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Saudis getting more bogged down in Yemen

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'EU plans to finalize SPV as soon as possible'

ECONOMY TEHRAN — In a way to counter the U.S. sanctions on Iran, European Union plans to finalize the special purpose vehicle (SPV) as soon as possible to facilitate export and import processes between EU members and Iran, Tarja Cronberg, the head of the European Parliament delegation for relations with Iran, stated. She made the remarks during a meeting

with Gholam-Hossein Shafe'i, the head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), at the place of ICCIMA on Tuesday, ICCIMA website reported. Also as Bloomberg reported on Monday, European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini has said that SPV meant to help companies do business with Iran will be completed by the end of the year. →4

Rouhani urges unity in face of psychological and economic war

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that the United States and his regional allies have started a psychological and economic warfare against Iran and it is necessary to keep unity to counter it. "There is a kind of economic and psychological warfare, and we cannot say that the situation is normal. In this situation, we should help each other through unity," he told a cabinet session.

Rouhani said in this situation the people should not face difficulty in buying basic commodities and that prices of commodities should be fair. President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. unilaterally from the 2015 nuclear deal 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. →2

Yemen's warring parties agree to reopen Sana'a airport for domestic flights

Yemen's warring parties agreed Wednesday to reopen the airport in the Houthi-held capital of Sana'a for domestic flights, one of the confidence-building steps under discussion at UN-led peace talks in Sweden, sources familiar with the talks said. The Houthi movement and the Saudi-backed government have agreed that

international flights would stop at a government-held airport for inspections before flying into or out of Sana'a. They have yet to agree whether those inspections would take place in the airport of Aden or that of Sayun. Sana'a airport is in Houthi territory, but access is restricted by an Arab-led military coalition, which controls the air space. →13

ARTICLE
Martin Love
Political analyst from North Carolina

What dooms nations can be surprising, and it resides internally

One can believe without fear of realistic opposition that people in general are much the same everywhere. Sure, cultures vary, religions and social systems vary, but the fundamental aspects and challenges and even joys of human life remain constant. This is no great epiphany, just simply the result of exposure. That said, feel-good narratives are all over the U.S. media, but most all of it is propaganda to give the largely unexposed public the impression that all is well. It isn't.

Of late one feel-good narrative has focused on George H.W. Bush, who died. You would think this former one-term President was some kind of Christian saint, or maybe a man of al-Ghazzali's wisdom and stature in the Muslim world. No way. Bush was in fact the epitome of a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant butcher masquerading as some sort of "man of peace" when he was President, and before in other governmental positions.

He actually was responsible for the butchering of hundreds of thousands of human beings. One notable incident occurred when he butchered many thousands of Iraqi soldiers who were in hasty retreat from Kuwait during the first Gulf War. This was unnecessary carnage. The war had already been won, and anyway it had originally gathered steam because of a false report that Iraqi soldiers were murdering babies in incubators in Kuwaiti hospitals.

Anyway, George H.W. Bush had a fancy funeral in Washington. At the official funeral ceremony his eldest son, George W. Bush spoke. You know, the President who ginned up the so-called "War on Terror" and invaded several countries, most notably Iraq. He is reported to have butchered maybe a couple million Middle Eastern people, most of them Muslims. Like father, you might say, like son.

Now, it has become accepted wisdom, even in the U.S., that the Iraq War was a "mistake" (for a number of obvious reasons only sub-cretins could miss.). Since Bush junior was responsible for this war, inasmuch as he was overwhelmed by bad Neocon and Zionist advice, he has not been particularly popular since he left office. →7

Sacrificing ethics for money

By Mohammad Homaefar
President Donald Trump and his die-hard loyalists have been tarnishing the image of the United States badly during the last 23 months since Trump entered the White House. Now, while the CIA and key senators from both Republican and Democratic parties are saying that evidence shows that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, known as MBS, had ordered the killing of Jamal Khashoggi,

Trump, his secretary of state Mike Pompeo and defense secretary James Mattis argue that there is no proof that MBS had advance knowledge of the murder. The CIA is believed to have evidence that bin Salman communicated repeatedly with an aide who commanded the team that assassinated Khashoggi, around the time of Khashoggi's death on October 2. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham who

after a classified briefing on December 5 about the murder of Khashoggi called the prince a "wrecking ball", "crazy" and "dangerous", in an open reference to Trump and his soldiers (Pompeo and Mattis), said, "You have to be willfully blind not to come to the conclusion that this was orchestrated and organized by people under the command of MBS and that he was intrinsically involved in the demise of Mr. Khashoggi." →13

1398 budget bill, (non)-oil revenues?

By Haniyeh Sadat Jafaryieh
The budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1398 (starting on March 21, 2019) was presented to the parliament on December 6 while Iran's economy, previously expected to boom, is experiencing the toughest conditions under the draconian U.S. sanctions. The upcoming year is supposedly an economic predicament for Iranians to endure and for the government to program and handle.

Budget bill in review:
The prepared budget bill, which will be officially submitted to the parliament by the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on December 16, is said to be contractionary. According to official information, major policies applied by the Rouhani administration in preparing the annual budget bill include:
• reaching stable economic conditions and improvement of business environment,

• controlling unemployment rate and preserving job creation,
• providing social justice and improvement of fair distribution of income,
• managing the operating deficit, improving the balance of capital assets, and
• developing regional-provincial balance. To improve general livelihood of Iranians, spur job creation, support production, and reinforce budget discipline the budget bill is aimed at: →4

PGCC might survive in name only: Chicago professor

By Javad Heirannia
TEHRAN — Robert R. Bianchi, a professor at the University of Chicago, believes that "Nowadays, China and Russia are acquiring greater influence in Iran and the Persian Gulf nations so it is natural that Doha and Muscat are inviting them to balance the destabilizing consequences of American and Saudi policies." Professor Bianchi, who also teaches at the Shanghai International Studies University (SISU), adds that "It's possible to say that Saudi Arabia and the UAE have virtually broken with the PGCC

by forming a separate defense agreement that excludes the other members." He adds that "The PGCC might survive in name only." Following is the complete text of the interview:
■ The Persian Gulf Cooperation Council's (PGCC) annual summit was held in Riyadh while the Qatari emir and the Sultan of Oman refrained from joining. What are the reasons behind this refusal?
A: Qatar and Oman are responding intelligently to profound shifts in the balance of

power, both globally and in their immediate neighborhood. Doha and Muscat see the Trump administration trying to downgrade America's responsibilities in the Middle East while inviting Saudi Arabia to escalate proxy wars with Iran all across the region. This has led to greater bloodshed in Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Such a polarized environment severely threatens the longstanding practice in Qatar and Oman of preserving good relations with Iran and Washington at the same time. →7

REPORT
Syed Zafar Mehdi
Journalist from New Delhi

Person of the Year: Murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi

As 2018 approaches its end, it is time to look back at the important events and happenings that shaped the year. The year would go down in history for many reasons — tragic incidents, hyperbolic remarks, political dramas, trade wars, downfall of dictators, rise of democrats.

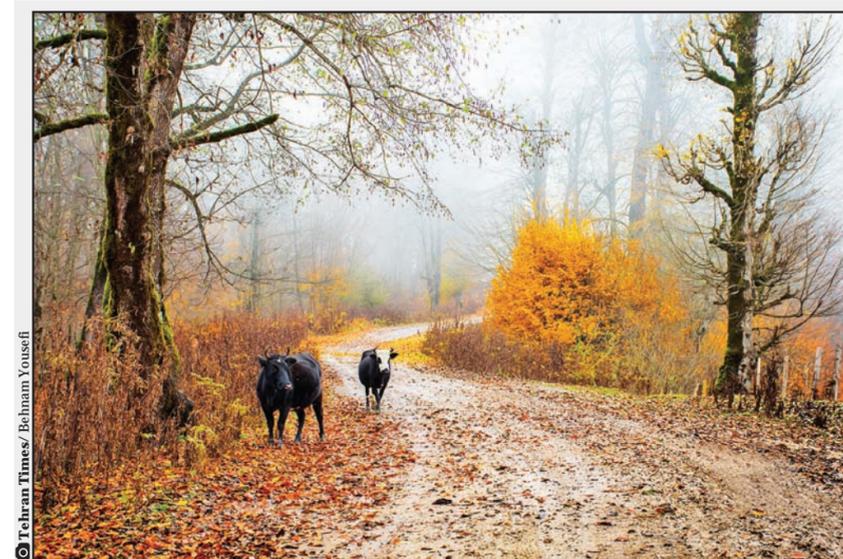
Some of the important events that shaped the world and grabbed our attention this year include U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally and quite dramatically pulling out of an international nuclear deal with Iran, a massive earthquake jolting Indonesia's Sulawesi island and killing thousands, Democrats regaining control of the U.S. house of representatives, cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan's party sweeping Pakistan's general elections, U.S. and China getting embroiled in a bitter trade war, and the brutal murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi ordered by the Saudi crown prince.

Khashoggi's murder on October 02 grabbed headlines across the world and generated a wave of anger and outrage against the Saudi regime. The manner in which the diabolical crime was carried out and the secrecy surrounding it generated tremendous amount of interest among people around the world.

Of course, it was not an ordinary crime committed against a lesser-known person at an undisclosed location for a petty reason. It was a monstrous crime against a well-known journalist carried out on the orders of Saudi crown prince at the country's consulate in Turkey.

Khashoggi's murder is one event that defined this year. A tragic incident that unmasked despots and neo-imperialists. The year would also be remembered for the decline of Saudi empire and Mohammad Bin Salman's fall from grace. What Khashoggi could not accomplish in his life, although he tried hard, he did that after his death. He can now rest in peace.

In a strong critique of the state of press freedom around the world, Time magazine has chosen 'The Guardians', a group of journalists targeted for their work, as 'Person of the Year'. The group includes Khashoggi, Capital Gazette newsroom and three other journalists. →6



Breathtaking autumn scenery across northern Iran

With the colorful season of autumn setting in, the riot of colors in the eye-catching, pristine landscapes in northern Iran is spectacular. The photo is depicting a quiet, deserted road in the northern province of Mazandaran. The misty weather surrounding the road and trees ornamented with colorful leaves hanging loosely from the branches all mesmerize the passersby.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Vaezi: SPV to become operational in weeks

POLITICS TEHRAN — Presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi said on Wednesday the special purpose vehicle (SPV), a European mechanism which aims to facilitate trade with Iran in defiance of U.S. sanctions, will come into effect within two or three weeks.

Speaking on the sidelines of a cabinet session, Vaezi pointed to the recent measures taken by the European Union to save the 2015 nuclear deal following the U.S. exit, saying the EU has vowed to counter Washington's renewed sanctions on Iran, Tasnim reported.

On May 8, U.S. President Donald Trump pulled his country out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and ordered re-imposition of sanctions on Iran.



IRGC has found clues about Chabahar terror attackers

POLITICS TEHRAN — Interior Minister Abdolkarim Rashti said on Wednesday that the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) has found clues about the perpetrators of the recent terrorist attack in Chabahar, Sistan-Baluchestan Province.

The IRGC is tasked with providing the security of that region and it will certainly give a crushing response to those involved in the attack, Rashti said, Mehr reported.

It came a week after a terrorist suicide blast in southeastern port of Chabahar near the Pakistani border, which left two police forces dead and dozens, including civilians, injured.



EU must take practical measures to establish SPV: advisor

POLITICS TEHRAN — A senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian parliament speaker has said Europe's promise of establishing the special purpose vehicle (SPV) needs practical measures.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks at a meeting with Tarja Cronberg, a member of the Executive Board of the European Leadership Network, Mehr reported on Wednesday.

While hailing the European Union's defiance of the unilateral U.S. sanctions against Iran, Amir-Abdollahian said Europe's delay in establishing the SPV is not acceptable.

Cronberg admitted that Europe has not acted quickly in fulfilling Iran's expectations from the nuclear deal it signed with world powers in July 2015 and went into effect in January 2016.



Tehran commends Armenian parliamentary polls

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Tuesday hailed the recent parliamentary elections in Armenia as part of a trend towards democratic changes in the neighboring country, the Foreign Ministry website reported.

In a statement, Qassemi expressed the hope that Iran and Armenia could increasingly strengthen their mutual relations following the participation of the Armenians in general elections and subsequent formation of the new government there.

Establishing ties with all neighboring states has a very significant and decisive position in Iran's foreign policy and helps establish peace, stability, prosperity and security in all regional states, he added.



Israel accession to FATF not important: MP

POLITICS TEHRAN — MP Alaeddin Boroujerdi said on Wednesday that the accession of Israel to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is not important for Iran, adding that the Zionist regime, whether it be a member of the FATF or not, makes every effort to pressure Iran.

"Israel is an eternal enemy of the Islamic Iran and will spare no efforts in pressuring Iran, especially through America," ISNA quoted Boroujerdi as saying.

He added that despite the pressure, the Iranian parliament goes ahead with the passing of the FATF-related bills.

On Monday, it was reported that Israel had been accepted as a member the FATF, which is dedicated to combating money laundering and terrorism financing.



Iran, Azerbaijan sign border security pact

POLITICS TEHRAN — Chiefs of the Iranian and Azeri border police on Tuesday signed a cooperation agreement to boost security at common borders, IRNA reported.

Brigadier General Qassem Rezaei from Iran and Colonel General Elchin Isa Oglu Guliyev from Azerbaijan signed the agreement. According to the pact, the two sides will boost exchange of intelligence and cooperation in fighting drug trafficking along the borders.

The agreement was signed on the sidelines of a meeting of border guard commanders of Iran and Azerbaijan in Baku.

Iran among top five producers of destroyers, vessels: military



POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran is among the world's top five producers of destroyers and vessels, deputy minister for defense and logistics affairs told a conference on Tuesday.

During the one-day conference themed "Explaining the Doctrine of Resistance" and hosted by the University of Tabriz, Brigadier General Amir Rastegari said today the Defense Ministry is capable of producing a plethora of military equipment, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

He also announced that Fateh submarine will join the Navy's fleet soon.

Rastegari, also head of the Maritime Industries Organization, said, "It is an honor for the armed forces that all defense equipment are produced inside the country."

"Today, all doctrines and policies are focused on promoting capabilities in the defense sector," the top military official remarked. "We have reached self-sufficiency in

producing all types of destroyers, as well as flying and radar-evading boats," he said, noting that the Defense Ministry attaches high significance to innovation to improve the country's industrial and scientific capabilities.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great headways in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in the arms sphere.

In a meeting with Navy commanders earlier this month, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei praised as "great and fabulous" the advances that the military forces, the Navy in particular, have made since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. He said the Navy's success in bringing into service homegrown vessels such as the Sahand destroyer or Fateh and Qadir submarines heralds more progress day after day.

Russian diplomat says SPV is essential to do business with Iran

POLITICS TEHRAN — Sergei Ryabkov, the Russian deputy foreign minister, has said that Europe's special vehicle purpose (SPV) is essential to do business with Iran, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

Ryabkov made the remarks in a meeting with Mehdi Sanaei, Tehran's ambassador to Moscow.

France and Germany have agreed to SPV which is a special payment channel created by Europe as part of its efforts to keep trade flowing with Iran in defiance of U.S. sanctions. The German magazine Wirtschaftswoche has reported

it has been agreed that the related company be located in France and its director to be chosen from Germany.

Bloomberg reported on Monday that European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini has said the SPV will be completed by the end of the year.

"I would expect this instrument to be established in the coming weeks, so before the end of the year, as a way to protect and promote legitimate business with Iran," she said.

The Wall Street Journal reported in November that British officials were also mulling over joining France and Germany

in order to rescue the European attempt to circumvent the U.S. sanctions and salvage the 2015 nuclear deal.

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

Abdolnaser Hemmati, governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), told a meeting of economists on Monday that Iran has made mutual monetary agreements with some countries to abolish U.S. dollar in financial transactions and the issue will be incrementally generalized to other countries in future.

'Iran, N. Korea see closer ties as remedy against U.S. sanctions'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Head of the Iran-North Korea parliamentary friendship group on Wednesday underlined the importance of closer relations between Iran and North Korea to counter the effect of cruel sanctions the U.S. has imposed against the two countries.

Alaeddin Boroujerdi made the remarks in a meeting with North Korean Amba-

sador to Tehran Kang Sam-hyon, Mehr reported.

The MP said Iran and North Korea enjoy great potential to meet the interests of the two countries.

"There are numerous potentials in Iran and North Korea, which need to be realized through careful and proper planning in order to advance the national interests of the two countries," Boroujerdi remarked.

He said parliamentary ties can facilitate political, economic and cultural relations between the two nations.

The lawmaker also emphasized the importance of implementing bilateral economic agreements and facilitating the involvement of the private sectors of Iran and North Korea in both sides' economy.

Kang, for his part, acknowledged the friendly nature of relations between the

two sides, saying the optimal use of the existing economic and agricultural platforms in North Korea and Iran can lead to closer ties.

Pointing to the recent visit by Iran-North Korea parliamentary friendship group to Pyongyang, the ambassador said expansion of relations among independent countries against U.S. sanctions can decrease the impact of the sanctions.

UN chief calls on all countries to preserve nuclear deal

By staff and agency

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has called on all countries to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, now that the U.S. has withdrawn from the multilateral agreement backed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

According to a confidential UN report seen by Reuters on Tuesday, Guterres called on all countries to "ensure the

continuity of this agreement that is fundamental to regional and international peace and security."

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.

Iran and the European side have been discussing ways to

conduct non-dollar trade in order to offset the U.S. sanctions.

France and Germany have agreed to host the special vehicle purpose (SPV), a special payment channel created by Europe as part of its efforts to keep trade flowing with Iran in defiance of U.S. sanctions.

Bloomberg reported on Monday that European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini has said the SPV will be completed by the end of the year.

Trump seeking 'psychological-media objective' through talks offer: diplomat

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's Ambassador to the UK, Hamid Baeedinejad, has said that Donald President Trump is seeking a "psychological-media objective" by calling for talks with Iran.

"U.S. sets 12 impossible conditions for Iran and at the same time calls for talks without any condition at highest political level. They seek psychological-media objective by calling for talks," Baeedinejad said in a post on his Instagram, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

The ambassador also noted that the U.S. violated the 2231 resolution of the UN Security Council by quitting the 2015 nuclear deal in May and has "no clear policy for the future".

In a press conference at the White House on July 30, Trump said he would meet with Iran "anytime they want to" and without "preconditions".

However, hours after Trump's statements, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo appeared on CNBC to set some conditions.



Back in May, Pompeo had set 12 conditions for talks with Iran, which were dismissed by Tehran.

In remarks on August 13, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said there will be no war between Iran and the U.S. and nor will be any negotiation between the two countries.

The Leader noted that negotiation with the current U.S. administration is impossible. "Even if we were to negotiate with the U.S., we would never hold talks with the current U.S. administration."

Iranian envoy meets top IAEA officials in Vienna

Iran's ambassador to Vienna-based international organizations held meetings with senior officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Austria.

In one of the meetings in Vienna on Tuesday, Kazem Gharibabadi held talks with IAEA Deputy Director General and head of the Department of Nuclear Safety and Security Juan Carlos Lentijo.

The Iranian envoy also separately met with IAEA Deputy Director General and Head of the Department of Safeguards Massimo Aparo, and with IAEA Deputy Director General and Head of the Department of Nuclear Energy Mikhail Chudakov.

The talks revolved around the existing joint projects between Iran and the IAEA and ways to promote cooperation and bilateral ties.

The IAEA is responsible for monitoring Iran's nuclear activities as per the 2015 nuclear deal and should also help Iran develop its nuclear energy program.

On May 8, U.S. President Donald Trump pulled his country out of the Joint



Iran's Kazem Gharibabadi meeting with IAEA Deputy Director General and Head of the Department of Safeguards Massimo Aparo, December 11, 2018.

Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was achieved in Vienna in 2015 after years of negotiations among Iran and the Group 5+1 (Russia, China, the U.S., Britain, France and Germany).

Since the historic deal was signed in Vienna, the IAEA has confirmed the Islamic Republic's compliance with its commitments in 13 successive reports.

(Source: Tasnim)

Leader: Saudis getting more bogged down in Yemen

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said on Wednesday that Saudi Arabia has been caught in the Yemeni quagmire and the more they try to get involved in the war against Yemenis the more they will be bogged down.

"They (the Saudis) thought they would gain control [of Yemen] in a matter of days or weeks. [But] the farther they go, the harder they will fall down and the more stinging will be the blow that they will receive," the Leader noted, according to Press TV.

Addressing the families of martyrs, the Leader said this has happened despite the fact that the U.S. has been helping Saudi Arabia militarily and politically in the war on Yemen.

The United States is a complicit in the crimes Saudi Arabia has been committing in the war against the people of Yemen, Ayatollah Khamenei pointed out.

The war on Yemen, started in March 2015 under a coalition led by Saudi Arabia, has put nearly half of the country's

population on the verge of starvation.

The Leader said the Saudis have extended a hand of friendship to the enemies of Islam.

Leader also said over the past years, the U.S. has consistently sought, but failed, to restore the domination it enjoyed over Iran prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and to bring the country under its tutelage similar to certain weak regional states, which Washington has branded as its "milk cows."

The leader further underlined Washington's stepped-up campaign against Iran over the past two years, saying the Americans sought to increase pressure on the country through sanctions and measures to disrupt national security with the aim of creating division and conflict among various groups.

"They were planning to lead some to the streets and had even referred to it as 'the hot summer.' To the enemies' dismay, [however], this past summer was one of the best ever," the Leader noted.

However, Ayatollah Khamenei cautioned, the U.S. might have plans coming for Iran. "America is a wicked, treacherous enemy and it might be playing deception by staging a row for the year (13)97, but for example devise a scheme for the year (13)98."

The Leader mocked claims by certain U.S. officials that the Islamic Revolution will not get to celebrate its anniversary in 2019, stressing, "The Iranian nation is standing in all strength and will, by divine grace, celebrate the 40th anniversary of the revolution in far greater splendor this year."

The Leader said by dubbing the U.S. "the Great Satan," Imam Khomeini united the world's monotheists and fair-minded nations against Washington.

At a Paris gathering in July 2017, John Bolton, now the national security advisor to Donald Trump, told the Mujahedeen Khalq members that "the outcome of the president's policy review should be to determine that the Ayatollah Khomeini's 1979 revolution will not last until its 40th birthday."

Rouhani urges unity in face of psychological and economic war

1 -> This happened despite the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency, which is authorized to oversee Iran's compliance to the nuclear deal, in its regular reports has confirmed that

Iran is fully abiding by the terms of the agreement.

Trump ditched the nuclear despite by warnings by the international community, including its Western allies.

Speaking to a select Jewish audience on December 7 at the White House reception for Hanukkah, Trump boasted for leaving what he called "the horrible Iran nuclear" deal.

"It was a horrible, horrible deal. Should have never been made and imposed the toughest-ever sanction. We sanctioned Iran like I guess few have ever been sanctioned before."

Police hunt through eastern France for Strasbourg Christmas market attacker

Police searched through eastern France on Wednesday for a man suspected of killing at least two people in a gun attack on a Christmas market in Strasbourg and who was known to have been religiously radicalized while in jail.

Witnesses told investigators the assailant cried out "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greater) as he launched his attack on the market, the Paris prosecutor said.

The prosecutor, Remy Heitz, also suggested the suspect may have chosen his target for its religious symbolism.

"Considering the target, his way of operating, his profile and the testimonies of those who heard him yell 'Allahu Akbar', the anti-terrorist police has been called into action," Heitz told a news conference.

Police identified the suspect as Strasbourg-born Cherif Chekatt, 29, who is on an intelligence services watch list as a potential security risk.

An investigation had been opened into alleged murder with terrorist intent and suspected ties to terrorist networks with intent to commit crimes, Heitz said.

Two people were killed and a third person was brain-dead and being kept alive on life support, he said. Six other victims were fighting for their lives.

France raised its security threat to the highest alert level, strengthening controls on its border with Germany as elite commandos backed by helicopters hunted for the suspect.

French and German agents checked vehicles and public transport crossing the Rhine river, along which the Franco-German frontier runs, backing up traffic in both directions. Hundreds of French troops and police were taking part in the manhunt.

Deputy Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said he could not rule out that the fugitive had already crossed the frontier.

Serial convict

The gunman struck at about 1900 GMT on Tuesday, just as the picturesque Christmas



market in the historic city was shutting down. He engaged in two gunfights with security forces as he evaded a police dragnet and bragged about his acts to the driver of a taxi that he commandeered, prosecutor Heitz said.

No one has yet claimed responsibility, but the U.S.-based Site intelligence group, which monitors jihadist websites, said ISIL terrorist group supporters were celebrating.

French and German security officials painted a portrait of Chekatt as a serial law-breaker who had racked up more than two dozen convictions in France, Germany and Switzerland, and served time in prison.

"It was during these spells in jail that

we detected a radicalization in his religious practices. But we there were never signs he was preparing an attack," Minister Nunez said.

One German security source said the suspect was jailed in southern Germany from August 2016 to February 2017 for aggravated theft but was released before the end of his 27-month sentence so that he could be deported to France.

"He was banned from re-entering Germany at the same time", the security source in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg said. "We don't have any knowledge of any kind of radicalization."

Border controls

The attack took place at a testing time for President Emmanuel Macron, who is strug-

gling to quell a month-long public revolt over high living costs that has spurred the worst public unrest in central Paris since the 1968 student riots.

The revelation that Chekatt was on a security watchlist will raise questions over possible intelligence failures, though some 26,000 individuals suspected of posing a security risk to France are on the "S File" list.

Of these, about 10,000 are believed to have been radicalized, sometimes in fundamentalist Salafist Muslim mosques, in jail or abroad. Police had raided the suspect's home early on Tuesday in connection with a homicide investigation. Five people were detained and under interrogation as part of that investigation.

At the Europa Bridge, the main border crossing in the region used by commuters traveling in both directions, armed police inspected vehicles. Police were also checking pedestrians and trains arriving in Germany from Strasbourg.

"We don't know where the attacker is and we want to prevent him from entering Germany," a spokeswoman for the German border police Bundespolizei said.

French Justice Minister Nicole Belloubet said there was no need for the government to declare a state of emergency.

Secular France has for years grappled with how to respond to both homegrown jihadists and foreign militants following attacks in Paris, Nice, Marseille and beyond.

In 2016, a truck plowed into a Bastille Day crowd in Nice, killing more than 80 people. In November 2015, coordinated Islamist militant attacks on the Bataclan concert hall and other sites in Paris claimed about 130 lives.

There have also been attacks in Paris on police on the Champs-Elysees avenue, the offices of satirical weekly publication Charlie Hebdo and a kosher store.

A man drove a truck into a crowd at a Christmas market in Berlin in December 2016, killing 12 people.

(Source: Reuters)

Canada frees CFO of China's Huawei on bail

A top executive of Chinese telecoms giant Huawei Technologies Co Ltd was granted bail by a Canadian court on Tuesday, 10 days after her arrest in Vancouver at the request of U.S. authorities sparked a diplomatic dispute.

Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's [HWT.UL] chief financial officer and the daughter of its founder, faces U.S. claims that she misled multinational banks about Iran-linked transactions, putting the banks at risk of violating U.S. sanctions.

In a court hearing in Vancouver, British Columbia, Justice William Ehrcke granted C\$10 million (\$7.5 million) bail to Meng, who has been jailed since her arrest on Dec. 1. The courtroom erupted in applause when the decision was announced. Meng cried and hugged her lawyers.

Among conditions of her bail, the 46-year-old executive must wear an ankle monitor and stay at home from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. Five friends pledged equity in their homes and other money as a guarantee she will not flee.

If a Canadian judge rules the case against Meng is strong enough, Canada's justice minister must next decide whether to extradite her to the United States. If so, Meng would face U.S. charges of conspiracy to defraud multiple financial institutions, with a maximum sentence of 30 years for each charge.

The arrest of Meng has put a further dampener on Chinese relations with the United States and Canada at a time when tensions were already high over a trade war and U.S. accusations of Chinese spying.

U.S. President Donald Trump told Reuters on Tuesday he would intervene in the U.S. Justice Department's case against Meng if it would serve national security interests or help close a trade deal with China.

Speaking in Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said Meng's arrest "was a mistake from the start".

"We have already made clear our position to the United States and Canada, who should immediately correct their mistake and release Meng Wanzhou," he told a daily news briefing.

"Any person, especially if it is a leader of the United States, or a high-level figure, who is willing to make positive efforts to push this situation toward the correct direction, then that, of course, deserves to be well received."



China had threatened severe consequences unless Canada released Meng immediately, and analysts have said retaliation from Beijing over the arrest was likely.

The U.S. State Department is considering issuing a travel warning for its citizens, two sources said on Tuesday.

The Canadian government was considering issuing a similar warning, Canada's CTV network reported. Reuters was not able to confirm the report.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Canadian government said that one of its citizens in China had been detained.

The International Crisis Group think-tank said on Wednesday it had received no information from Chinese officials about the detention of its employee, former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig, and that it was seeking consular access to him.

The Chinese ministry spokesman, Lu, said he had nothing he could say on the details of the case, but said the ICG was not registered in China as a non-governmental organization and Kovrig could have broken Chinese law.

The Canadian government said it saw no explicit link to the Huawei case.

However, Guy Saint-Jacques, Canada's former ambassador to China, asked by the Canadian Broadcasting Corp whether the Kovrig detention was a coincidence, said: "In China there are no coincidences... If they want to send you

a message they will send you a message."

Electronic monitoring

Meng, who was arrested as she was changing planes in Vancouver, has said she is innocent and will contest the allegations in the United States if she is extradited.

Tuesday was the third day of bail hearings. Meng's defense had argued that she was not a flight risk, citing her long-standing ties to Canada, properties she owns in Vancouver and fears for her health while incarcerated.

Her family assured the court she would remain in Vancouver at one of her family houses in an affluent neighborhood. Her husband said he plans to bring the couple's daughter to Vancouver to attend school, and Meng had said she would be grateful for the chance to read a novel after years of working hard.

"I am satisfied that on the particular facts of this case... the risk of her non-attendance in court can be reduced to an acceptable level by imposing bail conditions," said the judge, adding that he was also persuaded by the fact that Meng was a well-educated businesswoman with no criminal record.

She must remain in Canada and be accompanied by security guards when she leaves her residence. Meng will pay a cash deposit of C\$7 million, with five guarantors liable for a remaining C\$3 million if she absconds.

Meng was ordered to reappear in court on Feb. 6 to make plans for further appearances.

Huawei, which makes smartphones and network equipment, said in a statement it looked forward to a "timely resolution" of the case.

"We have every confidence that the Canadian and U.S. legal systems will reach a just conclusion," it said, adding that it complied with all laws and regulations where it operates.

The case against Meng stems from a 2013 Reuters report here about Huawei's close ties to Hong Kong-based Skycom Tech Co Ltd, which attempted to sell U.S. equipment to Iran despite U.S. and European Union bans.

Huawei is the world's largest supplier of telecommunications network equipment and second-biggest maker of smartphones, with revenue of about \$92 billion last year. Unlike other big Chinese technology firms, it does much of its business overseas.

Argentina foreign minister visits Qatar to drum up trade

Argentina's foreign minister said Wednesday that his crisis-ridden country desperately needed international investment, as he began a two-day visit to one of the world's richest nations, Qatar.

Jorge Faurie said Buenos Aires was "reaching out" to Doha at a time when it battles runaway inflation and economic austerity, and recently agreed to a loan from the International Monetary Fund.

"Argentina is at a point in its economy where it is highly dependent on external financing, which is why we are reaching out to countries that could invest in Argentina," he told reporters at a news conference.

"And Qatar is a country with great potential for foreign investments, and this is why we are in contact with them."

Faurie is expected to meet several high-profile government figures while in Doha, including Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

The visit comes just weeks after Argentina



approved an austerity budget, designed to meet the requirements of a \$56 billion IMF

bailout, despite widespread protests. Inflation is expected to reach almost 50

percent by the end of this year.

Argentina and Qatar enjoy increasingly warm relations as Buenos Aires seeks fresh trade opportunities and Doha looks for allies at a time when it is isolated regionally in a diplomatic stand-off with neighboring countries.

In October, the emir visited Argentina, and there have been high-profile deals between the two countries.

In June, state-owned Qatar Petroleum acquired a 30 percent stake in two Exxon Mobil affiliates in Argentina, allowing the company access to oil and gas shale assets there.

In May, Qatar Airways became the shirt sponsors of Buenos Aires-based Boca Juniors football club.

Faurie added that Argentina would "be at all times available" for any trade opportunities from the 2022 World Cup, which will be held in Qatar.

(Source: AFP)

Pakistan denounces blacklisting by U.S. for religious freedom violations

Pakistan on Wednesday denounced the United States for placing it on a list of countries violating religious freedoms, calling the designation politically motivated.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Tuesday added mainly Muslim Pakistan to the U.S. list of "countries of particular concern", which have violated religious freedoms or tolerated abuses against religious groups.

The move is likely to put further strain on relations between Islamabad and Washington, who have repeatedly clashed over how to deal with Islamist militants waging war in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's addition to the list comes despite efforts to end what in recent years has been its most controversial case involving a member of a minority religion.

The Supreme Court in October acquitted a Christian woman held on death row for more than eight years on a charge of blasphemy that she denied. The acquittal sparked days of violent protests by Muslims. Pakistan's foreign ministry said preserving the rights of minorities was a "cardinal principle" of the constitution, and it denounced the inclusion on the U.S. list.

"Pakistan rejects the U.S. State Department's unilateral and politically motivated pronouncement," the ministry said in a statement.

Last year, the United States put Pakistan on a watch-list of countries that violate religious freedom.

This year came the designation, along with Myanmar, China, Eritrea, North Korea, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Pakistan was created out of Muslim-majority areas in colonial India in 1947, and for decades portrayed itself as a progressive Islamic nation.

Starting in the 1980s, however, it has drifted towards a more conservative interpretation of Islam that has reshaped the political landscape, fueled militancy and cowed champions of tolerance and members of minorities into silence.

The vast majority of Pakistan's 208 million people are Muslims, with minorities accounting for about 4 percent of the population, including Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and members of the Ahmadi Muslim sect, who say they are singled out for persecution.

Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari said Pakistan's inclusion on the U.S. list was "pure political blackmailing" and an attempt by the United States to pressure Pakistan to implement U.S. policy goals in Afghanistan. Pompeo urged counties on the list to increase respect for religious freedom.

"In far too many places across the globe, individuals continue to face harassment, arrests, or even death for simply living their lives in accordance with their beliefs," he said in a statement.

(Source: Reuters)

Ex-Trump lawyer Cohen to be sentenced for hush money payments

U.S. President Donald Trump's former personal lawyer Michael Cohen will be sentenced on Wednesday for his role in the payment of hush money to women who said they had affairs with Trump and for lying to Congress about a proposed Trump Tower project in Russia that was discussed during the 2016 election campaign.

Cohen, 52, pleaded guilty in August to charges by federal prosecutors in New York that, just before the election, he paid adult film actress Stormy Daniels \$130,000 and helped arrange a \$150,000 payment to former Playboy model Karen McDougal so the women would keep quiet about their relationships with Trump, who is married. Trump denies having the affairs.

Cohen also admitted to unrelated tax and bank fraud. He faces sentencing on a separate charge of lying to Congress brought by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who is investigating possible coordination between Trump's campaign and Russia. Cohen pleaded guilty to that charge last month.

The sentencing by U.S. District Judge William Pauley in Manhattan will cap the stunning about-face of a lawyer who once said he would "take a bullet" for Trump but has now directly implicated the president in criminal conduct.

Trump has denied any collusion with Russia and has accused Mueller's team of pressuring his former aides to lie about him, his campaign and his business dealings. Russia has denied U.S. allegations of interfering in the election to help Trump.

Prosecutors and Cohen both say the hush money payments violated campaign finance laws and were directed by Trump himself to cover up affairs he had in 2006 and 2007. Federal law requires that the contribution of "anything of value" to a campaign must be disclosed, and an individual donation cannot exceed \$2,700.

Trump said on Monday on Twitter that the payments were a "simple private transaction" that did not violate the law.

Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani has argued the payments cannot be considered campaign finance violations because they were made to protect Trump's reputation and would have been made even if he had not been a presidential candidate.

Though Cohen asked in a Nov. 30 court filing to be given no jail time based on his assistance in the investigation, prosecutors on Friday asked that Cohen be given a "substantial term of imprisonment" for his crimes with only a "modest" reduction to the roughly four to five-year term they say he faces under sentencing guidelines.

Though they said he provided useful information about the hush money payments, prosecutors said Cohen declined to sign a formal cooperation agreement, which would have required him to be fully debriefed about his entire criminal history and his knowledge of others' crimes. His refusal to cooperate fully, they said, limited his credibility as a witness.

In his guilty plea to Mueller's charge, Cohen admitted he lied to Congress about the timeline for discussions about plans for real estate businessman Trump's skyscraper in Moscow. He said in written testimony to two committees that the talks ended in January 2016, before the first Republican primaries, when they actually continued until June 2016 after Trump clinched the Republican nomination.

Sentencing consultant Justin Paperny said Judge Pauley, has a reputation for being tough on white-collar defendants and that Cohen probably made a mistake by asking for no jail time when he failed to fully cooperate.

"It's like he wanted to have his cake and eat it too," said Paperny, adding that Cohen would do well to get a sentence in the low end of the guidelines.

(Source: Reuters)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	165352.1
IFX	1851.22

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,994 rials
GBP	53,528 rials
AED	11,380 rials

Source: iribnews.ir

COMMODITIES

WTI	\$52.41/b
Brent	\$61.03/b
OPEC Basket	\$59.72/b
Gold	\$1,246.30/oz
Silver	\$14.76/oz
Platinum	\$789.90/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Iran's electricity industry needs over \$142b to tackle rising demand

ENERGY TEHRAN — The managing director of Iran's Power Generation and Distribution Company (known as TAVANIR) said Iran's power industry needs six quadrillion rials (near \$142.8 billion) to keep the country's electricity infrastructure up with the rising demand, ISNA reported.

According to Mohammad Hassan Motevalizadeh, since it has been estimated that for the next 10 years the country's electricity demand will rise seven percent annually, the network infrastructures should also grow twofold.

Speaking in a seminar in Tehran, the official noted that with 80,000 megawatts of power capacity Iran is the top country in the region and the 14th amongst the world's top countries based on installed electricity capacity.

"Currently all the country's villages and rural areas are connected to the national grid," Motevalizadeh said.

The official underlined modifying consumption patterns and electricity tariffs as practical solutions to reduce electricity consumption in the country, adding that with the distribution of 100 million energy-saving light bulbs to subscribers, some 27,000 megawatts of consumption was reduced during peak periods.



Pistachio production hits 180,000 tons

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Production of pistachio in Iran has reached 180,000 tons since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018), according to a director in the Ministry of Agriculture.

Of the mentioned figure, some 130,000 tons have been exported, Shokrollah Hajivand told IRNA on Wednesday. Iran's production of pistachio has been anticipated to reach 200,000 tons by the end of current calendar year (March 20, 2019), according to Hajivand.

As reported by European Union's statistics agency Eurostat, Iran exported €125 million of pistachio to Europe during the first half of 2018, with 19 percent increase compared to the same period of time in the past year.

According to Eurostat, Iran's export of pistachio to Europe during the first half of 2017 stood at €105 million.



Textile exports rise 28% since March

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Exports of textile has witnessed 28 percent increase since the beginning of the present Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018) in comparison with the same time in the preceding year, IRNA quoted an official from Iranian Industry Ministry on Wednesday.

According to Afsaneh Mehrabi, domestic textile industry has improved in imports and exports and installation of new machineries. "There are 7,900 active production units in Iran," she added.

'EU plans to finalize SPV as soon as possible'

1 → "Britain, France and Germany are seriously working on SPV, but we should consider that it is a new experience both for Iran and the EU which has made the process delayed", Cronberg noted in the meeting.

She further said: "Iran has a long experience of tackling sanctions and I believe that the country can overcome again the challenge made by the U.S. unilateral sanctions."

Shafe'i, for his part, emphasized that the EU making the SPV practical will remove many problems for Iran and called on the EU members to make necessary decisions in this due as soon as possible.

'Iraq seeking exemption from U.S. sanctions to continue Iran's gas imports'

ENERGY TEHRAN — Iraq will send a delegation to the United States seeking an exemption from sanctions against Iran that would allow it to keep importing Iranian gas, Reuters reported quoting Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi as saying on Tuesday.

Washington gave Iraq a 45-day waiver for imports of gas from Iran when it re-imposed sanctions on Iran's oil sector on

November 5.

"The American side is cooperating with Iraq to find solutions that would remove pressure on Iraq because the (Iranian) gas is linked to a very sensitive issue which is electricity," Abdul Mahdi told a news conference.

Washington is seeking to roll back Iranian influence in the Middle East, including in Iraq, where Iran holds broad sway over politics and trade.



Iran is currently exporting 25 million cubic meters (mcm) of gas per day to Baghdad and 5 mcm to Basra, although, based on the deals between the two countries, Iran was to supply 35 mcm of gas on a daily basis to the capital Baghdad [gradually in three phases] while up to 25 mcm of gas per day was supposed to be exported to Basra.

Hayan Abdul Ghani, head of Iraqi state-run South Gas Co. (SGC), said last week, "Iraq's current production of gas is not enough to meet our power stations' demand and therefore we are still importing gas from Iran. We need at least 24 months to operate new gas projects and start production."

1398 budget bill, (non)-oil revenues?

1 → increasing the salaries of government's employees and the retired, continuing implementation of the planned programs to combat absolute poverty and improve healthcare, and paying cash subsidies to qualified Iranians with lower income.

In a bid to positively impact domestic economy and financial sector, the administration has prepared the budget plan revolving around:

- divesting government's responsibilities to the private sector,
- making governmental assets productive and generative,
- paying specific attention to production sector,
- reducing unnecessary costs of the government,
- increasing the tax brackets,
- modifying the system of paying cash subsidies and setting prices,
- amending government's relation with Iranian banks, and
- adjusting the system of levying tariffs and granting tax exemptions.

The unique and distinguishing characteristics of the proposed budget plan, compared to those of the previous years, are its support for:

- providing social justice and improvement of fair distribution of income,
- domestic production and job creation,
- strengthening budgetary discipline,
- modifying procedures and processes, and
- most importantly increasing the stability of budget against international impetuses.

For the next year, the prepared budget bill, as the Head of Iran's Budget and Planning Organization Mohammad Baqer Nobakht announced:

- predicts 4.33 quadrillion rials (about \$103.09 billion) of income for the government from various sources including tax, divesting state-run shares, oil and etc.
- estimates a 12-percent-growth for budgetary resources
- expects 27 percent reliance of budget on oil revenues
- forecasts 1.5 million barrels of oil sales per day (bpd) at the price of \$54 per barrel
- estimates dollar exchange to stand at 57,000 rials
- foresees no growth in fuel prices and petroleum price to stand at 10,000 rials (about \$0.23) per liter
- requires the government to pay 34 percent of its oil revenues to National Development Fund of Iran, according to the Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (2016-2021)
- necessitates the government to allocate \$14 billion (at the exchange rate of 42,000 rials) to supply of basic goods to back Iranians' livelihood. The exchange rate for other goods, imports of which are confirmed by the government, is 80,000 rials.
- mandates allocation of 1.42 quadrillion rials (about \$33.8 billion) for paying subsidies whether in cash or in form of basic goods to qualified Iranians

It is worth noting that all the used data and figures in this article are driven from the announcements made by Iranian officials and the administration has not released the budget bill tables.

Therefore, precise calculation of government's income in next year due to its high reliance to international and unpredictable factors, is not possible.

Oil revenues in focus; possible scenarios

Oil revenues, as the main source of supplying budget and government's income, stand among the major pillars in planning next year's budget bill.

The 1398 budget bill predicts Iran's oil price to stand at \$54 per barrel (pb) and sales of 1.5 million barrels per day.

The predicted oil price in the current Iranian year's budget bill was \$55 pb.

According to the OPEC Monthly Oil Market Report (MOMER) published,

Iran could sell 3.44 million bpd of heavy oil at the price of \$75.20 in September, 2018, while its average production level in the third quarter of 2018 stood at 3.59 million bpd.

Last Friday and in OPEC's 175th meeting in Vienna, OPEC and oil-producing allies known as OPEC+, agreed to cut production by 1.2 bpd and Iran was exempted from any oil production cuts. All was decided despite U.S. President Donald Trump's tendency to avoid the cut and keep prices low.

What occurred at OPEC and the general conditions of the international oil market can be translated in different ways, regarding Iran's ability in earning the oil revenues planned in next year budget bill.

In one optimistic scenario, future may seem bright for Iran's oil revenues thanks to the country exemption from OPEC oil cuts and possibility of any increase in oil prices due to other oil producers' lower production. Removal of 1.2 million barrels from the world market would help offsetting the value of Iran's lost barrels. As Reuters puts the idea in words, "an output curtailment also would provide support to Iran by increasing the price of oil amid attempts by Washington to squeeze the economy of OPEC's third-largest producer."

The conditions would turn more in Iran's favor in case the U.S. and China accord to bury the hatchets and move toward less tense relations and the eight countries which are granted sanction waivers continue buying Iranian oil.

Accordingly, being able to sell more than 3 million bpd of oil at the price of \$54 pb, would supposedly bring at least \$59.1 billion of revenues for the country per year.

However, the dark side is probable to emerge.

The prices and the volume of Iran's oil sales at the present time do not precisely match with what MOMER has announced (Iranian Oil Company does not publish any official figure about the volume or prices of Iranian oil, therefore, all the announced data are released by foreign resources or unofficial ones). In addition, international political and economic conditions do not seem much safe to guarantee Iran's interests.

What has been achieved at OPEC's latest meeting, of which Trump is not an advocate, is just an agreement signed on paper and its implementation would be compromised by any unpredicted decision or reaction of its signatories.

"There are tensions between China and U.S.," Iranian oil expert and market analyst Mahmoud Khaghani told the Tehran Times, "and the Chinese economy is going to experience a recession, India may followingly experience such a recession, and the conditions are not much better in Europe; France is dealing with some necessary challenges."



Mahmoud Khaghani

"This is what Trump expects to see. He wants EU to be dissolved which will automatically cross out the Petro-Euro," Khaghani added. "The tough international economic conditions will decrease the international demand in near future, from which Iran will suffer," he concluded.

As Iran's former OPEC Governor Mohammad Ali Khatibi told the Tehran Times, "according to Iranian officials, the country sells 3.75 million of bpd oil at the present time but rumors have it that oil

sales stand at much less than the announced figure. Some even put it at around 800,000 bpd."

"We should keep in mind that the predicted sales of 1.5 million barrels, foreseen in the next year budget, include selling crude oil in addition to the condensates," he underlined. "Condensate prices are lower than oil prices," he added.

"Iran's oil prices per barrel can usually be estimated by subtracting three dollars from the Brent prices," he said, "therefore, it presently hovers around \$57 per barrel."

In a pessimism scenario, being able to sell one million barrels of oil bpd at the price of \$54 pb, would supposedly bring \$19.71 billion of revenues for the country per year.

No matter what future brings for Iran, considering its oil revenues, the significant point is that the volume and prices of the country's oil sales are not predictable. Uncertainty is never welcome in economy.

Iranian experts unanimously believe that the country should decrease its reliance on oil revenues and move toward supplying its operating budget from other resources such as exports of non-oil products, tax revenues, tourism and etc.



Mohammad Ali Khatibi

"The Iranian governments were expected to decrease reliance of economy on oil revenues by five percent per year. They are still on the process," Khatibi lamented. "Oil revenues should not be utilized as a budgetary resource but should be saved at National Development Fund of Iran or any other national fund to be consumed for improving domestic infrastructure and development," he said.

Road to non-oil-reliant economy under construction

Iran's budget deficit, the fruit of the imbalance between government's costs and earnings, came in bigger than expected in the first half of the current year 1397 (March 21-September 22, 2018) to reach 372.3 trillion rials (\$2.65 billion), latest data released by the Central Bank of Iran shows. The shortfall was larger than the budget law's forecast of 164.3 trillion rials (\$1.17 billion) for the six-month period while it is 105.5 percent more compared with the deficit of the preceding year's corresponding period.

This reflects the significance of moving toward a non-oil-reliant economy for the government to be able to prevent its operating costs surpass its income and to tackle the predicted rampant inflation, increase the income of its employees and pay the intended cash subsidies to lower income-earners in the upcoming year without increasing the prices of energy carriers and fuel or levying higher taxes, which do not seem to be welcome by the Iranian nation under the ongoing conditions.

As Mehdi Karbasian, the Iranian deputy industry minister and head of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), told the Tehran Times in an interview, "to compensate any probable decrease in oil revenues, the government should make some changes in its foreign policies and also take some measures to attract financial resources from the Iranians who live abroad."

"The government should create some channels for Iranians living out of the country to inject their money in form of



Mehdi Karbasian

investments, for instance, to Iran. This is what India and China have been doing within the past years," he said, "The government can also lure Iranian businessmen, active in foreign countries, by granting them some specific credits."

The official also referred to a new resort for the government to guarantee its revenues. "Our oil sale contracts with our customers, such as China and India, relies up to 50 percent on their national currencies which reduces competitiveness for Iran and pulls us towards exclusive supply of goods," he said.

"Using national currencies in our financial transactions provides us a new channel for transferring money," he underscored.

Relying on new income sources such as non-oil exports, tourism, divesting state-run shares to the private sector as well as creating new banking channels is the new track on which the Iranian government is moving:

Based on the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), The value of Iran's non-oil exports during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year rose 13 percent from \$46.931 billion in the past Iranian calendar year of 1396 i.e. the country exported 75.27 million tons of non-oil products worth \$31.491 billion during the eight-month period.

More than 4.7 million foreigners travelled to Iran during the seven months to October 22, 2018 thanks to the lower costs of Iran travel packages and despite negative image created by the U.S. and the Iranophobia project, according to Ali Asghar Mounesan, the head of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization. The number shows a growth of 56 percent in total number of foreign visitors compared with the same period last year. A new report on global security, 2019 Travel Risk Map prepared and launched by global risk experts International SOS in collaboration with Control Risks, has portrayed Iran as safe as much of Western Europe for travelers in what could be an evidence that the country's tourism industry has a good potential to provide a serious source of revenues in face of stringent U.S. sanctions. Iran plans to attract 20 million tourists per annum by 2025 in order to generate \$30 billion of revenues as the country seeks to wean itself off the oil money. As planned in 1398 budget bill, the government is to increase the granted budget to tourism sector for 100 percent.

As reported in late September, Iranian Privatization Organization (IPO) has announced that privatization in Iran witnessed 100 percent growth during the first five months of the current calendar year and IPO offered 20 trillion rials (about \$476 million) of state-run shares to the private sector in this period.

The good news came on Monday when the CBI governor Abdolnaser Hemmati announced that Iran has made mutual monetary agreements with some countries on the way to abolish U.S. dollar in its financial transactions and the issue will be incrementally generalized to other countries in future.

Iran is abandoning dollar along with India, Russia, China and the EU, the act which is hoped to isolate the U.S. dollar as a global currency, preventing it from utilizing its currency as an unparalleled diplomatic and economic power in a globalized world.

Oil prices climb on OPEC-led supply cuts, Asian stock rally

Oil prices rose by around 1 percent on Wednesday amid a stock market rebound and on expectations that an OPEC-led output cut for 2019 would stabilize the supply-demand balance.

Disruptions to Libyan crude exports after local militia seized the country's biggest oilfield, El Sharara, were also buoying prices, traders said.

International Brent crude oil futures were at \$60.84 per barrel at 0742 GMT, up 64 cents, or 1.1 percent, from their last close. U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$52.06 per barrel, up 41 cents, or 0.8 percent.

The higher prices came amid an increase in Asian share markets on Wednesday.

U.S. President Donald Trump told Reuters in an interview on Tuesday that talks with China were taking place to defuse the trade dispute between the world's two biggest economies.

Despite Tuesday's more confident market, analysts warned of an economic slowdown.

"The global economy is set to cool in 2019-20, as rising interest rates and inflation begin to limit consumption in major developed economies, and market



uncertainty weakens the fundamentals in emerging markets," the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) said in its latest outlook.

British bank Barclays said in its 2019 commodities outlook that "the major risk to the near-term outlook relates to a faster-than-expected deterioration in economic activity".

In oil market fundamentals, a decision by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and some non-OPEC producers including Russia last week to cut supply by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) has supported prices this week.

"OPEC production curbs will stabilize the market," ANZ bank said on Wednesday. Crude prices had lost a third of their

value between early October and the announcement of the cuts. Some analysts warn, though, that the agreement may not have the effect hoped for.

Fereidun Fesharaki of energy consultancy FGE said in a note that the OPEC-led cuts would likely be "insufficient to mop up the inventories in the targeted three-month period till the end of the first quarter of 2019".

As a result, FGE said prices were "likely to hover in the \$55-\$60 per barrel range for Brent, with WTI sitting some \$5-\$10 per barrel below this given current fundamentals".

Undermining the supply cuts is soaring output in the United States, where crude production C-OUT-T-EIA has hit a record 11.7 million bpd.

The United States is set to end 2018 as the world's top oil producer, ahead of Russia and Saudi Arabia, with the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) saying on Tuesday the nation's annualized average output would be 10.88 million bpd for the full year.

The 2018 output increase would be 1.53 million bpd, the EIA said, adding that it expected production to average an unprecedented 12.06 million bpd in 2019.

(Source: Reuters)

Pakistan orders halt of fuel oil imports amid rising stocks



Pakistan's ministry of petroleum has ordered domestic energy stakeholders to halt fuel oil imports, optimize storage capacities and even export surplus to help ease rising stocks of the fuel, driven by the country's shift to LNG-based power generation.

The order follows a warning by Pakistan's refineries last month over potential shutdowns and a nationwide shortage of other oil products, especially gasoline and jet fuel, caused by critically low offtake from power producers.

"We have asked refineries to export or shift fuel oil surpluses to the storage of independent power producers," said minister of petroleum Ghulam Sarwar Khan last week.

"Pakistan State Oil has been asked to stop fuel oil imports and lift volumes from refineries instead in order to meet demand from [power utility] K-Electric," Khan added.

Fuel oil supply chain disruptions are

certainly not new to Pakistan. An abrupt decrease in fuel oil orders from power plants in late 2017 led to a rapid rise in stocks at import terminals and domestic refineries, delaying deliveries of imported cargoes and disrupting operations of domestic producers.

Consumption is unlikely to recover, as the electricity feedstock landscape continues its switch to gas facilitated by an exponential growth in LNG imports expected to increase from 4.9 million mt of LNG in 2017 to nearly 24 million mt/year by 2023, according to S&P Global Platts Analytics.

The situation has forced refiners to lower throughput this year to an average of 60%-70%, according to letters sent to the ministry of energy in late November by the Oil Companies Advisory Council, Pak Arab Refinery (Parco), Attock Refinery, National Refinery and Pakistan Refinery.

(Source: Platts)

Firms involved in Russian Nord Stream 2 face risk of U.S. sanctions



Companies that work in Russia's energy pipeline sector are risking U.S. sanctions, and Washington is considering possible actions against the Nord Stream-2 project, Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Francis Fannon told reporters on Tuesday.

"The firms working in Russian energy pipeline sector are engaging a lot of business that carries sanctions risk. We continue to review potential sanctions actions," Fannon said. "The U.S. government has the ability to sanction Russia export energy pipelines under section 232 of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)."

The statement follows Fannon's comment made on Monday that Washington believes that the construction of the pipeline poses "broad geostrategic threats" to European security and called on all parties to withdraw from it.

Russia's Permanent Representative to the European Union Vladimir Chizhov

said last week that the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project is developing and there are no obstacles to its implementation.

Nord Stream 2 pipeline construction underway in Finnish waters in the Baltic Sea.

The Nord Stream 2 is a joint venture of Russia's Gazprom with France's Engie, Austria's OMV AG, UK-Dutch Royal Dutch Shell, and Germany's Uniper and Wintershall. It aims to deliver 55 billion cubic meters (some 2 trillion cubic feet) of Russian natural gas per year to the European Union through the Baltic Sea bypassing Ukraine.

The pipeline project has been welcomed by some countries in Europe and opposed by a number of others, including Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic States, while the United States has also expressed its opposition.

Last week, U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton said that Washington was considering some options to stop the construction of the pipeline.

(Source: Sputnik)

Saudi Aramco, ADNOC's India refinery project delayed by 2 years

India has delayed the commissioning of a giant refinery that state-owned firms are building in tie up with Saudi Aramco and Abu Dhabi National Oil Co (ADNOC) by two years to 2025, a senior official at the consortium told Reuters on Tuesday.

The planned 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) coastal refinery in western Maharashtra state slated to commission in 2023, according to the website of Ratnagiri Refinery & Petrochemicals Ltd (RRPL), the joint-venture

company executing the project.

"The project will be completed in 2024 and commissioning will be in 2025," said RRPL chief executive B. Ashok.

He said the new commissioning schedule has been drawn as the company now has "detailed information on the configuration, availability of the people to build and so on".

According to RRPL website, the \$50 billion refinery and associated petrochemical project would be spread over 15,000 acres of land.

Acquisition of land for the project has been put on hold after a strong opposition from farmers, chief minister of Maharashtra Devendra Fadnavis said last month.

Land acquisition has always been a contentious issue in rural India, where the majority of the population depends on farming for their livelihood.

The refinery, which was initially expected to cost \$44 billion, was seen as a game changer - offering India steady fuel supplies and

meeting Saudi Arabia and ADNOC's need to secure regular buyers for its oil.

But thousands of farmers are refusing to surrender land, fearing it could damage a region famed for its Alphonso mangoes, vast cashew plantations and fishing hamlets that boast bountiful catches of seafood.

Ashok said the project would have a very high complexity to churn out superior grade fuels and 18 million tons/year of petrochemicals.

(Source: Reuters)

What would a new OPEC look like?

The global oil market is going through a metamorphosis, and if the signs are right, a possible long-term partnership between OPEC and its former rivals, especially Russia, looks to be forming.

UAE Minister of Energy, and OPEC chairman, Al Mazrouie reported that Saudi Arabia has proposed a conference to institutionalize an OPEC and non-OPEC Alliance. Al Mazrouie indicated that there will be a cooperation agreement signed between non-OPEC, led by Russia, and OPEC in the next three months. Next to this, the UAE minister said that "the declaration of co-operation will be used as a base and will be hopefully finalized in the next three months".

Looking forward, more developments can be expected after the signing of the March 2019 agreement. With the Christmas season in mind, the statement indicates that for 2019 the "Three Kings" will not be meeting on the 7th of January (as the Christian Holy Calendar indicates) but the OPEC - Non-OPEC Kings will be waiting for another 2 months. A new child seems to be born that day, presenting the global oil market with a fait-a-compli only to be strengthened by a formal new organizational structure, ending the current OPEC producers alliance and replacing it with a much stronger NOPEC.

Analysts have already been talking about a full restructuring of the oil cartel for years, with some even predicting a doomsday scenario based on Peak Oil or Renewables. Others have been assessing the option of a new NOPEC, including Russia and others into the cartel. Al Mazrouie bluntly stated that he is unconcerned about exits from the group following Qatar's departure. The impact



of members leaving the cartel in the last couple of years, with Qatar as the most recent example, is unlikely to erode the cartel's influence on global oil markets. OPEC's main producers, led by Saudi Arabia, already have been actively assessing and supporting a potential NOPEC approach for years. The importance of such a new alliance should not be underestimated. By taking Russia on board as a member, OPEC's grip on the oil market would increase substantially, looking at the current Russian production volumes. By allowing minor producers, such as Qatar, to leave and at the same time sidelining Iran, the effective power is in the hands of the new Triumvirate (Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Moscow). A possible inclusion of Russia, officially or unofficially, will increase the production levels

of OPEC+ by around 11+ million bpd. At the same time, other options also still exist, as Azerbaijan, Egypt and others could be looking to join too.

A stronger NOPEC also will be able to diminish U.S. claims of energy market dominance. Already, U.S. president Trump's claims are based on the wrong assumptions, as true energy dominance remains a long shot. Demand for OPEC oil continues to be strong and is predicted to increase in the next couple of years. At present, the real impact of U.S. energy and shale oil production is most likely overestimated by the media. Overall market fundamental power of U.S. shale oil is less, especially when taking into consideration that the U.S. has virtually no spare capacity. OPEC or NOPEC have an existing spare production capacity, and the capability to act as a swing producer to stabilize the market. U.S. shale does not have the same capabilities, based on technical and geological factors.

A stronger NOPEC is also needed to counter or mitigate the current market developments. OPEC's current production cut agreement is NOT enough. To counter the market sentiment at present a real cut should be made of around 1.7-1.9 million bpd. This will not be taken for granted by the market, as most of the parties are still questioning the OPEC-Russia cooperation. When formalizing or institutionalizing the cooperation, maybe by a full membership of a new organization, statements are taken as a fact, not as a political view or media proposition. The new NOPEC could grow into a powerful organization which offers counterweight to a booming U.S. shale sector.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Bank of America sees oil gains in 2019, but that forecast is far from universal

Despite dramatic slides in the oil market, some forecasters remain positive on prices and demand going into 2019. A year ahead outlook report from Bank of America Merrill Lynch expects Brent crude to regain its recent losses in 2019 and settle at \$70 a barrel. But amid mounting global uncertainty on everything from trade and monetary policy to politics, that forecast is far from consensus.

"Volatility will be high in the near future, but going into 2019, we are constructive on oil prices," Hootan Yazhari, head of global frontier markets equity research at Bank of America Merrill Lynch, told CNBC's Dan Murphy on Tuesday.

"We believe oil prices will resume their path back up to \$70 average next year, potentially higher in the second quarter for a brief spell of time. We believe the (OPEC) cuts were sufficient," Yazhari said, predicting a "relatively balanced oil market" and stable inventories next year.

But worries over the strength of crude remain rife, with other market analysts pointing to \$60 barrels or lower in the coming year. Brent crude is down nearly 30 percent from its October highs of more than \$86.

After a dramatic summit of OPEC and non-OPEC members over the weekend that triggered an immediate boost in oil prices, the commodity has already dropped back to pre-meeting levels, falling 3.1 percent by the end of Monday. The 15-member cartel, led by Saudi Arabia, agreed with Russia to cut production by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) by January to support prices amid a global supply glut and fears of waning demand.

■ OPEC cuts: sufficient or not?

Monday's price dip tells us two things, says PVM Oil Associates in London: "Either the 1.2 million bpd reduction in the production of the OPEC+ group is not deemed sufficient by the market, or there are other bearish factors at work."

It's likely the combination of the two that prompted selling — not least concerns over growth stemming from the U.S.-China trade war, political uncertainty over the U.K.'s Brexit procedure, and record production of U.S. shale oil. According to PVM, investors have pulled nearly \$50 billion out of the two major crude oil futures contracts since the latest rout started in October.

In addition to American shale producers firing on all cylinders, the impact of higher inventories in countries like Iraq and Brazil on market fundamentals is something the Saudi-Russia cut may not be able to fully counter.

Citi, meanwhile, sees oil going nowhere in 2019 and staying at \$60 a barrel. OPEC's cuts, the bank said, may in fact have been counterproductive, only encouraging U.S. shale producers to pump more.

"The more OPEC+ tries to support prices by withholding oil from the market, the more they give the U.S. shale sector an out from rationing supply growth themselves," Citi said in a research note written by a team led by Ed Morse, the firm's global head of commodities.

■ Markets 'getting scared'

U.S. based Capital Economics, meanwhile, sees an average of \$63 a barrel over the course of 2019. But some remain bullish yet — Japan's MUFG views Brent and U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) to be "oversold," predicting a "sharp rebound" in coming months, while Societe Generale forecasts Brent at \$73 for both 2018 and 2019. Richard Robinson, manager of Ashburton Global Energy Fund, believes the current dip is "transient" and that oil will recover to between \$70 and \$80 in the next three months, he wrote in a note earlier this month.

BAML's forecast is supported by its outlook for global demand, which it expects at 1.3 million bpd, consistent with above trend global gross domestic product growth of 3.6 percent. But Goldman Sachs has a much darker forecast, expecting the U.S. to slow down to less than 2 percent by the end of next year, one of its senior strategists told CNBC on Monday. "As a result of that you could see the market getting quite scared," the strategist said.

But as we go through seasonal demand peaks and the Iran sanctions waivers issued by Washington to 8 major oil-importing countries come off, "we will start to see the market tightening up," Yazhari said, noting that the market has not felt the full impacts of those sanctions yet, designed to cripple the energy sector of OPEC's third-largest producer.

"There are a number of factors to suggest the cuts were deep enough, that we will start to see a resumption to the upside in oil prices, but certainly we don't see oil prices moving up to the \$90, \$100 level that maybe we could've seen," the analyst said, adding, "We think that the only certainty is uncertainty at the moment."

Brent crude was trading at \$60.35, up .38 percent on the previous day, at 1 p.m. London time. WTI was at \$51.55, up roughly half a percent.

(Source: CNBC)

Oil tanker owners find solace in shale as OPEC readies cuts

America's shale boom could be about to spare the world's oil tanker owners from a typical OPEC raving.

The producer group and allies decided on Dec. 7 to restrict output from the start of next year by about 1.2 million barrels a day, adding to deeper cuts two years earlier. Under normal circumstances, that would be a dire turn of events for owners who see cargoes cut almost overnight. But shipping analysts are predicting that, this time, the rise of U.S. shale may well shield shippers.

"OPEC+ is reducing their output as U.S. is increasing theirs, hence the overall limited effect for tanker volumes," said Frode Morkedal, managing director of equity research at Clarksons Platou, an investment banking unit of the world's biggest shipbroker.

If owners do weather the storm, it would underscore the central dilemma facing the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries as it tries to prop up prices: deeper output cuts risk spurring rival production, especially shale. The idea of the tanker industry withstanding heavy reductions in OPEC production would have been almost unthinkable a few years ago, given the group's vital importance to seaborne trade.

■ Cuts covered

Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest exporter, pledged on Dec. 7 that it would pump almost 1 million barrels a day less in January than in November. At the same time, the U.S. just became a net oil exporter for the first time in 75 years.

U.S. production will expand at a rate of 1.18 million barrels a day in 2019, the Energy Information Administration said Wednesday in its monthly outlook. That's almost exactly the amount that OPEC+ pledged to curb — for the first six months of the year.

■ Production surge

As U.S. production surges, ports are racing to build facilities to serve supertankers that normally haul cargoes to Asia. The Louisiana Offshore Oil Port, the nation's biggest deepwater facility, began supertanker exports back in February. On Dec. 9, it said it had completed the loading of three very large crude carriers with U.S. domestic crude in the prior seven days.

(Source: Bloomberg)

NEWS IN BRIEF



Pakistan dismisses U.S. rebuke

INTERNATIONAL TEHRAN — Pakistan has rejected Washington's move of placing Islamabad on its annual list of worst offenders for countries that infringe on religious freedom.

Pakistan, the statement added, is a "multi-religious and pluralistic society where people of diverse faiths and denominations live together."

The reaction came after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Tuesday said he added Pakistan to the U.S. list of "countries of particular concern" regarding protection for people to worship according to their beliefs.

"In far too many places across the globe, individuals continue to face harassment, arrests or even death for simply living their lives in accordance with their beliefs," Pompeo said in a statement. Pakistan had previously been on a special watch list for religious freedom. The downgrade means Pakistan could be hit with U.S. sanctions, according to reports.

Meanwhile, sources told Tehran Times that the move could be part of Trump administration's vendetta against Imran Khan government since it has refused to toe its line on a number of issues.



Over 30 killed in multiple Afghan attacks

INTERNATIONAL TEHRAN — In a spate of terrorist attacks across war-torn Afghanistan in past few days, more than 30 people have been killed, according to reports.

At least four security personnel and eight civilians, including two women and a child, were killed on Tuesday in a suicide car bombing by the Taliban in Kabul.

The attack took place when a suicide bomber detonated explosives in Kabul's Paghman district, Interior Ministry spokesperson Najib Danish said. The attacker was also killed in the bombing.

In southern Kandahar province, Taliban fighters stormed a checkpoint in Arghistan district, killing eight officers, a spokesman for the provincial governor was quoted saying. At least 11 insurgents were also reportedly killed in the fighting.

Taliban militants have stepped up attacks on Afghan security forces and government facilities in recent months, even as the group is engaged in so-called 'peace talks' with the U.S. and Russia.

Although Afghan authorities do not reveal casualty toll of its personnel, according to the UN mission in Afghanistan, Afghan forces have suffered record number of casualties between May and October 2018 compared to previous years.



413 killed in Kashmir violence this year

INTERNATIONAL TEHRAN — The deadly cycle of violence and killings in Indian controlled Kashmir continues with around 413 persons, including 237 militants, 94 civilians and 81 armed forces personnel, killed this year so far.

According to official records, reported in Indian media, 176 locals have joined the militant ranks this year with highest number of youngsters, 30, joining in May and lowest, 4, in November.

Out of 237 militants, 163 were killed since June this year, when Governor rule was imposed following the break-up of BJP-PDP coalition government.

After the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani in 2016, who gave new impetus to militancy in the troubled Himalayan Valley, the government started Operation All Out to wipe out militancy from the state.

Since then, many militants have been gunned in encounters down across the valley, including some top commanders who had been evading security forces for years. Many of them were local Kashmiris with good education and career prospects.

On Sunday, three militants of Lashkar-e-Taiba were killed in an encounter near Srinagar, the summer capital of Kashmir, during which seven houses were completely destroyed.



Violence mars Bangladesh poll campaign

INTERNATIONAL TEHRAN — The campaigning for elections in Bangladesh has kicked off on a sad note with scores injured in political rallies across the country.

According to reports, the campaigning turned violent on Tuesday as police fired pellet guns into crowds and stick-wielding mobs attacked rival candidates.

Police quoted by AFP said clashes broke out in at least seven major towns on just the second day of campaigning, injuring nearly 100 people who turned out to cheer the two major parties contesting the Dec 30 polls.

The unrest follows a crackdown on the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in recent weeks, with hundreds of supporters from the main opposition party sent to jail before campaigning had even begun, according to AFP report.

In one of the districts, a motorcade of an opposition leader Fakhru Islam Alamgir was set upon by a huge crowd swinging batons, said the report. The opposition party blamed people aligned to the ruling Awami League, the party headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who is running for a record fourth term in office. Around 100 million voters have registered for this year's election, even though the opposition is yet to name a candidate to run against the incumbent PM.

Veteran opposition leader and two-time Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has been barred from contesting the election against her long-time rival Hasina.

She is serving 10-year jail term on graft charges her supporters say are baseless.

India's cooperation needed to end war in Afghanistan, says Pakistan

By Syed Zafar Mehdi

TEHRAN — Pakistan and India, the two South Asian warring neighbors, have long been accused of proxy war in Afghanistan, where the war has stretched into its 18th year now.

While India has used its soft power effectively to gain foothold in the war-ravaged country, Pakistan has failed to do so, for a host of reasons.

Apart from the troubled history between Pakistan and Afghanistan, primarily due to the dispute over border, the unending war in Afghanistan, perpetuated by the U.S. and carried out by militant groups allegedly based in Pakistan, has turned the two neighbors into bitter enemies.

The Afghan authorities have often accused Islamabad of providing sanctuary to the militant groups who target Afghanistan.

India, which considers Pakistan as its arch enemy, has used the debilitating relations between Kabul and Islamabad to its advantage, scaling up its engagement in the troubled country through visible reconstruction projects like roads, stadiums, dams and the parliament building.

Pakistan, however, remains a key player in Afghanistan because of the leverage it has over the Taliban. It has facilitated many rounds of talks between the militant group and the Afghan government in the past, although with little results.

While the previous political dispensation in Islamabad didn't see India's role in Afghanistan positively, the new government led by cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan is going out of its way to include India in its



Afghan-centric discourse.

Pertinently, the PTI government in Islamabad has recently made many overtures to New Delhi to revive the stalled dialogue process between the two countries, including Kartarpur corridor project and invitation to Indian PM Narendra Modi for the SAARC Summit. While India sent two of its ministers to the Kartarpur event, it ruled out the possibility of PM Modi attending the SAARC summit.

In a latest, seen as part of its outreach to India, Pakistan has said that India's cooperation would be needed for bringing peace to

war-ravaged Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said on Monday that although Pakistan was committed to facilitate a resolution of the protracted Afghan war, it needed help of other regional countries, including India.

Speaking in the National Assembly, Qureshi said Pakistan alone could not bring peace in Afghanistan as it was a "shared responsibility" of regional countries including India, Iran, Tajikistan and China.

"Since India is present in Afghanistan, its cooperation in this regard will also be

required," said Qureshi, according to Dawn. "Some meetings have taken place [among key stakeholders] for establishment of peace in Afghanistan. India also has stakes in Afghanistan and its cooperation will also be needed," Qureshi said, Express Tribune reported.

It is significant because Pakistan and India have traditionally been seen as 'part of the problem' in Afghanistan. If the two countries come together and play a positive role in the country, foreign powers who have badly messed up would have to withdraw, believe experts.

There has been no official statement from India's Ministry of External Affairs, but media reports say the government officials in New Delhi were skeptical about the sincerity of Pakistan's statement.

Pertinently, both India and Pakistan had sent their representatives to the Afghanistan conference hosted by Moscow last month, which also saw the participation of a Taliban delegation.

The war in Afghanistan, which started with the U.S. invasion in 2001, continues to claim innocent lives every day. According to the UN mission in Afghanistan, this year has recorded unprecedented civilian casualties since 2001.

Despite many peace overtures by the Afghan government, Taliban has been carrying out deadly attacks across the country. This week, more than 30 people were killed in multiple attacks across provinces.

Meanwhile, there has been growing clamor in the U.S. calling on the government to end the war in Afghanistan that has proved a total disaster. But, Trump seems to have other plans.

Person of the Year: Murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi

1 → The cover story starts with Khashoggi, detailing the circumstances that led to his murder, the brutality with which the crime was carried out at Saudi's Istanbul consulate, Saudi crown prince's culpability and the absence of morality in the Saudi-U.S. alliance.

"Every detail of Jamal Khashoggi's killing made it a sensation," reads the report, describing the scenes including the time stamp on the surveillance video, the images of private jets carrying Saudi agents, the bone saw, and Khashoggi's last words: "I can't breathe".

The report further says the crime would not have come to the world's attention if Khashoggi himself had not written and spoken about such issues during his life. He was a strong critic of the ruling elites in Riyadh and had courageously and unequivocally exposed their horrendous crimes and attempts to suppress the voices of dissent.

"His death laid bare the true nature of a smiling prince, the utter absence of morality in the Saudi-U.S. alliance," reads the Time report, referring to Saudi crown prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS).

Pertinently, the U.S. government officials, including President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, went out of their way to shield MBS and cover



up the heinous crime. Jared Kushner reportedly advised Trump to "stand by" the Saudi crown prince, arguing the scandal would "eventually pass".

The Time report says the Saudi kingdom was irked by Khashoggi's style of independent journalism wherein he reported "troubling facts" and trusted the public "to think for itself".

"Such independence is no small thing. It marks the distinction between tyranny and democracy. And in a world where budding authoritarians have advanced by blurring the difference, there was a clarity in the spectacle of a tyrant's fury visited upon a man armed only with a pen," the report notes.

All despots, it adds, live in fear of their people. "To see genuine strength, look to the spaces where individuals dare to describe what's going on in front of them."

The report also blasts Trump for 'embracing despots' and 'attacking the press', which it says has 'set a troubling tone'. It quotes the editor of Rappler Maria Ressa saying that the U.S. was "very confused". "What are the values of the United States," asks Ressa.

Truly, when a heinous murder takes place in broad daylight and an independent investigation exposes the perpetrator of the crime and still there is no anger or outrage, not even a statement of condemnation from the White House, we ought to ask uncomfortable questions.

Jamal Khashoggi is no more but his legacy will always inspire truth-seekers and whistleblowers. His murder has not only exposed the Saudi regime but also the so-called 'super-power of the world'.

India Elections: Modi's party suffers big setback, loses key states

By Syed Zafar Mehdi

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India suffered a major setback on Tuesday after losing three key states to Indian National Congress (INC), the main opposition party, in state elections. Congress is all set to form governments in Rajasthan, Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

The results, which come barely four months before the general elections in India, have set the ball rolling for Congress, which has been in the opposition since 2014.

Although BJP leaders have downplayed the impact of state elections on general elections slated for April 2019, but political pundits believe this might be an opportunity for Congress to bounce back and recoup the political space from right-wing nationalists.

All three states — Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh — were won last time by the BJP, which also won 60 out of 65 parliament seats in these states in 2014 general elections. Congress victory has clearly given it an upper hand going into 2019.

Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, in particular, were considered the bastions of BJP where they were in power for past 15 years. The juggernaut has been broken.

In Chhattisgarh, Congress claimed whopping 68 seats against BJP's 16, a clear verdict. In Rajasthan, Congress bagged 99 seats while BJP got 73, a good margin. In Madhya Pradesh, the contest was even, and eventually Congress prevailed over BJP with 114-109 figure. The other two states — Mizoram and Telangana — went to local parties.

The robust performance in these state elections is a shot in the arm for Congress party. It will unmistakably bolster the morale of party workers before the general elections and strengthen the hold of Rahul Gandhi over the party. Incidentally, the Gandhi scion completed one year on the day of election results as party president and he couldn't possibly have asked for better results.



Ecstatic over the results, Gandhi said his party had defeated BJP in these elections and would defeat it in 2019 general elections as well. He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who failed to woo voters this time, "refused to listen to the heartbeat of this country", adding that there was a perception among people that "PM Modi himself is corrupt".

"When PM was elected to power, he was elected on three platforms — employment, corruption, and farmers," said the young Congress president. "It was in people's mind that PM will fight against corruption. Now people think that PM Modi himself is corrupt."

Gandhi further said that BJP had "failed to provide a vision for the country going forward", and under the BJP government, "mismanagement of economy" had taken place.

PM Modi accepted the people's mandate and in a philosophical tone said "victory and defeat were an integral part of life". He said the defeats would further party's resolve to "serve people and work even harder for the development of India".

Since 2014, BJP has been overwhelm-

ingly dependent on PM Modi to win elections. But, this time, Modi factor didn't work for the party. A report in online news portal 'The Print' quite rightly noted that these assembly poll results may not be a verdict on PM Modi's popularity but they certainly carry a lesson for the BJP: "That it cannot rely solely on the Modi factor to win elections."

Senior BJP minister and star campaigner Arun Jaitley said the results were unexpected. "It is an opportunity to pause and analyze," he said, adding that anti-incumbency factor didn't play a role in BJP's defeat in these three key states.

Social media has been abuzz with politicians, journalists, and experts sharing their views on BJP's big debacle. "Democracy has won," the Congress party tweeted. "Thank you India, you have chosen love over hate, peace over violence & truth over lies. This victory is yours."

Prominent lawyer and activist Prashant Bhusan said the "0/5 drubbing of the BJP" was the result of "people becoming wise to

the fact that all promises of Modi and BJP governments were just jumlas (statements) and hot air; people are fed up with the politics of hate & goonda raj (warlordism)."

Mamata Banerjee, chief of Trinamool Congress party, which is part of the Congress-led grand alliance, hailed it as the "victory of democracy and victory against injustice, atrocities, destruction of institutions, misuse of agencies, no work for poor people, farmers, youth, Dalits, SC, ST, OBC, minorities and general caste."

Employing sports terminology of semi-final and final, she said "semifinal (state elections) proves that BJP is nowhere in all the states. This is a real democratic indication of 2019 final match (general elections)."

Senior Congress leader and former HRD minister Kapil Sibal said this was a victory of humanity. "This is the victory of Rahul Gandhi, our party, workers, people, and the fight against scams. This is the victory of humanity."

Senior journalist Shekhar Gupta said the myth of Yogi Adityanath as the "Hindi heartland's champion vote-catcher" has been shattered. Adityanath, the BJP chief minister of India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh, has been in news recently for his hateful anti-Muslim rhetoric and for changing names of cities from Muslim to Hindu.

Yascha Mounk, Lecturer at Harvard University, termed the results as "excellent news for Indian democracy".

"While much can change before next year, and the BJP might try to interfere with free and fair elections, the opposition has a real shot at displacing Modi next year," he tweeted. "And that should inspire opponents of populism around the world."

A Twitter user Vaishali said people were not happy that the Congress had won big, but people were happy that Communal BJP had lost the game, adding that the Congress still needs regional parties to win 2019 general elections.

Continuation PGCC crisis will increase Turkish footprint in Qatar: Entessar

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Nader Entessar, Professor Emeritus of Political Science from university of South Alabama says that Turkey's military base in Qatar allows Ankara to project power in the Persian Gulf while maintaining close ties to Doha.

He adds that "In addition to enabling Turkey to enhance its military presence in the Persian Gulf, the Turkish base in Qatar also sends an indirect message to Saudi Arabia that Ankara will remain by Doha's side while at the same time seeks to act as an intermediary to resolve regional crises."

Entessar says "If the current PGCC crisis continues unabated, Turkey will likely seek to increase its footprint in Doha."

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ The Persian Gulf Cooperation Council's (PGCC) annual summit was held in Riyadh while the Qatari emir and the Sultan of Oman refrained from joining. What are the reasons behind this refusal?

A: In recent years, the traditional annual meetings of the PGCC states have become a platform for Saudi Arabia to strengthen its hegemony over the other member states and to align the foreign policy of the PGCC states with that of Riyadh. The Saudi-engineered forced harmony in the PGCC began to show cracks with the organization's first major crisis in 2014. The PGCC had to cut its last year's meeting in Kuwait short, partly as a result of the military partnership between Saudi Arabia and the UAE outside the PGCC parameters. Given the ongoing blockade of Qatar by three members of the PGCC, namely Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, it was not surprising that Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani did not attend this year's PGCC meeting in Riyadh. However, Qatar did send a delegation headed by the country's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad Al-Muraikhi to represent Doha in the 39th PGCC summit. Oman's ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Said also did not attend the PGCC meeting in Riyadh but instead sent a delegation headed by the country's Deputy Prime Minister



The PGCC had to cut its last year's meeting in Kuwait short, partly as a result of the military partnership between Saudi Arabia and the UAE outside the PGCC parameters.

for the Council of Ministers. Sultan Qaboos's absence at the PGCC summit may have been related to both his health issues and Oman's desire to stay clear of entanglement in the deepening regional crises precipitated by Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen and Mohammad bin Salman's adventurist foreign policy.

■ Qatar left OPEC and according to some reports, it might break-up with PGCC. Do you think that Qatar will leave the PGCC?

A: Qatar's announcement about its intention to leave OPEC was a political message to Saudi Arabia and its aggressive moves to transform OPEC into a tool of Riyadh's broader foreign and economic policy goals. When the PGCC was formed in 1981, its stated objective was to enhance political, economic, security and cultural cooperation among its member states. However, the PGCC has now become a vehicle for Riyadh to buttress its role as a regional hegemon. Therefore, if the current trends continue, it is not beyond the realm of possibility for Qatar to leave the PGCC. However, we need to be cognizant of the fact that both the United States and Europe will do their utmost to maintain the PGCC's unity because they see the organization as a regional vehicle to confront Iran in the Persian Gulf.

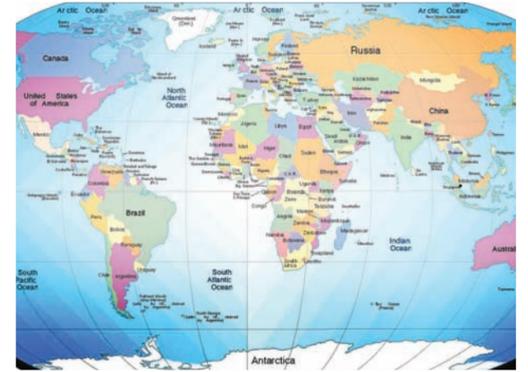
■ The PGCC failed to find a purely internal collective solution to the Qatar crisis. With regard to this failure, how do you see the future of PGCC?

A: Notwithstanding its lofty goals, the PGCC has largely been an ineffective body that has failed to foster meaningful ties among its member states. The organization's weakness has been amplified with Qatar's blockade by the Saudi-UAE-led group. Although the PGCC may continue to exist on paper for some time to come, the recent crises have definitely undermined its viability as a collective security and socioeconomic organization.

■ In case of Qatar's exit from PGCC, is there any possibility of a new alliance between Qatar and Turkey?

A: Turkey and Qatar have developed close security relations with each other in the past few years. Turkey's military base in Qatar allows Ankara to project power in the Persian Gulf while maintaining close ties to Doha. In addition to enabling Turkey to enhance its military presence in the Persian Gulf, the Turkish base in Qatar also sends an indirect message to Saudi Arabia that Ankara will remain by Doha's side while at the same time seeks to act as an intermediary to resolve regional crises. If the current PGCC crisis continues unabated, Turkey will likely seek to increase its footprint in Doha.

What dooms nations can be surprising, and it resides internally



1 → In fact, he has often been ridiculed as a horrible President, and as well widely considered Not Very Bright (NVB).

But lo and behold, at his Dad's funeral service, he kind of redeemed himself according to reports as a man of substance and even as a President of substance, even though there was no evidence to support such a reassessment — except, allegedly, for the fact that when he was delivering his eulogy for his father at the funeral service, he choked and cried like a baby. Imagine! History gets revised in mainstream media reports because George W. Bush wept at his father's funeral, because he showed some emotion publicly.

The problems with and in the U.S. have become too deep and they've been around too long, and past errors continue to be compounded by further errors. For example, we just learned that oversight (or fraud) by the Pentagon has resulted in Saudi and U.A.E. warplanes waging war on Yemen while being refueled in midair by U.S. military tanker aircraft for free — or rather on the U.S. taxpayer's dime.

Who knows if this was intentional, but the Pentagon has also pooh-poohed a halt to funding for the war on Yemen because, and this is a quote, "it would send the wrong message". I wonder what that message might be that is "wrong"? That halting mass killings is "wrong"?

And this week we got to hear from General Joseph Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the U.S., who said that the U.S. military will stay in Afghanistan because if it pulled out it would risk "another 9/11" in the U.S. Frankly, it's just the opposite: Usama bin Laden's primary complaint was the presence of the U.S. military in Arabia! But these errors of judgment or fraud and more by past and current U.S. "leaders", bad as they are, are minor compared to, arguably, the greatest error of all:

The ability to put one's self in the shoes of other humans and therefore understand why they may have a grievance, rather than assuming they are simply not human or somehow of a sub-species. Let's be clear: this incapacity is ultimately the death of nations or governments or regimes.

The two most prominent countries which are currently failing are the U.S. and Israel. In Israel, we hear from Gideon Levy, that country's finest journalist, who says that the far-right Zionists and even a majority of Israelis are completely "at

peace" with the Occupation in Palestine. Why is that? Because, Levy says, most Israelis really believe that they are Allah's "chosen" people. That and the Holocaust have given Jews to imagine they have the "right" to do ANYTHING they want anywhere they want.

They simply do not care at all about Palestinians and many others, who are considered sub-human, just as the Jews allegedly were by the Nazis. In somewhat the same vein, people like the Bushes and General Dunford and many other "leaders" don't give a damn about the suffering the U.S. military and U.S. policies have caused worldwide for decades. Why? Because people of different cultures and governments, especially if they don't succumb to U.S. imperialism or hegemonic demands, are considered lesser human beings, if not sub-humans.

General Dunford is worried about another 9/11 which dropped three tall buildings in New York with some peripheral damage and killed 3,000 plus people ... when the U.S. has laid waste to vast portions of entire countries and killed millions since the end of World War 2? The attack on Fallujah alone in Iraq during the Iraq War leveled thousands of buildings and killed tens of thousands of civilian residents. Is it not clear what I am driving at? Here it is:

Countries with leaders that do what the U.S. and Israelis have been doing, to cite just two nations and there are several others, are literally doomed. They may not be doomed this year or even next or even in five years, but doom remains inevitable. They are doomed sub specie aeternitatis, to use a Latin phrase, "under the gaze of eternity". They are doomed from the standpoint of what is universally and eternally true.

For example, one truism is that people are much the same everywhere and share the same characteristics, good and bad. And the action by one group or nation against another, as if this is not true, as if one group obviously human is considered sub-human, this is deadly to the group or nation or leaders with such beliefs on offense. History shows this clearly. And one other truism is that it is very difficult, but definitely possible, to be a wise leader, and I hope Iran's leaders are. Bush junior would have been far better weeping in sorrow for his own and his father's miserable Presidencies, too.

Trump impeachment and stigmatizing MBS; the fate in the Congress's hand

By hamid Bayati

TEHRAN — Perhaps Mohammed bin Salman failed to imagine that his credibility and royal reputation, or what's left of it, would depend on U.S. Senate, which has become a nightmare for him.

Bin Salman --, supported by Al Saud's wealth and undisputed U.S. support for the Yemeni war, repression of domestic opposition, hostage taking of the Lebanese Prime Minister, widespread mass repression of Shia Al-Qatif -- thought he could do whatever he wished, but now he is in a situation from which he may not be able to escape.

The honeymoon period for bin Salman ended with the United States in October after the assassination of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Meanwhile, although Riyadh tried hard to eliminate bin Salman from the Khashoggi murder case, evidence points to his undeniable role in the assassination.

U.S. Senators have been relying on the hard evidence so far gathered to deal with bin Salman effectively. Lindsey Graham, Republican senator from South Carolina in an interview with "Fox" claimed: "If it weren't for the United States, they'd be speaking Farsi in about a week in Saudi Arabia. We need them a lot less than they need us. I think by hooking up with him (MBS) we hurt our ability to govern the region."

Republican Senator Bob Corker, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has planned to introduce a resolution condemning Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for the killing of Khashoggi.

"While this doesn't affect policy ... it's a pretty strong statement for the United States to be making, assuming we can get a vote on it," Corker said, noting that condemning Mohammed was a bold move by Republicans.

Last week Republican senator Lindsay Graham also introduced a resolution from a number of Republican and Democratic senators calling for bin Salman to be "co-defendant"



Democrats are suggesting Trump committed an impeachable offense and could even be sent to prison when his term in the White House is over.

in the murder of Khashoggi.

"In response to this resolution, the Washington Post reported that the United States Senate would officially condemn Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman before the end of 2018. With this condemnation, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia will be required to stop other hostile policies in the Persian Gulf."

■ **Trump has reason to fear he may be impeached**

Some in the U.S. Congress are not only looking to slam bin Salman, but also President Trump, and Trump himself has expressed concern about his own possible impeachment.

A Congressional source said Trump sees impeachment as a "real possibility." But Trump isn't certain it will happen, the source added. A separate source close to the

White House told CNN that aides inside the West Wing believe "the only issue that may stick" in the impeachment process is the campaign finance violations tied to former Trump attorney Michael Cohen's payouts to Trump's alleged mistresses.

Impeachment talk has ratcheted up in recent days following a blockbuster filing from prosecutors in the Southern District of New York. In that filing, prosecutors directly alleged for the first time that Cohen was being directed by Trump when he broke the law during the 2016 presidential campaign.

Democrats are suggesting Trump committed an impeachable offense and could even be sent to prison when his term in the White House is over. The incoming chairman

of the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Jerry Nadler, said Sunday that the allegations, if proven, would constitute "impeachable offenses." Democratic Sen. Chris Coons said Monday Trump could be indicted after he leaves office.

Cohen first made the allegation in court in September that he was directed by Trump to make the payments to the two women, Stormy Daniels and Karen McDougal. Prosecutors endorsed the allegation in a sentencing document for Cohen on Friday, in which they said Cohen should receive a "substantial sentence" for the crimes he committed, which included campaign finance violations for the payments to the two women, tax fraud and lying to Congress.

Lawyers say that the prosecution of Trump during his presidency is difficult and the only way to dismiss him is to interrogate him first.

Procedurally regarding possible impeachment, charges must be brought by the U.S. Congress which then could result in a trial of the President. The law holds that the President, Vice President and U.S. state officials can be impeached for treason, bribery, and a variety of other possible crimes.

The process of impeachment must start from the House of Representatives and needs to be voted on by the majority of the representatives (half plus one). If this occurs, the trial will be held in the Senate.

At this point, two-thirds of the Senate's votes are needed to dismiss the President. Though the threat of impeachment has been raised on numerous occasions, only two American Presidents have been impeached.

Bill Clinton, the forty-second president of the United States, was impeached for lying to a jury and related malfeasance, but he was not thrown out of office.

The only other president who was impeached in the history of the United States was Andrew Johnson, who served as the 17th President of the United States. He managed to avoid a trial in the U.S. Senate, like Clinton.

do you see the future of PGCC?

A: The PGCC might survive in name only. A continued U.S. effort to weaponize the PGCC by turning it into a Saudi-led coalition against Iran will cripple the organization and might eventually destroy it altogether. A viable PGCC needs to resist domination by a single member such as Saudi Arabia, prevent manipulation by a great power—particularly the U.S. or Britain—and avoid picking fights with powerful neighbors like Iran and Turkey.

■ In case of Qatar's exit from PGCC, is there any possibility of a new alliance between Qatar and Turkey?

A: A formal alliance is unlikely and unnecessary. Doha and Ankara both prefer quiet understandings that are fluid, specific, and non-binding. In the language of international relations, such arrangements are often called quasi-alliances or partial pacts.

They allow both sides to hedge their bets and pursue multi-directional diplomacy as shifting circumstances require. Qatari and Turkish leaders realize they will not always agree on dealing with fast-moving events in such volatile areas as Libya, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt. Informal understandings can let them cooperate when possible and go their separate ways when necessary.



Far East, Russia, and Europe—ties that quickly deepened during the boycott, making Qatar a stronger global actor than its adversaries.

■ The PGCC failed to find a purely internal collective solution to the Qatar crisis. With regard to this failure, how

PGCC might survive in name only: Chicago professor

1 → When small nations feel that a once friendly great power is withdrawing its protection, they usually seek alternative backing from strong states who can help them maintain their independence vis-à-vis quarrelling neighbors. Nowadays, China and Russia are acquiring greater influence in Iran and the Persian Gulf nations so it is natural that Doha and Muscat are inviting them to balance the destabilizing consequences of American and Saudi policies. Building new partnerships with Russia and China can encourage the U.S. to prolong its Persian Gulf involvement in the short run and prepare the way for replacing it in the long term. Hence, the diplomatic skills of Qatar and Oman pose a striking contrast to Saudi Arabia's self-defeating path of overreach and isolation.

■ Qatar left OPEC and according to some reports, it might break-up with PGCC. Do you think that Qatar will leave the PGCC?

A: It's possible to say that Saudi Arabia and the UAE have virtually broken with the PGCC by forming a separate defense agreement that excludes the other members. In successfully weathering the Saudi-Emirati boycott, Qatar has shown it can flourish with or without the PGCC's blessing. Doha has built extensive economic and diplomatic ties with the

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Naloxone, a life-saving antidote to drug overdose: myths and facts

HEALTH TEHRAN — According to World Health Organization (WHO), Opioid overdose is treatable with naloxone, an opioid antagonist which rapidly reverses the effects of opioids.

In Iran, there are different opinions about the correct usage of naloxone.

Last week, the Food and Drug Administration's spokesperson announced that self-injection or non-prescribed usage of naloxone could have catastrophic consequences, even leading to adverse side effects on the heart.

Kianoush Jahanpour added that naloxone should be used only under a physician's supervision and with emergency room equipment, as it is usually used in emergency situations in hospitals.

Meanwhile, Health Ministry's Spokesperson Iraj Harirchi said on Monday that according to Iran's current laws, naloxone is only accessible in hospitals.

He said that naloxone is available in some countries in the format of nasal sprays or even edibles, but in Iran people should be first properly trained on this drug's usage, before making it available in pharmacies, especially if parenteral route of administration is used.

In an interview with Khabaronline on Monday, Dr. Omran Mohammad Razaqi said that naloxone nasal sprays which are extremely easy to use aren't available in Iran, but the drug can also be administered intravenously by bystanders who can perform injections.

According to WHO, naloxone has been used in the management of opioid overdose for more than 40 years. It is a safe drug with a low risk of serious side effects and any adult capable of learning basic life support can also learn to recognize an opioid overdose, and administer naloxone in time to save lives.

Educating people on usage of naloxone

WHO has announced that globally, an estimated 69,000 people die each year from opioid overdose alone. Among people who inject drugs, opioid overdose is the second most common cause of death after HIV/AIDS.



On November 4, 2014, WHO published guidelines aimed to reduce the number of opioid-related deaths globally. The guidelines recommend countries expand naloxone access to people likely to witness an overdose in their community, such as friends, family members, partners of people who use drugs, and social workers.

Naloxone is usually used with basic life support which is generally only available in medical settings, however, the guidelines recommend that people who are likely to witness an opioid overdose should be given access to naloxone and training in its use.

Route of administration

WHO guidelines recognizes that naloxone is effective when delivered by intravenous, intramuscular, subcutaneous and intranasal routes of administration. Persons using naloxone should select a route of administration based on the formulation available, their skills in administration, the setting and local context.

A study on naloxone distribution and administration by peers in Australia found that 74% of interviewees preferred using the intranasal route of administration.

Calls for naloxone widespread adoption

In recent years, a number of programs around the world have shown that it is feasible to provide naloxone to people likely to witness an opioid overdose, in combination with training on the use of naloxone and the resuscitation of people experiencing opioid overdose, prompting calls for the widespread adoption of this approach.

In 2012, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) called upon the World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to provide advice and guidance, based on scientific evidence, on preventing mortality from drug overdose, in particular opioid overdose.

Access to naloxone

Access to naloxone is generally limited to health professionals, and in many countries there is limited availability of naloxone even in medical settings, including ambulances.

Naloxone is a prescription medicine in almost all countries, and while it is not usually prescribed to people likely to witness

an opioid overdose, at least one country has made naloxone available in pharmacies without prescription.

Side effects

Naloxone has been used in opioid overdose management for over 40 years, with minimal adverse effects beyond the induction of opioid withdrawal symptoms. It carries no potential for abuse, although high doses may lead to the development of opioid withdrawal symptoms such as vomiting, muscle cramps and agitation.

Does naloxone only work for overdose cases caused by opioids?

The Iranian Food and Drug Administration's Deputy Director said last week that naloxone does not reverse the effects of benzodiazepines and stimulants such as cocaine, crystal meth (Methamphetamine) and ecstasy.

According to naloxoneinfo.org, naloxone only reverses the effects of opioids such as heroin, methadone, morphine, opium, codeine, or hydrocodone. It does not counter the effect of other types of drugs, such as benzodiazepines (drugs including diazepam, midazolam, or alprazolam), antihistamines (like pheniramine or phenegan), alcohol, or other sedatives (drugs such as phenobarbital) or stimulants such as cocaine and amphetamines. But if the person is not breathing it will not hurt to administer naloxone.

In the worst case scenario, naloxone will simply do nothing, but in the best case scenario it will save a life.

Study suggests anti-overdose med naloxone increases reckless opioid use

In March, CNBC published a controversial new study arguing that laws expanding access to naloxone have increased opioid-related ER visits and theft while doing nothing to curb mortality.

The study found opioid-related deaths increased 14 percent in the Midwest after these laws were in effect.

The authors believe that people act more recklessly when they have a safeguard in place, but the study's findings could just be correlation instead of causation.

Record number of cases in mysterious illness paralyzing children, officials say

The condition has been likened to polio, but investigators have found no evidence of that virus in recent cases.

This year has seen a record number of cases of a mysterious paralyzing illness in children, U.S. health officials said Monday.

It is still not clear what's causing the kids to lose the ability to move their face, neck, back, arms or legs. The symptoms tend to occur about a week after the children had a fever and respiratory illness.

No one has died from the rare disease this year, but it was blamed for one death last year and it may have caused others in the past.



What's more, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officials say many children have lasting paralysis. Close to half the kids diagnosed with it this year were admitted to hospital intensive care units and hooked up to machines to help them breathe.

The condition has been likened to polio, a dreaded paralyzing illness that once struck tens of thousands of U.S. children a year. Those outbreaks ended after a polio vaccine became available in the 1950s. Investigators of the current outbreak have ruled out polio, finding no evidence of that virus in recent cases.

The current mystery can be traced to 2012, when three cases of limb weakness were seen in California. The first real wave of confirmed illnesses was seen in 2014, when 120 were reported. Another, larger wave occurred in 2016, when there were 149 confirmed cases. So far this year, there have been 158 confirmed cases.

In 2015 and 2017, the counts were far lower, and it is not clear why.

The condition is called acute flaccid myelitis, or AFM. Investigators have suspected it is caused by a virus called EV-D68. The 2014 wave coincided with a lot of EV-D68 infections and the virus "remains the leading hypothesis", said Dr Ruth Lynfield, a member of a 16-person AFM taskforce that the CDC established last month to offer advice to disease detectives.

Why would the virus suddenly be causing these paralyzing illnesses?

"This is a key question that has confounded us," said the CDC's Dr Nancy Messonnier, who is overseeing the agency's outbreak investigation.

Experts also said it's not clear why cases are surging in two-year cycles.

Another mystery: more than 17 countries have reported scattered AFM cases, but none have seen cyclical surges like the US has.

Last week, CDC officials said the problem had peaked, but they warned that the number of cases would go up as investigators evaluated — and decided whether to count — illnesses that occurred earlier.

As of Monday, there were 311 illness reports still being evaluated.

This year's confirmed cases are spread among 36 states. The states with the most are Texas with 21 and Colorado with 15.

For an illness to be counted, the diagnosis must include an MRI scan that shows lesions in the part of the spinal cord that controls muscles.

(Source: The Guardian)

Limited activity harms Iranian girls' health, wellness: official



HEALTH TEHRAN — The deputy director of the Welfare Organization said the level of girls' overall health and physical wellness has decreased by 11% over the last 15 years due to inactivity and limited space available to them.

Habibollah Masoudi Farid said boys also face similar problems, Fars news agency reported on Wednesday.

"We have to take a systematic approach in devising plans for empowering people. Empowerment doesn't merely concern traumatized people or the ones with disabilities, but it also concerns devising widespread plans that targets kindergartens, nurseries, schools, families and the whole society," said Farid.

He added that the current urban engi-

neering is not suitable for families' physical activity, leading them to have less children and less exercises as well.

Physical inactivity

World Health Organization estimated that globally, around 31% of adults aged 15 and over were insufficiently active in 2008 (men 28% and women 34%). Approximately 3.2 million deaths each year are attributable to insufficient physical activity.

In 2008, prevalence of insufficient physical activity was highest in the WHO Region of the Americas and the Eastern Mediterranean Region. In both these regions, almost 50% of women were insufficiently active, while the prevalence for men was 40% in the Americas and 36% in Eastern Mediterranean.

Increased care cost drives 100m people into poverty each year: UN Chief



United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his message on the first observance of International Universal Health Coverage, 12 December 2018, said each year, 100 million people are driven into poverty because care cost far more than they could afford.

The full text of his message reads:

Today, the world marks the first International Universal Health Coverage Day. We do so because good health is a fundamental human right and crucial to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Quality physical and mental health services should be accessible to everyone, everywhere. Tragically, that is not the case for half the world's population. And

each year, 100 million people are driven into poverty because care cost far more than they could afford.

Such dire circumstances should befall no one — and do not have to. Many countries around the world have shown that it is possible to provide universal health care. They have also demonstrated that improving health is a smart investment in human capital that helps to promote economic growth and reduce poverty.

Strong leadership and community engagement are essential in ensuring that all people get the healthcare they need. On this International Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to a world with health for all.

(Source: UNIC)

Health minister attending PMNCH 2018 Partners' Forum

HEALTH TEHRAN — Iranian Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi has travelled to India to attend the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH) Partners' Forum which kicked off on Wednesday.

The two-day event is a multi-constituency partnership hosted by the World Health Organization and chaired seeks to achieve universal access to comprehensive, high-quality reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health care.

The Partnership has brought together 1,200 partners dedicated to the Every Woman Every Child (EWEC) movement and the achievement of the UN Secretary General's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (Global Strategy) on December 12 and 13, 2018, in New Delhi, India.

Hosted by the Government of India the 2018 Forum revolves around improving multi-sectoral action for results, sharing country solutions and capturing the best practices and knowledge within and among the health sector and related sectors.

According to the World Health Organization it will also



emphasize the importance of people-centered accountability bringing forward the voices and lived realities of women, children and adolescents through innovative programming and creative projects.

Qazizadeh-Hashemi is also scheduled to deliver speeches over the course of the two-day event.

Based on a report by Fars news agency over one of

the scientific panels held in the Forum the minister is planned to make a speech on the innovative measures taken to raise fund for better execution of maternal and newborn child health in Iran.

Specific goals of the Partners' Forum

Specific goals of the Partners' Forum include greater political momentum, sustaining attention to the "Survive-Thrive-Transform" agenda of the Global Strategy, and its contribution to driving the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The voices of women, children and adolescents will be central to our messaging and framing.

Knowledge exchange, through sharing of lessons learned and best practices to innovate and improve implementation strategies for results is another goal of the forum. The rigorously produced "Success Factors" case studies (selected from more than 300 partner-led proposals) will anchor this effort.

And lastly the forum is focused on improved cross-sectoral collaboration through knowledge exchange and joint advocacy strategies.

Too much salt might help spur A-fib

A high-salt diet could raise your risk for a common heart rhythm disorder, new research suggests.

Atrial fibrillation (A-fib) is a quivering or irregular heartbeat that can lead to blood clots or other complications. It affects millions of people worldwide and puts them at higher risk for stroke and, in rare cases, can lead to heart failure.

This study included 716 middle-aged men and women in Finland who were followed for an average of 19 years. During that time, 74 of the participants were diagnosed with atrial fibrillation.

Those with the highest levels of salt in their diet had a higher rate of atrial fibrillation than those with the lowest salt intake. After accounting for several other risk factors — including age, body fat, blood pressure and smoking — the researchers found that salt consumption was independently associated with the risk of atrial fibrillation.

But the study only found an association — it did not prove that a high-salt diet causes the heart rhythm disorder.

The study was published recently in the *Annals of Medicine*. "This study provides the first evidence that dietary salt may increase the risk of new-onset atrial fibrillation, adding to a growing list of dangers from excessive salt consumption on our cardiovascular health," said study author Tero Paakko, from the University of Oulu in Finland.

"Although further confirmatory studies are needed, our results suggest that people who are at an increased risk of atrial fibrillation may benefit from restricting salt in their diet," Paakko said in a journal news release.

The chances of developing atrial fibrillation increase with age, and the condition affects about 7 in 100 people 65 and older.

"With estimates suggesting that over three-quarters of salt consumed is already added in processed foods, reducing salt intake at a population level could have a hugely beneficial impact on new-onset atrial fibrillation and overall cardiovascular disease," Paakko said.

(Source: WebMD)

Foreign arrivals in Qazvin rise in H1



TOURISM TEHRAN — The number of foreign tourists to Qazvin province has significantly increased during the first six months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-September 22), compared to the same period last year, provincial tourism chief has said.

"Statistics show that over 12,600 foreign nationals visited historical destinations across Qazvin province during the first six months of the year, which indicated a significant year-on-year increase," Mohammad-Ali Hazrati said, ISNA reported.

He didn't mention how many foreign nationals visited Qazvin in the six-month period last year.

Famed for carpets and seedless grapes, Qazvin embraces wonderfully restored caravanserais, monuments, mosques, bazaars, atmospheric areas, some quirky museums and a handful of decent eating options. Its capital of the same name, was once the capital of all Iran, but for most foreign travelers it is primarily the staging point for excursions to the famous Castles of the Assassins and trekking in the sensational Alamut Valley.

Urmia Museum of Anthropology adds manuscripts gallery



HERITAGE TEHRAN — Urmia Museum of Anthropology in West Azarbaijan province has added a new gallery, special for rare handwritten manuscripts.

Several local officials, experts and academia attended the gallery's opening ceremony on Tuesday, CHTN reported.

The gallery showcases a collection of 72 significant, rare and weighty works many of which by great Iranian calligraphers, provincial tourism chief Seyyed Hadi Tabatabaei said.

"Manuscripts have been important and worthwhile over time and they should be considered ambassadors of culture and time."



ROUND THE GLOBE

City of Cuzco

The City of Cuzco, at 3,400 m above sea level, is located in a fertile alluvial valley fed by several rivers in the heart of the Central Peruvian Andes of South America.

Under the rule of Inca Pachacutec (Tito Cusi Inca Yupanqui), in the 15th century, the city was redesigned and remodeled after a pre-Inca occupation process of over 3,000 years, and became the capital of the Tawantinsuyu Inca Empire, which covered much of the South American Andes between the 15th and 16th centuries CE.



The Imperial city of the Incas was developed as a complex urban center with distinct religious and administrative functions which were perfectly defined, distributed and organized.

The religious and government buildings were accompanied by the exclusive abodes for royal families, forming an unprecedented symbolic urban compound, which shows a stone construction technology with exceptional aesthetic and structural properties, such as the Temple of the Sun or Qoricancha, the Aqllahuasi, the Surturcancha, the Kusicancha and a series of very finely finished buildings that shape the Inca compound as an indivisible unity of Inca urbanism.

The noble city was clearly isolated from the clearly delineated areas for agricultural, artisan and industrial production as well as from the surrounding neighborhoods. The pre-Hispanic patterns and buildings that shaped the Imperial city of the Incas are visible today.

With the Spanish conquest in the 16th century, the urban structure of the Inca imperial city of Cuzco was preserved and temples, monasteries and manor houses were built over the Inca city.

(Source: UNESCO)

Hospitals, clinics highlighting Iran's medical tourism

TOURISM TEHRAN — Over 20 top Iranian hospitals and clinics are taking part in the 10th Pars tourism exhibition, which opened to the public in Shiraz on Wednesday, aiming to get visitors acquainted with Iran's potentials in medical and health tourism, Fars reported.

Ten chambers of commerce are also attending the exhibit that will be running through December 15, the report added.

The exhibit is also turning the spotlight on religious and air traveling, hotels and eco-lodges, marine and air sports, online booking, free trade zones, recreational activities and handicrafts, amongst others.

Medical tourist arrivals in the country has

nearly doubled in the first three months of the current Iranian calendar year, corresponding to spring 2018, from a year earlier, according to data Ministry of Health provided in September.

A total of 166 Iranian hospitals have so far been received special licenses and are running international patient departments, health official Mohammad Jahangiri said in May.

Wallet-friendly and quality treatment services are what Iran is globally famous for when it comes to medical travels.

The country has launched extensive plans to bolster its tourism sector. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, Iran is expecting to increase the number of tourism arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million.

Tehran museum to exhibit rare Quran manuscript



آئین رونمایی و معرفی نسخه «قرآن زعفرانی» با ترجمه پارسی کهن
کاتب: ابوالفخر بن ابی الفضل الزعفرانی، مورخ ۵۴۶ ق

HERITAGE TEHRAN — A rare manuscript of the Holy Quran will be put on show for the public at the Reza Abbasi Museum in Tehran.

Academia and literary figures namely Azartash Azarnoush, Ali-Ashraf Sadeqi, Morteza Kariminia will deliver speeches about the importance of such works of art in an opening ceremony to be held on December 16, Mehr reported.

Known as "Quran-e Za'fferani", the il-

luminated manuscript, which is deemed as one of earliest of its kind, represents a full copy of the Holy Quran and it also bears a Persian translation.

Named after one of the great artists of the Safavid period, Reza Abbasi Museum embraces several permanent exhibition halls that showcase various eras of the Iranian history with objects belonging the pre-Islamic era, paintings and calligraphy works amongst them.



Provincial officials unveil a poster for the 10th Pars tourism exhibition

Semnan hosting nationwide crafts exhibit



HERITAGE TEHRAN — Crafters from 10 provinces are taking part in a national handicrafts sales exhibit which is being held in the city of Semnan.

"A total of 65 stalls have been set up for 100 artisans from the provinces of Isfahan, Khorasan Razavi, Kerman, Yazd, Sistan-Baluchestan, Alborz, Tehran, Golestan, Mazandaran and Semnan," Semnan's tourism chief has said, IRNA reported.

The event, which will be running through December 14, showcases various souvenirs, handwoven rugs, potteries, regional clothing, personal ornaments, woodwork, enamels, leatherwork, handwoven textile, traditional musical instruments, metalwork, and marquetry to name a few. It also offers live performances.

Semnan province is home to 4500 craftspeople working in 52 different fields.

Ancient Roman statue discovered in margarine tub

An ancient statue of the Roman deity Minerva was discovered in a margarine tub, where it had been languishing for years.

The Romano-British piece was brought to attention by amateur metal detectorist 66-year-old Len Jackman, who was visiting a local farmer in rural Oxfordshire. When Jackman sought permission to detect on his land, the farmer told him he was not the first to do so.

Jackman, a retired lorry driver, told CNN: "He invited me in to give me a map of his land and said he'd had other detectorists before. He then produced this statue out of an old margarine box, saying it was found on his land."

As an experienced detectorist, Jackman guessed that the statue -- which shared the box with some gold coins -- was Roman. But it would only be confirmed several months later, when he returned to show the farmer the discoveries he had made on his land.

"I told him I would take what I'd found to be identified and dated at the Museum Resource Centre in Standlake and he said if I was going I should take the stuff from the margarine tub. I said, 'I think you'll be getting a phone call!'"

Fortunately, Jackman recognized the significance of the lead and copper alloy statuette and took it to be assessed -- together with the other items he had uncovered.

On Tuesday morning Jackman was invited to the British Museum in London, where the statue was introduced by arts minister Michael Ellis, as he presented the Portable



Antiquities Annual report for 2017.

The artifact was just one of 78,000 archaeological items that were unearthed by the British public last year and voluntarily recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme, which is managed by the British Museum. More than nine out of 10 of these items (93 per cent) were found by metal detectorists like Jackman.

Coins or items made of gold or silver which are more

than 300 years old are defined as treasure. Overall, 1,267 of 2017's discoveries fell into this category -- including this statuette with its silver rivets -- making it a record-breaking year for treasure.

A spokesman for the British Museum told CNN: "When a potential treasure find is reported to the local Finds Liaison Officer (which they must do by law) it begins a process whereby the objects will be assessed by various experts including our curators here at the British Museum."

"Often that means that they will travel to the Museum to be examined. At the end of the process, there is an inquest where a coroner will declare the find to be legally treasure."

The Minerva statue is still going through the treasure process, according to the spokesman, so there is no monetary value attached to it as yet. "But a number of museums are already interested in acquiring it," he added.

Among the other items unveiled at the museum Tuesday was gold jewelry plucked from the Shropshire marshes, in the west of England, and a priceless antique lamp discovered on the banks of the River Thames in London.

Speaking at the museum, Ellis thanked the public for their contributions and said: "Thousands of hidden treasures have been uncovered this year, helping us to learn more about our past and those that came before us. Many of these important finds have been acquired by, and gone on public display in our museums, meaning that more and more people can experience and understand our rich history."

(Source: CNN)

Hotels are enhancing offerings for pint-size guests

By Shivani Vora

Once boring spaces with a few toys and a TV, "kids' clubs" at hotels and resorts are evolving into destinations that your children may actually enjoy hanging out in.

As a mother of two young children who often accompany me on my travels, I can say that most of the hotel kids' clubs I've seen -- that is, if a property even has one -- tend to be single room spaces with little consideration to youthful interests. Most offer predictable activities like arts and crafts and board games.

But increasingly I've begun to see clubs that have unique settings and entertainment offerings that aim to stimulate children and give them a sense of place. The best connect children to the culture of their destination while giving them space to play.

It's not a surprising move, explained Amanda Norcross, features editor of Family Vacation Critic. "Parents want their children to be happy and engaged on their trips," she said. "Having an innovative kid's club is certainly a way to do that. It also gives a hotel a differentiating factor in an industry that's always competing for guests."

■ **Lessons in culture and wildlife**

The kids' club at the Marbella Club, a beachside resort in Spain, is a good exam-



The art room in the kids' club at the Marbella Club in Spain gives youngsters plenty of space to create and hang their creations.

ple of a club that puts culture first. It's in a 55,000 square-foot villa that was the original home of Prince Alfonso of Spain. It has its own shallow pool and plenty of outdoor space with extensive gardens.

Children between the ages of 4 and 12 (there's a separate area for children from 5 months old to 3 years old) have a choice of six different activities a day. They may pick lavender and other herbs from the

vegetable garden and use them to blend their own perfumes in Andalusian style. Or the counselors might take them to the nearby beach where they can try their hand at kayaking or paddle surfing and learn about local birds.

Access to the club is 90 euros per day. Meals are included, and are always traditional Spanish dishes like paella or gazpacho that the youngsters help prepare themselves.

■ **Jam-making and recycling**

Located in the heart of Provence, the kids' club at Domaine de Manville is headquartered in two collector caravan cars.

Children entertain themselves with pottery making, gardening, jam-making classes using fruit grown on the property, and recycling workshops where they create arts and crafts using secondhand materials. There is also a court where children can learn to play Petanque, a sport -- similar to bocce -- that's native to Provence. Plus, the club is free to children (up to 13) staying at the resort. Room rates begin at \$215.

■ **Treasure hunting in a medina**

Similarly, Royal Mansour, in Marrakesh, has a new kids' club set in a private pavilion within the property's gardens, but still brings children all the richness of the local culture.

Access is included in the room charge (rates start at around \$1,000 a night), and activities include Moroccan art workshops, Arabic lessons and a treasure hunt in the hotel's medina. The hotel also offers a hands-on chocolate making experience for children in their on-site chocolate laboratory -- the best part may be when the youngsters taste-test the bonbons, truffles and other confections they've created.

(Source: The New York Times)

Permafrost thaw to topple buildings in Arctic by 2050, team suggests

Within the next two decades, infrastructure in countries across the Arctic circle — including the U.S., Canada and Russia — will begin to crumble as the frozen ground it is built on starts to thaw.

That is according to research published in the journal *Nature* in which scientists forecast potential hazards to infrastructure relating to permafrost thaw. In the paper, researchers found that three quarters of people living in permafrost areas — around four million people — will be affected by damage to buildings, roads and other structures in the region by 2050.

Permafrost is a thick layer of soil that is permanently frozen. In some areas, the ground has been frozen for tens of thousands of years. However, as global temperatures start to rise, this frozen earth has started to thaw, creating huge problems for the people living on it.

In 2016, scientists in Siberia warned that buildings would start to collapse from the mid 2020s as a result of the thaw.

■ Sinking cemeteries
Meanwhile researchers at Columbia University recently warned that in some parts of Alaska, sinking cemeteries mean people are no longer able to bury the dead in the ground.

In the latest study, Jan Hjort and colleagues carried out a hazard risk assessment for the permafrost regions of the Northern Hemisphere — an area covering about nine million square miles. They looked specifically at the damage to infrastructure that will take place under projected climate change scenarios. They looked at infrastructure that is “fundamental” to Arctic communities,



including residential, transportation and industrial facilities.

Findings showed that the thawing permafrost will pose a significant threat to Arctic communities across the Northern Hemisphere by 2050. “We show that nearly

four million people and 70 percent of current infrastructure in the permafrost domain are in areas with high potential for thaw of near-surface permafrost,” the team wrote.

“Our results demonstrate that one-third of pan-Arctic infrastructure and 45 percent

Findings showed that the thawing permafrost will pose a significant threat to Arctic communities across the Northern Hemisphere by 2050.

of the hydrocarbon extraction fields in the Russian Arctic are in regions where thaw-related ground instability can cause severe damage to the built environment. Alarmingly, these figures are not reduced substantially even if the climate change targets of the Paris Agreement are reached.”

In an interview with *Newsweek*, Hjort said damage to critical infrastructure could threaten the sustainable development of Arctic communities, as well as causing ecosystem disruption through things like oil spills. He said there are different adaptations that can be made to reduce or prevent thaw — such as insulation — and potential thaw can be considered during the construction of new infrastructure.

■ Infrastructure risk assessment
“Permafrost — and its thaw — is mainly controlled by climate conditions. (To prevent the permafrost thawing), we need to stop climate warming.” Concluding, the researchers say a detailed infrastructure risk assessment is needed to understand how communities in permafrost areas will be affected as the planet warms.

However, Christopher Burn, professor of geography and environmental studies at Carleton University, Canada, said that “from a Canadian perspective, the paper does not tell us anything we don’t already know, and in some ways is misleading.”

He told *Newsweek* the part of the paper looking at Canada uses incorrect permafrost projections, while they use a statistical approach to predict ground temperature — which Burn says does not provide an accurate representation of risk.

(Source: *Newsweek*)

It could be the age of the chicken, geologically, researchers say

With 65 billion chickens consumed each year, the signature fossil of the modern epoch may be the leftovers.

It’s one thing to eat chicken every day. It’s something else to have that on your permanent record, as in the geological record, the remnants of our time that archaeologists or aliens of the future will sift through to determine who we were and how we shaped our world.

But a group of scientists argue in a new essay that this is exactly how our time on Earth will be marked, by leftover chicken bones. We live in the Age of the Chicken.

There are about 23 billion chickens on Earth at any given time, at least ten times more than any other bird, forty times the number of sparrows. The second most numerous bird on the planet, at an estimated population of 1.5 billion, is a small creature called the red-billed quelea, sometimes known in its home of sub-Saharan Africa as a feathered locust.

The combined mass of those 23 billion chickens is greater than that of all the other birds on Earth. But, said Carys Bennett, an honorary fellow at the University of Leicester and one of the authors of the essay, it’s not only the mind-boggling numbers of chickens that will tell a tale of our times, but their shape, genes and chemistry.

■ Jungle fowl ancestors
Chickens seem to have been domesticated about 8,000 years ago, and gradually bred to be larger and meatier than their jungle fowl ancestors. But it wasn’t until production of broilers ramped up in the 1950s and farming practices changed that the bird was transformed.

The modern broiler chicken, with an average life until slaughter of a scant



five to nine weeks, by various estimates, has five times the mass of its ancestor. It has a genetic mutation that makes it eat insatiably so that it gains weight rapidly. It is subject to numerous bone ailments because it has been bred to grow so quickly. And because of its diet — heavy on grains and low on back yard seeds and bugs — its bones have a distinct chemical signature.

The broiler is also completely dependent on and designed for an industrial system of meat production. It can only live supported by human technology. Eggs are artificially incubated and chicks grow in climate controlled sheds of up to 50,000 chickens, the scientists write.

The chickens are transported to slaughterhouses at no older than nine weeks (broilers at some farm animal sanctuaries live four years or more) “where most waste products (feathers, manure, blood etc.) are recycled via anaerobic digestion, incineration and rendering into edible byproducts, all technology dependent.” Chicken potpie anyone?

(Source: *The NYT*)

Corals are developing resistance to heatwaves, says study

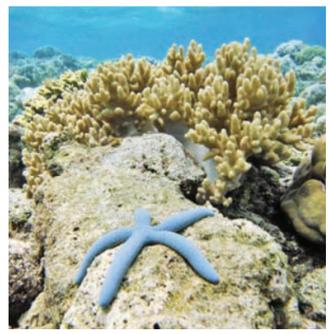
Researchers found that more individual coral reefs survived last year’s mass bleaching event compared in 2016. They found that the 2016 marine heatwave killed more susceptible species, leaving the resilient ones to survive. After the massive bleaching in 2016, scientists discovered that the coral reefs of the Great Barrier Reef have become more resistant to last year’s marine heatwave.

According to a recently published study, an international team of researchers discussed the extent of damage to the coral reefs after the major bleaching events of 1998, 2002, 2016, and 2017. They found that only 7 percent of the Great Barrier Reef has not been affected by bleaching events since 1998. Moreover, 61 percent of the individual reefs have been severely bleached at least once in the past 20 years.

However, here is the good news. While most of the Great Barrier Reef has at least once been severely damaged from coral bleaching caused by a marine heatwave, the corals that have been affected are found to be more resilient. Terry Hughes, the lead author of the study, revealed that there was less bleaching in 2017 even when the temperature was higher than the year before.

“Dead corals don’t bleach for a second time,” he stated in a press release from the Arc Center of Excellence Coral Reef Studies. The “north lost millions of heat-sensitive corals in 2016, and most of the survivors were the tougher species. As a result of bleaching, the mix of species is changing very rapidly.”

■ Satellite-based tools
The team of researchers used the data from the National Oceanic and



Atmospheric Administration’s satellite-based tools to monitor the extent of the damage of last year’s heatwave to the coral reef.

Hughes added that the more positive outcome last year was due to the conditions that the Great Barrier Reef experienced the year before. This is the first time that the natural wonder experienced two mass-bleaching events in a row. The reason why there was less bleaching last year was that the more susceptible species of corals died off in 2016.

This, of course, does not mean that coral reefs are no longer vulnerable to the rapid global warming. The researchers hope the new study could provide new knowledge about the cumulative impacts of climate change-driven environmental events that will become more frequent if the world fails to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

“We need urgent global action on greenhouse emissions to save the world’s coral reefs,” added Hughes.

(Source: *Tech Times*)

‘Pest-controlling’ bats could help save rainforests: new study

A new study shows that several species of bats are giving Madagascar’s rice farmers a vital pest control service by feasting on plagues of insects. And this, a zoologist at the University of Cambridge believes, can ease the financial pressure on farmers to turn forest into fields.

A key reason for this is that insect pests are destroying vast quantities of rice, leading local subsistence farmers to destroy even more forest to create new paddies. The result is devastating habitat and biodiversity loss on the island. But not all species are suffering. In fact, some of the island’s insectivorous bats are thriving, and this has important implications for farmers and conservationists alike.

Co-leading an international team of scientists, Ricardo Rocha from the University of Cambridge’s Zoology department Conservation Science Group, found that several species of indigenous bats are taking advantage of habitat modification to hunt insects swarming above the country’s rice fields. They include the Malagasy mouse-eared bat, Major’s long-fingered bat, the Malagasy white-bellied free-tailed bat, and Peters’ wrinkle-lipped bat.

■ Biological pest suppressors
“These winner species are providing a valuable free service to Madagascar as bio-



logical pest suppressors,” Rocha said. “We found that six species of bat are preying on rice pests such as the paddy swarming caterpillar and grass webworm. The damage that these insects cause puts the island’s farmers under huge financial pressure and that encourages deforestation.”

The study, published in the journal *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment*, used state-of-the-art ultrasonic recorders and molecular analysis to investigate the feeding activity of insectivorous bats in the farmland bordering the Ranomafana National Park in the southeast of the country.

The researchers recorded over a thousand bat ‘feeding buzzes’ (echolocation sequences used by bats to target their prey) at 54 sites, to identify their favorite feeding spots. This revealed that bat activity over rice fields was much higher than it was in continuous forest — seven times higher over irrigated rice fields, and sixteen times higher over hillside fields — which clearly shows that the animals are preferentially foraging in these man-made ecosystems. The researchers suggest that the bats favor hillside fields most because lack of water and nutrient run-off make these crops more susceptible to insect pest infestations.

■ The farming benefits

The team next used DNA barcoding techniques to analyze droppings collected from bats captured within the rice plantations and nearby forest. All six species of bats were found to have fed on economically important insect pests. While the findings indicated that rice farming benefits most from the bats, the scientists also found pests of other crops, including the black twig borer (a pest of coffee), the sugarcane cicada, the macadamia nut-borer, and the sober tabby (a pest of citrus fruits).

The “effectiveness of bats as pest controllers has already been proven in the USA and Catalonia,” said co-author James Kemp, from the University of Lisbon. “But our study is the first to show this happening in Madagascar, where the stakes for both farmers and conservationists are very high.”

The researchers argue that maximizing bat populations has the potential to boost crop yields and promote sustainable livelihoods. They are now calling for further research to quantify this contribution because Madagascar’s bats currently fall under game species legislation and are not actively protected in the country.

(Source: *eurekalert.org*)

Scientists recreate tiny drops of quark soup from the very early universe

You probably don’t stop to think about this often, but right after the birth of the Universe, matter was not in the form we recognize today.

Instead, scientists think it was very much in a state of soup, ‘quark soup’ to be precise — a state also known as quark-gluon plasma.

Now, researchers say they’ve managed to shape ultra-hot, ultra-small liquid droplets of this soup in the lab — possibly allowing us to peer back to the very first microseconds of existence.

Expanding drops of quark-gluon plasmas were created in three geometric shapes — circles, ellipses and triangles — by using a massive particle collider to smash together protons and neutrons at such high speeds and temperatures that they break up.

One of the key findings from the experiment is that these tiny quark-gluon plasma drops behave like fluids, even at the smallest scales. That’s something scientists had originally thought was impossible, but have now seen more and more evidence for.

“Our experimental result has brought us much closer to answering the question of what is the smallest amount of early Universe matter that can exist,” says one of the team, Jamie Nagle from the University of Colorado Boulder.

So what exactly is quark-gluon plasma? It’s a liquid-like state, but one that exists at searing temperatures, where conditions are too hot to form atoms.

We’re talking in the region of 4 trillion degrees Celsius (or nearly 7 trillion degrees Fahrenheit) — about 250,000 times hotter than the core of the sun.

While these particles eventually cooled enough to form regular matter that makes up our world today, the properties of this plasma remain fascinating for scientists — properties which tell the story of the very beginnings of the universe and everything in it.

(Source: *sciencealert.com*)

Did supernovae kill off large ocean animals at dawn of Pleistocene?

About 2.6 million years ago, an oddly bright light arrived in the prehistoric sky and lingered there for weeks or months. It was a supernova some 150 light years away from Earth. Within a few hundred years, long after the strange light in the sky had dwindled, a tsunami of cosmic energy from that same shattering star explosion could have reached our planet and pummeled the atmosphere, touching off climate change and triggering mass extinctions of large ocean animals, including a shark species that was the size of a school bus.

The effects of such a supernova — and possibly more than one — on large ocean life are detailed in a paper just published in *Astrobiology*.

“I’ve been doing research like this for about 15 years, and always in the past it’s been based on what we know generally about the universe — that these supernovae should have affected Earth at some time or another,” said lead author Adrian Melott, professor emeritus of physics & astronomy at the University of Kansas. “This time, it’s different. We have evidence of nearby events at a specific time. We know about how far away they were, so we can actually compute how that would have affected the Earth and compare it to what we know about what happened at that time — it’s much more specific.”

Melott said recent papers revealing ancient seabed deposits of iron-60 isotopes provided the “slam-dunk” evidence of the timing and distance of supernovae.



“As far back as the mid-1990s, people said, ‘Hey, look for iron-60. It’s a telltale because there’s no other way for it to get to Earth but from a supernova.’ Because iron-60 is radioactive, if it was formed with the Earth it would be long gone by now. So, it had to have been rained down on us. There’s some debate about whether there was only one supernova really nearby or a whole chain of them. I kind of favor a combo of the two — a big chain with one that was unusually powerful and close.”

(Source: *sciencedaily.com*)

SpaceX and NASA push back crewed dragon test flight

SpaceX and Boeing are both working toward full certification of their respective spacecraft to carry astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS). It’s been a long road, but SpaceX was set to launch its first demonstration mission (Demo-1) on Jan. 7th, 2019. There has been yet another delay, but at least this one is short. The launch is now scheduled for Jan. 17th.

NASA frames this as an “adjustment” rather than a delay. Although, delays are nothing new in spaceflight. It’s a high-stakes mission even if there won’t be any passengers aboard. Even a small error could result in a significant setback as NASA and SpaceX scramble to identify and fix the issue. A minor fuel leak on Boeing’s CST-100 Starliner crew capsule several months ago contributed to a multi-month delay in its testing schedule.

Kathy Lueders, manager of NASA’s Commercial Crew Program said the team still has more work to do before launching the mission. “We are not driven by dates, but by data,” said Lueders. There is some sense of urgency, though. NASA has been purchasing seats aboard Russian Soyuz missions since the retirement of the Space Shuttle seven years ago. It purchased those seats ahead of time, but the contract will run out at the end of 2019. NASA needs a working commercial vehicle to maintain access to the station in 2020.

Demo-1 will relay important data about the rocket’s performance, the crew capsule, and the autonomous docking system. This is an essential step to make sure SpaceX is ready to carry passengers, even though it’s successfully flown cargo to the station for years now. Following Demo-1, SpaceX will need to show that its launch abort system is ready to carry astronauts away from the Falcon 9 launch vehicle in the event of an emergency.

(Source: *extremetech.com*)

Mohseni-Bandpey appointed Tehran governor general

SOCIETY TEHRAN — The cabinet of ministers elected Anoushirvan Mohseni-Bandpey as the new governor general of Tehran on Wednesday morning, Tasnim news agency reported.



Mohseni-Bandpey replaced Mohammad Moqimi who was banned from his job in the wake of law on banning employment of the retired.

The law was passed in mid-September by the Majlis [Iranian parliament] and it was implemented by November 15. Mohseni-Bandpey has previously served as the head of Iran's Welfare Organization. He was also the acting labor minister before Mohammad Shariatmadari took office in early October. He was named as the caretaker for Social Security Organization in mid-November.

Mohseni-Bandpey holds a PhD in sanitary engineering from UK Newcastle University. The cabinet also appointed Azizollah Shahbazi and Alireza Ashangar as governor generals of Alborz and Semnan provinces respectively.

\$22m earmarked for equipping technical-vocational schools

SOCIETY TEHRAN — A total budget of 900 billion rials (nearly \$22 million) has been requested to develop and equip technical-vocational high schools across the country in the current Iranian calendar year (ending March 20, 2019), Mohsen Hosseini, an official with the Ministry of Education has announced.



Describing some of the programs and priorities of the technical and vocational training organization affiliated to the Ministry, Hosseini pointed to improvement of technical and vocational training plans as the Ministry's main priority.

Competency-based education and assessment is among the most important programs of the technical and vocational organization, which must be well implemented in all career and technical education high school, he added, Mehr reported on Wednesday.

Given that the number of years students are supposed to spend in career and technical education high schools has increased this year from two to three years, we need to assess the education quality provided in previous recent years and plan more appropriate methods for the next few years, he further explained.

Secondary education in Iran is divided into two three-year cycles: Lower-secondary education and upper secondary education, in which, students are segmented into three fields or streams of the education system: academic, technical, and vocational/skills. The academic stream which is divided into three fields of studies including, math and physics, experimental sciences, literature or humanities has traditionally been the most popular.

Students studying career and technical education high school have chosen the technical field, which before was only a two-year cycle and the students who planned to take Iran's standardized university entrance examinations (Konkur) would attend the universities without passing the pre-university year, while recently such schools also have switched to a three-year cycle.

LEARN ENGLISH

Job Interview II

A: Thanks for coming in today, did you have any trouble finding us? Please take a seat.

B: Thank you.

A: So, let's get started; tell me a bit about your **educational background**.

B: Sure! Well, I graduated with honors from Chesterton University with a **major** in Business Administration, with a **specialization** in Information Management, and I minored in psychology. I chose this course of study for two reasons: I wanted to gain some practical, marketable skills, which the information management track provided, and I also feel that interpersonal skills are essential for professional success, hence the **minor** in psychology.

A: Interesting. And, your postgraduate studies?

B: Well, I am really passionate about consumer behavior, so I pursued a master's in that area. I also strive to keep my professional skills current, so I continuously attend seminars and conferences related management and customer service.

A: Very good. Now, tell me a little bit about your work experience. I see here that you previously worked at Oracle.

B: Yeah, I worked as their customer support manager, which brought me a breadth of experience in both client care, and process management. I supervised and coordinated the customer support team as well as implemented new strategies to achieve better customer satisfaction.

A: Interesting...

B: Yes, in this position I was able to make some pretty significant **contributions** to the overall success of the company. With the different initiatives that we implemented, we lowered our churn rate to about five percent, which had a direct impact on revenue.

■ **Key vocabulary educational background:** the history of the education you've had with honors phrase with special recognition for receiving very high marks

major: the main field of study in an undergraduate degree

specialization: a limited area of study

minor: to have a secondary area of study in an undergraduate program

contribution: adding or giving something

■ **Supplementary vocabulary**

tertiary education: university education

take initiative: take the chance to do something before others do

distinguish: make something different in a special way

attribute: a good quality or feature that someone has

scrutinize: examine something in a careful and critical way

Iran to take part in international mental arithmetic contest

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Iran will attend the 18th PAN PACIFIC Abacus & Mental Arithmetic Association Global Abacus and Mental Arithmetic Championships which will be held in Malaysia on December 28.

The Iranian team is comprised of 35 talented children, Fars reported on Tuesday.

The championship is an example of what can be achieved with early intervention in abacus math and mental arithmetic education.

The purpose of the competition is to allow for the observation of mental arithmetic skills from all countries, to promote abacus and mental arithmetic education, and to improve friendships among participants from around the world.

On August 2, some 323 children aged 7 to 13 years took part in the 6th national abacus and mental arithmetic contest to solve some 7 mathematical test sheets using abacuses.

"Last year, Iranian students comprising 11 students aged 5 to 12 years, ranked first among 300 students from 21 countries at the 17th PAMA Global Abacus and Mental Arithmetic Championships held on December

28 in Sandton, South Africa," head of Smart Kids institute Rouhollah Mokhberian said.

He further expressed hope to win title at the competition, and highlighted that this year, we have a greater chance of claiming medals, since selected children are more skillful than the last year's delegation.

Talented girls and boys from provinces of Alborz, Lorestan, Bushehr, Tehran, Zanjan, Kordestan, Kermanshah, Hormozgan and Hamedan will be sent to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia to compete with participants from around the world, Mokhberian noted.

Also, talented children from different countries, including, Taiwan, Thailand, Canada, Hong Kong, United States, South Africa, Vietnams, South Korea, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Australia, India, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, UAE, Uzbekistan, Egypt, Tajikistan, Yemen will attend the international competition, he added.

"Iran has proposed to host the 19th PAMA Global Abacus and Mental Arithmetic Championships and in case it is confirmed Tehran will host the event next year," he concluded.



Last year, Iranian students comprising 11 students aged 5 to 12 years, ranked first among 300 students from 21 countries at the 17th PAMA Global Abacus and Mental Arithmetic Championships held on December 28 in Sandton, South Africa.

Bike-sharing scheme gets underway in Tehran

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Bike-sharing scheme, proposed by an Iranian startup through a system based on Internet of Things (IoT), has started to be implemented in the capital, YJC reported on Wednesday.

Some 500 bikes are currently provided for use in district 2 of the city, the head of board of directors of Pak Charkh Iranian Company, Hossein Qasemi, announced.

"We planned IoT-based bikes with initiatives to mitigate air pollution along with encouraging people to use green vehicles rather than emitting private cars," he added.

He further explained that the capital residents can start cycling through downloading Bdoon app on their smartphones and after paying some 1.59 million rials (about \$38) as a deposit, which can be refunded at any time the residents decide.

Using the aforesaid app users can scan the QR Code on the bike and will receive a code on their phone and by entering the secure electronic key the bike will unlock, he



said, adding that using the bikes costs nearly 3 cents per half an hour.

Whenever arrived at the destination, the citizens can

drop off the bikes at the nearest parking lots which are now set up in different parts of the city, he highlighted.

"Next Tuesday (December 18), the bike-sharing scheme will be launched officially in districts 2 and 6 with Tehran mayor, Pirouz Hanachi, in attendance," he stated.

According to journals.plos.org, bike-sharing programs, with initiatives to increase bike use and improve accessibility of urban transit, have received increasing attention in growing number of cities across the world.

The scheme was first introduced in mid-August in an attempt to address air pollution in the metropolis of Tehran.

According to World Health Organization exposure to air pollution kills seven million people worldwide every year and costs an estimated \$5.11trn in welfare losses globally, a report released last week revealed.

It highlighted that in the 15 countries that emit the most greenhouse gas emissions – and have the worst air pollution – health impacts are estimated to cost more than 4% of GDP.

Tax fossil fuel companies to raise billions and fix damage caused by climate change, experts say

A tax on the fossil fuel industry could be used to protect the world's most vulnerable people from climate change, according to a coalition of environmental groups.

As global temperatures soar, devastating events like hurricanes and floods are becoming more frequent and destructive, but many affected are those least responsible for these phenomena.

For years debate has gone back and forth about how best to reimburse those hit by these disasters, but there is still a need for a pot of money that can be accessed rapidly to aid their recovery.

In a new report released at a major UN climate summit in Poland, a "climate damages tax" that could generate up to \$300bn (£237bn) each year is suggested as a possible solution.

Based on the "polluter pays" principle, fossil fuel corporations would be taxed for every ton of coal, oil and gas they extract from the ground.

This would make those spewing out climate-damaging emissions responsible for recovery costs until these dirty fuels are phased out altogether.

"The Climate Damages Tax is a practical way to address the injustice at the heart of climate change – that the fossil



fuel industry make hundreds of billions in profits whilst the true costs of their product are paid by the rest of society, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable," said Julie-Anne Richards from the

Climate Damages Tax Coalition.

Sir David Attenborough at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Katowice: Climate change 'our greatest threat'

Ms Richards compared the proposed tax to similar charges applied to tackle the damage caused by oil spills and tobacco use.

Ralph Regenvanu, foreign minister for the island nation of Vanuatu, said his nation was "on the front lines of climate change and yet we have done little to cause it".

He cited the case of Cyclone Pam, which struck in 2015 and cost Vanuatu over 60 per cent of its GDP.

Though they applied to the existing Green Climate Fund for compensation, the grants awarded have been insufficient, suggesting a need for new sources of money to support climate reparations.

Finance – and specifically the amount of money given by richer nations to poorer ones to tackle climate change – is an important topic at this year's COP24 meeting in Poland.

However, the groups behind the report said discussion of the matter was progressing at a rate out of step with the urgency of climate change.

In their report, the Climate Damages Tax Coalition lay out a system in which companies pay for every ton of CO2 they emit, and this continues until fossil fuels are phased out entirely by 2050.

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Run-down areas account for 5% of Tehran: expert

Rundown areas constitute some 5 percent of the total areas in the capital, according to the statistics published in the Iranian calendar year of 1385 (March 2006-March 2007), head of the renovation of rundown areas organization affiliated to the Municipality has said.

"Currently, over 1.2 million people live in run-down areas, amounting to 15 percent of the total population of Tehran," YJC quoted Kaveh Ali-Akbari as saying on Wednesday.

۵ درصد از مساحت کل شهر تهران بافت فرسوده است

مدیرعامل سازمان نوسازی بافت فرسوده شهرداری تهران گفت: بر اساس آمارهای سال ۸۵، ۵ درصد از مساحت کل شهر تهران را بافت فرسوده تشکیل می‌دهد.

کاوه علی اکبری مدیرعامل سازمان نوسازی بافت فرسوده شهرداری تهران در گفتگو با خبرنگار باشگاه خبرنگاران جوان؛ اظهار کرد: یک میلیون و ۲۰۰ هزار نفر در بافت فرسوده زندگی می‌کنند که این رقم ۱۵ درصد کل جمعیت شهر تهران را شامل می‌شود.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-ide”

■ **Meaning:** elements or compounds

■ **For example:** We would like to test a wide variety of **polysaccharide** structures.

PHRASAL VERB

Liven up

■ **Meaning:** to become more exciting, or to make an event become more exciting

■ **For example:** Why don't we invite Jane? That'll liven things up!

IDIOM

Not have a clue

■ **Explanation:** don't know anything about something

■ **For example:** My wife's grandmother's maiden name? I don't have a clue!

Israeli border tunnel operation won't disturb calm: Aoun

U.S. Rejects Israel's Request for Sanctions on Lebanon over tunnels

By staff & agencies

Lebanon's president said that Israel's operation to destroy a series of cross-border tunnels won't endanger the calm along the frontier, adding that his country takes the issue seriously.

Michel Aoun, a Hezbollah ally, said that Lebanon is prepared to address the issue after assessing a full report on the situation. Aoun said the United States has informed Lebanon that Israel has "no aggressive intentions," adding that his country harbored none either.

Meanwhile, the United States has rebuffed Israel's request to impose sanctions on Lebanon and the Lebanese army so they would take responsibility for Hezbollah digging tunnels into Israel and violating UN Resolution 1701.

Hezbollah warns

Earlier, a Hezbollah official has warned Israel against invading Lebanon, saying the resistance movement is strong enough to block any military aggression and retaliate against it.

"The days when Israel could simply attack Lebanon are over, even though the initiative to attack is in Israel's hands," Hassan Hoballah, a member of Hezbollah's political bureau, said on Tuesday.

The remarks came hours after the Israeli army launched an operation along Lebanon's border under the pretext of "cutting off" what it claims are Hezbollah tunnels near the occupied territories.

Chief of Staff of Israeli military, Lieutenant General Gadi Eizenkot, claimed that the so-called Operation Northern Shield had been launched before the tunnels were operational and "became an immediate and direct threat to northern communities and army bases."

Elsewhere in his comments, Hoballah stressed that Hezbollah fighters are capable



of blocking any Israeli assault and launching counter-attacks on the enemy. The resistance forces, he added, are on "a constant state of alert and surveillance, and are assessing the situation."

The official also noted that Hezbollah's course of action will depend on developments in the field.

Hezbollah was formed following the Israeli regime's invasion of Lebanon and the ensuing occupation of its southern parts in the 1980s, and currently constitutes Lebanon's de facto military power.

Since then, the movement has helped the national army retake the occupied regions from Tel Aviv and thwart two Israeli acts of aggression in 2000 and 2006. It has also been playing a significant role in the Syrian army's fight against Takfiri terrorist groups.

Since the end of the 2006 war, Israeli forces have regularly violated Lebanon's sovereignty, with the regime's officials even

threatening another offensive against the Arab country.

Separately on Tuesday, President Michel Aoun called on Lebanon's military and security agencies to "closely monitor" the situation in the country's south.

Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA) reported that Aoun had held several phone calls with government officials and the army commander regarding the new Israeli operation.

"During President Aoun's phone calls, the situation was evaluated in light of the available information about the objectives of the Israeli operation and security agencies were asked to closely monitor the situation," the report said.

Additionally, the Lebanese army command said that it is watching the situation closely, reiterating its readiness to confront any emergency situation.

"The situation is under close follow-up,"

read an army communiqué.

It further pointed out that the Lebanese army units are carrying out their usual missions near the occupied lands in cooperation with the United Nations peacekeeping force, known as UNIFIL, to prevent any escalation or destabilization in the region.

'A PR stunt meant to save Netanyahu'

Analysts have, however, raised doubt about the declared objective of the Israeli operation, describing it as an attempt by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to divert attention from the corruption scandals he is grappling with.

Prominent regional analyst Abdel Bari Atwan, the editor-in-chief of Rai al-Youm, wrote Tuesday that the Israeli premier is struggling to save his own political life and avoid ending behind bars for graft by announcing such an operation.

He also said the operation was launched shortly after Netanyahu's meeting with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in the Belgian capital, stressing that the embattled prime minister had been in Brussels to ask Pompeo for help.

Miko Peled, a former member of the Israeli army who has now become a pro-Palestinian activist, also believes that the Israeli operation is actually meant to distract public opinion from Netanyahu's corruption probes.

"Yesterday, if you look at the Israeli papers, there was some mention of the corruption charges. Today, it's all southern Lebanon, it's all Hezbollah, it's all pictures of Netanyahu with his senior security staff, with the generals and so forth. So this is a great PR and political gift that he got when (ex-minister for military affairs) Lieberman resigned, and now he's making use of it," Peled told Russia's Sputnik news agency.

Yemen's warring parties agree to reopen Sana'a airport for domestic flights



UN asks warring parties to leave Hudaydah

The United Nations has proposed that both parties to the Yemen conflict pull out of Hudaydah, and that an interim entity be set up to run the embattled port city, a lifeline for millions of people in the war-torn country.

The proposal was put forward on Tuesday, the sixth day of the UN-brokered peace talks in Sweden between delegations from Yemen's Houthi Ansarullah movement and the country's former Saudi-backed regime.

Three sources familiar with the discussions told Reuters that the initiative, which has been presented by UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths, envisions the formation of a "joint committee or independent entity" to manage Hudaydah after the withdrawal of the warring sides from the strategic Red Sea port.

Hudaydah is the entry point for most of Yemen's commercial goods and vital aid.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE launched an offensive against Hudaydah in June but they have hit a stiff brick wall in the face of a strong resistance put up by Yemeni armed forces - led by the Houthis - and the city's residents.

The Saudi-led coalition claims that the Houthis are using the port city for weapons delivery, an allegation rejected by the Yemeni fighters.

So far in the peace talks, both parties have agreed to a UN role in Hudaydah.

However, the Houthis say the city must be declared a neutral zone, while the team of Yemen's former Saudi-backed president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi says it should be placed under the control of the self-proclaimed Interior Ministry.

Commenting on UN proposals on Hudaydah, Mohamed Abdulsalam, who heads the Houthi team, told Yemen's al-Masirah television that the Riyadh-sponsored party is "escalating its military aggression on Hudaydah."

"The presence of foreign forces in Yemen is contrary to the Yemeni constitution and the resolutions of the Security Council," he said, referring to the Saudi-led forces back-

ing pro-Hadi militants on the battlefield against Yemeni armed forces.

"There is no excuse for the presence of foreign troops in Yemen as long as we are heading for a political solution," he added.

Mass prisoner swap expected

Additionally on Tuesday, Yemen's rival parties exchanged lists of over 15,000 prisoners and detainees, including UAE and Saudi nationals, for a swap agreed at the start of the peace talks.

Delegates said the swap would take place through the Houthi-held Sana'a airport and the militant-held Say'un airport in the south, with the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) overseeing the process.

"We have exchanged more than 7,000 names from each side, including some 200 high-ranking officers," said Ghaleb Mutlaq, a member of the Houthi delegation.

Abdul Qader al-Murtada, another Houthi official, also said the process would begin on January 20.

Askar Zouail, a member of the former government's delegation, said his side had submitted the names of 8,576 detainees to the UN, while the Houthis had given the names of some 7,487 people.

He also noted that his side had urged the Houthis to hand over the body of Ali Abdullah Saleh, the former Yemeni president who was killed last December.

One source told Doha-based Al Jazeera broadcaster that as part of a confidence-building measure, the Houthis were expected to release several high-ranking militant commanders as well as ex-defense minister General Mahmoud al-Subaihi and some relatives of Hadi.

UN chief to attend talks

In another development on Tuesday, the UN said in a statement that the world body's chief Antonio Guterres would attend the closing of the Yemeni peace talks on Thursday.

Guterres, the statement read, would "hold meetings with the two delegations and will address the closing session of this round of consultations."



Reports said that another round of peace talks could be held in early 2019.

Over 60k killed in Yemen since 2016

The Saudi regime and a coalition of its allies invaded Yemen in March 2015, months after Riyadh-friendly Hadi resigned as Yemen's president amid a political conflict with the Houthi movement and fled to the Saudi capital.

According to new figures released by an independent research group, some 60,223 people had been killed in Yemen between January 2016 and the end of November 2018.

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) said that nearly half of those fatalities happened this year alone.

The death toll "is far higher than official estimates - and still underestimated," said ACLED's Executive Director Clionadh Raleigh.

"Fatality numbers are only one approximation of the abject tragedy and terror forced upon Yemenis from several sides. This cannot be overstated," Raleigh added.

The figure, however, does not include the deaths caused by disease, malnutrition or deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Yemen.

(Source: agencies)

Gazan kid dies of Israeli gunfire wounds sustained in anti-occupation protests

A Palestinian child has died four days after being shot by Israeli military forces during clashes between Israeli troops and a group of Palestinian protesters participating in an anti-occupation rally along the border between the besieged Gaza Strip and the Israeli-occupied territories.

Ashraf al-Qidra, the spokesman for the Gaza Health Ministry, said in a statement that Ahmed Yasser Sabri Abu Abed,

aged four years and eight months, died late on Tuesday.

He had been critically injured in the head near his eye during Friday rallies east of the city of Khan Yunis, located about 25 kilometers south of Gaza City. His father was wounded by shrapnel in the foot.

Tensions have been running high near the fence separating Gaza from the occupied territories ever since anti-occupation protest

rallies began in the Gaza Strip on March 30. More than 240 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces. Over 23,000 Palestinians have also sustained injuries.

The Gaza clashes reached their peak on May 14, on the eve of the 70th anniversary of Nakba Day (Day of Catastrophe), which coincided this year with the U.S. embassy relocation from Tel Aviv to occupied East Jerusalem al-Quds.

(Source: Press TV)

Sacrificing ethics for money

According to CNN, Bob Corker, also a Republican senator, said the prince "ordered, monitored, the killing" of Khashoggi, a Washington Post Journalist who was a critic of the Saudi war on Yemen.

However, Trump and his security team are denying the crown prince's involvement in the murder in order to sign more lucrative personal and government business deals with the Saudi kingdom. The deals range from hundreds of billions of dollars in arms sales to the kingdom to purchases of apartments by Saudi royals from Trump.

In 2015, Trump, then a presidential candidate, said he loves the Saudis because they spend millions for apartments from him. While the CIA and other American intelligence agencies have concluded that MBS is a complicit in the murder, a claim by Pompeo, who was directing the CIA until April, that there is no evidence that MBS knew of the murder is highly upsetting.

In view of these bitter facts, it is not an exaggeration to

say that the Saudis have been enticing Trump and his inner circle to shape the American foreign policy.

The cordial ties between bin Salman and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and Middle East adviser, is open to all. In a report posted on its website on December 8, the New York Times said according to two former senior American officials and the two people briefed by the Saudis, the exchanges between MBS and Kushner continued even after the killing of Khashoggi.

It also said according to documents, emails and text messages reviewed by the Times, 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.

"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".

Before Trump took power at the White House, millions of people around the world had a relatively positive view of the U.S. despite Washington's blind support for Israel, which has been continuously stealing the Palestinian lands. Such a view was given energy under Barack Obama.

However, under the Trump administration, humanitarian principles are being traded for money, no matter whether it is the killing of Khashoggi or the starving of the Yemeni people. For Trump, what is now of utmost priority is to boast more arms and business deals with the wealthy state of Saudi Arabia and demonize Iran.

In fact, Trump's United States has been trampling ethics by sacrificing the country's reputation for MBS.

May battles confidence vote, warning Brexit is in peril

Theresa May vowed to win a vote of no confidence triggered by angry Brexit supporters in her Conservative Party on Wednesday, saying her ouster would jeopardize Britain's divorce from the European Union.



Less than four months before the United Kingdom is due to leave on March 29, Brexit is in chaos with options ranging from a potentially disorderly no-deal departure to another referendum that could reverse it.

Speaking outside her Downing Street residence hours before the vote of confidence to decide her fate, May said she would fight with everything she had.

The long-running schism over Europe in her party contributed to the fall of all three previous Conservative premiers - David Cameron, John Major and Margaret Thatcher.

May, a 62-year-old vicar's daughter who voted to remain in the EU at a 2016 referendum, told opponents if they toppled her, then Brexit would be delayed or stopped.

"A change of leadership in the Conservative Party now would put our country's future at risk and create uncertainty when we can least afford it," she said.

"I stand ready to finish the job."

A new leader would not have time to renegotiate Brexit and secure parliamentary approval by the end of March, meaning the Article 50 withdrawal notice would have to be extended or rescinded, May said.

May will address lawmakers at a closed meeting before they cast votes in a metal box from 1800 GMT in Committee Room 14 at the House of Commons. An announcement is due at 2100.

In a possible sign May might offer a date for resignation after Brexit, her spokesman said the vote would not be about who leads the party into the next election, due in 2022.

"She must go"

May could be toppled if a simple majority of Conservative lawmakers vote against her, though a significant rebellion could also undermine her position. However, at least 174 of her 315 lawmakers had indicated public support for her by 1420 GMT.

Brexit is Britain's most significant political and economic decision since World War Two, though pro-Europeans fear it will weaken the West as it grapples with the presidency of Donald Trump and growing assertiveness from Russia and China.

The outcome will shape Britain's \$2.8 trillion economy, have far reaching consequences for the U.K. unity, and determine whether London keeps its place as one of the top two global financial centers.

The British pound rose to 1.2615 against the U.S. dollar. May won the top job in the turmoil that followed the 2016 EU referendum but promised to implement Brexit as a way to heal a divided nation. But on Monday she pulled a parliamentary vote on her deal - which seeks to keep Britain closely aligned with the EU after exit - to avoid defeat.

Her trade minister, Liam Fox, said the government might not even put it to a vote unless the EU gave more reassurances on the so-called Irish "backstop", an insurance policy aimed at preventing border controls on the island of Ireland.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the 27 other bloc members would not change a deal the EU spent two years negotiating.

Brexit-supporting lawmakers in her party say May has betrayed the people's vote in negotiations, while opponents say she struck a deal that is the worst of all worlds - out of the EU but with no say over rules it has to abide by.

"Theresa May's plan would bring down the government if carried forward," lawmakers Jacob Rees-Mogg and Steve Baker said in a statement. "Conservatives must now answer whether they wish to draw ever closer to an election under Mrs May's leadership. In the national interest, she must go."

Party divisions

May's predecessor Cameron bet all on the referendum he lost in 2016. Now, having already been weakened by a snap election last year which cost her a parliamentary majority, May also sees her own job at risk over Europe.

Widely praised for a punishing work ethic and dutiful approach, May's premiership has been characterized by obduracy in the face of crises.

Ministers said changing leader at such an important moment in British history was folly. "I am absolutely sure the prime minister will win," said Michael Gove, most senior Brexiteer in May's government.

But as investors and company bosses tried to gauge the ultimate outcome of the political crisis, some were betting Brexit would be thwarted.

The EU's top court ruled on Monday that Britain could cancel its Article 50 notice to leave without permission from other members and without losing privileges.

But if May's deal fails and Brexit is not delayed, then Britain could be heading towards a disorderly exit that investors fear will clog the arteries of trade, dislocate supply chains and roil markets.

"We are working hard to make sure we get an orderly Brexit," said Merkel, the EU's most powerful leader.

(Source: Reuters)

NASA offers to show proof of moon landing to Warriors' Stephen Curry

NASA has offered to show Stephen Curry proof the United States landed on the moon in 1969 after the Golden State Warriors star said in a podcast that he didn't believe the event ever happened.

"We'd love for Mr. Curry to tour the lunar lab at our Johnson Space Center in Houston, perhaps the next time the Warriors are in town to play the Rockets," Allard Beutel, a NASA spokesman, told The New York Times. "We have hundreds of pounds of moon rocks stored there, and the Apollo mission control. During his visit, he can see firsthand what we did 50 years ago, as well as what we're doing now to go back to the moon in the coming years, but this time to stay."

Curry expressed his doubts on The Ringer's "Winging It" podcast, asking, "We ever been to the moon?" Fellow NBA players Vince Carter and Kent Bazemore, who host the podcast, answered, "No." "They're going to come get us, I don't think so either," Curry said. "Sorry, I don't want to start conspiracies."

Asked to clarify by co-host Annie Finberg, Curry again said he didn't believe the landing happened.

Curry addressed the reaction to his comments on Monday night. "I've got a lot of interesting feedback from some ex-NASA astronauts that I'm planning on having a conversation with," Curry told reporters, according to The Athletic. "So some good is going to come out of this, for sure."

Curry isn't the only NBA player to support a conspiracy theory. Last year, the Boston Celtics' Kyrie Irving said the Earth was flat and later apologized for his comments this year.

(Source: ESPN)

Ancelotti frustration as Napoli denied "cherry on the cake"

Carlo Ancelotti conceded it was a bitter pill to swallow as Napoli came so close before being denied a place in the Champions League knock-out rounds with a dramatic 1-0 defeat to Liverpool at Anfield on Tuesday.

Former Roma goalkeeper Alisson Becker's superb late save on Arkadiusz Milik ensured Liverpool advanced to the last 16 thanks to Mohamed Salah's first-half goal.

The Italians had only needed a point to advance from Group C to the last 16 after missing out last season under Ancelotti's predecessor Maurizio Sarri.

"We did everything in our power to get through," said Ancelotti, who replaced Sarri with the aim of challenging in the top European competition and in Serie A this season.

"We are bitter, but we also know that we have exceeded our expectations and we challenged until the last minute in a very strong group."

Napoli finished third behind Liverpool with French champions Paris Saint-Germain winning the group.

Ancelotti had said that his side would be "idiots" not to reach the knock-out rounds.

"The cake has been made -- now we need to add a little cherry," the 59-year-old three-time Champions League winning coach warned his players beforehand.

(Source: AFP)

Yaya Toure leaves Olympiakos after three months

Former Manchester City and Barcelona midfielder Yaya Toure has left Olympiakos three months after rejoining the Greek Super League club.

Olympiakos said on Tuesday that the former Ivory Coast international's contract had been terminated by mutual agreement.

Toure, who was released by City after a limited role last season, chose to join the club where he won the domestic double in the 2005-06 season.

Yet the 35-year-old's second spell ended after just five appearances, with two coming in the league.

"Yaya is and remains an important member of the Olympiakos family, who has marked a central part of the history of the club," Olympiakos said in a statement.

"Olympiakos would like to thank him for everything he has offered to the club."

"Yaya will remain deeply devoted to the club and wishes to Olympiakos lots of success. Yaya is leaving as a friend and the doors at Olympiakos will always be open for him."

Toure joined Barcelona in 2007 and won two La Liga titles and the Champions League in 2009.

He moved to City in 2010, where he won three Premier League titles, two League Cups and the FA Cup.

(Source: Soccernet)

Bolton Chairman to 'personally' pay wages

Bolton Wanderers chairman and majority stakeholder Ken Anderson is to personally fund outstanding wages owed by the Championship club.

Wanderers said an agreement reached with the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) to pay November's wages was not the "preferred route".

The Bolton News reports that the PFA has already pulled out of the agreement because of other financial concerns.

Payments will be made on Friday - 14 days late. Wanderers said the latest delay was "caused" by exploring the option of assistance from the PFA, with an agreement first reached with the players' union on Friday, 7 December before it was revised and an initial statement was issued by the club on Monday.

The wage dispute at Bolton is not the first this season, with players going on strike and pre-season fixtures being cancelled because of similar issues last summer.

Financial problems have plagued the club in recent years, with the Trotters only avoiding administration in September after former owner Eddie Davies gave the club a £5m loan four days before he died.

(Source: BBC)

Sky to end ownership of cycling outfit Team Sky

One of the most successful teams in professional cycling history is looking for a new sponsor after Sky announced its ownership and sponsorship of Team Sky will cease at the end of 2019.

Broadcaster Sky helped found Team Sky in 2010 and, over the last eight years, the team has won six Tour de France titles with British riders Bradley Wiggins, Chris Froome and Geraint Thomas.

However, the team has come under criticism for its use of therapeutic use exemptions (TUEs) with an inquiry being launched by Britain's Parliament to investigate whether the team had been guilty of any doping offenses.

"Over the past nine seasons, Sky has backed us all the way, enabling us to achieve some amazing results and inspire millions of people to love our sport," said the Team Sky statement. "We'd like to thank Sky for all of their support, and in particular the opportunity to help Britain become a cycling nation."

"First things first, nothing changes for next year. Sky are fully committed to the end of 2019 and together we have ambitious goals for the season. We all want to close the Team Sky story with the strongest possible finish. We are more motivated as a Team than we have ever been."

The team hopes to secure new sponsorship for 2020 but finding a replacement willing to match the previous investment may prove difficult. Sky had invested \$188 million into the team over the last ten years, according to the Guardian.

"In terms of the future, we are open mind-



ed. If we can find a new long-term partner to take the Team forward into a new era, then we will do so," the statement continued.

"And we will be doing everything we can to make that happen over the coming weeks and months. Equally, any future partner would have to be the right partner - one who shares our ethos and buys in to our values."

If a replacement is not found, Team Sky's impressive roster of riders will be looking for new teams.

"Teams would love to snap those guys up,"

said cycling expert and broadcaster John Woodhouse, who has covered the Tour de France for 20 years.

"They would love to have those guys on their rota. Chris Froome has got another Tour in him, if not two."

Team Sky was formed with a clear ambition to build a successful outfit around a core of British riders and staff. They succeeded in winning the Tour de France with a British rider for the first time in 2012 and also secured victories at the 2018 Giro d'Italia

and the Vuelta a Espana in 2016.

But the team's darkest moment came in 2016, when the UK Anti-Doping agency (UKAD) launched an investigation over a parcel delivered to star rider Wiggins in 2011.

The team was condemned for manipulating regulations and their popularity was severely damaged worldwide. A report from the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) said the team had crossed an "ethical line."

More bad news followed when fellow Team Sky rider Chris Froome was subject to a doping investigation in 2017. He was found to have more than the permissible level of asthma drug salbutamol in his urine in 2012 but was later cleared of all charges.

Sky deny the controversy surrounding doping allegations as the reason for pulling out of the partnership but Woodhouse believes it might be a factor.

"We have to factor in that maybe Sky weren't getting the headlines that they wanted from the sport," he said to CNN Sport, while admitting that Sky may have taken cycling as far as they could.

"When you look at the reaction on the road, it's a very negative reaction to Team Sky. That's generating a lot of headlines that Sky don't need. You don't want the team you sponsor to be tainted in anyway."

Sky's Group Chief Executive Jeremy Darroch said the organization would now focus on new projects, including the Sky Ocean Rescue campaign which looks to raise awareness of the dangers of single-use plastics.

(Source: CNN)

Japan shuns Kagawa for bid to reclaim Asian Cup



Japan dropped former Manchester United star Shinji Kagawa from the Blue Samurai's bid to reclaim the Asian Cup, opting instead for a squad filled with young Europe-based talents.

Coach Hajime Moriyasu on Wednesday selected several players with only a handful of caps to their names for Asia's showcase football tournament in the United Arab Emirates starting in January.

The likes of Ritsu Doan of Groningen, Shoya Nakajima of Portimonense and Takumi Minamino of Salzburg will lead Japan's bid for a record-extending fifth title.

But there was no place for midfielder Kagawa, 29, now struggling for playing time at Borussia Dortmund.

Kagawa has long been among the leading stars of Blue Samurai and at his German outfit, but the attacking player has found himself unable to get regular first-team football under Dortmund coach Lucien Favre.

He told Japanese media last month that he wished to move to Spain to take on a

new challenge.

Moriyasu suggested he had been tempted to turn to veterans like Kagawa, but said he needed to pick players in their best form.

"Of course, I wanted help from experienced players, those who went to the Russian World Cup and those who have led Japan for years," Moriyasu told a press conference.

"Many of the players whom we selected at this time have only limited experiences. I have chosen them with hopes that they would take the ownership of the team and build the national team themselves and fight for the title," he said.

However, the young squad will be supported by Werder Bremen striker Yuya Osako and Galatasaray defender Yuto Nagatomo, both veterans of past World Cups.

Japan won the Asian Cup in 1992, 2000, 2004 and 2011, but failed in the last edition, won by Australia in 2015.

"Japan's national team did not win the title last time. We will reclaim the Asian Cup and bring back the title," Moriyasu said.

(Source: AFP)

Blind Spanish surfer says sea sets her free, goes for world title



Carmen Lopez can only imagine what the sea looks like, but the blind 21-year-old Spaniard is in her element riding the surf.

Guided by instinct and signals whistled by her coach, Lopez has been training hard to become Spain's first blind female athlete to enter the World Adaptive Surfing Championship in La Jolla, California, on Wednesday.

"The sea is where I feel peace and freedom, as if it were where I'm supposed to be," she said sitting on her surfboard after an hour and a half of wave-riding practice in the Bay of Biscay in northern Spain.

"I'm not different from other surfers," said Lopez, who was born with congenital glaucoma and lost her vision completely when she was a child.

In its fourth edition, the La Jolla event for surfers with disabilities features its first team competition for visually-impaired female athletes, with Lopez representing Spain.

Blind surfers such as Lopez' countryman Aitor Francesena or Brazilian

Derek Rabelo have achieved legendary status in the sport, and Lopez, who only took up surfing a few months ago, is aiming high.

After the La Jolla tournament, organised by the International Surfing Association (ISA), Lopez aims to compete in the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris. ISA has been campaigning to make adaptive surfing a Paralympic sport.

Lopez has also practised figure-skating and horse-riding and her coach and friend Lucas Garcia praised her natural balance and instinct. Garcia, who swims next to Lopez when she surfs, is her 'eyes' when it comes to telling her about a wave coming up.

"A single whistle means the wave is coming on her right side, and a double whistle, on her left side," he said, likening the signals to the way dolphins communicate.

Lopez wants to encourage others with disabilities to challenge their limitations, live a full life and perhaps try out radical sports.

(Source: Reuters)

Liverpool's Jurgen Klopp has 'no words' for Alisson save vs. Napoli

Jurgen Klopp described Alisson's stoppage-time intervention against Napoli on Tuesday as a "lifesaver" as Liverpool reached the knockout rounds of the Champions League.

Liverpool will be in a draw for the round of 16 on Dec. 17 after Mohamed Salah's 34th-minute goal proved to be the difference at Anfield in the must-win tie.

But, with a Napoli goal sending Liverpool into the Europa League, Alisson, the £65 million summer signing, made a crucial save to deny Arkadiusz Milik from close range.

"The goal Mo scored -- what a goal, unbelievable. And the save Ali made -- I have no words for that," Klopp said at his post-match news conference.

"That was, of course, a lifesaver tonight. I'm really proud what the boys did tonight."

Klopp added: "It was not only one save. He had a lot of things to do tonight."

"How cool and calm he was with the ball helps us a lot in our build-up situations. When he comes out for crosses he is outstanding. And, yes, that save was just incredible."

"But if we don't defend the whole pitch like we defended, Ali cannot make 20 saves like the last one."

"He did it. ... Incredible, unbelievable. I never saw something similar. But still he needs the other boys around."

The win means Liverpool, last season's finalists, have now progressed to the knockout stages in back-to-back Champions League campaigns for the first time since 2008-09.

Klopp was left delighted with the performance from his side, who are now unbeaten in their last 19 European



matches at Anfield.

"I'm still full of adrenaline," the Liverpool manager said. "This game was just amazing. It was outstanding, unbelievable."

"The boys played their whole hearts on the pitch -- I'm not sure it's right saying. With each part of their body, they were in that game. Our offensive defending, our offensive pressing was some of the best I've ever saw."

"The intensity we played with was just difficult to deal with. Yes, we could have scored more often but the 2-0 doesn't help a lot."

"The most difficult period was after the 1-0. You could see this little bit of relief and then Napoli was there. That

made the game so intense. We knew at half-time that you cannot change the tactics and say: 'Let's sit a bit deeper.' In that moment, they are not to defend anymore because they do it really so well."

"We had to do it like how we did it in the first half." Liverpool finish second in the Group C behind Paris Saint-Germain, meaning they can be paired with holders Real Madrid in the last 16.

"We have no say in that," Klopp said. "We wait for the draw -- no problem with that."

"Until 7:55 tonight, I was really not sure that we will be in the draw still and now we are in it. How could I sit here and ask for any team? I don't care."

"We are second in the group, so we will have an outstandingly strong opponent. That's it."

Meanwhile, Liverpool have a number of injury concerns to their defence after the Napoli victory, and sources have confirmed to ESPN FC that Joel Matip went to hospital following the match for tests on his shoulder injury sustained in the final seconds.

Trent Alexander-Arnold hobbled off in the 90th minute with an apparent foot issue, while James Milner was suffering from cramps.

"Trent got a knock on his foot, we are not sure about what exactly it is," Klopp said. "It is painful."

"Millie had cramps -- I hope it was only cramp. That was it, I don't know anything else."

(Source: ESPN)

Iran's first goalscorer at World Cup Danaeifard dies

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iraj Danaeifard, the scorer of the first official goal for Iran national football team in the FIFA World Cup, has died aged 67.

Danaeifard passed away from liver disease in Shiraz's Namazi Hospital on Wednesday.

Iraj Danaeifard was the son of Ali Danaeifard who was one of the founders of Taj SC football club (the club became known as Esteghlal in 1979).

He was invited to the national team for the first time in 1977 and helped Team Melli qualify for 1978 World Cup.

Danaeifard scored against Scotland, which was Iran's first goal ever at a World Cup.

He equalized the match in the second

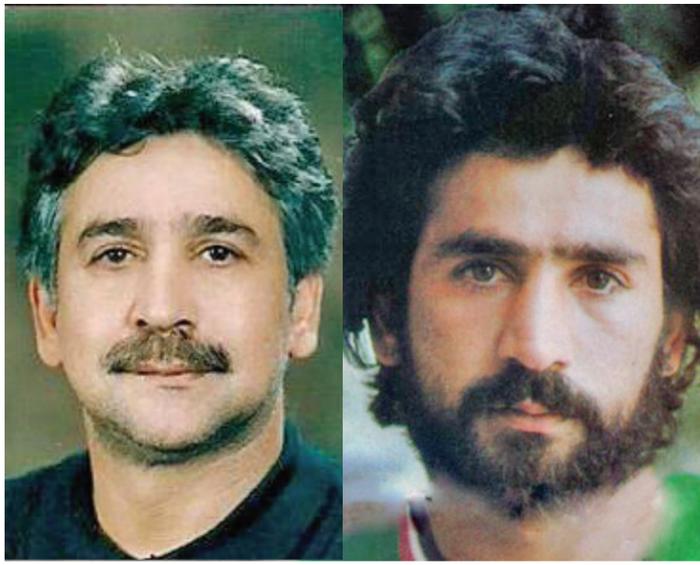
half and secured Iran's first ever World Cup point, and their last for 20 years till a famous win over the United States.

After the Asian Cup in Kuwait in 1980 he announced his retirement from international football with 17 caps and 3 goals for Iran.

Danaeifard played for Iranian football giants Taj from 1970 to 1972. He also played for Iranian football clubs Oghab and Pas.

In 1980, he moved to the United States and started playing for the NASL team, the Tulsa Roughnecks. He remained in the club until 1984 when the league folded.

The Tehran Times staff offer heartfelt condolences to his bereaved family.



Sambo wrestling's path to enter Olympic program 'is difficult, but possible', says chief

It will be difficult for the Sambo wrestling to make its way into the program of the Olympic sports, but chances are still on the table due to this sport's audience appeal, Vasily Shestakov, the president of the International Sambo Federation (FIAS), said on Tuesday.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) issued on November 30 its recognition for the Sambo wrestling as an Olympic competition, which can help the sport to officially enter the Olympic program of wrestling competitions in the future and to secure a financial assistance on behalf of the global Olympic body.

"Today, Sambo wrestling is a sustainable sport," Shestakov said speaking at a news conference, hosted by TASS on Tuesday. "The [previous Sambo] World Championship was broadcast live in 20 countries, 40 more countries broadcast the recordings, and the championship attracted a television audience of over one million viewers."

The World Sambo Championships, which is organized annually by the FIAS as the main tournament in Sambo and Combat Sambo, was held this year in Romania's Bucharest between November 8 and 12. The very first World Sambo Cup was held in Spain's Oviedo in 1977.

"The championship [in Romania] was also broadcast by the Olympic television channel and it proves that our



sport is interesting and is in a high demand," the FIAS president stated.

"It will be difficult to enter the Olympic program, but Sambo still has its chances as it is a very spectacular sport," Shestakov said adding that the next Summer Olympics are due in Japan's Tokyo in 2020.

Sambo wrestling originated in Russia in the 1920s, when soldiers of the then-Soviet Army developed their own hand-to-hand combat technique. The word Sambo

is a Russian acronym, which stands for "self-defense without weapons."

According to most recent statistics, provided by the All-Russia Sambo Federation, over 500,000 Russians practiced Sambo as of today and the figure includes over 230,000 children.

Russian President Vladimir Putin stated in 2016, speaking about Sambo wrestling and its global perspectives, that the Russia-originated wrestling should be included in the Olympic program, but it would require a lengthy and labor-consuming period.

FIAS president Shestakov has once again praised a decision of the IOC to recognize the Sambo wrestling and pledged to keep working on the improvements of this sport's federation in the future.

"We will continue working on the improvements and developments in the international organization as well as in national federations," Shestakov said. "We have met in advance all of the requirements on behalf of the IOC to be recognized."

"We [Sambo] are the first Russia-originated sport to be recognized on behalf of the IOC and I believe that something of the kind is most unlikely to happen in near future," he added.

(Source: Tass)

Childhood dream comes true for Theo Gmur



Theo Gmur's outstanding campaign at the PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Winter Games was recognized during a glittering ceremony in Zurich, Switzerland, that honored the nation's top athletes of the year.

The 2018 Credit Suisse Awards were handed out on Sunday (9 December), with the freshly minted Paralympic champion winning the "Disabled Athlete of the Year" category. A total of six awards were given out that night.

"Another childhood dream came true to conclude this indescribable year," Gmur posted on social media. "Now, it's time to race again," he added.

Gmur was the first Para alpine skier to claim the award. Wheelchair racer Marcel Hug had won the accolade the last five years. This year, Hug, along with fellow wheelchair racer Manuela Schaefer, was also

in the running for the prize.

Past winners included Heinz Frei (athletics and cycling) and Edith Wolf-Hunkeler (athletics).

The 22-year-old had a dominant Paralympic debut in March, winning three gold medals (downhill, super-G and giant slalom) in the men's standing category.

The Haute-Nendaz native then capped off the 2017-18 season by winning the overall World Cup crystal globe in his category.

Switzerland sent a 13-member delegation to PyeongChang 2018, with Gmur being the only athlete to medal. He carried his nation's flag during the Closing Ceremony.

Gmur also balances being an elite athlete and student, as he is studying sports at the Swiss Federal University in Magglingen. (Source: Paralympic)

Dembele must focus on being more professional - Rivaldo



Barcelona winger Ousmane Dembele has been warned to improve his attitude and focus on being more professional by club legend Rivaldo.

On Monday, sources told ESPN FC that Dembele had been two hours late for a training session on Sunday.

The 21-year-old, linked with a move away from Barca next month, was tracked down at his home by club security staff a day after starring in the 4-0 derby win over Espanyol.

In October, sources told ESPN FC that the club had concerns about Dembele's off-pitch behaviour. Rivaldo said there was no doubting the France international's talent but said he needed to change in order to make the most of it.

"Ousmane Dembele's situation at

Barcelona is upsetting because he's already shown that he can play very well, score goals and be an important member of the team," he said.

"He just needs to focus on being a little more professional and to stop being late for training sessions."

"This is not the correct mentality for someone potentially trying to leave Barcelona. It's always strange to hear that someone might want to leave a big club in this way."

"If he wants to leave, he must prove his value by playing well and not missing training sessions to recover his credibility as a professional. That will generate interest from other clubs."

"If he doesn't change, he is hurting himself more than the club." (Source: ESPN)

UAE 2019 door still open, says Korea Republic's Bento

Head coach Paulo Bento had a message as Korea Republic's AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 hopefuls checked in for training on Tuesday - every player has a chance to make the final squad for the Continental showpiece on January 5-February 1.

Korea Republic are seeking to win the AFC Asian Cup for the first time since 1960 and Bento wants the best players available for the challenge that awaits in UAE 2019, where 24 of the continent's top teams will be vying for glory.

Former Portugal coach Bento has called up 23 players plying their trade in the K League, Japan and China PR - for this phase of training and urged them to fight for their places.

"Nothing has been confirmed (for the Asian Cup squad)," Bento said. "The door is open to any player. I will confirm the final Asian Cup roster after checking these players through training."

Korea Republic players playing in Europe and West Asia were not called up for this phase as Bento wanted to allow them to focus on their club commitments.

"My selection will be based on the players' quality and



talent," he said. "The players need to show their strong will to compete."

The training squad for the Ulsan training camp includes five players who had never played for the senior team before.

"There are players that I know well, and there are new faces," Bento said. "We have players whose season schedule with their respective clubs just ended, so we need to conduct our training carefully considering their physical conditions."

Bento is scheduled to announce the final squad of 23 on December 20, three days before departing for the UAE. The Ulsan training camp is considered to be the last opportunity for East Asian league-based players to make their case for squad selection.

Bento, who has led Korea Republic to an unbeaten run since he took the helm in August, said he is not concerned about Europe-based players joining the national team late or in the middle of the tournament.

It has been already confirmed that Tottenham Hotspur star Son Heung-min will be available after Korea Republic play their first two group stage matches at the AFC Asian Cup.

"Since they've already experienced our national team, I'm sure they know our style of play and tactics," he said. "They're not here, but we'll train as usual, and I will try to make one team with new players this time."

The Taeguk Warriors are in Group C of the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 with China PR, Kyrgyz Republic and the Philippines. (Source: Yonhap News)

Persepolis to hold winter camp in Qatar

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Iranian football club Persepolis will hold their training camp in Doha, Qatar.

Persepolis are going to hold the preparatory camp at the Aspire Zone.

The camp will be held as part of preparation for the 2019 AFC Champions League group stage and the Iranian league.

Persepolis, who lost 2-0 to Kashima Antlers on aggregate in this year's final, will begin their campaign in the West Zone's Group D where they have Qatar's Al Saad SC, Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli Saudi FC and the Play-off 1 (UAE/UZB/IRQ) winners for company.

The Reds also are favorites to win Iran Professional League for the third year in a row.

Zob Ahan held to home draw by Naft Masjed Soleyman

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Zob Ahan Isfahan football team were held to a goalless draw at their home by Naft Masjed Soleyman in Iran Professional League (IPL) on Wednesday.

Zob Ahan, who are under pressure after a series of bad results in IPL and sacking their ex-coach Omid Namazi, shared the spoils with the Masjed Soleyman based football team at the Foolad Shahr Stadium.

It was the fourth game of Alireza Mansourian as Zob Ahan's new head coach. In the last three games with Mansourian on the bench, Zob Ahan could take only one point against Foolad Khuzestan football team.

"Frustrated," Zob Ahan boss Alireza Mansourian said in the post-match press conference. "We are mentally under pressure, not because of not winning the games but as a consequence of not scoring goals in our matches."

The result left Zob Ahan in thirteenth place on 13 points from 15 games, 2 adrift of Naft Masjed Soleyman who are tenth with 15 points from the same number of games as Zob Ahan.

Iraj Arab officially appointed Persepolis acting general manager

TASNIM — Iraj Arab has been officially appointed as acting general manager of Persepolis football club.

Arab was previously working as deputy chief of the club's administrative and financial.

He replaced Hamid Reza Garshasbi in the Iranian football club.

Garshasbi left his post due to the law barring the employment of retirees in government, state or public institutions which use state funds or facilities.

Under management of Garshasbi, Persepolis became runner-up at the 2018 AFC Champions League and won the Iran Professional League title.

Alireza Beiranvand to leave Persepolis in January

PLDC — Persepolis and Iran national football team goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand will leave his club in the January transfer window.

Beiranvand's contract includes a buyout clause worth \$600,000.

25-year-old stole the show in the 2018 World Cup by saving Cristiano Ronaldo's penalty in the match against Portugal.

Beiranvand also helped Persepolis reach the 2018 AFC Champions League, where the Iranian team lost to Japan's Kashima Antlers 2-0 on aggregate.

He also helped Persepolis win back-to-back Iran Professional League title.

Zob Ahan goalkeeper Rashid Mazaheri is a most likely replacement for Beiranvand in Persepolis.

Beiranvand will represent Team Melli in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup and after the competition he will decide on his new European club.

AFC President confident of strong Asian showing at FIFA Club World Cup

AFC President Shaikh Salman Bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa has arrived in Abu Dhabi, to attend FIFA Club World Cup UAE 2018 in the United Arab Emirates. The competition started on Wednesday with Al Ain of UAE faced Team Wellington of New Zealand, at the Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium.

Shaikh Salman stressed the importance of Asian teams participating in the competition and said that he was confident that Al Ain and Kashima Antlers from Japan will provide a positive impression as the two teams had the ambition and ability to produce high level performances and get positive results.

The AFC president said: "Al Ain has great experience and players of the highest caliber. They will also enjoy home advantage, which we hope will give them impetus to progress in the tournament. Kashima Antlers have shown they are in a good position after winning the AFC Champions League recently, and we hope they continue to get good results for Asian football."

Shaikh Salman expressed his confidence on the infrastructure in UAE and the LOC's ability to deliver a top class event.

The AFC President said: "The fact that the FIFA Club World Cup is being staged in the UAE once again reflects the country's position in delivering top class sport. The UAE has already successfully hosted different international and continental competitions in recent years, and so we are confident they will excel again."

(Source: the-afc)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

To redress the wrong of the oppressed and to gladden the hearts of the sorrowful is the best expiation of great sins.

Imam Ali (AS)

“Return” named best short at Karama Human Rights Film Festival

A R T TEHRAN — “Return” by Iranian director Shahriar Purseyeyedian was picked as best short film at the 9th Karama Human Rights Film Festival in Amman, Jordan, the organizers announced on Monday.



“Return” by director Shahriar Purseyeyedian.

It is about Rahim, a man who after 23 years in prison returns to his hometown to meet his brother.

Three other Iranian films were screened at the festival, which selected the motto “You Are Not Alone” this year to contribute to the understanding of the general situation of women around the world and in the Arab world in particular.

“The Fog” co-directed by Ali Shurvarzi and Hossein Mahruqi competed in the short film competition of the festival.

“Ballys: Story of A Revolution” by Seyyed Mohsen Purmohseni-Shakib and “Power to the People” by Andia Afsar Keshmiri were screened in the animated film competition.

Movies from Iran competing in Chennai festival

A R T TEHRAN — Two Iranian films will go on screen at the 16th edition of the Chennai International Film Festival, which will open in the Indian town today.

“Orange Days” by Arash Lahuti and “Dayan” by Behruz Nuranipur will be screened in the World Cinema competition.



A poster for “Dayan” by Behruz Nuranipur.

“Orange Days” tells the story of Aban, the only female contractor in the cutthroat and male-dominated orange harvesting industry, who enters a competition to win a large contract.

“Dayan” is about women in Iraq’s Kurdistan Region, who are captured by ISIS fighters and cannot return to their families.

The festival will be running until December 20.

“The Favourite” leads film nominees for Critics’ Choice

LOS ANGELES (AP) — “The Favourite” leads the field of films with 14 nominations for the 24th annual Critics’ Choice Awards.

“Black Panther” was close behind with 12 nominations. Three TV series are tied with five nominations each.

The Broadcast Film Critics Association and the Broadcast Television Journalists Association announced the nominees Monday.

Nominations for “The Favourite” include: best picture; best actress and best actress in a comedy for Olivia Colman; and best supporting actress for both Emma Stone and Rachel Weisz.

The film is about two cousins vying for the attention of Queen Anne.

“The Americans,” “The Assassination Of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story” and “Escape at Dannemora” garnered five nominations each in the television category.

HBO and Netflix are tied with 20 nominations each.

The Critics’ Choice Awards will be presented Jan. 13 on the CW Network.

“Exodus” studies connections between economic recession and return of Afghans from Iran

A R T TEHRAN — Bahman Kiarostami’s latest documentary “Exodus” surveys the impacts of the deep recession facing Iran following the U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal on the return of undocumented Afghan migrants from the country.

“Exodus” was made in the wake of the economic recession and its impacts on the return of Afghan migrants from Iran,” he told the Persian service of ISNA on Tuesday.

According to a recent report published by the International Organization for Migration, 13,644 undocumented Afghans spontaneously returned or were deported from Iran through the Milak (Nimroz) and Herat (Islam Qala) border crossings from December 2 to 8.

Afghan migrants are usually employed to do the difficult jobs Iranians shrink from.

Reading an article about the Imam Reza Immigration Center, a Tehran-based organization that registers those undocumented Afghan migrants who want to return their homeland, also pushed Kiarostami to make the documentary at the center.

“Thousands of Afghans were interviewed at the center every day and we were not allowed to have any control over the conditions at all, and the questions were those asked by the center’s agents,” he said.

“As the director of the documentary, I had minimal intervention in the inquiries made during the shooting,” he noted.

It seems that the investigative process at



Filmmaker Bahman Kiarostami in a undated photo.

the center turns into an inquisition. “They were asked a lot of questions from their identities to personal and religious issues,” Kiarostami stated.

Kiarostami views the documentary

typically a sequel to his books “Photo Riahi” and “Golshahr”.

Bahman, a son of the celebrated filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, said that he was inspired by his father in making “Exodus.” “The

film owes a debt to Abbas Kiarostami’s ‘Homework’ and ‘First Graders’.”

The film is competing in the 12th Cinéma Vérité festival currently underway at Tehran’s Charsu Cineplex.

“The House of Bernarda Alba” set up at Vahdat Hall

A R T TEHRAN — An Iranian troupe is performing Spanish dramatist Federico Garcia Lorca’s 1945 play “The House of Bernarda Alba” at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall.

Ali Rafeie is the director of the play. He previously staged Garcia Lorca’s “Blood Wedding” and “Yerma”. The two plays along with “The House of Bernarda Alba” are referred to as Garcia Lorca’s rural trilogy.

The play tells the story of an elderly woman, Bernarda, whose husband has just died, and she asks her five daughters to go through an eight-year mourning period according to her family’s tradition.

Roya Teymurian, Maryam Saadat, Maedeh Tahmasebi, Nasrin Derakhahan,



A scene from “The House of Bernarda Alba” by Ali Rafeie.

Parisa Saburi and Reyhaneh Salamat are the main members of the cast for “The House of Bernarda Alba”, which will be on stage until January 20, 2019.

Having a Ph.D. in theater from Sorbonne University in France, Rafeie is also the director of the acclaimed plays “Fox Hunting”, “It Does Not Snow in Egypt”, “Crime and Punishment”, “The Maids” and “Nightmares and Memories of a Bath Attendant about the Life and Murder of Amir Kabir”.

His last play “Nightmares and Memories of a Bath Attendant about the Life and Murder of Amir Kabir” was selected as the best play of the year in 2016 by Iran’s Critics and Theatrical Writers Society of the Theater Forum.

Iranian novel “Moon Brow” on PEN America Literary Awards long list

A R T TEHRAN — The English version of the Persian novel “Moon Brow” by Iranian writer Shahriar Mandanipur is among the semi-finalists of the 2019 PEN America Literary Awards.

The book has been rendered into English by the U.S.-based Iranian translator Sara Khalili and published by the Brooklyn independent publisher

Restless Books.

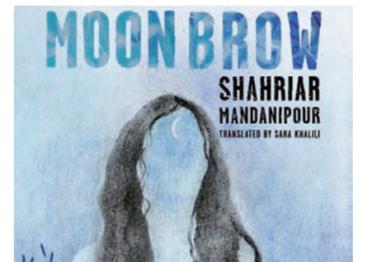
The book, which has yet to be published in Iran, is about Amir who lost his hand and memory during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. He just remembers a mysterious woman called Moon Brow.

The PEN America Literary Awards will be presented to writers and translators whose literary works were published in 2018 in various categories, including

fiction, nonfiction, poetry, biography, essays, science writing, sports writing, translation and more.

“Moon Brow” is competing with nine other books for the PEN Translation Prize worth \$3,000.

The finalists for all categories will be announced in January 2019 and the award ceremony will be held in New York City on February 26, 2019.



Front cover of the English translation of Iranian writer Shahriar Mandanipur novel “Moon Brow” by Sara Khalili.

Beauty meets despair in racial injustice movie “Beale Street”

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Some films about race in America are angry, many are passionate, or terrifying or heartbreaking, and a few are funny.

“If Beale Street Could Talk,” opening in U.S. theaters in major cities on Friday is marked by a quiet beauty and dignity, despite the despair that runs through it.

Based on the 1974 novel with the same title by the late James Baldwin, the film is director Barry Jenkins’ follow-up to his 2016 Oscar-winner “Moonlight.”

It is the latest in a slew of movies by or about African-Americans that were nominated last week for Golden Globe Awards, including Spike Lee’s Ku Klux Klan thriller “BlacKkKlansman,” superhero movie “Black Panther,” and 1960s road trip “Green Book.”

“If Beale Street Could Talk” is the story of two hopeful young lovers in Harlem whose future is ruined when the man is imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. Baldwin said Beale Street could stand for any black community in the United States.

Jenkins said he was drawn to make the film because of its blend of “sensuality and love - both physical and emotional love - but also this other voice that was very, very clear about social critique and taking America to task for the role it has played in the lives and the degradation of black folks.”

Yet Jenkins, who also adapted the screenplay, says rage is not in his wheelhouse as a filmmaker.

“I feel like anger has never been the best place for me to work from,” he said.

In contrast to the more strident tone of the novel, the film is made from the perspective of young and pregnant Tish, played by newcomer KiKi Layne, and her loving family.



Director Barry Jenkins arrives for the Time 100 Gala in the Manhattan borough of New York, New York, U.S. April 25, 2017. Picture taken April 25, 2017. (Reuters/Carlo Allegri)

“Tish is so young and pure and wide eyed and so innocent, that to work from any other place than that would have felt like a false move,” Jenkins said.

Jenkins sees “Beale Street” and “Moonlight” as companion pieces, partly because he wrote both films during the summer of 2013. They are also about black families, albeit very different.

“I still get notes and letters from total strangers who feel their lives have been impacted or in some ways improved because of the visibility that ‘Moonlight’ brought to their personal lives,” he said.

Jenkins hopes “Beale Street” leaves audiences with “a sense of optimism that the lives and souls of black folks in America have often been rooted in despair and degradation, and yet there has always been love, joy, family and community.”

Broadway’s “To Kill a Mockingbird” puts new spin on racial injustice

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Almost 60 years after it was first published as a book, “To Kill a Mockingbird” opens this week in a first Broadway theater adaptation whose themes of racial injustice are just as relevant today.

Yet writer Aaron Sorkin says despite the book’s familiarity as a beloved classic of American literature and movies, audiences are in for something different.

“Thirty seconds in and you’re just in a different place watching ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ the way you’ve never watched it before,” said Sorkin, the creator of political TV series “West Wing,” and who wrote the stage adaptation.

The Broadway version, opening on Thursday, stars Jeff Daniels as the upstanding small town white lawyer Atticus Finch who takes on the case of a black man wrongfully accused of rape in the Depression-era south.

The play was the subject of a bitter lawsuit earlier this year in which the estate of author Harper Lee accused Sorkin and the producers of deviating too much from the beloved 1960s novel and tying the play too closely to today’s social climate. Lee died in 2016 at age 89.

The dispute was settled in May without either side giving details. According to those who have seen the play in preview, one difference in the stage adaptation is allowing the main black characters more opportunities to speak up than the novel.

“Racism has been with us since the beginning of America, and then here it is again,” said Daniels. “What the play



U.S. President George W. Bush (R) before awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom to American novelist Harper Lee (L) in the East Room of the White House, in this November 5, 2007. (Reuters/Larry Downing)

does is speak to that a little bit - that tolerance of trying to look away when it happens.”

“To Kill a Mockingbird” has sold more than 50 million copies worldwide and was made into an Oscar-winning movie in 1962, starring Gregory Peck as Finch. It has been produced for the stage in various U.S. cities and in London but this is the first time “Mockingbird” has come to Broadway.

Gbenga Akinnagbe, who plays accused rapist Tom Robinson, said the circumstances faced by his character are still happening in courtrooms across the United States.

“So, it doesn’t feel like a period piece to me. It doesn’t feel like a period piece other than the clothes,” Akinnagbe said.