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Iran to deal with CNPC according to contract rights: Zanganeh

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said CNPC's leaving South Pars deal would be a violation of the contract and Iran will act accordingly, IRNA reported.

In an interview with the national television on Wednesday, the official noted that since the Chinese company is the second biggest shareholder in the

contract, when Total left they were to take over based on the terms of the contract otherwise it would be a breach of contract and we will deal with it according to our contractual rights.

Earlier in November, Zanganeh had said that China's state-owned CNPC had officially replaced France's Total in Iran's multibillion-dollar South Pars gas project. **→4**

Zarif says Iran gets its security from people

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Friday that it is people who back national security in Iran.

"Respecting the human rights is not just a moral obligation for Iran, rather it is a necessity for its national security. We need the people as supporters of our own national security and we are nothing without the people,"

he said in speech at annual gathering of pro-reform Neda-ye Iranian Party (Voice of Iranians).

The chief diplomat said respecting the human rights is not a legal and moral obligation for Iran, rather it is a "necessity for survival".

He noted that it is the people who have empowered Iran.

"It is the people of Iran who are the basis of our power," he added. **→2**

Researcher lists reasons why Iran must focus on its missile power

Seyed Hossein Mousavian, a former Iranian nuclear negotiator and a current Princeton University researcher, believes at a time that Iran is being militarily threatened from all sides, it is a "simple folly" to expect Tehran to "dismantle" its missile program.

"Under current circumstances, where the countries of the region are aggressively arming themselves, it is simply folly to ex-

pect that Iran will dismantle the backbone of its defense doctrine," Mousavian wrote in Al-Monitor published on Thursday.

Following is the text of the article headlined "Six factors shaping Iran's missile decision-making calculus".

The UN Security Council convened Dec. 12 to address the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). **→13**

Russian White Swans in the U.S. backyard; Washington terrified

By Farzad Farhadi

TEHRAN — On December 10, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation announced two Russian Tu-160 planes landed at an airport in close proximity to Caracas, Venezuelan capital, after traveling some 10,000 km. The two Russian nuclear-capable strategic bombers arrived a couple of days after Venezuelan President Nicholas Maduro's meeting with Vladimir Putin in Moscow, which ended with Russia's agreement to invest in Venezuela.

The Tupolev Tu-160 is a supersonic, varia-

ble-sweep wing heavy strategic bomber designed in the Soviet Union. It is the largest and heaviest combat aircraft, the fastest bomber now in use and the largest and heaviest variable-sweep wing airplane ever flown. Its flight range reaches 12,000 km without refueling and is therefore considered a part of Russia's strategic weaponry.

The Tupolev Tu-160 is a strategic ultrasonic bomber capable of carrying nuclear warfare. In addition to the Tu-160 bombers, an An-124 and an Ilyushin IL-62 airliner landed in Venezuela.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu said two the bomber planes were accompanied by two fighter planes, but did not indicate whether the planes were armed or not.

This Russian action in Latin America is not a routine military measure. For example, the Associated Press reported that the last time the Tupolev 160 planes were sent to Venezuela was five years ago. Before that, in 2008, after the military crisis between Russia and Georgia, Russia was sending a military fleet to Venezuela. **→7**

Turkey fails to comply with all its obligations in Idlib

By Poya Mirzaee

TEHRAN — Idlib is the only province of Syria to remain completely outside government control and has been dominated by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the modern successor to Nusra Front. The domination of the Syrian army in Syria now means the end of the war ultimately and this will lead to opportunities for political changes in the country.

On September 17, 2018, in the Russian city of Sochi, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian

President Vladimir Putin agreed to create a buffer zone between Syria's rebels and pro-government forces. At the meeting, Russian President Vladimir Putin considered his Turkish counterpart's comments about preventing humanitarian disasters and human rights violation given the ever-increasing number of Syrian refugees. Putin took charge of a plan to discourage Syrian leaders from using the military operations to clear Idlib of terrorists.

President Putin said that a buffer zone would

be 15 to 25 kilometers wide and come into force by October 15. In line with the agreement, Putin convinced the Syrian president to accept the Sochi agreement, concluded between Russia and Turkey. Iran and Russia are major allies of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Surprisingly, the Sochi agreement was actively adopted by Western countries, which had previously expressed grave concerns about the human rights situation in Idlib. **→7**

Erdogan slams Israel, says it wants to destroy al-Quds's Islamic heritage

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan addressed on Friday an Istanbul meeting of lawmakers from several countries on al-Quds (Jerusalem). Erdogan thanked 'heroes' who uphold the honor of al-Quds (Jerusalem) and humanity, protect the dignity of the Muslim Ummah community against occupiers.

He said al-Quds (Jerusalem) is not a cause for only a handful of Muslims in Palestine, but also "our common cause".

The Turkish common accused Israel of trying to deliberately wipe out traces of Islamic heritage

in al-Quds (Jerusalem) over the last 50 years.

"You lie to yourself if think you can destroy Jerusalem's spiritual identity by moving a few embassies, consulates there," said Erdogan.

"Bombing children playing ball along the coast of Gaza is a crime against humanity as bad as the Holocaust," he said.

Showing a reaction against the Israeli misconducts never means anti-Semitism, Erdogan said.

Palestinians must put an end to discord among themselves in order to see an outcome of their friends' efforts, Erdogan added.



ARTICLE

Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

The sad fate of Europe's leading figure

According to a new poll conducted by IFOP, French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Edouard Philippe's popularity ratings hit new lows as the "yellow vest" protests are getting more and more serious. The poll's results which were published on Tuesday, indicated that Macron's approval rating fell to 23 percent, down six percentage points on the previous month, while Philippe's fell to 26 percent.

It's to be noted that the "yellow vest" demonstrations were initially held on Nov. 17 in protest to fuel-tax rises. But then it took an anti-Macron color and became a broad movement.

The poll also shows that France 40-year-old president's score now matches the low charted by his socialist predecessor François Hollande in late 2013. Hollande was then widely considered to be the least popular head of state in modern French history.

Protesters condemn Macron of closing his eyes on the rising cost of living in France. During the recent rallies, four people have died and dozens were wounded.

The protests raised at a time when some analysts were speaking of Macron's role in leading Europe! Not long ago, there were talks of Macron becoming Europe's new Angela Merkel, and that he's slowly assuming her role as Europe's leading figure. As Merkel's center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) fared badly in the September general elections, her status as Europe's leading figure has taken a hit. On the other hand, Emmanuel Macron emerged victorious from the French presidential elections, defeating France's far-right candidate Marine Le Pen and entered the Elysee Palace.

From that time on, Macron had several meetings with European authorities on migration, fixing the euro currency, Europe's defense, taxing digital companies and other issues. This was while his authority was flagging at home.

Attending in Germany's National Remembrance Day for the victims of war and dictatorship, Macron said that the French-German alliance "is invested with this obligation not to allow the world to slide into chaos, and to accompany it on the road of peace." **→7**



ARTICLE

Ebrahim Fallahi
Tehran Times journalist

Chabahar port, Iran's wining card in trade with South Asia, CIS

In southeastern Iran, on the Gulf of Oman, there is a port city called Chabahar which is the home for Iran's only oceanic port. Due to its strategic geographical positioning, Chabahar port holds a great significance for Iran both politically and economically.

After years of negotiation, Iran has awarded the development project of this port to India, and the South Asian country committed \$500 million to build two new berths in this port.

However, after the U.S. reimposed sanctions on Iran in November, the future of many Iranian projects including Chabahar port were shadowed by the consequences of the sanctions.

But following several rounds of negotiations and discussions with New Delhi, the U.S. administration finally exempted the Chabahar project from the sanctions.

The new improvements around this important port intrigued the Tehran Times to pay a visit to Chabahar and conduct an interview with Behrouz Aghaie, the director general of Ports and Maritime Department of Sistan-Baluchestan Province (where Chabahar lies). What follows is the gist of the interview with the official.

An introduction to Chabahar port and development project

Chabahar has two main ports, Shahid Kalantari port and Shahid Beheshti port. Shahid Kalantari port's development has been finished in 1983. However, the development project for Chabahar's Shahid Beheshti port is planned to be implemented in five phases of which the first phase was started in 2007 and due to financial problems resulted from U.S.'s first round of sanctions on Iran the project was almost halted until 2016 in which the sanctions were lifted over Iran's economy.

In May 2016, Iran, India and Afghanistan signed a trilateral transit agreement in Tehran, a part of which is dedicated to Chabahar port's development project." Aghaie said.

India for long, has been negotiating with Iran for cooperation in development of this important port. Since through Chabahar port India can bypass Pakistan and transport goods to Afghanistan and Central Asia, while Afghanistan can get linked to India via sea. **→4**



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Geminid meteor shower seen in Iran

The Geminid meteor shower is one of the brightest rain of year, originating from the 3200-Phaeton asteroid (ancient Greek name for the planet Jupiter), which was discovered in 1982.

This meteor shower reached its peak on the night of Thursday and early Friday.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Cleric likens joining FATF to 'self-sanctioning'

POLITICS TEHRAN — The interim Friday prayer preacher of Tehran has warned authorities against repeating the failed experience of the 2015 nuclear deal by joining the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Mehr reported.

Addressing worshippers in Tehran on Friday, Hojatolislam Kazem Seddiqi likened joining the FATF to "self-sanctioning", saying that signing the related bills will reveal the country's financial information to the enemies. "This is contrary to the text of the Quran, the constitution, and the guidance of the Leader of Islamic Revolution who said that these plans are being hatched in the think tanks of the hegemons," Seddiqi added.



Vaezi calls relations with Turkey 'strategic'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Presidential chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi said on Friday that expansion of all-out relations with neighbors, including Turkey, is of strategic significance to Iran, Mehr reported.

Vaezi made the remark in a meeting with Turkish Trade Minister Ruhsar Pekcan on his visit to Turkey ahead of the upcoming visit of President Hassan Rouhani to the country to meet his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

He further said the current atmosphere of relations between the two sides gives hope for further efforts and a quicker pace to reach the desired level in trade and economic transactions.



FM blames West, clients for regional miseries

POLITICS TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Thursday that the United States and its allies need to stop their "hypocritical absurdities" about Iran's regional behavior, underlining that it is they and their clients who are responsible for the miseries in the region.

"US & allies should cease their hypocritical absurdities about Iran's missiles & regional 'behavior'. Facts speak for themselves. It's they who sell \$100s of billions in arms to butcher Yemenis & it's they & their clients—NOT Iran—who're responsible for miseries from Saddam to ISIS," Zarif tweeted.



Deterrence power has made war on Iran unthinkable: admiral

POLITICS TEHRAN — Habibollah Sayyari, the deputy army chief for coordination affairs, said on Wednesday the enemies will not even think of attacking Iran because of the country's deterrence power.

"High combat capabilities show the country's deterrence power, and as long as such power exists no enemy would think of attacking Iran," Rear Admiral Sayyari stated, Mehr reported.

"We must also boost our scientific capabilities so that we don't lag behind the enemies," the admiral remarked.

He also said the Army's mission is to defend the territorial integrity and independence of the Islamic Republic, underlining that such a mission is of the highest degree of sanctity and importance.



'U.S. punishing states for complying with UNSC resolutions'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Wednesday that his American counterpart, Mike Pompeo, has turned an isolated U.S. into the first permanent member of the UN Security Council to punish other countries for complying with council's resolutions.

In a tweet, Zarif said, "In latest mockery of #UNSC, @SecPompeo bragged about violating Res 2231; outlined plans for more violations; confirmed that US and allies rely on defunct Res 1929 provision on missiles; turned an isolated US into 1st perm SC member to PUNISH other countries for COMPLYING w/ Res."



U.S. criticized at UNSC for exiting nuclear deal

POLITICS TEHRAN — Members of the United Nations Security Council have thrown their full support for the 2015 nuclear deal despite pressure by the U.S. which was criticized at the chamber for exiting the agreement in defiance of international objection, Press TV reported.

Security Council members confirmed at the Wednesday meeting that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) had yielded broad positive results and lauded Iran's commitment to the deal as certified in thirteen consecutive reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The meeting was held on the implementation of Resolution 2231 in line with the provisions of the deal.

Iran welcomes preliminary deals between Yemeni warring sides

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Thursday that Tehran welcomes preliminary deals between the warring Yemeni sides, describing them as "promising" for continuation of talks.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday that the Yemeni parties had reached an agreement on a ceasefire in the Red Sea port city of Hudaydah, bringing the first round of the Sweden talks to a close.

Qassemi said, "This agreement shows that the Yemeni groups who attended the talks have understood the disastrous situation of the oppressed Yemeni people and prioritized humanitarian aid and prevention of the worsening of the situation over their interests." The spokesman also expressed hope that the port city of Hudaydah and other Yemeni ports and airports, including Sana'a airport, would



be prepared as soon as possible to receive humanitarian aid.

He added, "We hope the agree-

ments would be implemented within the framework of the specified time-frame and provide the necessary ground

We should make sanctions ineffective: general

POLITICS TEHRAN — Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Aerospace Force, said on Thursday that Iran should make the economic sanctions ineffective.

"Enemies' sanctions will never be lifted and we should make them ineffective," he told a number of highly talented students.

Noting that sanctions should be turned into opportu-

nities, the general said economic sanctions should also become ineffective as the country succeeded to develop its missile program.

He noted that the Islamic Revolution is result of the youths' endeavors and all are responsible to protect it.

"The first generation of the revolution fulfilled their duty and brought freedom and independence for people, passing various challenges. The youths and highly talented ones in

the society should continue this glorified path and all of us should make efforts to vaccinate the Islamic Iran against harms of the enemies' plots," he said.

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.

Israel's pipe dream about Iran will never come true: Tehran

POLITICS TEHRAN — Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi has lashed out at the "outrageous" remarks made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on taking military action against Iran, saying the Zionist regime's pipe dreams "will never come true."

Netanyahu said on Thursday that he does not rule out the possibility of taking military action inside the Iranian territories.

"Although the corrupt and aggressive Zionist regime, which is a symbol of delusions, grudge and hatred, will never ever dare to take such a step, the uttering of such outrageous and shameful words out of ignorance or delusion by the prime minister of an aggressive regime, knowingly or unknowingly, amounts to threatening a big and historical country with military action," he stated.

Such a threat "will be certainly fol-



lowed up on in legal and international forums and institutions," the spokesman warned.

Qassemi further said that the formation of the Zionist regime was originally based on invading and threatening regional states.

While the Zionist regime has in the past decades been the main disturber of stability and security and the root cause of various conflicts, it is now ridiculously expressing false concerns about stability in the region, he added.

Tehran urges UN to hold U.S. accountable for violating resolution 2231

POLITICS TEHRAN — The UN Security Council should hold the U.S. accountable for violating the resolution 2231 by leaving the 2015 nuclear deal, the Iranian deputy ambassador to the UN said on Wednesday.

In May, President Trump unilaterally pulled the U.S. out of the nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and ordered sanctions against Iran. The U.S. violated the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 that endorsed the multilateral agreement.

"The Council should consider the U.S. illegal acts as a flagrant violation of the resolution and hold it accountable for such violations," Es'haq Al-e-Habib told a UN Security Council meeting convened on the need to implement Resolution 2231.

Following is full text of his speech published by Tasnim news agency:

I would like to begin by sincerely thanking those Council members who reaffirmed their commitments to continue supporting the JCPOA.

At a time when multilateralism is under threat, preserving the JCPOA, which according to the UNSG, is "a demonstration of successful multilateralism" and a major achievement in "dialogue and diplomacy" is of utmost importance.

From this perspective, we laude the call by distinguished Secretary-General, in his report, that the JCPOA participants, "the Council, all Member States and regional and other international actors must ensure the continuity of this agreement that is fundamental to regional and international peace and security."

In this meeting that is held to consider the implementation of resolution 2231, the Council should therefore consider and address all obstacles created in its implementation, in particular its provisions on "promoting and facilitating the development of normal economic and trade contacts and cooperation with Iran".

As it is well-known, the sustainability of the JCPOA has been seriously challenged by unilateral and unlawful conduct of the United States in withdrawing from the JCPOA and re-imposing illegal sanctions against Iran.

It is a clear violation of the resolution that calls upon "all States without exception", which include the United States, not only to "take actions as may be appropriate to support the implementation of the JCPOA" but also to "refrain from actions that undermine implementation of commitments under the JCPOA". Therefore, the Council should consider the US illegal acts as a flagrant violation of the resolution and hold it accountable for such violations.

It is evident that any inaction or leniency in taking appropriate action to prevent the violation of resolution will only embolden the U.S. to continue its unlawful practices and irresponsible policies.

The irony is that the U.S., who itself is in absolute violation of resolution 2231, today accused Iran of violating this resolution.

What we heard today was another series of lies, fabrications, disinformation and deceptive statement by the U.S. It is not unprecedented. Just recall infamous speeches made in the past at this very chamber by the U.S. officials. It is not surprising too! Deception is an inseparable part of the U.S. foreign policy as is bullying and its addiction to sanctions and warmongering.

A clear example of such policies is the American approach towards Iran's peaceful nuclear program on which it manufactured an unnecessary crisis and were successful in abusing this Council to impose illegal sanctions.

Nevertheless, as soon as it was ended with the conclusion of the JCPOA and the IAEA repeatedly confirmed Iran's full compliance with its commitments, the US withdrew from the JCPOA, violated resolution 2231, re-imposed its illegal sanctions and started punishing States who abide by the resolution.

Such policies and practices clearly indicate that even in the past, they did not have any genuine concern about Iran's nuclear program.

Now, for the first time in the UN history, a permanent member of this Council is blatantly punishing UN members not for violating rather for complying with a Security Council resolution. And yet, the U.S. finds the audacity to

Ready to resume 20% uranium enrichment if JCPOA crashes

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's nuclear chief says the Islamic Republic is not "bluffing" when it says it is ready to resume twenty-percent uranium enrichment at the Fordow nuclear facility in case the remaining parties to the 2015 nuclear deal fail to abide by the accord, Press TV reported on Thursday.

Under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the official name for the nuclear agreement, Iran accepted to put confidence-building curbs on its nuclear program, but they do not obstruct the "peaceful activities of Iran's nuclear industry", said Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

"The enrichment is currently underway, but we would put aside the 300kg limit [set by the nuclear agreement] whenever we wish, and would do the enrichment at any volume and level," Salehi said in an interview with the national TV on the sidelines of a visit to the Fordow facility.



"We currently have 1044 centrifuges in Fordow, and if the establishment wants, we will restart 20-percent uranium enrichment in Fordow."

He expressed hope that the remaining parties to the nuclear agreement would deliver on their promise and implement their commitments in order to fill the gap created by the U.S. after its unilateral withdrawal from the pact.

Otherwise, he said, Iran will have to reduce its JCPOA commitments.

highjack the Council to intensify its hostilities against Iran.

We have not forgotten the days when the U.S. has rendered this Council ineffective in preventing Saddam's aggression, stopping the use of chemical weapons against Iranians, as well as addressing the attack to an Iranian civil aircraft over the Persian Gulf by the American forces, killing all 290 people on board, including 66 children.

Rather than allowing the U.S. to repeat such abusive pattern, the Council should strongly condemn the US for re-imposing its illegal sanctions against Iranians in violation of the UN Charter and international law.

These sanctions only harm the ordinary, and more importantly, vulnerable people such as women, children, elderly and patients. They prevent even the import of basic food, medicine, and medical devices.

Unlike the U.S. declaration, in practice there is no exceptions or exemptions for importing such needs. Now, they argue that banks "don't have confidence in Iran's banking system to facilitate those transactions. That's Iran's problem; it is not our problem."

Isn't it ironic and disgraceful? How come they had confidence to Iran's banking system till weeks ago and suddenly and for no reason lost their confidence? In fact, they avoid such transactions because they are intimidated and threatened by a bullying and irresponsible State.

On 7 November 2018, the U.S. Secretary of State shamelessly threatened all Iranians to mass starvation. He said the Iranian "leadership has to make a decision that they want their people to eat."

Does weaponizing of food and medicine against civilians have any other designation than crime against humanity?

Isn't the disruption of free trade and application of the U.S. national laws to other nations thus disrespecting their sovereignty, a clear manifestation of economic terrorism?

The international community should stand against American bullying policies and the U.S. authorities should be held to account for ordering, committing and enforcing such horrible crimes.

[Read full on tehrantimes.com](#)



get," he noted.

He added, "We should accept that we sit in one ship and we should make a better Iran and you the youths will make a better Iran for yourselves and your children."

Zarif: Iran gets its security from people 'National interests are not something factional'

1 → The foreign minister noted that the people should be praised and should be protected as "great social capital".

Zarif also said that Iran's power does not depend on foreigners, insisting it comes from inside the country.

"This is why I assure you that we all should be hopeful about the future, because our future is going to be better," he added.

He noted that Iran has been and is a "powerful" and "influential" country and

will remain so.

Referring to remarks made by Lindsey Graham, a Republican U.S. senator, Zarif said, "As a Muslim who lives in the region, I am ashamed that such remarks are made about our neighbor (Saudi Arabia)."

"However, at the same time I am proud that we have stand against your pressure over the past 40 years which makes you imagine that our neighbors would speak Farsi without your pressure. You are mistaken," he said.

In remarks made to Fox News on Sunday, Senator Graham said, "Let me put it this way — I want to be very blunt with you: If it weren't for the United States, they'd be speaking Farsi in about a week in Saudi Arabia."

Zarif also said that the time of being a superpower has gone.

Elsewhere, Zarif attached great importance to national unity saying that "national interests are not something factional".

"Today, an entity named Iran is the tar-

Israeli soldier, hit with rock, seriously wounded near Ramallah

■ Israeli army arrests dozens in raids across West Bank

An Israeli soldier has sustained serious injuries after a Palestinian anti-occupation protester hurled stones at him inside a settlement in the central part of the West Bank amid new wave of Israeli aggression against Palestinians in the occupied territories.

The Hebrew-language Yedioth Ahronoth daily newspaper reported that the unidentified Palestinian man entered Beit El settlement, which lies adjacent to Ramallah, on Friday morning, picked up a large stone and hurled it at an Israeli trooper, who was inside a military site in the settlement.

The report added that the Israeli soldier was seriously injured in the incident, before the Palestinian man fled from the area.

An unnamed Israeli army spokesman said, “A Palestinian nab was fighting with a soldier inside a military post in the settlement, and beat him with a stone on his head and fled.”

The spokesman went on to say that reinforced forces have been dispatched to the settlement, and a manhunt operation is underway to arrest the Palestinian man.

The Israeli soldier received initial treatment at the scene, before being transported to Hadassah Medical Center in al-Quds (Jerusalem).

Palestinian media outlets reported that Israeli soldiers have closed the main road linking Ramallah to Nablus near Jalazone refugee camp. The troops have installed concrete blocks on the road, and restricted the movement of Palestinian vehicles.

Israeli soldiers have also installed a road-block at the main entrance to Surda town, located northeast of Ramallah, and prevented Palestinians from either entering or leaving it.

■ Over 100 Palestinians detained since Thursday dawn: NGO

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Prisoners’ Association said in a statement on Friday that the Israeli army has detained more than 100 Palestinians, including lawmakers and former prisoners, throughout the occupied West Bank and East al-Quds (Jerusalem) since the early hours of Thursday.

The statement noted that Israeli forces detained at least 46 Palestinians, including two lawmakers and a journalist, during a large-scale pre-dawn campaign across the West Bank last night.

Israeli forces conducted multiple overnight raids in al-Khalil (Hebron) besides nearby towns of Idhna, Beit Kahil, Yatta and al-Dhahiriya, ransacking civilian houses and interrogating families.

■ Israel steps up raids on West Bank after troops killed

Meanwhile, a Hamas official in the occupied West Bank says Israeli forces have arrested dozens of Hamas supporters, including legislators, in overnight raids.



Palestinian media also reported on Friday that scores of Palestinians, including two legislators, have been arrested across the West Bank in overnight raids.

The Israeli military said it arrested 40 people and alleged 37 of them are linked to Hamas.

Israel has ramped up its raids across the occupied West Bank after two soldiers were killed near Ramallah, arresting dozens of Palestinians during a crackdown overnight.

“Forces apprehended 40 suspects wanted for their involvement in terror activities, popular terror, and violent riots targeting civilians and security forces,” the Israeli military said in a statement.

It claimed 37 of those arrested were known to be members of the Palestinian resistance movement of Hamas, which administers the Gaza Strip.

Two Israeli troops were killed after an attacker emerged from a vehicle and shot at soldiers near the settlements of Beit El and Ofra on Thursday. At least two other people, including a soldier, were wounded and the attacker fled.

The attack prompted the Israel regime to deploy troops to the West Bank, setting up checkpoints and blocking roads. Four Palestinians, including a female minor, were detained in the immediate aftermath of the incident.

The alleged shooting came after Israeli forces killed three Palestinians in separate operations over the span of six hours.

In total six people were killed in the most violent 24 hours to hit the West Bank and al-Quds (Jerusalem) in months.

The West Bank-based Palestinian Authority has blamed Israel’s illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories for the renewed tensions.

On Thursday, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged to authorize

new settlement units, asking attorney general Avichai Mendelblit to facilitate their construction.

Around 600,000 Israelis live in settlements in the occupied West Bank. All Israeli settlements are considered illegal under the international law.

■ Netanyahu warns Hamas

Separately, The Israeli premier also warned that the regime will “take action” against Hamas if the movement does not end “security operations” in the West Bank, Israel Hayom daily reported.

Netanyahu said the Israeli military would not stop its attacks against Gaza if Hamas’s alleged operations went on.

The Al Aqsa satellite channel also cited Hamas as marking 31 years since its establishment with a pledge to continue its legitimate right to confront the Israeli occupation.

The Palestinian resistance movement said it will keep up its fight for the removal of the Israeli siege on Gaza, and continue support for the “March of Return” protests in Gaza.

■ Israeli soldiers kill Palestinian in alleged car-ramming attack in West Bank

Moreover, Israeli troops have shot dead a Palestinian man in the central part of the occupied West Bank, alleging that he attempted to ram his car into the regime’s forces.

The Palestine Health Ministry announced the news in a brief statement, adding that the unnamed Palestinian lost his life in the industrial area of al-Bireh, a neighborhood near Ramallah, on Thursday afternoon.

According to other reports, the 60-year-old man, who had owned an aluminum factory in the neighborhood, was shot by Israeli soldiers when his vehicle deviated from its path.

The Palestinian Ma’an news agency, citing a number of eyewitnesses, reported that the incident had been merely a car accident, as

the driver saw the unexpected presence of the Israeli soldiers in his way and attempted to turn away from them before they heavily opened fire at him.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military said in a statement that the victim “attempted to run over” soldiers, lightly injuring one.

The Palestinian Red Crescent also announced that the Israeli forces had barred the group’s medical team from reaching the scene.

The fatal incident occurred hours after Israeli troops shot another Palestinian, accusing him of shooting dead two Israelis, wounding several others, one critically, at Asaf Junction, north of al-Quds (Jerusalem).

Hamas claimed the shooting attacks.

Amid the heightened tensions, Israeli forces encircled the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah and sent in reinforcements.

The shooting came hours after Israeli forces shot dead three Palestinians, including two Hamas members in the West Bank.

Israeli troops also shot dead a young Palestinian over an alleged stabbing attack in the Old City of al-Quds (Jerusalem) earlier on Thursday.

The Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority also blamed Israel’s illegal settlement activities on occupied Palestinian land for renewed tensions in the West Bank.

The Israeli military regularly opens fatal fire on Palestinians, accusing them of seeking to attack its personnel.

Human rights groups have repeatedly slammed Tel Aviv for its shoot-to-kill policy as a large number of the Palestinians killed at the scene of attacks did not pose any serious threat to Israelis.

Israeli troops have on numerous occasions been caught on camera brutally killing Palestinians, with the videos going viral online and sparking condemnations of the regime’s military.

In a separate development in the West Bank on Thursday, dozens of extremist settlers attacked Palestinian vehicles near the Israeli settlement of Yizthar south of Nablus.

Local sources said one person sustained injuries as Israeli settlers showered Palestinian vehicles with rocks, severely damaging at least three cars.

Around 600,000 Israelis now live in settlements considered illegal by the international community.

Tensions escalated in the occupied Palestinian territories after the United States President Donald Trump’s recognition of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel’s “capital” and relocation of the U.S. embassy to the city.

Angered by Trump’s move, Abbas boycotted his administration, saying Washington was no longer qualified to serve as a mediator in the decades-long conflict with Israel.

(Source: agencies)

Assad: Syria reconstruction to cost \$400bn

Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad predicts that Syria’s reconstruction will cost between \$250 billion and \$400 billion, Russia’s Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov has said after meeting with the Syrian head of state.

Borisov’s office said on Thursday that the diplomat had discussed industrial, medical, and energy cooperation with Assad in Damascus on Thursday, as a years-long fight against foreign-backed terrorists nears its end.

Syria has been able to purge ISIL and other terrorist groups from most of the country with support from Iran and Russia as well as the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah.

The war, which began in March 2011, has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians and dislocated thousands more while destroying most of the country’s infrastructure and industrial capacity.

Borisov said it was critical for Damascus to maximize the effectiveness of its planning by using the existing capacities in order to create the required financial and economic mechanisms. He noted that Syria didn’t have much time to begin the process as vestiges of what was once a united front against the government could still pose a threat by recruiting people. Borisov leads a Russian delegation that is in Damascus for a meeting of the permanent Russian-Syrian commission for trading, economic, scientific and technical cooperation.

■ Russia, China abstain in UN vote on Syria cross-border aid

Also on Thursday, Russia and China refused to vote on United Nations Security Council resolution that sought to extend approval for cross-border humanitarian aid deliveries to Syrian territories that were controlled by terrorists back in 2014, when the resolution was first adopted.

Vassily Nebenzia, Russia’s Ambassador to the UN, said the text of the resolution – drafted by Sweden and Kuwait – was outdated and “divorced from reality” because the situation in Syria had changed drastically.

The Russian envoy said the UN needed to help Damascus speed up its recovery process instead.

Western countries, however, have made it clear that they will not approve reconstruction funding for Syria, or remove sanctions on the Assad government unless a political solution is reached.

Despite running an aerial campaign that allegedly targets terrorists, the US and its allies have been openly supporting militant groups fighting Assad’s government, often helping them by targeting Syrian forces. Washington has repeatedly stressed that Assad must step down as part of any political solution.

■ Turkish forces to enter Syria’s Manbij if U.S.-backed YPG remains there: Erdogan

Elsewhere, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan says Ankara will send its forces to the Syrian town of Manbij if the United States does not remove the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) militia from the area.

Erdogan made the remarks in an address to members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul on Friday days after he threatened to launch a new operation to target the fighters.

“Manbij is a place where Arabs live, but they have surrendered the area to the terror organization. Now we are saying that you should cleanse, remove them, or else we will enter Manbij. I am speaking very clearly,” he warned.

Erdogan said Turkey was also determined to bring “peace

and security” to areas east of the Euphrates, where the YPG controls an area stretching more than 400 km (250 miles) along the border toward Iraq.

The Turkish president compared the promised military campaign to an incursion into northern Syria in 2016 and another one, which was launched earlier this year by Turkish forces and their Syrian rebel allies, who still hold territory there seized from YPG and the ISIL terrorists.

Turkey considers the YPG a terrorist organization and an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which has been fighting for an autonomous region inside Turkey since 1984. Turkey has been infuriated by the U.S. support for the YPG, which forms the backbone of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an anti-Damascus alliance of predominantly Kurdish militants. Turkey has complained over the slow implementation of a deal with Washington to pull YPG Kurdish fighters out of Manbij, which lies in mainly Arab territory west of the Euphrates, back to the eastern bank of the river.

A spokesman for the Syrian militants said on Thursday that up to 15,000 fighters are prepared to support Turkey’s latest operation.

■ Syria: Over 30,000 refugees return to Syria from Jordan

Up to 33,500 refugees have reportedly returned to Syria from Jordan through the Nassib border crossing within past two months, footage released on Friday shows.

According to the Russian Center for Reconciliation of Warring Parties in Syria, between 600-700 Syrian citizens return to the country daily through the Nassib border crossing.

(Source: agencies)

Rajapaksa in his place.

Rajapaksa failed to prove his majority in parliament and was twice defeated in no-confidence motions on November 14 and 16, but refused to step down.

Wickremesinghe also refused to step down since October 26, maintaining that his sacking was illegal.

Political sources said Sirisena was likely to invite Wickremesinghe to form a new government over the weekend and end the power vacuum.

(Source: agencies)

Britons must pay €7 to visit mainland Europe after Brexit

The European commission has confirmed that British citizens will have to pay to visit mainland Europe as soon as the EU’s free movement laws no longer apply.

A spokeswoman for Jean-Claude Juncker, the commission’s president, said visitors from post-Brexit Britain would have to fill out an online form and pay €7 (£6) for a visa waiver, which would be valid for three years.

The EU’s European travel information and authorization scheme (Etias) is aimed at securing Europe’s borders against people-smugglers and terrorists. It will apply from 2020 to all non-EU citizens’ entering the bloc’s border-free Schengen zone and will allow multiple trips within a three-year period.

It is not yet clear exactly what screening criteria will be used, but the details applicants supply, including past criminal convictions, will be matched against Europol databases and their eventual presence on EU and national wanted persons lists or watch lists checked before a visa waiver is granted.

The government had hoped to secure an exemption for British citizens after Brexit. It hailed the prospect of continued visa-free travel for short EU visits as one of the major achievements of the political declaration on the future relationship between Britain and the bloc.

The declaration said both sides wanted to preserve visa-free travel for short-term visits. It implied, however, that visas could be introduced for longer stays.

Even no-deal plans released previously by the EU suggested British citizens visiting the bloc and intending to stay for less than 90 days could be exempt from the scheme, as long as Britain guaranteed the same treatment to EU nationals visiting Britain.

The no-deal plans state: “In the scenario where the UK leaves the EU without a deal, this [exemption] would apply as of 30 March 2019.”

The document stresses that any exemption would be “entirely conditional upon the UK also granting reciprocal and non-discriminatory visa-free travel for all EU member states” in the event of no deal.

However, a new commission document, the EU’s draft regulation covering visa exemptions for British citizens, states: “Etias will apply to United Kingdom nationals once union law on free movement of union citizens ceases to apply to them, as to other visa-free third-country nationals.”

A commission source told Sky News: “Once Etias enters into operation, all visa-exempt non-EU nationals who plan to travel to the Schengen area will have to apply via Etias.”

This means that at the end of any Brexit transition period, British citizens will have to apply for an Etias visa waiver, unless the two sides agree to extend the period – in which case the EU’s freedom of movement laws will continue to apply to the Britain – or Britain decides to stay in the EU.

Modelled on the ESTA scheme in the United States, visitors will be encouraged to apply for their Etias waiver online at least 72 hours before travel. They will need to provide personal information and passport details and state the first country they will visit.

Officials have said the form, which is likely to apply to 39 million visitors from outside the EU every year, will take about 10 minutes to complete, with 95% of travelers expected to get a positive answer almost instantly and all others getting a response within four weeks.

■ Blair calls for Britain, EU to prepare for second Brexit referendum

Meanwhile, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair has called for Britain and the EU to prepare for a second Brexit referendum amid speculation that the British parliament may fail to agree on a Brexit deal.

Planning to speak in London on Friday, Blair’s office released extracts of the speech in advance.

Blair expressed his disapproval of going through a potentially damaging no-deal Brexit without holding another referendum. Britain is expected to leave the EU on March 29, 2019.

(Source: agencies)

Strasbourg attack suspect killed after gun battle with police: French officials

Suspected gunman Cherif Chekatt has been killed in a brief gun battle with the police after killing three people in a Christmas market attack in the French city of Strasbourg. He had evaded arrest for 48 hours.

A big police operation was launched in the Neudorf/Meinau area of the city on Thursday, leading to the death of the suspected attacker. Chekatt was killed some two kilometers away from the Tuesday attack site. According to Interior Minister Christophe Castaner, the suspect fired on police officers after they identified him and moved to arrest him. The police returned fire and killed Chekatt. Local sources reported hearing three to four shots after armed police units launched a helicopter-backed operation at the site.

Earlier that day, masked police officers had launched operations in three different locations in Strasbourg, including an area where Chekatt had last been seen. The site of his death was not far-off from there.

Overall, more than 700 officers had taken part in the 48-hour manhunt. Police on both sides of the Europe bridge, which links France to Germany across the Rhine river, had manned controls in search of the alleged shooter, creating heavy traffic.

The Tuesday attack, which raised France’s security threat assessment to its highest level, caused much panic in the French city with officials urging residents to stay indoors.

The European Parliament, which is about a 20 minute walk away from the city center, was put under lockdown before being evacuated by French authorities.

The attack also posed a threat to political envoys present in the vicinity. The 29-year-old suspect had been previously marked as a potential threat on a state security watchlist. French authorities claim the man had turned to religious extremism while spending time behind bars.

Chekatt had previously been incarcerated in French, German and Swiss jails for theft and violence.

■ ISIL claims responsibility

Also on Thursday, the ISIL Takfiri terrorist group reclaimed the attack on its Amaq news website, stating that the man had “carried out the operation in response to calls for targeting citizens of coalition countries.”

The group, however, provided no further evidence to back the claim.

(Source: Press TV)

Sri Lanka’s disputed PM Mahinda Rajapaksa to step down

Sri Lanka’s strongman leader Mahinda Rajapaksa will step down from his disputed position of the prime minister on Saturday, his son has said.

Rajapaksa’s legislator son, Namal Rajapaksa, posted on his Twitter account on Friday that his father will quit “to ensure stability of the nation”.

“To ensure stability of the nation, former president ... Rajapaksa has decided to resign from the Premiership tomorrow after an address to the nation,” Namal Rajapaksa said.

Pro-Rajapaksa lawmaker, Lakshman Yapa Abeywardena, also told The Associated Press news agency that Rajapaksa decided to resign following a meeting with President Maithripala Sirisena, allowing the president to appoint a new government.

On Thursday, the country’s Supreme Court declared Sirisena’s decision to dissolve the parliament unconstitutional.

The top court also cancelled a snap election Sirisena had called for January 5.

The top court’s ruling meant that the country was effectively without a government

and heading for a shut down in the absence of parliament voting for a budget for 2019.

A separate court earlier this month ordered that Rajapaksa should not exercise the powers of the office he has claimed since October 26.

Rajapaksa’s decision to back down signals an end to a crippling seven-week long power struggle in the South Asian island nation.

Sri Lanka’s political crisis began on October 26 when Sirisena abruptly sacked Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and appointed

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	\$52.56/b
Brent	\$61.42/b
OPEC Basket	\$59.20/b
Gold	\$1,235.85/oz
Silver	\$14.57/oz
Platinum	\$788.30/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Tehran hosting intl. printing, packing expo

ENERGY DESK **TEHRAN** – The 25th international exhibition of printing, packing and related machinery kicked off on Thursday at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground.

More than 445 companies from Iran and 12 other countries including Italy, Sweden, Germany, France, China, Turkey and South Korea are showcasing their latest products and services during the four-day event, IRIB reported.

The exhibition covers a variety of areas including printing machines, packaging machines, encoders and devices, export products sealing machines, and etc.

A conference and four specialized workshops in various fields of printing and packaging industry are also being held on the sidelines of the exhibition.

The exhibition aims to provide a platform to showcase the latest services and products to support domestic production, and transfer knowledge and technology.



25 airport development projects under study

ECONOMY DESK **TEHRAN** — Iran has currently 25 airport development projects under study and 45 ones under implementation throughout the country, Gholam-Hossein Baqerian, a board member of Airports and Air Navigation Company of Iran, told IRNA on Friday.

He put the value of these projects at 6.5 trillion rials (about \$154 million) and said that the underway projects are tried to be completed by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2019).

Iran to deal with CNPC according to contract rights: Zanganeh

1 → Total signed a contract in 2017 to develop Phase 11 of South Pars field with an initial investment of \$1 billion, marking the first major Western energy investment in the country after sanctions were lifted in 2016.

The company was pressured to leave Iran after the United States threatened to impose sanctions on companies that do business in the country.

The offshore South Pars field holds the world's largest natural gas reserves ever found in one place.

European shares sink as China data derails hopes of Santa rally

European shares were sharply lower for a second day on Friday as weak Chinese data renewed worries about the health of the world's second-largest economy and potential damage from Washington's protracted trade spat with Beijing.

The euro zone STOXXE .STOXXE index was down 1.1 percent at 1026 GMT with all bourses across the continent in the red.

The carmaker and auto supplier sector .SXAP was down 1.8 percent, the biggest loser. A drop in European car sales last month also deepened worries about slowing demand following the introduction of tougher new emissions tests.

The technology stocks .SX8P dropped 1.7 percent.

Germany's DAX, which is particularly sensitive to global trade tensions and the Chinese economy, was the worst performing index amid pressure on retailers, banks and carmakers.

Investors shunned equities after data showed China's November retail sales grew at the weakest pace since 2003 and industrial output rose the least in nearly three years as domestic demand softened further. [L3N1YJ1GY]

The data eclipsed hopes that boosted shares this week that trade tensions between Washington and Beijing were easing.

The world's second-largest economy has been losing momentum in recent quarters as a multi-year government campaign to curb shadow lending put increasing financial strains on companies in a blow to production and investment.

(Source: Reuters)

Chabahar port, Iran's wining card in trade with South Asia, CIS

1 → At the time, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that New Delhi would be investing \$500 million in the strategic port.

Then during the visit of the Iranian president to India in February 2018, the lease contract for Shahid Beheshti Port-Phase 1 was signed between Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) and India's Ports Global Limited (IPGL).

Aghaie noted that after settlements, the Indian party has chosen an Iranian company to cooperate in the development project.

"They held a tender in which various Iranian candidates attended and in the end a company named Kaveh Group was chosen as the Iranian partner in this project", he mentioned.

According to the official, technology transfer is an important part of the deal with the Indian side and in this regard most of the work force which is going to be employed for this project are going to be from Iran and the Indian side is also committed to transfer port related knowledge and technology into the country.

Aghaie further mentioned the progress of the Shahid Beheshti Port Phase 1 so far, saying, "During this phase over 203 hectares of land has been reclaimed, construction of three multi-purpose berths with a total length of over 1700 meters is completed, and over 15.5 million cubic meters of dredging has been executed which creates 16.5 meters of depth for berthing of vessels with even highest drafts."

"We have also constructed a 1470-meter breakwater tail to make it completely safe for vessels to berth during monsoon season," he added.

Asked about the equipment and machinery, the official explained that near €60 million worth of equipment, mobile cranes,

towers and pneumatic ship unloaders, lifts and tractors have been purchased and they have been operated during the phase 1 of development project, most of which have been bought from renowned European companies including those from Germany and Finland and some are supplied by Iranian Machin Sazi Arak Company.

■ Role of private sector

Speaking about the role of the country's private sector in this project, Aghaie stressed the importance of this sector's presence in Chabahar development saying, "The Ports and Maritime Organization has so far invested over \$1 billion in Chabahar development project and this has made the private sector to see the importance of this port for the country's economy and made them to come forward."

"They need to come forward and we always welcome them and support every company that is willing to cooperate with us in making this port what it is deserved to be", he underlined.

According to Aghaie, since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 2018) the private sector has invested over 450 billion rials (near \$107 million) in the first phase of developing Shahid Beheshti port and he expressed hope that another \$105 million will also be attracted by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 2019).

■ Progress in port activities

Regarding the improvements of Chabahar's ports in terms of commodity transit, exports, imports and transship, Aghaie explained, "Since the inauguration of the phase 1 of Shahid Beheshti Port, in container area we have witnessed a 70 percent rise in various fields of transit and transshipment, as for the oil terminal, the figure for the oil cargoes loading and unloading has jumped



A container cargo being unloaded at Shahid Kalantari Port in Chabahar on December 2

Sanctions an opportunity to enhance non-oil exports

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN — Under the condition when the U.S. unilateral sanctions on Iran's economy has reduced the country's main source of income i.e. crude oil exports, Iran can turn the sanctions into an opportunity to enhance its non-oil exports as a reliable source of income.

It is why the government has put supporting non-oil exports a top agenda as the resistance economy committee issued a package to support non-oil exports which was announced by the First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri to all the affiliated state-run organizations on November 18. The Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade is in charge of supervising the full implementation of the prepared package.

Iranian experts believe that under the present condition when the sanctions are putting Iran's oil-reliant economy under pressure, the only way to tackle the sanctions is to strengthen non-oil exports specially through supporting medium and small industries which are in need of the government's support for presence in the global markets.

Providing working capital for the production units is one of the government's supportive measures which will lead to strengthening export capabilities of these units.

In his periodical meeting with directors from state-run and private Iranian banks on December 8, Abdolnaser Hemmati, the governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), called for the banks to have supplying the working capital of production units while granting facilities among their



top priorities.

Also, Ali Saleh-Abadi, the managing director of Export Development Bank of Iran, has recently announced that through paying loans with proper rates this bank will grant special support to the production units which produce export-bound products.

It is besides special support provided to finance export-based projects specially in the field of technical and engineering services, he noted.

Providing the condition for the presence of Iranian companies in the international exhibitions outside the country and also setting up international exhibitions inside Iran is the other way to help the Iranian units elevate their export status, as marketing is a key point to export.

China to halt additional tariffs on U.S.-made cars as trade dispute de-escalates

China will suspend additional tariffs on U.S.-made vehicles and auto parts for three months starting Jan. 1, 2019, the country's finance ministry said on Friday, following a truce in a trade war between the world's two largest economies.

The Ministry of Finance, in a statement on its website, also said it hopes China and the United States can speed up negotiations to remove all additional tariffs on each other's goods.

"This is a good signal that China and the United States are on track to solve the trade war," said Wang Cun, director of the China Automobile Dealers Association's import committee. "Car makers might be ordering a large number of imported cars now."

Shortly after the Chinese finance ministry's

announcement, Tesla Inc (TSLA.O) said it had cut prices on its Model S and Model X vehicles in China.

Joe Hinrichs, president of Ford Motor Co's (F.N) Americas unit, also welcomed China's announcement, noting that the U.S. automaker exported nearly 50,000 U.S.-built vehicles to the country in 2017.

"As a leading exporter of vehicles from the U.S., we are very encouraged by China's announcement today," Hinrichs said. "We applaud both governments for working together constructively to reduce trade barriers and open markets."

Auto exports between the two countries are however relatively small. China exported 53,300 vehicles to the U.S. market last year and imported 280,208 U.S. manufactured



Tehran Times conducting an interview with Behrouz Aghaie, the director general of Ports and Maritime Department of Sistan-Baluchestan Province, in Chabahar on December 2

by 50 percent and finally as a whole we can say that on average the trade activities of Chabahar port have increased by 50 percent up to date."

"In the past six months over 110,000 tons of goods have been transited through Chabahar's ports", he added.

■ Advantages and features

As Iran's only ocean port with over 500 kilometers of marine border, Chabahar has a great deal to offer to the country's economy, the investors, the neighboring countries and even the region.

This port is located outside the Persian Gulf region and Hormuz area and so doesn't have the limitations of the country's other ports in regard to the South East Asian trade. This port could be a transit gate from Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) countries to CIS counties and also Afghanistan. It is the most cost efficient and optimal route to link IORA and CIS and event to Europe and Africa.

The port has also one of the largest international passenger terminals in the region with a capacity of simultaneous reception of over 600 passengers.

■ Exemptions and potentials

Sistan-Baluchestan Province's Ports and Maritime Department offers significant incentives for both investors and shipping companies who are willing to cooperate and operate in this port.

Land delegation as long-term lease agreements in form of BO.O.T, B.L.T, B.O.T, and B.O.O investment contracts, offering the opportunity for warehouse delegation in form of short- and long-term lease agreements, bringing equipment into Chabahar in form of partnership agreements subject to rules and regulations of free industrial-trade zones and especial economic zones and etc. are some of the great incentives and opportunities that

Chabahar offers for those who are willing to invest or cooperate in this port.

There are also several discount items for shipping cargoes among which a 30-percent discount for all terminal handling charges (THC), and over 75 percent discount for the storage of import containers and 80 percent discount for storing export goods can be mentioned.

■ Rail projects related to Chabahar port

Connecting the ports to the railway network is among the prioritized plans that will contribute significantly to promotion of the country's transit status.

For example, a railway is under construction to connect Chabahar Port to Zahedan, the center city of Sistan-Baluchestan Province, which will elevate the role of this strategic port in transit of goods.

According to Aghaie, the project to build this railway has a 30-percent progress and it will be complete by the next three years.

"Railway and rail development is one of the most important requirements of any improvement in Chabahar port's commodity transit and traffic", he emphasized.

It is worth mentioning that last October India launched a trade route to Afghanistan via Iran through shipping its first consignment of wheat to Afghanistan via Chabahar, bypassing longtime rival Pakistan. The country sent its second consignment of wheat to Afghanistan via Chabahar in last November and has said that it plans to send more shipments of wheat to Afghanistan via the Iranian port.

According to the official since the beginning of the phase 1, over 12,000 twenty-foot-equivalent units (TEU) loading and unloading has been done in this port which is 100 percent more than the figure for all the loading-unloading done in the history of this port.

■ IRAN EXPO a platform to strengthen exports capabilities of SMEs

Holding IRNA EXPO (an international exhibition on exports capabilities of Iran) is providing a ground for the elevation of non-oil exports as many officials believe that the high number of foreign exhibitors in the third edition of the event is a sign of ineffective U.S. sanctions.

IRNA EXPO 2018, running from December 13 to 16 at Tehran's Shahr-e Aftab International Fairground, is hosting 611 exhibitors from 57 countries and also 366 businessmen and traders are visiting the exhibit through 25 trade delegations from 18 countries, according to Majid Takkbiri, the chairman of the headquarters for holding the exhibition.

Takkbiri mentioned strengthening the export capabilities of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as one of the main goals of setting up the exhibition and said that to achieve this goal some new parts have been created in this edition of the event, for example the pavilion for information technology (IT) sector which has become recently active in the field of exports.

He also announced that 260 Iranian companies active in 12 sectors including foodstuffs, agriculture, automobile, handicrafts, industrial parts, electricity, leather, weaving, home appliances, medical equipment, health and energy are showcasing their products in IRNA EXPO 2018.

The international exhibition is holding 400 B2B meetings between Iranian and foreign exhibitors, creating a platform for the Iranian companies to promote their export capabilities, he underlined.

The tariff suspension and soybean purchase are early signs that the bitter trade war between China and the United States may be starting to thaw.

In Argentina, Trump and Xi agreed to a truce that delayed the planned Jan. 1 U.S. increase of tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods while they negotiate a trade deal.

A Trump official said on Tuesday that China had agreed to cut tariffs on U.S.-built cars and auto parts to 15 percent from 40 percent.

China's tariff cut was communicated during a phone call between Vice Premier Liu He, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping's landmark talks on trade in Argentina on Dec. 1.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil falls on China economic data, output cuts support

Oil prices slipped on Friday after China reported slower economic growth, pointing to lower fuel demand in the world's biggest oil importer, although market sentiment was supported by supply cuts agreed last week by major crude producers.

Benchmark Brent crude was down 40 cents at \$61.05 per barrel by 0820 GMT, on course for a decline this week of around 1 percent. U.S. light crude was 25 cents lower at \$52.33.

China, the world's No.2 economy, on Friday reported some of its slowest growth in retail sales and industrial output in years, highlighting the risks of the country's trade dispute with the United States.

Chinese oil refinery throughput in November fell from October, suggesting an easing in oil demand, though runs were 2.9 percent above levels a year earlier.

Concerned by mounting oversupply, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other oil producers including Russia agreed last week to reduce output by



1.2 million barrels per day (bpd), or more than 1 percent of global demand.

"For the time being until the OPEC cuts start kicking in, the market is oversupplied

in the short term," said Tony Nunan, oil risk manager at Mitsubishi Corp. "If China is slowing down, that's definitely a concern." The International Energy Agency said

on Thursday that it expected a deficit in oil supply to emerge by the second quarter of next year, provided OPEC members and other key producers stuck closely to last week's deal to cut output.

"The OPEC cuts will have a substantial impact on 1Q19 balances compared with this quarter, but market observers may need to wait for the cuts to percolate to inventory data," Barclays analyst Michael Cohen said in a note.

As part of the agreement, de facto OPEC leader Saudi Arabia plans to reduce its output to 10.2 million bpd in January.

The IEA kept its 2019 forecast for global oil demand growth at 1.4 million bpd, unchanged from its projection last month, and said it expected growth of 1.3 million bpd this year.

"Our market balance looks 0.5 million bpd tighter next year on reduced OPEC supply, such that the surplus is just 0.2 million bpd," Cohen said.

(Source: Reuters)

China turns up gas heat in 3 million more homes



China has switched another 3.29 million households to gas heating this winter, Reuters calculations show, more than it added last year, as Beijing continues to push the use of cleaner fuels to curb pollution. Gas heating has been installed in recent months across a new swathe of northern China - known for its heavy smog - underlining the government's commitment to reduce pollution even after last year's efforts triggered a fuel shortage that left people freezing in their homes. The new gas users will require an additional 4.53 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas in the Nov. 15 to Mar. 15 period, but analysts said the increase would not necessarily boost overall consumption in the country. "If China wants to deliver gas as promised to households, it will sacrifice industrial supplies," said Chen Zhu, managing director of consultancy SIA Energy. Last year's surge in gas demand combined with inadequate storage and insufficient infrastructure to cause a supply crunch that pushed prices to record levels just weeks into the heating season, forcing Beijing to pause its clean-fuel campaign. This year, a warmer-than-usual November, slack industrial demand and higher supplies of liquefied natural gas (LNG) have pressured wholesale gas prices. China's energy majors also bought more supplies ahead of the heating season, with November gas imports via pipeline and ship hitting a record. Even so, China is unlikely to meet the additional demand from the new users, without cutting some supply to industry, Chen said.

Reuters calculated the number of new households that switched to gas boilers by subtracting the number of new electricity users reported by State Grid - China's dominant grid operator - from the total new households reported as using clean fuels by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment. An additional 1.5 million homes will use electricity for heating, the numbers show, after Beijing proposed electric power as an alternative to gas for cities in the Fenwei Plain. The Fenwei Plain includes parts of Shanxi and Shaanxi, two of China's biggest coal-producing provinces, as well as Henan. Cities in the Fenwei Plain were included by Beijing as a "key battlefield" in its war against air pollution in July, in addition to 28 other cities in northern China. China's top steel-making province, Hebei, and top coal-producing region Shanxi were most aggressive in switching to gas heating, while homes in Beijing and Shaanxi province added more electricity than gas. Chen Hao, a resident of Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi province, said he doubted whether local households earning an average of 3,000 yuan a month could afford the extra 500 yuan in winter heating bills after switching to gas. Some people will also still burn coal, after local governments relaxed an outright ban on coal for heating in places not connected to gas supplies. "This winter, village officials are under pressure to keep us warm," said an elderly farmer surnamed Liu living in Zhangjiapu village in Shanxi province. Last year, Liu survived the winter without heat. (Source: Reuters)

Nigeria files \$1.1b legal claim against Shell, Eni over 2011 oil deal



Nigeria has filed a \$1.1bn legal claim against international energy majors Royal Dutch Shell and Eni in London on Thursday, linked to a controversial 2011 deal for an oil license.

The undeveloped deepwater plot, named OPL 245, is already at the centre of a Milan corruption trial where prosecutors have alleged bribes of \$1.1bn out of a \$1.3bn deal were paid to public officials for the plot.

The filing, in the commercial division of the High Court and seen by the Financial Times, alleges 14 defendants - including Shell, Eni and its Nigerian subsidiaries - "participated in a fraudulent and corrupt scheme" leading to the acquisition of the license.

Lawyers representing the Nigerian government said in a statement the claim reflects the determination of the state to "recover the very significant sums lost to corruption and the unlawful activity of Shell and Eni in this transaction."

The 2011 deal where Shell and Eni each received 50 percent of OPL 245 aimed to put an end to years of wrangling over its ownership, but has since ensnared the energy majors in corruption investigations.

Nigerian governments for years tossed the license back and forth between Shell and Malabu, a domestic oil company backed by businessman Dan Etete who first awarded it rights in 1998 when he was also petroleum minister.

Italian prosecutors allege Shell and Eni approved a deal to pay the government while knowing money would be funnelled

to entities controlled by Etete, who has denied any wrongdoing, who then paid off Nigerian officials.

A statement issued on behalf of the Nigerian state said that money used for the deal was allegedly "paid through to a company controlled by Dan Etete... and used for, amongst other things, bribes and kickbacks."

"Accordingly, it is alleged that Shell and Eni engaged in bribery and unlawful conspiracy to harm the Federal Republic of Nigeria and that they dishonestly assisted corrupt Nigerian government officials to breach fiduciary duties," it added.

Shell and Eni say their transaction with the federal government was legal, adding the payment was made to the state and they had no part to play in what happened to the money afterwards.

Shell said: "Based on our review of the prosecutor of Milan's file and all of the information and facts available to us, we do not believe that there is a case to answer in this matter," the company added.

Eni said it "continues to reject any allegation of impropriety or irregularity in connection with this transaction"

The Nigerian attorney-general's office did not respond to requests for comment.

The Nigerian government has filed a separate lawsuit in London against US bank JPMorgan for its part in transferring more than \$800m of the government funds to Mr Etete. JPMorgan has said the allegations are "without merit".

(Source: Financial Times)

IEA sees tentative signs of return to oil market balance

The International Energy Agency on Thursday raised its estimates of the "call" on OPEC, or demand for OPEC crude, in the first and second quarters of 2019 by 700,000 barrels per day (b/d) and 500,000 b/d respectively, suggesting over-supply could taper off following this month's producer meeting in Vienna and the oil market move "towards" balance.

In its monthly oil market report, the IEA cuts its estimate of non-OPEC production growth next year by 415,000 b/d to 1.5 million b/d, largely on the back of Russia's expected contribution to cuts agreed with OPEC last week. Its estimate for non-OPEC output growth next year was already a drop on this year's estimated growth of 2.4 million b/d.

The IEA's estimates for the call on OPEC are now 31.4 million b/d in the first quarter and 31.8 million b/d in the second quarter, compared with estimated production in November of 33.03 million b/d, a number that includes Qatar, which has said it will leave the group in January.

The report's supply/demand chart suggested only a slight imbalance in the first quarter, and that global oil demand will significantly exceed supply in the second quarter, contrasting with OPEC's own prediction this week of a more over-supplied market.

Cuts agreed by OPEC and its partners, together with separate cuts ordered by the Canadian province of Alberta, "may go some way towards restoring balance to the world market," the IEA said.

However, it also said OECD oil stock levels had risen above the five-year average in October for the first time since March, to 2.872 billion barrels, reflecting recent production surges, and led by an unusually strong build in crude stocks.

The monthly increase in crude stocks, at 46.4 million barrels, was the largest since March 2015 and reflected steep falls in refining in the U.S. and Japan, higher North



American crude output, and steady crude imports in Japan and South Korea.

The report said reduced global economic expectations pose a risk to its demand growth forecast for next year, which it maintained at 1.4 million b/d. It highlighted Venezuela's shrinking oil consumption, which is now roughly half 2012 levels, and forecast the country's demand will drop from 445,000 b/d this year to 330,000 b/d next year on the back of economic decline, mass emigration and fuel shortages.

"The OECD's lower expectation for the world economy in 2019 could reduce oil demand growth by roughly 100,000 b/d," it said. However, lower oil price assumptions are expected to be a "supporting factor," it added.

Trade flows

The report said that while Saudi Arabia is expected to shoulder much of the cuts agreed this month, it has recently signed contracts with China intended to sustain recent record-high shipments to that country, pushing up annual

exports to China by as much as 600,000 b/d next year.

The IEA also raised its estimate of Chinese oil demand growth next year to 445,000 b/d, compared with a growth forecast of 380,000 b/d in last month's report, on the back of buoyant aviation demand.

"China lifted a whopping 1.6 million b/d of Saudi crude in November, up 440,000 b/d month-on-month, and the Kingdom is seeking to sustain those record levels and reclaim its rank of top supplier" from Russia, the IEA said, adding that five new supply contracts should help maintain Saudi exports to China next year at 1.67 million b/d.

Meanwhile, the IEA estimated Iranian crude production had fallen by 310,000 b/d in November to 3.01 million b/d due to U.S.-led sanctions, and shipments of Iranian oil had fallen by 550,000 b/d to 1.28 million b/d. It noted that some Iranian oil is going into storage, with roughly 14 million barrels stored in seven tankers moored off Kharg Island at the end of November, and some is thought to have gone into storage in China, where National Iranian Oil Company has reportedly leased storage capacity.

One factor that might prove bullish overall for oil prices is a surge in freight rates for shipment of oil, resulting from a combination of weather disruptions, greater U.S. exports, and ship demolitions.

"Higher global oil production has seen increased demand for shipping and freight rates for crude and product tankers have soared. In particular, Very Large Crude Carrier rates have stayed elevated since reaching a two-year high at the end of October.

Rates for Suezmaxes gained \$0.45/b month-on-month to the highest in three years, as weather delays in the Turkish Straits hampered movements," the IEA said.

(Source: Platts)

Saudi Arabia to target U.S. with sharp oil export cut, sources say

After flooding the U.S. market in recent months, Saudi Arabia plans to slash exports to the world's largest oil market in the coming weeks in an effort to dampen visible build-ups in crude inventories.

American-based oil refiners have been told to expect much lower shipments from the kingdom in January than in recent months following the OPEC agreement to reduce production, according to people briefed on the plans of state oil company Saudi Aramco.

Saudi crude shipments to the U.S. next month could even test the 30-year low set in late 2017 of 582,000 barrels a day, down about 40 percent from the most recent three-month average, the same people said, asking not to be named as the information isn't public. The final figure could still change, they added.

By shifting the focus of Saudi export reductions toward the U.S., Riyadh hopes to show to the market it's making good on its promise to cut supplies. Fluctuations in U.S. crude imports and stockpiles have an outsized impact on the market because data are available on a weekly basis. In other regions, oil traders only get official figures on a monthly basis, or not at all in the case of stockpiles in big consumers such as China and India.

The Saudi energy ministry didn't respond to a request for comment.

While the plan to slash Saudi exports to America may ultimately convince a skeptical oil market about the kingdom's resolution to bring supply and demand in line, it may anger U.S. President Donald Trump, who has used social media to ask the Saudis and OPEC to keep the taps open.

Saudi total exports are set to drop to around 7 million barrels a day in January, down from about 8 million barrels a day in November-December, one of the people said. Khalid Al-Falih, the kingdom's energy minister, told reporters last week that Saudi production will drop in January to 10.2 million barrels a day, down from 11.1 million barrels a day in November.

The oil market has so far largely ignored the production cuts that OPEC and its allies announced in early December, a larger-than-expected 1.2 million barrels a day -- or just over 1 percent of global demand. Despite the OPEC+ curbs, benchmark Brent crude has hovered near \$60 a barrel. Futures in London jumped 2.2 percent Thursday on the prospect of lower Saudi shipments to the U.S., closing at \$61.45. Prices are still down 7.7 percent for the year.

The export curbs, if fully implemented, will affect big U.S. refiners such as Valero Energy Corp., Phillips 66, Chevron Corp., Exxon Mobil Corp., and Marathon Petroleum Corp. forcing them to buy similar crude elsewhere, such as Mexico, Canada or Venezuela. They could also hit Motiva Enterprises LLC, the Saudi-owned company that operates the largest refinery in the U.S.

Saudi Arabia has shipped 860,000 barrels a day of crude to the U.S. on average so far this year, according to Bloomberg calculations based on weekly customs data. Saudi exports into America had run even higher in the second half of the year, with July-to-December shipments rising to an average of 975,000 barrels a day, according to Bloomberg calculations.

Oil trader Andy Hall, who earned the nickname "God" for his prescient calls on pricing before closing his hedge fund after suffering losses last year, says the oil market is heavily influenced by data like the weekly U.S. stockpile figures.

"People look at these things, scrutinize them," he said of the data on Bloomberg Television Thursday. "The fact is, they only cover the U.S., which is 25 percent of the world oil market. The data available for inventories elsewhere in the world is poor at best."

Hall now serves on the advisory board of Orbital Insight, a Palo Alto-based provider of analytic platforms to translate satellite and aerial images into useful data, including global oil supplies. (Source: Bloomberg)

EU Parl't backs resolution condemning Nord Stream 2 as threat to energy security

Members of the European Parliament have voted to adopt a non-binding resolution calling for the Nord Stream 2 project to be cancelled. In the document, evaluating the latest developments related to the 2017 EU-Ukraine association agreement, MEPs praised Kiev's "crucial role" in the continent's energy supply and condemned the venture, saying "it is a political project that poses a threat to European energy security".

The Russian Foreign Ministry slammed the European Parliament's resolution as politically motivated, stating it has nothing to do with the economy. Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said during a Thursday briefing that hampering energy cooperation is crazy for Europe which needs energy resources.

It's not the first time that Nord Stream 2 has come under fire from EU legislators of late. After November's Kerch Strait incident in which three Ukrainian Navy ships were detained after violating Russia's maritime border and failing to react to legal demands to abandon dangerous manoeuvres, MEP from Germany Manfred Weber, who has long been opposed to Nord Stream 2, urged Europe to reconsider its investment in the pipeline. Then a MEP from Latvia, Sandra Kalniete, prepared a resolution to be reviewed in the parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs that calls for measures aimed at suspending the project.

The resolution draft "underlined that Russia and the EU will remain key economic partners in the foreseeable future, but Nord Stream 2 reinforces EU dependency on Russian gas supplies, threatens the EU internal market and is not in line with EU energy policy, and therefore needs to be stopped".

Incidentally, the European Parliament adopted the non-binding resolution opposing Nord Stream 2 just a day after the lower chamber of the U.S. Congress condemned the Nord Stream 2 undersea pipeline project with a symbolic bipartisan resolution. The House urged EU countries to stop what the representatives denounced as a "drastic step backward for European energy security and United States interests" called on Donald Trump to "support European energy security through a policy of diversification to lessen reliance on Russia".

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov lambasted the U.S. resolution as another manifestation of unscrupulous competition that Moscow considers "incorrect and unacceptable". He called it an "attempt to prevent the implementation of a purely commercial economic project". According to Peskov, this is "nothing more than camouflaged dishonest competition".

Both resolutions followed statements by U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton who said last week that Washington was considering some options to stop the construction of the pipeline. (Source: Sputnik)

The new dividing line in Western politics



By Fareed Zakaria
political scientist



For Stephen K. Bannon, the way to create an enduring populist majority is to combine forces on the left and right. That’s why he was in Italy this year, where parties representing those two sides joined together in a governing alliance. That’s why Bannon hopes to lure some of Sen. Bernie Sanders’s (I-Vt.) supporters away from the Democratic Party. But the next place we might be watching the rise of a new left-right populism is France.

Thus far, the “yellow vest” protests in France have lacked a party, structure and leadership. But lists of demands have been circulating. At their heart is an unworkable fantasy, such as a constitutional cap on taxes at 25 percent , coupled with a massive increase in social spending. What is striking about these manifestos is that they combine traditional wish lists from the left and right. No wonder, then, that nearly 90 percent of people who back the major far-left and far-right parties view the movement favorably, compared with only 23 percent of people in President Emmanuel Macron’s centrist party.

The “yellow vest” uprising has also spread to Belgium, where the fragile governing coalition has collapsed, largely over the issue of immigration. But there again, the protests have the feel of generalized discontent coming from left and right. Just as in France, the United States and Britain, the movement appears to be a rural backlash against urban elites.

The fissure between relatively better-educated urbanites and less-educated rural populations appears to have become the new dividing line in Western politics. “Outsiders” feel ignored or looked down upon and feel deep resentment toward metropolitan elites. It’s part class, part culture, but there is a large element of economics to it as well.

The Brookings Institution has shown that since the financial crisis of 2008, 72 percent of the gains in U.S. employment have accrued to the country’s top 53 metropolitan areas. To understand the structural division this causes, keep in mind that all U.S. cities together contain 62.7 percent of the country’s population but occupy just 3.5 percent of the land. The Wall Street Journal has pointed out that the fate of urban vs. rural America has been turned on its head. In 1980, cities were dysfunctional, crime-ridden and struggling to keep residents from leaving. Today they are thriving, growing and relatively safe, while rural areas are racked with problems. This urban-rural chasm is also true in France, Italy, Britain and many other Western countries.

And it’s likely to get worse. Research by economists Daron Acemoglu and Pascual Restrepo suggests that the use of robots does in fact reduce employment, by about six workers for one machine. Further, Acemoglu and Restrepo find that, in the United States, robots have been largely deployed in the Midwest and South. Although metro areas usually have rich and growing creative and service industries, rural America is less likely to be home to centers of technology, entertainment, law and finance. If you go to a rural part of the Midwest, typically the main sources of employment are government and health care (which is also partly funded by the government).

People in these areas are often described as being irrational at the ballot box. In the United States, they vote for a party that promises tax cuts for the rich and benefit cuts for the working class (i.e., them). The New York Times’ Thomas Edsall points out that the 2017 Republican tax law essentially subsidizes companies to automate. In Europe, contradictory proposals are adopted from the left and right. But this might simply reflect a more generalized anxiety, a blind search for someone who promises them a better future.

Tom Brokaw’s 1998 book “The Greatest Generation” is packed with stories of non-college-educated men who lived far from big cities. This was the “real America.” Similar regions across France were once called “la France profonde.” Today they are places of despair.

In Yuval Harari’s new book, “21 Lessons for the 21st Century,” the Israeli historian points out that the three most powerful 20th-century ideologies — fascism, communism and democratic capitalism — put the ordinary person at the center, promising him or her a glorious future. But today, we seem to need a handful of brainiacs who will, with computers and robots, chart the course for the future. So in France, in Britain, in the United States, the ordinary person, who doesn’t have a fancy degree, who doesn’t attend TED Talks, who doesn’t have capital or connections, will reasonably wonder: Where does that leave me?

To that question, no one has a good answer.

(Source: The Washington Post)

MBS is worse than a criminal. He’s a symbol.

Why is everyone so angry about Saudi Arabia’s crown prince? Jamal Khashoggi is only a small part of the story.

By Steven A. Cook

“Caterwauling.” That is how U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo described congressional reaction to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi and the stinging criticism of Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in a recent op-ed in the Wall Street Journal. He also called it a “media pile-on.” The piece, which deflected blame for the journalist’s death at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul argued that Saudi Arabia is too important an ally to censure.

The secretary’s op-ed was tin-eared and convinced absolutely no one. Yet he had a point. The congressional response to Khashoggi’s demise seems so out of character. After all, Congress as a whole has never had any particular interest in the fate of journalists around the world and generally deferred to successive administrations that justified “strategic relationships” with unsavory allies on national security grounds. When it comes to Saudi Arabia’s transgressions, few members were much interested in Yemen, spoke out forcefully about jailed activists, or raised an eyebrow at the crown prince’s accumulation of power. The political reaction to the Khashoggi story is particularly strange because, given its stated preferences, Congress should love Mohammed bin Salman: He hates Iran, has developed ties with Israel, allowed women to drive, and wants to crack down on extremism.

It’s not just Congress, though. Foreign-policy analysts, journalists, Uber drivers, the guys at the bagel place, and the folks at my mom’s bridge club recoil at the mere mention of Saudi Arabia and its young crown prince. There seems to be more to the generalized outrage over the Khashoggi murder than the headlines would suggest.

It’s hard to remember, but it was only last spring that Mohammed bin Salman took Washington by storm. He had friendly meetings at the White House and with a variety of legislators — some of whom are now his harshest critics — from both houses of Congress. All that political and diplomatic goodwill vanished the moment Jamal Khashoggi stepped into the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on Oct. 2. Few have fallen so far so fast. It took years for the crown prince’s bête noire, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to wear out his welcome in Washington. There



Outside the halls of Congress, commentators have speculated that the president’s effort to shield Mohammed bin Salman from blame in Khashoggi’s death has something to do with the Trump Organization’s business ties to Saudi Arabia.

are still people inside the Beltway who believe that former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was treated unfairly. No one much likes Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, but unlike Mohammed bin Salman, no one has compared him to Saddam Hussein.

So besides the obvious reasons — a disastrous military intervention in Yemen, the brazen murder of Khashoggi, the jailing of reformers, the forced resignation of the prime minister of another country, the plan to build a moat around a neighboring country, and the apparently blind arrogance that makes all this possible — what is behind the anti-Mohammed bin Salman caterwauling?

The first is partisan politics, of course. It is true that there are a fair number of Republicans who have been critical of the crown prince and the Trump administration’s approach to Saudi Arabia. Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham has been outspoken of late, and his party colleague Sen. Mike Lee has consistently sought to hold the Saudis to account for the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Last week, 14

Republican senators voted with all 47 Democrats and the Senate’s two Independents in favor of a resolution to end U.S. support for Saudi military efforts there, but all 37 “no” votes were also Republican.

Still, it’s the unanimity and vehemence of Democrats on the issue that’s most remarkable. It’s due partly to the perceived personal closeness between U.S. President Donald Trump’s family and the Saudi crown prince. It’s not just that the administration —as Pompeo made clear in the Wall Street Journal—regards Saudi Arabia as the pillar of its policy to contain. Outside the halls of Congress, commentators have speculated that the president’s effort to shield Mohammed bin Salman from blame in Khashoggi’s death has something to do with the Trump Organization’s business ties to Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the president’s son-in-law and senior advisor Jared Kushner apparently stays up late swapping stories and strategizing with the crown prince. And for their part, the Saudis, still angry over former U.S.

President Barack Obama’s policies, allowed themselves to become a partisan issue. They are squarely on Team Trump (along with the Israelis, Egyptians, and Emiratis).

Not to diminish the moral repugnance of Jamal Khashoggi’s murder — a legitimate source of outrage — but it did provide another opportunity for Trump’s opponents in Congress, as well as editorial writers, columnists, and allegedly objective analysts, to assail a leader they loathe. This is the context in which to understand efforts like that of the incoming chair of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff, who has vowed to get to the bottom of the Khashoggi murder and explore Trump’s ties to the Saudi royal family.

Second, the anger at Saudi Arabia over Khashoggi’s murder seems connected to unfinished business related to the attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001. Relevant here is the fact that journalists are routinely abused in Egypt, Turkey, Hungary, Russia, China — U.S. allies and foes alike — but their names and stories generally remain unknown except to a small group of activists and analysts at organizations like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Committee to Protect Journalists. The difference is U.S. officials’ lingering knowledge about — and lack of public reckoning with — Saudi responsibility for 9/11. They seem to have determined that with Khashoggi’s brutal death, enough is enough.

Everyone knows that 15 of 19 hijackers were Saudis, but the American public remains in the dark about aspects of the attacks directly related to Saudi Arabia. Perhaps the parts of the 9/11 Commission Report that remain outside public view are part of an effort to protect sources and methods, but they sow suspicions that Saudis played a role beyond the 15 known terrorists. The depth of American anger is reflected in the 2016 Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, which paved the way for families of 9/11 victims to sue Saudi Arabia in U.S. courts. The legislation passed in the Senate 97-1 and in the House of Representatives 348-77.

Khashoggi’s murder added fuel to the latent anger of 9/11. Mohammed bin Salman has engaged in some awful behavior, and many in Washington no longer feel the need to sweep bad Saudi behavior under the rug. (Source: Foreign Policy)

A little rain in Spain



Socialist leader Pedro Sanchez

of Spanish exceptionalism and showed that the country’s fabled immunity to far-right politics had finally given out.” “Fable” is apparently the right word.

In that election, the Socialists lost Andalusia in the southern region where they’ve governed without interruption for 36 years. As an anti-immigration, anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage, anti-tax, anti-feminist and anti-Islamic party, it gained seats in the regional parliament, winning 11 percent of the vote and 12 percent of the seats in the parliament. A party called Vox will join the People’s Party and a smaller centrist party to form the governing coalition. The Socialists scored their weakest result ever, winning just 28 percent of the vote.

Germany tries to break the impasse on migrants

Scrapping compulsory quotas for EU countries is welcome if belated.

The number of migrants seeking refuge in Europe has fallen in 2018 to a recent low of 135,000, according to the International Organization for Migration. But the fallout continues to poison and polarize politics in Europe as if record numbers were still arriving as they did in 2015 and 2016. Since then, Europe has remained virtually paralyzed over how to respond.

Germany’s decision ahead of Thursday’s EU summit to drop its long-held demand that EU countries compulsorily adopt a quota system for newcomers is a welcome gesture to break the impasse. It was never viable to force countries to take on refugees against their will. Far better to encourage those that are willing to share the burden by offering rewards.

In and of itself, abandoning the quotas demand solves little. It does, however, raise hope that Europe can begin collectively to

seek ways of managing a problem that for long-term demographic reasons will only become more acute. For now, there is less a refugee crisis than a political one.

The latter is having real and damaging effects. It is fuelling mistrust between western European governments and those in central and eastern Europe. It is hampering efforts to reform the EU and it is fuelling the rise of far-right populists. Belgium’s ruling coalition split on last Saturday because of a row over a UN compact on migration that is, in legal terms, relatively toothless.

The agreement was designed in the wake of the 2015 migrant crisis when more than 1m migrants landed on Europe’s shores. It was intended to improve data collection and help co-ordinate responses to migration. The near hysterical opposition to it in some European countries was emblematic of the extent to which migration has become a banner issue around which populists build support. Anti-

immigration parties now govern Hungary and Poland. They partner in ruling coalitions in Italy and Austria and are influencing politics in many other states, including the UK. In Sweden, their success in elections this year has so far helped prevent the formation of a government.

The decision to abandon the quota plans at EU level comes on the back of a neuralgia that has been building for years. Some of this was self-inflicted. The idea that it was possible to allocate refugees proportionally around 28 countries flew in the face of political and social realities as well as the instincts of refugees themselves.

The latter tend to gravitate to more affluent societies where jobs exist. Unfortunately, Germany’s belated recognition of these flaws leaves untouched the question of how to ease the burden on southern Europe where most migrants first arrive. A lack of solidarity from other European countries has turned Ital-

ian politics upside down and helped propel Matteo Salvini’s far-right League to power. The kind of anti-immigrant demagoguery Salvini engages in not only pollutes the public sphere. It also hinders the search for solutions. European leaders have rightly identified the need to exert greater control over the bloc’s external borders.

They have made progress cracking down on people smugglers. And they have done deals with countries in the EU orbit, notably Turkey, which while leaving a destabilizing refugee crisis on the doorstep has helped bring numbers down.

Now they need to make the case for well-run legal migration routes. They need to reform asylum procedures and create incentives for countries to share responsibility. The numbers of migrant arrivals is drastically down. But the EU can ill-afford to be unprepared whenever the next wave comes.

(Source: FT)

Russian White Swans in the U.S. backyard; Washington terrified

1 → ■ Washington's fear and Russia's response

Following the fall of Venezuela's strategic bombers, Americans were terrified, as U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo wrote on Twitter, "two corrupt governments squandering public funds, and squelching liberty and freedom while their people suffer."

On a conference call on December 11, the spokesman for the Kremlin, Dmitry Peskov, told reporters that it's "absolutely inappropriate" for Pompeo to call the Russian government corrupt and called the statement "undiplomatic" and "completely unreliable".

Peskov also said, "We are opposed to the remark that we are wasting people's money, while the statement is made by the Foreign Minister of a country whose half military budget would be enough to feed all of Africa."

■ Caracas welcomed Russian White Swans

Caracas welcomed the arrival of Russia's Tu-160 strategic bombers as an opportunity to show the will to defend its country against possible foreign military intervention.

Venezuela's Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez said, "The two countries have been building more than cooperation, a real friendship in all areas, with a special focus on military development. The Russian-Venezuelan joint ventures show a boost for the purpose of integrating airborne equipment, in terms of technical cooperation and exchange of experiences. No one in the world is afraid of the presence of logistical aircraft landed in Venezuela. We are makers of peace, not war. We are ready to defend Venezuela if necessary, until the end. We do this with our friends who defended the respectful relations among the countries."

Russian Ambassador to Venezuela



Vladimir Zaemsky said on Monday that military-technical cooperation between Moscow and Caracas has been developing very actively of late.

■ Experts' views

Abdel Bari Atwan, a prominent international affairs analyst, has said, "A new chapter of the Cold War is taking place between Russia and the US in different parts of the world that has become more evident with the deployment of Russia's strategic bombers to Venezuela. This is Moscow's warning message to Washington. The arrival of Russian bombers in the South American country has angered the U.S. government since it did not expect it. The U.S. is sensitive to South America and doesn't welcome Russia or other countries to get close to the region."

When Venezuelan President Maduro went to Russia, he pledged for help, and the Russian President immediately sent two bomber planes as expressing his support to Caracas. The US overthrew the Colombian, Brazilian and Argentinian governments, which were largely left-wingers, and brought the right parties instead. The U.S. has done all in power for its political, economic and military influence.

Trump's policy is not just a threat to the world, the Middle East and South America, but it is also a threat to America itself. Washington's military and economic movements against Caracas and the elected President of Venezuela have made the country to open up to the Russians. It is not unlikely that this South American country would do the same as Syria, allowing Russia to establish

military bases in its soil.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad sought help from Russia against the U.S.-led counterinsurgency plan for his government. Putin at once dispatched troops, fighters and the S-300 to defeat the U.S. plan. The U.S. power is gradually declining.

It is undeniable that the U.S. monopoly in the international arena has come to an end, and it cannot be overthrown any government on the pretext of democracy.

With the interference of Russia, the U.S. has failed to overthrow the Assad's government. Now, Russia is playing in the U.S. backyard in Syria which has alarmed Washington.

This becomes important when we review similar incidents during the Soviet era. When the US failed to overthrow Castro's Communist regime, during the operation of the Swine Gulf, Cuba thought of getting help from Soviet Union to protection. The Soviet Union, which was already worried about the US missile bases in Italy and Turkey, transferred its nuclear missiles to Cuba with passion. The U.S. intelligence realized it when it was too late, and that the materials needed for missiles were already transferred to Cuba. Although there were talks of air strikes to Cuban missile sites, Kennedy decided to resolve the crisis with diplomacy.

In any case, the landing of Russian strategic bombers in Venezuela, in addition to American fears, has pushed US-dependent states in South America, including Colombia to react. The country has objected to the presence of Russian strategic bombers in Venezuela, in line with White House policies. Washington has sensed the danger, especially since these bombers can target locations within the U.S.

The sad fate of Europe's leading figure

1 → The picture which the French President was trying to draw at that time is way different from the reality which flaunts in Paris streets. Please use the sharing tools found via the share button at the top or side of articles. Now Macron-haters have seized upon the protests in Paris and are shouting that the French president stands revealed as a massively flawed leader — remote, arrogant and pushing an outdated neoliberal agenda.

Before this, the theory was that if Macron could demonstrate his ability to change France, he would also take decisive steps towards a genuine European economic government, and then a reformed, strengthened EU had the power to push back against the extremists and far-right movements which gathered lots of support over last years. But this theory has

failed! Macron's domestic agenda ran into trouble, and as a result his international agenda is failing. This is the story of France's young president.

In the face of recent protests, Macron had no way but to withdraw from his order to increase fuel taxes. It also seems that he should take more appeasing actions to satisfy the demonstrators. Under such circumstances, other reforms that were to be implemented by Macron's government in near future now look much less likely to happen. It will, in turn, prevent the realization of developments that Macron has promised the French citizens, which will subsequently lead to more anger inside the French society.

Now it seems that things are getting a lot worse. Protests

and street violence are likely to go on for months, turning the mire even more frightening for both French citizens and their president. The outcome of the existing chaos can be the raise of a far-right or far-left president in France next elections.

Now Macron's dreams to be known as Europe's leading figure are all gone. Indeed, he'd be lucky if an early election doesn't terminate his presence in the Elysee Palace. The "yellow vests" are currently his most terrible nightmare. Macron, who came to power with the slogan of economic development in France and the economic and political leadership of the European Union, has definitely failed to become a strong leader in Europe. Today he's considered a defeated figure in the French economy and politics, rather than Europe's leading figure.

Turkey fails to comply with all its obligations in Idlib

1 → The West, especially Washington, London and Paris, which are in direct contact with the anti-Syrian government groups in Idlib, had been obviously indifferent to the situation faced by civilians in Idlib.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry has generally described the operations carried out by United States-led coalition forces as crimes against humanity and genocide. Much Syria was destroyed and hundreds of thousands have died. In Idlib, it seemed at first that the agreement reached in Sochi between Moscow and Ankara could improve the situation. But with the expiration of a deadline for Turkey to negotiate with the so-called intermediate opponents of Assad, Ankara failed to fulfill its obligations.

Analysts believe that Ankara deliberately neglected the issue of the withdrawal of the armed forces against Assad, in order to use them as a "trump card" for their policy. Erdogan also seems to be adopting a double standard with Russia, Iran and Syria on the one hand, and with the West, especially the United States, on the other. The lack of progress in the implementation of the agreements reached in Sochi between Turkey and Russia, which will aggravate and complicate the day-



to-day management of the situation in Idlib.

Lieutenant General Vladimir Savchenko, head of the Russian center for reconciliation of conflicting sides in Syria, said: "Despite the ceasefire agreement, illegal armed groups operating in the Idlib de-escalation zone keep violating it."

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said on Nov. 16, 2018 that

Turkey's attempt to disperse terrorists have more or less failed. She added: "In recent days, Syrian government forces have limited the moves that have been made by the Jabhat al-Nusra forces from the province of Idlib to the Aleppo area, but so-called moderate forces have contributed to the terrorists in these movements."

Such direct remarks by the spokesman of the Russian Foreign Ministry indicate that the patience of Moscow, Tehran and Damascus is wearing thin over the issue of the terrorists based in Idlib.

Earlier, the leaders of Turkey, Russia, France and Germany met at a summit hosting by Ankara to try to find a political solution to Syria's devastating civil war, and to provide access to humanitarian aid and salvage a fragile ceasefire in the country's last major rebel-held bastion. The Russian president noted that the creation of the buffer zone in Idlib is a temporary solution, and if the terrorist armed forces do not adhere to this agreement and continue military operations, Russia will have the right to respond fully, right to full control of the counter-terrorism of the Syrian

Currently, given the failures to comply with all the agreements at Sochi, further delay Idlib's liberation will decrease Syrian military clout, and the radical anti-government forces and terrorists will have more time to rebuild. It is time the terrorists were dealt with and a comprehensive political agreement takes shape to resolve Syrian problems.

Despite U.S. withdrawal, global migrant's compact will be effective

TEHRAN (FNA) — Despite overwhelming global support, the United States government has refused to endorse the Global Migrant's Compact (GCM) in Morocco (December 10-14).

However, more than 180 of the UN's 193 member states, along with human rights organizations, international relief agencies and civil society organizations have participated in the conference. Unfortunately, the Trump administration and nine other right-wing governments have still been successful in mischaracterizing and misleading the world community regarding what the compact is, and what it seeks to achieve which is to promote cooperation among countries of origin, transit and destination to ensure that migration is safe, regular and orderly.

As UN delegates met in Morocco to adopt the global compact to protect the rights and safety of refugees and migrants, the Trump administration launched a blistering attack condemning it as a violation of national sovereignty. The Trump administration, which pulled out of the negotiations last year, "maintains the sovereign right to facilitate or restrict access to our territory, in accordance with our national laws and policies, subject to our existing international obligations."

Ultimately, however, that a handful of countries, including the U.S., refused to come to Marrakesh should not detract from the fact that over 180 nations did, meaning the compact has received overwhelming global support. What is unique

about this is that countries that withdrew did so despite the fact that the compact is non-legally binding, and all of these countries (other than the U.S.) participated — in good faith — in the 18-month process to negotiate its terms.

The compact will only be effective if countries move forward with its implementation. What is important is that the compact's 23 objectives embody a comprehensive set of best practices for managing migration and refugee crisis in a safe, orderly manner which requires the cooperation of countries of origin, transit and destination. In other words, implicit in the compact is the understanding that not implementing these practices results in unsafe, irregular, and disorderly human movement, in loss of life, in human trafficking, in exploitation and abuse of migrants and refugees in situations of vulnerability including children.

It results in a failure to address the factors in countries of origin that are driving more and more people to migrate out of necessity and desperation, not choice. It also seeks to protect persons in situations of vulnerability who are not squarely included in the Refugee Convention, including those compelled to leave their countries due to disasters and the adverse effects of climate change and man-made humanitarian crisis.

All countries need to address these drivers, to promote practices that ensure that people are moving safely and regularly. At the same time, the compact recognizes the

sovereign right of every nation to manage its borders. That the United States does not want to implement these best practices is contrary to its own self-interests and/or claims about protecting basic human rights.

There are over 258 million migrants today most of whom migrate because of the U.S.-led wars in the Middle East and climate change. What has changed is the fact that increasingly, more and more people are migrating not out of choice — not as "economic migrants" — but because of other drivers like generalized violence, corruption, and the impacts of wars (famine and starvation in the case of Yemen) in their home countries. These people are in need of some level of international protection.

One of the goals of the compact is to ensure that those migrating out of desperation are not exploited or abused, and that their human rights are upheld. Ultimately, the GCM's success will be measured by how well states work together to ensure that labor, demographic, family, education and other needs are addressed in a mutually beneficial way that bolsters human rights.

Make no mistake. The same will be true about the GCM. Indeed, with or without the U.S., the compact will be effective in its voluntary implementation, particularly in the context of the Refugee Convention (signed and ratified by all UN member states) which is also being violated by the U.S. Sadly, this terrible record is a constant throughout American history.

Three Years after the unjustifiable Zaria massacre



By U.S. Adam

Political analyst from Nigeria



ZARIA — The 12th December 2015 will forever remain in the heart of every humanist in particular and the history of mankind in general. It's a day in which 1000+ of innocent lives were brutally killed regardless of gender and age differences by those that were employed to safeguard their lives. The atrocities against humanity that took place on that very day could never be captured completely, you can only write the little you know about.

The carnage is generally referred to as "12th December Zaria, Massacre" even though the bloodshed lasted for 3 days (12th, 13th and 14th December 2015), in three major places; Husainiyya Baqiyatullah Zaria, Gyallesu [House of Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky (H)] and Jannat Darul Rahama (Martyrs graveyard). And the massacre continued in different parts of Nigeria on different occasions (including the recent Arbaeen commemoration massacre in Abuja).

The Nigerian army initiated the killing from Husainiyya Baqiyatullah, Zaria with a mere fictional story of a road blockage, where hundreds of innocent, young and vibrant citizens were killed mercilessly including pregnant women and children, some of the women were raped and shot in their private parts, and others were burnt to death alive. The same atrocities and even more took place in the residence of Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky (H) and Jannat Darul Rahma. Three sons of Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky (H) [Hammad, Haidar and Humaid] are among the martyred. Many were severely injured at the spot, arrested, detained illegally and also denied proper medical attention since then to date, including the leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky (H) and his wife.

The sole aim of this massacre is to killed Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky (H) and put his Movement to history and makes it a bygone. This became clearer when Muhammad Bin Salman boldly said Saudi Arabia is behind the abduction of Sheikh Ibraheem Zakzaky (H)'s power in Nigeria to break the Iranian Nation power in Africa.

The most disturbing aspect that makes the massacre more worrisome and perturbing is the silent of the world on it, especially the international media. And none of the perpetrators of massacre is brought to justice till date; most of the illegally detained victims are yet to attain freedom despite the inability of both the Nigerian Government and the Nigerian Army to justify the massacre. This leads to the continuation of the innocent killings in various places on different occasion.

We are still calling on the people with moral sense to always stand with the oppressed so that tyranny and oppression will not find a place in our society. The peaceful coexistence of every society depends on how it shuns injustice, tyranny and oppression. No one is freed if someone somewhere is oppressed.

Nigeria's Buhari rattled by Boko Haram attacks as election approaches in 2019



By Ali Isah Omogbai

Political analyst from Nigeria

TEHRAN — Insecurity is a major electoral issue for President Muhammadu Buhari as he seeks re-election in 2019 polls. When Buhari won the presidential election in 2015 among the promises made was to restore the country back to peace and to ensure total security in the state, creation of job opportunities, better and easy life for the masses.

Ironically, the opposite was the case, life became more callous for the ordinary people, insecurities has always been a norm of the day which if it is critically view is nothing other than a political agenda. At the early hour of Buhari's reign a group of terrorist emerged known as herdsmen with their cattle entering villages destroying farm lands and slaughtering people, herdsmen are known to be carrying sticks with their cattle moving from place to place "nomadic farming".

During the terrorized period of the herdsmen Buhari did not take any measures to stop the inhuman perpetrating by the herdsmen which was originated from his own state rather he was given condolences to the victims

Govnor Peter Ayo Fayose, once describe president Buhari as a "captured president" wondered why a retired Army general and one time military head of state, contested and own the election in a democratic era on the ground to provide security to the citizens have suddenly became lame duck, "This is a killer government".

The frequency Boko Haram attacks on Nigerian soldiers have threatened Buhari's re-election, As Nigeria prepares for general elections in February, a series of attacks by Boko Haram has focused attention on the security situation in the country.

The armed group appears to have regained ground in the country's northeast in 2018, pushing into towns and villages it had previously lost to the Nigerian military.

With an escalation of attacks in recent months, the Nigerian government's claims of victory against Boko Haram appear premature.

The nine-year conflict with Boko Haram, that has killed more than 20,000 people and displaced two million others from their homes in Nigeria, has also spread to neighbouring Chad, Niger and Cameroon.

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‘Cancer treatment cost Iran \$715m last year’

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — Treatment of cancer cost Iran 30 trillion rials (nearly \$715 million) last year (March 2017-March 2018), Payam Azadeh, the scientific secretary of the third International Clinical Oncology Congress has said.

Cancer rate is increasing in Iran as the population is growing older; stomach cancer and breast cancer are among most prevalent cancers in Iran and their treatment is costly, Azadeh said, Fars news agency reported on Friday.

With some lifestyle changes such diseases are preventable, for instance 90 percent of the patients diagnosed with lung cancer are smokers, he highlighted.

By warning the public and raising awareness cancer rate will drop, he added.

Deputy Health Minister Reza Malekzadeh said in April that “population-based cancer registry of the Islamic Republic of Iran” shows a cancer incidence rate of 158 per 100,000 of the population and 143



per 100,000 of the population (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) in 30 provinces of Iran annually.

The database indicates that the rate for all cancers (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) for men and women combined was 182 per 100,000 in 2012 which means that the rate of cancer in Iran is well below the world average, he highlighted.

According to World Health Organization cancer is the second leading cause of death globally, and is responsible for an estimated 9.6 million deaths in 2018. Globally, about 1 in 6 deaths is due to cancer.

Around one third of deaths from cancer are due to the 5 leading behavioral and dietary risks: high body mass index, low fruit and vegetable intake, lack of physical activity, tobacco use, and alcohol use.

The economic impact of cancer is significant and is increasing. The total annual economic cost of cancer in 2010 was estimated at approximately \$1.16 trillion.

Iran ready for increased Indian pharmaceutical investment: health minister



HEALTH **TEHRAN** — The Iranian health minister has expressed the country’s readiness for an increase in investment by Indian pharmaceutical companies, IRNA reported on Friday.

“Iran will impose limitations on the importation of pharmaceutical products which will be domestically produced,” Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi said in a meeting with representatives of Iranian and Indian pharmaceutical companies in New Delhi, India.

Some Indian pharmaceutical companies might aim at exporting medicines to Iran at first, but they can also think of manufacturing pharmaceutical products in Iran in partnership with Iranian companies, he added.

He went on to highlight that the world needs Iran and Iran needs the world and despite the current condition and newly imposed sanctions Iran is still carrying out transaction with European and American countries.

It is suitable for Indian and eastern Asian countries to seize the opportunity for increased cooperation and exchange of technological know-how with Iran, he added.

The Iranian official has travelled to India to attend The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health Partners’ Forum which kicked off on Wednesday.

He also held meetings with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Damodardas Modi, and Commerce and Industry Minister Suresh Prabhu.

Iranian scientist Baharvand among winners of 2019 TWAS Prize



HEALTH **TEHRAN** — Hossein Baharvand, an eminent Iranian scientist, won The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) 2019 prize in biology, ISNA news agency reported.

Baharvand is a professor at Royan Institute for Stem Cell Biology and Technology. In 2004, he received a Ph.D. in Cell and Developmental Biology from Khwarizmi University.

For the first time, he generated the mouse and human embryonic stem cells (2003) and induced pluripotent stem cells (2008) in Iran.

According to TWAS website, Baharvand received the prize for his fundamental contribution to the understanding of how pluripotency and differentiation establish and maintain in stem cells.

TWAS for the advancement of science

in developing countries — works to support sustainable prosperity through research, education, policy and diplomacy. TWAS is a global science academy based in Trieste, Italy.

TWAS was founded in 1983 by a distinguished group of scientists from the developing world, under the leadership of Abdus Salam, the Pakistani physicist and Nobel laureate.

TWAS Prizes are awarded in nine fields including Agricultural Sciences, Biology, Chemistry, Earth, Astronomy and Space Sciences, Engineering Sciences, Mathematics, Medical Sciences, Physics, and Social Sciences.

Each TWAS Prize carries a cash award of \$15,000. The winners will lecture about their research at TWAS’s 29th General Meeting, when they will also receive a plaque and the prize money.

How our body clocks can make or break our health

As our lifestyles become increasingly demanding, we build our lives around artificially divided days and nights that accommodate the need to work night shifts, stay up all night, or travel between continents. But this impacts our natural body clocks, with unwanted consequences.

New research homes in on how disruptions to our circadian rhythm make us vulnerable to disease.

If we tamper with our circadian rhythms — set by the body clocks that regulate all the automated processes that take place inside the body — we tamper with our health.

Our body clocks control metabolism, contributing to the proper functioning of every organ in our bodies.

However, if we regularly bypass our natural day to night cycles — by working through the night, traveling long distance, or spending too much time looking at bright screens in the dark — our body clocks become disoriented and stop functioning correctly.

New research from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, The Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, CA, and Nagoya University in Japan identifies a key mechanism that links the dysregulation of circadian rhythms with a greater exposure to chronic diseases.

“Epidemiological studies are consistently revealing more and more connections between modern lifestyles and our internal biological clock, and when those two clash, it can lead to development of diseases such as obesity and breast cancer,” notes study author Steve Kay, Provost Professor of Neurology, Biomedical Engineering and Biological Sciences at the University of Southern California.

However, he adds, “This study goes beyond the epidemiology to explore the mechanisms of circadian disruption as a risk factor for certain diseases.”

The new study, which appears in PNAS, has identified a protein that plays a dual



role in the context of the circadian rhythm, and which explains how disrupted body clocks can lead to disease.

■ Disrupting a delicate balance

Kay and colleagues focused on HNF4A, a protein found in cell nuclei, which previous research suggested is involved in the early development of the liver, kidney, and large intestine.

When the researchers analyzed liver and colon cells taken from mouse and human tissue, they found that HNF4A interacts with the circadian clocks of these cells in complex ways. More specifically, HNF4A can block two other proteins — CLOCK and BMAL1 — that help regulate circadian rhythms in mammals.

“Inside the cell, the cogs of the clock are universal, but the hands of the clock are specific to each organ, so how the clock does its work in each cell is different,” explains Kay.

HNF4A, it turns out, responds to chemical signals within the cell and acts out on other proteins in accordance. This means that when this protein’s activity goes haywire, normal metabolic processes are also disrupted, leaving the organs more exposed to disease.

“So, in the liver, we looked at tissue-specific proteins and found that HNF4A is tied to the circadian clock, is regulated by the clock and cycles with the clock and, in turn, regulates the clock. That’s the new finding here, and it’s a big jump forward.”

(Source: parallelstate.com)

Colorectal cancer: Loss of two genes may drive tumor formation

New research suggests that the loss of two genes may drive an aggressive form of colorectal cancer, and proposes a combination of two compounds that may halt tumor growth.

The reduced expression of two genes may explain the development of colon cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), colorectal cancer is the third most common form of cancer and the third leading cause of cancer death among both men and women in the United States.

Up to 35 percent of colorectal cancer cases evolve from so-called serrated polyps. Polyps are growths found inside the colon, which may or may not develop into cancer.

Colorectal cancers that arise from serrated polyps are often more difficult to treat, so identifying serrated colon cancers early on is crucial for improving a person’s outlook.

New research, published in the journal Immunity, suggests that losing two specific genes drives serrated polyps. The findings may lead to new biomarkers for this type of cancer.

Jorge Moscat, Ph.D., a director and professor in the Cancer Metabolism and Signaling Networks Program at Sanford Burnham Prebys (SBP) Medical Discovery Institute in La Jolla, CA, is the senior author of the paper.

The findings also shed light on why people with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) are at a higher risk of developing colon cancer. IBD refers to conditions characterized by chronic inflammation of the digestive tract, such as Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis.

In the U.S., approximately 3 million people are living with IBD, according to recent estimates.

■ Genes loss, key in serrated colon cancer

Using a mouse model, Prof. Moscat and colleagues found that the loss of two genes caused the rodents to develop serrated colorectal cancer.



The two genes are responsible for encoding protein kinase C lambda/iota and protein kinase C zeta, respectively. An analysis of human tissue samples of serrated colorectal cancer also found a reduced expression of these two genes.

In the mice, the scientists also found that the loss of the two genes activated the tissue around the tumor and caused a protein called PD-L1 to infiltrate this tissue. Cancer cells often overexpress PD-L1 because the protein helps the cells evade the immune system.

Next, the researchers applied a compound — called a TGF-beta receptor inhibitor — that deactivated the tissue surrounding the tumor, together with a substance called anti-PD-L1 that reactivated the immune system.

This combined treatment shrunk the tumors and reduced their number.

The study’s senior author comments on the results, saying, “[T]he mouse model we created more closely mirrors the human disease, an important step that could help reveal more insights into this deadly cancer.”

“Our findings identify both a promising combination treatment for serrated colorectal cancer and potential biomarkers that can identify this cancer subtype — both of which are urgently needed.”

“It is very important that we understand how serrated colorectal cancer develops — especially as we know people with IBD are at risk for developing cancer,” Prof. Moscat continues.

(Source: instant.com.pk)

Is olive oil good for your hair?

People have used olive oil in cooking and home remedies for thousands of years. Some people suggest olive oil is useful for adding shine, body, and softness to a person’s hair. Some claim that it can even help with hair loss and dandruff. However, there is limited research to support these claims.

Is olive oil good for people’s hair? Before a person replaces their normal conditioners with olive oil, they should read on to learn more about the possible benefits of putting olive oil on the hair.



Using olive oil may help protect hair from damage.

Most people use both shampoo and conditioner for their hair.

While scientists would not consider olive oil a cleansing hair care ingredient or shampoo, they group oils as one of five conditioning agents that help decrease friction on hair, detangle the hair, and minimize frizz.

While there is no shortage of anecdotal evidence to suggest that olive oil is good for a person’s hair, scientists have conducted limited studies on various oils in hair care.

A 2015 review of studies states that oils may play an important role in protecting hair from damage. This is because some oils can penetrate the hair and reduce the amount of water the hair absorbs, which reduces the amount of swelling the hair shaft undergoes.

If the hair does not swell as much, it will not shrink as much either, so reducing the stress the hair sustains. Reducing this stress, in turn, reduces damage.

The same review suggests that hair absorbs saturated and monounsaturated oils better than polyunsaturated oils. Olive oil is monounsaturated oil.

Some studies exist that show that other oils may be beneficial when a person applies them to their hair. An older study from 2007 found that applying coconut oil to hair increased the hair’s moisture retention more than mineral oil.

Another study, dating from 2003, discussed the effects of different oils on preventing hair damage. While the research did not look specifically at olive oil, it did suggest that applying coconut oil to hair may avoid damage to the hair proteins.

The authors found that while coconut oil reduced protein loss in undamaged and damaged hair, mineral oil and sunflower oil did not. They observed the benefit with coconut oil when using it both before and after washing the hair.

As the study did not look at olive oil’s effect on preventing hair damage, there is no way to know if olive oil does prevent damage to the hair, and, if it does, how effective it is at doing so.

■ How to use olive oil for hair

People can use olive oil as a hair conditioner, but it may not be suitable for all hair types.

People who want to use olive oil as part of their hair-care routine could try the following method:

Measure out a small amount of olive oil, especially if it is the first time of applying it to the hair.

Apply the oil on dry areas of hair or scalp, which will vary from person-to-person.

Cover the hair with a shower cap and let the oil sit on the hair for about 15 minutes.

Rinse the oil out of the hair with warm water.

Shampoo the hair, repeating this step if the olive oil leaves the hair greasy.

There are many different suggestions online about how to use olive oil as part of a hair-care routine. At present, there is no research to support specific methods, including the one above, or suggestions as to which is the best for individuals to use.

Most people will be able to use olive oil on their hair safely, and so it may be worth trying a few different methods to find one that feels best.

■ What type of hair might benefit?

Not all types of hair will benefit from someone using olive oil as a conditioner.

Dry, coarse hair will probably benefit more than thinner, dry hair. People with oily, fine hair may find that olive oil makes their hair feel greasy and heavy.

■ Other possible beauty benefits of olive oil

A lip scrub made of olive oil and sugar can help exfoliate the lips.

While no research beyond anecdotal evidence has proven that olive oil can help with hair care, this oil does have other possible beauty benefits.

■ Potential benefits include the following:

High antioxidant levels mean that applying olive oil to the skin may prevent premature aging.

Olive oil has a moisturizing effect that can help keep the skin moist and supple.

High levels of fat-soluble vitamins may benefit the skin and treat certain skin conditions.

Applying an olive oil and sugar mixture to lips may help remove dry skin from lips and soften chapped lips.

Massaging olive oil into rough areas of skin, such as dry heels, can soften these areas.

Rubbing an olive oil-soaked cloth over areas of skin with makeup on can remove makeup.

Olive oil may be able to soothe some skin rashes.

■ Takeaway

While anecdotal evidence suggests that olive oil may be very beneficial for hair care, research to back up these claims is very limited. Before people think of olive oil as a hair cure-all, more research is required.

However, unless a person has an allergy to olive oil, applying olive oil to the hair as a beauty treatment is likely safe and very easy to do. For most people, the only risk of applying olive oil to their hair is that the hair will be left greasy and weighed down instead of feeling soft and silky.

(Source: Medical News Today)

Is AI dangerous? Why our fears of killer computers robots are overblown

Computer programs are still just tools. And like any tool, they can be helpful or dangerous, depending on

Robots are always taking over, at least in pop culture. In the 1984 film “Terminator,” the artificial intelligence (AI) weapons system Skynet attains sentience and launches a nuclear apocalypse designed to wipe out humanity. In HBO’s television series “Westworld,” robots attain sentience and start murdering people. Tesla founder Elon Musk has been saying for years that we need to take the threat of robot apocalypse seriously. “If one company or small group of people manages to develop god-like super-intelligence, they could take over the world,” Musk said in the 2018 documentary “Do You Trust This Computer?” “We have five years. I think digital super-intelligence will happen in my lifetime, 100 percent,” he warned.



Malevolent robots are fun monsters, like vampires or aliens. But, like vampires and aliens, they’re not real, according to “The AI Delusion,” a new book by Pomona College Economics professor Gary Smith. According to Smith, computers aren’t smart enough to threaten us — and won’t be for the foreseeable future. But if we think computers are smart, we may end up harming ourselves not in the far future, but right now.

Computers seem more intelligent than us because they can perform certain tasks much better than we can.

Computers seem more intelligent than us because they can perform certain tasks much better than we can. “People see computers do amazing things, like make complicated mathematical calculations and provide directions to the nearest Starbucks, and they think computers are really smart,” Smith told me in a phone interview. Computers can memorize huge amounts of information — a computer has effectively solved the game checkers, calculating every possible move, so that it is unbeatable. If computers can beat humans in games of skill and intelligence, then computers must be more intelligent than humans are. And if they are more intelligent than us, it follows that they pose a danger to us. Right?

This reasoning is not right, according to Smith. Computers can calculate and memorize, but that doesn’t mean they’re smarter than humans. In fact, computers are, in most respects, no smarter than a chair. They don’t have wisdom or common sense. “They have no understanding of the real world,” Smith says.

To explain computer limitations, Smith points to the Winograd schema, a computer challenge developed by Stanford computer science professor Terry Winograd. Winograd schemas are sentences like “I can’t cut that tree down with that axe; it is too thick.” A human reading that sentence knows instantly that the “it” refers to the tree, not to the axe, because it makes no sense to say that a thick axe can’t cut down a tree.

Computers have great difficulties with Winograd schemas. “A computer doesn’t know in any meaningful sense what a tree is or what an axe is,” Smith says. Similarly, computers aren’t going to decide to rise up against humans because computers don’t know what humans are, or what rising up is, or what their own survival is. Nor is there much chance that programmers will get them to understand any of these concepts in the near future. It’s like imagining that your television is going to leap off its perch and attack you. It’s a good science-fiction story, but not something to spend your days worrying about.

So rogue sentient televisions aren’t going to kill you. But increased stress levels from worrying about rogue sentient televisions could have a negative affect on your health. Similarly, smart computers aren’t dangerous, but imagining that computers are smart can cause problems.

So rogue sentient televisions aren’t going to kill you. But increased stress levels from worrying about rogue sentient televisions could have a negative affect on your health.

For example, computers can analyze huge amounts of data very quickly. They are good at finding unexpected correlations between different data sets. Once these correlations have been uncovered, or data-mined, researchers can go back and try to figure out what caused the correlation.

The problem here is that random correlations in data sets are quite common, especially when you are looking at huge amounts of data. If a researcher administers a treatment to a large number of patients with a range of conditions, data-mining software will likely find statistically significant results, because patterns occur in random data. But just because a computer finds a correlation, doesn’t mean the researcher has actually discovered a cure. Reliance on data-mining is one reason that up to 90 percent of medical studies are flawed or incorrect.

Cyntoia Brown must serve five decades before she’s eligible for release, state supreme court rules

There are similar problems with using computer programs to pick stocks — or to run presidential campaigns. Hillary Clinton relied heavily on an algorithm named Ada to help allocate resources and identify battleground states. The algorithm correctly identified Pennsylvania as a swing state but missed the dangers to the campaign in Michigan and Wisconsin. And of course, Ada couldn’t forecast FBI director James Comey’s last-minute announcement about Clinton in the final week of the campaign. The Clinton campaign trusted Ada to give them an edge, but the algorithm was only as good as the data put into it. Trusting it to set strategy may well have hurt the campaign.

Again, just because computers aren’t taking over doesn’t mean they can’t be dangerous. In his book, Smith notes that Admiral insurance planned to base car insurance quotes on AI analysis of applicant Facebook data. The company boasted that “our analysis is not based on any one specific model,” but would simply troll through data to find correlations between words on Facebook and driving records. In other words, the program would penalize people based on random passing correlations. Liking Michael Jordan or Leonard Cohen, the company said, could impact your car insurance premiums.

Facebook nixed the plan because it violated the platform’s terms of service. But it’s a good example of how trusting computer intelligence can lead to making poorly informed decisions that harm people for no reason.

(Source: nbcnews.com)

After this past week, 5G is starting to feel real



connection means self-driving cars have a way to communicate with each other in real time -- assuming there’s enough 5G coverage to connect those vehicles.

■ How does it work?

5G initially used super high-frequency spectrum, which has shorter range but higher capacity, to deliver a massive pipe for online access. But given the range and interference issues, the carriers are starting to explore lower-frequency spectrum -- the type used in today’s networks -- to help ferry 5G across greater distances and through walls and other obstructions.

The result is that the insane speeds companies first promised won’t always be there, but they’ll still represent a big boost from what we get today with 4G LTE.

■ Where do these carriers get the spectrum?

Some of these carriers already control small swaths of high-frequency radio airwaves, but many will have to purchase more from the government. The Federal Communications Commission is holding an auction for so-called millimeter wave spectrum, which all of the carriers are participating in.

■ Are there other benefits?

The 5G network is designed to connect a far greater number of devices than a traditional cellular network. That internet of things trend you keep hearing about? 5G can power multiple devices around you, whether it’s a dog collar or a refrigerator.

The 5G network was also specifically built to handle equipment used by businesses, such as farm equipment or ATMs. Beyond speed, it’s also designed to work differently on connected products that don’t need a constant connection, like a sensor for fertilizer. Those kinds of low-power scanners are intended to work on the same battery for 10 years and still be able to periodically send over data.

Sounds great, but when does 5G get here?

Verizon launched the first “5G” service in the world in October, but it’s a bit of a technicality.

The service isn’t mobile service, but a fixed broadband replacement. An installer will need to put in special equipment that can pick up the 5G signals and turn it into a Wi-Fi connection in the home so your other devices can access it.

There’s also some debate about whether the service even qualifies for 5G -- it doesn’t use the standards the industry has agreed upon. The company wanted to jump out ahead, and used its own proprietary technology. Verizon argues that the speeds, which range from 300 megabits per second to 1 gigabit per second, qualify the service for 5G designation. Its rivals and other mobile experts dispute that claim.

The launch is extremely limited in select neighborhoods in Los Angeles; Sacramento, California; Indianapolis; and Dallas. (Let us know if you’re one of the lucky few who get it.)

■ OK, but what about mobile 5G?

Verizon says it’ll launch its mobile 5G next year. AT&T is looking like the first company to launch a true mobile 5G service. It plans to launch 5G this year in 12 markets. Last month, it successfully tested a mobile 5G connection in Waco, Texas, using what should be the first consumer 5G device, a wireless hotspot built by Netgear.

Like the Verizon deployment, expect the rollout of 5G in these cities to be extremely limited.

AT&T said it plans to launch in 19 cities next year, including Los Angeles, San Francisco and Las Vegas.

No 5G phones? Can’t I just pick up 5G with my existing smartphone?

Sorry, no. 5G technology requires a specific set of antennas that aren’t available yet. Sprint says it plans to release the first US 5G smartphone next year, which will be built by LG. It’s also working on a 5G “smart hub” with HTC, but as with all of the 5G news so far, they’ve been light on details such as features,

specifications, price or availability.

Many of the phones will use Qualcomm’s X50 modem, which is designed specifically to tap into 5G spectrum.

Generally, 5G smartphones are expected to come out in the first half of next year. Rumors point to Samsung being among the first to build a 5G smartphone. The company reportedly will put 5G in a version of its Galaxy S10. Samsung mobile CEO DJ Koh, however, teased of a specific 5G phone to launch ahead of its flagship.

OnePlus has also said that it’ll be among the first to have 5G in a phone as well, but that device won’t be coming to the US.

Anything I should worry about?

High-frequency spectrum is the key to that massive pickup in capacity and speed, but there are drawbacks. The range isn’t great, especially when you have obstructions such as trees or buildings. As a result, carriers will have to deploy a lot more small cellular radios, creatively named small cells, around any areas that get a 5G signal.

That’s going to annoy anyone who doesn’t want cellular radios near them. With concerns over potential health risks, as well as the possibility some people will see them as neighborhood eyesores, there may be some objections to these things.

Carriers using low-frequency bands may get away with fewer cellular radios, but 5G will almost certainly require companies to further build out their networks.

■ How broadly will 5G be available in 2019?

Here’s the other concern -- 5G might still be a theoretical possibility for a lot of people.

T-Mobile says it’s launching in 30 cities next year, while Sprint will launch in nine cities. AT&T is launching in a dozen markets this year and 19 next year, and Verizon aims to launch next year too, but it’s unclear how wide the coverage will be. Globally, China, Japan and South Korea are racing to build out their 5G networks, with Europe behind as it takes the slow-and-steady approach.

So don’t feel like you need to rush out to buy that first 5G smartphone. Chances are, service won’t be widely available until 2020 or beyond.

Also, while some see 5G helping to improve coverage everyone, rural areas will likely miss out for a while since it lacks the infrastructure to support all of those cell radios.

■ Will it cost more?

That’s unclear. Indications are the carriers won’t likely charge any more, although then-Sprint CEO Marcelo Claure said in March that he saw 5G as a premium service. New CEO Michel Combes declined to comment on pricing.

You’ll remember that LTE didn’t cost anymore when it first came out -- you just needed to buy a new phone. But pricing models could change over time. Since 4G launched, the carriers both took away unlimited plans and brought them back.

Verizon’s home broadband service costs \$50 for wireless subscribers, and \$70 for everyone else. Those are in line with other broadband costs.

(Source: forbes.com)

The crucial link between AI and good data management

Artificial intelligence is unlike traditional software in one very important aspect: It has to learn how to do its job.

This provides a key benefit for product life cycles in that instead of having to wait for coding wizards to manually upgrade their creations once per year (or even less frequently), the system itself can add new tools, create new features and otherwise alter itself to better satisfy user requirements. The downside, of course, is that few AI programs will provide top-flight performance right out of the box; only through continuous use will they come to understand what is expected of them and how best to achieve their objectives.

A key factor in this evolution is the data that AI-driven systems are exposed to. Good data, properly conditioned and placed in the right context, will allow services to make informed decisions and take appropriate actions, while bad data will lead to poor results and steadily diminishing performance.

As an example, consider an AI-driven marketing strategy. A key data point might suggest increased interest in a particular product offering in a certain region or among a certain demographic. But if the data is based merely on webpage views or other anecdotal evidence rather than deep-dive consumer surveys, significant time, money and other resources could be diverted from more productive projects in order to chase an opportunity that doesn’t exist. (For more on AI in marketing, check out How Artificial Intelligence Will Revolutionize the Sales Industry.)

■ Seeing the Problem

To date, however, the enterprise has had marginal success in managing data, particularly unstructured data. According to Corinium, 70 percent of IT and data management teams struggle to meet analytics needs, while nearly 40 percent have trouble maintaining good data quality even though more than half are using cutting-edge hybrid and multi-cloud architectures for their data storage.

On the positive side, however, many organizations are starting to recognize the significance of the problem and are taking steps to address it. More than 90 percent of respondents say they will invest more than \$1 million in new analytics initiatives in the coming year, with



more than 60 percent employing hybrid, multi-cloud strategies to federate data across internal and external infrastructure.

One key problem still to overcome, however, is the need to evolve beyond basic data collection and aggregation to more advanced contextual and relevancy models, says Informatica President Amit Walia. Only by parsing key metadata regarding technology, business, operations and usage can the enterprise foster the kind of “intelligent data” needed to train intelligent algorithms.

But this is becoming harder to do as data volumes continue to explode. Somewhat ironically, many data analysis and management solutions are turning to the same AI and machine learning algorithms that empower the smart applications that end up consuming data and metadata. By making the entire process more intelligent, the enterprise can automate many of the rote functions that currently occupy the bulk of highly paid data scientists’ time, leaving them free to focus on more complex strategic objectives.

■ Data from afar

One thing that every intelligent data management system will need is streamlined connectivity to and from

the cloud. While wide-area networking is becoming increasingly fast, flexible and software-defined, it still lacks the fine-grain management tools to collate, process and transfer data at AI-friendly speeds. This is why NetApp and Nvidia have teamed up to unite the AFF A800 flash platform with the DGX supercomputer. The solution leverages NetApp’s Data Fabric to effectively provide “edge to core to cloud” data control, giving analytics engines an accurate, up-to-date view of the entire distributed ecosystem and direct access to data no matter where it resides or what format it is in.

Retrieving data is only the first step, however. Improving the way the database ingests and interprets data can be equally effective. Pavel Bains, CEO of database decentralization firm Bluzelle, believes blockchain can make a major contribution in this regard, by creating a universal data store that accommodates both structured and unstructured data. This will allow data management teams to provide the deep context that is needed for AI to quickly make sense of it all while at the same time ensuring that critical data is not under the control of any one cloud provider. Blockchain’s use of distributed, peer-to-peer storage nodes all but ensures that data can be made available virtually anywhere at the highest possible speed, all while maintaining high integrity due to its immutable but open ledger approach. (When AI works the way it’s supposed to, it can be a huge help to business.)

AI is a misnomer because it isn’t really intelligent. It cannot intrinsically differentiate between fact and fiction, good and bad, right and wrong. All it can do is consume massive amounts of data and look for patterns that fulfill its programming mandates. If the data is incorrect, or is interpreted incorrectly, the pattern will be skewed and the results will be faulty.

In this light, the real intelligence behind artificial intelligence lies where it always has: the human brain. Only through proper oversight in the collection and preparation of data will AI be able to deliver the greatest benefit to digital services and operations.

The smarter we are about data, the smarter our machines will become in the quest to achieve greater productivity.

(Source: techopedia.com)

Organic food worse for the climate, new study finds

Organically farmed food has a bigger climate impact than conventionally farmed food, due to the greater areas of land required, a new study finds.

The crops per hectare are significantly lower in organic farming, which, according to the study, leads to much greater indirect carbon dioxide emissions from deforestation. Although direct emissions from organic agriculture are often lower -- due to less use of fossil energy, among other things -- the overall climate footprint is definitely greater than for conventional farmed foods.

The researchers developed a new method for assessing the climate impact from land-use, and used this, along with other methods, to compare organic and conventional food production. The results show that organic food can result in much greater emissions.

“Our study shows that organic peas, farmed in Sweden, have around a 50 percent bigger climate impact than conventionally farmed peas. For some foodstuffs, there is an even bigger difference -- for example, with organic Swedish winter wheat the difference is closer to 70 percent,” says Stefan Wirsenius, an associate professor from Chalmers, and one of those responsible for the study.

■ Fertilizers are not used

The reason why organic food is so much worse for the climate is that the yields per hectare are much lower, primarily because fertilizers are not used. To produce the same amount of organic food, you therefore need a much bigger area of land.

The ground-breaking aspect of the new study is the conclusion that this difference



in land usage results in organic food causing a much larger climate impact.

The “greater land-use in organic farming leads indirectly to higher carbon

dioxide emissions, thanks to deforestation,” explains Stefan Wirsenius. The “world’s food production is governed by international trade, so how we farm in Sweden influences

The reason why organic food is so much worse for the climate is that the yields per hectare are much lower, primarily because fertilizers are not used. To produce the same amount of organic food, you therefore need a much bigger area of land.

deforestation in the tropics. If we use more land for the same amount of food, we contribute indirectly to bigger deforestation elsewhere in the world.”

Even organic meat and dairy products are -- from a climate point of view -- worse than their conventionally produced equivalents, claims Stefan Wirsenius.

■ Organic meat and milk

“Because organic meat and milk production uses organic feed-stock, it also requires more land than conventional production. This means that the findings on organic wheat and peas in principle also apply to meat and milk products. We have not done any specific calculations on meat and milk, however, and have no concrete examples of this in the article,” he explains.

The researchers used a new metric, which they call “Carbon Opportunity Cost,” to evaluate the effect of greater land-use contributing to higher carbon dioxide emissions from deforestation. This metric takes into account the amount of carbon that is stored in forests, and thus released as carbon dioxide as an effect of deforestation. The study is among the first in the world to make use of this metric.

“This is a big oversight, because, as our study shows, this effect can be many times bigger than the greenhouse gas effects, which are normally included. It is also serious because today in Sweden, we have politicians whose goal is to increase production of organic food. If that goal is implemented, the climate influence from Swedish food production will probably increase a lot.”

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

Time travel is technically possible, team says

The concept of time travel has always captured the imagination of physicists and laypersons alike. But is it really possible? Of course it is. We're doing it right now, aren't we? We are all traveling into the future one second at a time.

But that was not what you were thinking. Can we travel much further into the future? Absolutely. If we could travel close to the speed of light, or in the proximity of a black hole, time would slow down enabling us to travel arbitrarily far into the future. The really interesting question is whether we can travel back into the past.

I am a physics professor at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, and first heard about the notion of time travel when I was 7, from a 1980 episode of Carl Sagan's classic TV series, “Cosmos.” I decided right then that someday, I was going to pursue a deep study of the theory that underlies such creative and remarkable ideas: Einstein's relativity. Twenty years later, I emerged with a Ph.D. in the field and have been an active researcher in the theory ever since.

Now, one of my doctoral students has just published a paper in the journal Classical and Quantum Gravity that describes how to build a time machine using a very simple construction.

Imagine you're traveling along this loop; that means that at some point, you'd end up at a moment in the past and begin experiencing the same moments since, all over again -- a bit like *deja vu*, except you wouldn't realize it. Such constructs are often referred to as “closed time-like curves” or CTCs in the research literature, and popularly referred to as “time machines.”

Time machines are a byproduct of effective faster-than-light travel schemes and understanding them can improve our



understanding of how the universe works.

The general conclusion that has emerged from previous research, including Thorne's and Hawking's, is that nature forbids time loops. This is perhaps best explained in Hawking's “Chronology Protection Conjecture,” which essentially says that nature doesn't allow for changes to its past history, thus sparing us from the paradoxes that can emerge if time travel were possible.

■ The course of history

Perhaps the most well-known amongst these paradoxes that emerge due to time travel into the past is the so-called “grandfather paradox” in which a traveler goes back into the past and murders his own grandfather. This alters the course of history in a way that a contradiction emerges: The traveler was never born and therefore cannot exist.

There have been many movie and novel plots based on the paradoxes that result from time travel -- perhaps some of the most popular ones being the “Back to the Future” movies and “Groundhog Day.”

Mallory's model consists of two super long cars -- built of material that is not exotic, and have positive mass -- parked in parallel. One car moves forward rapidly, leaving the other parked. Mallory was able to show that in such a setup, a time loop can be found in the space between the cars.

(Source: Newsweek)

Fireball that exploded over Greenland shook Earth, triggering seismic sensors

When a blazing fireball from space exploded over Earth on July 25, scientists captured the first-ever seismic recordings of a meteor impact on ice in Greenland.

At approximately 08:00 P.M. local time on that day, residents of the town of Qaanaaq on Greenland's northwestern coast reported seeing a bright light in the sky and feeling the ground shake as a meteor combusted over the nearby Thule Air Base.

But the fleeting event was detected by more than just human observers, according to unpublished research presented Dec. 12 here at the annual conference of the American Geophysical Union (AGU).

Seismographic equipment, which had been installed near Qaanaaq just a few months earlier to monitor how ground shaking affected the ice, also recorded the fiery meteor blast. The Qaanaaq fireball provided scientists with the first evidence of how an icy environment -- and, possibly, a distant ice-covered world -- could respond to a meteor impact.

The first sign of the meteor was a brilliant flash in the sky over Greenland; the meteor was at its brightest at an altitude of approximately 27 miles (43 kilometers) above the ground, and it was traveling at nearly 54,000 mph (87,000 km/h), according to the International Meteor Organization (IMO).

■ Calculated impact energy

When the meteor exploded over Thule Air Base, the U.S. Air Force's northernmost base, it was like a bomb going off. With a calculated impact energy of 2.1 kilotons of TNT, this blast was the second-most-energetic fireball of the year, Live Science previously reported. A map of the impact site was shared on Twitter on July 31 by Ron Baalke of the Solar System Dynamics



group at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (and a “space explorer,” as he describes himself in his Twitter bio).

Researchers with the Seismometer to Investigate Ice and Ocean Structure (SIIOS) at the University of Arizona had installed an array of seismometers about 43 miles (70 km) north of Qaanaaq.

Recordings captured by the seismic sensors were interpreted by two Danish Seismological Network broadband stations in Greenland: TULEG (Station Thule) and NEEM (Station Eemian). The scientists were then able to identify a seismic event that matched the arc of the traveling ground waves and estimate the impact point of the fireball, the researchers reported at AGU.

They pinpointed the epicenter of the event near Humboldt glacier on the Greenland ice sheet, and seismic equipment picked up tremors from the impact location as far as 218 miles (350 km) away.

But their findings also have implications that extend beyond Earth. This seismic event was the first-ever recorded analog for impact events on ice-covered worlds -- such as frozen Europa, which is a moon orbiting Jupiter, and frigid Enceladus, an icy moon of Saturn -- and these findings “will inform impact science across objects throughout the Solar System,” the researchers said.

(Source: Live Science)

Scientists overhaul corn domestication story with multidisciplinary analysis

Smithsonian scientists and collaborators are revising the history of one of the world's most important crops. Drawing on genetic and archaeological evidence, researchers have found that a predecessor of today's corn plants still bearing many features of its wild ancestor was likely brought to South America from Mexico more than 6,500 years ago. Farmers in Mexico and the southwestern Amazon continued to improve the crop over thousands of years until it was fully domesticated in each region.

The findings, reported Dec. 13 in the journal Science, come from a multidisciplinary, international collaboration between scientists at 14 institutions.

Their account deepens researchers' understanding of the long, shared history between humans and maize, which is critical for managing our fragile relationships with the plants that feed us, said Logan Kistler, curator of archeogenomics and archeobotany at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and lead author of the study.

“It's the long-term evolutionary history of domesticated plants that makes them fit for the human environment today,” he said.

■ The future of corns

“Understanding that history gives us tools for assessing the future of corn as we continue to drastically reshape our global environment and increase our agricultural demands on land around the globe.”

The history of maize begins with its wild ancestor, teosinte. Teosinte bears little resemblance to the corn eaten



today: Its cobs are tiny and its few kernels are protected by a nearly impenetrable outer casing. In fact, Kistler said, it's not clear why people bothered with it all. Over time, however, as early farmers selected for desirable traits, the descendants of the wild plant developed larger cobs and tenderer, plentiful kernels, eventually becoming the staple crop that maize is today.

For years, geneticists and archaeologists have deduced

that teosinte's transformation into maize began in the tropical lowlands of what is now southern Mexico about 9,000 years ago. The teosinte that grows wild in this region today is more genetically similar to maize than teosinte elsewhere in Mexico and Central America -- though all remain separated from the domesticated crop by hundreds of genes.

■ Other resilient plants

In the southwest Amazon and coastal Peru, microscopic pollen and other resilient plant remains found in ancient sediments indicate a history of fully domesticated maize use by around 6,500 years ago, and researchers initially reasoned that the fully domesticated plant must have been carried there from the north as people migrated south and across the Americas.

“As far as we could tell before conducting our study, it looked like there was a single domestication event in Mexico and that people then spread it further south after domestication had taken place,” Kistler said.

But a few years ago, when geneticists sequenced the DNA of 5,000-year-old maize found in Mexico, the story got more complicated. The genetic results showed that what they had found was a proto-corn -- its genes were a mixture of those found in teosinte and those of the domesticated plant. According to the ancient DNA, that plant lacked teosinte's tough kernel casings, but this proto-corn had not yet acquired other traits that eventually made maize into a practical food crop.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Astronomers detect a planet, evaporating away at record speed

There's a kind of exoplanet out there that is suspiciously rare. We call them “hot Neptunes”, and only a few have been discovered among the 3,869 confirmed exoplanets.

But astronomers have made an eye-watering discovery of an evaporating planet that could prove to be the missing link. Called Gliese 3470 b, this planet is losing its atmosphere at a staggering rate, faster than any we've observed before.

Judging by how rapidly this planet is vanishing, it lends weight to the hypothesis that the reason we've seen so few hot Neptunes is because they've actually shrunk into mini-Neptunes - one of the most common kinds of exoplanet discovered by the Kepler mission.

The “question has been, where have the hot Neptunes gone?” said astronomer Vincent Bourrier of the University of Geneva in Sauverny, Switzerland. “If we plot planetary size and distance from the star, there's a desert, a hole, in that distribution. That's been a puzzle.”

A hot Neptune is pretty much what it sounds like. A giant planet, around the size and mass of Neptune or Uranus, but much, much closer to its host star - closer than the distance between Earth and the Sun. Therefore, it's also hotter, with an atmospheric temperature of around 927 degrees Celsius (1,700 Fahrenheit).

There are other Neptune-ish planets out there, but they're generally found orbiting much farther from their star. So either hot Neptunes are just rare in general; or they do form, but then they vanish somehow.

Gliese 3470 b (GJ 3470b for short) is not the only evaporating planet we've found. There's also Gliese 436 b, which was actually spotted leaking a few years ago, but not at a particularly fast rate.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Virgin galactic rocket ship reaches space, a milestone in space tourism

A Virgin Galactic spacecraft flew more than 50 miles above the Mojave Desert in California on Thursday morning, climbing into the edge of space for about a minute, a crucial milestone in the race to make big-business space tourism a reality.

The craft, SpaceShipTwo, soared at speeds topping out at 2.9 times the speed of sound -- around 2,200 miles per hour -- through nearly three layers of Earth's atmosphere to reach space, the company said.

SpaceShipTwo topped out at an altitude of 51.4 miles, just surpassing the Federal Aviation Administration's definition of where space begins but lower than the widely accepted boundary of 62 miles.

Thursday's accomplishment gave Richard Branson, the British billionaire who started Virgin Galactic in 2004 with the objective of ferrying tourists on short flights into space, a victory in the highly competitive but elusive contest of commercial space tourism. SpaceShipTwo had two people on board, both pilots in the cockpit, but carried research payloads that simulated the weight of carrying passengers.

“Today, as I stood among a truly remarkable group of people with our eyes on the stars, we saw our biggest dream and our toughest challenge to date fulfilled,” Mr. Branson, who witnessed the flight at the Mojave Air & Space Port in California, said in a statement.



The SpaceShipTwo craft, named VSS Unity, became the first Virgin Galactic rocket ship to reach space, but it was not the first private crewed spacecraft to soar to those heights. More than 14 years ago, a rocket ship operated by Mojave Aerospace Ventures, which later licensed its technology to Mr. Branson, ascended to an altitude of 69.7 miles. But in the following years, that promise soon faded. Private citizens were flown to the International Space Station, but commercial flights did not materialize amid setbacks in the industry, including the fatal crash of a previous SpaceShipTwo in 2014.

(Source: The NYT)

There's a massive ecosystem twice the size of the world's oceans beneath our feet

There's a vast and untouched ecosystem bristling with lifeforms that have never seen the light of day. It's bigger than all of the Earth's oceans. And it's beneath our very feet.

That's the startling conclusion of a 10-year study by 1,200 scientists from around the world after probing miles into the Earth's subsurface -- and finding a brave new world buried deep within the one we know.

“It's like finding a whole new reservoir of life on Earth,” Karen Lloyd, a professor at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, tells The Guardian. “We are discovering new types of life all the time. So much of life is within the Earth rather than on top of it.”

In all, researchers estimate the subsurface hosts anywhere from 15 billion to 23 billion tons of microorganisms. That's several hundred times more than all the mass of every human on the planet put together.

How could life thrive in those suffocating depths? Well, it depends on what we're looking for. The denizens of the subsurface aren't your garden variety life forms.

Take the barbed Altiarchaeales, for example. Oft-referred to as “microbial dark matter,” these single-celled organisms, like bacteria, don't have a nucleus, but rather just a single chromosome. Nonetheless, they're crucial players on the microbial stage -- found at the bottom of the sea amid hydrothermal vents that reach a piping hot 121 degrees Celsius.

In fact, the researchers note, 70 percent of the planet's bacteria and archaea call the subsurface home. Another kind of archaea just now making itself known to surface dwellers is the methanogen, a microorganism that manages to create methane out of nearly nothing at all.

The “strangest thing for me is that some organisms can exist for millennia. They are metabolically active but in stasis, with less energy than we thought possible of supporting life,” Lloyd told The Guardian.

(Source: natureworldnews.com)

Tehran Organic Week Festival opens

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 11th Tehran Organic Week Festival, aiming to increase public awareness about healthy food and fruits, kicked off on Thursday at Tehran’s Goftogu Park, Mehr news agency reported.

The 10-day event is attended by 120 domestic producers of organic products.



Saeed Rad, managing director of Tehran Fruit Markets Organization affiliated to the municipality, said on Thursday that organic products are costlier than the other products and such events would pave the way for encouraging the public to choose these healthier products despite their price.

The event also puts spotlight on buying organic products for Yalda Night celebrations this year.

Shab-e Yalda (Yalda Night), which falls on December 21, is known as the longest and darkest night of the year, and marks the last eve of autumn and the beginning of winter. Guests are usually served with nuts and fresh fruits such as watermelon, pomegranates, and persimmon.

LEARN ENGLISH

Wedding Planning

A: Trina, will you marry me?
B: Yes! Yes! And yes! Jared of course I'll marry you!
A: Oh Babe, I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with you! I can't wait for all the adventures we're going to have, for all the fights and the laughter. I can't wait to grow old and **wrinkly** with you.

B: Oh Jared! I can't wait for our wedding! I hope you don't mind, but I've already chosen a date! Six months from now in the summer! Melissa saw you buying the ring last month so I've had plenty of time to start planning!

A: She what?

B: Oh don't worry sweetie, I didn't know when you were going to **propose**. It was still a nice surprise! As I was saying, I've got it all planned out. There's almost nothing left to do! I wrote up our guest list and we will have **roughly** four hundred guests attending.

A: four hundred?

B: No need to **sweat** it my parents agreed to pay for most of the wedding, which is going to be low budget anyway. So roughly four hundred people, which means that the hall at Northwood Heights will be our reception **venue**. I thought it would be nice if we had the wedding at your parents' church and my uncle of course would be **officiating**. We'll meet with him soon for some pre-wedding counseling. The music for the wedding ceremony was a **no-brainer**. My step-sister and her **string quartet** will take care of that. My cousin will be the official photographer. I thought it would also be nice if his daughter could sing a solo. Did you know that she's going to be a professional opera singer?

A: Ah...
B: And then of course the ladies at the church would love to be our **caterers** for the **banquet** and we'll get the Youth Group to serve us. I was thinking that your friend's band could be our entertainment for the night. Though they might have to **tone it down** a bit. Or we could hire a DJ. Your sister's husband could get us a discount with that company that does the **décor** at weddings. What's their name again? I was thinking that we could have an island paradise- themed wedding and our theme color would be a soothing blue like Aquamarine. And there will be a huge seashell on the wall behind the **podium**. What do you think of our wedding **favors**? Who else am I missing? Oh, your uncle could be our **florist** and his wife could make our wedding cake!

A: Wow.
B: See? It's going to be wonderful! Oh this wedding is going to be everything I ever dreamed of.
A: If I survive the next six months.

■ **Key vocabulary**
wrinkly: having a lot of wrinkles, old
propose: ask someone to marry you
roughly: about, approximately, not exactly
don't sweat it: used to tell someone not to worry about something
venue: the place where an event takes place
officiate: to perform official duties, especially at a religious ceremony
no-brainer: something so simple as to require no thought
string quartet: a chamber music ensemble consisting of first and second violins, viola, and cello
caterer: someone who provides food and service
banquet: a formal dinner for many people on an important occasion
tone something down: to reduce the effect of something
décor: the way something is decorated
podium: a small raised area for a performer, speaker, or musical conductor to stand on
favor: souvenir with a small gift in given to a guest
florist: someone who grows and deals in flowers
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
unexpected: to be surprised by a given situation
nervous: to have anxiety
overwhelmed: to have an excess of emotions
(Source: irlanguage.com)



3,404 traffic-related deaths occurred last winter: traffic police chief

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Last winter, 3,404 traffic-related deaths happened in Iran, traffic police chief Taqi Mehri said on Thursday.

There are some 500 mountain passes in Iran of which 100 usually get snow in winter and with regard to the fact that this year precipitations have increased respectively driving in such slippery and icy is different from other seasons, Tasnim news agency quoted Mehri as saying.

He made the remarks over a road traffic drill marking the beginning of the winter traffic scheme, with the purpose of increasing road safety during cold weather. The scheme will end on March 13.

“Drivers must be carrying winter equipment for winter driving and should make sure the vehicle they are driving is ready for winter.”

Moreover, they must check the roads condition before hitting the road, he said, regretting that last year about 76 percent of the car crashes in winter were caused by over speeding, careless overtaking, distracted driving and drowsy driving.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mehri highlighted that in order to monitor the roads nationwide some 6,000 more traffic enforcement cameras must be installed.

Since the installment of 2,000 traffic enforcement cameras in roads the number of fatalities has decreased sharply, he added.

Last year (March 2017-Macrh 2018), approximately 16,200 individuals lost their lives in 6,000 fatal road crashes, he said.

“This means that some 3,000 who have violated traffic laws are held responsible for the car accidents while 3,000 were not at fault,” he stated.



Last year (March 2017-Macrh 2018), approximately 16,200 individuals lost their lives in 6,000 fatal road crashes, Mehri said.

There are some 33 million vehicles in the country and reckless drivers who are violating the laws must be punished and using new technologies to control such high risk driving behaviors is a must, Mehri concluded.

Meanwhile, Ayoub Soleimani, deputy commander of the Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran (abbreviated as NAJA), said on Thursday that inadequate traffic management and road safety equipment, sub-standard vehicles, etc. are stopping the trend of declining traffic-related accidents

and maybe they contribute to increased road crashes in the future.

“We strived to decrease 27,000 deaths occurred in the year 1385 (March 2006-March 2007) to 16,000 last year (March 2017-March 2018),” Soleimani explained.

The traffic-related deaths decreased by 45 percent over the aforesaid period, he added.

Within the framework of the sixth five-year development plan (2016-2021) such deaths should be dropped by 30 percent, he highlighted.

2,400 students suffering autism attend schools nationwide

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Some 2,400 students suffering autism are attending schools nationwide, director general for special schools organization affiliated with Education Ministry has said.

The curriculum for such students is meticulously designed, Fars news agency quoted Majid Qadami as saying on Friday.

The number of students with autism has grown from 2,000 since last year (March 2017-18), Qadami, said, adding that “we are trying to set up a school for students with autism in each province.”

Currently there are 20 schools for these students nationwide, he added.

The ministry has taken measures for autistic students who can attend schools, but those autistic people with the most significant symptoms or profound autism are covered by Welfare Organization, he concluded.

There are five schools special for autistic boy students in Tehran, but there existed no school for girls suffering



the disease in the capital. The first school for autistic girls was planned to be opened by the new school year (September 23) in Tehran, however, the project was delayed for almost three weeks.

Climate change: More than 1000 institutions pledge to withdraw investment from fossil fuels

Governments, universities and banks have quit fossil fuels in their hundreds after a global campaign to convince institutions to pull their investments.

A milestone achievement has been announced at key climate talks taking place in Poland as the initiative persuaded 1,000 institutions opting to divest from coal, oil, and gas companies.

The total sum of money being withdrawn since the campaign began in 2012 is now approaching \$8 trillion (£6.3 trillion).

Pressure is mounting for nations and businesses to eradicate fossil fuels altogether after scientists warned it was the only way to avoid disastrous global warming within decades.

However, efforts to arrive at international agreements have stalled at the COP24

summit as negotiators failed to reach a compromise on issues like green finance.

“While diplomats at the UN climate talks are having a hard time making progress, our movement has changed how society perceives the role of fossil fuel corporations and is actively keeping fossil fuels in the ground,” said May Boeve, executive director of 350.org, the group running the campaign.

Pledges to divest from fossil fuels now span 37 countries, and include major capital cities such as New York, as well as mainstream banks and insurance companies.

In July Ireland became the world's first country to make a pledge to sell off the fossil fuel components in its €8bn (£7.2bn) national investment fund.

Meanwhile hundreds of MPs from across

the political spectrum in the UK have called for fossil fuel investments to be dropped from their pension fund.

Faith organisations such as the Quakers and the Church of England have led the charge, accounting for nearly 30 per cent of the divesters.

“This is a moral movement as well as a financial one,” said 350.org organiser Nico Haeringer, who supports divesting groups around the world.

“Just five years ago we had 181 divestment commitments and \$50bn shifted away from polluting industries and today we're over 1000 and approaching \$8tn.”

Miriam Frank, a community organizer of a local campaign, attended the announcement at COP24.

“Divesting the Hebrew University's

However, regarding the current road conditions and also poor weather in the current winter, it will be a difficult year for road traffic control, he warned.

According to World Health Organization there were 1.25 million road traffic deaths globally in 2013 and low- and middle-income countries had higher road traffic fatality rates per 100,000 population. Almost half of all deaths on the world's roads are among those with the least protection – motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians.

■ Winter driving tips

Planning and preventative maintenance are important year-round—but especially when it comes to winter driving.

United States Department of Transportation advises that before starting your trip check the weather, road conditions, and traffic. Moreover, familiarize yourself with directions and maps before you go.

You should also keep the following in your vehicle: Snow shovel, broom, and ice scraper. Abrasive material such as sand or kitty litter, in case your vehicle gets stuck in the snow. Jumper cables, flashlight, and warning devices such as flares and emergency markers. Blankets for protection from the cold. A cell phone with charger, water, food, and any necessary medicine (for longer trips or when driving in lightly populated areas).

Know whether your vehicle has an antilock brake system and learn how to use it properly. Antilock brake systems prevent your wheels from locking up during braking. If you have antilock brakes, apply firm, continuous pressure to the brake pedal. If you don't have antilock brakes, you may need to pump your brakes if you feel your wheels starting to lock up.

Mohsen Ghafourian, deputy director for educational planning department of the Special Education Organization, said in June that one of the best schools for children suffering autism, equipped with the standards facilities in Iran, has been set up in Khuzestan province, southwestern Iran, and the second one is under construction and some autism schools are under construction in other provinces, including Qazvin, Kermanshah, and Khorasan Razavi.

Autism is a complex neurobehavioral condition that includes impairments in social interaction and developmental language and communication skills combined with rigid, repetitive behaviors. Because of the range of symptoms, this condition is now called autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

According to the latest statistics released by World health Organization 1 in 160 children has an autism spectrum disorder. In Iran, out of every 150 births, one child suffers autism spectrum disorder. It is anticipated that nearly 30,000 children under age five are suffering autism in the country.

investments from fossil fuels contributes to weakening the legitimacy of the fossil fuel industry, by calling them out for the harm they cause to our planet and the exploitation of people,” she said.

The campaigners said their goals were to get millions of people directly involved in fighting against climate change, and reduce the power of the fossil fuel industry over politicians and climate policy.

They say that early reports suggest divestment is already having an impact on fossil fuel share prices, and may have helped accelerate a decline in coal.

Nations are expected to set firm targets to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 at the latest, and by this date 350.org wants to achieve \$12tn in divested assets.

(Source: *The Independent*)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → چ

11 provinces hit by flood, 4 gone missing

Four have, unfortunately, gone missing in floods hitting 11 provinces across the country over the past three days, Rescue and Relief Organization head Morteza Salimi said on Sunday.

Provinces of Isfahan, Ilam, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Khuzestan, Fars, Kermanshah, Gilan, Lorestan, Mazandaran, and Sistan-Baluchestan are inundated by flood, YJC quoted Salimi as saying. Some 307 received relief services in the aforesaid provinces, Salimi, said, adding that sadly 4 individuals have gone missing in the northern province of Gilan.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“para-”

■ **Meaning**: beside

■ **For example**: Ambulances, each staffed by one **paramedic** and one emergency medical technician, must arrive within 12 minutes under the new standards.

PHRASAL VERB

Con somebody out of something

■ **Meaning**: to get money from someone by deceiving them

■ **For example**: He conned me out of £300.

IDIOM

Sit tight

■ **Explanation**: to wait patiently without taking any immediate action

■ **For example**: I know you're anxious to hear how you did, but just sit tight—they'll let you know the results when they're ready.

Truce agreement victory for Yemeni nation: Abdulsalam

Yemen's Ansarullah (Houthi) movement says a ceasefire agreed between the warring sides in Yemen is a victory for the war-torn country as it will stop the House of Saud regime attacks on the strategic city of Hudaydah.

Ansarullah chief negotiator Mohammed Abdulsalam made the remarks in an interview with Al-Masirah TV, shortly after the warring parties reached a ceasefire agreement after days of the United Nations-brokered talks in Sweden.

Based on the deal, "the existing local authorities will be officially in charge of controlling the city and establishing security there under the supervision of the UN," Abdulsalam said.

The Ansarullah delegation and Saudi regime-backed former government agreed that the UN would play a "leading role" in Hudaydah, which is currently controlled by the Ansarullah.

They also agreed to reopen the airport in the capital Sana'a, which was shuttered last year after numerous attacks by Saudi Arabia.

The Riyadh-backed side, which represented former Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi in the Stockholm talks, said on Friday that the Ansarullah must hand over the key port.

However, Abdulsalam strongly rejected the proposal, saying Hudaydah must be kept apart from the military conflict, and that a government should be formed first before all parties are disarmed.

Forces loyal to Hadi and the Saudi regime-led mercenaries were forced to sit for talks with the Ansarullah movement after their massive operation to seize the port city of Hudaydah failed.

The House of Saud regime and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) had deployed about 10,000 troops to Yemen's west coast after repeated campaigns to seize Hudaydah were thwarted by the Ansarullah and their allies.

Ansarullah calls the truce deal a defeat for the Saudis as it stops the aggression, allows existing local protectors who thwarted the Saudi offensive to be in charge of the city, and allows the Yemeni nation to regain their access to food, medicine, and other basic supplies.

Around 14 million people have been pushed to the brink of starvation since the Saudi regime war began in 2015, according to the UN.

■ Cessation of Saudi aggression

In his remarks, Abdulsalam said there is no sign that the Saudis are going to stop their aggression against the innocent people of Yemen despite the ceasefire deal.

One of the articles of the draft agreement proposed by the Ansarullah delegation is "the complete cessation of military actions in Yemen," but the Saudi side is rejecting it, he said.

"The UN has two options ahead of itself: it should either start the political process from the scratch or begin the political process from the draft version of the framework deal proposed in Sweden."

Abdulsalam also called on the Yemenis to remain vigilant, especially in Hudaydah and Tai'zz, and continue supporting the Yemeni



army and popular committees.

"Those who have shown resistance against 17 countries for four years can achieve a brilliant victory," he added.

The House of Saud regime invaded Yemen in March 2015 in an attempt to reinstall Hadi, who had resigned amid popular discontent and fled to Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia buys the bulk of its weapons used in war from the United States, Britain and France.

The U.S. Senate on Thursday voted to stop the U.S. armed forces from supporting Saudi Arabia in its military aggression against Yemen.

The historic bipartisan vote for the first time invoked Congress' war powers to challenge the U.S. military involvement abroad despite the Trump administration's unwavering support for the Saudi regime.

■ U.S. bills Saudis, Emiratis \$331mn for refueling warplanes in Yemen

Meantime, the U.S. Department of Defense said on Thursday it has sent Saudi Arabia and its main partner, the UAE, a \$331-million bill for the fuel their warplanes have received from American refueling aircraft during the past four years in the Yemen war.

"Due to errors in accounting by the Pentagon, the United States had not properly charged Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for those services," Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the senior Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, said in a statement.

Specifically, the Pentagon is seeking about \$36.8 million for jet fuel and \$294.3 million for flight hours by American refueling aircraft, Cmdr. Rebecca Rebarich, a Pentagon spokeswoman, said.

The United States refueled Saudi regime and Emirati warplanes operating in Yemen from March 2015 until Nov. 11. However, a resolution approved by the Senate on Thursday would keep the Pentagon from restarting that support.

■ 'Peace is possible': Iran, U.S. hail progress in Yemen talks

Elsewhere, the United States and Iran have welcomed breakthroughs in the UN-brokered peace talks between Yemen's warring parties.

The U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo,

in a statement on Twitter, called the ceasefire between the Saudi regime-backed government Hadi and Ansarullah "encouraging".

"The work ahead will not be easy, but we have seen what many considered improbable begin to take shape," he said hours after the UN announced the outcome of the week-long talks in Sweden.

"The end of these consultations can be the beginning of a new chapter for Yemen," Pompeo said, adding: "Peace is possible."

The U.S. provides military support for the Saudi regime-led campaign in Yemen.

The week-long negotiations were the first between Yemen's warring sides since 2016, and ended shortly before the U.S. Senate dealt President Donald Trump a symbolic rebuke by voting to recommend an end to the U.S. support for the Saudi-led coalition.

Bahram Qassemi, spokesman for Iran's foreign ministry, called Thursday's agreement "promising" and said Tehran hoped future negotiations, scheduled for January, would bring about a final agreement.

"This shows that Yemeni groups present in the talks well understand the sorry situation of Yemen's people, and have preferred preventing the worsening of the country's situation and the continuation of receiving humanitarian aid to their own interests," Qassemi said.

Prince Khalid bin Salman, the Saudi regime's ambassador to the U.S., also welcomed the ceasefire in a series of posts on Twitter, saying it would "help bring back security to the region, including the security of the Red Sea, a vital waterway for international trade".

The World Food Program (WFP) said the deal on the Hudaydah port, a key gateway for aid and food imports, was a much-needed boost for its task of feeding millions of severely hungry Yemenis.

David Beasley, WFP executive director, said: "any progress toward peace is good progress, as long as it helps the Yemeni people who have suffered so much in this conflict".

Noting that Yemen imports nearly all its food and about 70 percent of that goes through Hudaydah port, he added that "what all of Yemen needs the most, though, is a

permanent, lasting and full peace".

Other measures agreed in Sweden included prisoner swaps and the opening of humanitarian corridors to Tai'zz, Yemen's third largest city.

A number of key issues remain unresolved, however, and Antonio Guterres, UN secretary-general, said a framework for political negotiations would be discussed at the next round of talks at the end of January.

Meanwhile, Margot Wallstrom, Sweden's foreign minister, lauded the "positive spirit" of the peace talks.

"It takes concessions, it takes compromises and it takes some courage to get these discussions going and get good results in the end," Wallstrom said at the closing of the talks.

■ UN chief: Yemen's Ansarullah, ex-govt. agree to ceasefire in Hudaydah

Elsewhere, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also said the Yemeni warring parties have reached an agreement on a ceasefire in the Red Sea port city of Hudaydah, as a new round of peace talks aimed at ending nearly four years of a brutal Saudi-led war on its southern neighbor came to a close in Sweden.

The UN chief made the announcement on Thursday, shortly after the delegations of Yemen's Ansarullah movement and the country's former Saudi-backed government agreed that the world body play a "leading role" at the vital port, which is currently controlled by the Ansarullah.

"There is a ceasefire declared for the whole governorate of Hudaydah in the agreement and there will be both from the city and the harbor a withdrawal of all forces," Guterres said, adding that after the pullout, the UN would begin facilitating aid access to the civilian population.

More than 70 percent of Yemen's imports used to pass through the docks of Hudaydah.

Hudaydah has, however, been placed under a tight siege since June, when the Saudi regime-led coalition and their allied militia loyal to the government of Yemen's ex-president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, launched a full-scale military push to seize the strategic port city in defiance of international warnings.

The significant agreement came a week after the rival Yemeni sides began peace negotiations, brokered by UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and his team, in Rimbo, a locality near the Swedish capital of Stockholm.

Griffiths, for his part, said on Thursday that the pullout of all forces should take place "within days." He is due to brief the UN Security Council on Yemen on Friday.

Guterres, who arrived in Sweden late Wednesday to attend the closing session, further announced in a press conference on Thursday that both parties had also reached a series of other breakthroughs regarding the bloody conflict in Yemen, including a "mutual understanding" on Yemen's third city of Tai'zz, another hotspot in the war-ravaged country and the scene of some of the most intense clashes between the rivals.

Researcher lists reasons why Iran must focus on its missile power

➔ U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo said that Iran's pace of missile activities has not diminished since the JCPOA and that the United States seeks to reimpose ballistic missile restrictions that were outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 1929. European countries, however, distanced themselves from the United States by saying Iran had been in compliance with the Iran nuclear deal, while at the same time saying the missile tests were in nonconformity with UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorsed the nuclear deal. Meanwhile, China and Russia said Iran's missile tests were not a violation of Resolution 2231.

Iranian officials, including Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, have rejected that there have been any violations, reiterating that the UN resolution does not ban Tehran's missile activities.

One reason President Trump cited to justify his decision to withdraw the United States from the nuclear deal was Iran's missile program. Pompeo also demanded that Iran dismantle its ballistic missile program. Iran has repeatedly rejected calls for dismantling its arsenal, insisting that its defensive capabilities are non-negotiable. Moreover, Iran's Revolutionary Guards warned that if threatened, Tehran would increase the range of missiles to above 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles).

The following interconnected factors shape Iran's missile policies and its defense strategy:

One is the horrific memories of Iraq's invasion of Iran in 1980; hundreds of thousands of Iranians died in an eight-year war bankrolled by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and supported by major world powers, including France, the Soviet Union and the United States. The conflict left an indelible mark in the Iranian political psyche that the country must fight for its survival at all costs.

Second, Iraq's systematic use of Scud missiles to bombard defenseless Iranian cities gave Iran the incentive to begin investing in its ballistic missile program. Over the period of eight years, the Iraqi army launched 533 ballistic missiles on Iranian cities, resulting in 2,300 deaths and injuries to 11,600 Iranians. By the end of war in 1988, Tehran had been attacked 118 times, resulting in 1,600 casualties. In a potential future conflict, Iran can use its inventory to deter and retaliate against an adversary.

Third, the traumatic experience of Saddam Hussein's systematic use of chemical weapons against Iran, and the international community's indifference to such violations, has convinced Iran that it cannot rely on international institutions to deter and punish such flagrant violations. A CIA declassified assessment reveals that Iraq began using chemical weapons early in 1983, only to escalate in 1984. Iraq's 11,000-page report to the UN Security Council listed 150 foreign companies — including from the United States, Germany, and France — that played a role in Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction program.

Fourth, the current imbalance of conventional forces in the region play a critical role in Iran's missile policies. While Iran has been under an arms embargo for decades, its regional rivals, especially Saudi Arabia, have de facto carte blanche to purchase any advanced weapon systems. With defense spending of \$69.4 billion in 2017, the kingdom became the largest arms importer in the world. Meanwhile, Israel, with military spending of \$19.6 billion, is equipped with the most-advanced military hardware. In comparison, Iran's defense spending stood at \$14.5 billion, a fraction of its neighbors'.

While Iran's missile arsenal is the most diverse of its kind in the region, it has voluntarily limited the range of its missiles to 2,000 kilometers. However, Saudi Arabia's Chinese-made DF-3 and Df-21 missiles are reported to have an increased range of 2,800 kilometers (1,740 miles), with some claiming a range of up to 4,000 kilometers.

Fifth, Iran is surrounded by U.S. military forces in the region and a number of nuclear-weapon states, such as Israel and Pakistan. Israel, which has the most hostile relations with Iran, has an inventory of 200 nuclear warheads that are deliverable by ballistic missiles, including Jericho II, with a range of 3,500 kilometers (2,175 miles), Jericho III (6,500 kilometers, or 4,000 miles) and air- and sea-launched warheads.

Last but certainly not the least, over the past four decades, the United States has used economic, cyber and political warfare to isolate and weaken Tehran, and has repeatedly called for regime change in the country. Moreover, the Trump administration has firm intentions to create a new political alliance with six Persian Gulf Arab states, Egypt and Jordan aimed at confronting Iran.

The Nuclear Threat Initiative chaired by former U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz found in a study that between

"Under current circumstances, where the countries of the region are aggressively arming themselves, it is simply folly to expect that Iran will dismantle the backbone of its defense doctrine."

2005 and 2012, when the world powers imposed the most comprehensive sanctions on Iran, the country developed new, liquid-fuel ballistic missiles and tested at least 33 missiles, more than twice the number of missiles tested in the preceding 20 years. From 2012, when Iran-U.S. high-level direct nuclear talks began, until the signing of the deal in July 2015, Iran conducted only one missile test. The study said that in the 2012-2017 period since the negotiations began, Iran decreased the overall number of tests and focused more on solid-fuel short-range missile capabilities rather than intercontinental ballistic missiles. However, the German newspaper Welt am Sonntag reports that Western intelligence services maintain that Tehran, after Trump's departure from the nuclear deal, this year has doubled the number of last year's missile tests.

In such a hostile environment, an acceptable framework to alleviate mutual concerns should address the legitimate security concerns of all parties. Such a framework could include a multilateral arrangement for the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and a regional conventional arms arrangement beneficial to all parties. Otherwise, under current circumstances, where the countries of the region are aggressively arming themselves, it is simply folly to expect that Iran will dismantle the backbone of its defense doctrine.

Guatemala girl, 7, dies in U.S. custody 'of dehydration, shock'

A seven-year-old girl has died after being taken into custody by the United States Border Patrol, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) confirmed on Thursday.

The girl, from Guatemala, died of dehydration and shock eight hours after she was taken into custody, the Washington Post reported.

On December 6, the child and her father had been held by immigration authorities in the U.S. state of New Mexico as part of a group of 163 people who approached the U.S. agents to turn themselves in, the newspaper reported.

Early on December 7, the girl was found to have a 41-degree-Celsius fever and was taken by helicopter to El Paso hospital in Texas where she died, according to the report.

A statement by a DHS spokesperson said: "an accompanied female juvenile detainee began having seizures."

The names of the girl and her father were not released. The agency, which typically provides food and water to migrants in its custody, is investigating the incident to ensure whether appropriate policies were followed, the Post said.

The death of the child is expected to intensify scrutiny over the conditions endured by those held at Border Patrol stations and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facilities under the administration of the U.S. President Donald Trump, who has made toughening immigration policies a central tenet of his presidency and has pledged to build a wall along the southern border with Mexico.

Trump knew hush-money payments were wrong: ex-lawyer Cohen

The United States President Donald Trump knew it was wrong to order election-eve hush money paid to two women who claimed affairs with him, his former lawyer Michael Cohen said in an interview to be broadcast on Friday.

Trump acted because he "was very concerned about how this would affect the election," Cohen told ABC News of the women's allegations in his first comments since being sentenced to three years in prison on Thursday.

He also challenged Trump's assertion in a tweet on Thursday that he never told him

to break the law.

"I don't think there is anybody that believes that," Cohen told ABC.

"First of all, nothing at the Trump Organization was ever done unless it was run through Mr. Trump. He directed me to make the payments, he directed me to become involved in these matters," Cohen said.

When asked if Trump knew they payments to Stormy Daniels and Karen McDougal were wrong, he responded, "of course".

Cohen said he is "angry at himself" for his role in the deals, but that he did it out of "blind loyalty" to Trump, ABC reported.

"I gave loyalty to someone who, truthfully, does not deserve loyalty," he said.

Cohen was sentenced to a total of three years in prison on Wednesday for his role in making illegal hush-money payments and lying to Congress about a proposed Trump Tower project in Russia.

The U.S. District Judge William Pauley in Manhattan sentenced the lawyer to three years for the payments, and to two months for the false statements to Congress. The two terms will run concurrently.

Judge Pauley said Cohen's cooperation with prosecutors "does not wipe the slate



about 4,000 active-duty troops through January.

"When the Trump administration pushed for the militarization of the border, including more border wall construction, they are driving people fleeing violence into the deadliest desert regions," said ACLU's Pompa, calling for a "rigorous investigation" into the girl's death and "serious reforms to prevent future deaths".

"The fact that it took a week for this to come to light shows the need for transparency for CBP."

This summer, the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" immigration policy, which resulted in separating children arriving at the border with their parents, caused a national outcry. The policy was mostly reversed.

(Source: agencies)

clean" of his crimes. He also said that Cohen "appears to have lost his moral compass" and that lawyer "should have known better".

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

Trump denies having had the affairs.

Cohen also admitted to unrelated charges of tax evasion and making false statements to banks.

(Source: agencies)

Gattuso says Milan have only themselves to blame for Europa exit

AC Milan coach Gennaro Gattuso said his team had nobody to blame but themselves after they lost 3-1 at Olympiakos Piraeus and were knocked out of the Europa League in the group stage.

"We gifted the game to Olympiakos," he said after Thursday night's defeat in Athens, where all the goals came in the second half. "We made fools of ourselves ... We were too naive and allowed Olympiakos to get back into the game. We are very upset because we always make the same mistakes again and again."

Gattuso said the seven-times European champions simply went to pieces after missing their chances.

"We had the game in our hands but if you create seven or eight chances in a stadium like this and then fall apart the moment things go wrong, you deserve to go out," he said.

He refused to blame the hostile atmosphere, or refereeing decisions which went against his team.

"You can talk about the referee, about them throwing extra balls on to the pitch and the strange trumpet noise, but we should focus on what we can do to make Milan a better team," he said.

"We have to look at ourselves. They were better than us because they were energetic and determined. I apologise to all the Milan fans around the world for not having achieved our objective".

(Source: Reuters)

Guendogan feels Man City team mate Sterling's pain

The alleged racist abuse of Manchester City's Raheem Sterling by Chelsea fans has rekindled bitter memories for his club mate Ilkay Guendogan, who suffered similar treatment during the World Cup earlier this year.

Sterling was shouted at by supporters behind the goal in City's 2-0 Premier League defeat last Saturday and Chelsea later banned four fans from matches pending a police investigation.

Guendogan, who is of Turkish descent, said he can empathise, having faced jeers in warm-up games ahead of the World Cup after he and former international team mate Mesut Ozil were photographed with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan.

Ozil quit international soccer in July following Germany's group-stage exit in Russia citing "racism and disrespect", but Guendogan has continued to play for the national team.

"It's not easy because I lived it in the summer as well. I know how that feels and it hurts," Guendogan told reporters.

"This is obviously something that doesn't belong anywhere in the world ... we have no other choice but to stay strong and try to go through that period and try to do our best on the pitch. Yeah, to keep being successful, that's what matters."

Sterling, however, did not take the alleged abuse lying down and posted a statement on Instagram last Sunday in which he said newspapers were fuelling racism in soccer due to their negative portrayal of young black players. His comments were echoed by the Professional Footballers' Association and former players.

"I think he (Sterling) got a lot of support this week," Guendogan said. "I think the way Chelsea reacted was good."

"It's something we all have to fight."

(Source: Mirror)

Tokyo, Manchester & London on five-city shortlist to host ATP Finals

Manchester has joined current hosts London on a five-city shortlist to stage the ATP Finals from 2021.

Singapore, Tokyo and Turin have also made the cut after more than 40 cities expressed an initial interest in hosting the season finale.

Manchester lost out to the Chinese city of Shenzhen earlier this year in its attempt to host the WTA Finals - the women's equivalent of the ATP Finals.

A decision on the ATP Finals host will be made by March 2019 at the earliest.

London has hosted the event since 2009 and has drawn a cumulative total of more than 2.5 million spectators to the O2 Arena since then.

It extended its current agreement to host through to 2020 in May 2017. Manchester's unsuccessful plan to stage the WTA Finals was centred on the 21,000-capacity Manchester Arena, the likely venue if it was successful with the ATP Finals bid.

"It has been a highly competitive process, and the candidate cities on the shortlist deserve huge credit for the passion and creative vision they have shown in their respective plans to continue the growth of our showpiece event," said ATP president Chris Kermode.

"With the final shortlist announced, we believe we will be well-placed to determine the next exciting chapter."

(Source: BBC)

Five French league games postponed because of security issues

Five Ligue 1 matches have been postponed - with another three rearranged - because of the security issues in France as games are called off for the second weekend in a row.

The country has seen four weekends of violent anti-government protests - with more demonstrations expected.

Paris St-Germain's game in Dijon on Saturday is one of those postponed.

A minute's silence will be held before the games to honour the victims of the unrelated shooting in Strasbourg.

Strasbourg's players - whose game at Reims on Saturday goes ahead - will wear a shirt without sponsors' logos to pay respect. Three people were killed, with a fourth left brain dead and 12 others wounded in a Christmas market gun attack.

Games off this weekend (to be played at later dates)

Saturday: Amiens v Angers, Nantes v Montpellier, Dijon v PSG

Sunday: Guingamp v Rennes, Marseille v Bordeaux

(Source: Eurosport)

Football agents pick up \$548 million from transfers in 2018



They're the wheelers and dealers, the people that make football transfers happen -- and they're in a lucrative business.

A report released by world governing body FIFA has revealed that intermediaries or agents have been paid a total of \$548 million so far this year across 3,844 international transfers. Since 2013, agents have picked up a total of \$2.14 billion.

The report analyzed data from all global football transfers in the past five years, comparing instances when players and clubs had used an agent for a move to take place.

Close to 20% of international transfers in this five-year period involved an agent, with individual players more likely to use them than clubs.

Earlier this year the work and rivalry of "super agents" Jorge Mendes, Mino Raiola, Jonathan Barnett, Fernando Felicevich and Kia Joorabchian was compared to football's "Game of Thrones."

Mendes represents Juventus' Cristiano Ronaldo, Raiola works with Manchester United's Paul Pogba while Barnett is the agent of Real Madrid's Gareth Bale.

Raiola has said he is friends with "99%" of his clients and goes as far as to call Pogba "family."

"We just want the player to finish his career with the money he earned, and more -- but not less," he said in an interview with the FT.

In terms of countries, Italian clubs most commonly relied on agents for incoming players in 2018 with over 45% of the country's 175

transfers involving intermediaries.

England was second, although agents that were employed by English clubs were the highest-earning, accruing a total of \$155.8 million so far this year.

Agents connected with European clubs accounted for 96% of the money paid to intermediaries in 2018.

When transfer fees have been higher, agents have tended to earn less money from the transaction; between 2013 and 2018, they took an average of 28% of the transfer fee when it was less than \$1 million, but this figure was as low as 7.3% for transfer fees over \$5 million.

English FA chief executive Glenn resigns



The chief executive of the English Football Association, Martin Glenn, has resigned and will leave his role in May of next year, the FA announced on Thursday.

Glenn, a former director at Leicester City, was appointed in March 2015 and oversaw the men's senior team's rise from a poor Euro 2016 campaign to a run to the World Cup semi-finals this year in Russia.

"On behalf of the Board of the FA, I would like to thank Martin for building and leading a senior management team that has transformed our organisation," FA chairman Greg Clarke said in a statement.

"His integrity, commitment, energy and passion for football has underpinned the improvements on and off the pitch. The resulting commercial success has funded hugely significant change in the women's game, St George's Park (development centre), the FA Cup and the national teams."

Glenn's tenure also included World Cup title wins for the men's under-17 and under-20 teams, and a 40 percent increase in FA revenues.

However, he was unable to push through the sale of Wembley Stadium to Fulham chairman and U.S. businessman Shahid Khan, who pulled out of a 600-million pound bid in October.

"I will leave feeling proud of the success of the performance of all the England teams," Glenn said.

"I am confident that we have established,

in St. George's Park, a world class centre which will ensure that the teams will continue to build on their current successes.

"I hope that the FA will be able to build on this by accelerating the breakthrough of English qualified players into the first teams."

Alongside the highs, Glenn also came in for criticism last year for his handling of complaints by senior female players Eniola Aluko and Drew Spence that they had been subject to racism and bullying from former England women's team boss Mark Sampson.

Two independent investigations cleared Sampson of racism and bullying but he was ruled to have made discriminatory remarks, leading to a public apology from Glenn to the two players.

There was also the embarrassment of sacking England men's manager Sam Allardyce in 2016 after 67 days in charge following a newspaper report that alleged he had advised undercover reporters on ways to circumvent restrictions on third-party ownership of players.

Nevertheless, that decision led to the appointment of Gareth Southgate, who led England to fourth place at the World Cup in Russia and then a place in the final four of the inaugural European Nations League, reviving the country's enthusiasm for international football.

(Source: Reuters)

Liverpool face Man Utd test as City look to get back into groove

Jose Mourinho faces a quandary as he prepares Manchester United for a trip to Premier League leaders Liverpool while Manchester City will be keen to show that last week's Chelsea defeat was just a blip.

United have an impressive recent record against Liverpool, unbeaten in eight league games, but away fans will travel to Anfield on Sunday with a sense of trepidation.

Unai Emery takes his Arsenal side, unbeaten in 21 matches in all competitions, to face struggling Southampton while Chelsea also travel to the south coast to take on Brighton.

Manchester City host seventh-placed Everton in the early Saturday kick-off while Tottenham, fresh from reaching the Champions League knockout phase, face Burnley at Wembley. AFP Sports picks out some of the main talking points ahead of the weekend fixtures in the Premier League.

Can Mourinho end Liverpool's unbeaten run?

Jose Mourinho came under fire last year for failing to attack Liverpool's then leaky defence, settling for a 0-0 draw that cost his side momentum after a fine start to the season.

Normally a draw at Anfield would be a good result but defeat could leave United 11 points off the top four if other results go against them.

United scored four goals last week against Fulham but their attacking play has rarely been fluid this season and they are coming up against a defence that has conceded



a single goal at home in the Premier League this season.

In a statistical quirk, Roberto Firmino, Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane will all be looking for a first goal or assist in a Premier League match for Liverpool against United in more than 14 hours of football but few would bet against Salah adding to his tally in his current rich vein of form.

■ **Jesus firing blanks**

Gabriel Jesus is in a slump -- he has not found the net in the Premier League since August despite chances to stake his claim in the absence of Sergio Aguero through injury.

City boss Pep Guardiola has come to the defence of the

lowing "dual representation" -- whereby an agent is paid by a player and a club for the same transfer.

"They are starting to run football. They are certainly sucking tons of money out of football," West Ham owner David Gold recently said.

"We are all trying to pay less, they are doing nothing for football. I can't believe it is even a discussion. Other than agents, everybody else is against them."

London-based agent Michael Di Stefano, an intermediary registered with the FA, has defended the influence agents have in football.

"Players do need more often than not someone to help with the admin stuff," he tells CNN Sport. "Not everyone has the words or know-how to be comfortable when talking money, contracts and obligations."

"If Gianni [Infantino] wants to really set an example, he will cap the fee to a maximum of £1M (\$1.26M), no matter how high the transfer fee, and for all those lower, cap it at 5% [of the transfer]."

"He could also take away dual representation, forcing the club to represent itself via a club secretary, for example."

"You cannot take the agent out of the game, it's ridiculous to even suggest that. We are just people working (oftentimes for free) and offering fair advice about what is a nasty industry filled with inept, inadequate people at all levels, from the bottom to the very top!"

(Source: CNN)

'Majority' back 48-team Qatar World Cup, says Infantino



A "majority" of football federations support increasing the number of teams playing at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar from 32 to 48, FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in Doha on Thursday.

Speaking at a press conference after a three-day FIFA summit in the Qatari capital, Infantino said the idea had widespread backing from associations across the globe.

"We will see," he said. "So far, of course the majority is in favour because 16 more teams to participate, not only means 16 more countries with World Cup fever but also 50 or 60 more countries being able to dream."

"Is it feasible or not, that's the question?"

FIFA has said it will make its final decision in March, at its next council meeting, after the completion of a feasibility study.

It has backed a 48-team tournament to become the norm from 2026, when the World Cup will take place in the USA, Mexico and Canada.

And he said that Qatar would consider the idea of a 48-team World Cup in four years' time.

"There is an openness on the part of Qatar and that is something that I really appreciate," said Infantino.

About any final decision, he added: "Of course, the first partner with whom we are speaking about is the Qataris, the Qatar

federation, the Qatari authorities."

Any decision to extend the tournament would be faced by logistical and political problems.

The 2022 World Cup, the first in the Middle East, will take place over 28 days not the usual 32, as in Russia earlier this year.

Infantino confirmed that changing the number of days is not a possibility in Qatar, so one option would be to host tournament games across the region.

But that is complicated by Qatar being at the center of the worst diplomatic crisis to hit the Gulf in years.

Since June 2017, it has been politically and economically isolated by neighboring former allies, including Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

They accuse Qatar of supporting terrorism and being too close to Iran.

Doha denies the charges and says its rivals are seeking regime change in Qatar.

"Is it feasible to have a few games in neighboring countries, well maybe this is an option," he added.

"Of course, I am not that naive, not to know, not to read the news about what is going on."

"But we are in football, we are not in politics."

More than 70 federations took part in the summit, said Infantino.

(Source: France24)

Persepolis beat Pars Jonoubi, Tractor Sazi beaten by Foolad: IPL

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis football team defeated Pars Jonoubi 3-1 in Iran Professional League on Friday and moved to second place.

In the match held in Tehran's Azadi Stadium in front of about 50,000 spectators, Ali Alipour opened the scoring for Persepolis in the 31st minute and he completed his brace five minutes into the second half.

Omid Alishah made it 3-0 in the 56th minute.

Rouhollah Seifollahi pulled a goal back from the penalty spot in the dying moments of the match.

"First, I would like to congratulate Persepolis for this win. I apologize our

fans since we failed to play good. Persepolis are a strong team and they are AFC Champions League runners-up and also are a team to beat in their home matches," Pars Jonoubi coach Mehdi tartar said after the match.

Earlier on the day, Foolad defeated Tractor Sazi 2-1 in Tabriz. It was Foolad's first match under Afshin Ghotbi.

Saipa also lost to Sanat Naft 2-1 in Abadan.

On Saturday, Sepahan will play Esteghlal Khuzestan in Ahvaz.

Padideh remain top of the table with 31 points over Persepolis on goal difference.

Sepahan will move to top of the table with a draw against Esteghlal Khuzestan.



Bimeh Razi win World Wrestling Clubs Cup

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Bimeh Razi freestyle team from Iran claimed the title of the World Wrestling Clubs Cup on Friday.

The Iranian team won the title for the third time in the three-day competition held in Babol, northern Iran.

Bomeh Razi had already finished in top place in 2014 and 2015.

Bimeh Razi defeated the Turkey's representative 10-0 to win the title.

Earlier in the day, Pas Setaregan Sari defeated a Georgian team 9-1 to finish in third place.

Ukraine came fourth after defeating Kyrgyzstan 7-3 and India beat Hungary 7-3 in the seventh place.

World Wrestling Clubs Cup is an inter-



national wrestling club competition among teams representing member nations of the United World Wrestling (UWW) the sport's global governing body.

The tournament was held on the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran Wrestling Federation in 2014 in Iran.

Iran legend Iraj Danaeifard laid to rest

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, was laid to rest on Friday.

He was buried beside his father Ali Danaeifard, who was one of the founders of Taj SC football club (the club became known as Esteghlal in 1979), in Tehran's Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery.

The funeral was attended by Danaeifard's family, friends and teammates.

Danaeifard died on Wednesday at the age of 67 due to a cardiac arrest in Shiraz's Namazi Hospital.

He was invited to the national team for the first time in 1977 and helped Team Meli 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.

Thailand reveal preliminary squad

Thailand head coach Milovan Rajevac has announced his 27-player preliminary squad ahead of the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019.

The list welcomes back well-known players such as goalkeeper Kawin Thamsatchanan, Chanathip Songkrasin and Teerasil Dangda, among others, to the War Elephants outfit.

Four players will not make the journey to the United Arab Emirates in January, as Rajevac has revealed his intentions to name his final 23-player after a friendly match against Thai League 2's Thai Honda FC on December 26.

"We will have on warm-up game with Thai-Honda on December 26, and I will cut the team down before leaving for the UAE on the 30th.

"I don't want to have a tough game as I want to test the tactics and all the players. At first, we had approached Nepal, but they are not available at the



moment."

Drawn into Group A with host nation UAE, India and Bahrain, Thailand will play their final friendly match with Group F contenders Oman.

"We will also play a warm-up game with Oman behind closed doors in the UAE. This game will be our chance to test our potential for the Group A clashes with the UAE and Bahrain."

Thailand squad

Goalkeepers: Kawin Thamsatchanan, Siwarak Tedsungnoen, Chatchai Bootprom, Saranon Anuin

--Defenders: Korakot Wiriya-udomsiri, Pansa Hemviboon, Chalermpong Kerdkaew, Peerapat Notechaiya, Tristan Do, Mika Chunuonsee, Adison Promrak, Theerathon Bunmathan, Shinnaphat Leeaoh, Suphan Thongsong

●Midfielders: Sasalak Haiprakhon, Supachok Sara-chart, Pokklaw A-nan, Sumanya Purisay, Sanrawat Dechmitr, Tanaboon Kesarat, Thitiphan Puangjan, Chanathip Songkrasin

●Forwards: Supachai Chaided, Teerasil Dangda, Adisak Kraisorn, Chananan Pombupha, Sirod Chatthong

Zidane should take Premier League job – Wenger

Zinedine Zidane should make the next step in his coaching career in the Premier League, according to former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger.

Zidane has been out of work since choosing to leave Real Madrid last summer after guiding the club to a third successive Champions League triumph. Since then, he has been regularly mentioned as a potential replacement for Jose Mourinho at Manchester United.

Despite the former France captain's agent

stating in October a move to England was "not appealing," Wenger believes that is the only league which can give his compatriot the challenge he needs.

"If you want to work at the top level, you have to go to England," Wenger told beIN Sports.

"England is the only country where six clubs can battle for the title. In other countries, you can generally say who'll be champion by December.

"Zinedine is in a complicated situation



because he was at the biggest club in the world, and he can only go to the second biggest club. That means he's at a crossroads.

"Either he goes into a long-term project and he contributes to the construction of a club, or he goes back to a club capable of winning the Champions League."

Wenger has also been without a job since the summer, when he ended his 22-year association with Arsenal after winning three Premier League titles and seven FA Cups.

(Source: ESPN)

Stange: Syria determined to succeed

A year ago Bernd Stange was enjoying retirement, but in less than a month the 70-year-old will be at the helm of a talented Syrian side's push for a best-ever showing at the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019.

In a wide-ranging interview with the-AFC.com, the globe-trotting German boss discussed his return to football, his inside knowledge of Group B opponents Australia and the steady resolve of his playing group.

Stange has seen it all - and had seemingly seen enough when he decided to call time on his decorated career in July 2016 - but the veteran tactician simply couldn't shake his love affair with the game, coming out of retirement to lead Syria's campaign at UAE 2019.

"It was a very difficult decision to make for me and for my family, and I had to think about what I would do in the future," he revealed.

"I only had two options: to feed the ducks in the river in my hometown, to cut roses in my garden, to meet with the grandchildren, or to take responsibility in the most loved sport ever for me: football.

"I took a decision to prepare the Syrian national team, which had qualified for the Asian Cup 2019 in the United Arab Emirates, and I think it was a good decision."

With gardening duties left for another time, Stange is now plotting to be the first coach in history to take Syria to the knockout stage of the AFC Asian Cup, and perhaps further.

Few coaches in the world have the international experience to match a career which has included taking the helm of the national teams of East Germany, Oman, Iraq, Belarus and Singapore, in addition to club sides in Germany, Ukraine, Cyprus and AFC Asian Cup foes Australia.

The 70-year-old has particularly fond memories of his stint under - at the helm of a swashbuckling Perth Glory side from 1998 to 2001 - and has kept a close eye on the development of the Australian game since his departure.

"It's better (now) because they made the step from semi-professional football to full professional football.

A professional league, fantastic stadiums, good facilities, youth development. Everything is better," said Stange, who regularly faced current Socceros boss Graham Arnold in the Australian National Soccer League.

"I can only dream of such a situation as in Australia. (In Syria) we don't have such things, but maybe we have another idea and other strengths, and we have a good team.

"I've followed Australian football over the years and I've been there very often in Perth to see friends and players and that's why I'm very well informed about the progress of Australian football."

It is now two decades since Stange's time in Perth began, but Australia and Syria's connection is far more recent, with their 2018 FIFA World Cup qualification playoff - won in 3-2 after extra time by the Socceros - fresh in the memory.

Despite a gallant effort over two legs, Syria's World Cup dream was ultimately crushed by a combination of Tim Cahill's last two international goals and the woodwork, which denied Omar Al Somah from scoring what would have been a match-winning 121st minute free-kick.

With Australia going on to easily account for Honduras and reach Russia 2018, Syria were left to ponder what might have been, but Stange believes the experience could prove valuable when the two sides meet in their potentially vital Group D Matchday Three clash in Al Ain.

"I saw both games (in the playoff) and finally I felt Syria was a little bit better," he revealed.

"They had the chance to make the qualification, but they missed the opportunities, they had a red card and in the dying minute of the game Omar Al Somah hit the post.

"It's still a strong motivation (for us) and gives our team confidence to face Australia in our group in United Arab Emirates, but we will never make the mistake to underestimate the other opponents - Jordan and Palestine.

"It's quite clear in our team that we want to pass the group stage." Stange admits the ongoing situation in Syria provides unique challenges as a coach, but he is eager to



explain that life, and football, goes on in the nation.

Saudi-based stars Al Somah and Omar Khribin are names known throughout Asia, but Stange insists the Qasioun Eagles will equally rely on players from the Syrian domestic scene, for whom he reserves special praise.

"(The) situation in Syria improved very quickly," he explained. "We have a national league and people are enthusiastic about football in Syria. You have capacity crowds in Latakia, you have capacity crowds in Aleppo and Homs."

"Football is alive in Syria and we are going to watch these matches week after week and there are young talents - maybe more natural talents, not educated in academies with scientists and physios - but very motivated, hard workers.

"They don't care if the pitch isn't in 100 percent condition. They don't care if the food is not on the level of a professional player, but you can achieve something because they are anxious (to succeed).

"These are not pussycats, these are men. This is how I am choosing the players, and youngsters are coming, and coming, and coming again."

Having overcome improbable odds to become a rising Continental force, Syria will now aim to go deep into the AFC Asian Cup knockout rounds, and, in doing so, keep their ultra-experienced coach out of the garden and on the touchline for a long as possible.

(Source: the-afc)

Reading FC face nervy wait over Ezatolahi's Asian Cup involvement

The Iranian midfielder is a provisional squad for the competition in January.

Reading face being without Iranian midfielder Saeid Ezatolahi for a further month due to the Asian Cup.

The 22-year-old, who is on a season-long loan switch to Royals from Russian club FC Rostov, has been named in a provisional 35-man squad for the competition.

National team boss Carlos Queiroz will cut that list down to 23 players on Saturday, December 15, ahead of a training camp in Doha, Qatar.

Ezatolahi, who is one of nine midfielders on the provisional list, is currently sidelined for club and country due to a quad injury he picked up while on international duty back in October.

He has played just four times for Reading since joining at the end of August, but caught the eye with some impressive performances in the midfield.

The Iranian is set to be back at full fitness at the end of this month but his involvement in the Asian Cup could prolong his return to Royals.

The competition, which is being held in the United Arab Emirates, takes place between Saturday, January 5 and Friday, February 1.

Reading have four games in that time, along with two either side and a possible FA Cup replay as well.

It means Ezatolahi could miss up to seven games for his club, depending on how far Iran progress in the competition.

Queiroz's Iran are among the favourites to win the Asian Cup.

(Source: Football London)

Esteghlal coach Winfried Schaefer hits out at referee

TASNIM — Esteghlal coach Winfried Schaefer has criticized the referee for ruling out their goal against Padideh.

Esteghlal were held to a goalless draw by Padideh in Iran Professional League (IPL) on Thursday in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Referee Shahab Zahedifar disallowed Esteghlal goal in the 79th minute but TV replay showed it was a correct goal.

"I don't like to talk about the referees but it's time to talk about the wrong decisions which have gone against us," Schaefer said in the post-match news conference.

"Esteghlal played good during 90 minutes. We scored a goal but the referee disallowed our goal. It was a correct goal," the German coach added.

"I think the referees don't like us," Schaefer concluded.

Korea Republic's Cheon Seong-hoon joins Augsburg

Bundesliga side FC Augsburg have signed Korea Republic youngster Cheon Seong-hoon from Incheon United.

Cheon, 18, joins compatriots Koo Ja-cheol and Ji Dong-won at Augsburg. The striker will start his career with the Augsburg U-19 side.

Augsburg sporting director Stefan Reuter said: "We are pleased to have secured the signing of a promising talent in Cheon Seong-hoon.

"He will join the club in January and begin his preparations at the club in our U19s, so that we can slowly build him up and integrate him into the first team. We are sure Seong-hoon will quickly settle here in Augsburg with support from Koo Ja-cheol and Ji Dong-won."

Cheon said joining Augsburg meant he had fulfilled a childhood dream.

"I am thrilled with my transfer to Germany. It is a dream of mine to play in the Bundesliga and I would like to make this dream come true here in Augsburg."

(Source: the-afc)

Iran, Singapore to develop cooperation on Sports

IRNA – Iran and Singapore will develop cooperation in sports, Iran's Ambassador to Singapore Javad Ansari said.

Ansari met Sport Singapore chief executive officer Lim Teck Yin on Friday.

Singapore is going to cooperate with Iran as part of program of "strengthen evidence-based decisions" towards Vision 2030, its 20-year road map launched in 2012 to improve the lives of Singaporeans through sports.

Ansari said Iranian National Olympic Committee and the country's sports federations are ready to hold joint training camp practices with the Singaporean party.

Carson Wentz dealing with a fracture in his back

NFL Network Insider Ian Rapoport reported Thursday that a battery of tests revealed the Philadelphia Eagles quarterback has a fracture in his back, per sources informed of the injury.

Per Rapoport, the Eagles performed CT scans throughout the season, but none revealed the fracture until now. The team is still determining if there is any risk of worsening the injury if Wentz continues to play.

The QB will not need surgery.

Wentz missed practice as the Eagles sought further information on the back injury. He'd previously been on the injury report with a back injury earlier this season. Coach Doug Pederson characterized the issue as "soreness" on Wednesday. Now we know it's much more than that.

Rapoport previously reported Wentz is expected to miss Sunday's game versus the Los Angeles Rams, and the Eagles could contemplate shutting down the starter for the season. The fractured back makes it more likely Wentz will miss the final three games.

(Source: nfl.com)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Adopt generosity, and avoid vain severity and oppression; for, severity compels people to emigrate, and oppression incites revolt, and puts an end to your rule.

Imam Ali (AS)

Artists from Iraq's Kurdistan hang works at Tehran exhibit

A R T TEHRAN — The Saba Art and Cultural Institute in Tehran is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by a number of artists from Iraq's Kurdistan region.

Fifty paintings by 30 artists, including Hoshyar Saeid, Sattar Ali, Arsalan Ahmad, Forud Baqi, Mahabad Jamal and Ali Jola, have been selected to put on view during the exhibit at the Farshchian Gallery of the institute, Saba announced on Thursday.

Entitled "The Trace of Colors", the exhibition has been organized in collaboration with the Art Bureau office in Iran's Kurdistan and Sulaymaniyah's Haft Range Gallery.

The exhibit will be running until December 20 at the institute located near the intersection of Taleqani and Vali-e Asr Ave.

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Painting

■ An exhibition of paintings by Afra Khakzad is underway at Shokuh Gallery.

The exhibit named "Out of Time" will be running until December 19 at the gallery located at 19 Amir Nuri Alley, North Salimi St. near Andarzgu Blvd.

■ Paintings by Parisa Shabani are currently on display in an exhibition at Vaali Gallery.

The exhibit titled "Traces from the Years of Restlessness" runs until December 25 at the gallery that can be found at 72 Khoddami St., Vanak Sq.

■ Vista Gallery is playing host to an exhibition of paintings by Sanaz Lotfizadeh.

The exhibit entitled "Narrated by Animals" runs until December 17 at the gallery located at No. 11, 12th Alley, Mir Emad St.

■ A collection of paintings by Ghazaleh Mahbub and Salumeh Pezeshkpur is on display in an exhibition at Haft Samar Gallery.

The exhibit runs until December 19 at the gallery located at No. 8, Fifth Alley, Kuh-e Nur St., Motahari Ave.

■ Paintings by Elham Fatemi are on display in an exhibition at Atbin Gallery.

The exhibition will be running until December 25 at the gallery, which can be found at 42 Khakzad Alley, Vali-e Asr Ave. near Parkway Intersection.

■ An exhibition of paintings by Forugh Sotudeh is currently underway at Behnam Daheshpur Gallery.

The exhibit has been organized to raise funds for people suffering from cancer.

The exhibit will be running until December 19 at the gallery located at 13 Marmari Alley, off Masjedi Alley, Jabarian St. in the Farmanieh neighborhood.

■ An exhibition of sculptures and paintings by Azar Sheikh Bahaeddinzadeh is underway at Aria Gallery.

The exhibit will be running until December 24 at the gallery located at No. 10 Zarrin Alley, near Beheshti St., Vali-e Asr Ave.

"Dark Room" named best at Kerala film festival

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian director Ruhollah Hejazi's "The Dark Room" was selected as best film at the 23rd International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) in Thiruvananthapuram, India last night.

The film is about Haleh and Farhad, who together with their 5-year-old son, Amir, have been recently resided in a new complex. Amir is lost in the desert, in front of the complex, however, his parents find him soon. Later, Amir tells his father that someone has seen his body and this makes Farhad very upset and he's looking for a suspect who has sexually harassed his little boy.

The award for best director went to Lijo Jose Pellissery for his film "Ee. Ma.Yau" from India. The film also received the audience award and NETPAC

Award for best Asian film.

Anamika Haksar from India received the best debut director for her film "Taking the Horse to Eat Jalebis" and the FIPRESCI Award for best Malayalam film was presented to "Sudani from Nigeria" by Zakariya, also from India.

Oscar-nominated Iranian director Majid Majidi was the president of the jury of the official competition at the event.

He was honored with a lifetime achievement award at the opening ceremony of the festival on December 7.

Iranian director Asghar Farhadi's latest movie "Everybody Knows" was



Iranian director Ruhollah Hejazi (2nd R) receives the award for best film for his "The Dark Room" during the 23rd International Film Festival of Kerala in Thiruvananthapuram, India on December 13, 2018. (IFFK)

the opening film of the festival.

Five Iranian films, including "Tale

of the Sea" by Bahman Farmanara and

"Dressage" by Puya Badkubeh, were

also on screen at the various sections

of the IFFK.

Salamanca University launches Iranian studies center



A view of Salamanca University, Spain.

A R T TEHRAN — An Iranian studies center opened at the Philology Faculty of Salamanca University in Spain on Wednesday.

The dean of faculty, Vicente Gonzalez Martin, and Iranian cultural attaché Alireza Esmaili attended the opening ceremony of the center, the Persian service of Iran reported on Thursday.

"The establishment of the center is a major turning point in the study of the Persian language and Iranology," Gonzalez Martin said in a brief speech made during the ceremony.

He said that a memorandum of understanding signed between the University of Tehran and Salamanca

University has aroused an interest in Persian language educations in the university over the past few years.

Esmaili also expressed his happiness over the establishment of the center at the University of Salamanca, which is one of few oldest academic centers in Europe.

He said the center will highly help enhance the cultural exchanges between Iran and Spain.

Founded in 1134, the University of Salamanca is a Spanish higher education institution, located in the city of Salamanca, west of Madrid, in the autonomous community of Castile and León. It was given the Royal charter of foundation by King Alfonso IX in 1218.

Cuban ballet star Carlos Acosta stars in own biopic

HAVANA (Reuters) — For Carlos Acosta, the son of a black truck driver in Communist-run Cuba, overcoming poverty, prejudice and politics to become a global ballet legend, write a best-selling memoir and create his own dance company was not enough.

The 45-year-old, who won fame as a teen for his athleticism and virtuosity, this week presented a movie about his rags-to-riches life at Havana's annual film fest that moved audiences to laugh, weep and thunderously applaud.

"This is a Cuban story, so it's not my story only," Acosta said in an interview with Reuters.

"Yuli" uniquely blends a fictionalized account of Acosta's life based on his memoir "No Way Home" with archive footage of the news and him dancing, and original choreographies representing chapters of his past.

The 45-year-old, who retired from the Royal Ballet in 2015, features in a meta-role as himself directing his company Acosta Danza to dance those choreographies in a Havana theater.

The movie, scripted by Briton Paul Laverty and directed by Spaniard Iciar Bollain, received five nominations for the Spanish "Goya" awards on Wednesday.

Political at times, "Yuli" reflects the universal suffering of Cuban families divided by exile and struggling to get by when the



Cuban dancer Carlos Acosta attends the film premiere for "Yuli", a biopic about his life, during Havana's International Film Festival in Havana, Cuba, December 7, 2018. (Reuters/ Stringer)

country went through a deep economic crisis following the fall of former ally the Soviet Union.

The movie, which had its international premiere at the San Sebastian film festival in September, evokes how hard it could be for artists like Acosta to get Cuban government permission to work abroad, often key to them being able to forge a career.

But "Yuli" also celebrates the Cuban education system that provided free ballet training to the descendent of slaves from a rundown neighborhood and features a choreography blasting U.S. imperialism.

The film's emotional core is Acosta's complex relationship with his late father who - unusually given his macho, humble milieu - sent him to ballet school to keep him out of trouble.

Leiden University hosts workshop on Persian and Arabic manuscripts



This photo shows a rare manuscript on display in Hezardastan Hall of the Malek National Library and Museum Institution.

A R T TEHRAN — Leiden University, the oldest university in the Netherlands, has organized a workshop on Persian and Arabic manuscripts.

The workshop was held at the Persian and Iranian Studies center of the university, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Thursday.

Akbar Irani, the director of the Miras-e Maktub Research Center, a Tehran-based organization active in correction and publication of rare Persian manuscripts, and Susan Asili, the director of the manuscript section of the University of Tehran also attended

the workshop.

They gave two papers on the oldest Persian and Arabic manuscripts are preserved at the library of the University of Tehran. The manuscripts carry materials about Islamic philosophers such as Farabi, Jabir ibn Hayyan, and Avicenna.

Professor of codicology at Leiden University, Jan Just Witkam, and senior lecturer in the cultural history of Central Asia and Iran, Gabrielle van den Berg, and a large group of their students took part in the workshop, which was held in collaboration with the Embassy of Iran.

"Mary Poppins" return brings world some magic, cast say

LONDON (Reuters) — The return of Mary Poppins to the big screen brings some much needed magic to the world in uncertain times, the cast of the new film about the beloved nanny said on Wednesday as they premiered the highly anticipated movie in London.

More than 50 years since Julie Andrews won over children - and adults - around the world with her portrayal of the strict but kind nanny, Disney's "Mary Poppins Returns" sees her doing just that, visiting the now-grown up Michael and Jane Banks in their time of need.

Despite cold December weather, the film's picturesque Cherry Tree Lane blossomed outside the Royal Albert Hall venue, with plenty of the blooming plants sprouting up the stairs to a replica of the Banks' house.

British actress Emily Blunt led the cast down a blue carpet, just hours after receiving another award nomination for the role based on the books written by P.L. Travers.

"She has a lot of relevance for people around the world when things feel rather fragile," Blunt told Reuters of the character. "She's a great unifier."

Blunt said she had not spoken recently to Andrews, who won an Oscar for her performance in the 1964 "Mary Poppins" film, but had heard she had seen the sequel.

"I hear she's just seen the film and loved it so that means a lot to us," said Blunt, who like Andrews, sings in the movie.



Dancers perform ahead of the European premier of "Marry Poppins Returns" in London, Britain December 12, 2018. (Reuters/John Sibley)

"I hope that generations to come will sing these songs... They're catchy and wonderful." The new film is set some 20 years after the first film, with audiences now introduced to Michael Banks' own three children.

Lin-Manuel Miranda, the creator of the award-winning "Hamilton" musical, plays lamp lighter Jack - a similar role to Dick Van Dyke's chimney sweep in the original movie.

"Mary Poppins doesn't come along when everything's OK. Mary Poppins comes along when there's trouble," he said. "I feel like the world is in a scary time and so it feels like a movie the world needs right now."

As guests arrived for the premiere, a few miles away British Prime Minister Theresa May was facing a confidence vote triggered by lawmakers in her Conservative party - a ballot she later won.