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Epic 2009 rallies marked

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Large number of people gathered at Imam Hussein Square in Tehran on Sunday, December 30, 2018, to celebrate the 2009 rallies.

Iran, Syria ink long-term economic co-op agreement

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Es-lami and Syrian Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade Mohammad Samer al-Khalil signed an agreement in Tehran on Sunday to expand bilateral economic cooperation in the long term.

On the sidelines of the signing ceremony, Es-lami said a high-ranking delegation led by the first vice-president will travel to Damascus next month to conclude contracts for launching joint projects,

IRIB reported.

The Syrian official, for his part, said financial and banking cooperation was the main theme of the agreement.

It will facilitate trade transactions between the two countries and remove any obstacle in the way of bilateral economic, financial, and banking cooperation, he added.

"The period of the agreement is more than 20 years," he said, adding, "this is for the first time that Syria signs such a strategic and long-term agreement with another country."

Donations for the underprivileged up by 35% in 9 months

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Over the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 21) contributions to the underprivileged increased by 35 percent, Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation director has said.

Despite the financial hardships people are facing the donations have not decreased, Fars news agency quoted Parviz

Fattah as saying on Sunday.

Fattah went on to explain that the charity foundation's budget has been fully received this year amounting to 70 trillion rials (nearly \$1.6 billion).

The budget for last year (March 2017-March 2018) amounted to 40 trillion rials (nearly \$950 million) was also received, he highlighted. **→12**

Assad authorizes Iraqi forces to strike Daesh in Syria

By staff & agencies

Syria's state news agency says President Bashar Assad has authorized Iraqi forces to attack Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group inside Syria without waiting for permission from authorities in Damascus. Sunday's announcement highlights the close relations between the two neighboring Arab countries.

On Saturday Assad received a letter

from Iraq's Prime Minister Abdel-Mahdi calling for both countries' coordination in "fighting terrorism."

■ Iraq says it could deploy military into Syria

Iraq could send troops into neighboring Syria, Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi said, days after the United States said it would withdraw from the war-torn country. **→3**



REPORT

Ramin Hossein Abadian
Mehr News Agency
journalist

Violating ceasefire in al-Hudaydah with Saudi killing machine

The Yemen peace talks were underway in Swedish capital Stockholm between the resistance groups and a delegation from the fugitive government with hopes for a ceasefire in al-Hudaydah.

The agreement, which was the very first between the parties since Saudi military invasion of Yemen, created a glimmer of hope in the hearts of the Yemenis; however, their hope soon faded into bitter disappointment when the Saudi regime continued brutal attacks on al-Hudaydah and civilian homes in the early hours of the talks.

■ Truce lasted only a few hours

The Saudi regime did all in power to break the political agreement in Stockholm's peace talks as they didn't even honor the truce and continued their brutal attacks within few hours of the peace talks.

Yemeni Armed Forces spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Saree said that Saudi fighters bombed more than 40 different areas of Yemen including the city of al-Hudaydah during the first hours of the truce agreement. Since the pact, over 10 days ago, the Saudis have attacked al-Hudaydah 223 times and violated the ceasefire.

■ The United Nations only acts as a watchdog

Since the beginning of the outrageous war against the innocent and defenseless people of Yemen in March 2015, the UN has not taken any of its major organizational, legal and human rights responsibilities towards the Yemeni people. In some way, the organization has only acted as a spectator, because it is under the political and financial influence of the transatlantic allies of Riyadh. Even after the ceasefire agreement, the UN continues to play the same role.

The UN's passivity in the face of the crimes committed by the Saudis and their allies happens when shocking reports of deteriorating humanitarian situation come out every day in Yemen. For example, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, UNICEF, has released a report saying, "More than 11 million Yemeni children are suffering from food shortage, and every 10 minutes a child in Yemen dies from preventable illnesses." **→7**

Ill-planned operation in Syria could land Turkey in quagmire: Turkish analyst

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — Turkish political analyst Semih Idiz believes that any ill-planned military operation by Turkey in Syria can land Ankara in a quagmire.

After President Trump said he would withdraw all U.S. troops from Syria, Turkey's president on Dec. 21 delayed operations against Kurdish forces in northern Syria.

Major players in and around Syria have start-

ed positioning their forces as discussions get underway on how to proceed once U.S. forces vacate the country and their fight against the last remnants of ISIL.

Turkey vowed on Monday that the fight against ISIL would not be slowed by the U.S. withdrawal from Syria, where the Ankara-backed groups reinforced their positions around the potential flashpoint town of Manbij. While Ankara considers PYD and YPG as terrorist groups, these Kurdish groups have been U.S. close partners in Syria in

the U.S. alleged fight against ISIL. To know more about the opportunities and threats of the U.S. withdrawal from Syria for Turkey we reached out to Turkish political analyst Semih Idiz.

Commenting on the opportunities created by the U.S. withdrawal for Ankara, Idiz said, "Turkey will have strengthened its hand against the YPG Kurds in northern Syria because the group, which Ankara considers to be a terrorist organization, will not have the direct backing of a powerful western country." **→7**

We don't necessarily need "religious" theory of IR: Dallmayr

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Fred Reinhard Dallmayr, the emeritus professor of University of Notre Dame (USA), says since modernity is not necessarily anti-religious, and the same is true of IR.

He says, "We do not necessarily need a 'religious' theory of IR."

The former president of the Society for Asian

and Comparative Philosophy adds "we just need a more intelligent and more theoretical theory of IR, one which takes into account more elements."

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ When the religious issues did has been a matter of great in Theorizing of International Relations?

A: Religious issues were deeply involved in IR in the West during the Reformation. The basic principle of the Peace of 1648 was "Who controls

the state, controls religion."

■ Some argue that if the theory of International Relations means a constitutive and critical theory, then bringing religion into International Relations is possible, but if the theory of International Relations is an explanatory-empirical theory, the theorizing religion in International Relations is not possible and, in fact, there is not theological positivism theory in International Relations. What is your opinion? **→7**

Christmas 2018: Iran and Syria show respect, Israel and Saudi Arabia don't

Christmas is a time of goodwill to all men. Or at least it should be. But while the West's Middle East 'bad guys' Iran and Syria, showed the Yuletide spirit, its closest allies, Saudi Arabia and Israel, failed to do so.

Iran is demonized by Western neocons and we're meant to see the country as an evil, 'monster' regime of foaming-at-the-mouth religious fanatics who hate everyone.

So it goes against the dominant narrative somewhat that Iran's Foreign Minister Javad

Zarif tweeted a Christmas message and wished 'peace and joy to all in 2019', on Christmas Eve.

It also goes against the narrative that Zarif, back in September, wished Jews, in Iran and across the world, "a very Happy New Year filled with peace and harmony."

We're told repeatedly that the Iranian 'regime' is 'anti-Semitic', but do 'anti-Semites' wish Jews a happy 'Rosh Hashanah'? If so, it's a rather strange definition.

The Iranian foreign minister also tweeted on

December 26 a message of goodwill to Iran's Zoroastrian community.

Contrast this consideration to people of different faiths from Tehran, with the lack of congratulations on other religious holidays from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A week before Iran's foreign minister was tweeting positively about Jesus, the KSA's Customs Authority was also on the social media platform, confirming that Christmas trees were banned from entering the Kingdom for the festive season. **→13**

Insaakht, at the outset of promoting domestic products: VP

TECHNOLOGY

TEHRAN — Insaakht festival is at the outset of promoting domestic products, the vice president for science and technology Sourena Sattari said, IRNA reported on Saturday.

The closing ceremony of the Insaakht festival, an event focusing on Iranian products and technology, was held on Sunday.

Introducing domestic products need a huge social movement and the festival is a good beginning for promoting Iranian products, he explained.

A new generation of entrepreneurs in Iran are now important part of economy with their innovation and use of technology, he added. **→10**



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ARTICLE

Chris Cook
University College London
professor

Iran's 21st century energy strategy: Banking on energy

Iran approaches the 40th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution at a crossroads.

As Ambassador Ali Shams Ardakani, president of the energy commission at Iran's chamber of commerce, pointed out in a recent article published by the Iran newspaper, in the real world economy of Iran's land and resources, like other producers, is reaching the end of 'easy' oil. In the new era of 'hard' oil, which is more difficult and costly to extract, Iran faces hard choices.

These choices are all the more difficult because of Iran's enforced isolation from the Western financial system and from advanced technologies.

Having now visited Iran a dozen times since 2004, I have observed how sanctions on Iran increased Iran's resilience. Firstly, physical sanctions increased Iran's technological capacity and expertise. Secondly, financial sanctions, not only insulated Iran from global financial shocks, but also prevented capital flight. So the proceeds of Iran's 'easy' oil largely remain hoarded in Iran in the form of property investment and financial assets such as gold and hard currency.

There is a historic opportunity for Iran to mobilize both idle capital, and an underemployed, smart and well educated population to literally energize not only Iran, but the entire region, in an Energy Revolution.

This Energy Revolution requires a 21st century energy strategy and the necessary institutions and instruments to implement this strategy.

Resilience is not a strategy. It is an aim of strategy and policy which leads to security and independence from domination by external forces.

The case of Denmark illustrates in practice how resilience may be achieved after the 1973 Oil Shock – a 400% increase in oil prices – exposed Denmark's 90% reliance on fossil fuels.

Denmark addressed the challenge with a new energy strategy based upon the principle of resource resilience. The Danes mandated that for any given use of heat, transport, power, light and other energy services the use of oil & gas as a commodity would be minimized. **→13**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



No regional decision can be enforced without Iran: official

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Hadi Sadeqi, the Judiciary chief's deputy for cultural affairs, said on Sunday that today no decision can be enforced in the region without the will and involvement of Iran.

Iran has played a key role in annihilating Daesh (ISIL) and other Takfiri terrorist groups in the region and at the same time supporting resistance forces in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, Sadeqi said, according to IRNA.

Today the U.S. has begun to pull out its forces from Syria after seven years and even some Arab countries are reopening embassies in Syria, Sadeqi said.

He added many of these events are results of the prudence of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.



40 best military commanders named

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Forty of the best commanders of the Iranian armed forces were awarded in a ceremony at the Armed Forces Headquarters on Sunday, IRNA reported.

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Mohammad Baqeri, Army Chief Abdolrahim Mousavi, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Second-in-Command Hossein Salami, and Commander of the Khatam-al Anbiya Central Headquarters Ali Rashid attended the ceremony.

The IRGC Navy was named the best unit of the force and the Army Ground Force as well as Army Aviation were also named the best units.



'Aiding Gram cryptocurrency constitutes criminal act'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Secretary of Criminal Content Definition Task Force has said any cooperation with Telegram messaging app to launch Gram, the messaging app's cryptocurrency, in Iran constitutes an action against national security and will be dealt with as a disruption to national economy.

"One of the most important factors in banning Telegram was a sense of serious economic threat from its activities, which was unfortunately marginalized and neglected due to the fuss in the political atmosphere of the country," Javad Javidnia said, Fars reported on Sunday.

Earlier this year, the Judiciary issued an order to ban Telegram to protect national security.



Habibi re-elected Coalition Party chief

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Members of the Islamic Coalition Party have voted to re-elect Mohammad Nabi Habibi as the party's secretary general, ISNA reported on Sunday.

During a meeting, the members of the party also voted to elect Asadollah Badamchian as the chief and Mostafa Mir-Salim as the deputy chief of the party's central council.

They also elected other members of the party's presiding board.

The Islamic Coalition Party is a conservative political party which is the pivotal organization within Front of Followers of the Line of the Imam and the Leader.



Over 4.6 tons of drugs seized

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Iranian police have confiscated 4,650 kilograms of narcotics in Sistan-Baluchestan Province, southeastern Iran, the provincial police chief said on Sunday.

"Following the information received about a large depot of narcotics, the police started an operation," said Mohammad Qanbari, adding that when being chased the drug traffickers opened fire on the police.

Four people were arrested and two Peugeot sedans were also confiscated, Qanbari stated.



No ground for UN to restrict Iran over nuclear program: Russia

POLITICS The Russian ambassador to the United Nations has strongly ruled out the existence of any grounds on which to accuse Iran of a violation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

"On my part, I would like to stress that so far no one has presented to the Security Council any significant facts of the so-called Iranian violations. Therefore, we see no reason even to start a theoretical discussion on imposing restrictive measures against Tehran," Vassily Nebenzia said on Saturday, addressing the UN.

The Russian diplomat reiterated that the U.S. needs to stop pressure and threats against Iran and resume constructive talks with the Islamic Republic.

Regional people won't allow 'deal of century' to be realized: Shamkhani

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, said on Sunday that the vigilant people in regional countries will prevent a realization of "deal of the century".

U.S. President Donald Trump has proposed to establish a Palestinian state with limited sovereignty over around half of the West Bank and Abu Dis as its capital and has called his plan "deal of century".

During a meeting with Ziad al-Nakhala, secretary general of the Islamic Jihad movement, Shamkhani said that "deal of the century" would be a serious hit to Palestinians.

The Zionist regime's media outlets are making efforts to hide crimes against the Palestinians by brutalities of Takfiri groups.

He noted that the resistance front is more successful than ever and will speed up the process of realizing the Palestinians' wish to liberate the occupied lands.

The security chief also said that supporting the resistance front is a



Islamic Jihad leader (L) in meeting with Shamkhani in Tehran on Sunday

principled policy of Iran.

"From the outset of the Islamic

Republic of Iran's establishment, we have been beside the Palestinian resilient and

oppressed people and will continue to do so until the resistance movement gains complete victory," he said.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in July that "deal of the century" for the Palestinian territories will not come true.

"The Americans have named their devil policy on Palestine 'deal of the century' but they should know that, by divine grace, this 'deal of the century' will never materialize," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

■ **'Iran is true supporter of Palestinian cause'**

For his part, Nakhala said that Iran is a true supporter of the Palestinian cause.

He also said that the resistance front has strengthened its capacities against the aggressors.

Pointing to efforts being made by certain Western and Arab countries to defeat the resistance front, he said, "The Palestinian people will continue their glorious path more determinedly to achieve victory."

Leader names Amoli Larijani as Expediency Council chief

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — In a decree issued on Sunday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appointed Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani as chairman of the Expediency Council and a member of the Guardian Council's jurists.

Larijani replaces Ayatollah Seyyed Mahmoud

Hashemi Shahrroudi who passed away at the age of 70 on December 24.

Ayatollah Amoli Larijani is currently Judiciary chief.

The Expediency Council deals with major strategies and policy lines of the country. It is also vested with the responsibility to resolve differences between the parliament and the Guardian Council over parliament

approvals rejected by the Guardian Council.

The Guardian Council is a vetting body tasked with interpreting the Constitution, supervising elections of, and approving of candidates to, the Assembly of Experts, the President and the Parliament, and ensuring the compatibility of the legislation passed by the parliament with the criteria of Islam and the Constitution.

Envoy blasts media silence over Saudis' deploying Darfur children in Yemen

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran's ambassador to London has blasted the foreign-based Persian-language media for their silence over the deployment of Darfur child soldiers at front line of war in Yemen.

Hamid Baidinejad's remarks came after the New York Times wrote on Friday that child soldiers from Sudan's Darfur have reportedly been fighting on behalf of Saudi Arabia and its allies in the frontline of the deadly war on Yemen, with money being their only motive.

"The New York Times report has created great outrage among researchers and the media at the silence of the U.S. and Europe over the Saudi coalition's deployment of insurgent Darfur mercenaries who have [previously] violated human rights, especially the deployment of children,

in the Yemeni war," Baidinejad wrote on Twitter on Sunday.

He went on to stress that the silence of foreign-based Persian-language media outlets over the issue is strange since they claim to be concerned about the regional impacts of the war.

The New York Times reported that the Saudis have used their vast oil wealth to outsource the war, mainly by hiring survivors of the Darfur conflict to operate in Yemen, many of them children.

Citing several Sudanese mercenaries and lawmakers, the report said that as many as 14,000 Sudanese militants have been fighting in Yemen alongside Saudi-backed forces while at least hundreds of them have been killed so far.

Almost all the Sudanese come from Darfur and most of them belong to the

Rapid Support Forces, a tribal militia blamed for war crimes during the Darfur conflict, the report added.

Saudi Arabia has been striking Yemen since March 2015 to restore power to fugitive president Mansour Hadi, a close ally of Riyadh. The Saudi-led aggression has so far killed more than 20,000 Yemenis, including hundreds of women and children. Despite Riyadh's claims that it is bombing the positions of the Ansarullah fighters, Saudi bombers are flattening residential areas and civilian infrastructures.

Yemen is host to the world's largest humanitarian crisis with more than 22 million people in need and is seeing a spike in needs, fueled by ongoing conflict, a collapsing economy and diminished social services and livelihoods. The blockade

on Yemen has smothered humanitarian deliveries of food and medicine to the import-dependent state.

The UN has repeatedly criticized the Saudi-UAE-led military coalition's bombing campaign and placed it on a blacklist of child rights violators last year.

A UN panel has also compiled a detailed report of civilian casualties caused by the Saudi military and its allies during their war against Yemen, saying the Riyadh-led coalition has used precision-guided munitions in its raids on civilian targets.

A number of Western countries, the U.S., the UK, and France in particular, are accused of being complicit in the ongoing aggression as they supply the Riyadh regime with advanced weapons and military equipment as well as logistical and intelligence assistance.

Jubeir's dismissal could help restore Tehran-Riyadh ties: analyst

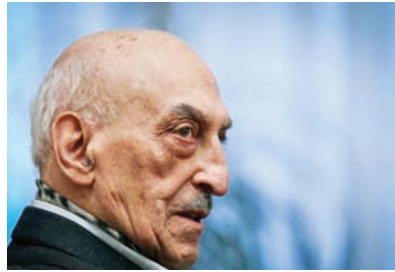
POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A senior political analyst believes the dismissal of Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir could be a step toward restoration of ties between Tehran and Riyadh.

In an interview with ILNA published on Sunday, Davoud Hermidas-Bavand, professor of political science and international law, said after the murder of Jamal Khashoggi the kingdom has faced many problems, especially in its foreign policy.

"In order to save face in such circumstances, someone had to be sacrificed... Hence all the fingers pointed toward Adel al-Jubeir, especially since he was not a member of the royal family," Hermidas-Bavand remarked.

He said while al-Jubeir had served as Saudi ambassador to the United States, he lacked political wisdom. "A foreign ministry's job is to improve relations not to intensify the differences, as he did with regard to Iran."

Improvement of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia was not possible under his



watch, he emphasized.

On Washington-Riyadh relations, he said, "When the Saudis see that they are condemned in the U.S. Congress and that U.S. senators are trying to cut off arms sales to them, they will react to these issues."

Hermidas-Bavand further said Riyadh may try to re-establish relations with Tehran in order to show its dissatisfaction with U.S. policies.

"However, one should know that such measure would be out of pressure, not satisfaction," he added.

Iranian military chief downplays U.S. pullout from Syria

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces said on Sunday that withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria is not a big issue while there are still many U.S. forces in the region.

"The U.S. pullout from Syria is not a significant action when there are many U.S. forces in the region," Mohammad Baqeri said at a conference.

On December 19, President Donald Trump announced that U.S. troops had defeated the Daesh terrorists in Syria and he sought to pull some 2,000 U.S. troops out of Syria.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi has welcomed Trump's decision, saying the U.S. military presence in the Middle East fuels insecurity.

"Basically, U.S. forces' arrival and presence in the region was a wrong, illogical, tension-provoking and crisis-inducing move from the outset, and has always been one of the key contributors to instability and



insecurity in the region," said Qassemi in a statement posted on the Foreign Ministry website on December 22.

Russia has also welcomed the decision by the U.S. to withdraw its forces from Syria, saying it creates prospects for a political settlement of the crisis there, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on December 19.

According to Reuters, the ministry also said that an initiative to form a Syrian constitutional committee had a bright future with the U.S. troop withdrawal.

Pakistan army chief sees better military ties with Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Pakistan's chief of Army Staff says his country's cooperation with Iran has strengthened and will continue to enhance regional security.

"The situation will improve in the future," General Qamar Javed Bajwa told Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan in the army's general headquarters in the western Pakistani city of Rawalpindi on Saturday, Press TV quoted him as saying.

"I am positive that security and military cooperation with Iran will improve the situation on the common border," he added.

Over the past years, the border area has witnessed several

attacks targeting the countries' security forces, with the Iranian border guards paying the highest toll.

Most recently, six Pakistani soldiers were killed when a paramilitary convoy came under attack by gunmen during a routine patrol in the mountainous district of Kech.

In October, 12 Iranian border guards were abducted near the town of Mirjaveh in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province and taken into Pakistan in April. Five of the guards were released last month, but the rest remain in captivity, despite Pakistan's repeated promises to have them freed.

In the deadliest incident, 11 Iranian border guards were killed in an ambush claimed by the Jaish ul-Adl terrorist

group near Mirjaveh in April 2017, with the assailants fleeing into Pakistan after the attack.

Iran says it reserves the right to pursue such attackers back into neighboring countries. It announced full preparedness for joint anti-terror operations with Pakistan after terrorists killed the Pakistani troops recently.

Bajwa said maintaining the province's security was the focus of the Pakistani army, adding that the country's progress was linked to peace, stability, and progress in Balochistan.

"Enhanced security coordination on the Pakistani-Iranian border would further improve the security situation," he said, adding the fencing of Pakistan's border with Afghanistan would also contribute to the situation.

Epic 2009 rallies marked

presidential election.

The 2009 rally in Tehran is remembered as an "epic" occasion as it put an end to months of protests.

Before Dey 9, the protests were abused by the ill-wishers, including the Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO), who has a record in many terrorist activities in Iran and siding with Saddam Hussein in the war against Iran in the 1980s.

The months-long protests sometimes turned violent and led to some deaths.

Insistence on vote rigging was described as a "sedition" intended to divide the society.

Brigadier General Hossein Salami, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps second-in-command, addressed the Sunday congregation in Tehran, saying Iran is powerful enough to stand against enemies in various areas, so much so that the military option against the country is not in enemies' language anymore.

"Today, the hegemonic system is confused and has to admit Iran's pow-

er. They signed the JCPOA [the 2015 nuclear deal] and then quit it, which shows their confusion. The U.S. spent trillions of dollars in Iraq and Syria, but had to leave the countries without having achieved anything, which shows their strategic defeat," he said.

U.S. President Donald Trump on December 19 announced that U.S. troops had defeated the Daesh terrorists in Syria and he sought to pull some 2,000 U.S. troops out of Syria.

Assad authorizes Iraqi forces to strike Daesh in Syria

1 → Iraq was “considering all its options” to defend itself from threats across its borders, the premier told a press conference

Baghdad has already reinforced its Syrian border to defend against remaining ISIL (Daesh) pockets in the Euphrates River valley.

Iraq remains concerned that ISIL could expand its footprint in the war zone, Abdul Mahdi said.

■ U.S. seeking to resurrect Daesh in Iraq

Leader of a major political party in Iraq has said that there has been clear intelligence evidence suggesting that the United States is trying to resurrect Daesh-led militancy in the Arab country after the Takfiri terrorist group was defeated in neighboring Syria.

Humam al-Hamoudi, who chairs the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, said on Saturday that Washington’s main strategy in Iraq has been to make the Arab country dependent on American military presence by keeping militancy alive in parts of the Iraqi territory.

Speaking to the Iranian television, Hamoudi said many Daesh militants fled to Syria after being defeated in Iraq over the past years. However, he said, the militants are mulling a comeback to Iraq with the help of the U.S. after they lost most of their positions in Syria.

“After our victory against Daesh and the purge of militants into Syria, some relatively accurate intelligence were received from there that the U.S. was trying to dispatch Daesh to Iraq through the joint borders so that Iraq would continue to face a problem called Daesh and seeks help from the U.S. and others,” said Hamoudi.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Hamoudi touched upon Iran’s role in Iraq and Washington’s efforts to drive a wedge between the two neighboring countries.

The Iraqi politician said there were huge commonalities between Iran and Iraq, especially in terms of religion, adding that bonds between the two nations even deepened in recent years after Tehran offered massive help to Baghdad in its fights against terror.

He said his party and many others in Iraq were opposed to U.S. sanctions against Iran and will do their best to undermine them.



A handout picture released by the official Syrian Arab News Agency on December 29, 2018 shows President Bashar Assad (R) meeting with Iraqi national security advisor Faleh al-Fayad in Damascus. (AFP/SANA)

“We honor our religious and cultural bonds with Iran,” said Hamoudi, adding, “we will not team up with Iran’s enemies in issues like sanctions but we will try to make this plot a failure.”

■ Trump’s Iraq visit unites Iraqi lawmakers against U.S. troop presence

Iraqi lawmakers have demanded that United States forces be expelled from the country in response to U.S. President Donald Trump’s abrupt visit, seen as a violation of national sovereignty.

“We will not accept any foreign forces in Iraq,” said Bina parliamentary bloc leader Hadi al-Amiri.

Secretary-General of the People’s Party for Reform Faiq al-Sheikh Ali also called for measures to be taken against Trump’s unannounced visit.

“Trump entered Iraq, rested here and did what he wanted to do, yet no one prevented him. Everyone just criticized him.”

Addressing previous calls for an emergency parliamentary session on Trump’s visit, al-Fatah Alliance lawmaker Hamed al-Mousawi confirmed that an emergency session may probably be held and that Iraq has the means to expel the U.S. forces “without using force.”

“Iraq isn’t like before and the Americans know very well that Iraq possesses the strength which the world witnessed when it faced all hardships,” said al-Mousawi.

Islah parliamentary bloc leader Sabah al-Saedi, head of one of two main blocs in Iraq’s parliament, also slammed the visit and called for an emergency parliamentary session.

“Trump needs to know his limits. The American occupation of Iraq is over,” said Saedi, adding that Trump had slipped into Iraq “as though Iraq is a state of the United States.”

On Wednesday, Trump spent a few hours visiting troops at al-Asad Air Base in Iraq’s

western Anbar Province, stopping short of visiting the Iraqi capital of Baghdad.

A scheduled meeting between Trump and Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi was scrapped. The two only talked over the phone.

Abdul-Mahdi’s office said in a statement that the cancellation came as a result of a “disagreement over how to conduct the meeting.”

The U.S., backed by the UK, invaded Iraq in 2003 under the pretext that the former regime of Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. No such weapons, however, were ever found in the country.

The invasion led to the rise of terrorist groups such as Daesh.

The U.S. and a coalition of its allies further launched a military campaign against purported Daesh targets in Iraq in 2014, but their operations have in many instances led to civilian deaths and generally spared the terrorists.

UAE regulator evaluating resuming flights by national carriers to Damascus

The United Arab Emirates’ General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) said it is evaluating the possibility of national carriers resuming flights to the Syrian capital of Damascus.

GCAA made the comment in a statement on Sunday, following the UAE’s reopening on Thursday of its embassy in Damascus.

UAE airlines Etihad and Emirates suspended flights to Damascus in 2012 because of security concerns.

(Source: Reuters)

N. Korean leader calls for more talks with South in new year

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said he wants to hold more summits with South Korea’s Moon Jae-in next year to achieve the goal of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, Moon’s office said Sunday.

Kim sent a letter to Moon on Sunday to commemorate the dramatic detente they engineered this year, including three summits, after years of confrontation marked by a series of the North’s nuclear and missile tests.

But stalled nuclear talks between Pyongyang and Washington had an impact on inter-Korean ties, with the South’s plan to host Kim in Seoul this year - as agreed at his summit with President Moon Jae-in in Pyongyang in September - going unanswered by the North.

Kim vowed to work towards denuclearization at his landmark summit with U.S. President Donald Trump in Singapore in June but the two sides have since made little progress, struggling to reschedule a high-level meeting abruptly called off in November.

Kim said in the letter that he was sorry his visit to Seoul did not take place, expressing his “strong resolve” to make it happen in the future while monitoring the situation, Moon’s office said.

“Chairman Kim said he is willing to meet often with President Moon next year to move forward discussions on peace and prosperity and resolve the issue of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula,” Moon’s spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom said in a statement.

(Source: Daily star)



Trump says ‘big progress’ on possible China trade deal

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Twitter that he had a “long and very good call” with Chinese President Xi Jinping and that a possible trade deal between the United States and China was progressing well.

As a partial shutdown of the U.S. government entered its eighth day, with no quick end in sight, the Republican president was in Washington, sending out tweets attacking Democrats and talking up possibly improved relations with China.

The two nations have been in a trade war for much of 2018, shaking world financial markets as the flow of hundreds of billions of dollars worth of goods between the world’s two largest economies has been disrupted by tariffs.

Trump and Xi agreed to a ceasefire in the trade war, deciding to hold off on imposing more tariffs for 90 days starting Dec. 1 while they negotiate a deal to end the dispute following months of escalating tensions. “Just had a long and very good call with President Xi of China,” Trump wrote on Saturday. “Deal is moving along very well. If made, it will be very comprehensive, covering all subjects, areas and points of dispute. Big progress being made!” Chinese state media also said Xi and Trump spoke on Saturday, and quoted Xi as saying that teams from both countries have been working to implement a consensus reached with Trump.

“I hope that the two teams will meet each other half way, work hard, and strive to reach an agreement that is mutually beneficial and beneficial to the world as soon as possible,” Xi said, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency.

China’s foreign ministry said on Sunday the two countries’ relationship had endured storms before, but that strong ties were important for the economies of both nations and for ensuring global stability and peace.

Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said that Sino-U.S. ties now “stand at a historic new starting point” and that the two sides should respect each other’s sovereignty, security and development interest and appropriately manage differences.

“Both sides should stick to rationally and objectively viewing the other side’s strategic intentions, strengthen strategic communication and promote strategic mutual trust to prevent strategic misjudgments,” he said in a statement.

■ Government shutdown

Having canceled his plans to travel to his estate in Florida for the holidays because of the government shutdown that started on Dec. 22, Trump tweeted, “I am in the White House waiting for the Democrats to come on over and make a deal.”

The Republican-controlled Congress was closed for the week-end and few lawmakers were in the capital.

(Source: Reuters)

Taliban dismiss Afghanistan’s peace talks offer

The Taliban have rejected Kabul’s offer of talks next month in Saudi Arabia where the militants, fighting to restore strict law in Afghanistan, will meet U.S. officials to further peace efforts, a Taliban leader said on Sunday.

Representatives from the Taliban, the United States and regional countries met this month in the United Arab Emirates for talks to end the 17-year war in Afghanistan.

But the Taliban have refused to hold formal talks with the Western-backed Af-

ghan government. “We will meet the U.S. officials in Saudi Arabia in January next year and we will start our talks that remained incomplete in Abu Dhabi,” a member of the Taliban’s decision-making Leadership Council told Reuters. “However, we have made it clear to all the stakeholders that we will not talk to the Afghan government.”

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid also said the leaders of the group would not talk to the Afghan government.

The militants have insisted on first

reaching an agreement with the United States, which the group sees as the main force in Afghanistan since U.S.-led forces toppled the Taliban government in 2001.

Diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict have intensified after Taliban representatives started meeting U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad this year. Officials from the warring sides have met at least three times to discuss the withdrawal of international forces and a ceasefire in 2019.

(Source: Reuters)

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STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	160774.0
IFX	1865.92

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	47,824 rials
GBP	53,189 rials
AED	11,380 rials

Source: iribnews.ir

COMMODITIES

WTI	\$45.33/b
Brent	\$53.21/b
OPEC Basket	\$53.92/b
Gold	\$1,281.95/oz
Silver	\$15.43/oz
Platinum	\$795.85/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Agricultural exports up 20%, hit \$4.6b in 8 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** – Iran exported 4,580 tons of agricultural products worth \$4.6 billion in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21), showing 20 percent and 19 percent rise in terms of weight and value respectively, IRNA quoted Shahrokh Shajari, an official with the Agriculture Ministry, as saying on Saturday.

Over the same period of time, 12,806 tons of agricultural products valued at %6.8 billion were imported to the country, down 1.2 percent in terms of weight and 7 percent in terms of value, he added.

“Meanwhile, the country exported food products to the tune of \$2 million during the 8-month period, an increase of 24 percent compared to the same period last year.”



Non-oil trade nears \$66b in 9 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The value of Iran's non-oil trade stood at \$65.97 billion in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (ended on December 21), according to the latest data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

Iran exported 86.94 million tons of non-oil commodities, worth \$33.35 billion, during the mentioned period of time, showing 5.40 percent growth in terms of value compared to the same time last year, IRIB reported

on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the country imported 23.87 million tons of goods valued at \$32.62 billion in the 9-month period, registering an annual growth of 15.9 percent in terms of value, the report added.

Foreign trade surplus stands at \$738 million in this period, according to the report.

Iran's top export destinations in the said time span were respectively Iraq by importing \$6.92 billion of Iranian goods equaling 2.77 percent of the total exports,



China (\$6.749 billion; 20.23 percent), and the United Arab Emirates (\$5.13 billion; 15.39 percent).

China, the EU and South Korea were the main exporters of non-oil goods to Iran in

this period. Some \$8.17 billion of goods equaling 25.5 percent of the total goods were imported from China, \$4.91 billion (15.6 percent) from the EU, and \$1.83 billion (5.62 percent) from South Korea.

Iran devises barter system to secure carpet exports

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran has devised a barter system with the goal of securing its carpet exports, the head of Iran National Carpet Center said on Sunday.

Fereshteh Dastpak told IRNA that according to the barter mechanism, countries which export goods to Iran will receive carpets instead of foreign currency.

Referring to hurdles in the way of banking transactions as a result of the U.S. sanctions, she said “with the assistance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), we are intending to remove carpet exports from the list of sanctions.”

She went on to say that the U.S. is the largest export



market for Iranian carpets, holding a share of 30 percent from total carpet exports. “There are groups in the U.S. which are seeking to exempt the Iranian carpet from the sanctions,” she added.

According to IRNA, Iran exported 5,400 tons of hand-woven carpets valued at \$425 million in the previous Iranian calendar year (March 2017-March 2018).

Iran exported \$126 million of carpets to the U.S. last year, but the figure is expected to reach zero over the next months in the wake of the sanctions.

Germany, Lebanon, Britain, and Japan stand next to the U.S. as the main buyers of Iranian carpet.

Trump says ‘big progress’ on possible China trade deal

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Twitter that he had a “long and very good call” with Chinese President Xi Jinping and that a possible trade deal between the United States and China was progressing well.

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First Announcement

IN THE NAME OF GOD
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING

INTERNATIONAL TENDER NO. 97-10/196

Tender Holder:
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING (IRIB)

Subject of Two-Stage Tender:
Establishing and Installing a Comprehensive Monitoring System and Management of Installations, Electricity and Installations (Tehran IRIB Center) according to the tender documents

Deadline of Receiving Documents:
As of publishing second announcement of advertisement latest by the business hour dated on **Sunday January 06, 2019.**

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

Type and Amount of Guarantee for Participating in Tender:
The amount of **USD 20,500** which should be in the form of extendable bank guarantee

Time and Place of Delivering Priced Bid:
The sealed A, B & C packages/envelopes should be submitted within one main envelope marked with tender number no later than **15 p.m.** on **Tuesday February 05, 2019** and submitted to the Secretariat of Commission of Tenders.

Time and Place of Opening Envelopes
The date of opening envelopes A&B is at **8:30 a.m.** on **Sunday February 10, 2019** in the office of Vice President of IRIB Planning and Financial Resources and opening of envelope C will be after technical evaluation.
It should be noted that bidders should hold license from the authorized bodies.

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

Public Relations Dept. of IRIB

Second Announcement

IN THE NAME OF GOD
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING

RENEWAL OF INTERNATIONAL TENDER NO. 97/120-51/10

Tender Holder:
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING (IRIB)

Subject of Tender:
Purchasing of Audio and Video Equipment (LTO Cartridge, LTO Drive, SSD, HDD) accordance with the technical specifications and other terms and conditions mentioned in the tender documents.

Deadline and How to Receive the Tender Documents:
From **Monday 31 Dec. 2018 (1397/10/10)** by **4 p.m.** on **Monday 07 Jan. 2019 (1397/10/17)** with presentation of introductory letter by company or its representative and the receipt of paying the documents fee.

Place of Receiving the Tender Documents:
Interested participants may refer to purchasing (KALA) Dept., 4th Floor of IRIB Administration Complex, Hotel Esteghlal St., Vali-e Asr Ave., Tehran Iran.

The Fee of the Tender Documents and How to Deposit it:
Submission of payment receipt for the amount of 1,000,000 Rials to Account No. 4101029171204273 (IBAN: IR310100004101029171204273) with CENTRAL BANK OF IRAN in the name of IRIB.

Type and Amount of Guarantee for Participation to Tender:
The amount of deposit for participant in tender is **USD 35,000** fixed or its equivalent in 3,500,000,000 Rials which should be in the form of Bank Guarantee.

Time and Place of Delivering Priced Bid:
The sealed A, B & C packages/envelopes should be submitted no later than **4 p.m.** on **16 Feb. 2019 (1397/11/27)** and at the address mentioned in the 4th clause.

Time and Place of Opening Envelopes:
The date of opening the envelopes A&B is on **17 Feb. 2019 (1397/11/28)** at **3 p.m.** in the office of Financial Vice President and opening of envelope C will be after technical evaluation.

For more information, please see:
www.iriboffice.ir/tenders and http://iets.mporg.ir/ **Tel: 00982122167463**

Purchasing (Kala) Dept. of IRIB

If OPEC blinks to provide \$60 oil U.S. shale players become beneficiaries

When oil cartel OPEC announced its 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) output cut alongside 10 Russian-led non-OPEC producers, after keeping the market on edge for most of December 6 and 7th, many thought the move would provide a modicum of support to rapidly declining oil prices.

While I never bought the relief rally that followed in its wake, many did. The argument was that a 1.2 million bpd cut was well above the rumored level of 1 million bpd.

Given that the production of Nigeria and Libya fluctuates because of their internal strife, that of Venezuela is rapidly declining courtesy its political mess, and Iran – exempted from the latest cut – was likely to face barriers in 2019 following the re-imposition American sanctions; 1.2 million bpd was actually as high as 1.5 million bpd in all but name, according to some market commentators.

Whether or not you buy that hypothesis, even 1.5 million bpd is not enough and that is why the so-called relief rally failed to last even a week following the OPEC meeting. In the run up the end of the year, on the Friday (December 21) before Christmas, both Brent and the West Texas Intermediate front-month contracts fell by over 11% week-over-week.

With the U.S. – already the world's largest oil producer – providing adequate buffer production to neuter the OPEC swing in the face of lackluster demand, the market remains unconvinced. Of course, not all oil barrels extracted are equal, and U.S. barrels in the export market are largely of a lighter, sweeter variety by composition.

But the fact that incremental American



production would on its own cancel out OPEC and non-OPEC cuts in 2019 is a point not lost on traders. Smart money suggests it is a point OPEC is just as cognizant of. For the OPEC and non-OPEC cuts to carry weight, the cut should have been around 2 million bpd in my opinion; a level both parties knew they need if providing an oil price floor of \$60 per barrel using Brent as a benchmark is their unstated objective.

Problem is, had they chosen that pathway,

the most visible beneficiaries would have been U.S. shale players, and OPEC just didn't want to blink. But having seen the end-result in the three weeks since the OPEC meeting, new jitters have surfaced.

The OPEC next meeting has been set for an unspecified date in April, in the knowledge that further intervention might be required. Now talk is rife of a possible "extraordinary", unscheduled meeting of oil ministers before April.

To provide some context, the last extraordinary meeting was held in 2008 when the global financial crisis appeared on the horizon. If the cuts are expanded, OPEC's desired price range of \$60-70 per barrel might well be achieved, but that would encourage higher production stateside and a loss of market share for some in OPEC. It could all have been so different, and ongoing bearish sentiment is to an extent of OPEC's own making.

Having announced cuts, the following week the Russians revealed they'd be pretty slow in implementing cuts and might not get to their agreed 200,000 bpd level before the end of Q1 2019, while the United Arab Emirates announced a massive investment aimed at boosting oil production. That is hardly an 'on-message' image that OPEC and 10 non-OPEC producers – signatory to output cuts – ought to be portraying.

Meanwhile, U.S. crude continues to alter the supply-side dynamic. For the next 5 to 7 years, contingent upon shale decline rates, the U.S. will remain a solid buffer producer first hitting 12 million bpd, and subsequently 15 million bpd by 2025 according to industry projections, and all in tandem with an evolving oil demand dynamic that would shift from mobility to rely upon petrochemicals and aviation.

Apart from issues with its own credibility, the potent problem OPEC is grappling with is that it is damned if it cuts output, and damned if it doesn't, with either move bringing with it a different kind of crude pain; and all of it for the sake of trying to keep oil prices within a very modest \$60-70 range.

(Source: Forbes)

Mexican army starts major crackdown on fuel theft



Mexico's military have taken control over 58 key fuel installations in the country, including refineries, upon orders by new President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who has vowed to fight corruption and fuel theft within and outside state-run energy company Pemex.

Lopez Obrador unveiled a plan on Thursday to increase the presence of military and the use of the army in fighting rampant fuel theft that has been costing Mexico's state firm Pemex billions of dollars annually.

According to Pemex's own estimates, the losses from fuel theft over the past three years have reached \$7.5 billion (147 billion Mexican pesos).

According to Lopez Obrador, authorities are also involved in widespread fuel theft.

On Friday, the Mexican army took control of refineries of Pemex across the country, where unionized workers were blocking the access to some of the sites, UPI reports, citing the Excelsior newspaper.

Mexican media report that three officials at Pemex, suspected of having facilitated

fuel theft, had already been arrested for the alleged crimes. The three Pemex officials have been sacked and will be facing criminal charges, Mexico's Attorney General Alejandro Gertz Manero said at Lopez Obrador's news conference on Thursday.

Pemex's new management are aware of the fact that company employees have been complicit in fuel theft and moved to deal with the problem, Gertz Manero said.

Illegal taps on Mexican fuel pipelines jumped by 45 percent annually between January and October 2018, according to Pemex's latest report on fuel theft.

Earlier this year, former Pemex chief executive Carlos Alberto Treviño Medina said that fuel theft was expected to cost the state oil company as much as US\$1.78 billion (35 billion pesos) in 2018.

Apart from rampant fuel theft, Pemex also has to cope with declining domestic oil production, which hit in October one of the lowest monthly production rates since 1990 when records began.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Venezuela to promote fair oil prices in OPEC by 2019



Venezuela continues today its call to promote in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) fair prices that allow better investments and the flow of oil to consumer states in 2019.

In recent statements, the minister of the sector, Manuel Quevedo, said that for the coming year the nation assumes the presidency of the Conference of the agency, a scenario to take action on the value of hydrocarbons. In the meetings held in 2018 with OPEC and non-OPEC nations, favorable scenarios were evidenced as a result of the actions taken to set the stabilization of the market, the minister said.

Two years after having reached the Declaration of Cooperation for the Voluntary Adjustment of Crude Production, this initiative promoted by President Nicolas Maduro confirms the joint work between these countries with the objective of stabilizing the world oil market, he said.

During the 175th OPEC meeting, held on December 6 in Vienna, Austria, it was agreed to lower the daily pumping from

2019 to balance the market, which will be distributed between OPEC and non-OPEC countries.

The former will adjust their production to 800 million barrels per day while the non-OPEC nations will maintain the index of 400 million barrels per day.

For the Conference of the agency in 2019 will be taken into account the figures of supply and demand of crude that threw the recent reports that, although they show a balance, also demonstrate the volatility of the costs by operational and geopolitical variables.

According to the state-owned company Petroleos de Venezuela, the South American delegation to the meeting will ratify its interest to maintain the balance for the development and economic prosperity of the member countries and the oil world. Likewise, it will propose converting Petro cryptocurrency into the future of oil transactions worldwide, as well as a bridge for the internationalization of this Venezuelan asset.

(Source: plenglish.com)

U.S. crude inventories static as rising production balances export surge

U.S. crude supply was little changed week on week as an uptick in production was matched by sharply higher exports last week, U.S. Energy Information Administration data showed Friday.

U.S. commercial crude supply edged lower by 46,000 barrels to 441.41 million barrels during the week ended December 21, EIA data showed. Analysts surveyed by S&P Global Platts on Wednesday expected a 1.4 million-barrel draw, while the American Petroleum Institute on Thursday called for a 6.9 million-barrel build.

The EIA data release was delayed until Friday due to the Christmas holiday.

The slight decline in U.S. crude stocks narrowed the surplus to the five-year average to 6.86 percent, down from 6.93 percent during the week prior.

Crude draws were concentrated in the Gulf Coast, where inventories fell 2.46 million barrels last week to 229.3 million barrels. The steep decline in USGC stockpiles was predicated on a 644,000 b/d increase in exports to 2.97 million b/d last week.

The large USGC draw was sufficient to bring nationwide inventories lower, even as all other regions added barrels to storage last week. East and West Coast stocks increased 1.26 million barrels and 517,000 barrels to 48.6 million and 118.7 million barrels, respectively.

Notably, stocks in Cushing, Oklahoma, the delivery point of the NYMEX crude contract, grew 799,000 barrels to a 49-week high at 41.3 million barrels. The build at Cushing more than accounted for the entire uptick in Midwest crude stocks, which only increased 359,000 barrels to 129.2 million barrels last week.

Surging U.S. exports were offset by a 100,000 b/d uptick in domestic production back to the all-time high 11.7 million b/d. Additionally, an unexpected 0.3 percentage point dip in refinery utilization to 95.1 percent of capacity brought total net crude inputs down 58,000 b/d to a



five-week low at 17.35 million b/d last week. Analysts surveyed by Platts on Wednesday had expected refinery utilization to increase 0.3 percentage point to around 95.7 percent of capacity.

USGC refinery runs edged higher by 0.1 percentage point to a 15-week high at 97.9 percent of capacity, but despite this uptick, regional crude runs dipped 26,000 b/d to 9.37 million b/d. Midwest refiners also ran less crude last week, with net inputs dropping 77,000 b/d to 3.92 million b/d amid a 1.8 percentage point decline in regional run rates to 95.9 percent of capacity.

Strong export activity was supported by a wide Brent/WTI spread, which averaged at around \$9.30/b last week. But this spread has begun to narrow as Brent prices retreated following the restart of production at the North Sea Buzzard Field last week. The 130,000 b/d Buzzard field accounts for roughly 30 percent of the North Sea Forties crude basket, which is itself the largest contributor by volume to the Dated Brent crude basket.

During the first half of December, WTI delivered into Rotterdam was trading at around minus 56 cents/b to North

Sea Forties, Platts calculations showed. But last week, this spread flipped from around minus 68 cents/b on Monday to \$1.82/b on Friday amid the Buzzard restart. This week, WTI has maintained an average premium of around \$1.35/b to Forties.

Last week, Europe-bound U.S. crude cargoes fell to 3.6 million barrels, down 1.8 percent from the week prior, according to data from cFlow, S&P Global Platts trade-flow software.

Nationwide gasoline stocks grew 3 million barrels to 233.1 million barrels last week, exceeding analyst expectations of a 1.1 million-barrel build. The increase expanded the nationwide gasoline supply overhang to 3.8 percent above the five-year average.

But USAC gasoline stocks fell 174,000 barrels last week to 60.33 million barrels, narrowing the supply glut there to just 3.9 percent above the five-year average. This surplus had been as wide as nearly 20 percent in early November. Despite the nationwide build, gasoline cracks improved last week as the supply overhang thinned in New York Harbor, the delivery point of the NYMEX RBOB contract.

Prompt-month NYMEX RBOB averaged at a 40 cents/b premium to front-month ICE Brent last week, up from around 5 cents/b during the week prior and minus \$1.12/b in November, Platts calculations showed. This week, the crack has widened further, with RBOB averaging at a roughly \$1.45/b premium to Brent. Despite the improving margins, the RBOB/Brent crack remains historically weak at well below year-ago levels of \$8.56/b.

Distillate stocks were essentially unchanged at 119.9 million barrels. While inventories were static week on week, their deficit to the five-year average widened to 7.7 percent from 6.9 percent during the week prior. Analysts surveyed by Platts on Wednesday had expected a 500,000-barrel draw that would have pushed distillate inventories to more than 11 percent below the EIA-reported five-year average.

(Source: Platts)

Digitalization promises more gains for upstream oil sector

The global drive towards smarter upstream technology, given a major flip-flop by the 2014 oil price collapse, continues to bring down upstream costs and boost recovery rates across the industry.

With U.S. shale oil breakevens of around \$50/b seemingly capping oil prices in the medium term, the need to hunt marginal gains through operating efficiencies is set to remain a key theme for producers in 2019.

Growing digitalization, together with smaller, faster return projects and other efficiency gains, is now seen as a vital plank to lowering capital intensity in the upstream sector.

Globally, upstream players could see annual cost savings of \$75 billion per year from further digitalization by 2023 in addition to boosting discovery rates of new resources, according to recent estimates by Wood Mackenzie.

With machine learning and artificial intelligence getting ever better at spotting drilling targets, potential cost savings of \$5 billion-\$7 billion, or 10-15 percent per year, in exploration could be achievable, the research group believes.

Accounting and consultancy group PwC concurs.

In its Oil and Gas Trends 2018-19, PwC suggests that oil companies should "double down" on digitalization to keep costs in check for finding and developing ever more elusive new reserves.

Digital tools are needed more than ever to create a competitive edge in the upstream sector in what has become a margin business, PwC believes. At the same time, Big Data and new technology will be key to staving off supply competition from booming renewable energies.

One such application of the technology revolution in the upstream sector is the creation of so-called "digital twins", or virtual simulations of assets that can improve the efficiency of predictive maintenance.

BP's APEX surveillance system, for example, creates a virtual model of all the company's production systems throughout the world to help spot issues before they affect production. The production optimization tool makes use of integrated asset models to improve safety, cut downtime and reduce costs. BP claims to have added 30,000 barrels of production from using APEX last year.

Automated real-time production optimization and predictive maintenance are part of a new digital landscape harnessing insights from surging flows of real-time operating data, allowing producers to spot failures before they occur.

The potential for autonomous robots, or drones, to detect and repair faults are one way the industry is looking to cut infrastructure downtime and boost returns.

BP believes it has developed an algorithm that recognizes the sound of sand entering a well, thereby avoiding a potential fall in oil production.

An autonomous "snake" robot, developed with Norway's Equinor, can swim around subsea installations and perform tasks such as turning on or off valves and checking for faults.

Explore the many questions surrounding big data, artificial intelligence and blockchain's impact on the energy industry. Meet with experts to examine ongoing initiatives, technological advancements, impending regulations and the focus on cybercrime.

Equinor is also looking to boost process automation so it can be notified when a part should be replaced.

In the not-too-distant future, Equinor hopes a digital integrated process will seamlessly predict faults, generate work orders for new equipment, fabricate 3D-printed parts, which would then be delivered by drone and finally installed by a robot.

Such a fully-automated process will be feasible "in a few years", according to Equinor's head of digitalization at the giant Johan Sverdrup field development, Trine Svalestad.

Offshore, the cost of developing new deepwater barrels has already fallen more than 50 percent since 2013, according to Wood Mackenzie.

While downsizing of projects and a greater focus on subsea tiebacks have been instrumental, the ability to drill faster wells has also been key. It now takes half the time to drill a deepwater well in the Gulf of Mexico compared to 2014, WoodMac estimates. More automation, AI and robotics also mean a drastically smaller workforce, one of the major costs for offshore projects.

Even in the U.S. onshore sector, where many believe the scope for further progress on drilling and production efficiencies is flatlining, optimism on costs remains. According to Rob West, Redburn's head of global equity research, technology advances will continue to drive down the cost of developing shale oil rocks well into the coming decade.

West has reviewed "hundreds" of emerging shale production technologies and has shortlisted 20 advances which have the potential to substantially lower production costs in the 2020s.

Helped mostly by new enhanced oil recovery techniques, or EOR, recovery per well can be raised by another 80 percent, he believes, cutting full-cycle breakeven costs to \$25-\$30/b from about \$45/b currently.

(Source: Platts)

Libyan oil revenue falls in November: NOC

Libya's oil and gas revenue dipped to \$2.4 billion in November from \$2.87 billion in October, but full-year revenue is expected to surge by 76 percent to \$24.2 billion, state oil firm NOC said on Friday.

Although lower than the previous month, November revenue was the third highest monthly figure in 2018, NOC said.

Despite recurrent security problems that have affected output from Libyan oilfields, NOC's revenue has been boosted this year by higher oil prices and production.

Libya currently produces about 1.15 million barrels per day of oil.

"NOC will continue to drive the economic recovery and provide the funds necessary to ensure a fair distribution of wealth and economic justice across the country," NOC Chairman Mustafa Sanalla said in a statement.

Last week, NOC declared force majeure at its biggest oil field after it was taken over on December 8 by tribesmen, armed protesters and state guards demanding salary payments and development funds.

NOC and the internationally recognized government agreed on a security plan this week to protect the 315,000 barrel per day El Sharara field including setting up green zones inside the site to stop anyone entering without a permit and removing all unauthorized people.

"We are also working hard to implement agreed security measures at Sharara so operations and production can resume as soon as possible," Sanalla said.

The reopening of the field hinges on "the implementation of key reforms by the government to the local Petroleum Facilities Guard," he added.

(Source: standardmedia.co.ke)

Three crises we cannot ignore in 2019

By Jan Egeland



The year 2018 is about to end with seemingly little having been achieved to resolve major crises around the world. Syrians continued to try to flee their country as conflict raged on. Over the summer, millions faced a potential offensive on Idlib province, which could have resulted in a major humanitarian catastrophe.

In Africa, South Sudan's peace deal sparked a moment of joy for civilians, but its provisions are yet to be implemented. Further east in Bangladesh, close to a million Rohingya refugees were trapped in limbo, too scared of persecution to return to Myanmar.

The year also witnessed large waves of people forced to flee their homes in Ethiopia, Venezuela, Syria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

And as we look ahead into 2019, there are at least three major crises that are likely to get a lot worse.

■ Continuing displacement in Cameroon

For a long time, Cameroon has been providing a safe haven for people fleeing conflicts in neighboring Central African Republic (CAR) and Nigeria, but the country has its own simmering crisis.

Several armed groups have sprung up to fight for independence in English-speaking parts of Cameroon since October 2017, which has resulted in severe security clampdowns in these areas. The situation deteriorated rapidly during the last six months, partly because of the 2018 presidential elections and movement restrictions on civilians. The displacement of more than 400,000 people attracted little international media attention and there was little diplomatic effort to ease the tensions.

A disarmament, demobilization and re-integration committee has been set up by the Cameroonian government, and a presidential decree has been issued authorizing the release of some people detained during the clashes. But the upcoming local elections in 2019 could see the crisis escalate further. It could also spill over to neighboring Nigeria - a dreadful scenario.

At the same time, given that Cameroon is not identified as a hotspot by the international community, little funding will be committed to addressing the crisis, which would affect not only Cameroonians but also displaced people from CAR and northeast Nigeria.

■ Yemen's looming famine

This year saw the war in Yemen hammer civilians harder than ever, after three years of armed conflict had already decimated infrastructure, public services and uprooted two million people from their homes.

We, the agencies on the ground in Yemen, warn collectively of an impending famine. This mass starvation will not be caused by failed harvests or natural disasters. In Yemen, civilians are being slowly starved to death by a man-made catastrophe. The warfare, access restrictions and sanctions imposed on the civilian population by the warring parties and the nations propping them are solely to blame.

Peace talks in Stockholm earlier this month led to a long overdue ceasefire agreement for the crucial port city of Hudaydah. However, millions of women, men and children in dire need are yet to see the effects of the agreements on the ground in Yemen, where clashes are still ongoing.

The UK, United States, France, Iran and other powers that support parties to the conflict in Yemen's must use their influence to bring about a permanent end to the violence.

Parties to this conflict already have blood on their hands. Next year, they risk bearing responsibility for a famine that could affect millions, if the agreements made in Stockholm are not put into effect immediately.

■ The DRC's forgotten crisis

The Democratic Republic of the Congo saw pockets of insecurity spread like wildfire to entire regions in 2018. Inter-communal violence escalated in the previously peaceful province of Ituri. Countless armed groups continue to fight each other and attack civilians in the east and central parts of this vast country. In the few cases when families were able to return to their homes, they face such destruction that they need aid to survive.

In addition to spiraling violence, hunger levels soared this year. In 2018, DRC saw a 100 percent increase in food insecurity compared with 2017.

Global attention will momentarily shift to the troubled nation on December 30 as the Congolese people head to the polls to elect a new president, but the country will not stay under the media spotlight for long.

The DRC's mega-crisis is likely to go largely underreported in 2019, as the situation continues to deteriorate. Countless more people will edge towards starvation. Unless violence and displacement end and the humanitarian response is strengthened, many parents will watch their children die from malnutrition and preventable diseases.

Humanitarian aid can somewhat alleviate the suffering of Congolese, Yemeni and Cameroonian people, but only if donor countries step up their funding and warring factions give us access to communities caught up in conflict. That said, only political solutions to these conflicts can really prevent the impending human catastrophes.

It is unthinkable that so many people can starve to death in a world that has the means and the technology to feed everyone. These are all preventable deaths in a world of plenty and it will weigh on our conscience if we don't prevent them.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Mohammed bin Salman, regional menace

By Daniel Larison

Hisham Melhem has written a searing denunciation of Mohammed bin Salman (MBS)'s disastrous foreign policy record and his destabilizing domestic power grabs. Here he calls out the crown prince's responsibility for the destruction and starvation of Yemen:

But the culprit responsible in the main for condemning the country once known as Arabia Felix for an agonizing slow death is Saudi Arabia. For this reason alone, Mohammed Bin Salman should be boycotted by the democracies of the world.

The war on Yemen has been the crown prince's signature policy, and it was the very first thing that he did after he was made defense minister by his father. The reckless decision to intervene and the stupid determination to persist in an unwinnable war told us everything we needed to know about Mohammed bin Salman's judgment and competence a long time ago, but unfortunately it took several more years and many more outrages and crimes for a lot of people to catch on that he was a menace and a war criminal rather than a reform-minded visionary. It isn't surprising that someone as ignorant and hapless as Jared Kushner has been taken in by Mohammed bin Salman, but what is everyone else's excuse?

Many American policymakers and politicians have downplayed and whitewashed Saudi coalition crimes in Yemen because of our government's involvement in the disaster, and some of them are so obsessed with Iran that they have been prepared to



MBS has turned out to be exceptionally repressive and cruel even by Saudi standards, and in just a few years he has become one of the world's great war criminals.

ignore or explain away any number of atrocities as long as they can claim that opposing Iran is the goal. Mohammed bin Salman hasn't had many successes in the last few years, but he did know which buttons to push to get credulous Western pundits,

businessmen, and politicians to fawn over him as if he were Ataturk reborn. To their lasting discredit, the crown prince's fan club were more concerned with "rooting" for his success than they were about the lives of Yemeni civilians and the rights of his

many jailed, tortured, and murdered critics. Every puff piece profile of Mohammed bin Salman has been sure to mention that he permitted women to drive, but there have not been nearly as many articles talking about the torture of women's rights activists detained by the Saudi government:

The sources say that masked Saudi interrogators tortured the women during the initial stages of interrogation, but it was unclear whether they were seeking to force the women to sign confessions or merely to punish them for their peaceful advocacy. Following the interrogations, sources said, the women showed physical signs of torture, including difficulty walking, uncontrolled shaking of the hands, and red marks and scratches on their faces and necks. At least one of the women attempted to commit suicide multiple times, the sources said.

There was never any reason to assume that Mohammed bin Salman would be an improvement over his predecessors, but there was every sign from the very beginning that he might prove to be much worse. He has turned out to be exceptionally repressive and cruel even by Saudi standards, and in just a few years he has become one of the world's great war criminals. The U.S.-Saudi relationship was already a bad one before he came to power, and with him in power it has become truly toxic. There is no good reason for the U.S. to have close ties with a government that is both a liability and a regional menace, and the crown prince ensures that it will be both for the foreseeable future.

(Source: The American Conservative)

The military's new boss is walking into an ambush

Donald Trump has picked a former CEO to run the Pentagon. He should have gone with a psychiatrist.

By Gordon Adams

It's at once entirely fair and entirely absurd to ask if Patrick Shanahan, soon to be acting U.S. secretary of defense, is up to his new job. It's fair because Shanahan's prior experience as an executive at Boeing hasn't necessarily equipped him with the skills and knowledge traditionally considered to be required to run the Pentagon. It's absurd because at the present moment, the only skill that matters is the ability to placate a mercurial and emotional president—and it's not clear, by that standard, whether there's anyone at all who would be qualified.

Consider, first, Shanahan's resume. For much of his life, he had only one employer: a major defense contractor. That experience gives him management skills, some say. And, to be sure, the deputy secretary's job is management of the Pentagon and its processes.

But the Pentagon is not Boeing. At a company, orders can be given and followed; policymaking is top-down, as Shanahan demonstrated when called on by management to fix an ailing Dreamliner program. Politics in a federal government agency are of a different kind. At the Department of Defense, there are many independent power centers—the collection of armed services chiefs is a big one—that have to be cajoled for defense secretaries to achieve their goals. As one former secretary of defense told me at the start of his tenure: "If I don't have the Chiefs with me, I can't run the building." Outside power centers like the White House have to be worked behind the scenes; Congress has to be flattered and persuaded. Respect has to be earned everywhere.

Unlike for CEOs, defense secretaries' day-to-day responsibility is rarely to run the department itself. Instead, their job is to be the face of the Pentagon to the rest of the world—other federal agencies, the public, allies, and adversaries—through interagency and White House meetings on policy, congressional testimony, overseas travel, media appearances, and international negotiations. The White House relationship is a particularly important role for the defense secretary, who is one of the four principal national security policy advisors to the president, along with the national security advisor, the secretary of state, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

This is a task for which departing Secretary of Defense James Mattis was well prepared through decades of military service, including overseas command in Afghanistan and



As deputy, most of Shanahan's challenges until now have been inside the Pentagon. The only task that has required him to have close White House ties has been the president's order to create a controversial new military service for space.

Iraq, leadership of the military's Central Command, and a turn as NATO commander for defense transformation.

Shanahan's biography reveals no background appropriate to this policy advisor role. He has never served in positions with responsibility for defense policy, politics, or international relations. But that is a big part of his job, at least on paper. The jury is even out on his basic management skill set. Early reports about his tenure at the Pentagon suggest he has had high staff turnover and tensions with several of the armed services.

But all this discussion makes it sound like Shanahan will be operating in a normal administration. He will not. We are talking about Trumpland, a parallel universe of strange vectors and unpredictable beasts, where only one's relationship with the ruler behind the curtain matters. As Mattis's experience reveals, President Donald Trump's White House is not one that relishes back-and-forth policy discussions or disagreement from department heads. And the disagree-

ments can go deep and have serious implications for national security, including issues like overseas military exercises (as in South Korea) and the deployment and redeployment of forces (as in Syria). One false step and Shanahan may be history, like a growing list of other senior officials in this administration.

Trump clearly likes firing people and replacing them with yes men and women — people for whom loyalty comes before patriotism, good sense, or, often, good policy. After the departures of Mattis, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, National Security Advisor HR McMaster, and chief of staff John Kelly, will Shanahan be the next victim?

As deputy, most of Shanahan's challenges until now have been inside the Pentagon. The only task that has required him to have close White House ties has been the president's order to create a controversial new military service for space. Shanahan has reportedly made the creation of a Space Force a high priority, which suggests he may be attuned to his master's voice.

But Shanahan's status as acting secretary suggests an audition, a kind of probation testing for good behavior. (It's a status also recently awarded to the new chief of staff, Mick Mulvaney.) Trump's message seems to be: You serve at my pleasure, and when I am done with you, the departure may be as sudden as the going-away Henry VIII gave Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard. Supine and fawning submission, of the sort we saw at that famous cabinet meeting in June 2017 (notably excepting Mattis), is what the president will expect of his next secretary.

Yet fulfilling Trump's pleasure is likely to be a monumental challenge for Shanahan, as it would be for anybody with a modicum of independence. Mattis, for instance, had a hard time straddling the gap between fulfilling the needs of an impulsive and relatively uninformed chief executive and the requirements of good policy and the stroking of allies. His answer was to slow-roll impulsive decisions: an order to deny transgender Americans the opportunity to serve in the military, a Soviet-like military parade on Pennsylvania Avenue, the creation of an independent military force for space operations, the stand-down of military exercises in South Korea, the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, and arming soldiers at the U.S. border. With the order to immediately leave Syria, Mattis had had enough and delivered his resignation — only for Trump to push him out the door.

(Source: Foreign Policy)

Who is responsible for the destruction of the Arab state?

Daily 'Express' in its editorial comments said that U.S. President Donald Trump has revealed that not the U.S. but Saudi Arabia would assist Syria in its reconstruction, however, if looked closely it is the U.S. who is responsible for the destruction of the Arab state.

It said that previously U.S. was asked to help in reconstruction of war torn Syria but Donald Trump in a tweet said that it would be better for rich countries of the region to help Syria instead of a country which is 5000 miles away from Syria.

It went on to say that American analysts also believe that President Donald Trump

is trying to escape from his responsibilities. The paper said that Syria's infrastructure has been completely destroyed due to con-

It went on to say that American analysts also believe that President Donald Trump is trying to escape from his responsibilities.

tinuous war and military operations, which needs to be rebuilt.

It went on to say that even in Yemen, the U.S. involvement in the country cannot be ignored. According to the report, there is a risk of famine in Yemen and many other

African countries.

It said that only in Yemen 20 million children are suffering from life threatening

diseases like diarrhea and other diseases.

The editorial said that Western states especially the U.S. have played negative roles in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Libya and their only objective was to protect the Zionist regime.

As a ceasefire in Yemen comes into effect the plight of the Yemeni people remains ongoing. The war on Yemen is known as the "forgotten war" because it lacks international attention, despite being one of the biggest humanitarian catastrophes in modern history.

Since 2015, thousands of civilians, mostly children and women have been killed by Saudi airstrikes. Reports say that the Saudi-led coalition is committing daily crimes in Yemen. The Saudi war has resulted in bringing famine to more than 14 million Yemeni civilian, which is half the population.

(Source: Yemen Press)

The UAE reopens embassy in Damascus; Arabs in line to return to Syria

By Mohammad Ghaderi

TEHRAN — Besides the security developments in Syria that have always made headlines and the Zionist's attacks on Syria, these days Damascus has become a hangout place for states that have not achieved much in the past few years of war against Syria.

As President Donald Trump announced the U.S. withdrawal from Syria and Turkey affirmed a plan to operate in eastern Euphrates, Israel begun targeting passenger places from Lebanon's airspace in Syria, although with not much achievement. Another development in Syria is the United Arab Emirates has recently announced reopening embassy in Damascus. In addition, for the first time, after 8 years, a Syrian passenger plane, flying 150 passengers for the New Year holiday, landed in Monastir Habib Bourguiba International Airport in Tunisia. The aircraft belonged to the Cham Wings Airlines Company, a private Syrian airline.

At the airport many Tunisians came to welcome the Syrian tourists, among who were representatives of civil society, human rights defenders and journalists.

Talah Hassan, president of the Syrian community association of Tunisia, had announced that the travelers would spend a week in Tunisia to visit various Tunisian cities.

Although former Tunisian President Moncef Marzouki cut ties with Syria in 2012, the incumbent president Beji Caïd Essebsi restart relations with Damascus.

There have been also talks on Syria to join the Arab League



once again. The 30th Arab League Summit is scheduled in March 2018 in Tunisia where Tunisian leaders will try to bring Bashar al-Assad to the table again.

However, the UAE reopening embassy in Syria is happening when the Arab states did all in power to help topple al-Assad's government.

Abdel Bari Atwan, the famous analyst of the Arab world, wrote: "A long line of countries is expected to form to resume relations with Damascus, and of course this time the ties will be stronger than before."

On the issue of the Syrian tourists in Tunisia, Atwan said, "The political tourism to a country comes at the time when, a

while ago more than 5,000 Tunisian Salafis were dispatched to Syria in the form of extremist groups, supported by the U.S. and some Persian Gulf Arab states, to topple the Syrian government."

Atwan expected more states to resume relations with Damascus with the coming New Year and more Arab leaders land in Damascus airport to begin amicable relations with al-Assad, as Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir did the same.

■ When Arab leaders give up

Atwan believes most Arab leaders have come to accept al-Assad as the head Syrian government, particularly with U.S. pulling out Syria, the path for Assad has been paved further.

Some Persian Gulf Arab states like Oman never closed down embassy in Damascus. Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi traveled to Damascus a few months back. Bahrain is seeking to reopen embassy in Damascus soon as Bahrain's Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifeh warmly received his Syrian counterpart Walid Muallem in September.

Atwan also suspected that once Abu Dhabi opens embassy in Syria, the UAE may represent the interests of Riyadh in Syria as it holds close relationship with the House of Saud.

Dismissal of Adel al-Jubeir as a foreign minister, who kept pushing for removal of al-Assa, may have to do with the reopening of the UAE embassy in Damascus.

In any case, Damascus will be witnessing quite bit of developments in months to come including high level officials' trips which would mean victory for Syria after seven years of fighting terrorism at home.

A hard year for Trump

By Hanif Ghaffari

TEHRAN — Analyzing the current circumstances in the United States indicate that the coming year will be very difficult for the U.S. President.

The removal of James Mattis as the U.S. Defense Secretary on the one hand, and other actions taken by Trump on the eve of the new year, raised lots of conflicts and tensions in the country. These tensions are intensifying as Washington is entering 2019. Definitely this is going to be a hard year for the controversial President of the United States due to the Democrats' inter-party competitions and the intensification of social, political and economic crises in the United States.

In this critical period, Trump is trying to prevent the American citizens from concentrating on the turbulent atmosphere

ruling over the White House. It's not still clear that how long Trump can play his role in producing cross-sectional crises to cover the deep-seated crises in the United States, but in spite of the President's will, the game's about to change.

Recently, Trump's performance has been seriously under the focus of American media. It has reached a point where, according to a recent poll conducted by Fox News (which supports Trum), only 39% of Americans are confident of Trump's re-election in 2020. This is while 55%re opposed to his re-election. If these figures don't change by that time, we'll see lots of tensions in the White House in the years between 2018 and 2020. However, the newly elected House members, most of them Democrats who are opposing Trump, will soon enter the U.S. Congress.

Many American sources have predicted that Trump's controversial actions and policies will lead the country into intense crises in different aspects. They believe that these crises will raise in different areas and will become America's Achilles' heel in the domestic and international system.

In one of its recent reports, Washington Post has referred to Trump's crisis-producing actions, such as the controversial border with Mexico, and said; "For probably the first time in American history, part of the government is shut down for lack of funding because of a dispute over a construction project."

It continues: "President Trump, as you may have heard, promised during the 2016 presidential campaign that he would solve most of America's immigration problems and many of its other issues by building a wall on the border between the United

States and Mexico. This wall was going to be paid for by Mexico, he claimed, an assertion that was never believable. More believable: that the wall was going to be made of concrete slabs, a point he made in some detail on the trail."

The Washington Post also argues that the results of some major researches will be soon published in the United States, including special counsel Robert Muller's investigations on Russia's possible intervention in the U.S. presidential elections. Trump will undoubtedly criticize this report. As a result, the situation will become even worse.

The truth is that Trump's presence on top of the U.S. political and executive equations has created internal and international crises in the country, crises which will affect the White House for many years, even after Trump's stepping down from power.

Ill planned operation in Syria could land Turkey in quagmire: Turkish analyst

1 → Even if it continues to secure covert support from the U.S. the situation is not the same for it without the presence of American boots on the ground."

Referring to the possible threats to Ankara resulted from the U.S. withdrawal, he said, "Although Turkey has secured an advantage, Ankara also knows that it has to tread cautiously because the prospect of a Turkish military operation east of the Euphrates brings up questions which have yet to be answered. The most important one is the reactions of Russia and the Syrian regime."

He added, "There is also the added problem that France has said it will not follow the U.S. lead and pull out of northern Syria, so Turkey will have to also manage the European side of the equation too. In addition to this there is the fact that President Trump has effectively tasked Turkey with fighting the Islamic State. President Erdogan said Turkey can do this, but faces risks that it cannot afford to minimize."

Touching upon the potential consequences of the Turkey's military operation in northern parts of Syria and Saudi Arabia's destructive regional policies, the Turkish analyst noted, "The bottom line is that an ill planned and hasty operation by Turkey could land it in a quagmire where it is not only fighting the YPG and the ISIL, but also risks confrontations with the Syrian regime or French forces. As far as your question about Saudi Arabia, it is unlikely that we will see Saudi forces along the Turkish border. The dialogue between Riyadh and Damascus is a long way from bearing fruit and Omar al Bashir's intervention will not change the situation much, given the present alignment of factors in the region."



Violating ceasefire in al-Hudaydah with Saudi's killing machine

1 → The 400,000 Yemeni children suffer from severe malnutrition and fight for survival. Over 6,000 children have been killed or injured since the start of the Yemeni war in 2015. More than 20,000 people are in urgent need of water and food and medicine in al-Hudaydah."

■ Yemeni resistance is more powerful than before

Despite Riyadh's violation of the political agreement of Stockholm, the Yemeni resistance groups and, above all, Ansarullah are responding to the Saudis' brutal attacks more with greater power. In fact, it was the military power of the Yemeni resistance group that brought the Saudi mercenaries to the negotiating table in Stockholm in the first place.

For example, Brigadier Saree announced that recently the Yemeni army and popular committees targeted large Saudi mercenaries at a military base in Al Jawf, where dozens of the forces were killed and wounded as a result. He also said the mercenaries were preparing for a new operation and escalation of conflicts in the province of al-Jawf in favor of the Saudi coalition.

In any case, the reality is that the Saudis continue to carry out their cruel killing of innocent people of Yemen, even following the peace talks in Sweden, because they realize their objective in Yemen has failed.



We don't necessarily need "religious" theory of IR: Dallmayr

1 → A: If IR is purely empirical, then to become relevant religion also has to be treated empirically. So genuine religion can only enter IR, if IR is treated broadly, that is, theoretically and spiritually.

■ Some scholars such as "Michael Allen Gillespie" in the book "The Theological Origins of Modernity" believe that modernity was not initially against religion, and in later years, as a result of social, cultural and political conditions, it has led to secularism.

So Based on this conception, religion is not conflict with modernity, so can it be said that religion is not conflict with the International Relations theory stemming from modernity?

A: Gillespie is correct; modernity at the start was not anti-religious (witness the Reformation). Hence modernity is not necessarily anti-religious, and the same is true of IR.

■ Some argue that the current International Relations theory cannot explain some of the current phenomena of international relations and we need a religious theory of International Relations, especially with regard to religious issues. What is your opinion? In general, theorizing Religion in International Relations is feasible?

A: We do not necessarily need a "religious" theory of IR. We just need a more intelligent and more theoretical theory of IR, one which takes into account more elements.

■ If theorizing Religion in International Relations is possible, can this religious theory in International Relations explain all the unresolved issues and problems?

A: Religion cannot explain everything, but something. There is also economics, sociology, history and human "nature".

Second Announcement

Call for public tender (First/Second publish) - Retender
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National Iranian Drilling Company

Tender descriptions:			
The Tender holder	Registration No. through national electronic tendering system	Tender No. (Indent No.)	Estimated value (Rial/Euro)
National Iranian Drilling Company	3,185,811	Tender No.:FP/17-97/028 Indent No.: 48-22-9622052	41,820,000,000

★ Qualitative evaluation of tenderers:

Method	R Based on minimum scoring (60) made in award criterion reflected in the tenderers pre-qualification forms.
1-	Applicants which have more than 4 in process contacts with NIDC are not allowed to participate in this tender.
2-	Applicants which have more than 2 in process contacts with NIDC in similar subject (exclusively same subject) are not allowed to participate in another tender.

★ Purchasing & Submitting

Tender Document Distribution by Company	The distribution of the documents will be started one day after the publishing of second advertisement and ended on the following tenth day thereof.
Distribution Place	Hall No: 113, 1 st floor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN, KASHANI, TEL: 06134148659
Submitting Method	Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt in the amount of 510,000 Iranian Rials under account number 4001114006376636 (Shaba No. IR 350100004001114006376636) in name of "NIDC Income Central Fund" issued by I.R. of Iran Central Bank Submitting formal Request for the purpose of receiving Tender Documents
Closing date	Days after the last time of Purchasing 14
Documents Receiving Method	Address
	Hall No. 107, 1 st floor, Tender Committee, Operation building, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel: +98-61-34148580 +98-61-34148569

★ Tender Guarantee

Value of guarantee	2,091,000,000 Rial/ 42,526 Euro
Type of guarantee	✓--Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that obtain activity license from the central bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. ✓--Submitting one original Bank Fund Receipt under account number 4001114006376636 (Shaba No. IR 350100004001114006376636) in name of "NIDC saving account" by the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran.
Duration of credit & quotation	Tender Guarantee and quotation should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum for one time in initial validity duration.

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Second Announcement

Khouzestan Steel Company

Announcement of the contractors' qualification for a package included New Secondary Metallurgical Facilities and One New single strand Wide Slab Continuous Casting Machine with all auxiliaries in EPC, EPCF condition at KSC

Khouzestan Steel Company (KSC) intends to build a new secondary metallurgy line (LF, VD / VOD; included all related auxiliaries) & a new single strand wide slab continuous casting machine including all related auxiliaries. The location is in existing steelmaking indoor and the required molten steel is provided by current melt shop.

The features of the slab casting :

- Capacity 1.2 MTPA (good Slab)
- Width 1200 - 2200 mm
- Thickness 200 - 300 mm

Companies interested in taking part the tender having the following qualifications, can declare their readiness:

1. Technological Knowledge of secondary metallurgy lines and slab continuous casting.
2. Experienced in executing EPC, EPCF or Turn-key secondary metallurgy line projects, slab continuous casting machines or similar steel making projects.
3. Having the ability of financing or taking the final product as reimbursement after the completion of the project is preferred.
4. Equipment must be supplied from European Companies in Europe or other countries under their license with European Union Countries Standards.

The interested companies shall send the following documents to KSC by the date : **26 January 2019**

1. The lists and references (Name, Location, Scope, Capacity and the Contract Price) of similar projects, EPC or Engineering, Procurement, Construction Separately
2. The list of project with frame of financing and taking final product (if any).
3. The Company Profile and Catalogue

After receiving the documents and evaluating the companies' competency, the KSC will send tendering documents to the selected contractors.

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 Post Box: **1378**, Post Code: **61788-13111**; Purchasing Department.
 Mr. F.Farmani - Mr. Dehghan Khani
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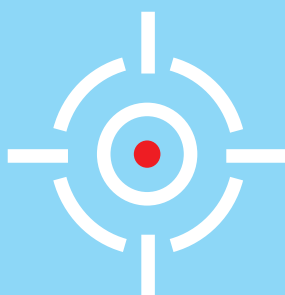
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Mindfulness 'has huge potential' as a weight loss strategy

As the holiday season draws to a close, many of us may be struggling with the extra weight we put on during extensive, food-filled celebrations with family and friends. Can mindfulness techniques come to our aid in getting rid of those extra pounds?

New evidence confirms that eating mindfully can help with maintaining a healthy weight.

According to anecdotal evidence and some existing research, mindfulness techniques can help a person maintain or improve their physical and mental well-being.

For example, mindfulness can reduce symptoms of anxiety and enhance cognitive functioning, and it may even improve a person's immune response.

The principle behind mindfulness is very simple: One has to be fully present in the moment, focusing attention on external stimuli and their effects on the body and mind, learning to concomitantly acknowledge and dismiss unnecessary thoughts.

Thus, learning mindfulness techniques can help us tone down the effects of stress and regain more enjoyment in present experiences.

Recently, researchers have suggested that mindfulness can also aid a person in their weight loss efforts.

A new study from the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire National Health Services Trust in the United Kingdom — in collaboration with other clinical and research institutions — confirms these and similar findings.

"This research is significant, as we have



shown that problematic eating behavior can be improved with mindfulness application," says the study's first author, Petra Hanson, a research fellow and doctoral student at the Warwickshire Institute for the Study of Diabetes Endocrinology and Metabolism at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire.

Hanson and the team report their findings in The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism, which is an Endocrine Society publication.

■ 'Enabling appropriate lifestyle decisions'

The research team worked with 53 individuals participating in a dedicated weight

management program at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire National Health Services Trust.

Of the participants, 33 took part in at least three of four mindfulness training sessions, which taught them to practice mindfulness while eating.

Over the next 6 months, the participants who had attended three or four mindfulness sessions lost, on average, 3 kilograms (about 6.6 pounds), while those who had only attended one or two mindfulness sessions lost an average of 0.9 kilograms (around 2 pounds).

Moreover, when compared with a control group of 20 participants who attended the

same weight management program but no mindfulness sessions, the individuals who had received complete mindfulness training shed an average of 2.85 kilograms (almost 6.3 pounds) more.

"Surveys of the participants indicate [that] mindfulness training can help this population improve their relationship with food," explains Hanson. Mindfulness, she explains, can help people change and manage their eating behaviors with more ease.

"Individuals who completed the course said they were better able to plan meals in advance and felt more confident in self-management of weight loss moving forward," says Hanson, adding, "Similar courses can be held in a primary care setting or even developed into digital tools."

She expresses hope that "[t]his approach can be scaled up to reach a wider population."

"Mindfulness has huge potential as a strategy for achieving and maintaining good health and well-being," comments senior author Dr. Thomas Barber, from the Warwickshire Institute for the Study of Diabetes Endocrinology and Metabolism.

The researcher notes that many pressing chronic diseases are linked, to some extent, with lifestyle behaviors and concludes:

"[The] focus should be on enabling the populace to make appropriate lifestyle decisions and empowering subsequent salutary behavior change. In the context of obesity and eating-related behaviors, we have demonstrated that mindfulness techniques can do just that."

(Source: Medical News Today)

Bipolar: Physical activity may boost mood and energy

New research, published in the journal JAMA Psychiatry, found that higher levels of physical activity boost mood and energy levels. The benefits were particularly noticeable in people with bipolar disorder.

Being physically active might help people with bipolar disorder fight off depressive symptoms.

In the United States, almost 3 percent of adults experienced bipolar disorder "in the past year."

Around 4.4 percent of adults have bipolar at some point in their lives. Depression is even more prevalent, both in the U.S. and across the globe.

In fact, about 8 percent of people over the age of 20 in the U.S. have depression, according to the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC).

With 300 million people living with depression, the World Health Organization (WHO) describe it as the "leading cause of disability worldwide."

New research may help alleviate depressive symptoms, particularly in people with bipolar disorder.

A team led by Vadim Zipunnikov, Ph.D. — an assistant professor in the Department of Biostatistics at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, MD — found that increased physical activity improves mood and energy levels for those living with the condition.

■ How physical activity affects mood

Zipunnikov and colleagues asked 242 participants, aged

15–84, to wear activity tracking devices and keep electronic diaries of their mood and energy over the course of 2 weeks.

The participants — 150 of whom were female — used the diary four times per day to assess their perceived energy and mood using a seven-point scale that ranged from "very tired" to "very energetic" and from "very happy" to "very sad."

The researchers accounted for each individual's daily routines and designated four time points throughout the day: one in the morning, one at lunch, one at dinner time, and one at bedtime.

Overall, the study found that higher physical activity at any one of these time points correlated with better mood and higher energy levels at the following time point throughout the day.

(Source: Medical News Today)

Childhood poverty has a lasting impact on developing brain, finds study

Growing up in a less well-off family may negatively impact the brain, according to research showing how socioeconomic status can have a lasting impact on a person's development.

U.S. researchers found brain regions responsible for learning, language and emotional development tended to be more complex in people whose parents were educated to a higher level or who worked in professional rather than manual jobs.

Brain scans from hundreds of young people show these effects are stable throughout childhood and adolescence, the National Institute of Mental Health researchers found.

This means targeting additional support in the pre-school years could help minimize inequalities it causes in a host of life outcomes, including mental health and academic achievement, the researchers added.

"Early brain development occurs within the context of each child's experiences and environment, which both vary significantly as a function of socioeconomic status," said lead author Cassidy McDermott and colleagues.

In childhood, socioeconomic status, which encompasses income as well as opportunities and a string of other factors, has been linked to a range of mental health, cognitive development, and academic outcomes.

"Socioeconomic status may exert some of its effect on cognition by altering structural brain development, particularly in regions associated with language and learning," Ms McDermott said.

"However, it is important to note that this pathway represents only one possible set of interactions between childhood environment, anatomy, and cognition."

For the study, published in the Journal of Neuroscience, the researchers looked at 1,243 brain MRI scans from more than 623 young people aged between five and 25. While the socioeconomic score used did not take account of family income in the earliest measurements this is another determinant of socioeconomic status and also correlates with parental occupation and education factors.

Previous studies have shown links between parental occupation and earnings and an overall increase in the volume of the brain's grey matter.

However the study takes this further and shows that higher socioeconomic status in early childhood has a pronounced effect on two areas of the brain, the thalamus and striatum.

The thalamus is a key region in the center of the brain involved in the transmission and processing of sensory information, and a larger thalamus volume is closely linked with quicker thinking and higher verbal IQ.

While differences in size and complexity of these brain regions tracked with socioeconomic status, and this has been shown to predict future life outcomes the study does not prove one causes the other.

Many other factors will play a role in early year's development and future outcomes, and McDermott and colleagues say they hope understanding the roots in anatomy can help reduce variation.

(Source: The Independent)

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Vanak
Arjantin
Zafar...
nice cases ready to move in.

Iransaakht, at the outset of promoting domestic products: VP

1→ A new generation of entrepreneurs in Iran are now important part of economy with their innovation and use of technology, he added.

The festival was held in six different sections including literature, visual arts, digital, audio and visual media with the motto of Iranian technology in service of Iranian market.

Tehran mayor Pirouz Hanachi and the Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research Director Hamidreza Tayyebi attended the ceremony, which was held at the Vahdat Hall.

Going green? Here are the easiest ways to recycle your old tech devices

We all have a shoebox stashed away somewhere full of fraying cords and ancient hardware from a different era. As tech companies pump out newer, sleeker, and faster devices on a year-to-year basis, it's only natural for certain devices to lose their luster or fall into disrepair.

By 2020, Greenpeace estimates there will be 6 billion smartphone users, each replacing their phones every two years, on average. The waste from smartphones, as well as obsolete desktops and laptops, is already straining the environment in a number of different ways.

E-waste is growing out of control, with the United Nations finding in 2014 that over 40 million metric tons of devices and parts found their way into landfills. They estimate a 21% increase in 2018. However, tech companies have started to step up to the challenge, expanding recycling programs and offering more refurbished devices for sale.

Amazon offers gift cards for any old devices that still work and provides clear directions for sending in any items that no longer function. They have an easy-to-follow portal that prints a UPS shipping label for you to quickly send your device back. Smartphones, tablets, Kindles, and games are accepted for return.

The company supports "the responsible disposal and recycling of electronics products" and has over 30,000 collection sites for rechargeable batteries, it says on its website. You can even recycle the boxes your Amazon purchase comes in. Amazon also allows you to donate any other non-electronic items you may have by putting them in your used boxes and printing a free UPS label from their Give Back Box program. Donations go to your local participating charity.

Similarly, Apple has a robust recycling effort, dangling the prospect of Apple Gift Cards for any prospective refurbishers.

"No matter the model or condition, we can turn it into something good for you and good for the planet. And through April 30, we'll make a donation to Conservation International for every device we receive — getting us even closer to leaving the world better than we found it," Apple wrote on its website.

After only a few questions, users can figure out how much their old device is worth, or if it's worth anything at all, and instantly get Apple Store credit or Apple Store Gift Cards. Apple claims to disassemble at least 200 iPhones an hour using Daisy, a robot designed specifically for the recycling process. They have been eager to take on the recycling challenge and continue to push for more and more ways to reuse minerals and parts in old devices.

In an April press release, CEO Tim Cook said that Apple would continue to push "the boundaries of what is possible with the materials in our products, the way we recycle them, our facilities and our work with suppliers to establish new creative and forward-looking sources of renewable energy because we know the future depends on it."



Apple has lead the way in publicly condemning the environmentally-costly lifecycle of most devices on the market, writing in their environmental responsibility report last year that they needed to move toward "a closed-loop supply chain, where products are built using only renewable resources or recycled material."

Google has its own recycling program, offering both mail-in services and collection sites. Both Google products and other electronics can get you something from the Google Store.

Sony established one of the first recycling programs for their televisions and electronics in 2007. In 2016, they collected 9,749 tons of used consumer electronics and aim to have a collection center within 20 miles of 95% of the homes in North America.

As of March last year, Sony cumulatively collected approximately 222,727 tons of electronic devices. You can also contact them online with any questions about how and where to recycle any old devices or electronics. Although they don't offer payment or credit for any non-Sony devices, they do recycle everything for free and have a special program for rechargeable batteries.

Samsung, now the world's largest smartphone producer, organizes a number of different recycling programs for their devices. They have collection sites across the US for devices, batteries, and printer toner, but do not offer mail-in services. Depending on the state, Samsung is required to recycle their devices at no cost to you. They do not say whether credit or gift cards are offered in exchange for old devices.

There are also many charities and non-profit organizations collecting electronics and putting them to good use. Music & Memory collects old iPods and mp3 players and refurbishes them for use in nursing homes. Other organizations offer home pick-ups of old electronics and devices that you no longer need.

Before letting that shoebox overflow with old devices, cords, and batteries, check an organization's website to see if you can be rewarded for recycling.

(Source: techrepublic.com)

Sorkheh Hesar to be first smart park in Iran

TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — The Sorkheh Hesar National Park in northeastern Tehran is planned to be turned into the first smart park in Iran.

The head of Tehran Municipality ICT Organization Mohammad Farjoud and the mayor of District 13 of Tehran Municipality Mohammad Rahmanzadeh signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to make Sorkheh Hesar National Park a smart place as a project.

As one of the projects, which is planned at the district 13 as the pilot region, the infrastructure projects related to making Sorkheh Hesar National Park smart through computer network will be developed.

Smart monitoring and parking, smart irrigation, smart waste water treatment

and recycling water, smart safety, smart health services and video games as well as smart tree ID signs are some measures, which will be taken to make the Sorkheh Hesar National Park smart.

Organizing parking space in streets, establishing smart kiosks, and smart fueling are other projects planned in the agreement, Mohammad Farjoud explained.

"We do hope that the smart projects boost the urban life and services for Tehrani citizens," he added.

Through IT facilities, the difficulties changed into opportunities and improved quality of life, the District 13 mayor Morteza Rahmanzadeh said.

"The district 13 is ready to perform smart waste segregation at source as the pilot region," he said.



Smart monitoring and parking, smart irrigation, smart waste water treatment and recycling water and smart tree ID signs are some measures, which will be taken to make the Sorkheh Hesar National Park smart.

Iranian startup to stop vicious cycle of fresh fruit and vegetable distribution system



TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — An Iranian startup is planned to stop the vicious cycle of fresh fruit and vegetable distribution system in Tehran, Yazd and Isfahan, Tasnim reported on Saturday.

Known as Bazargam, the startup provides two separate applications for costumers and distributors.

The applicants can order fresh fruits and vegetable online and receive them at their desired location and time.

Sometimes the price of fruit increased 700 percent from farm to consumer because the existence of several dealers, an official with science and technology vice presidency announced.

Esmail Qaderifar, who is also the founder of the startup, said that the application provides the fruit from farmers.

The startup saves 25 to 30 percent of fruit consumption price and people can buy more fruits, he said.

The fruits are delivered in pockets made from stone dust, which are environment-friendly, he added.

Agriculture ministry, Central Organization for Rural Cooperatives of Iran, Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare and District 2 of Tehran Municipality cooperate with science and technology vice presidency to establish the startup.

ICT Ministry introduces blockchain in a video series



TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Ministry introduces blockchain technology in a series of videos for public.

The seven-part video series, which are available on ICT media channel at the Aparat website, aims to give information to public about blockchain as a fundamental section of technology.

"Informing public is the principle of using new aspects of technology," the ICT Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi announced on his Twitter account on Saturday.

In early December, a group of block-

chain experts from Tehran's Sharif University of Technology announced that they are developing a startup which is to introduce the first Iranian blockchain-based taxi app.

The startup founder Amir Abbas Emami said that they have launched Initial Coin Offering (ICO).

The latest report of Europe Union Blockchain Observatory and Forum (EUBF) details that for blockchain to realize its potential within government institutions, they must focus on using the technology to build two things: digital identity systems, and digital versions of their national currencies.

The biggest challenges for tech in 2019

If you thought 2018 was a bad year for tech, 2019 might turn out to be even worse. This year was filled with revelations about privacy, security and cyberwarfare. Next year, the consequences of those revelations will unfold. And we should be very worried about what the future holds.

■ Privacy is dead

In 2018, it became very clear that Americans have no control over their digital information. We discovered that our cellphones could be monitored, and many of the apps on our phones are tracking us. We found out that Facebook shared our private messages with third parties and let developers using its platform harvest and exploit our data in order to influence political elections. Our data is perpetually being gathered, leaked, exploited, breached and sold.

And perhaps worse is what the future holds. We most likely aren't aware of all the companies that hold our personal data and what they are doing with it: the social media companies that know us as well as our friends do, the financial technology companies that sell our bank account transaction data, the messaging apps that hold our private photos and texts.

But 2018 was also the first year of privacy protection in Europe: The General Data Protection Regulation went into effect in May. Despite the protestations of those who complain that G.D.P.R. places an undue organizational burden on start-ups, it could return privacy to millions of people living in the European Union.

But those of us in the United States have no similar privacy protections. There is no way for us to know which companies have our data, and I don't think that will change in 2019. I'm also not very optimistic that any significant legislation will be passed, especially given the relationships between some members of Congress and Silicon Valley companies. The only people who have a chance to hold tech companies accountable and demand better protections are ordinary people like you and me. And I think that we will fail.

Many of us will delete apps. We will disable as much tracking as we can on our phones. We will delete our Facebook accounts. We will delete our social media histories and old emails and text messages. But it won't be enough because most people will not care: The trade-off between privacy and convenience will be worth it to them, because the loss of their privacy will have little to no impact on their day-to-day life. Most people will read (or perhaps ignore) the news stories about every new privacy scandal, and they will then go back to their phones.



■ The end of security

There were some very large and frightening data breaches this year. Quora was hacked, and 100 million user accounts were compromised. Facebook was hacked, and 50 million users were affected. Google+ was hacked, and Facebook was hacked again, disclosing that it gave developers access to photos that users had uploaded but never posted. Then we learned that the Google+ hack was worse than we initially knew. And then Marriott realized it had been hacked, exposing the personal data of 500 million people.

The knee-jerk response this year has been to say that these companies need stronger punishments for security breaches, or that we need to regulate tech companies. This response is appropriate in cases where the breach is a result of poor security practices, as appears to have been the case in the 2017 Equifax breach. But some of this year's breaches were different: The Marriott and Quora hacks seem to have been the work of malicious hackers, and in the case of Marriott, the hackers are reported to have been Chinese government spies.

It's not clear that these breaches were a result of poor security practices or corporate negligence. The truth is — and I say this as someone who has worked in Silicon Valley as an engineer — the security teams and security practices at Google and Facebook are among the best in the world. It's not clear that stronger punishments or more regulation will fix the problem or prevent these kinds of data breaches from happening.

Being the best in the world when it comes to security and following the best security practices have not protected these companies, and, ultimately, they have not kept our data safe. We will see more of these breaches in the coming year, at large companies, and our data will be exploited in ways we never could have

dreamed of. Preventing these companies from storing our data would, ultimately, protect it, but the chances that will happen are slim to none. Instead, as these security breaches become routine, engineers and their employers will accept them as an inevitability and treat them (at least internally) as a nonevent — much the same as credit card companies and credit card users treat credit card fraud today.

There's a lot at stake. The spies from foreign governments hacking into American companies aren't trying to destroy you, me or any specific individuals living in the United States — they are trying to destroy the country that we live in.

■ Tech's anti-government stance

Employees at tech companies like Amazon, Google and Microsoft have begun to organize. In response to an employee walkout at Google, the company changed the way it enforces forced arbitration agreements in sexual harassment cases. The company also dropped out of a competition to provide cloud computing services to the Pentagon after employees protested the company's involvement.

Google employees during a "women's walkout," a protest over the company's handling of sexual harassment claims.

Some of the internal protests at these companies centered on civil rights issues, such as the way that victims of sexual harassment are treated. Others, like the outcry about Google's Project Dragonfly (a censored search engine Google was building for China), were related to freedom of expression. However, a majority of the employee protests and complaints seem to have been about government-related projects. At Salesforce, hundreds of employees signed a petition asking the company to cease working with United States Customs and Border Protection. At Microsoft, employees circulated an open letter urging the company to stop working with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and also complained about the company's bid for the Pentagon's cloud computing contract — the very same one that Google employees pressured their employer about. And, at Amazon, employees protested the company selling its Amazon Web Services products to the United States government.

The United States is engaged in cyberwarfare with China and Russia, in which tech companies are inevitably involved. Employees of these same tech companies are pushing their employers to drop contracts with the United States government. If they succeed, who is going to win the war?

(Source: nytimes.com)

Illuminating nanoparticle growth with X-rays

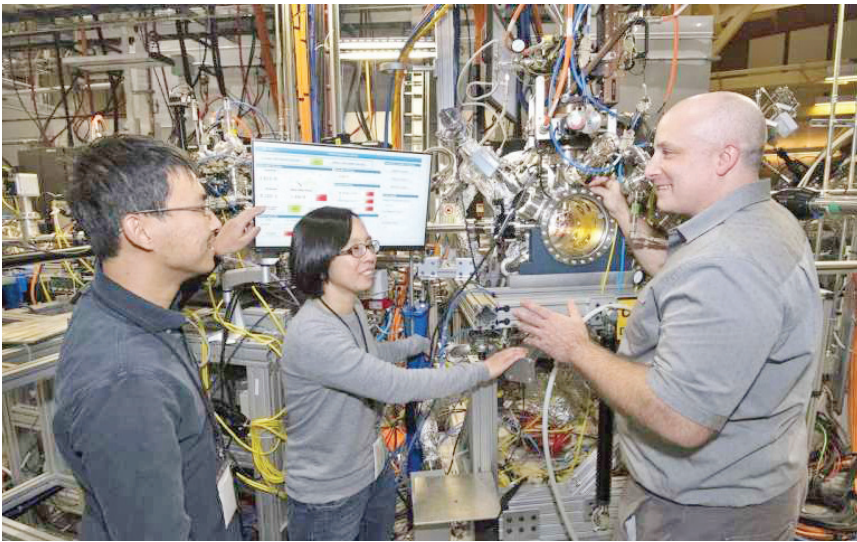
Hydrogen fuel cells are a promising technology for producing clean and renewable energy, but the cost and activity of their cathode materials is a major challenge for commercialization.

Many fuel cells require expensive platinum-based catalyst substances that initiate and speed up chemical reactions --to help convert renewable fuels into electrical energy. To make hydrogen fuel cells commercially viable, scientists are searching for more affordable catalysts that provide the same efficiency as pure platinum.

"Like a battery, hydrogen fuel cells convert stored chemical energy into electricity. The difference is that you're using a replenishable fuel so, in principle, that 'battery' would last forever," said Adrian Hunt, a scientist at the National Synchrotron Light Source II (NSLS-II), a U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science User Facility at DOE's Brookhaven National Laboratory. "Finding a cheap and effective catalyst for hydrogen fuel cells is basically the holy grail for making this technology more feasible."

Synthesizing catalysts

Taking part in this worldwide search for fuel cell cathode materials, researchers at the University of Akron developed a new method of synthesizing catalysts from a combination of metals -- platinum and nickel -- that form octahedral (eight-sided) shaped nanoparticles. While scientists have identified this catalyst as one of the most efficient replacements for pure platinum, they have not fully understood why it grows in an octahedral shape. To better understand the growth process, the researchers at the University of Akron collaborated with multiple institutions, including Brookhaven and its



NSLS-II.

"Understanding how the faceted catalyst is formed plays a key role in establishing its structure-property correlation and designing a better catalyst," said Zhenmeng Peng, principal investigator of the catalysis lab at the University of Akron.

The "growth process case for the platinum-nickel system is quite sophisticated, so we collaborated with several experienced groups to address the challenges. The cutting-edge techniques at Brookhaven National Lab were of great help to study this research topic."

"Understanding how the faceted catalyst is formed plays a key role in establishing its structure-property correlation and designing a better catalyst," said Zhenmeng Peng, principal investigator of the catalysis lab at the University of Akron.

Research team shows how to recycle Christmas tree

Twinkling pine, spruce and fir trees bring holiday cheer to homes around the world. But with the end of festivities comes the not-so-jolly chore of disrobing and discarding these unwieldy house guests.

You don't want your Christmas tree to end up in a landfill, where it will take forever to decompose. So what's the most responsible way to get rid of a Christmas tree?

Take a minute to search the internet for what your town recommends, or call your local trash haulers. Many communities will collect Christmas trees curbside for two or three weeks after the holidays.

Not only is this method most efficient (better to have a few garbage trucks driving around than a bunch of individual cars), but municipalities often use the trees for parks or habitat restoration, piling them into barriers against soil erosion or sinking them into ponds to provide habitat for fish. Some beachside towns use Christmas trees to rebuild sand dunes, a tactic that came in handy after Hurricane Sandy.

Tree for mulching

In New York City, the Department of Sanitation will collect your tree for mulching and "tree cycling" from Jan. 2 through 12. Another option is to haul your tree to a MulchFest event, where you can watch it get chipped and bring home a bag of mulch.

Before you drag your shrub to the curb, make sure to strip the lights, ornaments and tinsel. If you wrap the tree in a plastic bag to get it out of the house, take the wrap off once it's outside.

Try to find a friend with a wood chipper who can shred your tree for you. "It makes wonderful compost," said Todd Larsen, executive co-director of Green America, an environmental nonprofit based in Washington D.C.

Alternatively, visit Earth911 and search your ZIP code for places that recycle Christmas trees. Many Home Depots, Boy Scout troops or local nonprofits will take Christmas trees at no cost.

Another good place to check is your local zoo or animal sanctuary, which might



want trees for animal enrichment or food. One Michigan petting zoo, for instance, wants to turn your Christmas tree into a nutritious snack for its twin goats, Bubba and Gump.

If you're feeling crafty, you can recycle parts of your tree to make wreaths, candles, coasters and fragrant sachets.

Habitat for birds

Finally, if you live in a rural area, you can simply put your tree out on your land and "return it to nature," said Eric A. Goldstein, a lawyer for the Natural Resources Defense Council. Trees fall on their own all the time and become good habitat for birds, rodents and other wildlife.

Landfills are packed so tightly that there's no oxygen, which organic materials need to decompose, said Jessica Davis, the director of the IUPUI Office of Sustainability in Indianapolis. Also, the lack of oxygen means that when your Christmas tree finally does decompose, it will release methane, a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

It's not great to burn your tree either, Mr. Larsen said. Sap and dried needles tend to crackle, pop and explode when they burn. Moreover, fir, pine and spruce trees contain a highly flammable tar called creosote, which produces soot and can lead to chimney fires.

(Source: The NYT)

Scientists making incremental advances with inventive new materials and electrolytes

Access to energy wherever and whenever we need it is fundamental to much of modern society, keeping us warm in the winter, cool in the summer, entertained all year round, and making sure our food is safe to eat. How we store that energy is a constant work in progress, and while plenty of scientists are making important but incremental advances with inventive new materials and electrolytes, others are out to entirely reinvent what we think of as a battery.

Consider a regular spring. If you coil that spring with your finger, you are packing it with potential energy. If you then allow it to uncoil, you are letting that energy free. Now imagine that principle applied to a tower of stackable concrete blocks, with a six-armed crane acting as the finger.

This is the vision of Swiss startup Energy Vault, which is developing a new kind of battery, if you can call it that, designed to store energy from renewables like wind and solar in skyscraper-sized concrete towers.

Creating a tower

To charge it, the crane lifts blocks off the ground and stacks them to create a tower. To discharge it, the crane lets gravity lower the blocks to the ground and converts the kinetic energy generated during the descent into electricity.

This is a similar premise to pumped hydro plants, which are commonplace and also rely on gravity. These pump water up to into a reservoir during periods of low grid demand, and then capture the power generated as it is released to rush downhill through turbines. Energy Vault says its solution could hold a capacity of up to 35 MWh and 4 MW peak power and offer a roundtrip efficiency of 90 percent. It is deploying its first system in India in 2019.

A TV remote control, a watch and a flashlight, these are all everyday items that somewhere in the design process, address the need to accommodate cookie-cutter batteries in cylindrical and rectangular shapes. But what if batteries could be

Using the ultrabright x-rays at NSLS-II and the advanced capabilities of NSLS-II's In situ and Operando Soft X-ray Spectroscopy (IOS) beamline, the researchers revealed the chemical characterization of the catalyst's growth pathway in real time. Their findings are published in Nature Communications.

"We used a research technique called ambient-pressure x-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (AP-XPS) to study the surface composition and chemical state of the metals in the nanoparticles during the growth reaction," said Iradwikanari Waluyo, lead scientist at IOS and a co-corresponding author of the research paper.

Energy of electrons

"In this technique, we direct x-rays at a sample, which causes electrons to be released. By analyzing the energy of these electrons, we are able to distinguish the chemical elements in the sample, as well as their chemical and oxidation states."

Hunt, who is also an author on the paper, added, "It is similar to the way sunlight interacts with our clothing. Sunlight is roughly yellow, but once it hits a person's shirt, you can tell whether the shirt is blue, red, or green."

Rather than colors, the scientists were identifying chemical information on the surface of the catalyst and comparing it to its interior. They discovered that, during the growth reaction, metallic platinum forms first and becomes the core of the nanoparticles. Then, when the reaction reaches a slightly higher temperature, platinum helps form metallic nickel, which later segregates to the surface of the nanoparticle.

(Source: rdmagazine.com)



purpose-built in any shape to fit with what would otherwise be an optimally designed product?

In October, scientists at Texas State University and Duke University came up with a way to 3D print batteries out of a plastic known as polylactic acid (PLA) in theoretically any shape. Doing so involved some experimentation, because PLA in its typical state is not an ionic conductor.

Positive and negative electrodes

The scientists got around this little problem by infusing the material with a cocktail of ethyl methyl carbonate, propylene carbonate and lithium perchlorate. They also used graphene in the anode and carbon nanotubes in the cathode, the positive and negative electrodes, respectively.

Through these improvements, the team was able to 3D print a proof-of-concept battery in the shape of a coin cell that actually worked. They built on this by 3D printing a battery into a bracelet equipped with LEDs, which was able to remain illuminated for around 60 seconds.

The MIT researchers describe a system that instead of salt uses molten silicon, which is able to store more heat and is not as corrosive at high temperatures. Additionally, at high temperatures it shines extremely brightly.

(Source: New Atlas)

NASA's Nancy Grace Roman, known as the 'mother of Hubble,' dies at 93

Nancy Grace Roman, a former NASA executive who is often described as the "mother" of the Hubble Space Telescope, has died at 93.

Roman, a longtime employee of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, was the first woman to hold an executive role at the agency, the Associated Press reported. After getting her Ph.D. in astronomy from the University of Chicago in 1949, Roman joined NASA in 1959 as its first Chief of Astronomy in the Office of Space Science at NASA Headquarters and remained in the role for nearly twenty years until her retirement in 1979, according to NASA.



She was involved with such groundbreaking programs as the Cosmic Background Explorer, and as her informal title suggests, the beloved Hubble Space Telescope.

Roman is remembered for her work in bolstering career opportunities for women through the American Association of University Women, the Washington Post reported. Roman is said to have consistently bucked significant barriers throughout her education and career at a time when there were few women in her field, especially at the executive level. She is most often credited with furthering much of the early development of the Hubble program, particularly as it related to funding and proposals.

Per the Post, in his book "The Universe in a Mirror," author and space historian Robert Zimmerman wrote: "During the 1960s and early 1970s there was no one at NASA who was more important in getting the first designs and concepts for Hubble funded and completed."

According to NASA, Roman's awards and honors include the Women in Aerospace's Lifetime Achievement Award, the NASA Exceptional Scientific Achievement Award, and the NASA Outstanding Scientific Leadership Award, among others. Last year, Roman was honored as part of a fan-designed Lego set honoring women of NASA that also included pioneers such as Katherine Johnson, Sally Ride, and Mae Jemison.

Roman died Tuesday following an ongoing illness. According to the Post, she is not survived by any immediate family members.

(Source: gizmodo.com)

Marine debris study counts trash from Texas to Florida

Trash, particularly plastic, in the ocean and along the shoreline is an economic, environmental, human health, and aesthetic problem causing serious challenges to coastal communities around the world, including the Gulf of Mexico.

Researchers from the Dauphin Island Sea Lab and the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve teamed up for a two-year study to document the problem along the Gulf of Mexico shorelines. Their findings are documented in the publication, Accumulation and distribution of marine debris on barrier islands across the northern Gulf of Mexico, in ScienceDirect's Marine Pollution Bulletin.

From February 2015 to August of 2017, the researchers kept tabs on marine debris that washed up on the shoreline every month at 12 different sites on nine barrier islands from North Padre Island, Texas to Santa Rosa, Florida. The trash was sorted by type, frequency, and location.

The most shocking discovery was that ten times more trash washes up on the coast of Texas than any of the other Gulf states throughout the year.

Most of the trash, 69 to 95 percent, was plastic. The plastic items included bottles and bottle caps, straws, and broken pieces of plastic. Researchers also cited that more trash washed ashore during the spring and summer. This could be because more people are outside and on the water during this time.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Elon Musk reflects on Mars, brain chips and Tesla's near-death experience

Tesla chief executive officer Elon Musk said the electric car company had a near-death experience earlier this year that had him working nonstop, taking a "painful" toll on his well-being.

"Tesla really faced a severe threat of death due to the Model 3 production ramp," Musk said during an interview with Axios on HBO that aired Sunday night. "Essentially, the company was bleeding money like crazy and if we didn't solve these problems in a very short period of time, we would die. And it was extremely difficult to solve them."

By June, Tesla hit a key production milestone, with 5,000 Model 3 sedans manufactured in a week. In October, Tesla posted its first profitable quarter in two years.

Musk blamed working long hours and being tired for his "bad manners" on a call with investors earlier this year, in which he dismissed some analysts' questions as "boring." His behavior on Twitter also became even more erratic, with tweets that bordered on the bizarre and had an impact on the company's stock price.

In August, Musk sent an impromptu tweet claiming he had secured funding to take Tesla private at \$420 a share. That prompted an investigation and subsequent \$40 million fine from the Securities and Exchange Commission, who charged him with fraud in September.

Musk also runs SpaceX, The Boring Company and serves as CEO of Neuralink, a company developing brain-machine interfaces.

As if that weren't enough, there is one more challenge that might be in his future, he said: A move to Mars. SpaceX is currently working on Starship, formerly known as the Big Falcon Rocket, which will be used to one day colonize Mars. Musk put his odds of a move at about "70 percent," but said there's a likelihood he'd die there.

(Source: nbcnews.com)



Buzzed flies reveal important step to intoxication

A new study from Scripps Research, published in the Journal of Molecular Biology, reveals a twist in how intoxication happens. When the alcohol from our cocktail reaches our nerve cells, the alcohol apparently employs intermediary molecules on the membrane surface of the neuron to produce the intoxicating effect, indirectly.

It turns out that both flies and mammals can get drunk on alcohol. So, for their study, Scott Hansen, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Molecular Medicine, and his team, enabled fruit flies to become inebriated to track ethanol's path. The fly is a useful model to study gene activity because its genome is smaller than other animals and is easily manipulated, Hansen says.

"They act just like people," Hansen says about the flies. "They start losing coordination. They literally get drunk."

The alcohol in beverages acts much like an anesthetic. It creates a hyper "buzzed" feeling first, and then sedation, Hansen explains. But how? It turns out there is an important intermediate step that wasn't previously known.

Ethanol molecules

The scientists looked to a system they have seen at play in anesthesia to track alcohol's effects, starting with an en-



zyme on nerve cell membranes called phospholipase D2, (PLD2). The enzyme links ethanol molecules to lipid (fat) in the membrane of the nerve cell. They found the enzyme becomes a catalyst triggering multiple downstream activities within the cell. It creates a fatty alcohol metabolite called phosphatidylethanol (PEtOH). That metabolite builds up and causes nerves to fire more easily, resulting in more hyperactive flies.

"With hyperactivity you see the flies run around more, and this is what we equate to being buzzed," Hansen says.

When the scientists knocked out the gene for the enzyme that makes the PEtOH metabolite, thus eliminating the signal, the flies did not become more active.

This is the first time this pathway has been identified as a determinant of alcohol sensitivity, Hansen says. It remains to be seen whether the metabolite is involved in the full sedation experienced by the flies after the initial buzz and how this pathway may play a role in the hangover that many people experience later on. Hansen says that his current research is addressing these questions.

Knowing alcohol's molecular targets could enable development of an antidote to intoxication, or even hangover, Hansen says.

The "fatty alcohol is known to linger in the brain for more than 16 hours making it a likely target," Hansen says. "Also, understanding this pathway could give insight as to why people use alcohol for pain management."

"It has definitely led to some different ways of thinking about alcohol intoxication at the molecular level," Hansen says. "Most scientists thought alcohol had a direct effect. Blocking the enzyme in flies shows that's not likely true."

(Source: phys.org)

Donations for the underprivileged up by 35% in 9 months

1 → The budget for the next fiscal year (starting on March 21, 2019) will be the same as the current year, he concluded. Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation is a charitable organization, founded in March 1979, after the Islamic Revolution, to provide support for families who are struggling financially. The aim is to help such families regain financial stability. Boosting job creation is one of the primary objectives of the foundation.

Tehran hosts international health, safety, firefighting, rescue exhibition

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 4th international health, safety, firefighting, and rescue exhibition will be held in Tehran on January 2 to 5, with many manufacturers, designers and service providers presenting their products and advanced achievements, IRIB news agency reported on Saturday. The 4th international health, safety, firefighting, rescue exhibition gathers local and foreign suppliers and manufacturers to exchange ideas and technologies, aiming to enhance safety, health and environmental standards.



The exhibition showcases a variety of services and modern technologies related to health and safety executive field, including automatic fire detectors, fire extinguishing systems, active fire protection, portable fire extinguishers, warning signs, fire control training and counseling courses, emergency situations management, and other related programs and equipment, the managing director of the exhibition, Saeed Dolatshahi said.

In order to increase the awareness for the business environment safety, in addition to establishing special booths, several workshops will be held in the field of labor law requirements and technical, safety regulations of offices, with related experts in attendance, he concluded.

LEARN ENGLISH

You Missed the Deadline!

A: And so, I just wanted to check in with you and find out where we are with this project. As you know, you’ve missed a **fairly significant** deadline last week, and this will negatively **impact** the team’s ability to **move forward** with the next stages of this project.

B: I know, I’m really sorry that I missed the deadline. But really, it wasn’t my fault. You see, we had all of these **unexpected** technical problems at the **last minute**, and that I couldn’t get into the database and extract the kind of information that I needed for the data analysis. You know, if the tech guys would have done their job and kept the CRM stable, then I wouldn’t have missed my deadline.

A: Oh, come on! An excuse like that is **tantamount** to lying. You’re **essentially** blaming the tech team for your time management issues, rather than accepting responsibility for the fact that you were **procrastinating** for the past two weeks.

B: No, I’m not trying to **pass the buck** here; I know that it was me who is **ultimately** responsible for getting this done. But the thing is, I could have finished on time if the system hadn’t gone down. And you know, with everything I’ve got going on now, I can’t afford to waste time dealing with technical problems. I’ve got a lot **on my plate** and there are only twenty-four hours in a day...

A: I’m not going to accept this excuse. You’re using these small technical glitches **as a crutch** and trying to **rationalize** the fact that you’ve missed your deadline. Look, we have standards and I expect you to live up to those standards. No **phonier** excuses. If you’re **in over your head**, you tell me. No more missed deadlines. Now, I want that data on my desk by nine am!

■ **Key vocabulary**
fairly significant: very important or very relevant
impact: to have an effect on something
move forward: continue, go on
unexpected: coming without warning
last minute: at the last moment
tantamount: same as, equivalent to
essentially: in essence, basically
procrastinate: leave tasks or duties for a later time
pass the buck: blame someone else, pass on the responsibility
ultimately: at last; in the end; eventually
on my plate: another way of saying I have many things to do
as a crutch: used to indicate you justify failure with excuses
rationalize: to explain bad behavior in a way that (falsely) makes it seem proper or better
phony: not true, fake or false
in over your head: too much to handle
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
behind schedule: later than expected
procrastination: the action of delaying one’s work
fabricate: to create an untrue story
justify: to give the reasons why you did something wrong
tardiness: the quality of being late often



Migratory birds wintering in Iran increased by 26.5%

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — The total population of migratory birds took flight to spend the cold season in the country increased by 26.5 percent last winter compared to a year earlier, head of aquatic animals and wildlife affairs at the Department of Environment (DOE) has said.

Annual census for migratory birds in Iran begins in the middle of the Iranian calendar month of Dey (December 22- January 20), and ends in middle of the month of Bahman (January 21- February 19), which will be a 1-month period since January 1 to 31.

Every year, from early-September to late-February, Iran hosts rare species of migratory birds heading from north to the southern countries due to reduced seasonal temperatures and food availability, Majid Kharrazian-Moqaddam said.

He went on to note that with increased rainfall averages and accordingly with wetlands being filled with water, bird migration reaches its peak, and the number of aquatic birds and animals observed and recorded during the migration season in the country have grown substantially.

According to the census conducted during winter in the aforesaid period in Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017- March 2018), some 914,914 migratory birds of 161 species have been located in 483 sites across the country, which demonstrates a 26.5 percent rise compared to the same period a year earlier (March 2016- March 2017), he noted.

Among the various groups of migratory birds wintering in Iran, the largest population belongs to the group of geese, swans and ducks amounting to 781,499 and the smallest population of 7 are the long-tailed ducks or oldsquaw, he added.

Provinces of Mazandaran and Golestan hosting a population of 699,130 and 356,181

Councils could be banned from felling trees without consulting locals in Sheffield

Householders are to be given more say over whether the trees on their streets can be cut down, the government has announced.

Environment secretary Michael Gove has drawn up the plans in the wake of a three-year battle in Sheffield over mass felling of trees.

Campaigners celebrated the announcement but warned the consultations must be genuine and thorough.

Protests have been staged in Sheffield since 2015, when a scheme emerged to fell up to 17,500 street trees that were said to be diseased or a danger to walkers due to roots damaging roads and pavements.

Demonstrators chained themselves to trees in an effort to prevent the work being carried out. The local authority went to the High Court to get an injunction to prevent them climbing inside safety barriers.

Since then, 5,500 trees have been felled, around half of which were on residential streets and were “healthy”. The city prides itself on its environmental standards, calling itself “Europe’s greenest city”.

The city council signed a £2.2bn private finance deal with contractor Amey in 2012 to manage the city’s street trees.

Amey and the council say every tree removed is being replaced with a sapling.

The latest proposals include:

Making sure communities have their say on whether street trees should be felled with requirements for councils to consult local residents;

Mandatory reports by councils on tree felling and replanting;

Giving the Forestry Commission more powers to tackle illegal tree felling and strengthen protection of wooded landscapes.

Chris Rust, co-chair of the Sheffield Tree Action Group, welcomed the news but said it was a shame it had come too late to save thousands of trees in the city.



With increased rainfall averages and accordingly with wetlands being filled with water, bird migration reaches its peak, and the number of aquatic birds and animals observed and recorded during the migration season in the country have grown substantially.

migratory birds respectively, are the first provinces with the highest sufficient resources, as movement of migratory birds is closely linked to seasonal availability of resources, he stated.

Moreover, the province with the highest diversity of aquatic and migratory aquatic birds, is Gilan province having 85 different

species, he also added.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Kharrazian-Moqaddam said that the population growth rate of wintering birds, the population of oldsquaws and rails have the highest growth rates, while the flamingoes and pelicans showed the lowest growth rates of 26 and 27.9 respectively due to the severe water shortage the wetlands

Dozens of protected nature sites threatened by UK government road-building plan

Endangered wildlife, ancient woodlands and scenic landscapes are under threat from government plans to boost spending on controversial road building projects.

Environmental groups have highlighted at least 28 projects threatening to pave over vital conservation areas as part of a new highway network.

With ministers pledging another enormous chunk of road spending in the coming years, campaigners are concerned not enough consideration is being given to nature.

In a country already blighted by toxic air pollution and considered “one of the most nature-depleted in the world”, they say Britain can ill afford to back plans that will increase the number of drivers.

Irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodlands and chalk streams are among those in danger, as are vulnerable species including water voles, great crested newts and rare bees.

In October, Philip Hammond announced a £25.3bn spending plan for roads from 2020, which will go towards repairing infrastructure and building highways.

“The government has definitely stepped up its road-building campaign, and that’s going to have a massive impact on wildlife,” said Dr Sue Young from The Wildlife Trusts.

“You can see the difference between the budgets for the road investment scheme – the first one was £15bn between 2015 and 2020.”

There are already more than 100 major schemes to develop roads, with more than 1,300 additional miles of lanes planned.

While further proposals for the next phase of road building have yet to be confirmed, environmental groups have assembled lists of projects in the pipeline they are worried about.

These include proposals crossing valu-

are facing, he further lamented.

Migratory birds on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List have also headed to the country last year with an enhancing population of 17.4 percent compared to past two years, the highest number of which was common pochard and the two species of Siberian crane and red-breasted goose had the lowest proportion, he explained.

Earlier this month, Mehr reported that the number of migratory birds has increased in Hour al-Azim wetland, located in southwest-ern province of Khuzestan on the border of Iran and Iraq, due to recent above-normal rainfalls and good conditions.

Additionally, deputy director of Khuzestan province’s environment department general announced that Bamdej Wetland in Khuzestan province, suffering a significant drop in water level during summer, has been filled with water after autumn rainfalls, which led to an increase in the number of migratory birds choosing the wetland to pass the winter on.

Also, deputy director for the provincial DOE Zaman Ahmadi on early December said that in the current season compared to past few years, the number of migratory birds has increased in Miankaleh wetland due to the appropriate nutritional conditions.

As per the data published by National Drought Warning and Monitoring Center it seems that recent above normal rainfalls and the increase in the precipitation levels has played a key role in improving the wetlands conditions nationwide which will surely effect the migratory birds’ population even more this year.

Last year during winter, the whole country received 29.6 millimeters of rain while this year the amount almost quadrupled amounting to 92.3 millimeters.



able wildlife sites and national parks from Durham to the South Downs, as well as scientifically important habitats and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Some projects such as the M4 diversion through the Gwent Levels – dubbed Wales’ Amazon rainforest – will bulldoze the homes of valuable creatures including European cranes and over 100 threatened insect species.

Meanwhile, under current proposals, the massive Oxford-Cambridge expressway project would cut through marshes supporting rare wading bird populations, and woodlands home to some of Britain’s rarest bats.

Schemes come with pledges to replace any lost biodiversity by constructing new habitats, but some projects such as the proposed A27 Arundel bypass would plough through habitats considered irreplaceable, including forests that have existed for over 400 years.

The government has stated it wants to ease congestion and open up new growth opportunities, but the campaigners say these plans are far from Theresa May’s pledge to “leave the environment in a better state than we found it”.

In order to minimize damage and help restore Britain’s fading wildlife, Dr Young said road-building must be governed by the principle of net biodiversity gain – meaning any new projects must pledge to restore more habitats than they destroy.

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Studies on launching Iran’s first tram started

An appraisal study on the country’s first tram, to be established in the northern city of Rasht, has been started, an official with the municipalities and village administrations has announced.

“The research project has been started since past few months, which, according to preliminary information, will cost about 250 million euros,” ISNA quoted Hossein Rajab-Salahi as saying on Tuesday.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-drome, -dromous”

- **Meaning:** field or running
- **For example:** He trained at this Army **Air drome**.

PHRASAL VERB

Hold onto something

- **Meaning:** hold firmly using your hands or arms
- **For example:** Hold onto your hat because it’s very windy outside.

IDIOM

Come in handy

- **Explanation:** to say that something may be useful some time or other
- **For example:** Don’t throw away those old shelves; they may come in handy one day.

U.S. forces leave Hasakah base following Trump’s decision to evacuate Syria

The United States has reportedly evacuated a military base in Syria, the first step towards delivering on the U.S. President Donald Trump’s recent pledged to pull American forces out of the war-torn country.

According to local residents of al-Malikiya, in the northeastern province of Hasakeh, some 50 American soldiers had already left the base and traveled to a base in Iraq, along with their armored vehicles and other equipment.

The evacuation began after Trump, in an unexpected change of policy, announced he was going to return the troops back home because the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group was already defeated and there was no reason for the U.S. to extend military presence there.

The U.S. has stationed about 2,000 soldiers in 18 bases across Syria since 2015. The Pentagon says the withdrawal would take between two and three months.

The controversial decision triggered backlash from both Democrats and Republicans in Congress and prompted Defense Secretary James Mattis to resign. The decision also led Brett McGurk, the U.S. special envoy to the so-called anti-ISIL coalition in Syria and Iraq, to quit.

He criticized Mattis, essentially firing him by announcing in a tweet that his replacement, Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan, would take over from January 1, two months before the former Pentagon chief’s tenure ended.

He also criticized McGurk, saying his time in office was about to end, accusing him of grandstanding his exit.

But Trump doubled down on his policy by also announcing that he would cut in half the roughly 14,000 U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

America’s military presence in northern parts of Syria, where the U.S. troops were working closely with Kurdish groups to push back against ISIL, had drawn fire from Turkey.



Ankara has launched its own military incursion into Syria, with a declared goal of destroying Kurdish groups causing unrest in Turkish territories.

Upon announcing his decision to leave Syria, Trump said Turkey would be taking on the U.S. military responsibilities in the country.

Russia, Turkey to coordinate on Syria: FMs

Elsewhere, Russia and Turkey have agreed to coordinate ground operations in Syria after last week’s announcement of a United States’ military withdrawal, Turkish and Russian foreign ministers said.

“We paid special attention to new circumstances which appeared in connection with the announced U.S. military pullout,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said after talks with Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu in Moscow on Saturday.

“An understanding was reached on how military representatives of Russia and Turkey will continue to coordinate their steps on

the ground under new conditions with a view to finally rooting out terrorist threats in Syria,” Lavrov said.

Cavusoglu confirmed the two countries would coordinate Syria operations, adding they also discussed plans to help refugees to return home.

“We will continue active work (and) coordination with our Russian colleagues and colleagues from Iran to speed up the arrival of a political settlement in the Syrian Republic,” he said in remarks translated into Russian.

He reminded that Turkey and Russia, as guarantors of the Astana peace process, are defending Syria’s territorial integrity and political unity from all efforts to harm them.

Turkey and Russia have a joint will to clear all “terrorist” groups from Syria, Cavusoglu added.

Besides Lavrov and Cavusoglu, Turkey’s Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, intelligence chief Hakan Fidan and presidential aide Ibrahim Kalin held talks on Saturday with

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu, Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov, Presidential Envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentiev, and presidential aide Yuri Ushakov.

In a surprise move, the United States President Donald Trump last week said he was pulling all 2,000 troops from Syria, declaring that Washington achieved its objective with the “defeat” of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group.

The ISIL terrorist group, which in the past held large swaths of territory in Syria and Iraq, has lost nearly all its areas, although thousands of its armed members are thought to remain in war-battered Syria.

On Friday, Russia said it would host a three-way summit with Turkey and Iran on the Syrian conflict early next year.

Turkey had threatened a military operation against Manbij to remove the Kurdish-led forces, which Ankara calls “terrorists”. Turkey and its allied fighters have been amassing troops around the city in recent days.

The Turkish threats coincided with the US announcement that it would withdraw troops from Syria.

Russia, Iran and Turkey have been working together to bring about peace in Syria under what is known as the Astana process, named after the Kazakh capital where the talks take place.

Each country plays a key role in the conflict that started in March 2011. Russia and Iran have intervened on the side of Syria’s government, ensuring its survival.

Turkey supports rebel groups against Assad in northern Syria, which is also to prevent Syrian Kurds from establishing and expanding territory along its border.

Various so-called “de-escalation zones” were agreed among the three guarantor powers in Syria as a result of multiple rounds of talks.

(Source: agencies)

Israel confiscates Palestinian land for settlement construction Palestinian youth killed by Israeli troops laid to rest

Israeli authorities have confiscated thousands of square meters of private Palestinian land in the southern West Bank to expand a settlement in blatant violation of international law and defiance of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions condemning Tel Aviv’s land expropriation and settlement expansion policies in the occupied territories.

On Sunday, the Wall and Settlement Resistance Committee lodged an appeal to the so-called Israeli Supreme Court, denouncing the Israeli regime’s seizure of approximately 1,200 dunams (1.2 square kilometers) of Palestinian-owned land.

Hassan Bureija, head of the committee, told the Arabic-language Voice of Palestine radio station that Israeli officials have granted 1,182 dunams (1.18 square kilometers) of private Palestinian land to the Israeli Ministry of Construction and Housing in order to erect an outpost south of Beit Lahm “Bethlehem”, situated about 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) south of al-Quds (Jerusalem).

On November 18, Palestinian chief negotiator and Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Saeb Erekat, said the Israeli regime is forcibly displacing the Palestinian population to advance its settlement expansion projects.

Less than a month before the United States President Donald Trump took office, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2334, calling on Israel to “immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem” al-Quds.

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

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent Palestinian state with East al-Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital.

The last round of Israeli-Palestinian talks collapsed in 2014. Among the major sticking points in those negotiations was Israel’s continued settlement expansion on Palestinian territories.

Trump backtracked on Washington’s support for a “two-state solution” last year, saying he would support any solution favored by both sides.

Israel irate after Jordanian minister steps on regime’s flag

Meantime, a Jordanian minister has been photographed stepping on an Israeli flag, infuriating the occupying regime and leading it to summon Amman’s envoy to Tel Aviv.

A photo was recently released showing Jumana Ghunaimat, Jordan’s minister for media affairs and communications and government spokesperson, stepping on an Israeli flag painted on the floor of the trade union headquarters in Amman last week while on her way for a meeting.

Israel’s foreign ministry has lodged a strong protest with Jordan over Ghunaimat’s move, both to government officials in Amman and to the kingdom’s embassy in Tel Aviv.

On Monday, the ministry summoned Jordan’s envoy to Tel Aviv to clarify the incident.

The Amman meeting brought a number of Jordanian government officials, among them Prime Minister Omar Razzaz who entered the trade union building through a side entrance and avoided trampling on the Israeli flag.

During Razzaz’s speech at the event, political activists heckled him and accused him of hypocrisy in “supporting the Zionist entity.”

Israel and Jordan have maintained diplomatic relations since they signed a peace deal in 1994. However, many Jordanians strongly oppose Amman ties with Tel Aviv.

A Jordanian diplomatic source says the country won’t let Israel reopen its diplomatic mission in Amman until the regime launches a probe into the July shooting.

The Israeli mission in Amman shut down last July after two Jordanians were gunned down by an embassy guard, prompting the return of the Israeli ambassador along with the killer to the occupied territories.

The guard received a hero’s welcome on his return, further enraging the Jordanians.

Palestinian youth killed by Israeli troops laid to rest

Moreover, Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip have held a funeral ceremony for a young man killed by Israeli forces along the border with the occupied territories.

On Saturday, residents of the town of Khan Yunis participated in the funeral procession for Karam Fayyad, 26, who was shot in the head by Israeli forces during an anti-occupation protest in the southern Gaza Strip on Friday.

According to Palestinian health officials, eight other Palestinians, including a medic and a journalist, were wounded by Israeli fire during the latest weekly protest.

Tensions have been running high near the fence between the besieged Gaza Strip and Israeli-occupied territories since March 30, which marked the start of a series of protests dubbed “The Great March of Return.” Palestinian protesters demand the right to return for those driven out of their homeland.

The clashes in Gaza reached their peak on May 14, the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Nakba Day, or the Day of Catastrophe, which coincided this year with Washington’s relocation of the United States embassy from Tel Aviv to occupied al-Quds (Jerusalem).

More than 240 Palestinians have so far been killed and over 20,000 others wounded in the renewed Gaza clashes, according to the latest figures released by the Gaza Health Ministry.

The Gaza Strip, with a 1.85-million-strong population, has been under an Israeli siege since June 2007.

The blockade has caused a decline in living standards as well as unprecedented unemployment and poverty there.

Israeli troops arrested some 6,500 Palestinians throughout 2018

Elsewhere, Israeli military forces have reportedly arrested



6,489 Palestinians, including 140 women and 1,063 minors, during separate operations across the occupied West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip throughout the current year.

The Commission for Prisoners and Ex-Prisoner Affairs, in a statement released on Saturday, announced that six Palestinian lawmakers and 38 journalists were rounded up in 2018.

The statement added that Israeli authorities had issued 988 administrative detention orders during the mentioned period.

The commission highlighted that figures showed that the sweeping majority of Palestinians arrested this year were from the West Bank, while only 5 percent were from the Gaza Strip.

The statement came on the same day that Israeli forces raided several homes in the northern West Bank village of Faqu’a, and detained a Palestinian man.

Palestine’s official news agency WAFA reported that Israeli soldiers arrested Yasser Jamil Abu Khamis after violently ransacking his home.

The troopers also stormed the homes of his brothers, Mohammad and Loay, as well as of his father’s. There were no reports of detentions there.

More than 7,000 Palestinians are reportedly held at Israeli jails. Hundreds of the inmates have apparently been incarcerated under the practice of administrative detention, a policy under which Palestinian inmates are kept in Israeli detention facilities without trial or charge.

Some Palestinian prisoners have been held in administrative detention for up to eleven years.

Palestinian inmates regularly stage hunger strikes in protest at the administrative detention policy and their harsh prison conditions in Israeli jails.

According to reports, at least 13 Palestinian lawmakers are currently imprisoned in Israeli detention facilities. Nine of them are being held without trial under administrative detention.

(Source: Press TV)

Christmas 2018: Iran and Syria show respect, Israel and Saudi Arabia don’t

I-> In fact, despite the large number of Christians from other countries who work in the country, including many Britons, the holding of any Christmas-related services or commemorations in Saudi Arabia is strictly banned. “The Christmas season – often a season where Christians around the world are most visible – is a tense time for Christians in Saudi Arabia, who have to celebrate the holiday in secret, risking arrest and deportation,” said Jeff King, president of the International Christian Concern, in 2016.

Imagine being a Christian and not being able to openly celebrate the birth of Christ. It happens in Saudi Arabia, yet Western leaders, so keen to lecture others about ‘human rights’ and ‘religious freedom’ stay silent, preferring to pick on Iran – where Christmas can be openly celebrated.

Syria is another country ‘monstered’ by the endless war lobby but where, against all the odds, the Christmas spirit is still maintained. Big seasonal celebrations were held this year in Aleppo and Damascus. Remember Aleppo?

It was recaptured by the Syrian Arab Army from Islamist ‘rebels’ two years ago this month, and the neocon ‘liberal interventionist’ commentariat, and most of the political class portrayed it as a most terrible thing. Ian Austin MP said that people in Aleppo faced ‘slaughter’.

John Woodcock MP called the Morning Star newspaper ‘traitorous scum’ for referring to the recapture of Aleppo by Syrian forces of their own territory, as a ‘liberation’. But if you look at the pictures of Christians celebrating Christmas there once again, which they were forbidden to do under the western-backed head-chopping ‘rebels’ you can see that the ‘L’ word was indeed appropriate.

This year in Damascus though, the festive celebrations were defiled by another act of aggression against Syria from a Western-supported-country, one which incidentally Ian Austin and John Woodcock have been Parliamentary ‘Friends’ of.

On the evening of December 25, loud explosions could be heard seven miles from the center of Damascus. Russia’s Defense Ministry said that Israel’s Christmas Day F-16 strikes endangered two civilian flights – as well as injuring three personnel at the logistics compound.

Whatever your stance is on Middle Eastern affairs – and leaving aside the illegality of the operation whenever it took place – the question is: did Israel really have to bomb Syria on Christmas Day?

Would Israel’s ‘security’ have been lessened if the raid had taken place on December 28 and not the 25th? Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did tweet Christmas greetings out to ‘Christian friends’ in Israel and around the world on December 24, but why did his forces attack a country where Christians were celebrating one day later?

Just imagine the enormous outcry if Russia had carried out air strikes on Ukrainian targets on the evening of 25th December. In fact, the U.S. magazine Newsweek, doing its best to ratchet up East-West tensions still further, predicted such an event only last week. They published an article on Christmas Eve which began with the words “As people in Western Europe and the United States get comfortable for the holidays, the chances increase that Russia will take advantage of the distraction to launch attacks against its neighbor Ukraine, experts said.”

And who are these ‘experts’, I hear you ask. Well, guess what, they were all from the Atlantic Council.

The ‘experts’, surprise, was wrong. The ‘monster’ Russia did not launch attacks on Ukraine over Christmas. But Israel did attack Syria – and there was silence from those who would have screeched very loudly (and be calling for RT to be taken off the air immediately) if the Kremlin had ordered such a sacrilegious act.

Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL) were also busy bombing on Christmas Day. The genocidal group carried out suicide bomb attacks on Libya’s Foreign Ministry in Tripoli on Tuesday morning, killing three and leaving over half-a-dozen injured.

One doesn’t expect IS to respect Christmas, but you would expect Western leaders – of predominantly Christian nations to regard the group as public enemy number one. Yet in Syria, the U.S. and its allies welcomed the group’s growth precisely because it threatened the secular, Christian-protecting government of Bashar al-Assad. A declassified U.S. intelligence report from August 2012 predicted the establishment of a “Salafist principality in Eastern Syria” and said that this is “exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime.”

Furthermore, in a leaked tape recording the former Secretary of State John Kerry admitted that the U.S. allowed IS to expand its territory to threaten Damascus. At the same time, those fighting IS, and other al-Qaeda-linked death squads in Syria, namely the Syrian Arab Army, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, have been ‘monstered’ by the West and its regional allies’ propaganda machines.

Reflect on this: It wasn’t Syrian, Russian, Iranian or Hezbollah forces or followers who slaughtered British and other Western holiday-makers on the beach in Tunisia in 2015 – but an IS terrorist who is thought to have been trained at a jihadist camp in neighboring Libya and whose government had been forcibly toppled by NATO powers four years earlier. Similarly, it wasn’t Syrian, Russian, Iranian or Hezbollah forces or followers who carried out murderous attacks against civilians in Paris, Nice, Brussels, and London, or at Christmas markets in Berlin and Strasbourg.

Respecting Christmas and what it stands for is an important litmus test, as it tells us a lot about the actors involved, especially if they are not themselves Christians.

The ‘monstering’ of those who do show the proper ‘Yuletide spirit’, and the turning of a blind eye to those that don’t, highlights the spectacular hypocrisy of those in power in the West who profess to support ‘Christian values’ but in fact do everything possible to subvert them.

(Source: RT)

Iran’s 21st century energy strategy: Banking on energy

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This principle was applied across all possible energy services by investing in renewable energy, where Denmark now leads global wind turbine manufacturing.

Since 1973 while Denmark’s GDP has doubled, energy use has fallen and carbon fuel use (and CO2 production!) has declined significantly. This image strikingly illustrates how Denmark’s centralized National Grid is evolving to a distributed Natural Grid.

Gerard Pique’s investment group completes FC Andorra takeover

The investment group led by Barcelona defender Gerard Pique has purchased FC Andorra, who play in Spain’s lower leagues.

Pique said in a statement that his investment group, Kosmos, have completed their takeover after club members approved the sale.

FC Andorra, founded in 1942, currently play in Spain’s fifth tier against clubs in Catalonia, playing as high as the third tier in the 1980s and 1990s.

The acquisition of FC Andorra is the latest business move by Pique.

Kosmos were given approval by the International Tennis Federation to revamp the Davis Cup, transforming it into a season-ending tournament held in one venue as opposed to the current format which spreads ties out over months in different countries.

Pique has also launched business ventures in esports, video games, eyeglasses, isotonic drinks and organic hamburgers.

Mundo Deportivo reported that Pique could also retire from football in 2020 to focus on running for Barcelona’s club presidency in 2021.

(Source: Soccernet)

‘Sick’ player skips key game, goes to holiday

Galatasaray defender Serdar Aziz was pictured on holiday in the Maldives a day after he missed his side’s final game of 2018 with what he claimed was an upset stomach.

The Turkey international’s wife shared an image on her Instagram stories page from the tropical island which featured her husband, who was ruled out of Galatasaray’s 4-2 win over Sivasspor.

Aziz’s trip to the Maldives sparked outrage among Galatasaray fans, who were disappointed to see the defender miss an important league game through injury but well enough to go on holiday.

Sources told ESPN FC that Galatasaray have transfer listed Aziz following the recent set of events, and Aziz’s agent has said his client has been asked to find a new club.

Galatasaray denied rumours that Aziz has had his contract terminated.

Aziz said that he suffered food poisoning and he went on holiday as it had already been booked.

The 28-year-old has been inconsistent this season with Galatasaray struggling defensively in the league and in Europe.

Galatasaray are fifth in the league table, six points behind leaders Istanbul Basaksehir.

The Super Lig is on a month long winter break, with league action resuming on Jan. 20.

(Source: ESPN)

N’Golo Kante goal gives Chelsea victory at Crystal Palace

N’Golo Kante’s second-half goal gave Chelsea a 1-0 win in a drab match at Crystal Palace and took them to within a point of third-placed Manchester City ahead of City’s game at Southampton.

Maurizio Sarri’s side dominated possession in the early stages but were unable to get through Palace’s well-organised defence, Marcos Alonso booked for throwing the ball away in frustration after failing to keep it in play.

The Eagles posed their first glimmer of a threat after 11 minutes when Wilfried Zaha went down under Antonio Rudiger’s challenge, but muted appeals for a penalty were waved away.

At the other end, Rudiger met a Willian cross with a flicked header but could not generate enough power to trouble goalkeeper Vicente Guaita.

Back came Palace, and Jorginho closed down Andros Townsend as he cut in from the wing, the hosts countering to set up a shooting chance for Kante, whose effort flew wide.

Olivier Giroud fired home an angled half-volley only to be frustrated by an offside flag, and as the half-hour approached Palace scrambled clear when Eden Hazard’s strike almost found its way through to Giroud.

Jorginho blasted wide as Chelsea pressed again, and Sarri’s side won a free kick 25 yards out after a foul on Hazard, Willian’s effort hitting the outside of the post.

(Source: Eurosport)

Kyrgios set for Brisbane despite spider bite

Nick Kyrgios says he is ready to defend his Brisbane International title despite being taken to hospital on Christmas Day with a spider bite.

The Australian, 23, was put on antibiotics after waking with a swollen foot, but practised in Brisbane on Saturday.

The world number 35 will face American Ryan Harrison, whom he beat in the 2018 final, in the first round on Monday.

“I didn’t take it (bite) seriously,” said eighth seed Kyrgios.

“I just felt an irritation on my foot the day before Christmas. There’s worse things in the world but I think I’ll be OK.”

As he prepares to return for the first time since October, Kyrgios said he plans to reduce his 2019 schedule after struggling with his mental health last season.

He endured a frustrating 2018, dropping from 21 in the rankings before being forced to cut his season short because of a recurring elbow injury.

“Just being away from home was the toughest bit,” Kyrgios said. “Battling injuries, going to tournaments and not even playing was tough, but they’re not really big problems.

“I’ll have a lighter schedule and when I play, enjoy playing and just compete.”

(Source: BBC)

‘We are all Koulibaly’: Napoli fans don masks to support racism victim

Thousands of Napoli fans showed their support for Senegalese defender Kalidou Koulibaly who was subjected to racist chanting at Inter Milan in midweek by wearing masks and holding up his picture before their team’s Serie A game against Bologna on Saturday.

Posters with the message “Siamo Tutti Koulibaly” (“We are all Koulibaly”) were visible throughout the Stadio San Paolo during the game which the hosts won 3-2.

Napoli’s French-born player Koulibaly was targeted by monkey noises and racist chants at the San Siro on Wednesday, before being sent off for sarcastically applauding the referee.

Serie A returned to action three days after the violent clashes in Milan during which an Inter supporter died after being hit by a car.

And fans showed their solidarity with Koulibaly, wearing masks with the player’s face, as well as t-shirts bearing his name.

The home fans also displayed a banner on front of the stadium, “We are all Koulibaly: no to racism!,” with fliers in the stadium “Koulibaly big brother” or “We’re with you Kalidou”.

Among them a very young fan held up a poster with: “I’m small, but a man like Koulibaly”.



On the pitch, Napoli’s Algerian defender Faouzi Ghoulam wore Koulibaly’s number 26 shirt in warm-up with the Senegalese player suspended after his sending off on Wednesday.

“It doesn’t matter the colour of the skin. It doesn’t matter religion. It doesn’t matter

what team you’re rooting for. Football, like all sports, is a game. And all the games are passion, fun, freedom: And in freedom we are all alike! Tomorrow we will all be koulibaly!,” Ghoulam tweeted before the match. European football governing body UEFA said that the correct anti-racism protocol had

not been followed during the midweek game.

And Napoli coach Carlo Ancelotti said Saturday they would have been in favour of the match being suspended temporarily.

“There was a bit of confusion after Milan, we never asked for the suspension, but three times a temporary interruption.

“UEFA confirmed that we are right, it surprises me that the president of the referees federation disagrees.

“I hope it will never happen again or we will walk off the pitch.”

Ancelotti added: “50,000 people calling Koulibaly’s name is quite a show, there has been a good feeling throughout the city.

“Kalidou is very popular, he has had messages from many sportsmen and it is a sign that it is not so difficult to improve things.”

Meanwhile, there were also banners before Saturday’s match between Parma and Roma in memory of 39-year-old Inter Milan supporter Daniele Belardinelli, who was killed during the pre-match clashes.

“Ciao Dede” and “an ultra never dies, Daniele with us” were two of the banners remembering Belardinelli who had been banned from the San Siro between 2007 and 2017 for violence.

(Source: Goal)

Liverpool’s Klopp avoids title talk despite Arsenal rout



Liverpool crushed Arsenal 5-1 to move nine points clear at the top of the Premier League on Saturday but manager Jurgen Klopp still would not get involved in any talk of winning the title.

Second-placed Tottenham Hotspur’s surprise defeat at home to Wolverhampton Wanderers allowed Liverpool to extend their lead by three points although Manchester City, who are 10 points off the pace, could cut the gap with a win at Southampton on Sunday.

Liverpool will, however, have an opportunity to take points off City when they play Pep Guardiola’s side at the Etihad on Thursday in what is the biggest game of the season so far.

Tiring of media questions about the title race, Klopp said he was wary of falling into the trap of talking up his team’s chances with 18 games of the 38-match campaign remaining.

“I’m not the smartest person in the world but I’m really not an idiot. It’s not important how many points you are ahead in December... If we drop three points the next headline will be: ‘Are they nervous?’”

the German told reporters.

Asked to reflect on 2018, which has seen Liverpool finish as Champions League runners-up and now go unbeaten in the league to become the title favourites, Klopp said it was “not too bad.

“The boys have made a big step but it’s important to show it’s a positive process. In 2018 I have nothing to moan about,” he added.

The ex-Borussia Dortmund coach was pleased with his side’s reaction when they went a goal down to Arsenal after 11 minutes but he was particularly satisfied with Mohamed Salah’s decision to give a second-half penalty opportunity to Roberto Firmino.

The Brazilian had scored twice in the first half and, having never managed a hat-trick for the Merseyside club, Salah’s gesture allowed Firmino to complete his triple.

“Mo Salah gave the penalty to Bobby and I almost cried because we all know how much Mo wants to score goals,” said Klopp.

Liverpool’s Scottish left-back Andy Robertson, said all the focus was now on the trip to the Etihad.

(Source: Reuters)

Mayweather promises entertainment, not a knockout, in Japan



Floyd Mayweather is promising entertainment when he fights Japanese kickboxer Tenshin Nasukawa in three rounds of exhibition boxing on New Year’s Eve, but not necessarily a knockout. “If it happens, it happens,” Mayweather said Saturday when asked whether he was going to knock out Nasukawa.

But the American was adamant that his opponent wasn’t going to knock him out or down on Monday. “Throughout my years at boxing, I never touched the canvas once,” Mayweather, 41, told reporters at a Tokyo hotel, brushing off the upcoming event as “just another day.”

“I can do three rounds in my sleep,” he added. Neither kicking nor official results are part of the Rizin Fighting Federation match, but a knockout is possible under the special rules. Mayweather had initially appeared to walk away from the fight, set for Saitama Super Arena, on the northern outskirts of Tokyo. The Mayweather-Nasukawa bout will culminate an evening of more than a dozen fights, which will be streamed by FITE for a fee, but not in the U.S. Fuji TV is broadcasting the fights in Japan.

“It’s all about entertainment, come

Dec. 31. I want to go out and have fun,” said Mayweather, appearing relaxed and gushing about how he liked Asia and his fans in the region.

Mayweather hasn’t fought since beating Conor McGregor more than a year ago for his 50th win from 50 fights.

Nobuyuki Sakakibara, the head of Rizin Fighting Federation, who traveled to the U.S. to woo Mayweather back to the fight, has said it involves the largest payout for an exhibition fight but has not given specifics.

Mayweather previously said he was already making “seven figures” just by talking about it. Nasukawa, 20, appearing earlier in the day, said he wanted people to see his “courage, determination and challenging spirit.”

Nasukawa, despite his no-loss record in kickboxing and mixed martial arts, was previously little known outside Japan. He said he enjoyed the sudden international attention. He acknowledged he didn’t understand what the English comments were saying on his Instagram account but added: “I love it.”

(Source: ESPN)

NHL suspends Bruins’ Backes 3 games for head hit

The NHL on Friday suspended Boston Bruins forward David Backes three games without pay for what the league called “an illegal check to the head” of New Jersey Devils forward Blake Coleman.

The hit happened during the Devils’ 5-2 victory in Boston on Thursday. With two minutes remaining in the game, Backes skated from the left circle into the slot and put his shoulder into Coleman’s face as Coleman cleared the puck. Backes drew a minor penalty on the play.

It is Backes’ second three-game suspension in the 2018

calendar year, the first coming in March for a late hit on Detroit’s Frans Nielsen.

He will forfeit \$219,512.19 during the suspension.

The suspension will also keep Backes out of the NHL’s marquee game of the regular season. The Bruins play the Chicago Blackhawks on New Year’s Day in the Winter Classic at Notre Dame Stadium in South Bend, Ind. The annual outdoor showcase is the second of the three games Backes will miss.

Boston plays at Buffalo on Saturday and hosts Calgary

on Thursday.

Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy told reporters on Friday that forward Brad Marchand will likely miss the game against the Sabres after taking a couple of high hits against the Devils.

“We’ll have a much better idea on him (Saturday),” Cassidy said. “Doesn’t look likely for him (Saturday), would be my guess. But he’s traveling with us, so that could change.”

(Source: Reuters)

Murray, Nadal look for Brisbane bounce-back after injury-hit 2018

Andy Murray aims to kick-start his stalled career in Brisbane this week after an injury-plagued 2018, with Spanish great Rafael Nadal also playing as he tests his troubled knee ahead of the Australian Open.

The season-opening tournament boasts a stellar field with Kei Nishikori and Grigor Dimitrov also in contention as they prepare for the first Grand Slam of the year at Melbourne Park. The women’s field includes seven of the world’s top 10 -- defending champion Elina Svitolina, US Open winner Naomi Osaka, Sloane Stephens, Petra Kvitova, Karolina Pliskova, Kiki Bertens, and Daria Kasatkina.

Three-time Grand Slam winner Murray only played six tournaments last season and arrived in Australia early to acclimatise and prepare as he continues his recovery from hip surgery.

■ ‘A better place’

The Scot, who won the Brisbane title in 2012 and 2013, said he had been training hard to work himself back to the sort of fitness levels that saw him capture nine titles in a stellar 2016 campaign and reach the

number one ranking.

“There are still things that I want to achieve,” he said. “Whether I am capable of that I don’t really know.”

The 31-year-old had intended to play Brisbane at the beginning of 2018, but was forced to withdraw on the eve of the tournament and pull out of the Australian Open with the hip problem.

He said he still had some pain, but “I’m in a better place than I was a few months ago”.

The former world number one spent the off-season training in the heat of Miami to prepare for what can be gruelling conditions in Brisbane and then Melbourne.

He hasn’t played since pulling out of the China Open in September, with his ranking plunging to 256.

World number two Nadal also battled injury worries throughout 2018 but enjoyed success as well. He won a record-extending 11th French Open in June and reached the semi-finals both at Wimbledon and the US Open.

But in November he announced he need-

ed an operation on his right ankle and only resumed training two weeks ago.

■ Forward step

He made his comeback at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi on Friday, but withdrew from his third-place play-off match to ensure he didn’t push his body too far too soon. “Being honest, I’m satisfied the way I was playing tennis. I am more or less satisfied with how the body held,” he said. “It’s not the moment for me to take a step back, it’s the moment to make a step forward. The match (in Abu Dhabi) is a step forward for me, that’s the main thing.”

He told CNN last week that the decision to have surgery had been vindicated.

“It was a little bit of risk that we don’t make it into the beginning of the season, but here we are, practising more or less hard and we are excited to start the new season,” he said.

On the women’s side, Osaka has become hot property after a breakthrough 2018 in which she captured her maiden WTA title in Indian Wells then won the US Open at



the expense of Serena Williams, who had a meltdown in the final.

Now world number five, she said she was comfortable in the limelight. “I never feel pressure to perform. I enjoy Grand Slams the most,” said Japan’s first major winner. “I always feel there is a certain degree of pressure but it’s from myself.”

(Source: AFP)

We are ready to ‘fight for our dreams’ in Asian Cup: Jahanbakhsh

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh says that they will “fight for their dreams” to end a 43-year trophy drought in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

Iran national football team last lifted Asian football’s most coveted trophy on home soil in 1976, when they completed the third leg of three consecutive championship wins that mark the country out as one of continent’s most successful ever.

Iran head to the United Arab Emirates as one of favorites, where they will meet Yemen, Vietnam and Iraq in Group D.

Albion’s record signing Jahanbakhsh sustained hamstring damage in the 3-1 defeat at Everton at the start of last month. He has not featured since and is now with Iran for the Asian Cup in Doha’s training camp.

“My recovery process goes well and I think I will be fit for the Asian Cup,” Jahanbakhsh told reporters.

“We are desperate to win the title after 43 years. We feel obliged to make our people happy and we also know that the fans’ expectations are very high after the 2018 World Cup. They are right to have a dream and we will do our best to make their dreams come true,” Jahanbakhsh said.

“Iran played very well against three powerhouse teams in the 2018 World Cup and our people celebrated in the streets despite we missed out on advancing from the group stage. It shows they are behind us and pushing us,” he added.

“Iran can make history in the 2019 AFC Asian Cup because we take advantage of one of the best generations we have ever had. Four years ago, we were knocked out of the Asian Cup in penalty shootout against Iraq but this time we are determined to win the title,” Jahanbakhsh stated.



Iranian women allowed access to watch live football in stadium

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iranian women are permitted to spectate a friendly match between Iran’s women’s football team and Russia’s in a women-only crowd at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran.

The timing of the match is not out yet, although the sports ministry’s officials have given the green light to the women for attending the match.

The last female Iranians who got to watch a football

match live was in 1981.

In November, around 500 women were permitted to join the 80,000 crowd attending the second leg of the Asia Champions League final in the capital between Persepolis and Japan’s Kashima Antlers.

Some 100 women also watched the men’s national team’s friendly against Bolivia in October.

The Iranian women who are football-mad will have a chance to watch the friendly match with Russia live.

Korea Republic coach Paulo Bento comments on contender tag

Finishing inside the top four in four out of the five AFC Asian Cup competitions in the 2000s, Korea Republic are hoping to end the championship drought in UAE in 2019.

The two-time winners last tasted AFC Asian Cup glory in 1960 and were runners-up in the 2015 competition.

They were third in 2000, 2007 and 2011 with 2004 as the glaring point as they bowed



out in the quarter-final following a loss to Iran.

Now, Korea Republic have Paulo Bento as their head coach and are hoping that the new coach can bring in a new result as they leave as champions.

A report revealed Bento’s comments leading up to the AFC Asian Cup, saying: “I can understand that we can have positive expectations for the Asian Cup because we

performed well in the last six matches.

“I’m confident that we’ll play well, but I also know we’re not the only team chasing the title. Other teams will be ready, too. I don’t think we’re the top favourites.”

Korea Republic is in Group C of the 2019 edition and will open their campaign against the Philippines. Next up are Kyrgyzstan and then China PR. (Source: Fox Sports Asia)

Total prize money revealed for AFC Asian Cup

With the AFC Asian Cup 2019 just around the corner, 24 countries are hoping for one goal – and that is to lift the title and be crowned as champions.

However, there is certainly more than winning a trophy in arguably the biggest continental competition, there is a corresponding prize money attached to being champions that will certainly help the winning nation moving forward.

And as stated earlier by AFC, this 2019 edition is set to be the richest in history as a total prize money of nearly USD \$15 million is up for grabs.

■ IT PAYS TO BE PART

Not just for champions or finalists, but simply taking part in the AFC Asian Cup will bring in an impressive USD \$200,000 to the national team.

That’s an incredible \$4,800,000 among the 24 participating nations.

■ REACHING THE KNOCKOUT STAGES

Of course, reaching the knockout stages comes with its perks and even losing in the semis will bring in \$1 million each.

With two semi-finalists pocketing it, the total cash prize given away at this point is at \$6,800,000.

■ ADDED INCENTIVES FOR THE FINALISTS

Outside of being crowned as two of the best in the region, the finalists are also in for big money just for being the final two teams.

The runners-up are going to pocket \$3 million while the champions will get a whopping \$5 million.

This brings a grand total of \$14,800,000 in cash prizes in the AFC Asian Cup.

AFC Asian Cup 2019: 5 coaches with a point to prove

With just over a week to go until the curtains are raised for the AFC Asian Cup 2019, FOX Sports Asia looks at the coaches who have a major point to prove in the competition.

■ 1) Carlos Queiroz (Iran)

Among the most high-profile coaches in the tournament, all eyes will be on Iran manager Carlos Queiroz when Team Melli begin their bid to end a 43-year trophy drought.

Queiroz’s journey with the national team has been far from smooth-sailing, with feuds between him and former manager Branko Ivankovic making headlines, aside from the usual problems with the board.

Queiroz suffered backlash just weeks ahead of the tournament with his comments regarding the team’s expectations causing former striker Khodadad Azizi to lash out at the former Real Madrid manager.

Queiroz’s contract runs out at the end of the Asian Cup and nothing but victory will boost his chances of securing a renewal. To make matters worse, Iran will also be without a few key players, with star midfielder Saied Ezatollahi chief among the absentees.

Despite that though, Iran still possess one of the most talented squads in the competition. After narrowly missing out on a knockout berth in the 2018 World Cup, the onus will be on Queiroz to fulfill the expectations of the fans and the team by overseeing a historic run by Team Melli. No sweat!

■ 2) Stephen Constantine (India)

The man under possibly the most pressure going into the Asian Cup is Indian national team coach Stephen Constantine.

Constantine’s tenure with the Indian team started positively, with the Blue Tigers winning the SAFF Championships as well as the Intercontinental Cup and embarking on a 13-game unbeaten run.

However, it’s been all downhill since then, with rifts between the coach and a few of the senior players hogging the headlines.

Sunil Chettri, in particular, had an alleged falling out with Constantine, losing the captain’s armband in the process. According to reports, a few senior players also sought the removal of the English coach as they felt he was not fit enough to guide the team from a tactical perspective.

Dull, uninspiring football has been the theme of the Indian team under Constantine, but the AIFF refuted reports that they were planning on giving him the boot



following the Asian Cup.

Instead, the governing body backed the coach to help the team embark on a historic journey in their return to Asia’s premier footballing event.

Regardless, the likelihood is that if India fail to leave their mark in the competition, it will be Constantine’s head on the line.

■ 3) Marcello Lippi (China PR)

The biggest name in the competition and one of the most revered coaches in all of world football, Marcello Lippi too will feel the heat when China’s campaign in the Asian Cup takes flight.

Lippi took the reins of the Chinese team in 2016 with the hopes of making them a force to be reckoned with once again in the Asian circuit. However, his tenure has seen far too many pitfalls thus far and China now enter the Asian Cup with little to no expectations whatsoever.

Lippi’s side have struggled this year, winning just three of nine matches and scoring seven goals in the process. Their most recent defeat to Iraq has just piled the pressure on the Italian mastermind’s shoulders.

The World Cup-winning coach’s contract runs out after the Asian Cup and reports suggested he is not looking for an extension which means he would be eager to end his tenure on a high by making at least the quarter-finals of the competition.

■ 4) Sven-Goran Eriksson (Philippines)

Sven-Goran Eriksson took charge of the Azkals ahead of the 2018 AFF Suzuki Cup amid much hype and expectations and coached the Philippines to a respectable semi-final berth.

The Azkals will be a part of the Asian Cup for the first time in their history and Eriksson will be looking to make their journey a memorable one.

Philippines have been grouped alongside Korea Republic, China and Kyrgyz Republic and enter the competition as

massive underdogs, however, the general consensus within the camp is that under Eriksson, anything is possible.

Azkals captain Phil Youngghusband too stressed on the importance of having such a well-reputed manager at the helm, saying, “When you bring in someone with such a big name they’re used to certain standards.

“They’re used to good quality and I think having someone who has those expectations and standards will, when he’s asking for things to be done, people in the organization are more inclined to do it because it’s coming from someone who has worked with the best in the world.

“If you bring that quality then that will benefit Philippine football, it will benefit the players, it will benefit the coaching staff around him and you should see better results.”

The Swede won the Serie A during his time with Lazio and also led England to the World Cup quarterfinals in 2002; clear proof of his credentials as a manager, and if he can make history with the Azkals by winning a couple of games, it will go to show just how important having the right man at the helm is for a football team.

■ 5) Milovan Rajevac (Thailand)

After a disastrous Suzuki Cup campaign in which Thailand failed to defend their crown, crashing out in the semi-finals, manager Milovan Rajevac came in for some intense scrutiny.

Rajevac’s rather pragmatic approach right through the competition eventually backfired against Malaysia in the semi-finals and fans were left fuming as a result.

The Thailand FA too have reportedly issued the Serb an ultimatum stating that Rajevac needs to ensure a knockout round berth for the War Elephants in the Asian Cup to retain his job.

However, the coach has so far seemed immune to the pressure and criticism levelled at him. Thailand have failed to make it into the knockout rounds of the Asian Cup since 1972, when they reached the semi-finals, and the onus is on their coach now to deliver big-time.

“We were able to spend a lot of time together because of the ASEAN Championship and with the Asian Cup we’ll be looking to achieve something we haven’t achieved before. Our minimum expectation is to go through to the Round of 16, to go through the group,” Rajevac said.

“That’s our minimum, but going to the best 16 is not going to satisfy us. We won’t just be happy with that and we’ll try to go step-by-step.”

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

Iranian duo join Portuguese club Maritimo

PLDC — Portuguese football club Maritimo has completed the signing of two Iranian players.

Mohammadreza Ghasemi, 19, who plays in left back position, has joined Maritimo from Portuguese club Lusitania FC Lourosa.

Amirhossein Sheikholeslami, 21, who plays in midfield, has joined the Portuguese team from Iran’s Zob Ahan.

The pair have joined their countryman Amir Abedzadeh in Maritimo.

Club Sport Maritimo MH M, commonly known as Maritimo, is a Portuguese sports club founded in Funchal, Madeira, in 1910. Maritimo is best known for its football team playing in Portugal’s top-flight competition, the Primeira Liga.

Iranian weightlifter collects three gold medals in Manama competition

MNA — An Iranian weightlifter at 55 kg division has grabbed three gold medals at an international weightlifting championships underway in Bahrain.

According to the official website of Iran Weightlifting Federation, on the first day of Weightlifting Championships, hosted by Bahrain’s Manama in three cadets, junior and adult divisions, the Iranian weightlifter at 55 kg Payman Dehghani from the Iranian Army Ground Force team grabbed three gold medals.

Dehghani lifted 79 kg weight at snatch move and 115 kg at clean and jerk, totaling 194 kg to win three gold medals.

Two Bahraini weightlifters totaled 136 and 115 kilograms and stood at second and third places.

Persepolis coach Ivankovic handed one match touchline ban

TASNIM — Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic was charged with misconduct by the Iran Football League Organization after the match against Zob Ahan.

The Croat has been handed a one-match touchline ban as a result of his actions in an Iran Professional League (IPL) meeting with the Isfahan-based football team.

Persepolis defeated Zob Ahan 1-0 in early December in Tehran’s Azadi Stadium.

Ivankovic said the referee’s decisions went against Persepolis. Ivankovic’s first game in the stands will be against IPL leader Padideh in February.

Iran female squash player ranks 15th in world

IRNA — Iranian female squash player Niki Shemirani ranked 15th in the world U-17 category.

After receiving the 5th title in Belgium, World Squash Federation announced that she is ranking 15th in the world.

Squash is a ball sport played by two (singles) or four players (doubles squash) in a four-walled court with a small, hollow rubber ball. The players must alternate in striking the ball with their racquet and hit the ball onto the playable surfaces of the four walls of the court.

20 teams due to attend int’l wrestling competitions in Iran

IRNA — Some 20 domestic and foreign teams will compete in the 16th edition of Shahid Hasheminejad Wrestling Championship in northern Iranian city of Behshahr, head of Behshahr Wrestling Committee said on Saturday.

Speaking during a press conference, Shahram Jafari said that wrestlers from Russia, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Georgia will take part in the tournament.

He also said that wrestling committees from 15 Iranian provinces have made it certain to send wrestlers to the competition.

The tournament is scheduled to be held in Behshahr on January 17-18, 2019.

Australia impress in win over Oman

Defending champions Australia outclassed Oman 5-0 in an international friendly on Saturday, ahead of their AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 campaign.

Australia were in superb form at the Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum Stadium in Dubai.

The Socceroos had suffered several setbacks in their preparation for their UAE 2019 challenge with Daniel Arzani and Aaron Mooy missing out due to injuries, but their dominance over Oman began as early as the 10th minute with Andrew Nabbout opening the scoring.

Four minutes later, Chris Ikonomidis doubled Australia’s lead with his first international goal, before Awer Mabil made it 3-0 in the 24th minute.

Two minutes from the hour-mark, Milos Degenek also opened his international account, and Jackson Irvine completed a super win for Australia with his goal in the 89th minute.

In the Continental showpiece, Graham Arnold’s charge, will play Jordan in their Group B opener on January 6, before playing Palestine and Syria, while Oman will have a final friendly with Thailand on January 2.

(Source: the-afc)



INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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» Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603

» www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.

Tel: 88911433

» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com

» Printed at: Rooztab - ISSN: 1017-94

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.o. Box: 14155-4843
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There is no price for your soul but heaven; so, beware of selling it for anything else.

Imam Ali (AS)

Fajr theater festival announces Iranian lineup for intl. competition

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — Seven Iranian plays will be performing in the international competition of the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival, the organizers announced on Sunday.



A scene from “Oblomov” by Siavash Bahadori.

Among the plays are “Flight Instructions for Captain and Cabin Crew” by Farhad Fozuni, “Steve Jobs” by Mehran Ranjbar and “She” by Arash Dadgar.

The lineup also includes “Mother” by Majid Kazemzadeh, “Death and the Penguin” by Payam Dehkordi, “The Play” by Masud Haqqanah and “Oblomov” by Siavash Bahadori-Rad.

The 37th Fajr International Theater Festival will be held in Tehran from February 11 to 23.

“Sicily” to recount transfer of power in New York mafia family at Tehran theater

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — An Iranian troupe is scheduled to perform a play titled “Sicily” about the transfer of power in a mafia family in New York at Tehran’s Mehregan Theater on Wednesday.



A poster for “Sicily”.

“Sicily” will be directed by Farhad Mehrkheirani who will also play a role in the play, a public relations team announced on Sunday.

The cast also includes Aqil Bahrami, Aida Razzaqzadeh, Behruz Ebadi, Maryam Qorbanian, Parisa Mohammadzadeh, Ramin Masumian, Mohammadreza Mansur, Tiam Moniri, and Amir-Hossein Mehmandoost. The play will be on stage until January 15.

After a decade of dormancy, Chaka Khan blooms again

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — If Chaka Khan were a flower, she’d be a perennial.

“Because I go dormant and then I...” Khan stops and gracefully lifts her arms together, then slowly brings her hands apart, like a tulip emerging in spring.

“I’ve done it many, many times,” explained the singer, perhaps best known for her multimillion selling 1984 cover of Prince’s “I Feel For You.”

On the brink of her first new album in a decade, and, on New Year’s Day, serving as grand marshal at the Rose Parade, Chaka Khan is in bloom again.

After receiving the call from the Pasadena Tournament of Roses Association, the term “grand marshal” had the 65-year-old Khan’s mind running wild.

“This is all new for me,” the 65-year-old Khan commented. “I love challenges. And I love new stuff.”

Khan will also open parade festivities with a performance. Publicists were unable to confirm whether the grand marshal-performer double duty is a Rose Parade first, but they did note it was the first time in recent memory. Khan said she would sing two songs: “I Feel for You,” as well as “Hello Happiness,” the second single from the new album.

The new song is not a political statement — unless you want it to be.

“I think we need a shot of just not taking the little things so seriously,” Khan said of the “Happiness” lyrics. “Little things are important. It’s about the little things, but just flow.”

Book City to celebrate J. D. Salinger’s 100th birthday

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — The Book City Institute in Tehran plans to celebrate the 100th birthday of American writer Jerome David Salinger during a program titled “A Day with Salinger”.

“Little, Brown and Company, the American publisher of Salinger’s books, is scheduled to celebrate his birthday on January 1 and we also decided to mark the day,” the secretary of the celebration, Homeira Afshar, told the Persian service of MNA on Sunday.

“We intend to review Salinger’s works and discuss his style of writing, special isolation, and lifestyle during the celebration,” she added.

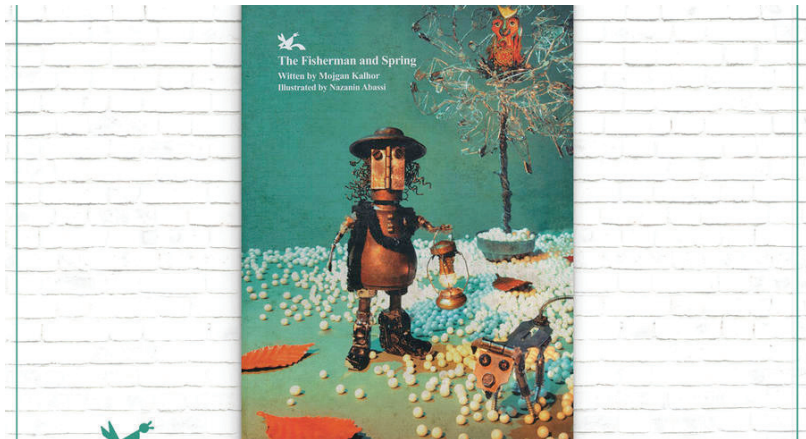
Book City Institute deputy director

Ali-Asghar Mohammadkhani and Persian literature scholar Abolfazl Horri are scheduled to deliver speeches and critic Amir Puria will hold a dialogue with writer Mostafa Mastur on Salinger.

Excerpts of several of Salinger’s stories will be read live by actors Nima Reisi and Gelareh Abbasi. A number of Iranian celebrities, including Hutan Shakiba and Habib Rezai, will talk about Salinger on videos, which will be screened during the program.

A Persian audio version of Salinger’s widely read novel “The Catcher in the Rye” will also be unveiled at the celebration, which will be organized in collaboration with the Novin Audio Book Institute, the publisher of the audiobook.

“The Fisherman and Spring” published in English



Front cover of the English version of Iranian children’s book writer Mojgan Kalhor’s “The Fisherman and Spring”.

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — Iranian children’s book writer Mojgan Kalhor’s “The Fisherman and Spring” has recently been published in English in Tehran.

Illustrated by Nazanin Abbasi, the book has been translated into Persian by Siamak Mazlumi, the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA), the publisher of the book, announced on

Sunday.

The book tells the story of a fisherman who lives in a snowy region with a very long winter. Fisherman supposes that the spring has lost its way to the region, therefore he starts searching for it. A little fish and a group of birds also join him in searching for the spring.

An animated adaptation of the book directed by Seyyed Hassan Soltani was produced by IIDCYA in early 2018.

Multigenerational 50th-anniversary Woodstock event set for 2019

NEWYORK (Reuters) — Fifty years after the Woodstock music festival became one of the watersheds of hippie counterculture, an anniversary event will take place in August 2019 on the same field north of New York City.

The Bethel Woods Center for the Arts announced a three-day festival of “music, culture and community” that will celebrate “the golden anniversary at the historic site of the 1969 Woodstock festival.”

The Bethel Woods Center, a nonprofit that now owns the 37-acre (15-hectare) field that was the site of the 1969 Woodstock festival, said in a Facebook posting on Thursday that the Aug. 16-18 festival will be a “pan-generational event.”

It will feature live performances from prominent and emerging artists across multiple genres and decades, as well as talks from leading futurists and tech experts. The festival is a joint venture with concert promoters Live Nation.

Details of performers, tickets and other participants will be announced at a later date, the Bethel Woods Center said.

The August 1969 Woodstock festival, billed as “three days of peace and music,” is regarded as one of the pivotal moments in music history and 1960s counterculture.

Over three sometimes-rainy days, more than 30 acts - including Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, The Who, The Band, and the Grateful Dead - performed around the clock to a 400,000-strong audience, most of whom watched for free and camped onsite in the mud. The festival was documented in an the 1970 film “Woodstock,” which won an Oscar.

Although it was known as Woodstock, the festival actually took place in Bethel, some 70 miles (110 km) south of the village of Woodstock in upstate New York. Bethel is 90 miles (144 km) north of New York City.

“Fifty years ago, people gathered



Janet Huey displays her original ticket at the site of the original Woodstock Music Festival in Bethel, New York, U.S. August 14, 2009. (Reuters/Eric Thayer/File Photo)

peacefully on our site inspired to change the world through music,” Darlene Fedun, chief executive of the Bethel Woods Center, said in a statement announcing the 50th-anniversary event.

“We remain committed to preserving this rich history and spirit, and to educating and inspiring new generations to contribute positively to the world through music, culture, and community,” Fedun added.

The Bethel Woods festival is not affiliated with Michael Lang, a promoter of the 1969 festival, who has also spoken of plans to organize a 50th-anniversary event but has yet to make any announcement. Woodstock anniversary festivals were also held in 1994, 1998 and 1999.

Many of the 1969 Woodstock artists are now dead. Surviving musicians who are still performing into their 70s include Joan Baez, Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend of The Who, and David Crosby, Neil Young, Graham Nash and Stephen Stills of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young.



A poster for Book City’s program “A Day with Salinger”.

Two Persian translations of the book by Ahmad Karimi and Mohammad Najafi have been published in Iran. “The Inverted Forest”, “Personal Notes

of an Infantryman”, “Once a Week Won’t Kill You” and “Raise High the Roof Beam” are among Salinger’s numerous stories published in Persian in Iran.

Manhattan festival to screen “Empty View”



A scene from Iranian short animation “Empty View” by Ali Zare Qanatnoi.

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — Iranian short animation “Empty View” by Ali Zare Qanatnoi will go on screen at the 8th edition of the Bronx World Film Cycle, an annual film and multi-arts event in Manhattan, New York City.

The film tells the story of a mother who keeps a look out for her son to return home from war. She knits him a pair of gloves remembering how her son rubbed his cold hands together on the wintry morning he left. The war goes on; the mother waits. She

unravels the gloves and knits them over and over again. When their small home is bombed, the gloves burn into ashes. Mother sits atop the rubble, plucks her white hair one by one and knits the gloves with her hair. Finally, spring arrives and the war ends. The mother hears the sound of military boots nearing. She gathers all the strength left in her and walks down the stairs with anticipation.

Over 35 films from 23 countries will compete during the event, which will be held from January 4 to 6.

Santa, romance and horror? ‘Bird Box’ bucks holiday trend

NEWYORK (AP) — For so long, movies around the holidays have been merry and bright. Lately, more and more seem murderous and designed to fright.

Released just days before Christmas on Netflix, the Sandra Bullock-led thriller is about monstrous entities that compel any human who sees them to quickly try to kill themselves. Not exactly the stuff of sugar plum fairies.

But even though Netflix declines to release viewership numbers, “Bird Box” seems to have struck a nerve, triggering the creation of memes and online chatter for a very dark film dropped into the festive period.

“I have never ever had as much attention or as many page likes, post likes/ shares and comments on any of my other pages as I have had on this one,” says Heather Drake, who started a Facebook page for fans of the story and is not affiliated with the film or distributors. “It’s been insane. I can’t even come close to responding to all the feedback, if that tells you anything.”

Critics have been mixed toward “Bird Box,” with many noting similarities to John Krasinski’s “A Quiet Place.” Variety complained about the “inexplicably bland ensemble” and The Hollywood Reporter sniffed that it was “not all that it might have been.” The Guardian declared it “a bird-brained mess.”

In some ways, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that a film about monsters attacking people showed up on the online video streamer on Dec. 21. Alternate Christmas movies are all the rage these days, from “Die Hard,” “In Bruges,” “Kiss Kiss Bang Bang” and “Lethal Weapon.”

Drake thinks the holiday timing of “Bird Box” isn’t that important, noting the need for fresh and intriguing movies during the holidays far from usual stale fare like “It’s a Wonderful Life” or “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.”

“I don’t honestly think it would have mattered if it was Dec. 21 or July 21,” she said. “However, Dec. 21 would give an advantage as many people are on vacation from school and work. And who doesn’t want to cozy up



This image released by Netflix shows Sandra Bullock in a scene from the film “Bird Box”. (Merrick Morton/Netflix via AP)

and “Netflix and chill” on a cold night when they don’t have to worry about school or work the next day?”

Netflix’s decision may also be an attempt to replicate last late-December’s hit “Bright,” starring Will Smith and Joel Egerton. That supernatural cop drama also wasn’t received well by critics but garnered strong word-of-mouth interest and a sequel has been promised.

Bullock has been one of Hollywood’s top stars since her 1994 hit “Speed” but had never made a horror movie until “Bird Box.” She told The Associated Press before a special screening in New York this month that the risks she and the cast undertook were somehow appealing.

To evade the movie monsters, Bullock and two young children are blindfolded while navigating through a forest and a treacherous river. The title refers to a literal box of birds that her character carries — the birds begin to chirp when the unseen evil approaches. Like the timing of the final film, it seemed to be a fresh challenge.

“Anytime that they yelled ‘Stop!’ we knew we knew we had gotten to a place where we could all get injured,” Bullock said. “And we fell. And I said don’t stop the camera unless I say, ‘Stop!’”