talk about a political settlement, it is due to the Astana process," he told reporters at a news conference in Brussels after a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) meeting. "Rather than marginalizing this process or attempting to come up with alternative platforms with small groups ... we ought to be looking at what we can do within the [Astana process] and how to accelerate it."

Cavusoglu said the Astana process is not aimed at replacing United Nations-backed negotiations dubbed the Geneva process. Yet it has largely overshadowed those efforts and sidelined the United States, putting Russia in the driver's seat on Syria. At a handful of summits, the three countries' leaders have agreed to de-escalation zones, although Assad's forces have since retaken all but Idlib province, Syria's last major rebel stronghold where some three million people are sheltering from the war.

Some observers believe it is only a matter of time before the same fate befalls Idlib, however.



The main focus of Jeffrey's meetings, expected to be held on Friday, is to discuss the "road map" for the Syrian town of Manbij, Cavusoglu said. Washington agreed in May to the plan that foresees the removal of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/Yekineyên Parastina Gel) from the town, but Turkey is frustrated with the slow pace.

The YPG has proven itself as the U.S.-led coalition's most effective ground force against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists, but has ties with the armed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê), which has waged a three-decade insurgency in Turkey at a cost of 40,000 lives.

Turkish and the United States troops began joint patrols in Manbij last month even as Turkey shelled YPG targets east of the Euphrates River, threatening a confrontation with the 2,000 Special Forces the United States keeps in the region. Turkey wants the

YPG to withdraw from the length of its border and has flushed out Kurdish fighters from other areas in Syria, including the western province of Afrin where thousands of people were killed or displaced.

Policy over Syria is part of a web of disagreements between Ankara and Washington that plunged relations between the NATO allies to their worst in decades. The atmosphere has improved since October, when Turkey freed an American pastor after convicting him of having links to a military coup plot that failed to overthrow President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2016.

However, a handful of other U.S. citizens remain in custody, as do two Turkish consular workers at the U.S. missions, on terror-related charges. Turkey is also nervous about a looming fine from the U.S. Treasury for its state-run Halkbank, accused of helping Iran bypass sanctions. A bank executive is serving a 32-month sentence in the United States for his role in the scheme and Turkey

wants him sent home.

Separately, the U.S. prosecutors are still investigating Trump's former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, on his secret lobbying efforts on behalf of Turkey, according to news reports this week that cited court documents filed by Robert Mueller, the U.S. special counsel investigating links between Russia and the U.S. President Donald Trump's campaign and business. Mueller recommended Flynn receive little or no prison time for his cooperation in that probe.

Flynn was hired by clients with ties to the Turkish government in 2016 to persuade the U.S. officials to expel Fethullah Gulen, a Muslim cleric who has lived in Pennsylvania for two decades and who Turkey accuses of masterminding the abortive coup. Investigators found that Flynn had lied about working as a foreign agent for Turkey and being paid \$530,000 for his trouble.

Trump and Erdogan talked for about an hour at last week's G20 meeting, where they discussed Syria as well as the Halkbank case, according to the Turkish leader.

Cavusoglu said Trump also raised the issue of the U.S.-led F-35 program with Erdogan, telling him he wants to deliver the fighter jets to Turkey "without any problems," despite a report that said Turkey could be barred from the program if it goes ahead with the acquisition of a Russian missile defense system. Bloomberg News cited a summary of the Pentagon's report sent to Congress that said Turkey should be given "a real alternative that would encourage [it] to walk away from a damaging S-400 acquisition."

"Congress has made some interventions, but this is a very comprehensive project and Turkey is one of the key actors. It is not easy to just cancel this process; there are economic and legal dimensions [that will] impact on our relations. Therefore, no problems are foreseen," Cavusoglu said.

Turkey has spent more than \$1.25 billion on the program, the world's most expensive weapons project, since 2002 and is a producer of critical parts for the jets. But its insistence on buying Russia's S-400 system, which is designed to shoot down the U.S. planes, may disqualify it from acquiring the jets. The United States is worried that Russia will obtain sensitive F-35 technology if Turkey uses both systems.

(Source: al-monitor)

U.S. wants to continue support for Saudi-led coalition in Yemen

The United States wants to continue support to the House of Saud regime-led coalition in Yemen's war and will remain engaged in efforts to militancy in the state, a State Department official said on Sunday.

Since the Oct 2, murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom's Istanbul consulate, the U.S. administration has come under pressure at home over the nearly four-year-old conflict.

The Senate last month voted to advance a resolution to end the U.S. military support, which includes arms sales and intelligence sharing, for the Western-backed Sunni Muslim coalition that intervened in 2015 against the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement to restore the internationally recognized government.

"There are pressures in our system ... to either withdraw from the conflict or discontinue our support of the coalition, which we are strongly opposed to on the administration side," said Timothy Lenderking, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Arabian Affairs.

"We do believe that the support for the coalition is necessary. It sends a wrong message if we discontinue our support," he told a security forum in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The United States last month halted U.S. refueling of aircraft from the coalition, which has been blamed for air strikes that have killed thousands of civilians in Yemen.

The U.S. official's reassurances of continued support comes



as Sweden hosts the first United Nations-led peace talks in two years between the warring parties and as Persian Gulf Arab leaders hold an annual summit in Riyadh on Sunday,

expected to discuss the war.

■ U.S. behind humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen
Meantime, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman says the United States is behind the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen by providing arms and financial support for the aggressor states, which have been wreaking havoc in the war-torn country.

"The United States has caused one of the biggest human catastrophes in Yemen, as admitted by international organizations, through providing financial and political support and giving weapons to the aggressor forces," Bahram Qassemi said in a statement on Sunday.

Rejecting allegations that Iran has requested to send a delegation to the ongoing Yemen talks in Stockholm, Sweden, the Iranian spokesman said, "Since the beginning of the crisis in Yemen, the Islamic Republic has emphasized the need for Yemeni-Yemeni talks away from any foreign intervention and the ongoing talks in Stockholm are of a Yemeni-Yemeni nature."

A round of talks between delegations from Yemen's Ansarullah movement and the country's former Saudi regime-backed government opened in the Swedish town of Rimbo on Thursday under the auspices of the UN in an effort to find a political solution to the Yemen conflict and end a devastating Riyadh-led war on the country.

(Source: agencies)

Hezbollah: No spot in Israel safe from our missiles

Hezbollah's deputy secretary general says there is no spot across Israel outside the range of the Lebanese resistance movement's missiles.

"There is not a single point in the occupied territories out of reach of Hezbollah's missiles," Sheikh Naim Qassem told Tehran-based al-Vefagh newspaper in remarks published on Sunday.

Israel has launched a series of operations along the Lebanese border, and an Israeli minister has hinted at possible incursion into Lebanon in order to destroy what the regime claims Hezbollah tunnels.

An Israeli incursion into Lebanon would likely spark a major confrontation with Hezbollah. The Lebanese resistance movement has warned that Israel would "regret" invading Lebanon.

"The Zionists cannot tolerate such a high level of threats in confrontation with Hezbollah, which is why they have no motive for entering another war with Lebanon," Qassem said.

He said the Lebanese resistance movement has built such a deterrence which has prevented Israel from taking any action against



Lebanon since 2006.

"Even when they threaten they say, 'If Hezbollah attacks us' they will react, because the rules of engagement created in Lebanon by Hezbollah have made it very difficult for

Israel to even consider launching a war against Lebanon," he said.

Last week, Israel launched "Operation Northern Shield" to uncover and destroy what it claimed tunnels dug by Hezbollah

into the occupied territory.

Intelligence and transport minister Israel Katz said on Friday that Israeli forces may need to go into Lebanon to deal with the alleged tunnels.

Israel has waged two wars against Lebanon in 2000 and 2006. It was forced to withdraw on both occasions in the face of Hezbollah's resistance, despite inflicting severe damage on Lebanon's infrastructure.

Qassem also said the Palestinian resistance has made Israel face a "new equation."

Last month, a botched Israeli intelligence operation in the Gaza Strip unleashed brief skirmishes after which Tel Aviv accepted a ceasefire after about 500 rockets were fired from the besieged territory at Israeli in a matter of several hours.

Qassem further said the situation on the ground in Syria is improving day by day, where victories achieved by the Syrian Army and its allies are quite visible now.

He said a political solution has to be found to the crisis but the United States is preventing it through its military operations in the country and supporting certain militant groups.

(Source: Press TV)

Palestinians mark Intifada with call for 'armed struggle'



Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has marked the 31st anniversary of the first Intifada with pledges to continue the "armed struggle" and rebuked Arab leaders for seeking to normalize ties with Israel.

"Armed struggle is a strategic option to safeguard the Palestinian cause and restore Palestinian national rights," Hamas said in a statement issued on Saturday.

The first Intifada broke out in 1987 after four young Palestinians were killed by Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint in Gaza as well as the shooting death of a 17-year-old boy during an unarmed protest.

Intifada is an Arabic word that literally translates to "shaking off." It has been used to refer to legitimate means of resistance against oppression across the Middle East for decades. In the Arab-Israeli conflict, it means a concerted Palestinian effort to shake off Israeli occupation and gain independence.

In its statement on Saturday, Hamas said "resistance is a legitimate right guaranteed by international laws and conventions."

It said 31 years after the eruption of the uprising, which is also known as the stone Intifada, Palestinians are still in need of unity, partnership, and the reconstruction of their national project.

The second Intifada began in 2000 and was known as the al-Aqsa Intifada. It was sparked by former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon's visit to the al-Aqsa Mosque complex.

The anniversary comes amid worldwide outrage over the United States relocation of its embassy to al-Quds (Jerusalem) from Tel Aviv and the recognition of the city as the so-called capital of Israel.

Israel annexed East al-Quds in the 1967 Six Day war in a move never internationally recognized. The occupying regime claims the entire city as its capital. Palestinians also want it as the capital of their future state.

Control of the highly sensitive city remains one of the major stumbling blocks in any Israeli-Palestinian deal.

On Saturday, Hamas seized the occasion to repeat its rejection of the U.S. President Donald Trump's plan for "peace" in the Middle East, billed as the "deal of the century."

The plan, the movement said, is aimed at "liquidating the Palestinian cause and undermining the rights of the Palestinians."

Hamas also lashed out at Arab states for their attempts to normalize relations with Israel, saying such efforts "are doomed to failure."

"Our people will stand against those who are promoting normalization regardless of the sacrifices," it said.

The House of Saud regime is at the heart of the new push to forge normal relations with Israel, with reports of exchange of visits by Arab and Israeli ministers and politicians becoming a regular feature.

In the occupied West Bank, the ruling Fatah faction of Palestinian Authority (PA) chief Mahmoud Abbas also vowed to "continue the struggle to end all forms of Israeli occupation," even though it did not specify its nature.

The Palestinians, Fatah said, will pursue their struggle with "greater determination until the right of return for refugees is achieved, as well as the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with East al-Quds as its capital."

Fatah also voiced full support for Abbas in his rejection of the "deal of the century" and Trump's decision to recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's "capital" and move the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv.

(Source: Press TV)

Putin tells Netanyahu of need for 'strict' stability in Mideast

Russian President Vladimir Putin has reminded Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of the need to maintain stability following the recent Israeli operations near the Lebanese border.

Speaking over the phone, Putin and Netanyahu discussed the Israeli operations, the Kremlin said in a statement on Sunday.

"The president of Russia stressed the importance of ensuring stability in the region," the statement said.

Ties between Damascus and Tel Aviv have been strained since Russia's delivery of the S-300 missile defense system to Syria following the September downing of a Russian spy aircraft during an Israeli airstrike.

Russia has blamed Israel for the incident, which killed 15 Russian crew members. The Defense Ministry has said Israeli jets used the Russian plane as cover to attack Syria.

In their late Saturday talks held at the initiative of Netanyahu, Putin told him that Israel must improve its military coordination with Russia, the Kremlin said.

The Russian leader also emphasized the importance of the upcoming talks between their military experts to examine the circumstances of the September incident.

Israel has recently deployed additional troops along Lebanon's border under the pretext of "cutting off" Hezbollah tunnels near the occupied territories.

Netanyahu has boasted that the Israeli operation was "only a small piece of the big picture" of what he called efforts to ensure its security.

The operation has drawn rebuke and ridicule even from Israeli leaders, with opposition leader Tzipi Livni criticizing Netanyahu for overdramatizing the campaign "for political gain."

Intelligence and transport minister Israel Katz said on Friday that Israeli forces may need to go into Lebanon to deal with the alleged tunnels.

(Source: Press TV)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	166891.2
IFX	1838.6

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,532 rials
GBP	53,564 rials
AED	11,380 rials

Source: iribnews.ir

COMMODITIES

WTI	\$52.61/b
Brent	\$61.57/b
OPEC Basket	\$58.79/b
Gold	\$1,249.65/oz
Silver	\$14.68/oz
Platinum	\$798.80/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Shasta's new managing director appointed

ECONOMY **d e s k** **TEHRAN-** Mohammad Rezvanifar was appointed as the new managing director of Iran's Social Security Investment Company (SSIC, also known by its Persian acronym Shasta), Tasnim news agency reported on Sunday.

Rezvanifar, who was previously the managing director of Tamin Pharmaceutical Investment Company (TPICO), one of the subsidiaries of Shasta, replaced Morteza Lotfi, the previous managing director of Shasta.

Shasta is the investment arm of Iran's Social Security Organization (SSO).



Stock market index rises 73% since March

ECONOMY **d e s k** **TEHRAN—** Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE)'s main index (TEDPIX) has increased 73.3 percent since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018), Tasnim news agency reported on Sunday. As reported, the value of trades at TSE in the previous calendar week (ended on Friday) has also risen 1.7 percent.

Presence of new shareholders at TSE rose 40 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1396 (ended on March 20, 2018), compared to its preceding year, as the former head of TSE, Hassan Qalibaf-Asl, has previously announced.



Dairy products prices drop 9%

ECONOMY **d e s k** **TEHRAN—** According to the secretary of Iran Dairy Industries Society, the prices of milk and other dairy products experience a decrease of nine percent since Sunday, IRNA reported.

In an interview with IRNA, Reza Bakeri announced that the drop has been decided by market adjustment committee on the way to protect consumers' rights and all the affiliated organizations and producing factories are required to act upon the decision.

Iran, Russia call for supporting private sectors in sanctions era

1 → According to the official, oil and gas, agriculture, food, transportation and logistics are among the most important areas of cooperation which could be discussed during this year's annual business forum.



President of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation Sergey Katyrin (L) met with Gholam-Hossein Shafeie (R), the head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), in Tehran on Saturday.

Further in the meeting, ICCIMA Head Gholam-Hossein Shafeie mentioned the importance of the Iran-Russia business forum in creating a platform for dialogue between Iranian and Russian traders, saying, "In the current situation, a new environment is provided for communication between Iranian and Russian businessmen, therefore both Russian and Iranian Chambers of Commerce are required to pave the way for development of economic cooperation."

Renewable power purchase prices to rise 40% in peak periods

E N E R G Y **d e s k** **TEHRAN —** Seyed Mohammad Sadeqzadeh, head of Iran's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (known as SATBA), said the Energy Ministry is going to increase the guaranteed purchase prices for renewable electricity generation during the year's first six months when the consumption is higher.

According to the official there are over 85,000 big scale renewable power plants and more than 2000 small scale ones are currently active across the country, IRIB reported on Sunday.

Sadeqzadeh noted that over 80 percent of the country's solar and wind electricity output is generated during the mentioned six months.

Earlier in August, Sadeqzadeh said that the country's total capacity of generating electricity from renewable resources will reach 1100 megawatts (MW) by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2019).

Overall, in the next five years, Iran is aiming for a 5,000 MW increase in renewable capacity to meet growing domestic demand and expand its presence in the regional electricity market.



Iraq welcomes Iranian participation in renovation projects

ECONOMY **d e s k** **TEHRAN—** In a meeting with the Secretary of the Committee of Expanding Economic Relations with Iraq and Syria Hassan Danaieefar, Iraqi Minister of Construction and Housing Bengin Rikani voiced his country's tendency for cooperation of



Iranian companies in renovation projects in Iraq, IRNA reported on Sunday.

During the meeting held in the Iraqi capital, the two sides discussed the present status quo of mutual economic relations, including the possible ways for paying Iranian companies' arrears, in the presence

of Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad Iraj Masjedi.

Heading a delegation, Danaieefar made a three-day-trip to Iraq to confer on bilateral ties with Iraqi officials such as Iraq's Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi and Iraqi Transport Minister Abdullah Luaibi.

Switzerland plays for time in stock market standoff with EU

In its game of brinkmanship with the European Union, Switzerland is playing for time.

Bern didn't say yes to a hotly contested agreement with Brussels on Friday, taking the gamble that its equity market won't get cut off from EU investors. The government didn't say no either, announcing a national debate on the draft of the treaty instead.

That shifts the focus to Dec. 11, when the European Commission is due to discuss the matter. Switzerland and the EU are battling over a "framework" agreement to supplant the amalgamation of 120 treaties that now govern relations. The EU has made clinching an accord a prerequisite for further recognition of the Swiss bourse under MiFiD II. The pact is politically unpopular in Switzerland.

"The country is very divided; and I wonder whether implicitly what they're saying is 'look, you're going to have difficulty getting this through the people and we'll demonstrate this by going to consultation,'" said Clive Church, professor emeritus of European studies at the University of Kent. "Then the EU will know where it stands."

■ Framework details

For its part, the EU, which is dealing with Brexit, is in no mood to grant Bern any concessions. The bloc has urged a "swift" consultation period.

■ Battle ahead

The new treaty would affect how Bern adopts elements



Source: Bloomberg

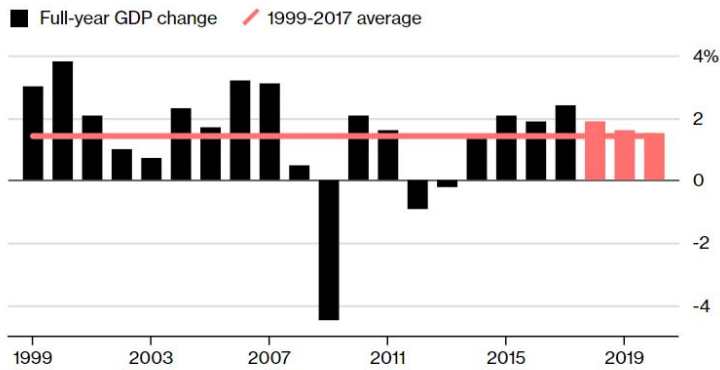
Note: Data as of Dec. 7, 2018

of EU law, and it has run into an unholy alliance of opposition within Switzerland: The euro-skeptic nationalists oppose it on the grounds that it impinges on their country's independence, while labor unions fear it will erode high local wages.

Worker association Travail.Suisse reacted to the government's announcement by comparing the treaty's hollowing out of labor market protections to an Emmentaler cheese with lots of holes. The nationalist Swiss People's Party said it was dismayed that the government hadn't rejected the draft treaty out of hand.

Even if Bern manages to clinch an agreement with Brussels, the framework treaty can be torpedoed via

Bruised Euro-Zone economy stumbles on after its 2018 beating



Source: Eurostat, Bloomberg surveys

The euro-zone economy is down but not out after a year battered by freezing weather, trade wars, budget disputes and car trouble.

The exuberance of 2017 -- when the bloc enjoyed a brief "euroboom" -- has given way to slowing momentum and an onslaught of bad news. Germany's supposed powerhouse economy contracted over the summer, and Italy is not only shrinking but also reviving memories of the regional debt crisis. European automakers are wondering if they're next to be targeted by U.S. import tariffs.

■ Hanging in there

Euro-zone growth is slowing but it's still just above its average.

Purchasing managers surveys show the deterioration continuing. Italy is close to a triple-dip recession, and its benchmark stock index has dropped 12 percent in six months. The Stoxx Europe 600 is down 10 percent. The S&P 500's decline is half that.

That's all left economists wondering how bad things can get. Barring a shock though, the answer for most is that the signs point to continued -- if low-level -- expansion.

The outside chance of a slump has increased but "growth is likely to remain decent," said Bert Colijn, an economist at ING. "Are we getting toward the end of the cycle? The end, no. But more late-cycle."

That's still inconvenient for the European Central Bank as it prepares to

halt its bond-buying program, a key step toward removing its crisis-era stimulus. Policy makers will meet Thursday, when new economic projections will reveal to what extent they see the current bout of downbeat data dragging on.

Traders have already adjusted their pricing and now see no interest-rate increase at all next year.

Other central banks are also shifting gear. Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell has turned slightly more dovish recently, casting doubt on the pace of U.S. rate increases next year. The Bank of England is on hold as it -- and the U.K. -- await Brexit.

ECB policy makers have kept a cautiously upbeat tone, saying growth has returned to a more sustainable pace and citing positives such as falling unemployment, wage growth that is starting to pick up, and solid domestic demand. They note that sentiment indicators are still above their long-term averages.

The bloc's Achilles heel is that it's relatively highly exposed to foreign trade, so global turbulence that hurts exports can be more damaging. China, the world's second-biggest economy and a key destination for euro-zone exports, is in the throes of a slowdown, with third-quarter momentum the weakest in almost a decade.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Deflation threat returns to haunt Chinese economy as risks from U.S. trade war linger

China suffered another economic blow on Sunday with the return of the deflation threat, a day after it reported slower than expected growth in exports and imports.

A fall in both consumer and producer price indexes was a result of weakness in demand from both Chinese consumers and investors and reflected their reluctance to spend as confidence in future growth is undermined by the trade war with the US.

The figures add the challenge faced by the Chinese leadership in keeping economic growth on track ahead of the annual central economic work conference, where policies for next year will be determined.

Last month the consumer price index fell 0.3 per cent from October while the producer price index dropped 0.2 per cent -- the first month-on-month fall in seven months -- due to the steep fall in the price of crude oil and coal, according to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Sunday.

On a yearly basis, China's PPI rose only 2.7 per cent in November, the lowest reading in two years, while China's CPI in November rose 2.2 per cent from a year earlier, the lowest in four months, the official statistics showed.

Analysts said deflationary pressure was set to continue as economic activities to weaken.

Jiang Chao, an analyst with Haitong Securities, wrote in a note before the Sunday data was released that China's PPI would drop to zero in December and fall further into negative territory in 2019, officially putting China in a deflationary zone.

The return of deflation risks, which often associated with a contraction in economic activities, provides fresh evidence that China's US\$12 trillion economy is heading into trouble, even though China and US have agreed a 90-day truce in the trade war during which they will try to resolve their differences.

The official purchasing managers

a referendum. Calling one requires the signatures of 50,000 adult citizens in the country of 8 million.

Switzerland's equivalence status for its exchanges under the EU's MiFiD II rules, which allows banks and brokers within the 28-country bloc to trade there, runs out on Dec. 31.

For the Swiss general public "the question of wages is much more central" than the stock market "side show," said Cedric Wermuth, a member of the Social Democrats in parliament's lower house. Brussels had to be aware that bids to pressure the Swiss into agreeing to the accord "won't have a positive impact."

■ Punching above its weight

Switzerland is home to Europe's fourth-largest stock market.

Elmar Brok, a member of the European Parliament, said he couldn't understand Switzerland's objections to the labor-market provisions. He threatened reprisals in areas including "energy and the stock market," according to the SonntagsBlick newspaper.

To prevent its bourses from suffering a plunge in volume once equivalence expires, Bern has found a loophole that it hopes will guarantee trading remains in Switzerland. The move met with wide approval in Switzerland, including from the association of multinational corporations, whose members including stock-exchange heavyweights Roche, Nestle and Novartis.

(Source: Bloomberg)



index, a leading indicator of economic growth, showed activity in China's vast manufacturing sector stalled in November for the first time in over two years as new orders shrank.

The country's exports decelerated rapidly last month, although China's trade surplus with the US widened to a record level, the Chinese customs administration said on Saturday.

The Chinese government has been trying to shore up confidence in the country's economic prospects since the summer and shifted its policy priority from cutting debt to bolstering growth. However, signs of stress continue to mushroom in the economy.

Economic data from the first three quarters of the year has suggested that as many as 19 provinces have fallen behind their annual GDP targets and many local governments are scrambling to spur investment so that they can meet their growth targets for 2018.

The Chinese government has expressed its concerns about unemployment and promised to give cash subsidies -- in the form of a partial refund of unemployment insurance payments -- to employers if they do not cut their labour force.

China's economic growth also slowed to 6.5 per cent in the third quarter of this year from 6.7 per cent in the second quarter of this year.

(Source: South China Morning Post)

OPEC coalition cuts unlikely to affect U.S. shale output: analysts

Saudi Arabia's energy minister Khalid Al-Falih said Friday that U.S. oil and natural gas producers were "breathing a sigh of relief" over the planned production cut announced Friday, but analysts expect that the agreement will have little impact on U.S. shale output.

"I just think there's a lot of uncertainty and this is a pretty small cut," Amy Myers Jaffe, director of the Council on Foreign Relations' energy security and climate program, told S&P Global Platts Friday.

"I believe there will be little change in U.S. production as a result of the announced cuts," said Rene Santos, an analyst with Platts Analytics.

Growth of U.S. shale production, the only domestic output which can react relatively fast to price changes, may be capped because of takeaway constraints in the Permian unlikely to be relieved until late 2019, Santos said.

In addition, there are too many questions about the agreement, particularly compliance and duration, to significantly boost U.S. oil output, he added.

The agreement by OPEC and its allies, led by Russia, to cut 1.2 million b/d in oil output starting January may be a relative non-factor for U.S. producers, who are basing their output decisions more on pessimism



about the stock market, the looming U.S.-China trade dispute and an ongoing currency crisis in emerging markets, Myers Jaffe said. "The OPEC cut is only going to gain momentum if the negative aspects of those other features do not assert themselves," she said. "I don't think OPEC has the will to make the kind of cuts we'd need to make if we saw a real recession."

But Jason Bordoff, a former energy policy

adviser to Barack Obama and founding director of Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy, said the 1.2 million b/d production cut will likely keep oil prices within the current range and prevent a dramatic decline.

"The outlook for U.S. shale production is much brighter, with oil prices in the \$60s than the \$50s or below, so today's decision to prop up the price will help shale output

continue to grow, even if not as rapidly as the dramatic surge seen in 2018," Bordoff said.

ICE February Brent was trading just below \$62/b Friday afternoon, up about \$1.90 from Thursday's settlement. The contract traded as high as \$63.73/b Friday morning on news of the OPEC coalition's cut agreement.

The decision by OPEC, Russia and other allies to cut production comes as U.S. oil production continues to shatter all-time records.

U.S. oil production averaged nearly 11.6 million b/d in November, a roughly 1.5 million b/d increase from November 2017, according to estimates by the U.S. Energy Information Administration. EIA expects U.S. oil output to exceed 12 million b/d by April, a nearly 3 million b/d increase in just two years.

The increase is largely being fueled by growth in the Permian, where output is expected to average nearly 3.7 million b/d in December, according to the EIA.

On Thursday, the U.S. Geological Survey released an assessment that claimed the Wolfcamp shale and Bone Spring formation, two of the Permian Basin's fastest growing oil and natural gas plays, have an estimated mean of 46.3 billion barrels of oil and 281 Tcf of gas.

(Source: Platts)

Pakistan loses a great deal as crucial LNG shipment cancelled

The Pakistan LNG Limited has cancelled a crucial shipment of the liquefied petroleum gas (LNG) that will not only cause a shortage of gas during winter – to the benefit of furnace oil mafia – but will also cause a loss of Rs12 billion to the national exchequer.

According to sources in the Petroleum Ministry, the Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) told the Pakistan LNG Limited that the LNG is not needed for now and a new shipment should be sent in June 2019. The canceled shipment carried 130,000 metric ton LNG.

The source said this cancellation of LNG shipment will result in a loss of Rs12 billion as the LNG will become expensive in June and delivery fee will also increase. Due to this delayed arrival, the LNG terminal company will have to pay \$1 per MMBTU capacity charges.

The sources said the cancelled LNG vessel was supposed to be received by Pakistan at 11.38 percent. However, now the supplying company has sold that vessel at 17 percent in the European market.

They said cancellation of shipment will create an LNG shortage for industries in beginning of 2019. The PPL said the Sui



Northern Gas Pipeline Limited (SNGPL) does not need the LNG shipment right now.

According to the ministry, the SNGPL needed two vessels of LNG due to requirement of industries in the winter. When the Petroleum Ministry was contacted for its official response on the LNG shipment cancellation, it said it was unaware of the development.

While addressing media a few days ago, the minister for petroleum has said the domestic users are the first priority for gas provision in winters and the power plants come next. Mixed LNG is being supplied to domestic users in areas of Punjab. In the current situation, RLNG will be supplied to the industries.

(Source: tribune.com.pk)

Mexico to cancel Feb. auctions for oil, gas blocks including 1st shale areas

Mexico's energy secretary Rocio Nahle said on Saturday that President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's newly installed administration would cancel two February bidding rounds for oil and gas blocks, including Mexico's first shale areas on offer.

Lopez Obrador, who took office on Dec. 1, has sharply criticized the landmark energy opening enacted by his predecessor, President Enrique Pena Nieto, whose government planned the February auctions.

The new president previously said he would suspend future oil auctions pending a review of the more than 100 contracts already awarded, but has not detailed what would become of the auctions slated for February.

Mexico's oil industry is struggling to stem a long-running crude output decline, posing one of the biggest challenges for Lopez Obrador's six-year term. He has yet to disclose a full plan for the sector.

Nahle told reporters at an event in the state of Chiapas on Saturday that two bidding rounds would be canceled. Together they would have auctioned off 46 oil and gas blocks, including the first shale areas in Mexico to be offered to private and foreign oil companies.

The dense rock has been successfully tapped over the past decade in the United States, in-



cluding the lucrative Eagle Rock formation in Texas just across Mexico's northern border.

Nahle did not address auctions for partnership rights for seven onshore joint venture contracts with national oil company Pemex, which are also scheduled for February.

Under Mexican law, the independent oil regulator known as the National Hydrocarbons Commission (CNH) runs the auctions and supervises contracts. The commission did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Lopez Obrador's energy initiatives have so far focused on reducing fuel prices by building a new refinery in his home state of Tabasco, where he is expected to announce details of the project on Sunday.

(Source: Reuters)

Storm hits Carolinas and officials warn of potential widespread power outages

A winter storm brought snowfall and freezing rain to North and South Carolina on Saturday, creating hazardous conditions on roads and threatening to leave hundreds of thousands of people without power, officials said.

The snowfall began on Saturday evening and was expected to last until early Monday in some areas, with up to 18 inches (46 cm) forecast for North Carolina's Mount Mitchell, the National Weather Service said.

North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, who declared a state of emergency on Friday, told residents to finish stockpiling food and avoid unnecessary travel.

"This weekend isn't the time to head out to see the winter wonderland. Stay safe

where you are," Cooper said in a statement.

The effects of the storm, including power outages, could last for days in North Carolina, with the state's mountainous western region expected to be particularly hard hit by snow, officials said.

About 500,000 electricity customers could lose power in North Carolina and South Carolina, a Duke Energy spokeswoman said on Twitter.

By Saturday evening, the storm had dumped 5 inches (13 cm) of snow on Hendersonville, a North Carolina city about 100 miles (160 km) west of Charlotte, meteorologist Zack Taylor of the federal Weather Prediction Center said by phone. Charlotte, North Carolina's most

populous city, was expected to also receive 5 inches (13 cm) of snow before the storm ends.

Snow was forecast for Virginia's southern region beginning early on Sunday, including up to 6 inches (15 cm) in the Lynchburg area.

Virginia Governor Ralph Northam declared an emergency for the state on Saturday, warning of potential power outages and snarled transportation.

The storm could affect airports, including Asheville and Raleigh-Durham International in North Carolina, Lynchburg and Roanoke in Virginia and Greenville-Spartanburg International, South Carolina. American Airlines said it would waive change fees for people booked through Charlotte Douglas

International, a major regional hub in North Carolina.

A mix of snow and sleet fell in upstate region of South Carolina on Saturday evening, Taylor said.

The South Carolina Emergency Management Division warned motorists to drive carefully on bridges, overpasses and remote roadways, which could quickly freeze over.

Icy rain also threatened to cover roads with ice in the mountains of northeast Georgia, officials said.

The storm formed earlier this week off the Texas coast and moved east, lashing parts of Arkansas and Tennessee with icy rain.

(Source: Reuters)

Are Russia's natural gas goals too ambitious?

This kind of development is often lost amid talk of higher news grabbing global oil markets headlines, particularly as Russia, now a major part of the so-called OPEC+ group, with Saudi Arabia, is essentially calling the shots in global oil markets. However, make no mistake, Moscow's (albeit Russian President Vladimir Putin's) ambitions aren't just focused on oil markets or geopolitical developments in the Middle East and Europe, they are also in natural gas markets, both piped gas into Europe and liquefied natural gas (LNG) production and exports, particularly to the Asia-Pacific region which represents 72 percent of global LNG demand.

Moreover, that figure is set to increase to 75 percent as China continues to ramp up its LNG procurement to help meet Beijing's mandate that natural gas make up at least 10 percent of the country's energy mix for power generation to help fight rampant air pollution, particularly in the country's major urban centers.

Several years ago, Putin said that Russia aimed to be the largest LNG producer in the world, an unlikely possibility at the time and still not likely given that current LNG production leader Qatar will ramp up its liquefaction capacity from a current 77 million tons per annum (mtpa) to an impressive and hard to beat 100 mtpa within the next five or six years.

However, this reality seems to be lost on Russia who is still pushing ahead with LNG development, likely realizing the geopolitical leverage that not only piped natural gas and crude oil exports bring, but also LNG, both large scale and small-scale projects. Fast forward to yesterday, news



broke that Russia's largest non-state natural gas producer Novatek will start producing LNG on the shore of the Baltic Sea in February.

■ Small-scale LNG ambitions

Novatek and Russia-based Gazprombank are planning to build an LNG plant and terminal in the Baltic Sea port of Vysotsk with a capacity of 660,000 tons of LNG per annum. The plant's capacity could be expanded to 800,000 tons in 2021. "There is an ambitious task of launching the operations of the project and loading the first cargo of liquefied natural gas in February 2019," the contractor, Atomtekhenergo, said in a statement.

The disclosure also comes just a few months after Rus-

sian state-owned gas giant Gazprom, best known for its geopolitically charged pipeline gas to Europe, currently around 25 European nations import gas from the company, and Tokyo-based conglomerate Mitsui & Co. inked a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on LNG development. Currently, Japan is the global LNG import leader, importing some 83.83 million tons in 2017, paying around \$35.6 billion for imports of the super-cooled fuel last year, a rise of 19.3 percent year-on-year.

■ Large scale LNG realities

Earlier this week, Yamal LNG, a joint venture-owned integrated LNG project in northern Russia, announced it had offloaded its one-hundredth cargo of LNG, less than a year since the project's first shipment in December 2017. Yamal's third LNG train, production facility, became operational in late November, while the nameplate capacity of all three trains is 5.5 mtpa, for a total liquefaction capacity of an impressive 16.5 mtpa. Yamal LNG shareholders are Novatek (50.1 percent), France's Total (20 percent), and China's CNPC (20 percent) and Silk Road Fund (9.9 percent).

Russia currently operates two LNG projects but has numerous other, some massive, projects under review or trying to get partners on board. While its certain that Russia will not be able to muster 100 mtpa of liquefaction capacity in the foreseeable future to challenge Qatar, what is unclear is whether or not Russia will seek to politicize its LNG exports to achieve geopolitical advantage as it has done with oil and mostly pipeline gas into Europe.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Geopolitical stakes are huge on this tiny island

The specter of a rumored U.S. military buildup in Cyprus that would draw a major Russian response now adds to the ongoing Greek Cypriot-Turkish conflict over the island and the oil and gas riches it promises.

Ever since the massive hydrocarbon discovery in Cyprus' exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in 2011 by American company Noble Energy the island has been the center of a geopolitical game that doesn't stop with rifle tensions between Turkey and the Greek Cypriots.

And now this game is drawing nearer to its climax, with much at stake.

Cyprus--an island in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea--is divided into the Greek-dominated Republic of Cyprus in the south and the Turkish-controlled north. Since 2004, the Republic of Cyprus has been a member of the European Union, and the northern 'entity' remains recognized solely by Turkey.

But it is the EEZ--the exclusive economic zone--where this geopolitical game of chess is being played out.

Generally, Turkey doesn't accept the jurisdiction of Cyprus over the EEZ, and particularly the process of bidding on and awarding concession for offshore oil and gas drilling. Every attempt by Nicosia to invite international companies to explore offshore has been met with a strong reaction from Turkey, which is constantly looking for geopolitical leverage in this battle.

From the Turkish perspective, the Greek Cypriots persist "in ignoring the equal and inalienable rights and interests of the Turkish Cypriot side on natural resources of the island".

Indeed, everything in correlation with oil and gas on Cyprus has a specific political weight and is highly sensitive.

Fiona Mullen, Director of Sapiienta Economics in Nicosia, told Oilprice.com that even though Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots "argue that a Greek Cypriot-only government should not be recognized because the Republic of Cyprus constitution provides for power-sharing, over time UN resolutions and other case law have favored the Greek Cypriots," which form the internationally recognized government.

"More generally, you hear countries like the U.S. supporting the Republic of Cyprus' right to explore and exploit its hydrocarbons--but they always add that it should be equitably shared in the context of a solution to the Cyprus problem," Mullen said.

Amid the verbal war between Cyprus and Turkey, and maritime maneuverings that suggests it could go beyond verbal at any time--U.S. oil major ExxonMobil has started drilling an exploration well offshore Cyprus in the EEZ.

Launched two weeks ago, tensions are at a new high. And everyone from Israel, Qatar, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, the United States and all of Europe--and beyond--have a keen interest in what happens next.

At question most immediately is Block 10, of which Exxon is the operator with partner Qatar Petroleum. The partners were awarded the exploration license in December 2016, as a part of the country's third licensing round. As expected, Turkey has sharply protested against the move, accusing foreign companies of contributing to the destabilization of the region.

"This is a breaking point. Everyone should know that we will not yield even an inch of our rights and interests at sea," Turkish media quoted Binali Yildirim, the speaker of Turkey's Grand National Assembly, as saying.

Turkish accusations were met with a response from Washington that was less than desirable, even if it did mention sharing.

When Exxon started drilling two weeks ago, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Francis Fannon said "we certainly were happy to see U.S. company involvement and continued opportunities here... we reiterated the U.S. long-standing position of recognizing Cyprus' rights to develop its resource wealth in its EEZ... we believe that resource wealth should be shared with all communities on the island equitably in the context of a comprehensive settlement."

Despite some recent showdowns on the sea, with Cypriots carefully watching Turkish seismic vessels that Ankara claims the Greeks have been "harassing", Mullen doesn't believe that Turkey will try to halt Exxon's drilling--for now.

"It looks as though Turkey will not try to disrupt Exxon's, partly because it's Exxon and partly because Block 10 is not in the area claimed by Turkey as its continental shelf and not in the areas that the Turkish Cypriots have licensed. However, Turkey has said several times that it will not allow production of hydrocarbons. So, if the Cyprus problem remains unresolved, and we reach production stage, this is the point of maximum risk of an offshore conflict..." Mullen told Oilprice.com.

Earlier in November, Ankara announced its own oil and gas plans in areas licensed by the Turkish Cypriots to Turkish Petroleum. It's in Ankara interest to allow Exxon's exploration to find what it will find because any luck here will assist Turkey in its own exploration efforts.

Nor is Exxon the only player in this intricate game. Two other oil majors--French Total SA and Italy Eni--have announced a joint bid to explore offshore Cyprus in Block 7--despite warnings from Turkey over claims to this area.

Block 7 activities--if the November 26 exploration permit is approved by the Cypriot Energy Ministry--will be a much bigger bone of contention with Turkey.

From the Turkish standpoint, Block 7 "remains within the outer limits of Turkey's continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean".

"The reckless behavior of Greece -- supported by European states -- acting together with the Greek Cypriot administration is a danger and above all a threat to themselves. We will use our rights under international law and conventions to the end. And we are determined to put in their place anyone who wants to stop us. Profiteering is wrong. Profiteering in international relations is much worse," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned.

These, according to the Greek Foreign Ministry, are "Turkish provocations" that will "undermine regional stability at a critical juncture [...]"

From an economic point of view, the stakes are enormous in Cyprus' EEZ. There are studies and research that confirm impressive hydrocarbon potential here, but everyone's still waiting for the "vein of gold" to be revealed. So a lot is riding on Exxon.

According to Mullen, the jury is still out, but "back in 2016, the government mentioned that it could earn \$500-\$600m per year from Aphrodite, which is around 4-4.5 tcf. This would be equivalent to around 10 percent of annual government revenue".

"Aphrodite gas is still stuck in the ground because the price is not right for the companies, so at the moment this is all hypothetical. There are high hopes in Cyprus that Block 10 will yield a big find," Mullen added.

Still stuck in the ground or not, what makes Aphrodite so mouth-watering is its location--very close to Israel's Leviathan gas field, the discovery of which was a game-changer for Israel. According to the US Geological Survey, an estimated 122 trillion cubic feet of recoverable natural gas lie, along with 1.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil under the Levant Basin seabed.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Macron has succeeded only in uniting his country against him

By Jonathan Miller

Paris is not burning. Or, only a little bit is burning this evening. President Emmanuel Macron flooded the zone with twice as many police as last week. Then, there was the dawn roundup of hundreds of known troublemakers. Kettling the gilets jaunes in the Champs Elysée was a good way of preventing them from getting up to mischief on the side streets. And there were armored personnel carriers parked at the Arc de Triomphe, should anyone doubt the government’s determination.

Macron may claim to have won this round but, like Pyrrhus, one other such victory would utterly undo him. Whatever he says when he breaks his silence tomorrow, the optics remain terrible. Shops have been looted. Cars are still burning. The television images have been terrible. Motorways are closed and now the farmers are angry again. If in Paris the absolute scale of destruction was less than before, and the number of gilets fewer, Macron has nevertheless met his, Waterloo.

The tragedy of this is that Macron’s analysis of what ails France is spot on. This is a country that is 20 years late enacting essential structural reforms. But Macron has been incapable of explaining his project for national renewal. He is almost autistically disconnected from voters. He was elected only because the French are revolted by Marine Le Pen. He won only 20 per cent of the votes in the first round. Voters have never really warmed to him and now actively detest him.

Macron will not resign. That’s what prime ministers are for, and Macron is not thought to have warm thoughts about his. Nineteen months into his five-year term, he still commands an enormous majority in the National Assembly and the reins of executive power. His forthcoming caning in European elections won’t change this, but will further degrade his authority in Europe. Ironically, to say the least, Macron rival, deputy Italian prime minister Matteo Salvini, spent the afternoon appearing before tens of thousands of adoring supporters in Rome.

The quintessential non-populist, the darling of bien pensants all over the world, Macron has succeeded only in uniting his country against him. They are fed up with Macron’s grand pronouncements and global jet setting. They want to know why they are being taxed until the pips squeak, why their children can’t get good jobs, why they are stalked by speed cameras, and they don’t know or care what Macron is talking about when he goes on about fiscal union, a European army and the benefits of globalization.

(Source: The Spectator)

A major national security shakeup: Nauert in —and Kelly out?

By Curt Mills

The Trump administration is heading for its second major national security shuffle of the year.

President Donald Trump has settled on Heather Nauert, the Fox & Friends alumnus and current State Department spokesman, as his appointment to the United Nations in New York. He confirmed the appointment to reporters in Washington on Friday; the choice will have to be approved by the Senate. It’s not clear as of this writing whether she would serve in the cabinet, as did her predecessor, Nikki R. Haley. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Ambassador John Bolton, national security advisor, are said to favor a return of the position to its pre-Haley form: reporting exclusively to Foggy Bottom. But Nauert’s ascension means the president has passed on John James, the defeated Michigan Senate candidate, failed to court Dina Powell (the job is “Dina’s if she wants it,” a veteran Republican operative close to the White House told me) and decided to keep his point man on Europe, Ambassador Ric Grenell , in Berlin .

Added, however, to the brewing intrigue around 1600 Pennsylvania is word of a more comprehensive administration staff shakeup. Perhaps impacted by the national moment brought on by the death of President George H.W. Bush, Trump also nominated William Barr, who served the forty-first president, as his attorney general on Friday.

But the coup de grace could be the exodus of White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, as early as Friday, as both CNN and Bloomberg News have reported. A source close to the White House tells me the leading candidate to replace General Kelly remains Nicholas Ayers, the vice president’s ambitious chief of staff. Others favor Mick Mulvaney, the libertarian-leaning budget point man friendly to foreign policy restrainers .

Kelly’s departure, not confirmed, would be a watershed — and Rubicon crossed. Trump, a deep admirer of the military from his school days, has hesitated to part ways with the four-star generals in his midst—Defense Secretary James Mattis and Kelly. Internally, the two are seen as linked. Accordingly, Kelly’s exodus could be viewed as a green light for a Mattis departure. Another source close to the White House says Mattis plans to stick around at least through April.

If there is indeed a major shakeup, it would be the second major national security shuffle of the calendar year. Trump convulsed his administration earlier this year with the appointments of the hawkish duo of Michael R. Pompeo and John R. Bolton at State and the National Security Council. But the latest moves could potentially be broader than were the major shifts earlier this year at State and on the NSC. This administration views immigration concerns as a matter of national security . Barr will be expected by border hawks , upset by the ouster of Jeff Sessions, to keep the heat up on Trump’s signature issue. This contingent also seeks the dismissal of Kelly’s protegee, Kirstjen Nielsen, the homeland security secretary. The immigration hardliners favor one of two vanquished political candidates as a replacement—Lou Barletta, the defeated Pennsylvania senate aspirant, or Kris Kobach, who was defeated in his bid for Kansas governor. The danger for the hawks, however, is that the president, first and foremost a fan of political winners, could pass on both.

(Source: The National Interest)

The wooing of Kushner: How the Saudis got a friend in the White House

By D. Kirkpatrick & Hubbard& Landler& Mazzetti

Senior American officials were worried. Since the early months of the Trump administration, Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law and Middle East adviser, had been having private, informal conversations with Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the favorite son of Saudi Arabia’s king.

Given Kushner’s political inexperience, the private exchanges could make him susceptible to Saudi manipulation, said three former senior American officials. In an effort to tighten practices at the White House, a new chief of staff tried to reimpose longstanding procedures stipulating that National Security Council staff members should participate in all calls with foreign leaders.

But even with the restrictions in place, Kushner, 37, and Prince Mohammed, 33, kept chatting, according to three former White House officials and two others briefed by the Saudi royal court. In fact, they said, the two men were on a first-name basis, calling each other Jared and Mohammed in text messages and phone calls.

The exchanges continued even after the Oct. 2 killing of Jamal Khashoggi, the Saudi journalist who was ambushed and dismembered by Saudi agents, according to two former senior American officials and the two people briefed by the Saudis. As the killing set off a firestorm around the world and American intelligence agencies concluded that it was ordered by Prince Mohammed, Kushner became the prince’s most important defender inside the White House, people familiar with its internal deliberations say. Kushner’s support for Prince Mohammed in the moment of crisis is a striking demonstration of a singular bond that has helped draw President Trump into an embrace of Saudi Arabia as one of his most important international allies.

But the ties between Kushner and Prince Mohammed did not happen on their own. The prince and his advisers, eager to enlist American support for his hawkish policies in the region and for his own consolidation of power, cultivated the relationship with Kushner for more than two years, according to documents, emails and text messages reviewed by The New York Times.

A delegation of Saudis close to the prince visited the United States as early as the month Trump was elected, the documents show, and brought back a report identifying Kushner as a crucial focal point in the courtship of the new administration. He brought to the job scant knowledge about the region, a transactional mind-set and an intense focus on reaching a deal with the Palestinians that met Israel’s demands, the delegation noted.

Even then, before the inauguration, the Saudis were trying to position themselves as essential allies who could help the Trump administration fulfill its campaign pledges. In addition to offering to help resolve the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, the Saudis offered hundreds of billions of dollars in deals to buy American weapons and invest in American infrastructure. Trump later announced versions of some of these items with great fanfare when he made his first foreign trip: to an Arab-Islamic summit in Riyadh, the Saudi capital. The Saudis had extended that invitation during the delegation’s November 2016 visit.

“The inner circle is predominantly deal makers who lack familiarity with political customs and deep institutions, and they support Jared Kushner,” the Saudi delegation wrote of the incoming administration in a slide presentation obtained by the Lebanese newspaper Al Akhbar, which provided it to The Times. Several Americans who spoke with the delegation confirmed the slide presentation’s accounts of the discussions. The courtship of Kushner appears to have worked.

Only a few months after Trump moved into the White House, Kushner was inquiring about the Saudi royal succession process and whether the United States could influence it, raising fears among senior officials that he sought to help Prince Mohammed, who was not yet the crown prince, vault ahead in the line for the throne, two former senior White House officials said. American diplomats and intelligence officials feared that the Trump administration might be seen as playing favorites in the delicate internal politics of the Saudi royal family, the officials said.

By March, Kushner helped usher Prince Mohammed into a formal lunch with Trump in a state dining room at the White House, capitalizing on a last minute cancellation by Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany because of a snowstorm. Bending protocol, Kushner arranged for Prince Mohammed, often referred to by his initials as MBS, to receive the kind of treatment usually reserved for heads of state, with photographs and news media coverage, according to a person involved in the arrangements. It appears to have been the first face-to-face meeting between Kushner and the prince, but Kushner raised eyebrows by telling others in the White House that he and Prince Mohammed had already spoken several times before, two people at the event recalled. In a statement, a White House spokes-



man said that “Jared has always meticulously followed protocols and guidelines regarding the relationship with MBS and all of the other foreign officials with whom he interacts.”

White House officials declined to explain those protocols and guidelines, and declined to comment on Kushner’s one-on-one communications with Prince Mohammed since the killing of Khashoggi. Their connection, though, has been pivotal since the start of the Trump administration.

“The relationship between Jared Kushner and Mohammed bin Salman constitutes the foundation of the Trump policy not just toward Saudi Arabia but toward the region,” said Martin Indyk, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and a former Middle East envoy. The administration’s reliance on the Saudis in the peace process, its support for the kingdom’s feud with Qatar, an American ally, and its backing of the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, he said, all grew out of “that bromance.”

■ ‘You will love him’

Before the 2016 presidential race, Kushner’s most extensive exposure to the Middle East was through Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was a Kushner family friend, and the Kushners had contributed heavily to Israeli nonprofits supporting Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories of the West Bank. But the Arab rulers of the oil-rich Persian Gulf mainly figured in Kushner’s life as investors in American real estate, the Kushner family business.

So Tom Barrack, a Lebanese-American real estate investor with close ties to both Trump and the Persian Gulf rulers, set out during the campaign to introduce Kushner to his associates as a useful ally.

“You will love him and he agrees with our agenda!” Barrack wrote in May 2016 in an email to the Emirati ambassador in Washington, Youssef Otaiba. Otaiba soon positioned himself as an informal adviser on the region to Kushner. “Thanks to you, I am in constant contact with Jared and that has been extremely helpful,” Otaiba wrote to Barrack in the first months after Trump took office.

The Emirati ambassador was also eagerly promoting Prince Mohammed. Since the prince’s aging father had taken the throne in 2015, the Emiratis were betting heavily on the prince as their preferred contender in the succession struggles within the Saudi royal family. “MBS is incredibly impressive,” Otaiba wrote Barrack in June 2016, as they tried to arrange meetings between the prince and the Trump campaign.

The month after the American election, the de facto ruler of the United Arab Emirates — Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi — delivered a similar message when he made an unannounced trip to New York for a meeting with Kushner and others about the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. While speaking with Kushner, the Emirati prince also recommended Prince Mohammed of Saudi Arabia as a promising young leader, according to a person familiar with their conversations.

Kushner seemed impressed. The meeting had been arranged in part by Rick Gerson, a hedge fund manager who was close to Kushner and to the Emirati crown prince. After the encounter, Gerson sent a message to the Emirati crown prince about his success in winning over Kushner. “I promise you this will be the start of a special and historic relationship,” Gerson wrote, in a text message. On the eve of the inauguration, Gerson wrote to the Emirati crown prince again. “You have a true friend in the White House,” Gerson wrote, recounting a visit with Kushner before Kushner departed for Washington.

The emails with Ambassador Otaiba and the text messages with Gerson were provided to The Times by people critical of Emirati foreign policies and authenticated by others with direct knowledge of their contents. Gerson declined to comment and the Emirati embassy did not respond to requests for comment.

■ ‘lack of familiarity’ with history

Top aides to Saudi Arabia’s Prince Mohammed also met with Kushner on a trip to New York in November 2016, after the election. The Saudi team included Musaad al-Aiban, a cabinet minister involved in economic planning and national security, and Khaled

al-Falih, installed by the prince as minister of energy and chairman of the state oil company, according to executives who met with them and a person who was briefed on the meetings. Aiban did not respond to a request for comment, and Falih could not be reached for comment. The delegation made special note of what it characterized as Kushner’s ignorance of Saudi Arabia.

“Kushner made clear his lack of familiarity with the history of Saudi-American relations and he asked about its support for terrorism,” the team noted in the slide presentation prepared for Riyadh. “After the discussion, he expressed his satisfaction with what was explained about the Saudi role in fighting terrorism” and what the Saudis said was their international leadership in fighting extremism. Kushner, the Saudi report said, also questioned the delegation’s motives, asking whether the group had always been interested in working with Trump. As a candidate, Trump had promised to ban Muslim immigrants from entering the United States and had singled out Saudi Arabia as a dangerous influence.

“Kushner wondered about Saudi Arabia’s desire for partnership and whether it came from opportunity or worry, and he wondered as well if it was specific to this American administration or whether it was presented to Hillary Clinton (for example: women driving),” read another slide, next to a photograph of Kushner. But Kushner was clear about his own priorities, the report said. “The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was among the most important issues to draw Kushner’s attention,” the delegation reported, and therefore the best way to win him over.

“The Palestinian issue first: there is still no clear plan for the American administration toward the Middle East,” the delegation wrote, “except that the central interest is finding a historic solution to support the stability of Israel and solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” To cultivate ties with the Trump team, the Saudis had prepared a long list of initiatives that they said would help Trump deliver for his supporters.

Seizing on. Trump’s campaign vows for the “extreme vetting” of immigrants, the Saudi delegation proposed “establishing an intelligence and data” exchange “to help the American administration carry out its strategy of investigating those requesting residency (extreme vetting),” according to an Arabic version of a presentation for the Trump team. And the delegation pledged “high-level coordination with the new American administration” to help with “defeating extremist thought.” Several of the Saudi proposals were evidently welcomed.

One was a “joint center to fight the ideology of extremism and terrorism.” President Trump helped inaugurate a Saudi version of the center on his trip to Riyadh the following May. Another Saudi proposal outlined what the Trump administration later called “an Arab NATO.” In their presentation, the Saudis described it as an Islamic military coalition of tens of thousands of troops “ready when the president-elect wishes to deploy them.”

Other initiatives appeared timed to Trump’s first term in office, like proposals to spend \$50 billion over four years on American defense contracts, to increase Saudi investment in the United States to \$200 billion over four years, and to invest, with other Persian Gulf states, up to \$100 billion in American infrastructure. And the delegation urged Trump to come to Saudi Arabia himself to “launch the initiatives as part of a historic welcome celebration.”

It is unclear how the delegation’s slide-show presentation to and about the Trump team were obtained by the Al Akhbar newspaper, which is sympathetic to the Lebanese movement Hezbollah and Iran, an enemy of Saudi Arabia.

Several Americans identified in the presentation acknowledged meeting with the delegation and confirmed broad outlines of the discussions. The Times provided the documents and the names of delegation members to an official of the Saudi Embassy in Washington, who declined to comment.

■ A Saudi role in Mideast peace

Israel had long argued to American diplomats that Saudi Arabia’s influence in the region made it essential to any peace deal,

and the Israelis were developing high hopes for Prince Mohammed because of his hawkish views toward Iran and his general iconoclasm (he would later make several statements, like affirming the Israeli “right” to land, that were notably more sympathetic to the Israeli position than those of other Saudi leaders.)

Within weeks of Trump’s move into the White House, Kushner had embraced the delegation’s proposal for the president to visit Riyadh, convinced by then that the alliance with Saudi Arabia would be crucial in his plans for the region, according to a person who discussed it with Kushner and a second person familiar with his plans. The secretary of state at the time, Rex W. Tillerson, opposed the idea. It would link the administration too closely to Riyadh, these people said, giving up flexibility and leverage. Trump initially saw little benefit either, according to a person involved in his deliberations. But by the time of the inauguration Kushner was already arguing that under the influence of Prince Mohammed, Saudi Arabia could play a pivotal role in advancing a Middle East peace deal, according to three people familiar with his thinking. That would be the president’s legacy, Kushner argued, according to a person involved in the discussions.

It was around the time of the White House visit in March 2017 that senior officials in the State Department and the Pentagon began to worry about the one-on-one communications between Prince Mohammed — who is known to favor the online messaging service WhatsApp — and Kushner. “There was a risk the Saudis were playing him,” one former White House official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. Two later face-to-face encounters with Kushner preceded key turning points in Prince Mohammed’s consolidation of power.

Shortly after Kushner visited Riyadh with the president in May 2017, Prince Mohammed orchestrated the ouster of his older cousin, Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, removing him from control of the Saudi Interior Ministry and replacing him as crown prince. Prince Mohammed also announced a Saudi-led blockade of its neighbor and rival Qatar, the host of a major American air base. And days after Kushner made an unannounced visit to Riyadh in the fall of 2017, the crown prince summarily detained about 200 wealthy Saudis, including several of his royal cousins, in a Ritz-Carlton hotel in Riyadh. After each play for power, President Trump publicly praised Prince Mohammed.

One former White House official argued that Kushner’s personal ties to Prince Mohammed had sometimes been an asset. At one point, for example, the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen had blocked a critical port, cutting off humanitarian and medical supplies. “The national security adviser at the time, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, suggested that Kushner call Prince Mohammed to address the issue, the official said, and General McMaster believed Kushner’s intercession had helped persuade the Saudis to loosen the restrictions. White House officials also say that Kushner has formal conversations with many other leaders in the region. And previous administrations have also had close ties to the Saudi government.

Since the uproar over Khashoggi’s killing, the Trump administration has acknowledged only one conversation between Kushner and Prince Mohammed: an Oct. 10 telephone call joined by John R. Bolton, the national security adviser. The Americans “asked for more details and for the Saudi government to be transparent in the investigation process,” the White House said in a statement.

But American officials and a Saudi briefed on their conversations said that Kushner and Prince Mohammed have continued to chat informally. According to the Saudi, Kushner has offered the crown prince advice about how to weather the storm, urging him to resolve his conflicts around the region and avoid further embarrassments.

Few of the Saudi promises have amounted to much. The effectiveness of the counterterrorism center in Riyadh remains doubtful. After offering \$50 billion in new weapons contracts, the Saudis have signed only letters of interest or intent without any firm deals. After proposing to marshal up to \$100 billion in investments in American infrastructure, the Saudis have announced an investment of only \$20 billion.

Inside the White House, Kushner has continued to argue that the president needs to stand by Prince Mohammed because he remains essential to the administration’s broader Middle East strategy, according to people familiar with the deliberations.

Whether Prince Mohammed can fulfill that role, however, remains to be seen. His initial approaches to the Palestinians were rejected by their leaders, and their resistance stiffened after the Trump administration recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital without waiting for a negotiated agreement on the city’s status.

Now the prince’s father, King Salman, 82, who is still the official head of state, has appeared to resist Kushner’s Middle East peace plans as well. “The Palestinian issue will remain our primary issue,” the king declared in a speech last month, “until the Palestinian people receive all of their legal rights.”

(Source: The NYT)

Qatar withdraw from OPEC may increase Iran's production share: Zaccara



Any relation between Trump's anti-OPEC policies and Doha decision?

A: It is clear that Trump is worried about the oil price ramping up, as he tweeted, and that he prefers a united OPEC that can prevent the control of oil prices, but I cannot see that Doha decision has been affected by the U.S. policy on the matter.

How do you see the future of the 60 years old organization?

A: The OPEC has been very important in some periods of its history, and certainly it will remain as an important production cartel of a very limited energy resource worldwide for the next 30 to 50 years. However, their efficiency in controlling the prices, and making the states members to comply with the established quotas has been very limited in the last 20 years. With extra-OPEC members being very influential in the short and long term, depending on the success of the shell oil production, the OPEC capacity of having a determining role on oil price will be significantly reduced in the coming decades.

At the present moment which Iran is under U.S. and its regional allies' pres-



sure such as Saudi Arabia and UAE to cut Iran's oil export to zero, will Doha withdrawal from OPEC affect the U.S. goals toward Iran?

A: Sanctions against Iran so far proved

to have a very limited impact neither in the Iranian production nor in the oil price. Qatar withdrawing from OPEC does not mean the country will withdraw from the market either, meaning that probably the oil market

will not suffer from neither situations. This is not necessarily harmful for U.S. interest in the region, but it may increase the quota (of power and production) that OPEC may allocate to Iran, which is not in line with the U.S. policy towards Iran.

Will this decision affect China's One road-One belt project?

A: As far as the price is not going up, China will not suffer economically speaking. Neither from the political point of view, since China has been reluctant of getting dragged in the many regional confrontations that affect the region. The Chinese government has cordial relations with all the governments, including Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and neither the Saudi-Qatari crisis nor the Saudi-Iranian confrontation have forced China to choose sides and to cut ties or reduce imports from any of the three producers. That said, the China project is a long term project that includes many countries and aspects that seems will not be affected by this politically driven decisions that will have very limited economic impact on the oil market nor on the links that China had built with the different state actors along the road-belt.

Will there be another referendum over Brexit?



After the British citizens voted to leave the European Union in 2016, the two Labor and Conservative parties (as UK's two traditional parties) tried their best to change the general vote on this issue. The active role played by people like former British Prime Minister Tony Blair can well indicate the dissatisfaction among British authorities over the Brexit.

Supporters of the People's Vote campaign are currently trying to convince the public for holding a new referendum on Brexit. "The People's Vote campaign seeks to ensure that the government's Brexit deal is put before the country in a public vote so that we can decide if a decision that will affect our lives for generations makes the country better or worse off. Good deal or bad deal, it's definitely a big deal - and that's

why it should be put to a People's Vote", that's how the campaign's supporters define their goal.

Proponents of this campaign believe that the parliament's negative vote to May's plan is the best opportunity to hold another referendum. On the other hand, Theresa May doesn't intend to violate the people's vote in the 2016 referendum explicitly, so she tries to appear to be opposed to a new referendum, but she set the game in a way that it will eventually lead to the UK's remain as part of the European Union.

Labor Party officials led by Jeremy Corbyn have also agreed to vote again on the Brexit, and have officially backed this issue. The fact that Britain's two rival parties have come to an agreement on holding a new referendum has provided the ground for its ultimate realization.



A Long Time Coming: Saudi-Made Famine in Yemen

TEHRAN (FNA) — The world needs to act now because according to a new report by the World Food Program, Yemeni civilians are enduring a famine.

The agency plans to designate several besieged cities as areas of famine as well, because of lack of available food for roughly 73,000 inhabitants in the areas. According to the UN body, Yemen, which is in the midst of a Saudi-led war and blockade, is the site of some of the worst humanitarian conditions on Earth. More than 3.3 million in the area are facing food shortages that do not fall under extreme famine conditions. Millions are without enough to eat, clean water to drink, and other basics like health care as well.

This comes at a time when US Senators have voted to move a resolution to the full Senate floor that would end US support for the Saudi-led military aggression in Yemen, which has been criticized as unduly dangerous to civilians and re-examined by lawmakers on Capitol Hill following Saudi Arabia's admission of involvement in the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist at Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2.

This also comes at a time when representatives of Yemeni warring factions have gone to Sweden to discuss ceasefire and peace. They want to end the conflict which has killed thousands, displaced millions, created the worst cholera epidemic, and brought about 14 million Yemenis to the brink of starvation. Desperate to escape the Saudi-made famine, to be reunited with their loved ones, and to save the future of their children, the negotiators are picking through the scattered signs of hope that this unnecessary conflict might end.

That could happen if:

1- The world community supports the ongoing peace talks, forces Saudi Arabia and its allies to end their



airstrikes and blockade, and allow international humanitarian aid into the famine-hit areas, including the port city of Hodeida. The Saudis must suspend their belief in the possibility of a single military victory in battle-hardened Yemen to win the upper-hand in talks. That will never happen. They should also stop blaming Iran for their defeat as Iran has no presence in Yemen and has always maintained that there is no military solution to the protracted conflict.

2- The political consultations are the first step toward putting Yemen on the path to peace. The country needs a solution for its famine right now. The international civil society is united in the desire to end this conflict. Many UN member states have demonstrated their full cooperation with the ongoing political process. The Saudi war was never authorized by the United Nations. It is illegal, all the reason why

the United States and its NATO should also end their support for the Saudi aggression.

3- The ongoing famine and soaring civilian death toll has brought even more to the side of ending Western support for the conflict. Several EU countries have halted arms sales to Saudi Arabia. There is negotiation underway within the US Congress for a series of combined deals, including a non-binding resolution saying Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman is complicit in the grisly murder of Washington Post Khashoggi. They should do the next best thing: Vote for ending the Saudi-led war on Yemen.

4- The Trump administration refuses to tamp down the panic-mongering and cheap political theater of "Iran presence in Yemen", supplies the Saudis with weapons with which to flatten Yemeni neighbourhoods and kill civilians, generate more refugees, and strength-

en ISIL and Al-Qaeda. This makes the US government complicit in Saudi war crimes, as they are deliberately targeting hospitals and clinics in Yemen. This appalling trend disrespects the neutrality of health facilities.

5- According to the UN Human Rights Office, the indiscriminate bombing campaign has killed and wounded thousands of civilians. The spiralling civilian death toll and humanitarian crisis has brought international shock and condemnation, so much so that Washington has been forced to react. In the words of some US officials, "The White House has been increasingly frustrated as it is starting to see the war as de facto support for Saudi war crimes." Regardless of the tired tropes and doublespeak, they have facilitated the conflict and are hence responsible for the bloodshed and mass starvation.

It is evident that the Saudis cannot win this unwinnable war. The ongoing blockade and escalation is a humiliating attempt by the Saudis to save face. The world can't be blinded to this shock and terror. The Saudis must be forced to stop the bombing raids and allow the world to see what they have done to the Yemeni people and their hopes for peace. The world community should discount the Saudi lobbyists and censure all war makers and profiteers who masquerade as providers of security for the region and beyond.

The United Nations should create an international commission of inquiry to investigate the Saudi violations of international law as well. This should include the US for taking part in the naval blockade, assisting the Saudi coalition, supplying weapons, intelligence and in-flight refuelling of fighter jets and widening the man-made famine. No one should be let off the hook.

The effects of U.S. sanctions on Iran's natural gas projects

By Omid Shokri Kalehsar

Iran holds the second largest natural gas reserves in the world. Despite this advantage, the country controls less than one percent of the world's natural gas market. Nevertheless, Iran is the third largest gas producer and, over the past few years, has focused on increasing its share of the global gas market. By the end of 2017, according to the National Iranian Gas Company, Iran was producing 800 million cubic meters per day. Iran's short-term intention is to increase the volume of gas available for export by 365 million cubic meters per day by 2021.



Exporting natural gas takes a back seat in terms of priorities to more immediate economic considerations like boosting investment into oil fields, satisfying domestic consumption, and expanding gas-based industries. Iran has 50 independent gas fields, of which currently only 23 are developed and producing. Iran's largest gas field at South Pars, with reserves of 14 trillion cubic meters, accounts for around 40 percent of the country's gas reserves. In 2017, Iran produced 130 billion cubic meters of natural gas from this field. Iran plans to complete Phase 11 in the next two years so that it can produce about 180 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually. But based on estimates from the Ministry of Oil, South Pars will experience a significant drop in pressure, known as the "dew point," probably around 2023.

In 2015, after the signing of the nuclear agreement, Iranian officials repeated calls for an injection of around \$100 billion in foreign investment into the country's oil, gas, and petrochemical sector. Most of Iran's oil wells have entered the second half of their lives. With 8 percent of oil production dropping automatically year on year, Iran desperately needs technology and capital from foreign countries just to stabilize its oil production. The U.S. ban on companies engaging in dollar deals with Iran, however, means that large financial institutions risk heavy fines from the Treasury Department, thus hampering any progress in Iran's ability to gain such investments through formal and legal restrictions.

Iran signed major agreements with foreign companies in the natural gas sector, including contracts for the development of the 11th phase of the South Pars field with both French and Chinese partners designed to increase the production capacity of the field by 56 million cubic meters per day. After the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal, however, the French company Total abandoned the contract, and China National Petroleum Corporation officials stated that only they would remain in Iran's natural gas sector. However, Chinese companies do not have a good record in Iran's oil industry. For instance, several Chinese companies have delayed work in the Azadegan Fields for no good reason. Also, Chinese firms with interests in the United States or in U.S.-funded projects may be reluctant to invest in Iran.

According to Mohammad Hassan Adeli, former secretary general of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, sanctions are one of the main reasons for Iran's failure in its gas export policy. However, other factors include the long process of achieving consensus on big decisions in Iran and a prevailing opinion among Iranian policy makers that gas should only be consumed domestically or turned into petrochemical products.

Iran has plans to increase its export of natural gas to other countries. For instance, Iran and Pakistan began work on a pipeline in March 2013 that would send 1.5 million cubic meters per day natural gas to Pakistan. However, US sanctions against Iran may force Pakistan to seek a less controversial alternative. Iran is also eyeing the European market. But gas exports to Europe face two major problems. Firstly, traditionally, Russia has dominated this market and Iran cannot hope to play as large a role as Russia in supplying gas to Europe. Second, in order to export Iranian gas via pipeline to Europe, Iran must secure transit through several intermediary countries.

Given recent developments in the energy market—not to mention the sanctions imposed by the Trump government—attracting foreign capital and technology to the Iranian energy industry, especially the natural gas industry, carries none of the optimism of previous years.

Foreign private companies have enough financial resources to make a splash in the Iranian market. But attracting foreign investment requires a suitable legal framework and an efficient and fast decision process, as well as political stability. In addition, Iran needs to revise its foreign policy and solve its issues with neighbors as well as the West. With neither foreign technology nor capital, Iran will not be able to produce more oil and gas to export to neighbors, let alone export to the EU.

At present, major natural gas producers such as Russia and the United States have made huge investments in their own natural gas sectors. If these major natural gas producers control the regional and world gas markets, Iran is likely to struggle to find importers. Boosting Iran's share of the market from one percent to 10 percent, as the government would like to do, is possible only with foreign investment, which requires a reduction of political risk in the country and an effort to eliminate tension with neighboring countries.

(Source: Lobelog)

Fragile alliance in the Gulf Cooperation Council



The notable issue is that Qatar not only does not take the position and role of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council very seriously, but other Arab countries have also noticed the intangible presence of the organization in the international arena.

While the king of Saudi Arabia, Salman bin Abdul Aziz, invited the Qatari emir to attend a coming meeting, it is not yet known whether Qatar's Emir intends to participate. Qatar could easily be planning to exit the PGCC.

In any case, it can be predicted that the withdrawal of Qatar from the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council after leaving OPEC will prompt anger and dissatisfaction with the U.S. because the Trump administration

repeatedly has aimed to solve the Persian Gulf crisis and called on the alliance of these countries against Iran. The U.S. has been attempting to create an alliance, a so-called "Arab NATO", against Tehran's regional influence.

The U.S. did not make any move against Saudi Arabia for the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, but it did apparently set a deadline for the resolution of the matter.

The Arab countries set up the PGCC originally believing that they could achieve a cultural, political, and social unity, but eventually, like the Arab League, it became a fragile alliance due to differences in views and positions on a variety of issues.



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Iranian incubator manufactures amblyopia therapy device

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — An Iranian incubator at Iran University of Medical Sciences has manufactured a device for treatment of amblyopia, also known as lazy eye, IRNA news agency reported on Saturday.

Amblyopia is a vision development disorder in which an eye fails to achieve normal visual acuity, even with prescription eyeglasses or contact lenses.

The newly developed limited edition device can perfectly help in shortening the treatment course, Mehdi Zare Bidaki, the project manager of the amblyopia therapy device, said.

Typically amblyopia becomes much harder to treat after about 7-9 years of age, however, the device is capable of treating people with lazy eye aging above 7 or even 50 years, Zare Bidaki added.

The device has been manufactured for the first time in Iran, he said, adding that the device will be also effective in treatment of strabismus [crossed eyes] or some other apparent eye misalignment, as well as age-related eye diseases.

Currently it takes one to two years for lazy eyes to be treated, though it might take even longer depending on the type and severity of the disease, he said, stating that using amblyopia therapy device patients can be treated after receiving 10 to 17 therapy sessions, each taking 20 minutes.

While treatment were believed to on work with children aging under 7 now everyone can receive therapy, he highlighted.

Elsewhere in his remarks Zare Bidaki mentioned vision screening tests run by Iran's Welfare Organization which resulted in decreasing the disease incidence from 2 percent to 0.2 percent nationwide.

According to All about Vision, amblyopia begins during infancy and early childhood. In most cases, only one eye is affected. But in some cases, reduced visual acuity can occur in both eyes.



Currently it takes one to two years for lazy eyes to be treated, though it might take even longer depending on the type and severity of the disease. But using amblyopia therapy device patients can be treated after receiving 10 to 17 therapy sessions, each taking 20 minutes.

■ Causes of amblyopia

Amblyopia commonly starts when one eye has much better focus than the other. Sometimes, one is more farsighted or has lots of astigmatism, but the other doesn't, according to WebMD.

When your child's brain gets both a blurry image and a clear one, it starts to ignore

the blurry one. If this goes on for months or years in a young child, vision in the blurry eye will get worse.

Sometimes a child's eyes don't line up like they should. One could turn in or out. The doctor will call this strabismus, and it can also lead to amblyopia. Kids who have it can't focus their eyes together on an image,

so they often see double.

All children should be tested before they are school-age.

■ How to treat amblyopia

The most common method is to force your child's brain to start using the weak eye. First, the doctor will correct any underlying problems in that eye, like nearsightedness, farsightedness, or astigmatism. Most kids with amblyopia also need glasses to help their eyes focus. If a cataract is blocking light from her eye, the doctor may recommend surgery to remove it.

Then he'll give her a patch to wear over her strong eye. At first, she'll have a hard time seeing with just the weak eye. But it's important that she wear the patch. Her vision will get better, though it might take weeks or months for that to happen. Follow the doctor's instructions carefully and bring your child in for scheduled visits so the doctor can see how the treatment is working.

After the doctor says her vision is back to normal, she won't have to wear the patch all the time. But sometimes when kids go back to using both eyes, they lose some vision in the weak eye. If that happens, she might have to wear the patch again.

In mild cases of amblyopia, the doctor might suggest using an eye drop called atropine. It blurs the strong eye so your child won't need to wear a patch.

If strabismus prevents her eyes from moving together like they should, your doctor might recommend surgery on her eye muscles.

With early diagnosis and treatment, most children will gain vision. Amblyopia becomes much harder to treat after about 7-9 years of age, so make sure your child gets eye exams early on.

Particularly if lazy eye is detected early in life and promptly treated, reduced vision can be avoided. But if left untreated, lazy eye can cause severe visual disability in the affected eye, including legal blindness.

A new blood test could help diagnose Alzheimer's



Doctors may find it hard to diagnose Alzheimer's disease before the obvious symptoms set in, and many of the current tests for it are expensive and complicated. However, researchers recently devised a blood test that could accurately detect this condition.

Recent research aimed to develop an accurate blood test to diagnose Alzheimer's.

According to the Alzheimer's Association, the condition will affect an estimated 5.7 million people in the United States by 2050.

Despite this, there are few ways of accurately diagnosing Alzheimer's disease early on.

These include MRI and CT scans, which help doctors rule out other conditions that might cause similar symptoms.

Another way of diagnosing Alzheimer's is by collecting cerebrospinal fluid and looking for biomarkers of the disease. This is the most accurate test for this neurodegenerative condition, but it is costly and invasive.

For all these reasons, researchers from Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, MA, have been developing a blood test for Alzheimer's that aims to be accurate, more cost-effective, and less unpleasant.

In the study paper, which appears in the journal Alzheimer's & Dementia, the researchers explain that the test may be able to detect biomarkers of Alzheimer's disease before the appearance of obvious symptoms.

■ Test may be 'a transformative breakthrough'

One mark of Alzheimer's and other types of dementia in the brain is the formation of toxic plaques, some of which appear due to a buildup of tau proteins.

Tau proteins are made of related molecules with somewhat different properties. In the new study, the researchers started by devising a method to identify the specific subset of tau molecules that appear at high levels in Alzheimer's disease.

The researchers came up with ways of detecting different types of tau molecules in both blood and cerebrospinal fluid, and they tested these methods in samples of

plasma (a blood component) and cerebrospinal fluid from two sets of participants (65 in the first group and 86 in the other).

One group of samples came from volunteers enrolled in the Harvard Aging Brain Study, and some who had participated in research at the Institute of Neurology in London, United Kingdom.

The second group came from volunteers recruited by specialists at the Shiley-Marcos Alzheimer's Disease Research Center at the University of California, San Diego.

The team assessed five tests for tau molecules, looking to see which would be most effective. In the end, the scientists settled on a test that they called "the NT1 assay," which demonstrated both sensitivity and specificity, meaning that it was able to accurately detect Alzheimer's.

"A blood test for Alzheimer's disease," claims study author Dominic Walsh, "could be administered easily and repeatedly, with patients going to their primary care office rather than having to go into [the] hospital."

"Ultimately, a blood-based test could replace cerebrospinal fluid testing and/or brain imaging," he suggests, adding, "Our new test has the potential to do just that."

"Our test will need further validation in many more people, but if it performs as in the initial two cohorts, it would be a transformative breakthrough."

The researchers stress that while they verified the test in blood samples from two different cohorts, they will need to conduct further trials with larger groups of participants to fully establish the effectiveness of the test.

Also, they now aim to learn more about how tau protein levels change as the condition progresses, compared with their levels before Alzheimer's symptoms set in.

"We've made our data and the tools needed to perform our test widely available because we want other research groups to put this to test. It's important for others to validate our findings so that we can be certain this test will work across different populations," notes Walsh.

(Source: flipboard.com)

Vitamin D deficiency increases schizophrenia risk



Some research suggests a link between low vitamin D levels and a person's risk of developing schizophrenia. New evidence indicates that this notion may be correct.

A new study has investigated the link between low vitamin D levels and schizophrenia risk.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, schizophrenia is one of the leading causes of disability worldwide.

Symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, and cognitive problems characterize schizophrenia.

So far, however, researchers have been unable to find out exactly what causes this condition.

That being said, they have identified some likely risk factors — such as the presence of certain sets of genes, or exposure to some viruses.

Due to older research suggesting that schizophrenia might be more prevalent in regions with less sun, some scientists have hypothesized that vitamin D deficiency may also be a risk factor for this condition.

A recent study led by teams from Aarhus University in Denmark and the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, has found that newborn babies with low vitamin D levels are more at risk of developing schizophrenia later on.

"Much of the attention in schizophrenia research has been focused on modifiable factors early in life with the goal of reducing the burden of this disease," says lead study author Prof. John McGrath.

"Previous research identified an increased risk of schizophrenia associated with being born in winter or spring and living in a high-latitude country, such as Denmark."

In the study paper, which appears in the journal Scientific Reports, the authors report that vitamin D deficiency in newborn babies may be responsible for approximately 8 percent of all schizophrenia cases in Denmark.

■ A 44 percent increase in risk

The new study assessed the data of 2,602 people in Denmark. The researchers analyz-

ed vitamin D levels in blood samples from babies born in Denmark in 1981–2000. All of these eventually developed schizophrenia in early adulthood.

Prof. McGrath and his team compared these samples with additional ones from schizophrenia-free individuals whom scientists had matched by date of birth and biological sex to those in the initial cohort.

The team discovered that those born with a vitamin D deficiency had a 44 percent higher risk of developing schizophrenia later in life. Also, this deficiency in newborns could account for about 8 percent of all schizophrenia diagnoses in Denmark, the authors suggest.

"We hypothesized," explains Prof. McGrath, "that low vitamin D levels in pregnant women due to a lack of sun exposure during winter months might underlie this risk, and [we] investigated the association between vitamin D deficiency and risk of schizophrenia."

Preventing vitamin D deficiency in women who are pregnant, he says, may therefore also prevent children's later risk of schizophrenia.

According to Prof. McGrath, "As the developing fetus is totally reliant on mother's vitamin D stores, our findings suggest that ensuring pregnant women have adequate levels of vitamin D may result in the prevention of some schizophrenia cases in a manner comparable [with] the role [that] folate supplementation has played in the prevention of spina bifida."

In the future, the researchers aim to organize a clinical trial assessing whether or not administering vitamin D supplements to women who are pregnant could effectively protect their children from exposure to neurodevelopmental conditions.

"The next step is to conduct randomized clinical trials of vitamin D supplements in pregnant women who are vitamin D deficient, in order to examine the impact on child brain development and risk of neurodevelopmental [conditions] such as autism and schizophrenia," says Prof. McGrath.

(Source: Medical News Today)

What are the treatments for obesity?

Obesity can happen for a number of reasons, including diet, a sedentary lifestyle, genetic factors, a health condition, or the use of certain medications. A number of treatment options can help people to achieve and maintain a suitable weight.

Carrying excess weight can increase the risk of a number of health problems. Losing weight can be frustrating and difficult, but even losing just 5–10 percent of body weight can bring significant health benefits, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

■ 1. Dietary changes

Replacing high-fat foods with more fruits and vegetables can help a person to lose weight.

One reason why excess weight and fat accumulate is when a person consumes more calories than they use. Over time, this can lead to weight gain.

Some types of food are more likely to lead to weight gain. Some processed foods contain additives, such as high-fructose corn syrup. This can cause changes in the body that result in additional weight gain.

Reducing the intake of processed, refined, and ready-made food that is high in sugar and fat, while increasing the consumption of whole grains and other high-fiber foods — such as fresh fruits and vegetables — can help a person to lose weight.

One advantage of a high-fiber diet is that the body feels full more quickly, making it less tempting to eat more. Whole grains help a person to feel full for longer, because they release their energy more slowly.

Fiber and whole grains can also help to reduce the risk of a number of conditions related to metabolic syndrome.

Metabolic syndrome is a condition that involves a number of health problems, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular problems. It is more common in people with obesity.

A doctor or dietitian can help to suggest a strategy and possibly a suitable weight-loss program.

■ Avoid crash-dieting

Trying to lose weight quickly by crash-dieting carries the following risks:

New health problems may develop.

Vitamin deficiencies can occur.

It is more difficult to achieve healthy weight loss.

In some cases, a doctor may suggest that a person with severe obesity should follow a very low-calorie liquid diet. A health professional should monitor this strategy to ensure that the person remains safe while following the diet.

■ 2. Physical activity

Climbing the stairs instead of taking the elevator can be good exercise.

While the body does burn some calories even when a person is just sitting or sleeping, for most people, the more active they are, the more calories the body will burn.

However, this can take time. To lose one pound of fat, a person needs to burn 3,500 calories.

Good ways to start getting active include: walking briskly, swimming, using the stairs instead of the elevator, getting off the bus or train one stop earlier and walking the rest of the way.

Doing chores such as gardening, housework, or walking the dog all contribute.

The CDC suggest doing 60–90 minutes of moderately intense activity most days of the week.

People who are not used to exercising or who find it difficult to be active due to health or mobility problems should speak to a health professional about how to exercise and how to get started.

A person who is not in the habit of exercising should not start with too strenuous an activity, as this could pose a health risk.

■ 3. Weight-loss medications

A doctor will sometimes prescribe medication, such as orlistat (Xenical) to help a person lose weight.

However, they usually only do this if: dietary changes and exercise have not resulted in weight loss and the person's weight poses a significant risk to their health.

The National Institutes of Health note that people should use medication alongside a reduced-calorie diet. Orlistat does not replace lifestyle changes.

Side effects include gastrointestinal symptoms, such as fatty stool and increased or decreased defecation. Some people have reported unwanted effects on the respiratory system, muscles and joints, headaches, and others.

From 1997 to 2010, doctors were able to prescribe sibutramine, too, but the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) withdrew approval in 2010, due to concerns about serious adverse effects.

■ 4. Surgery

Weight loss, or bariatric, surgery involves removing or changing a part of a person's stomach or small intestine so that they do not consume as much food or absorb as many calories as before.

This can help an individual to lose weight and also reduce the risk of high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and other aspects of metabolic syndrome that can occur with obesity.

Surgery can either make the stomach smaller, or it can bypass part of the digestive system.

■ Gastric sleeve or gastric band

The surgeon uses a gastric sleeve or a gastric band to make the stomach smaller.

After the operation, a person cannot consume more than about one cup of food during each sitting. This significantly reduces food intake.

■ Gastric bypass

The procedure enables food to bypass parts of the digestive system, specifically the first part of the mid-section of the small intestine. It may also reduce the size of the stomach.

This is generally more effective than restrictive procedures, but there is a higher risk of vitamin and mineral deficiencies, as the body can no longer absorb as many nutrients.

A doctor may recommend surgery for a person who has a body mass index of 40 or above, or lower than 40 if they have other health issues.

Surgeons often do bariatric surgery as a laparoscopic, or key-hole procedure.

■ 5. Hormonal treatment

Hormonal treatment might one day help people with obesity. Scientists who published a study in 2014 noted that part of the success of bariatric surgery may be the impact it has on gut hormones.

Harnessing these hormones could lead to novel, non-surgical options.

The researchers suggest that combining certain hormones might provide an effective therapy.

■ 6. Browning white fat cells

Humans and other mammals contain two types of fat cell: Brown-fat cells burn calories and produce heat.

White-fat cells store calories.

(Source: Medical News Today)

Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey to spend \$2m on regional startup center

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran, Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey are to invest \$500,000 each on establishing a regional startup center, Iran's information and communication technology (ICT) minister has said.

Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi called the center as a place for exchanging information and technology in the field of technology for young generation, Tasnim reported on Friday.



Iranian experts have a great knowledge in space technology, which can lead to wealth creation in the region, he explained.

Iran has already invested over five billion dollars to develop ICT infrastructures, however, other countries should also cooperate in this field, he said.

With remote sensing satellite, a country can predict sand and dust storm and flood, however, its manufacturing is costly, he said.

"However, using these satellites jointly by regional countries can be beneficial," he said.

He also extolled startups active in the field of agriculture, which helped water saving and pesticide.


With replacement of traditional methods, Iranian startups save 35 percent of water resources and 300 thousand dollars in pesticide industry, he explained.

The four countries discussed the issue on the sidelines of Bakutel 2018, which was held from December 4 to 7 at the Baku Expo Center.

Tech that will (probably) die in 2019

It's that time of year again, folks. Let's make some wild prognostications about the tech industry and play grim reaper for the devices and tech trends we don't expect to make it to 2020.

There are plenty of reasons tech becomes obsolete. The tech world operates just like the natural one: weeding out the chaff through cold, unsentimental natural selection. Buying habits, user behavior, societal trends, and the forward march of technological innovation always leave a heap of failed or outdated products, companies, and trends in the dust.



First, let's take a look at how last year's predictions turned out:

- **Essential Phone.** Ugh. Essential isn't dead, but it's on life support. The high-end modular smartphone didn't sell well, which prompted the company to lay off staff and refocus on a new product in October. Of course, that was before the New York Times investigative report into Google's handling of sexual harassers, including Android and Essential founder Andy Rubin. And yet, Essential still announced a \$149 headphone dongle last month. It's time for Essential and Andy Rubin to go away.
- **Initial Coin Offerings.** ICOs haven't died, but as regulatory agencies like the SEC have cracked down on scams and fraudsters and the crypto market as a whole has taken a nosedive, there are a lot less new, exorbitantly priced ICOs popping up than there were a year ago.
- **Apple iPods.** Nope, you can still buy an iPod touch. As for any hope of buying a standalone Apple music player that's as compact and durable as my beloved iPod nano, we're all out of luck.
- **Anything Competing With Amazon.** Well this one was a bit broad. Amazon has bought its way into everything from grocery stores and entertainment to pharmaceuticals, on top of expanding its dominant e-commerce empire. But the corporate overlord isn't infallible. Amazon recently shuttered its Amazon Restaurants food delivery service in the UK.
- **Snapchat Spectacles.** Somehow...no! Not only did Snap release a version two of Snapchat Spectacles, but there are rumors of a version three.
- **Sony A-Mount.** Nope, still kickin'.
- **Pentax.** Still alive and well, and releasing new cameras.
- **Prisma.** It still exists, but in the eyes of consumers, it's long since passed into the app heap of history. If you disagree and still use Prisma, feel free to sound off in the comments.
- **Manual Vacuums.** Okay, so we didn't all throw out our vacuums in the past year. But the robovac revolution is coming...
- **Skype for Business /Wunderlist.** Yep, these are gone and replaced by Microsoft Teams and Microsoft To-Do, respectively.
- **MoviePass.** On death's doorstep. We're re-upping our death prediction this year.
- **The Internet.** This one was symbolic, okay. The internet is still alive and as terrible a place as ever, but despite an ongoing fight to restore it, net neutrality is most decidedly dead.

Now, to this year's predictions.

(Source: pcmag.com)

‘Plans underway to develop digital transformation’

TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Information and Communication Technology Ministry (ICT) has several plans for developing digital transformation, ICT Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said on Saturday, IRNA reported.

An appropriate ecosystem in information technology paves the way for digital transformation, he explained.

The IT industry is one of the infrastructures for development of industry in the field of ICT, he said.

Azari Jahromi said that there is a great capacity for using Internet of Things (IoT) in Iran.

The ICT ministry is providing an ecosystem for urban services in the near future.

"We have also discussed the role of digital transformation during meetings with the health minister Hassan Qazizadeh Hashemi," he explained.

The IoT capacities for digital transformation in water and electricity industry are finalized, he said.

In July, the ICT ministry and the Ministry of Energy signed an agreement to boost job creation and improve efficiency in the field of water and electricity through technological advancement.

He named digital transformation in agri-



culture as another part of ecosystem.

Smart irrigation is a great method to deal with water shortage and environmental problems, he said.

According to an agreement signed by the ICT ministry and the Ministry of Agriculture in July, it was projected that at least 20 percent of the agricultural economy to be linked with the digital economy over the

course of four years.

It covers smart irrigation and pest control via space technology.

Iran is heading to development of digital economy and the University of Tehran is responsible for research in this field, he said.

The ICT ministry holds about 50 workshops in different provinces in recent year to introduce digital economy, he said.

■ E-government not a claim

The ICT ministry is providing infrastructures for e-government and it is not a claim, Azari Jahromi said.

Today people can register for smart cards for purchasing gasoline with three clicks, he said.

Iran started issuing smart cards for purchasing gasoline on December 3 through "Mobile Government" - the first phase of e-government services project which came on stream in May.

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.

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

He said that the ministry plans to stop issuing paper bill for different services in near future.

The Mobile Government 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.

Govt. supports startups in cultural spheres: official



TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The government supports startups which are using hi-tech in cultural and social areas, an official with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs said, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Amir Hossein Al-e Es'haq said that these startups improve innovation and entrepreneurship among young generation.

The cooperation of state-run organization with startups and private sector has a crucial role in facilitation

of cultural issues, he said.

The industrial park for science, soft technology and culture in Tehran also attracts more cultural companies active in the field of innovative industry, the head of the park Mohammad Hossein Imani Khoshkhu announced in late October.

The park also aims to attract startups active in the field of culture and manifest that the culture section can be productive and there is no need for financial support in this section.

AI, robotics an alternative for oil income: academic



TECHNOLOGY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's achievements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics have the capacities to replace the country's oil exports in the future, the chairman of the Iranian national RoboCup committee announced, IRNA reported on Friday.

Morteza Mousakhani made the remarks on the sidelines of the RoboCup Asia Pacific (RCAP) 2018 competition, which was held at the Persian Gulf island of Kish from December 5 to 10.

The improvement of AI technology leads

to promoting industry and increasing export, he explained.

Over 250 teams from 16 countries including Malaysia, Russia, Singapore, Japan, South Korea and China participated in the competition and the 9th Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Robotics is going to be held today on the sidelines of the event.

RCAP is a super-regional headquarter representing the RoboCup Federation coordinating RoboCup activities in the Asia Pacific region. RCAP headquarters is located in Singapore.

Blockchain: What's it good for? Absolutely nothing, report finds

In a joint report for the Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning (MERL) Technology conference this fall, researchers who studied 43 blockchain use cases came to the conclusion that all underdelivered on claims.

And, when they reached out to several blockchain providers about project results, the silence was deafening. "Not one was willing to share data," the researchers said in their blog post.

In their research, Christine Murphy, a social researcher at Social Solutions International and John Burg and Jean Paul Pétraud, fellows at the U.S. Agency for International Development, found a proliferation of press releases, white papers and persuasively written articles touting the many attributes of the distributed ledger technology (DLT).

"However, we found no documentation or evidence of the results blockchain was purported to have achieved in these claims. We also did not find lessons learned or practical insights, as are available for other technologies in development," the researchers reported.

"Despite all the hype about how blockchain will bring unparalleled transparency to processes and operations in low-trust environments, the industry is itself opaque. From this, we determined the lack of evidence supporting value claims of blockchain in the international development space is a critical gap for potential adopters," they added.

Blockchain pilots and proofs-of-concept, however, are not without value, the researchers noted; in the end, the real value of blockchain deployments may not be technology itself, "but rather as an impetus to question what we do, why we do it, and how we could do it better."

The scathing evaluation of blockchain by the research trio was backed to some extent by industry analysts, who said the marketing hype around it has created unrealistic expectations, especially as enterprise use is not yet fully baked.

Avivah Litan, a Gartner vice president and distinguished analyst, said while the report's findings came as no surprise to her, it lacked balance. The researchers did not bother to ask why projects had not delivered on goals, such as improving transactional efficiency, transparency and privacy, she said.

"Back in early 2018, we'd already said... 99% of enterprise projects are dead end; 99% don't need the technology; they don't get out of the lab. They're a result of CEOs fear of missing out — the FOMO phenomenon," Litan said. "Having said all that, it's a very valuable technology. People started trying to use it before it was ready for prime time. That's true in the cryptocurrency world and in the enterprise blockchain world."

Gartner gauges the maturation of new technology through a "Hype Cycle," a graphic-based lifecycle that follows five phases: from the Technology Trigger, when proof-of-concept stories and media interest emerges, to the Plateau of Productivity, when mainstream adoption occurs — if the technology is more than niche.

Among those five Hype Cycles is the Trough of Disillusionment, when interest wanes as pilots and proofs-of-concepts fail to deliver and technology providers either work out the kinks and improve the technology to the satisfaction of users, or ultimately fail and die out.

Enterprise blockchain technology that's centrally administered like a traditional database yet still part of a peer-to-peer architecture that immutably stores encrypted transactions is headed into the Trough of Disillusionment, Litan said.

"Blockchain winter has come," Litan said.

Earlier this year, a Gartner CIO survey revealed on average that only 3.3% of companies worldwide had actually deployed blockchain in a production environment.

In a blog post, Litan listed eight hurdles needed for blockchain to advance and meet the goals stated by technology providers hawking it as a cure-all for virtually any international, transactional network need - from fee-less, cross-border payments to supply chain tracking.

A Gartner survey of CIOs last spring revealed only 1% had blockchain deployed in production environments; that number has grown to 3.3% today, according to Gartner Distinguished Analyst Avivah Litan.

The challenges include a more efficient consensus algorithm, a more scalable design — including the ability to move the bulk of data "off chain" to a separate database — and data confidentiality through zero knowledge proofs (ZKP), a cryptography technology that allows a user to prove funds, assets or identifying information exist without revealing the information behind it.

"Until such time that these hurdles are surmounted, most permissioned blockchain projects will remain in development or POC mode," Litan said. "More importantly, they will not support the key blockchain tenet of decentralization, so under those circumstances, these projects are likely much better off using proven legacy database technology."

Industry groups and vendors are working to overcome those hurdles. For example, Ernst & Young has created a public blockchain prototype it plans to launch in 2019 that lets companies use ZKPs to complete business transactions confidentially.

The Hyperledger Foundation and the Enterprise Ethereum Alliance (EEA) — the two largest open-source blockchain consortiums — have teamed up to tackle performance issues, including developing "Layer 2" architectures for offloading data from blockchains to aid scalability.

Ninety percent of goods in global trade are carried by the ocean shipping industry each year. A new blockchain solution from IBM and Maersk will help manage and track the paper trail of tens of millions of shipping containers across the world by digitizing the supply chain process.

Martha Bennett, a principal analyst for Forrester Research, noted any blockchain or "DLT" project is a long-term

strategic initiative, and disappointment is inevitable "when the hoped-for miracles fail to materialize."

"It's not realistic to expect a solid cost model or definitive benefits statement because it's simply too early for that," Bennett said via email. "To assemble real evidence, we need to have a number of fully operationalized, scaled-out deployments running for at least a couple of years. And we're simply not there yet."

Just as there are many projects that exist only in white paper or conference presentation format — where language is all about the "could have" potential — "equally, there are many initiatives that are going forward because it's clear to the participants that the benefits are achievable," Bennett added.

For example, Walmart has for the past two years been piloting a produce supply chain powered by IBM's blockchain service. The pilot has been so successful, Walmart recently presented its suppliers with an edict: get your product data into the system by September, 2019 so it can be tracked from farm to store.

After piloting a blockchain-based supply chain tracking system, the retailers are telling suppliers to get their product data into the system so they can begin tracking produce from farm to store. The deadline: September 2019.

Fintech software provider MonetaGo deployed the first Hyperledger Fabric production blockchain for financial institutions to gain financing approval. The network has been live since March and is used by the licensed Trade Receivables Exchanges in India.

"The network boasts 100% uptime and is scalable to meet the rapidly growing needs of the Indian market," MonetaGo CEO Jesse Chenard said via email. "Once frauds, fuzzy matches, and operational errors are accounted for, the return on investment is approximately 631.46. Understandably, this number is extremely high due to preferred pricing for early network participants. At scale, MonetaGo anticipates the ROI to be 45. That means for every dollar spent on the blockchain technology, companies can expect to make about 45 dollars back."

The Linux Foundation, which oversees the Hyperledger Foundation, pointed to other successful pilots, such as blockchain supply chain deployments by the diamond industry.

The TrustChain blockchain network will track and authenticate diamonds, precious metals and jewelry at all stages of the global supply chain, from the mine to the retailer.

"We recently concluded a perception survey on developers and financial decision makers at large companies using or considering blockchain. Almost 90% of the 376 respondents who responded to the online survey in August and September expect moderate to high growth in business blockchain over the next two years," a spokesperson for the Linux Foundation said via email. "A similar majority see business blockchain as a core technology of the future that will enable new business models to emerge."

(Source: computerworld.com)

Research team finds 2018 global CO2 emissions tick up again

For a young student, report-card season can be an exciting, stressful, or even depressing time of year. The annual tally of the world’s climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions is a little like that — but with a lot more on the line than a B in language arts. And unfortunately, 2018’s tally once again brings us short of a passing mark.

This annual project is the work of a large group of carbon-cycle scientists that updates the books to be as accurate a record as possible. The scientists also project the final tally for the current year based on all the available data at the time of publication.

Last year, for example, the projection for 2017 was a global CO2-emissions increase of 2 percent, with error bars spanning 0.8–3.0 percent. This year’s update to the dataset puts the actual number at 1.6 percent. Interestingly, China’s emissions were projected to grow 3.5 percent (range 0.7–5.4 percent), but they appear to have ended up just 1.5 percent higher. Still, that brought an end to a brief stretch when China’s emissions had actually declined from a 2013 peak.

Greenhouse gas emissions

Projections for 2018 signal that a renewed growth of global greenhouse gas emissions is underway.



The global total is projected to increase by around 2.7 percent over last year. Even U.S. emissions, which have been slowly declining for about a decade, look to bounce up about 2.5 percent in 2018.

However, that seems to be primarily because of the weather — higher-than-normal heating demand in the winter and cooling demand in the summer. Don’t expect that bounce to continue next year.

Total and per capita emissions over time, through 2017. The solid line shows emissions from within nations, while the dotted line shows emissions due to their consumption of goods.

Strong growth

Emissions from the 28 European Union nations (which still includes the UK) are projected to decline 0.7 percent, roughly maintaining a long-term trend. Emissions in rapidly developing India, on the other hand, are projected to rise 6.3 percent (range 4.3–8.3 percent) thanks to strong growth in coal and oil use.

China, too, is seeing a significant uptick and is projected to grow by 4.7 percent (range 2–7.4 percent) this year. While the strongest growth there is in natural gas use (up almost 18 percent), coal use also went up 4.5 percent despite a trend away from that fuel.

In the absence of a crystal ball, it’s tempting to over-interpret the numbers from any individual year and extrapolate into the future.

(Source: arstechnica.com)

In Antarctica, scientists enter an extreme state of ‘psychological hibernation’

Some of the world’s most important science is conducted in one of its most inhospitable, hostile places. But not without a cost, new research reveals.

A new long-term analysis of researchers stationed in Antarctica sheds new light on a psychological phenomenon very few of us ever have to experience: a unique coping mechanism, triggered when people are confined in isolation within a dark and extreme physical environment for several months at a time.

People could also be susceptible in other exceptional kinds of prolonged confinement, researchers think, like during months-long missions travelling to (or stationed on) Mars, for example.

“Our findings could reflect a form of psychological hibernation,” explains one of the researchers behind the new study, psychologist Nathan Smith from the University of Manchester in the UK.

Uncontrollable conditions

“Previous research has suggested that this is a protective mechanism against chronic stress, which makes sense — if conditions are uncontrollable, but you know that at some point in the future things will get better, you may choose to reduce coping efforts in order to preserve energy.”

To gain a better understanding of how winter-over syndrome presents itself, Smith’s team studied the psychological well-being of two crews of research staff based at Antarctica’s Concordia Station, run jointly by France and Italy, and located on the Antarctica Plateau in East Antarctica.

The 27 participants — who were stationed at the facility in two separate groups for roughly 10 months at a time, including the dark winter months — had their sleep quality measured via a sleep diary they filled in throughout the experiment.

They were also gauged on their emotional health and coping strategies, via two psychometric questionnaires: respectively, the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule



(PANAS) and the Utrecht Coping List (UCL).

The winter months

What Smith and fellow researchers found was that the participants’ sleep quality and emotional state both suffered during the largely indoors confinement of the winter months, both of which began to recover when the summer brought warmer, brighter weather conditions.

“Perhaps the most striking result from this study was the reduction in all of observed coping strategies during the midwinter period,” the authors explain in their paper.

“This pattern contradicts the idea that emotional strategies and avoidance take over from more active strategies in situations involving chronic stressors.”

In other words, the researchers had expected active forms of behavior during the winter (such as problem-solving abilities) to decline, but passive forms (emotions like denial and depression) to increase.

But that’s now what happened. In the study, these passive forms of coping also seemed to decline in response to the extreme confinement, resulting in a general indifference and emotional flatness.

While the pseudo-hibernation comes with its share of negative symptoms, the researchers speculate it may have some positives, offering a way of dealing with the harshness and stress of long periods of confinement with little or no stimulation, and likening it to the ability to ‘switch off’ mentally from work stress.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

How do animals breathe underwater?

Hundreds of millions of years ago, very, very distant ancestors of humans — and of all land animals with backbones and four limbs — had this water-breathing ability, but it was lost after the first air-breathing creatures began living on land full time.

As it happens, there’s plenty of dissolved oxygen in most of the planet’s seas, lakes and rivers, though our air-breathing lungs simply can’t process it. But the world’s water dwellers have evolved several other methods for accessing oxygen in water, experts told Live Science.

Some animals such as jellyfish absorb the oxygen in water directly through their skin. A gastrovascular cavity inside their bodies serves a dual purpose: digesting food, and moving oxygen and carbon dioxide around, Rebecca Helm, an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina, Asheville, told Live Science.

Forms of microbial life

In fact, Earth’s earliest forms of microbial life that used oxygen obtained it the same way as jellies do — through diffusion. This form of respiration likely appeared around 2.8 billion years ago, “sometime after cyanobacteria started pumping oxygen into the atmosphere,” according to ocean scientist Juli Berwald.

“Because they only have an outer cell layer and an inner cell layer and their insides are jelly and don’t have cells, they don’t need as much oxygen as animals that have actual tissues on the inside,” Berwald told Live Science in an email.

“It’s much slower than using a circulatory system to bring oxygen to far reaches of the body. That probably means that there’s a limit on how big jellyfish can grow,” Berwald added.

Breathing through oxygen diffusion over the body surface is also found in echinoderms — a group of marine animals that includes starfish, sea stars, sea urchins and sea cucumbers.

Sea stars absorb oxygen as water flows over bumps on their skin called papulae, and



through grooves in other structures called tube feet, invertebrate zoologist Christopher Mah, a researcher with the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., told Live Science.

Specialized adaptation for breathing

Some types of shallow-water sea cucumbers, however, have a different type of specialized adaptation for breathing: a respiratory “tree” structure located in the body cavity near the anus. As the cucumber’s rectal opening sucks water into its body, the respiratory tree extracts oxygen and expels carbon dioxide.

In fish, gills have proved to be a successful system for respiration, using a network of blood vessels to draw in oxygen from flowing water and diffuse it through gill membranes, according to the Northeast Fisheries Science Center.

Across most fish, gills have the “same basic blueprint,” Solomon David, an assistant professor with the Department of Biological Sciences at Nicholls State University in Louisiana, told Live Science.

“They’re made to have this countercurrent exchange of gas — pull oxygen out and release waste,” David said. When fish gape their mouths, they create a current of water flowing over their gills. Reddish, highly vascularized tissue sucks out oxygen and expels carbon dioxide, “kind of like capillaries in our alveoli,” he said.

(Source: Live Science)

Researchers develop method to transfer entire 2D circuits to any smooth surface

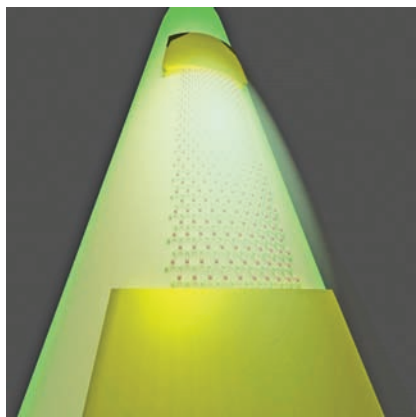
What if a sensor sensing a thing could be part of the thing itself? Rice University engineers believe they have a two-dimensional solution to do just that.

Rice engineers led by materials scientists Pulickel Ajayan and Jun Lou have developed a method to make atom-flat sensors that seamlessly integrate with devices to report on what they perceive.

Electronically active 2D materials have been the subject of much research since the introduction of graphene in 2004. Even though they are often touted for their strength, they’re difficult to move to where they’re needed without destroying them.

The Ajayan and Lou groups, along with the lab of Rice engineer Jacob Robinson, have a new way to keep the materials and their associated circuitry, including electrodes, intact as they’re moved to curved or other smooth surfaces.

The Rice team tested the concept by



making a 10-nanometer-thick indium selenide photodetector with gold electrodes and placing it onto an optical fiber. Because it was so close, the near-field sensor effectively coupled with an evanescent field - the oscillating

electromagnetic wave that rides the surface of the fiber - and accurately detected the flow of information inside.

Hindering the signal flow

The benefit is that these sensors can now be imbedded into such fibers where they can monitor performance without adding weight or hindering the signal flow.

“This paper proposes several interesting possibilities for applying 2D devices in real applications,” Lou said. “For example, optical fibers at the bottom of the ocean are thousands of miles long, and if there’s a problem, it’s hard to know where it occurred. If you have these sensors at different locations, you can sense the damage to the fiber.”

Lou said labs have gotten good at transferring the growing roster of 2D materials from one surface to another, but the addition of electrodes and other components complicates the process. “Think about a transistor,” he said. “It has source, drain and gate electrodes

and a dielectric (insulator) on top, and all of these have to be transferred intact.

Raw 2D materials are often moved with a layer of polymethyl methacrylate (PMMA), more commonly known as Plexiglas, on top, and the Rice researchers make use of that technique. But they needed a robust bottom layer that would not only keep the circuit intact during the move but could also be removed before attaching the device to its target. (The PMMA is also removed when the circuit reaches its destination.)

The ideal solution was polydimethylglutarimide (PMGI), which can be used as a device fabrication platform and easily etched away before transfer to the target. “We’ve spent quite some time to develop this sacrificial layer,” Lou said. PMGI appears to work for any 2D material, as the researchers experimented successfully with molybdenum diselenide and other materials as well.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Scientists discover new molecular insights of spider silk

Spider silk belongs to the toughest fibers in nature and has astounding properties. Scientists have now discovered new molecular details of self-assembly of a spider silk fiber protein.

This is a schematic scheme of a spidroin consisting of an assembled C-terminal domain (cyan), the unfolded central domain (white line) and the N-terminal domains (green).

They are lightweight, almost invisible, highly extensible and strong, and of course biodegradable: the threads spiders use to build their webs. In fact, spider silk belongs to the toughest fibers in nature. Based on its low weight it even supersedes high-tech threads like Kevlar or Carbon. Its unique combination of strength and extensibility renders it in particular attractive for industry. Whether in aviation industry, textile industry, or medicine -- potential applications of this magnificent material are manifold.

Material scientists have long sought to reproduce the fiber in the laboratory, but with limited success. Today, it is possible to manufacture artificial spider silk of similar properties as the prototype, but the molecular-level structural details responsible for material properties await to be disclosed. Now, scientists from the Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg (JMU) delivered new insights. Dr. Hannes Neuweiler, lecturer at the Institute of Biotechnology and Biophysics at the JMU, is in charge of this project.

The “silk fibers consist of protein building blocks, so-called spidroins, which are assembled by spiders within their spinning gland,” explains Neuweiler. The terminal ends of building blocks take special roles in this process. The two ends of a spidroin are terminated by an N- and a C-terminal domain.

The domains at both ends connect protein building blocks. In the present study, Neuweiler and colleagues took a close look at the C-terminal domain. The C-terminal domain connects two spidroins through formation of an intertwined structure that resembles a molecular clamp.

(Source: Science Daily)

Fluoride used in toothpaste could be key to longer battery life

Researchers have found a new way of making batteries last longer than the usual lithium ions by using fluoride present in toothpaste.

A team of chemists from California Institute of Technology (Caltech), Jet Propulsion Laboratory or JPL, as well as Honda Research Institute and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, experimented on the anion or the negatively charged form of fluoride to make batteries.

Robert Grubbs, Victor and Elizabeth Atkins Professor of Chemistry at Caltech, said that fluoride batteries can last up to eight times longer than the typical lithium-ion batteries used today. Fluoride’s higher density contributes to the battery’s better lifespan.

“Fluoride-based battery electrodes can store more ions per site than typical lithium-ion electrodes, which means that this technology has the capability to be much more energy dense,” said Brett Savoie, a professor of chemical engineering at Purdue University.

The researchers said that manufacturing this type of battery is challenging since fluoride is naturally corrosive and reactive. Instead of producing rechargeable fluoride batteries on solid components, the team used liquid components. The result is the first of its kind to work at room temperature.

To do this, fluoride ions are dissolved into a liquid electrolyte similar to the process of making lithium-ion batteries. The molecule responsible in dissolving fluoride ions is called bis (2,2,2-trifluoroethyl) ether or BTFE.

“For a battery that lasts longer, you need to move a greater number of charges,” said Simon Jones, co-author and a chemist at JPL. “Moving multiply charged metal cations is difficult, but a similar result can be achieved by moving several singly charged anions, which travel with comparative ease.”

Another challenge is figuring out how to make the batteries work at varying voltages. They found that fluoride’s anion is compatible with high-voltage power.

(Source: Tech Times)

Probe headed for Mercury fires most powerful ion drive ever built

The BepiColombo Mercury probe is a joint mission between the European Space Agency (ESA) and Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA). The probe is intended to study Mercury’s magnetic field, magnetosphere, interior, and surface structures. It consists of two vehicles — the Mercury Planetary Orbiter (MPO) and the Mercury Magnetosphere Orbiter (MMO).

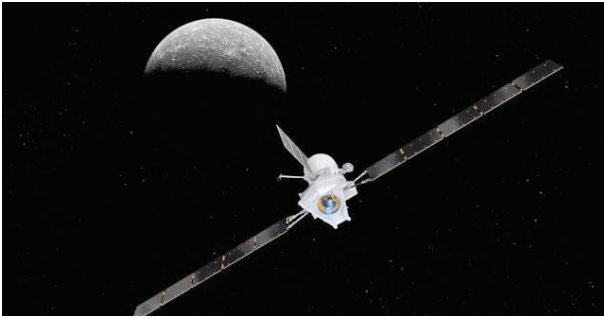
Repeated complaints to the ESA about this missing information have resulted in our emails being blocked.

It also packs the most powerful set of ion engines we’ve ever built into a spacecraft. Last week, scientists successfully tested those thrusters in space for the first time, in preparation for a mid-December burn that will put the spacecraft on its Mercury trajectory.

At first glance, the actual performance of the “most powerful ion drive ever built” may seem modest. The Mercury Transfer Module (aka the engine and support framework for the first two probes) uses four QinetiQ T6 ion thrusters capable of providing a maximum combined thrust of 290mN. One Newton is the amount of force required to give a 1kg mass an acceleration of one meter per second per second. 290mN attached to the bottom of a spacecraft may not sound like much, but this is the genius of ion drive propulsion.

Unlike chemical rockets, which provide vastly more thrust over much smaller periods of time, ion thrusters provide a small amount of thrust for a very long period of time. “Electric propulsion technology is very novel and extremely delicate,” explains Elsa Montagnon, Spacecraft Operations Manager for BepiColombo. Either approach can work to achieve Mercury orbit, but Mercury is actually one of the more difficult planets in the solar system to achieve a stable orbit around in the first place. Mercury is moving around the sun at an orbital velocity of 47.87km/s, compared with Earth’s 29.78km/s.

(Source: extremetech.com)



CBI Governor calls for banks to support industrial production units

Head of Coordinating Council of State-Owned Banks and CEO of Bank Melli Iran (BMI) Dr. Hosseinzadeh said that the Governor of Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati has called for all banks of the country to support industrial and production units of the country especially at the current condition that the country faces with US sanctions, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

He pointed to the recent remarks of the Central Bank of Bank and said, “background of reform of the banking system of the country should not be weakened.”

Recently, Governor of Central Bank of Iran (CBI) called for paying due attention of the banks on the way of provision of working capital in the industrial and production units of the country, he maintained.

He reiterated that revising banking system is necessary, adding, “in this regard, banks of the country burden heavy responsibility and should play a leading role in spurring production and generating employment.”

In the end, CEO of Bank Melli Iran (BMI) once again called on all banks in the country to roll up their sleeves in order to materialize most economic objectives of industrial and production units, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank concluded.

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\$400m needed for insurance of villagers, nomads: minister

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The minister of labor, cooperatives and social welfare has called on the Planning and Budget Organization to allocate a total budget of 17 trillion rials (about \$400 million) for insurance coverage of the villagers and nomads in the next Iranian calendar year (starting March 21, 2019), Fars reported on Sunday.



In a letter to Mohammad Baqer Nobakht, the head of the Plan and Budget Organization, Mohammad Shariatmadari, pointed to a 1.7 million rural and nomad households covered by insurance, while a 3.2 million households are not being under any insurance coverage.

"This would make these families vulnerable as they are not provided with any life or income protection insurance, and pension," Shariatmadari lamented.

To address the shortcoming the minister requested a budget amounting to 17 trillion rials (about \$400 million) to cover all the villagers and the nomads within the framework of the budget bill for the upcoming fiscal year.

Welfare Organization to create 50,000 jobs by March 2020

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Over 50,000 job opportunities will be generated by the Welfare Organization for the individuals under the Organization's coverage in the next Iranian calendar year (March 2019-March 2020).

Skilled persons with disabilities will be the priority to fill the positions to be created next year, said the Organization's director, Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey, Mehr reported on Sunday.

Many plans and programs for launching businesses have been implemented this year for over 47,000 financially struggling individuals covered by the Welfare Organization, one third of whom have been persons with disabilities, he stated.

He went on to highlight that the employers who hire the ones under the organization's coverage and disabled people will be offered facilities such as exemption from paying employee's insurance premium, covering parts of their payroll, low-interest loans, and etc.

"We will pay the employee's insurance premium who is employed by a company to encourage employers to give the people with disabilities the opportunity to have a job," he added.

"We have also devised special programs for the next year, in addition to employment, which is to prevent births with disabilities, divorce and increase premarital mandatory genetic tests," he concluded.

LEARN ENGLISH

Just in Time Strategy

A: I called this meeting today in order to discuss our manufacturing plan. As I'm sure you're all aware, with the credit crunch, and the global financial crisis, we're **obligated** to look for more **cost efficient** ways of producing our goods. We don't want to have to be looking at **redundancies**. So, we've outlined a brief plan to **implement** the just-in-time philosophy.

B: We have two basic points that we want to focus on. First of all, we want to reduce our **lead time**.

C: Why would want to do that? I think this is not an area that really needs to be worked on.

B: Well, we want to reduce production and delivery lead times for better overall **efficiency**.

A: Right, production lead times can be reduced by moving **work stations** closer together, reducing queue length, like for example, reducing the number of jobs waiting to be processed at a **given** machine, and improving the coordination and cooperation between successive processes. Delivery lead times can be reduced through close cooperation with suppliers, possibly by inducing suppliers to locate closer to the factory or working with a faster shipping company.

C: I see, that makes sense.

B: The second point is that we want to require supplier quality assurance and implement a zero **defects** quality program. We currently have far too many errors that lead to **defective** items and therefore, they must be eliminated. A quality control at the source program must be implemented to give workers the personal responsibility for the quality of the work they do, and the authority to stop production when something goes wrong.

C: I'm with you on this one. It's essential that we reduce these errors; we've got to force our suppliers to reduce their mistakes.

A: Exactly. Well, let's look at how we're going to put this plan into action. First... (fade out)

■ **Key vocabulary**
obligate: make a person do something because it is the right thing to do

cost efficient: cheap, not expensive

redundancy: the ending of workers' employment

implement: lay off

implement: put a plan into action

lead time: the time between the beginning of a process and its end

efficiency: the ability to produce something more quickly

work station: an area where a person works and does his job

given: used to refer to a specific time, place or thing

defect: a mistake or error that makes something not perfect

defective: having a mistake or error that makes something not perfect

■ **Supplementary vocabulary**

inventory: supply of goods stored in a place

carrying cost: the cost of holding inventory

warehouse: large building where products or goods are stored

stock: the supply of goods for sale, or available

bottleneck: something that slows a process down

Agricultural water use fallen by 40% in Lake Urmia basin

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Implementation of the Lake Urmia restoration programs applying sustainable agricultural techniques and water-saving measures, has led to 35-40 percent drop in agricultural water consumption in the catchment basin of the Lake, head of the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project (CIWP) has said.

In addition to water consumed in agricultural lands, the amount of chemical inputs contaminating groundwater and wetlands has also decreased by 40-50 percent and even 100 percent in some areas, IRNA quoted Abolfazl Abesht as saying on Sunday.

The 4th phase of joint cooperation between Iran's Department of Environment, UNDP, and Japan for Lake Urmia restoration was a continuation of three-year attempt to revive the lake through engaging local community and farmers by applying sustainable agricultural techniques with Japanese government making a contribution of \$1 million, he explained.

In the first phase of the project the Japanese government had contributed \$1 million to the UNDP for Lake Urmia. In March 2014 the Japanese government provided the first grant to UNDP. The contribution was implemented as a component of UNDP's ongoing Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project, a plan in which UNDP is partnering with Iran's Department of Environment.

Building on the first phase which piloted successful water-saving measures to restore Lake Urmia, the governments



of Iran and Japan along with the United Nations signed into effect a project extension (the second phase) in March 2015 which added another \$1 million to the combined effort.

The third phase of Contribution to Lake Urmia Restoration document was signed on April 6, 2016 and Japan has allocated another \$1 million to the project.

The program is currently being implemented in 11 cities and 130 villages in the Lake Urmia basin, which is involved by more than 10,000 farmers and locals, Abesht stated.

He went on to note that the main goal

of the project is to elicit people's participation for the revitalization of Lake Urmia, so that the local community are involved in planning, decision making and implementation of the programs.

Pointing to the project which increases the technical capacity of farmers, he said that the project costing a low price, has not imposed heavy financial burden on the farmers, as it employed simple methods, including, changing planting patterns or reducing chemical inputs in the agricultural lands.

Referring to cross-sectoral cooperation as another achievement of the project, he

IBTO joins campaign to help Zainab with rarest blood type



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iran's Blood Transfusion Organization (IBTO) has joined the global campaign to help two-year-old Zainab Mughal who needs ongoing transfusion of one of the rarest blood types, ISNA news agency reported on Sunday.

Zainab, who lives in Tallahassee in Florida, has been diagnosed with high-risk neuroblastoma, according to the Independent.

However, her blood type is so rare that only three matching donors have been found so far as her blood is missing a common antigen called "Indian B".

Most people carry the antigen in their blood cells and unfortunately her parents and family members are not match for her.

Only people who can be a possible a match for Zainab are those whose parents are 100 percent Iranian, Pakistani or Indian and whose blood types are either "A" or "O".

Moreover, of these people only 4 percent will be missing the Indian B antigen.

Not-for-profit organization OneBlood has been working closely with Zainab's fam-

ily, other blood centers and the American Rare Donor Program (ARDP) to help find a match for her and so far three matching donors have been found, including one ARDP tracked down near London and two from the United States.

In order to fulfill her blood needs her family must find between 7 to 10 donors.

Those who thinks they could be a match for Zainab or wants to help is urged to visit www.oneblood.org/zainab.

Neuroblastoma is a cancer that develops from immature nerve cells found in several areas of the body. It most commonly arises in and around the adrenal glands, which have similar origins to nerve cells and sit atop the kidneys. However, neuroblastoma can also develop in other areas of the abdomen and in the chest, neck and near the spine, where groups of nerve cells exist.

Neuroblastoma most commonly affects children age 5 or younger, though it may rarely occur in older children. In most cases of neuroblastoma, a cause is never identified.

Seabird populations have dropped 70% as fishing industry competes for food



The world's seabirds are being pushed to the brink of extinction by the fishing industry which is competing with them for food, a new study has warned.

Populations have dropped by up to 70 percent since the middle of the 20th century, experts said.

This is partly due to habitat destruction and pollution, but the new research led by the University of Aberdeen, has revealed that pressure from fishing has played a major role in this decline.

Scientists compared two time periods – 1970 to 1989 and 1990 to 2010 – to assess the degree of competition seabirds faced for prey species such as anchovy, mackerel and squid.

The team then estimated the annual consumption of those prey species for nearly 300 varieties of seabird, based on population counts and models

This was then compared to annual catches by fishing boats as contained in the Sea Around Us world database.

The scientists found that the total annual seabird consumption decreased from 70 to

57 millions of tons over the study period, while annual fishery catches increased from 59 to 65 millions of tons over the same period.

"Our research shows, that despite the decline of the world seabird community between 1970-1989 and 1990-2010, competition with fisheries remained sustained," said the study's lead author Dr Aurore Ponchon from the University of Aberdeen. "This competition was even enhanced in almost half the oceans.

"This enhanced competition, in addition to other factors such as pollution, predation by invasive species on chicks, the destruction and changes in their habitat by human activities and environmental changes caused by climate change, puts seabirds at risk, making them the most threatened bird group."

She added: "This study calls for an improved management of the world's fisheries to alleviate competition pressure on seabird populations."

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ب

\$2.7b allocated to job creation in rural areas

A total fund of 120 trillion rials (nearly \$2.7 billion) has been earmarked for granting job creation loans to the people in rural areas nationwide, labor ministry's caretaker has said.

"Measures taken to boost job creation in rural areas, including providing facilities and generating sustainable jobs have been efficient to some extent, as rural population in some provinces of the country is on the rise," IRNA quoted Anooshirvan Mohseni Bandpei as saying on Friday.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-nomy, -nomic, -nomical, -nomically”

■ **Meaning:** laws or knowledge

■ **For example:** They discuss how to meet up with other **astronomy** enthusiasts.

PHRASAL VERB

Live off somebody/ something

■ **Meaning:** to get your income or food from a supply of money or from another person

■ **For example:** Mom used to live off the interest from her savings.

IDIOM

On cloud nine

■ **Explanation:** to be very happy because something wonderful has happened

■ **For example:** When the boss announced my promotion, I was on cloud nine.

Qatari emir shuns PGCC summit in Saudi Arabia

Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani has refused to participate in the annual Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) summit, which is set to take place in the Saudi capital city of Riyadh at the weekend, and instead sent the foreign minister to attend the event.

“Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan al-Muraikhi arrived in Riyadh to lead the delegation of Qatar to the PGCC summit,” director of information office at the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ahmed al-Rumaihi, wrote in a post published on Twitter on Sunday.

Bahrain’s Foreign Minister Sheih Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifah, in return, criticized Qatar’s emir in a tweet for not attending the regional grouping’s summit.

“Qatar’s emir should have accepted the fair demands (of the boycotting states) and attended the summit,” Sheikh Khalid wrote in his tweet.

The official Qatar News Agency said in a tweet on December 3 that the monarch had got “an invitation from the King of Saudi Arabia” for the meeting, but it did not say whether Sheikh Tamim would travel to Saudi Arabia.

The Arabic language Al Aan online newspaper, citing diplomatic sources, reported late last month that Secretary General of the PGCC Abdul Latif



bin Rashid al-Zayani was going to visit Doha to invite the Qatari emir to attend the 39th annual summit of the regional grouping.

Last month, Kuwait’s Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled al-Jarallah confirmed that all six PGCC countries would be attending the annual summit of the council, which is set to take place on December 9.

Jarallah said the summit could present a “hope to resolve the [Persian] Gulf

crisis and solve the differences.”

The report came as a surprise since the House of Saud regime, along with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, has been embroiled in a diplomatic and trade boycott against Qatar for a year and a half.

The Saudi regime, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt all cut off diplomatic ties with Qatar on June 5 last year, after officially accusing it of “sponsoring

terrorism.”

The administration of the Saudi regime-backed and former Yemeni president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Libya, the Maldives, Djibouti, Senegal and the Comoros later joined the camp in ending diplomatic ties with Doha. Jordan downgraded its diplomatic relations as well.

Qatar’s Foreign Ministry later announced that the decision to cut diplomatic ties was unjustified and based on false claims and assumptions.

On June 9, 2017, Qatar strongly dismissed allegations of supporting terrorism after the Saudi regime and its allies black-listed dozens of individuals and entities purportedly associated with Doha.

Later that month, Saudi Arabia and its allies released a 13-point list of demands, including the closure of Al Jazeera television network and downgrade of relations with Iran, in return for the normalization of diplomatic relations with Doha.

The document containing the demands by the Saudi regime, Egypt, the UAE and Bahrain also asked Qatar to sever all ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement.

Qatar rejected the demands as “unreasonable.”

(Source: Press TV)

Paris: Trump must not interfere in French politics

‘Yellow vest’ protests intensify, spread to Belgium, Netherlands

➔ “Very sad day & night in Paris. Maybe it’s time to end the ridiculous and extremely expensive Paris Agreement and return money back to the people in the form of lower taxes?” he suggested.

Trump had earlier posted: “The Paris Agreement isn’t working out so well for Paris. Protests and riots all over France.”

“People do not want to pay large sums of money, much to third world countries (that are questionably run), in order to maybe protect the environment. Chanting ‘We Want Trump!’ Love France.”

The protests in France are not directly linked to the Paris climate agreement which was signed in 2015 and has since been abandoned by Trump, to the dismay of French President Emmanuel Macron and other Western leaders.

Spurred by rising fuel prices - in part due to tax hikes aimed at helping France shift to a lower-carbon economy - the “yellow vest” protests have grown into a broad movement against Macron’s policies and governing style.

Earlier this week Trump retweeted one of several posts falsely claiming that French protesters were chanting his name.

The videos that have been used to support this claim were in fact filmed at a far-right protest in London earlier this year.

Other French politicians have also responded angrily to Trump’s latest tweets, including a lawmaker from Macron’s party who dubbed the U.S. leader “Donald the Senile”.

“DON’T INSULT MY COUNTRY DOTARD,” Joachim Son-Forget posted, employing an antiquated insult previously used against Trump by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Brussels

Elsewhere, Belgian police have fired tear gas and water canon to disperse demonstrators inspired by France’s “yellow vests” anti-tax movement in the capital Brussels.

Protesters, dressed in yellow jackets that have become a symbol of the protests in France, gathered in two districts of

the city, namely Arts Lois and Porte de Namur, on Saturday.

Police already blocked access to the area housing European institutions including the offices of the European Commission and the European Parliament as a precautionary measure. Anti-riot officers used tear gas against protesters as they were trying to break the blockade and force their way through.

“A policeman was injured in the face. He was taken to hospital but his life is not in danger,” Brussels police spokeswoman Ilse Van De Keere said

Some 400 people have so far been arrested.

According to the Belgian news agency Belga, young protesters blocked a highway linking Brussels to the town of Rekem in Flanders, located near the French border.

Belga said the demonstrators also put up a barricade near the Franco-Belgian border close to Adinkerke.

France’s intense protests, which degenerated into street clashes and vandalism throughout Paris over the weekend, broke out last month over fuel taxes aimed at financing France’s anti-pollution measures.

Many influential figures in France have reportedly been pressing President Emmanuel Macron to alleviate the popular anger after witnessing the urban violence in the country’s capital on Saturday, when dozens of automobiles were burned and businesses attacked and looted.

Thousands protest against government in Serbia

Meantime, several thousands of Serbians have staged a protest rally to denounce alleged government violence against political opponents and the media.

The demonstrators — around 5,000 individuals by police estimates — marched through the streets in the capital, Belgrade, on Saturday, demanding policy changes by President Aleksandar Vucic and his ruling Serbian Progressive Party.

The peaceful rally was held to condemn an assault on the leader of the Serbian Left Party, Borko Stefanovic, who was attacked by a group of men wearing black clothing in the southern city of Krusevac on November 23.



The opposition politician suffered minor injuries after being beaten with an iron rod, and the attackers were reported to have been arrested shortly after the incident.

Serbian protesters claimed that the supporters of the 48-year-old president had been involved in the assault, a charge that has been denied by the government.

Opposition groups and activists in Serbia accuse the government of corruption, violence, and stifling press freedoms. They say the Serbian president has maintained an authoritarian rule over the country.

Vucic’s approval ratings have slipped since he won a 2016 presidential vote by a landslide, but he remains the country’s most popular political leader, and his ruling coalition holds a majority at the 250-seat parliament.

Netherlands

In the Dutch city of Rotterdam, a few hundred protesters marched peacefully, singing and handing flowers to passers-by.

About 100 protesters gathered in a peaceful demonstration outside the Dutch parliament in The Hague. At least two protesters were detained in Amsterdam.

(Source: agencies)

What do most UN ambassadors have in common? Decades of experience

Heather Nauert will be nominated by the United States President Donald Trump administration as the next U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, succeeding Nikki Haley.

However, despite almost two years as the State Department spokeswoman, Nauert struck many as an incongruous pick for one of the top jobs in the U.S. diplomacy.

Unlike almost all her predecessors, Nauert does not have a significant background in the Foreign Service or other government service: Instead, she had worked as a reporter and anchor since 1996, mostly for Fox News. She is best known as a former co-host on “Fox & Friends,” one of President Trump’s favored television shows.

“We have never had anyone remotely as underqualified as Heather Nauert,” Daniel Benjamin, a State Department counterterrorism coordinator during the Obama administration, who is now at Dartmouth, wrote on Twitter.

Indeed, when you compare the potential U.S. diplomat’s resumé to those of other top United Nations ambassadors from other nations on the Security Council, Nauert stands out.

Britain — Karen Pierce

Pierce joined Britain’s Foreign and Com-

monwealth Office in 1981 and was first posted to Tokyo, after spending a period learning Japanese. She had a variety of other foreign postings after that, including in Washington, from 1992 to 1995.

She served as Britain’s Deputy Permanent Representative at the United Nations in New York from 2006 to 2009, and from 2012 to 2015 she was permanent representative at the United Nations in Geneva (between these two stints, she also earned a master’s degree in international strategy and diplomacy from the London School of Economics).

Her most recent positions were as British ambassador to Afghanistan and director general political for the foreign and commonwealth. She took the top British job at the United Nations in March 2018. “Diplomats and observers agree she has been a robust presence since starting the job in March,” the Guardian wrote in October.

China — Ma Zhaoxu

Like Nauert, Ma once served as head spokesman for his country’s foreign ministry. However, the Chinese diplomat had a longer history with China’s Foreign Affairs Ministry, which he joined in 1987. He also held high-ranking positions in Britain and Belgium before being appointed direc-

tor-general of the ministry’s Information Department in 2009.

After that role, which involved talking frequently to the media, he was China’s ambassador to Australia from 2003 to 2016 and followed that with a 20-month stint as China’s top envoy to the United Nations in Geneva. He took up his post in New York in January 2018.

“Ma is a rising star in the foreign service with fairly broad experience and international exposure at a relatively young age,” unnamed sources told the South China Morning Post before he took the post.

France — Francois Delattre

Delattre joined the French foreign ministry in 1989. He has served abroad a number of times, including as French ambassador to Canada from 2008 to 2011 and as ambassador to the United States from 2011 to 2014. He took up his position at the United Nations in New York after leaving Washington in 2011.

The French ambassador sees himself as a supporter of multilateralism. Writing in the Financial Times this year, he called on the United States to work with other countries in areas such as the Sahel region in Africa.

“Success there and in so many other areas requires all Security Council members — no-

tably the U.S. — to work with each other. As the world is confronted with unprecedented global challenges, American commitment to our shared values and common solutions has rarely been more critical,” Delattre wrote.

Russia — Vasily Nebenzya

Nebenzya’s diplomatic career dates from the Soviet days — his first postings was as attaché of the Soviet Union Embassy in Thailand in 1988. Over this lengthy career, he served abroad a number of times, including at Russia’s Permanent Mission to the UN in New York. He also served as deputy permanent representative of Russia to the United Nations office and other international organizations in Geneva.

Before taking up his current position in New York last year, Nebenzya had been serving as deputy minister of foreign affairs for Russia. He replaced Russia’s veteran diplomat Vitaly Churkin, who died after suffering cardiac arrest in February 2017.

Before his appointment, the Moscow Times noted that Nebenzya’s foreign postings characterized “a successful career in the foreign service,” adding that he “has specialized in diplomatic work with international organizations.”

(Source: Washington Post)

China summons U.S. ambassador over Huawei arrest

➔ “China strongly urges the Canadian side to immediately release the detained person, and earnestly protect their lawful, legitimate rights, otherwise Canada must accept full responsibility for the serious consequences caused.”

The statement did not elaborate.

Meng’s arrest was on the same day that the U.S. President Donald Trump met in Argentina with China’s Xi

Jinping to look for ways to resolve an escalating trade war between the world’s two largest economies.

The news of her arrest has roiled stock markets and drawn condemnation from Chinese authorities, although Trump and his top economic advisers have played down its importance to trade talks after the two leaders agreed to a truce.

A Huawei spokesman said on Friday the company has “every confidence that the Canadian and U.S. legal systems will reach the right conclusion.” The company has said it complies with all applicable export control and sanctions laws and other regulations.

(Source: Reuters)

Armenians vote in election testing revolution’s power shift

Armenians began voting in an early parliamentary election as acting prime minister Nikol Pashinyan sought a stronger mandate, having been elected by lawmakers to the post in May following a peaceful revolution earlier this year.

Pashinyan came to power in the wake of weeks of mass protests against corruption and cronyism in the ex-Soviet republic. The former newspaper editor, who was jailed for fomenting unrest in 2008, represents a dramatic break from the cadre of rulers who have run Armenia since the late 1990s.

He stepped down in October so Parliament could be dissolved ready for the early election.

Former high-ranking officials were sacked and some were arrested following the power change. And a court of appeal ordered the detention of former President Robert Kocharyan again on Friday on charges of attempting to overthrow the constitutional order.

He was first arrested in July but freed the following month and the case was sent to the appeals court. Kocharyan was Armenia’s second president, serving in the post from 1998 to 2008, when mass protests erupted over a disputed election.

The former ruling Republican Party, however, still dominates the current Parliament that was elected in 2017.

Pashinyan has said he expects Sunday’s vote to lead to a legislature that better reflects the nation’s new political landscape.

Nine parties and two blocs are taking part in the election and opinion polls suggest the My Step Alliance, which includes Pashinyan’s Civil Contract Party, will easily win a parliamentary majority.

After taking office, Pashinyan promised there would be no major shifts in Armenian foreign policy and has offered assurances he will not break with Moscow.

Armenia hosts a Russian military base and is a member of Russia-led military and economic alliances.

Pashinyan also suggested he would stick with existing policies on the long-running issue of Nagorno-Karabakh.

A mountainous part of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, is run by ethnic Armenians who declared independence from Baku during a conflict that broke out as the Soviet Union crumbled in 1991.

Though a cease-fire was agreed in 1994, Azerbaijan and Armenia still regularly accuse each other of conducting attacks around Nagorno-Karabakh and along the Azeri-Armenian border.

(Source: Daily Star)

Trump pardon of Manafort would be ‘terrible mistake’: Senator Rubio

The United States President Donald Trump would make a “terrible mistake” if he pardoned his former campaign Chairman Paul Manafort after charges brought as a result of the federal probe into Russian election interference, Republican Senator Marco Rubio said Sunday.

“I just think it would be the wrong thing to do and I think it would be a huge political mistake as well,” Rubio said on CNN’s “State of the Union.”

Manafort faces sentencing on his convictions in August of tax and bank fraud charges. In a court filing on Friday, Special Counsel Robert Mueller said Manafort lied to investigators about his interactions with a Russian tied to Russian intelligence services.

That filing detailed why Mueller’s office last week retracted a plea agreement with Manafort. He pleaded guilty in September to two conspiracy charges and agreed to cooperate with investigators in hopes of a lighter sentence.

Trump has not ruled out a pardon for Manafort and has praised him as a good man. In contrast, he has said his former longtime “fixer” Michael Cohen, who has cooperated with federal prosecutors, should go to jail.

“I believe it’d be a terrible mistake. Pardons should be used judiciously. They’re used for cases with extraordinary circumstances,” Rubio said on ABC’s “This Week.”

Rubio told ABC that Trump granting a pardon to Manafort could have unintended consequences.

“I think, in fact, that if something like that were to happen, it could trigger a debate about whether the pardon powers should be amended given these circumstances,” the Florida senator said.

Mueller is investigating Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and whether Trump’s campaign colluded with Moscow to sway the election. Russia denies interfering in the 2016 election and Trump has denied any collusion occurred.

Manafort’s alleged false statements included comments about his business dealings and contacts with a former associate in Ukraine, the Wall Street Journal reported. Those statements did not appear to be central to Mueller’s Russia probe, but it is unclear if prosecutors plan to accuse Manafort of additional lies.

(Source: Reuters)

Ex-Nixon White House lawyer: Congress will have to impeach Trump

A former White House lawyer thinks that the United States Congress will have soon no choice but to start impeachment proceedings against President Donald Trump.

John Dean, who served as President Richard M. Nixon’s counsel from 1970 to 1973 and received jail time for his role in the Watergate scandal, made the remarks this week after prosecutors sought “substantial” prison term for Michael Cohen, Trump’s former personal lawyer and fixer.

“I don’t know that this will forever disappear into some dark hole of unprosecutable presidents,” Dean, a CNN contributor, said Friday on CNN’s “Erin Burnett OutFront.”

“I think it will resurface in the Congress. I think what this totality of today’s filings show that the House is going to have little choice, the way this is going, other than to start impeachment proceedings.”

(Source: Press TV)

Atlanta wins MLS Cup in only second season

Atlanta United won the MLS Cup in only their second season in the competition with a 2-0 win over Portland Timbers.

MLS Most Valuable Player Josef Martinez opened the scoring on 39 minutes with his 35th goal of the season and Franco Escobar added a second after the break.

It was Atlanta boss Gerardo Martino's final game in charge before he becomes head coach of Mexico.

"We won it, it feels good," he said. "If I had to choose a way to leave somewhere, this is the best way."

Venezuela international Martinez broke the deadlock for the Five Stripes when he rounded Timbers goalkeeper Jeff Attinella before slotting the ball into an empty net.

The Timbers, featuring former Aston Villa, Birmingham and West Brom defender Liam Ridgwell, started the second half strongly but were soon undone when Martinez won a free-kick for Atlanta.

Miguel Almiron's set-piece was flicked on by Martinez into the path of Escobar, who fired into the bottom corner.

"For me personally, this is up there with the top moments," said Atlanta goalkeeper Brad Guzan, who previously played for Aston Villa, Hull and Middlesbrough.

"You never know if you're going to have this opportunity again."

Atlanta - who finished second in the Eastern Conference in the regular season - were formed in 2014 and started playing in the MLS in 2017.

Victory is the city's first major pro sports title since 1995 when the Atlanta Braves baseball team won the MLB World Series.

(Source: BBC)

Brazil's Paqueta arrives at AC Milan ahead of record transfer: report

Brazilian midfielder Lucas Paqueta has arrived in Italy ahead of completing a record transfer move to AC Milan, Italian media reported on Sunday.

"I'm very happy to be here, I chose Milan because of their history," Paqueta told journalists at the airport.

The Serie A giants are reported to have agreed a 35 million euro (\$40.4 million) deal with Flamengo - the club Paqueta joined as a ten-year-old - in what would be the most expensive signing of a Brazilian by an Italian club.

Paqueta scored 10 goals to help Flamengo finish second in the Brazilian championship which has just ended, and bid a tearful farewell after his last game at the Maracana Stadium.

"I will be eternally grateful to this club," said the 21-year-old, who is hoping to follow in the footsteps of former Brazilian stars Kaka and Leonardo who made their names at AC Milan.

Leonardo -- now AC Milan's sporting director -- pushed through the move with Flamengo receiving 70 percent of the 35 million euros transfer fee and the remainder to be divided between the player and the Brazilian federation.

Paqueta, who has two caps for Brazil and can play both mid-field and as a forward, is reported to have agreed a five-year deal worth 1.5 million euro (\$1.7 million) per season.

He will be in the stands for Sunday evening's Serie A game against Torino in the San Siro and will undergo a medical early next week.

Gennaro Gattuso's Milan are fourth in Serie A and can pull within a point of third-placed city rivals Inter Milan with a win against Torino.

(Source: AFP)

Salah refuses MOTM award vs. Bournemouth



Mohamed Salah refused to accept the Man of the Match award after scoring a hat trick in Liverpool's 4-0 win over Bournemouth, instead handing it to teammate James Milner in recognition of a landmark appearance.

Salah netted three times at the Vitality Stadium on Saturday afternoon to take his goal tally to 12 for the season.

It was his second hat trick for Liverpool since arriving from Roma last summer, but he felt Milner, who made his 500th Premier League outing, was more worthy of the accolade.

"It's not a bad way at all [to get back amongst the goals]," Salah told Sky Sports. "Top of the table and scored three goals today, clean sheet. That's everything I can say today."

"My expectation is very high. But I know everyone else's expectation for me is very high. As I said before, the most important thing, we are top of the table and we win each game."

"I have to congratulate him [Milner]. It's an amazing career. He deserves it today. He's had an amazing career, so I hope we are going to win something together. But I will not accept."

Bournemouth manager Eddie Howe said afterwards that he considered Salah to be one of the best players in the world.

Jürgen Klopp agreed with the sentiment and praised the forward's honesty for staying on his feet for the second goal after Bournemouth's Steve Cook attempted to make a cynical foul.

"I think Eddie Howe is one of the best managers I ever met, to be honest, so how could I say something different?" Klopp told his postmatch news conference.

(Source: ESPN)

Raheem Sterling says newspapers 'fuel racism' in football



Newspapers are helping to "fuel racism" by the ways in which they portray young black footballers, says Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling.

It comes after Sterling, 24, faced alleged racist abuse from Chelsea fans during City's 2-0 defeat at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

Chelsea and the Metropolitan Police are investigating the allegations.

"All I have to say is have a second thought about fair publicity and give all players an equal chance," he said.

In a post on Instagram, Sterling said he "had to laugh" when he heard the alleged racist remarks during the game because he expects "no better".

In the post, England international Sterling cites newspaper headlines about team-mates Tosin Adarabioyo and Phil Foden buying houses.

The headline referring to 21-year-old defender Adarabioyo - who is on loan at West Brom - focuses on how he spent £2.25m on a property "despite having never started a Premier League match".

By contrast, midfielder Foden, 18, "buys a £2m home for his mum" and is later described as having "set up a future".

"You have two young players starting out their careers - both play for the same team, both have done the right thing, which is buy a new house for their mothers who have put in a lot of time and love into helping them get where they are," Sterling said.

"But look at how the newspapers get their

message across for the young black player and then for the young white player.

"I think this is unacceptable, both innocent, have not done a thing wrong but just by the way it has been worded, this young black kid is looked at in a bad light, which helps fuel racism and aggressive behaviour." Sterling has frequently found himself at the centre of attention throughout his career, most recently for a tattoo of a rifle on his leg earlier this year.

He later defended the tattoo, saying it had a "deeper meaning" and referred to his late

father, who was killed in Kingston, Jamaica.

That followed criticism for proposing to his girlfriend, purchasing clothes at high-street chain Primark, and even for buying his mother a house.

In June, he said he longer worried about criticism of his lifestyle in a piece with the Players' Tribune.

Lord Ouseley, the founder of anti-discrimination body Kick it Out, has called for leaders in football to deal with racism "at the top".

"What happened at Chelsea shows what is

still going on in football," he told BBC Sport.

"Where is [Premier League chief executive] Richard Scudamore, where is [FA chairman] Greg Clarke, where is Chelsea's chairman [Bruce Buck] - they should have been talking out last night and it has to deal with at the top."

"We do not have any leadership at the top of the game to speak out, they rely on Kick it Out."

"We have already made comments about the way Raheem Sterling has been treated differently by the media. The print media often targets, not just black players, but all footballers."

"Raheem Sterling has received bad press over the last few years because of his lifestyle and clearly there are issues from potential stories adding to prejudice and I have every sympathy for him."

"Players know if they are abused in any way they have to tell the referee. It was awful. All players know the referee is in charge and has a duty of care, and the referee can remove those people. It didn't appear to me he told the referee in the first place."

Many players and pundits have taken to social media to condemn the alleged racist abuse aimed at Sterling, with Match of the Day host Gary Lineker calling it "despicable".

"Are we going to continue to allow this type of racist behaviour go on?" asked former Manchester United and England defender Rio Ferdinand, while Match of the Day pundit Ian Wright said "the bad old days are back".

(Source: BBC)

Top swimmers challenge FINA with lawsuit



Three world-class swimmers have filed a lawsuit in the United States, challenging what they allege is the monopoly world governing body FINA has over the control of international competitions.

The lawsuit, brought on behalf of three-times Olympic gold medalist Katinka Hosszu of Hungary and U.S. world champions Tom Shields and Michael Andrew, followed the cancellation of a new professional swimming event scheduled for Dec. 20-21 in Turin.

"FINA's insistence that the world's best swimmers may compete only on FINA's terms and its efforts to enforce that rule are nakedly anti-competitive," said the lawsuit which the trio said was filed "on behalf of elite swimmers around the world". The Italian federation said FINA had threatened sanctions against those swimmers taking part in the event, which was put together by organizers of the International Swimming League (ISL).

The world governing body, in a statement, said it had taken note of the filings in California. "As world and Olympic champions, the swimmers in question will understand

that FINA's attention is focused on the 950 swimmers, including two of the athletes in question, from 180 member federations taking part in the 14th World Swimming Championships in Hangzhou," FINA said.

"FINA will nonetheless give the filings our full attention and mount a robust defence if required to do so. Meanwhile in Hangzhou, the FINA Athletes Committee will consult with aquatic athletes to continue its work of making sure athlete voices are clearly heard within FINA's decision-making bodies."

"FINA remains open to proposals that would enhance - rather than conflict with - current and planned competition calendars, providing further opportunities for aquatic athletes, and ideally in a manner that benefits the whole sport." The governing body had said in November the Turin meeting did not meet their rules requirements. "The project of the Italian Swimming Federation to organize a swimming competition in Turin at short notice did not meet all the necessary FINA rulebook requirements."

(Source: Eurosport)

Liverpool leapfrog Man City: do we have a real Premier League race?



-- has barely featured during this campaign because of injury and although City have an enviable supply of creative players, it is difficult to replace a player of that standard.

■ Liverpool hunger

Liverpool have not been playing with the same fluency as they did last season but they have added steel to their game and boast a phenomenal defensive record, with just six goals conceded in 16 Premier League matches.

The addition of centre-back Virgil van Dijk and goalkeeper Alisson Becker has made an enormous difference at the back and at the other end of the pitch, Salah has started firing again.

The Egyptian forward had a quiet start to the campaign by the standards of last season, in which he scored 44 goals in total, but is now the Premier League's joint-leading scorer,

Manchester City -- Premier League champions-elect in the eyes of many -- now know they are in a real scrap after Liverpool leapfrogged them to the top of the table on a telling day in the title race.

Both sides started Saturday unbeaten after 15 matches with an impressive 25 wins between them -- but it was Pep Guardiola's champions who blinked first.

Mohamed Salah scored a hat-trick for Jürgen Klopp's side as they romped to a 4-0 win at Bournemouth in the early kick-off, taking them to 42 points, one clear of City.

City had the tougher task of taking on Chelsea at Stamford Bridge later in the day and despite dominating the first half they ended up losing 2-0 -- their first league defeat since April.

City remain firm favourites to win their second consecutive title but their aura of invincibility has been shaken and a hungry Liverpool are not in the mood to back off.

Guardiola took pride in his team's performance despite the defeat, saying he never felt they were going to match the Arsenal Invincibles, who went through an entire Premier League season unbeaten in 2003-04.

"We are going to try to be champions," he said. "In a season like this, with a lot of games -- plus after last season -- everybody wants to beat us. They put in something extra."

"What is important is how we react. Even if we would have won today, it's still only the beginning of December. There are still a lot of points to play for."

For all of City's much-vaunted squad depth, they sorely missed the injured Sergio Agüero at Stamford Bridge, mustering 14 shots but managing just four on target.

Kevin De Bruyne -- last season's club player of the year

IPL: Sepahan, Persepolis share spoils in controversial match

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Sepahan drew 1-1 in Iran Professional League (IPL), with both teams in good form and looking to extend unbeaten streaks.

In the match held in Isfahan's Naghshe Jahan Stadium, Sepahan started good but after 15 minutes, the visiting team controlled possession and kept Sepahan on their toes.

In the second half, Persepolis dominated the match once again but Sepahan midfielder Ezatollah Pourghaz's brilliant long-range left-footed effort opened the scoring in the 74th minute.

With one minute remaining, referee Alireza Faghani showed the spot for Sepahan's defender handball.

Ali Alipour, Persepolis best goalscorer,



equalized the match from the penalty spot.

Sepahan forward Kiros Stanley and Persepolis defensive midfielder Kamal Kamyabinia were shown the red cards after involving in a bust-up in the dying moments of the match.

Sepahan returned to top with 30 points thanks to a superior goal difference over Padideh.

Persepolis are third, two points adrift of the leaders.

"I am proud of my players because the spirit they showed against Sepahan. Both teams fought for the win," Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic said in the post-match news conference.

"It was like derby for Persepolis and I am happy we extended our unbeaten run," the Croat added.

Nazemalsharieh, Mozafar nominated for the world's best futsal coach



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian futsal coaches Mohammad Nazemalsharieh and Shahrzad Mozafar have been nominated for the world's best coach.

Nazemalsharieh led the men's futsal team to the 2018 AFC Futsal Championship title, while Mozafar helped the women's team win the AFC Futsal Championship back-to-back title.

Since the 2007 edition the Best National Team Coach of the World category is dedicated to the memory of unforgettable futsal coach Dimitri Nicolaou

The Best National Team Coach in the World nominations are as follow:

(in strict alphabetical order!)

- Jorge Gomes Braz (POR)
- PORTUGAL N.T.
- Bruno Garcia Formoso (ESP)

JAPAN N.T.

- Carlos Raül Chilavert Genaro (PAR)

PARAGUAY N.T.

- Márcio Bica Coelho (BRA)

BRAZIL Women N.T. U20

- Luís Conceição (POR)

PORTUGAL Women N.T. A - PORTUGAL Women U18

- Renan Franklin (BRA)

BRAZIL N.T. U20

- Shahrzad Mozafar (IRN)

IRAN Women N.T.

- Seyed Mohammad Nazemalsharieh (IRN)

IRAN N.T.

- Hesham Saleh (EGY)

EGYPT N.T. U18

- Sergey Skorovich (RUS)

RUSSIA N.T.

Mes Sungun nominated for the world's best futsal club



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian futsal club Mes Sungun has been nominated for the best club in the world.

Mes Sungun, headed by Hamid Bigham Tabrizi, won the 2018 AFC Futsal Club Championship in August after beating Miguel Rodrigo's Thai Son Nam 2-1 at Yogyakarta.

The winners of the UMBRO Futsal Awards 2018 will be announced on January 10.

(in strict alphabetical order!)

Associação Carlos Barbosa de

Futsal

Brazil

Club Atlético San Lorenzo de Almagro

Argentina

Clube Esportivo e Recreativo Atlântico Erechim

Brazil

Leoas Da Serra

(BRA) - women futsal

Magnus Futsal

Brazil

Mes Sungun Varzaghan FSC

Iran

Movistar Inter Fútbol Sala

Spain

Pato Futsal

Brazil

Sporting Clube de Portugal

Portugal

Thai Son Nam FC

Vietnam

Afghanistan suspends officials after women's soccer team abuse investigation

KABUL (Reuters) — Afghanistan's Attorney General has suspended the head of the Afghan Football Federation after a probe into allegations of sexual abuse of members of the national women's soccer team, a spokesman for the attorney general said on Sunday.

President Ashraf Ghani ordered an investigation after Britain's Guardian newspaper reported last week that senior figures linked to the Afghan women's team alleged that some players had been molested by officials from the soccer federation.

Jamshid Rasouli, a spokesman for the attorney general, said the officials had been suspended following a recommendation from the team set up to investigate the incident.

According to the Guardian, the alleged abuses took place inside the federation's headquarters in Afghanistan as well as at a training camp in Jordan last February. Ghani called the allegations "shocking



and unacceptable to all Afghans".

An Afghan official said Keramuddin Keram, the

powerful head of the Afghan Football Federation and five others had been suspended but added that the investigation is still ongoing to find more details.

Officials representing Keram did not immediately respond to phone calls and text messages seeking comment.

The Afghan Football Federation issued a statement, calling the allegations "groundless" and said it would fully cooperate with any probe.

When the allegations first surfaced, a spokesman at FIFA, the world soccer federation, said it had a "zero tolerance" policy on abuse and was looking into the Afghan case.

Ranked as one of the most dangerous countries for women, allegations of sexual contact outside marriage can have deadly consequences in Afghanistan. Victims of sexual harassment are often extremely reluctant to come forward for fear that they will be accused of adultery.

Daei tips Asian giants for final meeting

Ali Daei believes that the Islamic Republic of Iran and Japan are the most likely contenders to reach the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 final, with the continental competition now less than four weeks away.

The Iranian legend is the tournament's record goalscorer, having found the back of the net 14 times over three editions, yet the former striker never lifted the trophy for his country, whose wait for the title stretches back to 1976.

But on the back of a strong 2018 FIFA World Cup and with head coach Carlos Queiroz having been in charge for almost eight years, Daei thinks the time could be now for Team Melli, although it is the side from East Asia he considers as favorites.

"I think Japan are the favorites to become champions but I also think our team is at a good level and ready to perform well and I hope we can reach the final," said Daei.

"Japan showed at the World Cup that they can play great football and they have improved a lot. So, I think Iran and Japan, if they don't happen to face each other in earlier stages, have the highest chance to play the final against each other.

"Our side has really progressed in the past two or three years. The players have

been together for a long time so there is a good understanding between them."

Iran's FIFA World Cup display earned them many plaudits after the Central Asian side defeated Morocco and then put in excellent displays against Spain and Portugal before narrowly missing out on last 16 qualification.

The team's defensive solidarity stood out in particular, with some of the world's best attacking talents left frustrated, but Daei also had praise for the forwards Que-

iroz has at his disposal.

"I think if we can reach the final then Alireza Jahanbakhsh will be one of our key players, while Saman Ghoddos is another who could perform well at the Asian Cup," noted Daei.

"Mehdi Taremi could finish as top scorer if he plays in his regular position at the front of our attack, but it depends on the coach's tactics. But there are also other good strikers in Asia that will challenge for this award.



"Sardar Azmoun, meanwhile, is a great player who can play for big teams in Europe in the coming years." Iran are one of the most successful teams at the AFC Asian Cup, with three titles to their name, but it has now been for than 40 years since they were last crowned champions, after winning three successive tournaments between 1968 and 1976.

Daei reached the semi-finals in both 1996 and 2004, but suffered the agony of elimination on penalties both times as Saudi Arabia and China progressed to the final in their place.

"There are many reasons why we haven't won it in so long; for example, we should have won the tournament in 1996, but we lost to Saudi Arabia on penalties and I missed one of them," admitted Daei.

"I think our best games were in 1996 in the UAE, where we only finished third despite deserving the title. We played so well and were unlucky not to become champions."

Iran will open their Group D campaign against Yemen on January 7 before facing Vietnam and Iraq, who eliminated Team Melli on penalties at the quarter-final stage four years ago in Australia.

(Source: the-afc)

Iranian fighters win two gold medals at WKF Karate 1-Series A

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Zabiollah Poorshab and Miad yari claimed two gold medals at the World Karate Federation (WKF) Karate 1-Series A event in Shanghai on Sunday.

Poorshab defeated Kazakhstan's Igor Chikhmarev 2-0 for gold at under-84kg.

Yari also beat Eray Samdan of Turkey at under-60kg to win the gold.

In the under-67kg category, Amir Mehdi zadeh defeated his compatriot Alireza Shirsefat 8-4 in the bronze medal match.

The event, part of the WKF's second-tier circuit, is the season-ending competition and the final opportunity for karatekas on the tour to improve their ranking.

The competition has brought 1176 karatekas from 80 countries together in Shanghai, China.



Esteghlal eye former Persepolis striker Toure

PLDC — Esteghlal football club have shown interest in signing former Persepolis striker Ibrahima Toure.

The 32-year-old forward currently plays in French football club from Gazélec Ajaccio.

Toure scored 60 goals in Iran Professional League from 2007 until 2011 with Paykan, Persepolis and Sepahan football teams.

Esteghlal general manager Amir Hossein Fathi has traveled to Dubai, the UAE to negotiate with the Senegalese.

Toure joined Ligue 2 side Monaco in 2012 and scored 10 goals in 17 league appearances during the second half of the 2011-12 season.

The following season, he played in 35 league games and scored 18 goals, which helped Monaco win the Ligue 2 championship and promotion back to Ligue 1.

Esteghlal are going to strengthen for the AFC Champions League since the team have been drawn with Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal, the 2017 runner-up and two-time winner, Al Duhail SC of Qatar and the UAE's Al Ain in Group C.

Persepolis defender Ansari undergoes successful knee surgery

TASNIM — Persepolis iconic defender Mohammad Ansari underwent successful surgery to repair his torn ACL on Saturday.

He suffered an ACL injury in the last minutes of the match against Kashima Antlers in the AFC Champions League second-leg final in Tehran's Azadi Stadium in mid-November.

Ansari has missed the rest of the Iran professional League (IPL) season and will join his teammates from the start of the new season.

The 27-year-old defender has played a key role, helping Persepolis win back-to-back Iran Professional league titles.

Henk ten Cate takes charge of Al Wahda

Al Wahda FSCC have appointed the widely acclaimed Henk ten Cate as head coach.

The club, who announced ten Cate's appointment on social media, said the Dutchman will take charge of the UAE Pro League side this coming week.

The former Barcelona and Chelsea assistant coach replaces Romanian Laurențiu Reghecampf, who was relieved of his position in late November.

Al Wahda, who are currently fifth in the UAE Pro League, will be hoping ten Cate can have the same effect he had on rivals Al Jazira with them.

Ten Cate, 63, left Al Jazira in May after a two-and-a-half-year stint, which included steering the club to the 2015/16 President's Cup and 2016/17 UAE Pro League title.

Abu Dhabi-based Al Wahda will make their 10th AFC Champions League appearance in the competition's 2019 edition.

The 2007 semi-finalists are in Group B alongside Saudi giants Al Ittihad, PFC Lokomotiv from Uzbekistan and one of West Asia's four playoff winners.

(Source: the-afc)

Boston Celtics make franchise history over Chicago Bulls

The Chicago Bulls suffered their worst ever defeat with a 133-77 loss to the Boston Celtics.

Guard Jaylen Brown came off the bench to score 23 points in what was the Celtics' biggest margin of victory in franchise history.

Celtics forward Daniel Theis made his first start of the season and delivered a career-high 22 points and 10 rebounds.

"I was real excited [to start]," said German Theis, 26.

"I'm just trying to help the team however I can. It's been a while since I've played that long, but I feel great."

The Bulls' 56-point margin of defeat surpassed that of the 53 they fell to at Minnesota in November 2001, and victory for the Celtics eclipsed their 51-point win over the Philadelphia Warriors in 1962.

Victory also meant the Celtics stretched their winning streak to five games.

(Source: BBC)

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Liberality is better than kinship, and a liberal man is kinder than a relative.

Imam Ali (AS)

Bands to perform for women-only audience at Niavaran Cultural Center

A R T **TEHRAN** — Two all-female bands are scheduled to give performances exclusively for an audience of women at Tehran's Niavaran Cultural Center.

A group led by Yasaman Firuzi will perform modern Iranian and folk dances during the program entitled "The Days of Union" on December 13 and 14.



Diamonds in an undated photo.

Khatereh Khoshdel, Atena Farahani, Mahin Moradi, Roya Rezaian, Maryam Kazemi and Diana Nasira are among over 35 performers of the concert.

The center will also host a performance by the pop band Diamonds on January 2, 2019.

The band led by pianist Farimah Abbasi plans to perform a repertoire of their new songs in different languages including English, French, Italian, Turkish and Greek.

Amitis Eivani is the singer of the band, which also features Hengameh Ghafari on bass guitar, Rojin Edalatkhah on violin and Nasim Zebardast on drum.

"The Skier" crowned best at Greece Olympia festival

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Fereidun Najafi's "The Skier" won the best film award at the Olympia International Film Festival for Children and Young People, Iran's Art Bureau, the international distributor of the film, announced on Sunday.



A scene from Iranian director Fereidun Najafi's "The Skier".

The film tells the story of a boy from Kuhrang who faces problems on his way to take a little ibex to a tribal ritual in a snowy, remote region in Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari Province.

Iranian short "Butterfly" by Maryam Khalilzadeh was also screened at the festival, which was held in Pyrgos, Greece from December 1 to 8.

"Star Wars" costumes sketchbooks seen fetching large sums at auction

LONDON (Reuters) — A sketchbook revealing early costume designs for Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker and other "Star Wars" characters is expected to sell for more than 100,000 pounds (\$130,000) at auction in London next week.

The colored pencil sketches, drawn by Oscar-winning costume designer John Mollo between 1975 and 1976, closely resemble the final designs used in the original 1977 sci-fi film "Star Wars: A New Hope" by director George Lucas that kicked off lucrative movie and television franchises.

"It is very rare to see anything (like this) come up at auction," Katherine Schofield from Bonhams auction house told Reuters at a preview on Thursday.

"To have something of this magnitude, of this scale, from the estate of somebody who worked on the film and was so important to the film that he won an Academy Award for it, is really exciting."

Props and costumes from the multi-billion dollar "Star Wars" movie franchise frequently prove popular at auction. A complete R2-D2 droid used in the 1977 movie sold for \$2.76 million last year.

Reza Amirkhani's "Salvation" named best novel at Jalal literary awards

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — "Salvation" (Raresh), Reza Amirkhani's novel about the consequences of urban development for a young couple that live in Tehran, was picked as best novel at the 11th Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards on Saturday.

Amirkhani received his award from Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Abbas Salehi during a ceremony held at the National Library and Archives of Iran.

He dedicated the entire 1 billion rial (about \$24,000) cash prize to the Danayar Research Institute, which provides educational services for teachers and schoolchildren in remote towns, in particular in the Sistan-Baluchestan region.

The Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards, Iran's most lucrative literary prize, annually selects and awards a number of books in different categories. Each winner is awarded a trophy and 30 Bahar Azadi gold coins worth over 1.1 billion rials (over \$27,000).

However, the culture ministry, which is the main organizer of the awards, decided to present the winners the equivalent of 30 Bahar Azadi gold coins.

This year, the jury did not consider any winners for other categories, and books from the nominees only received honorable mentions as well as one-third of the 1 billion rial cash prize.

In the documentation section, the cash prize was shared by "Alef Laam Khomeini" by Hedayatollah Behbudi and "Biking to Find Shams" by Hassan Karami Qaramaleki.



Writer Reza Amirkhani (R) receives his award from Culture Minister Seyyed Abbas Salehi during the 11th Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards at the National Library and Archives of Iran in Tehran on December 8, 2018. He won the award for his novel "Salvation". (Mehr/Mohammad Moheimani)

"Lion's Wound" by Samad Taheri won the honorable mention in the short story

collection section and "The Eloquence of Syntactic Structures in the History of

Beyhaqi" by Leila Seyyedqasem received the honorable mention in the review section.

Iranian Youth Cinema Society to review Spanish short films



A poster for Spain Short Film Evening.

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Youth Cinema Society will review Spanish short films on Wednesday during a program entitled "Spain Short Film Evening".

The program will be organized in collaboration with the Embassy of Spain at the Film Museum of Iran.

"Such events are important to us, as we can share our culture properties with

Iranians," Spanish Ambassador Eduardo López Busquets said in a press release published by the society on Sunday.

"We are willing to continue our cooperation with the Iranian Youth Cinema Society to organize additional Spanish film sessions in other Iranian cities such as Tabriz and Shiraz," he added.

The society has previously organized film evenings for Japan, Finland and Chile.

Bollywood, Beyonce and bling as daughter of India's richest man set to marry

MUMBAI (Reuters) — U.S. singer Beyonce will perform at the wedding of the daughter of India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, along with Bollywood stars, and guests will be flown in on 100 chartered flights in lavish marriage celebrations.

Isha Ambani, 27, will marry Anand Piramal, 33, in the financial capital of Mumbai on Tuesday, but the festivities begin this weekend in the desert city of Udaipur, with three days of song, dance and pre-wedding rituals.

Wedding guests have access to an app mapping out the activities, which include a private concert by Beyonce.

More than 100 chartered flights are landing in Udaipur's sleepy airport, a source on the spot, who declined to be identified, told Reuters.

Bollywood stars, including Priyanka Chopra, who got married last week, will also attend.

Indian media have speculated that the guest list includes former U.S. President Bill Clinton, along with his wife and Democratic candidate in the 2016 presidential election, Hillary Clinton.

"The event will have many visitors from abroad, so customs and immigration counters have been set up at the airport and will remain active for the next five days," the airport source said.

The source declined to say how much Beyonce was being paid for the concert and media have not reported a figure.

The wedding will bring together two of India's most influential families.

Ambani, the chairman of Reliance Industries, has a net worth of \$47 billion, Forbes magazine says. The Piramals have



Construction workers install glass on the exterior of Gulita, a bungalow which according to local media will be the marital home of Isha Ambani, daughter of the Chairman of Reliance Industries Mukesh Ambani, in Mumbai, India, December 7, 2018. (Reuters/Francis Mascarenhas)

interests in pharmaceuticals and real estate, and according to a report in the news magazine India Today, have given the couple a 50,000-sq-foot (4,645-sq-m) sea-facing home in Mumbai.

Many in India, where millions live in dire poverty, have closely followed the preparations, including the couple's engagement at the luxury Villa D'Este hotel on Italy's Lake Como, attended by more than 600 guests, and featuring a private performance by singer John Legend.

Newspapers and websites have been full of details about the ceremonies, the designer jewellery and clothes, with some of India's top designers dressing the wedding party.

The wedding invitation includes necklaces and precious stones stacked in a two-tier floral box, at a cost of 300,000 rupees each (\$4,236), India Today said.

"Revolt" praised at French filmfest



A scene from "Revolt" by director Kurosh Asgari.

A R T **TEHRAN** — "Revolt" by Iranian director Kurosh Asgari won the France 3 Free Short Award at the Tous Courts Film Festival in Aix-en-Provence, France, the organizers announced on Saturday.

The award is presented by France Télévisions.

"Revolt" is about a boatwoman who makes a living by carrying passengers. She encounters a prostitute who sometimes travels with her.

One day she enters into a conflict between the prostitute and her costumer to support her. "My Love My Friend", a production between Italy and France by Adriano Valerio received the Grand Prix.

The special jury award went to "The Extraordinary Day" by French director Joanna Lurie and "How Fernando Pessoa saved Portugal" by Eugene Green from France won the award for best screenplay.

Drake and Lamar lead but women shine through in Grammy nods

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Rappers Kendrick Lamar and Drake led Grammy Award nominations on Friday, but Cardi B, Lady Gaga, Brandi Carlile and American newcomer H.E.R helped make it a female-dominated line-up for the year's top prizes in the music industry.

Ten-time Grammy winner Taylor Swift, Beyonce, Ariana Grande and Camila Cabello were among the biggest snubs in top categories that were dominated by hip-hop and R&B.

Canada's Drake, the most-streamed artist of 2018, won eight nominations, including album of the year for "Scorpion," and both song and record of the year for his single "God's Plan."

Five of the expanded eight nominees in the album of the year race were women - Cardi B's "Invasion of Privacy," Janelle Monae's "Dirty Computer", folk singer Brandi Carlile's "By the Way, I Forgive You," country singer Kacey Musgraves' "Golden Hour" and newcomer H.E.R.'s self-titled "H.E.R."

Rapper Post Malone's "Beerbongs & Bentleys" and the soundtrack to hit movie "Black Panther," which was produced by Lamar, round out the album of the year field.

Lamar, the first rapper to win a Pulitzer Prize for music, Drake, Cardi B and Carlile also garnered nominations for record of the year.

The Recording Academy, whose members choose the Grammys, this year expanded to eight from five the number of nominees in the top four categories - record, song and album of the year, and best new artist - to allow a more diverse line-up.



Drake performs during the iHeartRadio Music Festival at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada, U.S., September 23, 2016. (Reuters/Steve Marcus)

The Academy also expanded its membership and set up a diversity task force after an uproar over the low number of female nominees, winners and performers on the televised ceremony in January.

Six of the eight best new artist nominees on Friday were women, including H.E.R., Chloe x Halle, British pop star Dua Lipa, and Bebe Rexha.

Cardi B, coming off a phenomenal year, Lady Gaga, actor Donald Glover's music moniker Childish Gambino, and country-pop star Maren Morris each had five nominations overall.

Lady Gaga's nominations came mostly from her single "Shallow" with actor-director Bradley Cooper from their movie "A Star is Born," which won five Golden Globe nods on Thursday.

In the biggest snub, Swift, one of the world's most successful singers, was shut out of the major awards, getting just one nomination in the pop category for her best-selling album "Reputation."