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# Palestinian govt. in Tel Aviv will be formed: Leader



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Palestinian Islamic Jihad chief Ziad al-Nakhala and his accompanying team were received by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Monday, December 31, 2018.

## Iran, Syria explore facilitation of bilateral banking transactions

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN**— In a meeting between Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati and Syrian Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade Mohammad Samir al-Khalil in Tehran on Monday, the two sides investigated the ways to facilitate banking transactions between Iran and Syria, CBI website published.

As reported, establishment of a joint

bank was one of the issues discussed in this due.

In the meeting, Hemmati said that expansion of banking ties between the two countries is a precondition for boosting bilateral trade which has come under the spotlight in the agreement the two sides signed on Sunday for expanding bilateral economic cooperation in the long term. **→4**

## Iran held talks with Taliban in Tehran on Sunday

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi announced on Monday that Iranian diplomats held a meeting with a Taliban delegation in Tehran on Sunday, December 30.

During a press conference, he said that the Iranian delegation was headed by Abbas Araqchi, the deputy foreign minister for political affairs.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran shares borders with Afghanistan and has cultural

and historical affinities with the country. As an important player in the region which seeks peace, stability and security, Iran wanted to enter these talks after negotiations with the Afghan government," he stated.

The news of talks in Tehran came a few days after a top Iranian security official confirmed that the Islamic Republic has been holding talks with the Taliban in coordination with the Kabul government to help relieve rampant insecurity in Afghanistan. **→2**

## 'Assad has decisively won war in Syria'

Leading British daily the Guardian says 2018 has ended on a note of triumph for the Syrian government amid the U.S. decision to withdraw troops and a race among Arab states to restore ties with Damascus.

U.S. President Donald Trump has announced a rapid troop withdrawal from Syria. The Guardian said the decision has "ended any potential threat originating

from an indefinite American presence inside Syria's borders."

Last week, the UAE reopened its embassy in Damascus, which it had closed in 2011. Bahrain followed suit and other countries, including Kuwait, are expected to re-establish ties in the coming year. And the Arab League is reportedly poised to re-admit Syria, seven years after expelling it. **→13**



## REPORT

**Salman Parviz**  
Journalist

## India, Iran to maintain trade level amid sanctions

**U.S. unilateral sanctions bring economic challenges for both nations**

**R**e-imposition of sanctions by U.S. President Donald Trump's administration against Iran sent the national currency rial on a roller coaster ride against the U.S. dollar, spiraling inflation and soaring cost of living for the general public in Iran. From the record highs of 190,000 rials against the dollar in late September, the greenback exchange rate has now recovered, hovering around 10,000 rials in the open market.

In May Washington announced U.S. exit from the Iran nuclear deal (also called JCPOA), and imposed tougher sanctions with a goal of reducing Islamic Republic's oil exports, which peaked to 2.8m bpd in April, to "zero". The news of the disruption of oil supply from Iran sent global crude prices soaring, touching \$86 per barrel in October.

Such uncertainties from the supply market have disrupted vulnerable energy dependent countries' economies and in some cases have created riots in the streets.

The announcement of the sanctions had a domino effect for India, Iran's second largest crude buyer, importing 540,000 bpd on average this year. Iran was India's third largest crude supplier after Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

With one of the highest economic growth rates in the world, India imports 80 percent of its crude and the demand is on the rise. As a result of the uncertainties in crude supply created by the sanctions, the Indian rupee fell to a record low of 73.81 against the dollar on October 5, cooling off the domestic stock market and escalating inflation.

Indian oil refiners had a good deal buying Iranian crude at \$3-5 a barrel cheaper compared to other Middle Eastern producers and benefits included \$2-4 discount for a barrel of crude, \$1 a barrel on freight subsidies and extended payment facilities, the Mumbai-based Business Today reported.

Higher crude prices imply higher deficits for India, which in turn leads to fall of Indian rupees against the dollar. **→13**

## The lesson Iraqis gave the U.S. president; will Trump learn the lesson?

**By Ramin Hossein Abadian**

**TEHRAN** — U.S. President Donald Trump's unexpected visit to Iraq on Wednesday came with a decisive response from the entire country, an answer that Trump should learn from in setting up his policy towards Iraq. Trump made the trip following a series of strange measures since retaliating on its presidential seat. After entering the Iraqi territory, Trump went straight to the American base of Ein al-Assad in Anbar province to visit the U.S. army. Trump's wife Melania also accompanied him during the trip. Once in Ein al-Assad, they launched several self-defense campaigns with U.S. troops, as if Iraqi territory be-

came the president's election campaign scene.

### Violation of Iraq's sovereignty

No doubt the U.S. president unexpected journey to Iraq was a violation of Iraq's sovereignty and an insult to Iraqi officials. The trip was made against diplomatic regulations and rules.

The U.S. president should have complied with the diplomatic requirements and officially provided the Iraqi authorities with the timing of his visit to Iraq, to avoid political and media attacks.

Experts believe that the United States is trying to show keeping troops in Iraq are natural part of process after a major defeat in Iraq. **→7**

## Brexit: A global laughing stock

**By Hanif Ghaffari**

**TEHRAN** — Brexit has long been a foggy point in the security, political, social, and economic equations in Britain and the United Europe. Conflicts and debates over Brexit have increased in the UK, and opponents of the Britain's exit from the European Union are about to hold a referendum again. On the other hand, Prime Minister Theresa May insists that the agreement reached between London and Brussels is the best possible deal, and the British Parliament should vote for it.

The British Prime Minister has warned that the parliament's negative vote would make the situation

even more complicated. However, the other side of the equation is more determined! European officials said that, in spite of some remarks over the Brexit and London's departure from the EU, there will be basically no more negotiations, and the UK internal problems encountered is not related to European leaders.

In one of these statements, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the European Union would not negotiate with May's government or the next British government on helping London to have an easier exit from the EU.

The Brexit's opponents believe that holding an early election or referendum on this issue could untie this knot. **→7**

## Iraqi PM sheds light on Trump visit after criticism

Iraq's Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi has given explanations on a sneak trip by U.S. President Donald Trump to a military base near Baghdad last week, which angered Iraqis.

Abdul-Mahdi on Sunday stressed that the visit had taken place with the prior notice of the Iraqi government and that the al-Asad Air Base at which Trump arrived Wednesday night was "100% an Iraqi base".

Trump's two-hour sojourns at the base, stopping short of a visit to Baghdad, drew criticism from Iraqi lawmakers who have demanded U.S. troops be expelled in response to what they believe was an unannounced trip. Abdul-Mahdi dismissed that,

saying the Americans had in fact "informed us the same morning of the day on which Trump was about to visit Iraq and we welcomed it."

However, "we put forth two pre-conditions: one being that he must come like any foreign dignitary, with official welcoming and meetings being included and the other, a few limited subjects be specified for negotiations given the briefness of the visit."

The Americans, however, said Trump did not plan to go anywhere other than the base, to which "we also announced that there would be no possibility for the prime minister and the accompanying delegation to go to the Ayn al-Asad base." **→13**

**Ranking of Bank Refah Kargaran amongst Leading Corporations of Iran**

**Based on the Ranking Calculated by the Industrial Management Institute**

**Ranked 6th in Assets Index amongst Top 100 Iranian Corporations & Ranked 9th in Sales Index amongst Top 500 Iranian Corporations**

[www.refah-bank.ir](http://www.refah-bank.ir)

[bankrefahkargaran](http://bankrefahkargaran)

مرکز فراد: ۰۲۱-۸۵۲۵



Refah K. Bank



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Haj Ali Akbari  
named Tehran  
Friday prayer  
leader

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has appointed Mohammad Javad Haj Ali Akbari as interim Friday prayer leader in Tehran.

On Friday, which falls on January 4, Haj Ali Akbari will lead the prayer in Imam Khomeini Musalla.

He was born in Damavand in 1964.

The Leader appointed Haj Ali Akbari, 54, as the new head of the Policy-Making Council of Friday Prayers in January.

Other interim Friday prayers of Tehran are Mohammad Emami Kashani, Ahmad Khatami, Kazem Seddiqi, Ali Movahedi-Kermani and Mohammad-Hassan Aboutorabi Fard.



Judiciary chief tells  
students, workers  
not to be 'ladders'  
for enemies

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The head of Iran's Judiciary on Monday cautioned protesting students and workers against serving as "ladders" for enemies of the Islamic Republic.

Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani was referring to recent protests in a branch of the Islamic Azad University over a deadly bus accident as well as protests in some places in the country by workers over lack of payments.

According to ILNA, the ayatollah also said enemies are playing another "sedition" like the protests which followed the presidential election in 2009. "We should recognize the moment and promptly put the sedition's eye out."



Iran will hold  
southern neighbors  
for any mischief in  
Persian Gulf

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The chief of Iran's armed forces has warned certain Iran's southern neighbors over "inviting America for carrying out sedition in the Persian Gulf".

"Iran's southern neighbors should know that besides its peace-loving doctrine, the Islamic Republic has a powerful and decisive military presence and, if needed, it will defend its territorial integrity and hold the inviting states as responsible for the aftermaths," General Mohammad Baqeri said during a visit to the Persian Gulf. IRIB news agency reported.

"They should not tie their hopes to America, because America itself did not achieve anything other than leaving Syria after years of violence and anarchism," the commander remarked.



Outgoing  
Turkish, Indian  
ambassadors  
meet Zarif

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The outgoing Turkish and Indian ambassadors to Iran met with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Monday to say goodbye.

Turkey's Riza Hakan Tekin had formerly served at the Turkish embassies in the United Arab Emirates and Bulgaria, and worked at the Permanent Mission of Turkey in the United Nations in New York.

According to Brinkwire, Derya Ors, head of the Ataturk High Council of Culture, Language and History, has been appointed ambassador to Iran, replacing Hakan Tekin.

No report has arrived yet regarding a replacement for the outgoing Indian ambassador, Saurabh Kumar.



Intelligence  
Ministry dismantles  
currency fraud  
network

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Intelligence Ministry issued a statement on Monday announcing it has dismantled a currency fraud network in the western province of Kurdistan.

The statement said that 11 members of the network were arrested.

"While Iran is experiencing delicate economic conditions and the use of currency resources should come under careful scrutiny, members of the fraudulent network received subsidized foreign currency the equivalent of 47,000 billion rials from banks under the guise of importing basic commodities, but invested the fortune in foreign countries," the statement said, according to Tasnim.



'Defense  
Ministry ready to  
cooperate with  
private sector'

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Deputy Defense Minister Qassem Taqizadeh said on Monday that the Defense Ministry is ready to cooperate with the private sector.

"The Defense Ministry is ready to cooperate with knowledge-based corporations, factories and scientific forces to meet defense needs," he said at a conference at Supreme National Defense University.

Taqizadeh also said that Iran is ready to counter enemies by relying on the country's capacities.

"We have never started any war, however, we will make the enemies regret if they seek to take actions against us," the defense official remarked.

# Operation Karbala-4 was not a military deception: General Soleimani

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC Quds Force, said on Monday that Operation Karbala-4 in late December 1986 during Iraq's war against Iran was a main operation and not a "military deception".

He was speaking following a controversial tweet by Mohsen Rezaee, secretary of the Expediency Council, on December 28 in which he said the 1986 operation had been meant to be a military deception. Rezaee was the commander of the Revolution Guards at the time.

Rezaee's tweet drew strong backlash from critics of various affiliations. One of the most severe ones came from President Rouhani's advisor Hesamoddin Ashna, who rebuffed the then-commander's remarks and demanded "transparency" and why the operation was initiated with the knowledge that it had been divulged to the Iraqis beforehand.

Operation Karbala-4 was launched under the cover of darkness in late December 1986 during Saddam Hussein's war against Iran, and was meant to give Iranian forces a foothold along the Arvand Roud waterway in southwest Iran. The Iranian troops would go on the offensive once across the waterway.



**Soleimani defended the decision to push ahead with operation Karbala-4, saying the enemy became notified about most of the operations and it was not logical to cancel an operation for which efforts had been made for several months.**

However, the operation did not go as planned, according to Press TV.

The late Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who carried the title of Iran's commander of war at the time, had in an interview with ISNA some years later in which he said the operation had been divulged, leading to a high number of casualties on the Iranian side.

According to some reports, in the operation about 1,000 were martyred, 3,900 went missing, and 11,000 injured.

"After success of operation Karbala-5, the enemy assumed that Karbala-4 was not our main operation," Soleimani said in a televised interview with Reza Rashidpour's "Hala Khorshid" program.

Soleimani defended the decision to push ahead with operation Karbala-4, saying the enemy became notified about most of the operations and it was not logical to cancel an operation for which efforts had been made for several months.

Rezaee's tweet has also drawn reaction from the parliament. Chief of the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh said on Monday that the body will discuss the issue and expressed dismay over Rezaee's remarks by saying that "elaborating on some issues does not do national security any good."

## Palestinian govt. in Tel Aviv will be realized: Leader

Ayatollah Khamenei says Palestinians' final victory is imminent

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Monday that the Palestinian people will achieve "final victory" over Israel in the not-too-distant future.

"Palestine will remain powerful and the Palestinian nation's final victory will take place in near future with the grace of God," Ayatollah Khamenei said during a meeting with Ziad al-Nakhala, secretary general of the Islamic Jihad movement.

Noting that resistance is key to victory, the Leader said, "As long as there is resistance, the Zionist regime's downfall and demise will continue."

"During the past years, the Palestinian people's victory was not (to the extent) to establish a government in Tel Aviv, which will be realized with the grace of God, but the main victory was bringing the Zionist regime to knees, a feat that Arab armies could never accomplish," the Leader remarked.

Ayatollah Khamenei then referred to the Israeli military's latest failed attempt in taking on Palestinian resistance groups in the Gaza Strip, which was met with an

overwhelming response that forced the regime to call for a truce after only two days.

"The Zionist regime called for ceasefire in the two previous wars, one after 22 days and another after eight

**"During the past years, the Palestinian people's victory was not (to the extent) to establish a government in Tel Aviv, which that will be realized with the grace of God, but the main victory was bringing the Zionist regime to knees, a feat that Arab armies could never accomplish," the Leader notes.**

days. In the last clash, the regime (also) called for ceasefire after 48 hours. This means bringing the occupying Zionist regime to knees."

The Leader reiterated that the Zionist regime is on the wane.

Elsewhere, Ayatollah Khamenei said that Iran will never back away from supporting Palestine despite the heavy pressure from the world's arrogant powers.

"These forces will never make us abandon our divine, sacred and rational responsibility," Ayatollah Khamenei insisted.

For his part, Nakhala said that the Palestinian resistance front is stronger than ever and in case of a war it can target Israel with its missiles.

Nakhala also said that the Palestinians will stand against "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".

## Iran held talks with Taliban in Tehran on Sunday

**1 →** "The series of contacts and talks with the Taliban group have taken place with the knowledge of the Afghan government," said Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council.

"That trend will continue," Shamkhani said after visiting Kabul on December 26.

Qassemi said the talks are aimed at helping negotiations between Afghan groups and peace process in the country.

He also said that Araqchi will visit Afghanistan in the next two weeks.

**'Iran welcomes reopening of embassies in Damascus'**

Qassemi also said that Iran welcomes reopening of embassies by foreign countries in Syria.

So far the United Arab Emirates has reopened its embassy in Damascus, the latest sign of efforts to bring the Syrian government back into the Arab fold.

A few hours after the UAE's announcement, Bahrain signaled its intention to reopen its embassy in Damascus, which has been closed since March 2012.

**'Europeans have not readied SPV yet'**

Qassemi also said that the Europeans have not yet been able to establish the special purpose vehicle (SPV) to save the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

"However, we will pursue the issue and we hope that the Europeans would

defend their identity by preparing this mechanism," he said.

SPV is a European Union's initiative intended to protect trade with Iran against newly reimposed U.S. sanctions.

President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. unilaterally from the 2015 nuclear deal in May and ordered sanctions against Iran. The first round of sanctions went into force on August 6 and the second round, which targets Iran's oil exports and banks, were snapped back on November 4.

**'Any move by Brazil to move embassy to Tel Aviv will not be conducive to peace'**

In the press conference, Qassemi also advised Brazil against moving its embassy

## IRGC plans to develop speed boats with stealth technology

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps announced on Monday that it plans to upgrade its speed boats in the Persian Gulf with radar-evading stealth technology and new missile launchers.

"We are trying to increase the agility of the Guards' speed boats and equip them with stealth technology to facilitate their operations," Alireza Tangsiri, the IRGC Naval Force chief, was quoted as saying by IRNA.

Tangsiri also said the speed boats will be equipped with new missiles, and their speed will reach 80 knots per hour. The IRGC last week launched war games in the Per-

sian Gulf, where third of the world's sea-borne oil passes through, and warned that its forces were ready to respond to any hostile U.S. action.

A U.S.-Iranian war of words has escalated since U.S. President Donald Trump took Washington out of a world powers' nuclear deal with Iran in May, and reimposed sanctions on its banking and energy sectors.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani recently warned that if the country cannot sell its oil due to U.S. pressure, then no other regional country will be allowed to do so either, a threat which many have taken as meaning to block the strategic Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.



IRGC speed boats are seen near the USS John C. Stennis CVN-74 (not pictured) as it makes its way to the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz, December 21, 2018.

## Iran plans to develop solar-powered airship in the next 10 years

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Space Transportation Research Center has presented a design project for an airship that is planned to be developed within the next 10 years.

According to ISNA, Rahim Ehsani, the center's director, announced the concept of the four-engine airship, which will be powered by solar panels installed on it.

According to Ehsani, the airship will fly semi-automatically, with landings and take-offs done manually by the crew, whereas the rest of the flight will be carried out by the autopilot using digital maps. He did not mention at what speed the vessel is expected to fly.



The project currently only exists as a concept and it is unknown for what purpose the aircraft will be used.

Airships are mostly used either for military purposes, such as reconnaissance, or for civilian ones, such as tourist attractions, tours or as advertisement platforms. They are also occasionally used as transportation in some countries.

Airships are currently used by the U.S., French and British militaries for reconnaissance purposes. Civilian versions are also used by several countries as tourist attractions and for sightseeing tours. They are also used in Japan for advertising.



# Iraqi warplanes strike ISIL leaders in Syria

Iraqi warplanes hit a meeting of ISIL (Daesh) leaders near Deir al-Zor in Syria on Monday, destroying the building they were gathered in, the military said in a statement, without giving further details about the militants targeted.

The statement said F-16 fighter jets carried out the raid around al-Sousa village in eastern Syria, as "30 leaders from Daesh gangs" met in the building.

The strike came a day after Iraq's government hinted at greater involvement for its armed forces in Syria as the U.S. begins withdrawing troops from the country.

Iraq fears that ISIL militants in Syria will try to cross the border, and analysts warn of increasing insurgent-style attacks in both countries.

Baghdad has carried out several air raids in Syrian territory with the agreement of President Bashar al-Assad. Its army and Shia paramilitaries have reinforced at the border in recent months.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has reportedly allowed Iraqi fighter jets to conduct airstrikes against the positions of the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the war-ravaged country without waiting to be granted formal authorization for the assaults.



A high-ranking Iraqi official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Russia's RT Arabic television news network that Iraqi warplanes will be able to enter the Syrian airspace and bombard Daesh sites under Assad's directives.

The Iraqi official, however, highlighted that the Syrian president has demanded the Baghdad government to inform Syrian authorities before launching any aerial raid.

On December 12, the media bureau of Iraq's Joint Operations Command (JOC) said

in a statement that Iraqi military aircraft had carried out two separate airstrikes against members of the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in Syria's eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr.

The statement noted that the fighter jets targeted a meeting of Daesh Takfiris in al-Susah town, which lies in Abu Kamal district of the province, leaving 30 terrorists dead.

Another air raid destroyed a militant hideout in the same Syrian town, killing 14 Daesh terrorists.

Iraqi authorities have on occasions stated that they work closely with the Syrian government to monitor and target terrorist targets based on the efforts of intelligence and information departments of the security coordination committee formed between Baghdad, Damascus, Tehran and Moscow years ago, as well as coordination with the so-called US-led anti-Daesh coalition.

"If we perform a strike, we will coordinate with the international coalition, the joint security center and all the relevant parties. As we work together, we follow the principle of partnership to ensure safety and harmony between allies," former Iraqi Ministry of Defense spokesman Tahseen al-Khafaji said in April.

(Source: agencies)

## UAE court upholds 10-year jail sentence against activist Ahmed Mansoor



A court in the United Arab Emirates upheld on Monday a 10-year jail sentence against pro-democracy campaigner Ahmed Mansoor for criticizing the government on social media, two sources said Monday.

The state security court's ruling against Mansoor, who prior to his imprisonment had been one of a tiny number of publicly active rights campaigners in the UAE, was later reported by the Abu Dhabi-government owned National newspaper.

A trade and tourism hub, the UAE is an absolute monarchy which tolerates little public criticism. Mansoor, a 49-year-old electrical engineer and poet, was among five activists convicted of insulting the UAE's rulers in 2011. They were pardoned the same year.

He was arrested again in March 2017 at his home in Ajman, on charges of publishing false information and rumours, promoting a sectarian and hate-incited agenda, and using social media to "harm national unity and social harmony and damage the country's reputation."

In May 2018, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison and handed a fine of 1 million dirhams (\$270,000).

The court upheld both the jail sentence and fine Monday, the two sources said on condition of anonymity.

The National also said that Mansoor would remain under surveillance for three years upon his release and that Monday's ruling was not subject to further appeal.

United Nations human rights experts, the European Parliament and rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (HRW), are among those to have urged the UAE to release Mansoor and condemned his detention as a violation of freedom of expression and opinion.

In 2015 Mansoor received the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders, an annual prize awarded by a panel of international human rights NGOs, for his work documenting the human rights situation in the UAE.

Amnesty International's Middle East Research Director, Lynn Maalouf said: "Instead of punishing Ahmed Mansoor for daring to express his opinions, the authorities must ensure his conviction and sentence are quashed and release him immediately and unconditionally."

Human Rights Watch said in March 2018 it believed Mansoor was being held in solitary confinement, a concern echoed in a resolution by the European Parliament on the case.

"The UAE's railroading of prominent human rights advocate Ahmed Mansoor is yet another stain on the country's reputation," Adam Coogle, Middle East researcher at HRW, said.

"So long as Mansoor remains in prison, no amount of money nor army of public relations firms will be able to wash away this stain."

(Source: Daily Star)

## Vatican spokesman, deputy, resign over strategy differences



The Vatican spokesman and his deputy resigned on Monday over disagreements on strategy, ending a year of upheaval in the Holy See's communications structure.

A brief Vatican statement gave no reason for the resignations. Spokesman Greg Burke, an American, tweeted that he and his Spanish deputy, Paloma Garcia Ovejero, had quit to let Pope Francis appoint a new team in what was a "time of transition".

A Vatican source said both Burke and Ovejero had wanted more autonomy from the Vatican department that oversees all communications, known as the Dicastery for Communications.

They quit two weeks after Pope Francis appointed a personal friend, Italian journalist Andrea Tornielli, to become editorial director of all Vatican communications.

The source said it was believed to be the first time both posts had changed hands simultaneously, underscoring the differences of opinion.

"Paloma and I have resigned, effective Jan. 1. At this time of transition in Vatican communications, we think it's best the Holy Father is completely free to assemble a new team," Burke tweeted.

The 59-year-old former Rome-based reporter for Fox News joined the Vatican in 2012 as an advisor in its Secretariat of State and became spokesman in 2016. He is a member of the conservative Catholic group Opus Dei.

Ovejero, 43, a former reporter for the

Spanish radio network COPE, was one of the few high-ranking women in the Vatican.

During Burke and Ovejero's tenure, the top two jobs in the Vatican press room were, unusually, held by non-Italians.

Tornielli is now the third-ranking person in the communications department but his closeness to the pope, whom he has known since before the pontiff's election in 2013, will likely make him particularly influential.

Monday's resignations capped a year of tensions in Vatican communications.

Monsignor Dario Viganò resigned as overall head in March after a scandal over a doctored letter, a public relations fiasco two months after the pope warned of the dangers of fake news.

Viganò released part of a letter by former Pope Benedict that was to have remained private, using it to promote a book on the theology of Pope Francis.

A promotional photo for the book released by Viganò blurred a part of the letter in which Benedict declined to write an introduction, saying he was unhappy with one of its contributors.

Viganò was replaced in July by Paolo Ruffini, ex-head of a Catholic television station.

The Vatican said Alessandro Gisotti, an Italian journalist who has handled the Vatican's social media, would be interim spokesman.

(Source: agencies)

## Democratic Senator Warren takes step toward 2020 U.S. presidential bid



U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, a progressive Democrat who has exchanged stinging insults with President Donald Trump, said on Monday she has formed an exploratory committee to run for president in 2020.

The Massachusetts senator, known as a liberal firebrand in her party, released a video in which she outlines her vision of a path to opportunity for all Americans, not just the wealthy.

"Every person in America should be able to work hard, play by the same set of rules, & take care of themselves & the people they love," she said in a Twitter post. "That's what I'm fighting for, & that's why I'm launching an exploratory committee for president. I need you with me."

Warren said in September she would take a "hard look" at running for the Democratic nomination to challenge Republican Trump in 2020. She and Trump clashed frequently through the 2016 presidential campaign and Trump has cast aspersions on her claim to Native American ancestry, referring to her as "Pocahontas."

Warren, an architect of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau set up after the 2008 financial crisis, has been a strong voice in the U.S. Senate on financial issues.

Warren, a former Harvard Law School professor, campaigned with Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in 2016 and attacked Trump as an "insecure money grubber" driven by greed and hate.

(Source: Reuters)

## Russian apartment block blast kills at least four, dozens missing

Rescuers scrambled amid freezing temperatures to recover people trapped in the rubble of a Russian city apartment block that collapsed in a gas explosion on Monday, killing at least four people and leaving dozens missing, news agencies reported.

The blast, thought to have been caused by a gas leak, damaged 48 apartments in a nine-story building in Magnitogorsk, an industrial city in the Urals some 1,700 km (1,050 miles) east of Moscow, the emergencies ministry said.

"Four people have been killed, five are in hospital ... and the fate of 35 is unknown," Russian news agencies quoted the emergencies ministry as saying.

President Vladimir Putin flew into Magnitogorsk late on Monday afternoon, the Kremlin said, as rescue workers toiled in temperatures of -22 Celsius (-7.6 Fahrenheit) to locate people trapped in the debris.

Health Minister Veronika Skvortsova told state television that the chances of finding survivors were diminishing as the day wore on.

RIA news agency reported that the blast tore through the building at around 0600 a.m. (0100 GMT) when many residents were asleep. Monday was a public holiday in Russia.

(Source: TASS)

## China's Xi, in New Year's address, says pace of reform won't 'stagnate'

China's pace of reforms will not "stagnate" and its door will open wider and wider, President Xi Jinping said Monday in his New Year message, as he also warned of challenges ahead.

Xi has repeatedly pledged his support for reform this year, as China marks 40 years since landmark economic reforms, amid mounting pressure to accelerate reforms and improve market access for foreign companies as a trade war with the United States weighs on the economy.

In a speech carried by all major state media, Xi said that in 2018 China had pushed more than 100 important reform measures.

"The world has seen a China whose reforms and opening up have gathered speed, and has seen China's determination to follow through with reforms and opening up," Xi said.

"Our pace of reforms will not stagnate, and the door to opening up will widen further."

Xi did not make specific mention of the trade war with the United States, noting that 2019 would bring "opportunities and challenges."

"As we open our eyes to look at the world, we are faced with huge changes, changes not seen in 100 years," he added, without elaborating.

"No matter how the international situation changes, China's confidence and determination to safeguard national sovereignty and security will not change. China's sincerity and goodwill for maintaining world peace and promoting common development will not change."

(Source: Reuters)

## North Korea's Kim sent message to Trump on nuclear talks

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has sent a "conciliatory message" to U.S. President Donald Trump amid stalled nuclear negotiations.

Kim's "letter-like" message to Trump was delivered on Friday through an unspecified channel, the newspaper reported, citing an unnamed diplomatic source.

The report did not include details about the message but said it related to U.S.-North Korea talks, and was conciliatory in tone.

On Sunday, the office of South Korea's President Moon Jae-in said Kim had sent a letter to his counterpart in Seoul saying he wants to hold more inter-Korean summits next year to achieve denuclearization of the peninsula.

Neither the U.S. State Department nor the U.S. Embassy in Seoul had an immediate comment about the report of Kim's message to Trump when contacted by Reuters.

Moon's office could not confirm the Chosun Ilbo report.

"There is a dialogue channel between North Korea and the United States through which they exchange active communication, but I cannot know whether it took the form of letter or something else," Moon's spokesman told a news



briefing on Monday.

At a summit with Trump in Singapore in June, Kim vowed to work towards denuclearization.

However, both sides have struggled to make progress on this matter. They are also yet to reschedule a meeting between U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and senior

North Korean official Kim Yong Chol after an abrupt cancellation in November.

Pyongyang's state media has credited Trump for his willingness to continue dialogue but has also slammed the U.S. State Department for tightening sanctions.

The stalled negotiations have had an impact on inter-Korean ties, with Kim failing to visit Seoul this year as agreed to at an inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang in September.

The Chosun Ilbo report said Kim wrote in the letter to Moon that he would come to the South "in the near future" after giving a New Year address on Tuesday.

Kim's New Year address provides a rare public appearance for the young leader and is closely watched by neighboring countries as it is seen setting the tone for his domestic and foreign policies.

According to Moon's spokesman, Kim said in the letter to the South Korean president that he was sorry his previously planned trip to Seoul did not take place, expressing his "strong resolve" to make it happen while monitoring the situation.

(Source: Chosun Ilbo)



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	161405.3
IFX	1873.44

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	48,011 rials
GBP	53,284 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: iribnews.ir

COMMODITIES

WTI	\$45.76/b
Brent	\$53.82/b
OPEC Basket	\$53.92/b
Gold	\$1,283.05 /oz
Silver	\$15.47/oz
Platinum	\$798.25/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



**Exports to Azerbaijan rise 50% in 8 months on year**

ECONOMY

**TEHRAN** — The value of Iran’s exports to Azerbaijan rose 50 percent during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21, 2018) compared to the same period of time in the previous year, IRNA reported on Monday citing the data released by Iran’s Trade Promotion Organization (TPO). The TPO data put Iran’s exports to the neighboring country at \$301 million during the mentioned time span while its imports from that country was \$12 million.



**NISOC to start 14 mega oil projects from March**

ENERGY

**TEHRAN** — National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) will start implementation of at least 14 mega projects on oil fields during the first half of the next Iranian calendar year (March 21-September 22, 2019), IRNA reported quoting the managing director of the company. Making the remarks on the sidelines of a specialized session on preserving and boosting production from the 28 oil fields under development by NISOC, Ahmad Mohammadi also announced that 8-10 new contract packages are being finalized in line with the technical and operating objectives of the company and also creating jobs in the region.



**Water supply to 800 villages to be improved in 3 months**

ENERGY

**TEHRAN** — Supplying water to 800 villages with the population of over 590,000 people will be improved by the end of current calendar year (March 20, 2019), IRIB quoted managing director of Water and Wastewater Company of Iran (Persian acronym: ABFA) as saying on Monday. Hamidreza Janbazi also said: “We have prepared a plan for the next three years to boost water supply by 63 cubic meters per second, while managing consumption at the same time.” In this line, digging wells, implementing water desalination projects, elevating the quality of water, and boosting water reserving capacity are some of the plans on the agenda, he added.

Iran, Syria explore facilitation of bilateral banking transactions

**1 →** The agreement was signed by Iranian Transport and Urban Development Minister Mohammad Eslami and Samer al-Khalil at the place of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIIMA). The Syrian minister, for his part, underlined the important role of the central banks of the two countries to facilitate trade ties in line with materializing the objectives of the agreement.



Central Bank of Iran Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati (R) and Syrian Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade Mohammad Samer al-Khalil met in Tehran on Monday.

Persian Gulf Star Refinery’s 3rd phase to come on stream by Friday

ENERGY

**TEHRAN** — The third phase of Persian Gulf Star Refinery, in south of Iran, will be put into operation by the end of the current Iranian calendar week (Friday), Shana reported quoting Deputy Oil Minister Alireza Sadeqabadi. Sadeqabad, who is the managing director of National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC), also said that putting this phase into operation the country’s daily gasoline output will reach 105 million liters. “Reaching this amount of production, while

meeting the domestic demand for gasoline, we will also witness some 20 million liters rise in the country’s gasoline output during the second half of the current Iranian calendar year (September 23, 2018 - March 20, 2019) from the figure of the same period of time in the previous year”, the official noted. He also highlighted that Iran’s capacity of gasoline production has risen 67 percent since the beginning of current Iranian year (March 21, 2018) compared to the same period of time in the past year. Persian Gulf Star Refinery in the southern



province of Hormozgan is the first of its kind designed based on gas condensate feedstock received from South Pars gas field which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf. Construction of the refinery started in 2006, but the project was delayed as the result of some

mismanagement and also financial limitation due to the West-led sanctions against Iran. Persian Gulf Star, the Middle East’s largest processing facility for gas condensate, is planned to play a big role to turn Iran into an exporter of gasoline.

Biggest problem for global economy in 2019 won’t be U.S.-China trade war

The biggest problem for the global economy in 2019 won’t be the trade war between America and China. It will be massive business failures. Perhaps bank failures, too. The U.S.-China trade war was the big problem in 2018, raising fears of de-globalization and the descent of the global economy into a collection of highly protected national markets.

But financial markets and global corporations will bring the two parties on the negotiation table in 2019, the way they did with NAFTA a few months ago. Instead, the biggest problem for the global economy in 2019 will be massive business failures that could also lead to bank failures in emerging markets relying on foreign capital to maintain elevated living standards. The reason? The rise of interest rates and the end of easy money created by central bankers in recent years. The explanation is simple and straightforward. Easy money acted as a tsunami, lifting up both the demand and the supply side of the global economy to higher levels. On the demand side, it encouraged consumers to resume taking on more debt. China’s debt to GDP ratio, for instance, has soared, from around 18 percent in 2008 to over 50 percent in 2018.



Then, there’s the debt of China’s corporate sector that is a big unknown. On the supply side, it encouraged corporations and entrepreneurs to pursue low profit businesses opportunities. U.S. Total industry capacity utilization, for instance, increased from around 67 percent in 2009 to close to 80 percent by 2011, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Saint Louis. Meanwhile, the NFIB Small Business Optimism Index rose from close to 80 back in 2009 to close to 108 in 2018. That’s the highest level since the Regan years, a period characterized by low interest rates, too. Simply put, easy money placed the global economy into a cycle of higher growth. More consumer debt fueled more spending. More spending fueled more investment and the creation of new

Political risk set to cut Eurozone growth

The precarious political climate within and outside the Eurozone has become a significant risk and is likely to cut growth for the region in 2019, according to a Financial Times poll of economists. All but one of 24 respondents told the FT they expected growth of between 1 percent and 1.8 percent next year. The European Central Bank estimates that growth for 2018 will have been 1.9 percent. The outlook has become increasingly poor, and economic conditions could worsen dramatically because of tension between the US and China over trade. Such an escalation would prove particularly painful for the region’s largest and most export-dependent economy, Germany, respondents said in the poll, which was conducted in mid-December. “The economic fundamentals look encouraging,” said Florian Hense, economist at Berenberg, a bank. “Having said that, we cannot rule out two major risks. First, politics may go badly wrong. Think trade, Brexit, Italy. Second, even if the big risks that are currently scaring companies and households fade over the course of 2019, the fear factor may take on a life of its own for a while.” Jörg Krämer, chief economist at Commerzbank, said he was concerned that “a decade of de-globalization lies ahead of us”, which would weigh on growth in a region that relies heavily on manufacturing exports.

The estimates follow a dramatic slowdown in the second half of 2018, with the economy expanding by just 0.2 percent between the second and third quarters — its lowest level in more than four years — on the back of a slowdown in export sales. The ECB’s latest forecasts show growth hitting 1.7 percent next year as lower unemployment and a sharper rise in wages boost domestic spending. Most economists polled by the FT supported the ECB’s stance. “There are still convincing arguments in favor of the upswing to continue — albeit at a more moderate pace — with private consumption propped up for now by resilient employment growth,” said Michael Heise, chief economist at Allianz. Economists’ expectations for inflation lay mostly between 1.2 percent and 1.8 percent, compared with an ECB target of just under 2 percent. While some respondents said stronger wage growth would spur underlying price pressures, others saw little evidence that the pick-up in pay was driving prices higher. While a surge in oil prices drove headline inflation above 2 percent during 2018, underlying price pressures remain weak. One respondent, Guntram Wolff, director of Bruegel, a Brussels-based think-tank, forecast that core inflation — which strips out changes in oil and food price, and is seen as a better indicator of longer term pressures — would remain weak at just 1 percent. Many of the 24 respondents played down the economic threat of a surge in support for populist parties in European elections in the spring. (Source: Financial Times)

Second 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



# Brent crude rises but set for first yearly drop since 2015

Oil prices rose about 2 percent on the final day of the year on Monday, mirroring gains in stock markets, but were on track for the first annual decline in three years amid lingering concerns of a persistent supply glut.

Hints of progress on a possible U.S.-China trade deal, with U.S. President Donald Trump saying he had a "very good call" with Chinese President Xi Jinping, helped bolster sentiment for oil.

Brent crude futures was up 83 cents at \$54.05 a barrel by 0932 GMT, after rising by over a \$1 a barrel in early trade to a high of \$54.55 a barrel.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$45.99 a barrel, up 66 cents, or 1.4 percent, from their last close. WTI also rose more than a \$1 in early trade, reaching \$46.38 a barrel.

Both contracts are down more than a third this quarter, the steepest decline since the fourth quarter of 2014.

For most of 2018, oil prices were on the rise, driven up by healthy demand and supply concerns, especially around the impact of renewed U.S. sanctions against major producer Iran, which were introduced in early November.

Brent crude, seen as a global benchmark for oil prices, rose by almost a third between January and October, to a high of \$86.74



per barrel.

That was the highest level since late 2014, the start of a deep market slump amid bulging global oversupply, and many leading analysts and traders at the time said they expected crude to hit \$100 per barrel again by the end of 2018.

Instead, Brent prices have wiped out all of 2018's gains, plunging by almost 40 percent

from the year's high, in what has been one of the steepest oil market sell-offs of the past decades.

The slump came after Washington gave unexpectedly generous sanction waivers to Iran's biggest oil buyers and as concerns over a global economic slowdown amid the Sino-American trade dispute dented the outlook for oil demand.

"It was the bailout of Iran that really pricked the bubble that was the crude oil market," said Sukrit Vijayakar, director of energy consultancy Trifecta.

"For the immediate future, in the absence of anything new, the first pressure point for oil markets would come around May 2019 or a month or so earlier when the 'extensions of (Iran) waivers' would be discussed."

The current downward pressure on oil prices should likely taper off from January, analysts said, as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies including Russia start curbing production by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd).

The market, however, might still remain under some pressure from swelling production in the United States, which has emerged as the world's biggest crude producer this year, pumping 11.6 million bpd.

"The key swing producers within OPEC+ do have meaningful spare capacity and are able to use it if they deem it necessary. That said, it is nonetheless a difficult tool to use correctly in a world where forecasters tend to routinely underestimate U.S. production by several hundred thousand barrels per day," JBC Energy consultancy said in a daily note.

Outside the United States, production in Russia and Saudi Arabia also hit record levels this year. (Source: Reuters)

## Hedge funds bet on oil rally in 2019 after wackiest year-end in decade

Hedge funds are keeping their cool in the most tumultuous end of the year for oil since the 2008 financial crisis, betting on better days ahead.

They boosted wagers on rising Brent prices for a third straight week amid expectations that OPEC and allies will follow through on a deal to reduce output. The vote of confidence comes against a backdrop of turmoil in financial markets that saw one measure of oil-price volatility jump the most on record in November and head for its highest year-end level in a decade.

"There is a little more optimism and neutrality coming into markets and we're getting some positive signs," said Ashley Petersen, an oil analyst at Stratias Advisors LLC in New York. "It's not as if demand is tanking tomorrow and supply is going to triple. We're seeing a little more rationale enter markets, a little more of a wait-and-see mode."

Although the global crude benchmark has declined about 15 percent since OPEC and its allies came together and announced an agreement to reduce output on Dec. 7 -- extending its plunge since early October to 40 percent -- producers have signaled dedication to the deal.

OPEC and its allies aim to publish a statement in January on the implementation of the agreement to cut production, according to Russia's Energy Minister Alexander Novak. He also said the market may see the impact of the cuts in January or February, and if necessary, the group can convene before its scheduled meeting in April. At the same time, a decline in Iranian imports to Japan adds another positive sign.

"OPEC has done a pretty good job indicating that they are going to hold compliance," said Brian Kessens, who helps manage \$16 billion in energy assets at Tortoise in Leewood, Kansas.

Hedge funds' net-long position -- the difference between bets on higher Brent prices and wagers on a drop -- rose 6.7 percent to 162,249 contracts for the six days ended Dec. 24, ICE Futures Europe data show. Longs rose, while shorts declined to the lowest level since late November. The report was for a period shorter than a week because of the Christmas holiday.

Analysts surveyed by Bloomberg forecast Brent to average \$70 a barrel in 2019 as the market tightens, OPEC's supply cuts take effect and unintended losses in Venezuela and Iran increase.

So far, the apparent confidence from hedge funds and analysts hasn't yet translated into a calmer market. After surging a record 86 percent in November, the Chicago Board Options Exchange Oil Volatility Index ended Friday at 53.11. The last time it finished the year above 51 was 2008.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Six renewable energy trends to watch in 2019

2019 promises to be an exciting year for clean tech. An increasing number of countries, companies and regions are embracing sustainable energy generation and the landscape is rapidly evolving.

Here are 6 renewable energy trends to watch in the coming year.

### 1. Energy storage

Energy storage plays an important role in balancing power supply and demand, and is key to tackling the intermittency issues of renewable energy. Pairing a storage system with a renewable energy source ensures a smooth and steady power supply, even when weather conditions are not optimal for energy generation.

Batteries are the most common storage devices used in renewable energy systems and their use is increasing on both the residential and grid-wide scale. Energy storage technologies are expected to continue to improve, making their use more viable and affordable. It is projected that storage will represent a core component of all new energy technologies moving into the future, as both utility-scale and domestic energy storage solutions become more price competitive, eroding the advantages of traditional energy sources.

On the Caribbean island of Barbados, old electric car batteries are being reused to provide grid energy storage and extend their useful lifespan.

### 2. Microgrids and AI

Microgrids are local energy grids that can operate either autonomously or while connected to a larger traditional grid. They provide energy independence, efficiency and protection during emergencies. Using the machine learning capabilities of Artificial Intelligence (AI) with microgrid controllers allows for continuous adaptation and improvement of operation.

Deployment of microgrids is becoming significantly quicker, with new software allowing for designs to be completed in a single day. San Diego tech company XENDEE is rolling out an advanced toolkit for microgrid design in partnership with the WorleyParsons Group to make available turnkey solutions in up to a 90 percent less time and cost than conventional methods.

From California to the Pacific Islands, microgrids are taking center-stage. Palau is a Pacific island nation and the 13th smallest country in the world, but has committed to building what would be the world's largest microgrid - 35MW of solar panels paired with 45 megawatt-hours of energy storage. This effort is part of the nation's goal to transition to 70 percent renewable energy by 2050.

recognizing that islands are on the front lines of experiencing the effects of climate change and stand as ground zero for the global energy transition.

### 3. Energy blockchain and IoT

Originally developed to record cryptocurrency transactions, blockchain technology is being adapted for use in the energy market. Blockchain is an incorruptible digital ledger that conducts and records transactions through a peer-to-peer network. The lack of centralization in blockchain leaves it as ideal for eliminating the middlemen of electricity suppliers. It reduces energy inequality and inefficiency and empowers consumers to buy and sell energy from other consumers directly.

Pairing the distributed ledger technology of blockchain with the everyday devices that we use to receive and convey information, now commonly referred to as the Internet of Things (IoT), stands to have a profound impact on energy systems. With the correct applications, devices can autonomously buy and sell energy at the optimal times, optimize energy system settings in a real-time context and monitor and analyze performance of energy-consuming devices.

These technologies are beginning to be used for groundbreaking projects, such as the Brooklyn Microgrid. The project involves a community-powered microgrid whose owners buy and sell power to each other via blockchain technology. The success of projects like this ensure that they will be implemented on a wider scale.

### 4. Grid parity and falling costs

Grid parity occurs when an alternative energy can generate power at a cost and performance level equal to or less than electricity generated from conventional methods. Solar and wind have reached parity in both price and performance in many regions, and new technologies continue to hone their competitive edge.

The traditional model of large, top-down and centrally distributed energy production is being replaced by modular, consumer-driven and evenly distributed power generation. Once thought to be difficult to integrate into the grid, renewables are now serving to strengthen grid reliability and resilience. The utilization of blockchain, AI and other automation technologies make renewables self-optimizing, increasing their efficiency.

Solar and wind are already more efficient and cost-effective than conventional sources, and evolving technologies will continue to improve their price and performance. Combining the economic benefits with a low environmental impact, we can expect

to see renewables move from being an acceptable energy source to a preferred one.

### 5. Big commitments

An increasing number of corporations, cities and countries are embracing emissions reduction targets and climate action plans to meet the goal of limiting the rise in global temperature.

To date, over 100 cities worldwide report that at least 70 percent of their energy production is from renewables, and more than 40 are currently operating on 100 percent renewable electricity. Hundreds more have pledged to work towards the goal of energy generation that is 100 percent based on renewables. Recognizing their impact on climate change, 158 companies have also committed to transitioning to 100 percent renewables.

Many of these corporations and municipalities were inspired to make these commitments after the 2015 Paris Agreement. With the new information provided by the IPCC's 2018 report, we can expect to see an increase in bold commitments to switch from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.

### 6. Energy access advances in developing countries

When talking about exciting new innovations in energy technology, it can be easy to forget that a significant percentage of the world's population remains without access to electricity at all. A billion people live without electricity and hundreds of millions have unreliable or prohibitively expensive energy sources.

Achieving universal access to energy is a critical component of addressing global development challenges. The changes that are occurring in the energy market offer a solution to the problem of energy access. Community-based microgrids could represent the most cost-effective way of delivering affordable and reliable power to those currently living without it. Clean, modular and renewable energy systems are ideal for many of the communities that have been unable to benefit from conventional centralized forms of energy generation and delivery.

While politics often stand in the way of progress, new energy technologies and commitments from international groups like the World Bank and SEforALL are laying a foundation for providing energy access to developing countries. With their ever-improving cost and performance metrics, we can expect to see renewables increasingly deployed to provide power to communities and regions that have long been left in the dark.

(Source: Forbes)

## Asian naphtha under pressure as supply threatens to outweigh demand

The Asian physical naphtha market looks set to face downside pressure in the first half of 2019 as key producers in the Middle East and Southeast Asia move to ramp up production, while demand in Northeast Asia could falter during a heavy steam cracker maintenance season over April-June.

The impact of new plants starting up in the Middle East in late 2018 -- which will ramp up to full production in early 2019 -- will be keenly felt in the first quarter as more naphtha supply flows into Asia, market sources said.

Abu Dhabi National Oil Co or ADNOC's new carbon black and delayed coker unit that started up in September at Ruwais West refinery will add 300,000 metric ton per year (mt/year) of naphtha production.

Bahrain National Gas, or Banagas, has started operations at its third 350 MMcf/d Central Gas Plant, which is slated to double Banagas' annual naphtha exports to 360,000 mt.

Looking east, Malaysia's 300,000 barrels per day (b/d) Refinery and Petrochemical Integrated Development, or RAPID is expected to start up in Q1.

However, the startup of a steam cracker operated by Petronas Refinery & Petrochemical Corporation with an ethylene production capacity of 1.3 million mt/year at the site could absorb some of the incremental naphtha production from the new refinery, market sources said.

Additional supply will also come from Australia, from where Japan's Inpex is expected to load 10 cargoes of plant condensate, a quality similar to open spec naphtha, from the new Ichthys LNG project from Darwin in 2019. Each clip is 320,000 barrels or 35,555 mt. The plant's first condensate cargo was shipped to an Asian end-user last week. On the flip side, demand might soften as the second quarter approaches as paraffinic naphtha demand will likely ease during a heavy scheduled maintenance season at steam cracker units in North Asia, especially in South Korea.

Five naphtha-fed units in South Korea -- Idemitsu's Chiba steam cracker, Yeochun Naphtha Cracking Center's No. 1 steam cracker, Hanwha Total's Daesan steam cracker, KPIC's Onsan steam cracker and LG Chem's Daesan steam cracker -- are scheduled to go offline for 30-45 days' turnaround in Q2. This equates to at least 369,500 mt of lost ethylene production, or around 1.2 million mt of lost paraffinic naphtha requirement, in the quarter, assuming each cracker is idled for at least 30 days.

Japan Mitsui Chemical's naphtha-fed steam cracker in Chiba, Taiwan Formosa's No.2 steam cracker and Indonesian Chandra Asri's steam cracker will also be idled for 30-45 days' maintenance in Q3, resulting in a combined loss of 250,417 mt of ethylene production -- and 758,839 mt of naphtha demand -- in Q3. In Q4, South Korean Lotte Chem's Daesan cracker with an ethylene production capacity of 1 million mt/year will be shut for 28 days, while Sinopec's 200,000 b/d Zhongke (Guangdong) refinery in China is due to shut in October.

However, it is not all doom and gloom for the naphtha price outlook. The oversupply situation may not turn out to be as bad as feared, some market sources said.

(Source: Platts)

## Qualitative Tender for Tenderers

To Number 97/1044

(Assignment of the Project as EPCF)

First announcement

The Khuzestan Water and Wastewater Company intends, in accordance with the implementing regulation of paragraph (c), Article 12 of the Law on Tenders and Circulars No. 100/50225 dated 6/88/1 and No. 100/135946 dated 1385/8/21 of the Planning and Budget Organization of the country, the following project will be given to EPCF (engineering services, supply of goods, construction, installation and financing) to eligible companies with free capacity and with the general information indicated below:

Tender Number	Tender Title	Required field of work (having one of the following options)	Place of documents' sale	Deadline for selling documents an evaluation the date of ad	Date and time of opening evaluation envelopes
97/1044	Implementation of sewage installations in Masjed Soleyman city (main pipeline network, transfer and construction of wastewater treatment plant) by EPCF method	Contractors with a design and construction contract (EPC) in the field of water with expertise of water and waste water	Dezab Consulting Engineers Co.	To date (2019/01/30)	At 14 2019/02/03

### ● The Rules of Tenderers' Evaluation:

In addition to the criteria set out in the above qualitative assessment inquiries, the following criteria for verifying the tenderers' eligibility are required in view of the fact that the initial cost estimate is more than the permissible base level of a given discipline:

- The name of the contractor is included in the National Competitive Bidding Information Database <http://iets.mporg.ir> and the Assistant's Office is located at: <http://tec.mporg.ir>
- Having an empty capacity at the base of a given discipline or the above fields.
- Perform at least one similar project to this project in the last five years at a minimum amount 1/3 of the estimated sum updated in the yearly estimate based on the group's moderation index.

Also, contractors are required to submit an agreement with the foreign financial provider to provide 85% of the project's financial resources.

4. The address and location of the evaluation documents are as follows:

### ● Engineering Dezab Co. in addresses:

Ahvaz, Golestan, Farvardin St., Dezab Consultant Engineering Co., Monitoring Unit, Phone No.: 33214524 Tehran, Shahr-e Ziba, Hakim Gharb, Taavon Blvd., Corner of Sharbani St., P. 13, Zip Code: 147883958, Phone Number: 44156725 & 44156504

The deadline for delivery of evaluation documents is up to 10 days to reopen the envelopes.

Place of Delivery Evaluation Packs: Ahvaz, Kianpars, First Square, Khuzestan Water and Wastewater Company, Fifth Floor, Secretariat of the Secret and Secret Affairs.

The opening of the envelopes in the Office of Contract Management is open and the Website of the company is: [www.abfakh.ir](http://www.abfakh.ir) and the National Information Agency of Tenders country is <http://iets.mporg.ir>

Public Relations and Education Department of the Khuzestan Water and Wastewater Company



## NEWS IN BRIEF

**Does India steal water, asks Pakistan's CJ**

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — While politics has dominated the discourse around India-Pakistan relations, it is the water that has always threatened to derail their bilateral relations, pushing them to the brink of war.

The latest to join the chorus is Pakistan's chief justice Saqib Nisar who on Sunday asked why India was stealing Pakistan's water, saying that it won't be allowed to do so.

The remarks were made by the country's top judicial authority while hearing a petition in Supreme Court related to Ravi River and Abbasia Link Canal.

The chief justice asked if the Punjab government was aware of whether India was stealing water from the Ravi River, and if so, what steps had been taken to remedy the situation. An official representing government informed that water was not being stolen by India, to which the chief justice ordered that an operation be conducted with police against those who steal water.

Under this treaty, India got control over Beas, Ravi and Sutlej, while Pakistan got control over Indus, Chenab and Jhelum. Since these rivers do not originate from Pakistan but flow to the country through India, Pakistan has often accused India of stealing its waters.

**Hasina retains power in Bangladesh**

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has retained power with a landslide victory in general elections that were marred by incidents of violence and allegations of rigging.

Sheikh Hasina's ruling Awami League party (ALP) and its allies bagged 288 seats in the 300-seat parliament, with the main opposition, Bangladesh National Party (BNP) led by Khaleda Zia, securing only six seats.

ALP government had launched a crackdown on the opposition in the run up to elections, which was widely criticized by observer groups. Human Rights Watch and other international rights groups said the crackdown created a climate of fear.

The election day was marked by clashes between the supporters of two main parties and violence, despite authorities beefing up security across the country.

Hasina, 71, has been praised for giving boost to economic growth in the poor nation during her previous three terms and for hosting Rohingya refugees who escaped persecution in their home country Myanmar.

But, the four-time prime minister's detractors accuse her of dictatorship and muzzling the voice of opposition — including arch-rival Khaleda Zia who is serving 17 year jail term on corruption charges.

**China refutes report about Pakistan's \$40 bn debt**

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — China has strongly rejected media report that Pakistan would repay \$40 billion in debt to China under the ambitious China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project.

Chinese embassy in Islamabad issued a statement, saying the figure of \$40 billion is "wrong and misleading".

The embassy said that the Chinese government provided concessional loans of \$5.874 billion to Pakistan government's major transportation infrastructure projects, with a composite interest rate of around 2 per cent in a repayment period of 20-25 years.

Earlier, a report in Express Tribune, citing documents of the ministry of planning and development, said debt repayments of energy and infrastructure projects amount to \$28.43 billion, and \$11.4 billion will be paid in the form of dividends to the investors.

Over the past 5 years, under CPEC, 11 projects have been completed and 11 projects are under construction. The total investment of the above 22 projects is around \$18.9 billion. There are 20 more projects in the pipeline.

Being the largest and most comprehensive project under Belt and Road initiative, CPEC is of great political, economic and social significance to both China and Pakistan.

**Afghan presidential polls delayed till July 20**

**INTERNATIONAL d e s k** **TEHRAN** — In the wake of volatile security situation and lack of preparedness of election authorities, the presidential polls in Afghanistan have been delayed by three months.

Election authorities announced on Sunday that the elections would be postponed to July 20 to give authorities more time to organize the ballot. The announcement follows criticism of October's parliamentary elections, which saw problems ranging from terror attacks to malfunctioning voting equipment, incomplete voter lists and delays at polling booths.

The presidential election was originally scheduled for April 20 but Gula Jan Abdul Bade Sayad, chairman of the country's Independent Election Commission (IEC) said mounting problems had forced a delay.

Provincial and district council elections, as well as a previously postponed parliamentary vote in Ghazni province, will be held on the same day.

President Ashraf Ghani had previously insisted that the election would go ahead on time but his spokesman said the government welcomed the decision by the IEC.

Meanwhile, the Taliban has rejected Afghanistan's proposal to hold peace talks in Saudi Arabia next month. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the militant group would not talk to Afghan representatives, but would meet with U.S. officials in January.

By: Syed Zafar Mehdi

**TEHRAN** — The year gone by was shaped by many significant events in South Asia. There was drama, there was intrigue, there was betrayal, there was brutality, and there was a healing touch too.

From Imran Khan's phenomenal rise to Nawaz Sharif's staggering fall in Pakistan, from Narendra Modi's dwindling fortunes to the frightening campaign of right-wing forces in India, from America's failures in Afghanistan to China's growing influence in the region, from Taliban's hide-and-seek games to Afghan government's handshakes, from the persecution of Rohingya refugees to the plight of oppressed Kashmiris.

Here is a lowdown on some of the important events that made news this year:

**Khan's victory and Sharif's growing troubles**

The year 2018 will be remembered for the historic political transition in Pakistan, when cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI) had the last laugh in the bitterly-contested, violence-marred general election.

PTI romped home with 114 seats, while its closest rival Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) clinched 63 seats and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) trailed behind with 43 seats. Although PTI couldn't touch the magic figure of 137 seats, it managed to cobble together a coalition.

The results were not shocking as many poll strategists had tipped Imran Khan to be the next premier of Pakistan, but the election was marred by allegations of rigging and manipulation against the powerful military establishment of Pakistan, which allegedly backed Khan's PTI over other parties.

A few weeks before the polls, Pakistan's former Prime Minister and PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif was sentenced to ten-year jail term in an anti-graft case and banned from contesting elections. He termed the election result as "tainted and dubious".

Although the Islamabad High Court later suspended the 10-year jail term against Sharif, last week an accountability court again sentenced him to seven years in prison on corruption charges, compounding his legal troubles.

Meanwhile, the new premier, well aware of the anti-American sentiment that permeates Pakistani society and polity, has refused to be a pawn in American's sinister game in the region. At the same time, he has extended an olive branch to estranged neighbors India and Afghanistan, although the overtures haven't been received well in New Delhi.

Under the new government, Pakistan's relationship with China has also strengthened further as both sides make progress on the ambitious China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. China has also come to the rescue of Pakistan's flailing economy by pledging a good package.

**Modi's fall from grace and rise of Hindutva forces**

Outgoing White House chief of staff John Kelly says he was surprised by U.S. President Donald Trump's so-called Muslim ban despite his full-throated defense in the early days of the administration.

"I had very little opportunity to look at them," before the orders were announced, Kelly acknowledged in an interview with the Los Angeles Times.

Trump issued an executive order shortly after taking office in January 2017 to suspend the entire U.S. refugee program for 120 days and bar travelers from seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States.

"Obviously, it brought down a greater deal of thunder on the president," said Kelly, referencing nationwide protests held to decry Trump's crackdown.

He noted that former Attorney General Jeff Sessions's decision to impose a "zero tolerance" immigration policy at the border was equally surprising to him.

Sessions's measure resulted in separation of children from their parents.

"What happened was Jeff Sessions, he was the one that

In India, while government's economic mismanagement and increasing attacks on religious minorities dominated the popular discourse this year, state elections earlier this month was the top story of 2018.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) suffered a major setback after losing three key states — Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh — to Indian National Congress (INC), the main opposition party, in state elections.

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

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

Ecstatic over the results, Congress president Rahul Gandhi said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had "failed to provide a vision for the country going forward", and under the BJP government, "mismanagement of economy" had taken place.

This year also saw the rise of right-wing Hindu forces in India, led by chief minister of northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath, who stoked communal passions with inflammatory speeches, and went on a spree to change names of places in his state. He belongs to Modi's party BJP.

This year, India enhanced its defense partnership with Russia and continued oil trade with Iran, despite the U.S. sanctions. Although New Delhi kept everyone guessing initially regarding its stance on U.S. diktat to stop oil imports from Iran, it eventually rebuffed Trump and embraced Iran.

Chabahar port project also got headway this year. India Ports Global Limited finally took over operations at the Shaheed Beheshti Port in Chabahar last week.

**China-U.S. trade war and Beijing's growing clout**

While Donald Trump, in his characteristic recalcitrant manner, announced no-holds-barred trade and tariff war against friends and foes this year, what made headlines was his trade war with China.

Trump threatened to impose heavy tariffs on Chinese imports to force Beijing into renegotiating its trade balance with the U.S.

Beijing, a heavyweight in its own right, vowed to retaliate with duties on nearly everything it imports from the U.S. and tariffs on goods U.S. companies imports from China.

As the trade war between them intensified, experts blasted Trump's trade policies, which they said pose the greatest threat to global economic growth.

"I would say the policies that are embraced by the U.S. administration around trade represent the biggest risk today to the global economy," BlackRock's Philipp Hildebrand was quoted saying by CNBC.

Hu Xijin, chief editor of Chinese daily Beijing Times, said China is an economic and a nuclear power and it isn't an easy task to provoke it from any direction.

"China is not Mexico and will not agree with a laundry list of demands from the U.S. in this trade war," he wrote on Twitter, saying China will "hit back to the end" if U.S. persists with its trade war.

Meanwhile, China stepped up its engagement in South Asia this year, especially in Afghanistan-Pakistan region, where U.S. has been slowly losing the ground.

The partnership between China and Pakistan has grown stronger this year, courtesy

China's investment in Pakistan through CPEC, and Beijing has been seeking an active role in Afghanistan too.

Last week, Pakistan, China and Afghanistan held second round of trilateral dialogue in Kabul in an attempt to facilitate the peace process and help end the protracted U.S.-imposed war in Afghanistan.

**Afghan peace process and America's war games**

This year, Afghan peace process witnessed many ups and downs as the Taliban played hide-and-seek with the Afghan government and foreign powers jumped into the fray.

On Eid al Fitr this year, the two warring sides observed a historic, unprecedented three-day ceasefire, which saw the Taliban fighters and members of Afghan security forces embracing each other in a spirit of camaraderie never seen before.

The ceasefire lasted three days after which the Taliban fighters went back to the frontlines to fight the same dirty war, turning down government's offer to extend the truce.

Afghan president Ashraf Ghani, who has offered many concessions to the group to join the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, said the three-day truce was an indication that majority of rebels were votaries of peace.

"It is now Taliban's turn to give a positive response," he said. "I am ready to extend the ceasefire anytime when the Taliban are ready."

On Eid al Azha, Ghani-led government again extended an olive branch to the Taliban, declaring a conditional ceasefire. This time, the offer was not accepted. The group refused to hold parleys with the government in Kabul, calling it 'illegitimate'.

Amidst this hide-and-seek game between the two warring parties, foreign powers, mainly the U.S. Russia and China took advantage of the situation and started engaging directly with the Taliban.

U.S. reportedly held many rounds of 'peace negotiations' with the Taliban in recent months, including the one in UAE this month. Experts believe it is insulting to the Afghan government, which feels sidelined.

Also, as the security situation continues to deteriorate, many pundits have questioned the motive of U.S. government to hold talks with the 'murderers', saying violence and dialogue cannot go together.

**Repatriation of Rohingya and their untold misery**

This year, the misery of persecuted Rohingya Muslims continued — both in the refugee camps of Bangladesh and in their native Rakhine province of Myanmar.

And, despite the repatriation deal between the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh, homecoming did not happen as the conditions were not considered conducive for their voluntary repatriation.

As per conservative estimates, there are around 905,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar presently, although some human rights bodies have put the figure higher. The exodus of persecuted Rohingya

Muslims from Rakhine started in October 2016, following the crackdown by Burmese army. Almost 200,000 fled to neighboring Bangladesh. In August 2017, more than 720,000 of them escaped to Bangladesh following persecution, murder, arson and rape.

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who visited Bangladesh in July this year, admitted nothing could have prepared him for the "scale of the crisis and extent of suffering" he witnessed there.

Myanmar and Bangladesh had signed a bilateral repatriation agreement late last year, according to which the process of voluntary repatriation was to begin in 60 days. But the plan was shelved.

In June, Myanmar inked an agreement with UN to expedite the process of Rohingya repatriation, but the memorandum of understanding (MoU) was kept under wraps. Rohingya community leaders, after seeing the leaked MoU, rejected the agreement, saying it did not address their concerns.

International aid groups and bodies fighting for refugees have also opposed the idea of repatriating Rohingya refugees in current circumstances.

"The conditions are not in place for safe, voluntary, and dignified return of Rohingya refugees," Matthew Smith, co-founder of Fortify Rights, told Tehran Times in an interview.

**Crisis of governance and human rights in Kashmir**

This year saw many unsavory political events unfold in Indian-controlled-Kashmir as the government collapsed and the security situation turned grimmer.

The coalition government between India's ruling Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) and Kashmir's Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), two parties with contrasting ideologies, fell apart in June.

The decision of BJP to pull out of an alliance with PDP, according to a report by Concerned Citizens Group led by former union minister Yashwant Sinha, was part of a "grand strategy" for 2019 parliament elections.

The report said the feeling in Kashmir is that the BJP-led government in New Delhi will now take more "belligerent" position on laws that give Kashmir a special status in Indian union.

BJP-PDP fallout paved ground for direct rule of federal government in New Delhi, through governor, who dissolved the assembly after reports about 'horse trading' by some local parties in Kashmir.

In recent years, and especially this year, New Delhi has adopted more muscular approach with rising incidents of violence. Indian security forces have allegedly opened fire at civilians at many places.

Government forces, observers say, are not able to manage the situation when protests at encounter sites, a growing phenomenon in the disputed region, break out.

Earlier this month, seven civilians were killed in southern Kashmir, which sparked widespread protests across the state. Politicians, cutting across the political divide, denounced what they called a "massacre".

Meanwhile, this year, United Nations released its first ever report detailing the human rights violations in Kashmir, across the Line of Control (LoC), highlighting a situation of chronic impunity for violations committed by security forces.

The exhaustive report urged all the parties to end the cycles of violence and ensure accountability for the past and present abuses. Indian government rejected the report, terming it "fallacious".

**Kelly also acknowledged that being Trump's chief of staff for 17 months has been a "bone-crushing hard job."**

instituted the zero-tolerance process on the border that resulted in both people being detained and the family separation," Kelly said. "He surprised us."

The Trump administration has been under criticism over its "zero tolerance" towards immigration.

Since campaigning for the 2016 presidential election, Trump has been accused of stoking racial, ethnic and religious tensions lurking within America.

Kelly also acknowledged that being Trump's chief of staff for 17 months has been a "bone-crushing hard job."

"I'm guarded by the Secret Service. I can't even go get a beer," he said. Trump said earlier this month that Kelly would leave at the end of the year.

Budget director Mick Mulvaney has been announced as Trump's acting chief of staff after the position was turned down by Vice President Pence's chief of staff Nick Ayers and publicly dismissed by North Carolina Republican Representative Mark Meadows and former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie.

(Source: Press TV)



# Who will be the leader of Turkey after Erdogan?

By Emir Eksioglu

**ISTANBUL** — Since President Erdogan has been successful in every election he has entered for years, there is a view that “Erdogan will never lose” which is accepted by most of the people in Turkey. This is actually a reasonable view because, despite several adverse events, Erdogan and the AK Party have been superior to the polls for years.

I think that President Erdogan will win the next election, even if he is not as strong as he used to be, as long as his health allows him and he wants to be in the political arena.

However, of course, it is a fact that Erdogan is not as powerful as he was a few years ago, and the criticism towards the Erdogan government and the country's course, including those who voted for him, is too much to be underestimated. We can also understand this from the alliance he had formed with the president of the Nationalist Movement Party, Devlet Bahçeli, which had criticized him repeatedly in the past. The AK Party, chaired by Erdogan, is no longer a party that will win the elections alone.

But it should also be noted that the AK Party is a lucky party. Because, CHP (Republican People's Party), which has been acting as the main opposition party for years, is not a party that can take over the majority of the people because of its constant chaos, wrong choices, and attitudes. You may not be able to see another major opposition party, which draws an amateur image like CHP, in any country of Europe.

As a matter of fact, many secret meetings have been organized with many people who want to be in charge of the country's government after Erdogan. I want to write the names of the different profiles that could play the first chair in the leadership of Turkey after Erdogan.

The only one who can win elections against Erdogan

Meral Aksener, who was elected to the parliament for the first time in 1995, while President Erdogan was the mayor of Istanbul, and served as the first female Minister of Internal Affairs in Turkish history after a year, is a respected name for her political experience by many people today.

In 2001, Aksener, who took part in the founding stages of the AK Party with two names, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Gül, who later served as the Prime Minister and the President, left the party as a result of disagreements in the establishment of the AK Party, then turned into a very popular political icon in the Nationalist Movement Party, which is one of the most well-established parties of Turkey.

After the failed election results of the Nationalist Movement Party, where she served as a member of parliament and parliamentary deputy speaker for many years, Aksener, who rolled up her sleeves to become the party's



leader, has formed The Good Party against the obstructions of Devlet Bahçeli, who is thought to run the party with a dictatorial approach by many, and her party achieved a successful result in its first year, surpassing the 10% threshold.

I think Meral Aksener is the only name to win the election against President Erdogan, who has been superior to his rivals in every election for years. Meral Aksener is a politician who is at the forefront with her nationalism but keeps it in a very good balance, and she's not a person like French Marine Le Pen, who has rhetoric towards racism and fascism.

In Turkey, the majority of the population position themselves as the center-right wing and both the AK Party and most of the political parties that have been successful in the past are center-right parties. Meral Aksener is a figure who is positioned in the center-right wing, but she is also a strong social democrat leader with strong rhetoric and sympathetic attitude.

I can already say that Meral Aksener will continue her successful political graphics and that one day she will be at the highest level of Turkish politics, although she is subjected to a great deal of pressure from her party and her rise.

He loves Erdogan, and the people love him. Suleyman Soylu, who was the president of the Democratic Party, which had an important place in Turkish political history in the past as it elected three presidents and seven prime ministers, became one of the most trusted names of President Erdogan after a few years, even though he did politics in opposition to Erdogan and the AK Party at the time.

Suleyman Soylu, who currently serves as the Minister of Internal Affairs, is one of the most respected names of the nationalist-conservative wing, just like Meral Aksener. Especially in recent years, his successful and determined struggle against the PKK, the terrorist organization that

committed numerous murders in Turkey and his being in the forefront of positive developments regarding internal security has gained Suleyman Soylu, a very positive sympathy by the Turkish people.

However, the possibility of Minister Soylu taking over the leadership of Turkey does not seem to be much at the moment, because Minister Soylu, who has expressed his loyalty to Erdogan at every opportunity, cannot make such a move when Erdogan is still the President. He even made it clear that he was planning to leave politics after Erdogan on a TV show he attended on CNN. But of course, there is a saying in our country that “A period of 24 hours is a very long time for politics” and we can see that Soylu to make a move for leading Turkey after Erdogan.

Besides, I have to say that apart from Suleyman Soylu, politicians who are currently working at the AK Party will crave for their seats in the AK Party in a possible disintegration process because, people, who have the qualities of leadership to meet the demands of the people like Erdogan, do not take part in the AKP positions.

Turkish people may need the experience and knowledge of their former prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who was one of the most important figures of the AK Party until a few years ago and who was both the president of AK Party, and the Prime Minister of Turkey between 2014 and 2016, is a name with a reputation in AK Party although he had to resign as a result of a ridiculous statement published by several media oligarchs in Turkey.

It would not be wrong to say that Davutoglu, who has not met with Erdogan in any way lately, has withdrawn into his shell because he is not as active in political developments as he used to be. I think that Davutoglu, who is said to be founding a strong political party against Erdogan from time to time, should carry out an active and correct opposition

policy against Erdogan in order to become Turkey's leader after Erdogan because, so to speak, it is not possible for the people to sympathize with the return of a name that is scratched and forced to withdraw to his shell by Erdogan to active politics after Erdogan.

However, Davutoglu, who is touted as Ahmet Hodja in the conservative sector, is one of the most experienced politicians in the country and is always a name that is likely to be re-elected to the top seat. One of Davutoglu's greatest advantages will be the support given to him by some of the prominent figures who have successfully taken part in Turkish politics.

There are other alternatives as well as we often see in Turkish political history, a name that is not known very much, may show up suddenly and become the leader of the country. So even though I can guess a few names, we should not forget that it may not be possible.

For example, Cihangir Islam, who is preparing to succeed the wise leader of Felicity Party that once came to power, Temel Karamollaoglu, is a new hope of the highly conservative group in Turkey, even if he is far from his former power. Islam, who maintained his medical success in parliament and made a good opposition, will be one of the most remarkable figures of the parliament until the next general elections scheduled to take place in 2023. At the same time, he is a politician with a vision that can move Felicity Party and its masses, which is declared as reactionist by some people, to a lot of innovations and to get votes from the voters who are opposed to him.

If the wave of young leadership spreads to Turkey as it did with Macron in France, with Kurz in Austria, with Trudeau in Canada and with Tsipras in Greece, Faik Tunay, who became a CHP deputy at a young age, is also a name that can play first chair even though he is of central right origin. Tunay's strong international connections and his ability to speak many important languages will be a great advantage for him and his leadership of Turkey. Although Tunay has not been seen much in the political arena lately, it is quite likely that he will progress in the right direction at the right time, using his young age's advantage.

Of course, even if they haven't been involved in politics until now, the successful names of the business world can step in this direction in a possible conjuncture. In the past, we have witnessed ultra-rich names such as Cem Uzan and Cem Boyner enter into politics and fail. Ali Koç, on the contrary, can be an example of success.

In conclusion, I should say that the emergence of a successful name from the business world to the leadership of Turkey will not produce as negative results as in the case of Trump, the first example in the world that comes to mind. At least in the international perspective...

## The lesson Iraqis gave the U.S. President; will Trump learn the lesson?

**1 →** In any case, what has happened is a clear violation of the Iraqi sovereignty of Iraq, although the president of the United States in self-defense slams the accusations for his unconventional action.

### Welcoming gesture with missiles

Iraqis top officials didn't pay homage to President Trump as a message that he should have respected the Iraqi sovereignty.

Officials, parties, currents and political groups, as well as Iraqi people, did not accept the U.S. secretary-general Donald Trump's secret and unexpected travel to send the message to the President of the United States that every diplomat in Whatever the case, it should respect the Iraqi sovereignty and, otherwise, it will not pay homage to it.

U.S. embassy in the Green Zone in Baghdad, however, was shot by two missiles during Trump's visit to Iraq. The missiles conveyed the message that the Iraqis won't throw red carpet for those who disrespect Iraq's territory.

### The decisive message of Iraqi political groups to the American president

Initially, the Al-Islah and Al-Bana alliances in Iraq's parliament issued a statement in which it condemned Trump's trip to Iraq, declaring, “The U.S. President's trip to Iraq violated Iraq's sovereignty and acted as if Iraq's Anbar province was one of the states of the U.S. An extraordinary parliamentary meeting was essential to investigate this violation of the sovereignty.”

The Iraqi Al-Bana alliance also condemned the U.S.



president trip to Iraq and called it a clear violation of the laws and diplomatic rules, and emphasized that the trip demonstrated U.S. government's feeling superior over other states.

Mahmoud al-Rabee, a member of the Political group of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, also said: “Trump's unexpected trip to Iraq without Iraqis permission is a reason that America ignores the Baghdad's government independence, sovereignty and credibility, and this call for adoption of a law to expel foreign forces from Iraq.”

Spokesman and a senior commander of Iraq's Kata'ib Hezbollah (Hezbollah Battalions) popular forces Jafar

al-Hosseini said: “The Islamic resistance forces will force the U.S. to pull its forces out of Iraq.” He considered Trump's unexpected trip and his meeting with U.S. troops his lack of security in Iraq. The spokesman said the commanders of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq have promised to kick out those who make attempts to violate neighboring countries, including Syria. He stressed that the decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq is in the hands of the Iraqi people and government not Trump's.

Hashim al-Moussawi, the official spokesman for Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba, also said, “Trump should know that the blood of the martyrs has brought Iraq's sovereignty, and the establishment of U.S. military bases in Iraq is not possible. He added that the Iraqi government must expel U.S. troops, because they have violated the sovereignty of the country. “We will not allow Iraq to turn into a base for threatening neighboring countries.” He stressed that insulting Iraq's sovereignty won't go unpunished.

The question here is whether the U.S. President will learn his lesson he got in Iraq. Though Trump tries to pretend that his trip to Iraq has been successful, he knows all too-well that his effort does not change the reality.

The timely and determined response of Iraqi parties and parliamentary alliances, as well as the massive protests by the public to the unexpected and secret Trump's trip to Iraq was a great lesson to U.S. President Trump. However, time will tell if he learned the lesson.

## Freedom, sovereign debt, generational accounting and other myths

By Lu Wei

“How to draw the line between the recent and still unsettled EU/ EURO crisis and Asia's success story? Well, it might be easier than it seems: Neither Europe nor Asia has any alternative. The difference is that Europe well knows there is no alternative – and therefore is multilateral. Asia thinks it has an alternative – and therefore is strikingly bilateral, while stubbornly residing enveloped in economic egoisms. No wonder that Europe is/ will be able to manage its decline, while Asia is (still) unable to capitalize its successes. Asia clearly does not accept any more the lead of the post-industrial and post-Christian Europe, but is not ready for the post-West world.” – Professor Anis H. Bajrektarevic diagnosed in his well-read ‘No Asian century’ policy paper. Sino-Indian rift is not new. It only takes new forms in Asia, which – in absence of a true multilateralism – is entrenched in confrontational competition and amplifying antagonisms.

The following lines are referencing one such a rift.

At the end of 2017, Brahma Chellaney, a professor with the New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research, wrote an article titled “China's Creditor Imperialism” in which he accused China of creating a “debt trap” from Argentina, to Namibia and Laos, mentioning its acquisition of, or investment in the construction of several port hubs, including Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Piraeus in Greece, Djibouti, and Mombasa in Kenya in recent years.

These countries are forced to avoid default by painfully choosing to let China control their resources and thus have forfeited their sovereignty, he wrote. The article described China as a “new imperial giant” with a velvet glove hiding iron fists with which it was pressing small countries. The Belt and Road Initiative, he concluded, is essentially an ambitious plan to realize “Chinese imperialism”. The article was later widely quoted by newspapers, websites and think tanks around the world.

When then United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson visited Africa in March, he also said that although Chinese investment may help improve Africa's infrastructure, it would lead to increased debt on the continent, without creating many jobs.

It is no accident that this idea of China's creditor imperialism theory originates from India. New Delhi has openly opposed China's Belt and Road Initiative, especially the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as it runs through Pakistan-administered Kashmir, which India regards as an integral part of its territory. India is also worried that the construction of China's Maritime Silk Road will challenge its dominance in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Based on such a judgment, the Indian government has worked out its own regional cooperation initiatives, and taken moves, such as the declaration of cooperation with Vietnam in oil exploration in the South China Sea and its investment in the renovation of Chabahar port in Iran, as countermeasures against the Chinese initiative.

Since January, India, the United States, Japan and Australia have actively built a “quasi-alliance system” for a “free and open Indo-Pacific order” as an alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative. In April, a senior Indian official attending the fifth China-India Strategic Economic Dialogue reiterated the Indian government's refusal to participate in the initiative.

The “creditor imperialism” fallacy is in essence a deliberate attempt by India and Western countries to denigrate the Belt and Road Initiative, which exhibits their envy of the initial fruits the initiative has produced. Such an argument stems from their own experiences of colonialism and imperialism. It is exactly the US-led Western countries that attached their political and strategic interests to the debt relationship with debtor countries and forced them to sign unequal treaties. China's Belt and Road Initiative is proposed and implemented in the context of national equality, globalization and deepening international interdependence, and based on voluntary participation from relevant countries, which is totally different from the mandatory debt relationship of the West's colonialism.

It is an important “Chinese experience” to use foreign debts to solve its transportation and energy bottlenecks that restrict its economic and social development at the time of its accelerated industrialization and urbanization. By making use of borrowed foreign debts, China once built thousands of large and medium-sized projects, greatly easing the transportation and energy “bottlenecks” that long restrained its social and economic development. Such an experience is of reference significance for other developing countries in their initial stage of industrialization and urbanization along the Belt and Road routes.

In the early stage of China's reform and opening-up, US dollar-denominated foreign debt accounted for nearly 50 percent of China's total foreign debts, and Japanese yen close to 30 percent. Why didn't Western countries think the US and Japan were pushing their “creditor imperialism” on China?

Some foreign media have repeatedly mentioned that Sri Lanka is trapped in a “debt trap” due to its excessive money borrowing from China. But the fact is that there are multiple reasons for Sri Lanka's heavy foreign debt and its debt predicament should not be attributed to China. For most of the years since 1985, foreign debt has remained above 70 percent of its GDP due to its continuous fiscal deficits caused by low tax revenues and massive welfare spending. As of 2017, Sri Lanka owed China \$2.87 billion, accounting for only 10 percent of its total foreign debt, compared with \$3.44 billion it owed to Japan, 12 percent of its total foreign debt. Japan has been Sri Lanka's largest creditor since 2006, but why does no foreign media disseminate the idea of “Japan's creditor imperialism”?

In response to the accusation that China is pursuing creditor imperialism made by India and some Western countries, even former Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa wrote an article in July using data to refute it.

Most of the time, the overseas large-scale infrastructure construction projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative are the ones operated by the Chinese government and Chinese enterprises under the request of the governments of involved countries along the Belt and Road routes or the ones undertaken by Chinese enterprises through bidding.

It is expected that with the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects and industrial parks under the Chinese initiative, which will cause the host country's self-development and debt repayment ability to constantly increase, the China's creditor imperialism nonsense will collapse.

*Dr. Lu Wei is an associate research fellow with China's National Development and Reform Commission's Academy of Macroeconomics Studies.*

(An early version of this text appeared in China Daily)

## Brexit: a global laughing stock

**1 →** George Osborn, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, is one of the Brexit opponents. He argues that if the current trend continues, the UK departure from the EU will become more complicated. To realize Brexit, either the government, or the decision of the citizens to leave EU should change! Osborn's words seem not to be realistic considering the positions of the European parties. It is unlikely that the change of government in Britain would result in re-holding talks with the EU authorities.

The Guardian, in one of its most recent analyzes on the Brexit, wrote that the interactions that have taken place over the

withdrawal of the UK from the European Union have “the UK a global joke.”

John Kampfner, the former chief executive of the Creative Industries Federation, writes: “You know you've hit rock bottom when the Germans mock you on primetime TV and the jokes are actually quite funny. Giving Britons this year's “golden dumbass” prize, Oliver Welke, the German equivalent of Dara Ó Briain, describes how Theresa May “can't get out of the EU and can't even get out of her bloody car”, over pictures of Angela Merkel waiting embarrassedly outside her Berlin residency as the door of our prime

minister's limo fails to open.

“Just go!” the host yells. “Hard Brexit, soft Brexit, liquid Brexit, just fog off!” Next, he shows a cartoon of a man in a bowler hat repeatedly burning his hand on a hot stove, then stabbing his eye with a fork. The audience is falling about laughing. Welke's Heute Show on ZDF may not have the cachet of the US equivalent, the Daily Show, but it is good at reflecting the moment.”

It continues: “Brexit has already deeply damaged the British brand. The idea that we could compensate for the loss of European markets and political influence by growing

markets elsewhere was always a folly, driven by ideological extremism. The view from countries outside the European Union about the state of Britain is no different to those inside – apart perhaps from a few rightwing thinktanks in Washington, which is one city that I haven't frequented.”

Two years has passed since the referendum was held over the Brexit, which ended up in the victory of the proponents of the UK exit from the EU. But the details of this departure remains ambiguous among the British authorities, and this ambiguity seems to be intensified in 2019.



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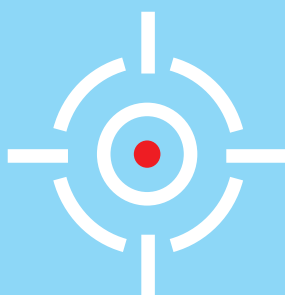
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# Large dialysis center to be set up in northern Iran

**HEALTH**  
d e s k

**TEHRAN** — A major dialysis center will be established in the city of Babol, northern province of Mazandaran, the chancellor of Babol University of Medical Sciences has said.

The 100-bed hospital will be the largest dialysis center in northern Iran. ISNA news agency quoted Farzad Jalali as saying on Sunday.

With regard to the fact that annually dialysis patients grow in number by 5 percent building such a center is on agenda, Jalali highlighted.

The fund for construction of the center will be raised by a charity foundation, he stated, adding that the three-story center will be stretching over 3,000 square meters land area.

Currently there are 34 dialysis beds offering services to 300 patients monthly on average in Babol, he concluded.

According to an article titled "Quality of life of patients with chronic kidney disease in Iran" published in Indian J Palliat Care Journal in 2018, the incidence of chronic renal failure in the world is 242 cases per a million people, and 8% is added to this population each year. The population of patients with renal failure in Iran is 320,000.

One of the ways to improve the condition of patients with chronic renal failure is hemodialysis. In addition to hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis and kidney transplantation are the common alternative treatments. The patients undergoing dialysis have to spend several hours of their lives in dialysis sessions.



**With regard to the fact that annually dialysis patients grow in number by 5 percent building such a center is on agenda, Jalali highlighted.**

## Can exercise lower blood pressure as effectively as drugs?

Millions of people live with high blood pressure, which can place them at risk of developing cardiovascular diseases. For this condition, doctors typically prescribe blood-lowering drugs, but could exercise help just as well?

A new study suggests that exercise can be just as effective as drugs when it comes to keeping blood pressure under control.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 75 million adults in the United States have to manage high blood pressure, where it exceeds the threshold of 140 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg).

The condition can increase their risk of developing heart disease or experiencing a stroke, both of which are leading causes of death in the U.S.

Moreover, high blood pressure drives an expense of around \$48.6 billion per year nationally, including the cost of medication, accessed health care, and absence from work.

People with high blood pressure typically follow an anti-hypertensive or blood pressure-lowering treatment, which includes special medication. At the same time, specialists sometimes advise that people make lifestyle changes to help them manage their blood pressure.

**■ One such change is to take regular, structured exercise that can be of several types:**

- endurance exercises, such as walking, jogging, or swimming
- high-intensity interval training, involving short bursts of intensive exercise
- dynamic resistance, including strength training
- isometric resistance, such as the plank exercise

• a combination of endurance and resistance exercises

However, no studies have yet compared the effectiveness of physical activity in lowering blood pressure with that of antihypertensive medication.

A new study in the British Journal of Sports Medicine — a BMJ publication — aims to address this gap in the literature.

**■ Findings indicate similar effects**

Since there are no studies that directly compare the effects of blood pressure medication with those of structured exercise, the study analyzed the data of various research projects that focused on one or other of these approaches.

The researchers — from institutions across Europe and the U.S., including the London School of Economics and Political Science in the United Kingdom, and the Stanford University School of Medicine in California — explain that structured exercise helps lower systolic blood pressure, which measures the blood pressure in the blood vessels as the heart beats.

In the current study, they looked at the data from 194 clinical trials that focused on antihypertensive drugs and their impact on systolic blood pressure, and another 197 clinical trials, looking at the effect of structured exercise on blood pressure measurements. In total, these trials collected information from 39,742 participants.

Dr. Huseyin Naci — from the Department of Health Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science — and colleagues conducted several sets of analyses on the data from the trials.

First, they compared the effects of all types of antihypertensive drugs with those of all kinds of exercise. Then, they looked at specific drug types versus specific types of exercise. Finally, they compared the impact of different exercise intensities with those of different drug dosages.

In the first instance, the investigators conducted these analyses by using data from healthy participants with normal blood pressure. Then, they repeated them with data from individuals with high blood pressure only.

They found that antihypertensive drugs were more effective in lowering blood pressure than structured exercise in the case of the general population. However, when they looked specifically at people with high blood pressure, they saw that exercise was as effective as most blood-lowering medication.

Moreover, the study authors concluded that there is "compelling evidence that combining endurance and dynamic resistance training was effective in reducing [systolic blood pressure]."

**■ More exercise is beneficial**

Still, the research team cautions that they based their analyses on many small-scale trials, and others should replicate their results with more extensive studies.

Dr. Naci and colleagues also strongly advise against giving up on antihypertensive medication and replacing it with exercise.

"We don't think, on the basis of our study, that patients should stop taking their antihypertensive medications," the researcher says in a podcast in which he speaks about the current research.

(Source: Medical News Today)

## Iranian health minister reportedly resigns

**HEALTH**  
d e s k

**TEHRAN** — Iranian Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi submitted his resignation to the cabinet last week, Fars news agency reported on Monday.

According to the report Qazizadeh-Hashemi has bid farewell to his deputies and colleagues after today's meeting at Health Ministry's headquarters in Tehran.



The minister has not attended recent cabinet meetings which has given rise to the speculations about his pending resignation.

MP Elyas Hazrati tweeted on Sunday that Hashemi has resigned due to budget cut at health sector budget in the budget bill for the next Iranian fiscal year 1398 (starting on March 21).

According to the budget bill proposed for the next fiscal year, 350 trillion rials (about \$8.3 billion) will be allocated to the health sector.

According to reports, President Hassan Rouhani has yet to accept the resignation and government officials are trying to convince Hashemi to remain in office.

## Budget for rare diseases projected to rise by 70%

**HEALTH**  
d e s k

**TEHRAN** — The budget proposed for treatment of rare diseases will rise by 70 percent for the next fiscal year (starting on March 21), Budget and Planning Organization announced in a statement, ISNA news agency reported on Monday.

The current year's budget amounted to 2.16 trillion rials (nearly \$51.5 million) which will increase to 3.66 trillion rials (nearly \$87 million) for the next year, according to the statement.

Health Ministry spokesperson Iraj Harirchi said in mid-December that according to the budget bill proposed for the next fiscal year, 350 trillion rials (about \$8.3 billion) will be allocated to the health sector.

President Hassan Rouhani presented the administration's draft of the national budget bill for the next year in late December. The proposed bill amounts to 17.03 quadrillion rials (about \$405 billion at the official rate of 42,000 rials).

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## Holidaymakers invited to spend Christmas in Iran



Foreign travelers visit UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace in downtown Tehran.

**TOURISM** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran tourism chief has proposed people from across the world to opt the country for spending Christmas vacation this year.

In a tweet on Saturday, Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization Director Ali-Asghar Mounesan assured people who would choose Iran as their holiday destination that they won't forget the great memories of their trip.

"[I] invite you [to] travel to Iran, the country of love and peace in your holidays. [I] ensure that [you] will not forget great memories of this journey," he tweeted, IRNA reported.

Millions of people across the world take overseas trips during the Christmas and New Year period, considerably boosting tourism revenues of hot destinations.

Iranian tourism officials expect a rise of overseas visitors in the coming months, as a plunge in the national currency's value has made it extremely cheap for foreigners to visit Iran.

In October 2018, Mounesan said the number of tourists who visited Iran since the beginning of the Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018) rose by 51 percent compared to the figure for the same period in the past year.

Lots of visitors to Iran believe that Western media often portrays Iran negatively, saying there is a widespread misunderstanding about the true nature and safety of the country, which is tainted by the reputation of some of its more politically unstable neighbors.

The 2019 Travel Risk Map, which shows the risk level around the world, puts Iran among countries with "insignificant risk", a category where the UK, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, and Finland are placed in.

## ‘Volcano Tourism’ is on the Rise and geologists gay it needs to stop

Earlier this year, a "lava bomb" crashed through the roof of a sightseeing boat in Hawaii, injuring 23 people. Last year, an 11-year-old boy died in Italy when he fell through a volcanic crater. His parents died trying to save him.

People are going to extreme lengths to get up close with an active volcano, resulting in extreme consequences for some.

"Volcanoes are one of the forces of nature that truly are beyond human power to control," Amy Donovan, a geographer at the University of Cambridge and author of a paper about volcano tourism, told CNN. "We can't do anything about eruptions, other than get out of the way." Donovan's new report, published this week by the Royal Geographical Society, warns about the dangers of "volcano tourism." Hordes of "volcanophiles" are racing around the world to get as close to the powerful eruptions as possible. Tourists who don't understand the volatile nature of eruptions also put emergency services at risk if they need to be rescued. Donovan specifically pointed to the rise of tourists to Iceland in accordance with active volcano eruptions.

(Source: travelandleisure.com)



### ROUND THE GLOBE

#### Durmitor National Park

Durmitor is a stunning limestone massif located in Northern Montenegro and belonging to the Dinaric Alps or Dinarides.

It is also the name of Montenegro's largest protected area, the Durmitor National Park, which constitutes the heart of a landscape shaped by glaciers, numerous rivers and underground streams of which are embedded in the much larger Tara River Basin Biosphere Reserve.

Some fifty peaks higher than 2,000 meters above sea level rise above plateaus, alpine meadows and forests, including Bobotov Peak (2,525 metros above sea level). Numerous glacial



lakes, locally known as "mountain eyes", cover the landscape. Despite its many attractions, Durmitor is best known for the spectacular canyons of the Draga, Sushica, Komarnica and Tara Rivers, the latter stands out as Europe's deepest gorge.

Durmitor is a popular tourism destination, known for superb hiking, climbing, mountaineering and canoeing opportunities. The nearby town of Zabljak is Montenegro's primary ski resort.

Besides the extraordinary landscape beauty and the fascinating geological heritage, Durmitor National Park is also home to an impressive biological diversity. At the habitat level, a rare old-growth stand of European Black Pine deserves to be mentioned. Favored by the altitudinal gradient of more than 2,000 metres and both alpine and Mediterranean climatic influences, there are more than 1,600 vascular plants in the wider Durmitor Massif.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Shaking minarets, enigmatic destination worth visiting once!

**TOURISM** **d e s k** For centuries Menar Jonban ("shaking minarets"), which is located in Isfahan, central Iran, has been a source of charm for Iranians and even foreign visitors because its dual minarets are really prone to vibrate!

The minarets are almost 17 meters in height from the ground level, and in a distance of about 10 meters.

The popular destination is in fact a burial monument surmounted by two brick towers that can be swung with little pressure; when one is shaken by the human force, the other starts to vibrate automatically.

It was originally built some 700 years ago as a mausoleum for "Amu Abdullah" who was a mystic figure in the Ilkhanid era (1256-1353 CE). Archaeological studies suggest that the dual minarets were later added to the mausoleum during the Safavid era (1501-1736).

The unique characteristic of the shaking of the minarets, and the entire building, have been repeatedly studied. The findings of most of such researches indicate that the specific dimensions and proportions of the building and minarets and even the material

forming the bricks used for the building contributes to the vibrations.

Following physical experiments, it was suggested that this phenomenon is similar to the mirror image vibrations observed when connecting two vertical identical pieces of string to a connecting horizontal one. Should the two vertical strings be of different lengths or weights the same results would not be achieved.

However, such a theory also has its skeptics and is dismissed as a mere coincidence under the guise that most buildings also have such vibrations (although on a smaller scale) and it's only the height of the minarets that make it so visible in this particular case.

The city's historical relics are standing almost close to each other but the "shaking minarets" are located on the outskirts.

Used to be one of capitals of the mighty Safavid Empire, Isfahan is a top tourist destination for good reasons. Unlimited visual appeals such as tree-lined boulevards, Persian gardens and majestic Islamic buildings has named the city a living museum of traditional culture.



People visit Menar Jonban, a tourist destination in Isfahan, central Iran.

## Landmark water mill restored in central Iran

**HERITAGE** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The 18th-century Dosangi Mill, which is of high archaeological importance, has recently been restored in Meybod county, Yazd province, central Iran. "Restoration of this mill, which included dredging mud for input canals, was carried out in the span of two months," said Seyyed Mostafa Fatemi, the provincial tourism chief, CHTN reported.

"The water mill, which is built by the hands of creative people of Meybod, is one of tourist attractions of this county.... and it dates from the late Safavid era (1501-1736) with regarding to its building materials and architecture." One of the most essential features of the mill is that it is built underground and no similar match to it has been found yet, the official said.

The water mill is situated on confluence of the

qanats (subterranean aqueducts) so that it is important from hydraulics point of view, he explained.

The structure is locally known as "double stone watermill of Mohammad-Abad".

Meybod is situated some 50 kilometers north of Yazd where tourism officials are planning to internationally promote it as the "city of watermills". It seeks UNESCO status for long being a cradle of watermills and for its cultural evolution of water supply through the millennia.

Watermills were typically constructed in accordance with the then design requirements for instance they featured dome-shaped roofs with high-enough vestibules to allow camels or other livestock to move back and forth with ease in order to convey grains or flour.

## Russian envoy: U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO harms multilateral humanitarian cooperation

The withdrawal of the United States from UNESCO harms multilateral humanitarian cooperation, Russia's Envoy to UNESCO Alexander Kuznetsov told TASS on Monday.

"The U.S. announced its decision [to withdraw from UNESCO] back in the autumn of 2017, so there is nothing sensational about it," Kuznetsov said, commenting on the fact that the decision enters into force on December 31.

"Back then, we expressed regret over this step that undoubtedly harms multilateral humanitarian cooperation and UNESCO's principle of universality as an organization in the UN system," he added. The diplomat noted that "this is not the first case like that". He reminded that "back in 1985, the U.S. already withdrew from the organization and remained outside of it for some 20 years.

However, it did not prevent UNESCO from successfully fulfilling its tasks. There is no doubt that it will be like that this time as well," Kuznetsov added.



Commenting on developing ties between Russia and UNESCO, the diplomat said "these relations are traditionally marked by close cooperation practically in all spheres, including education, science, culture and information". "It is important that there are many

friends and partners of UNESCO in Russia, and not just in the capital, but also in many other regions, such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Yakutia and others," he noted.

Kuznetsov said that "UNESCO has a unique mandate in the UN system, which is about 'strengthening peace in the minds of people' through development of international cooperation in the humanitarian sphere".

"Today it is in demand with the international community like never before in the conditions of escalation of the debate around the issue of what the future international world order should be like," the envoy added.

Russia is "ready to facilitate the formation of the multipolar world order in the framework of this mandate on the basis of equality, respecting civilizational and cultural diversity, considering each other's interests and strictly observing international law," Kuznetsov concluded.

(Source: Fars News Agency)

## The tech that could change the way we travel

From hydrogen-fueled vehicles to hyperloop transportation and cable cars, a range of technologies and ideas are being developed to shape the future of urban mobility.

Below, CNBC's "Sustainable Energy" looks at how travel around our towns and cities is changing.

#### ■ Cities of tomorrow

For Susan Shaheen, who co-directs the Transportation Sustainability Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley, the way we travel could look very different over the next few years.

"In the next few decades things are going to change a lot, and that's going to be due to technological advances — things like automated cars, electrification and further advancements in wireless and electronic connectivity," she told CNBC.

This would mean people getting from point A to point B in a much more seamless way, Shaheen added. Travel options will increase, too, including "active" forms of transportation like electric bikes and scooters, with automation also playing a role.

#### ■ Hyperloop

Looking to the future, hyperloop is one radical idea that could dramatically reduce travel times between cities.

Several businesses, including Hyperloop Transportation Technologies and Virgin Hyperloop One, are developing a hyperloop system. For its part, Virgin Hyperloop One has received \$295 million in funding. Its investors include the Virgin Group, GE Ventures and SNCF.

Hyperloop is a form of transportation that uses magnetic levitation to float vehicles above



A man touches the rear of a full-scale passenger Hyperloop capsule unveiled by Hyperloop Transportation Technologies on October 2, 2018 in El Puerto de Santa Maria.

a track. Electric propulsion accelerates the vehicle through a low-pressure tube, with the vessel capable of gliding for long distances at "airline speed" thanks to "ultra-low aerodynamic drag."

In terms of intercity travel, change could well be afoot. "In 10 to 20 years' time I think we're going to see a lot more high speed rail facilities that will allow people to travel long distances but in shorter periods of time," Shaheen said, adding that hyperloop technology was another potential mode of transport for both urban travel and long distance freight.

#### ■ Zero-emission travel

While hyperloop offers a tantalizing glimpse of how travel could develop in the coming years, mass transportation systems like buses and trains will still have a crucial

role to play. Indeed, in the last few years, a number of innovative buses and trains have been introduced to public transport networks around the world.

The Scottish city of Aberdeen, known to many as "the oil capital of Europe," now boasts a fleet of zero-emission hydrogen buses.

In the rail sector, European firm Alstom recently launched what it says is the world's first "hydrogen powered" train.

The French business says that the Coradia iLint uses fuel cells that turn hydrogen and oxygen into electricity. In terms of speed, the train can travel up to 140 kilometers per hour.

#### ■ Sharing is caring

When it comes to two-wheeled forms of transport, cycle sharing schemes are becoming increasingly popular modes of transport.

The Danish capital of Copenhagen is home to a large number of cycle paths and lanes, with efforts made to construct raised, safe lanes for cyclists to use.

"If you want to create a biking city then you have to make it safe to go by bike," Lord Mayor Frank Jensen told Sustainable Energy earlier this year.

"In Copenhagen, children learn to bike when they start going to school, they bike together with their parents, and when they grow up they continue biking," Jensen added.

#### ■ Changing times

For UC Berkeley's Shaheen, cycle-sharing schemes are part of a wider shift in habits.

"We've seen a number of innovations today in the developed world including e-scooters and bike sharing and car sharing and on-demand transit services like Uber and Lyft," she explained. "We're also seeing a lot more focus on shared, automated vehicles," she added.

While there is excitement surrounding the potential of autonomous vehicles, concerns have been raised with regards to safety. In March 2018, for example, one of ride-hailing powerhouse Uber's self driving vehicles killed a pedestrian in Tempe, Arizona.

Shaheen went on to state that in order to encourage a wider uptake of automated vehicles, focus needed to be placed on public safety and the perception of autonomous transport's safety.

"Right now, a lot of members of the public are not convinced they want to get into an automated vehicle," she added. "What would really help is to do a lot more testing on public roads."

(Source: CNBC)



# Experts suggest West Coast’s biggest bird oasis is dying

During migration season, birds pack the wetlands at the edge of the Salton Sea. Ducks dive, pelicans skim across the water’s surface, and hundreds of other species stalk the shores and bob on the surface of California’s largest, and most unusual, lake.

The Salton Sea is a vast, shallow body of water percolating in the hot desert inland of San Diego and a key stopover point for many birds migrating along the Pacific Flyway. Over the years, as other wetlands along the flyway have been lost to development, drought, or other causes, it has taken on an outsized importance for migrating birds.

Nearly all of California’s population of eared grebes, for example, stop over at the lake, and at least a third of all the white pelicans living in North America dip in and out of its waters on their migratory travels.

But the Salton Sea is shrinking. Because of a host of reasons climate-related, agricultural, and political, less and less water ends up trickling into the lake each year, while the hot desert sun keeps evaporating its water away.

■ **State-mandated inputs**

And a year ago marked the end of some state-mandated inputs of extra water that had been keeping the Salton Sea relatively full for about 15 years. Without that extra water, the lake’s shrinking will start to accelerate — making it saltier, smaller, less welcoming to the birds that rely on it during migration, and more harmful to the people who live near its shores.



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**Because of a host of reasons climate-related, agricultural, and political, less and less water ends up trickling into the lake each year, while the hot desert sun keeps evaporating its water away.**

“There are cascading impacts all the way down on various bird populations,” says Michael Cohen, a Salton Sea expert from the Oakland-based Pacific Institute. “Part of the message is that there’s not that many places left for the birds to go — so this place is important.”

■ **The geologic past**

The Salton Sea took on its modern mien about 100 years ago, when an irrigation canal full of water from the nearby Colorado River broke open. It took nearly two years for the breach to be fixed, and in the meantime, Colorado River water gushed down into the Imperial Valley.

The valley, as it happened, had no outlet, so the water pooled in a depression near its northern end, in the hollows left behind from lakes that had filled and dried that region many times over the geologic past.

But the lake was in a hot, dry part of the world where summer temperatures routinely hover far above 100F. Left to its own devices, it would have quickly evaporated away in the beating desert sun.

But in the 1920s, locals decided to use the lake as a place to divert all the water that ran off the farms that carpet the surrounding valley. In essence, they put the lake on long-term life support. The district had rights to vast quantities of Colorado River water, and agriculture was booming in the valley, so in those early decades plenty of runoff went rolling downhill into the lake.

(Source: nationalgeographic.com)

## This may be life’s ‘missing ingredient’, scientists say

Billions of years ago, molecules on a lifeless and tumultuous Earth mixed, forming the first life-forms. Eons later, a larger, smarter form of life is huddling over lab experiments trying to understand its own beginnings.

While some say life emerged from simple chains of molecules, others say early chemical reactions formed self-replicating RNA. A relative of DNA, RNA acts as a decoder or messenger of genetic information.

A new study provides evidence for the RNA idea, which is known as the “RNA world hypothesis.” But at least one ingredient in early RNA may differ from what’s found in the modern form, a group of scientists reported on Dec. 3 in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

In tiny plastic tubes, the researchers put water, a little bit of salt, buffer to keep the pH basic and magnesium ions to speed up reactions. These conditions are similar to those found in a freshwater lake or pond, a crater lake, or the kind of lake or pool found in volcanic regions such as Yellowstone National Park — all places that life could have started.

■ **Primer copies**

The researchers then added a small piece of RNA called a primer attached to a longer piece of RNA called a template. New RNA is made when a primer copies template RNA, through base pairing. The nucleobases uniquely match up with one another: C binds only with G, and A binds only with U.

The researchers added the nucleobases (A, C, G and U) so they could bind to the template and thereby extend the shorter piece, the primer. Results showed that, with ingredients from modern RNA, the reaction didn’t work fast enough for the RNA to form and replicate without errors.

But then, the researchers added another chemical, called inosine, into the mix. Instead of the guanine-based molecule. After that,



the researchers were surprised to find that RNA could form and replicate slightly more accurately than it does in a mix with guanine.

This mix didn’t cause what’s called an “error catastrophe,” meaning that mutations or random mistakes in replications stayed below a threshold, ensuring they could be eliminated before accumulating.

■ **An important test**

The “fact that (the addition of inosine) surmounts the problem of error catastrophe is an important test (of the molecule’s) significance,” said David Deamer, a biologist at the University of California, Santa Cruz, who was not part of the study. His only quibble is the claim that inosine is more plausible in the making of primitive RNA than other alternative bases, Deamer said.

But because inosine can be easily derived from another base pair, adenine, it makes the process of originating life “easier” than if you had to make guanine from scratch, said John Sutherland, a researcher into the chemical origins of molecular biology at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology in the U.K., who was not part of the study either.

The findings break the “conventional wisdom that inosine couldn’t have been useful,” Sutherland told *Live Science*. Inosine had earned this reputation because it works a very specific job in a form of RNA called transfer RNA, which decodes genetic information.

(Source: space.com)

## How to memorize the largest known prime

A few weeks ago, a computer owned by Patrick Laroche of Ocala, Florida discovered a mathematical treasure, a new largest known prime number.

Known as M82589933, it has 24,862,048 decimal digits. If you’d like to read more about it, check out this article I wrote for Slate two years ago (and updated a year ago). Though I did not write that article about this particular largest known prime number, I did write it about a previous largest known prime numbers, and M82589933 is yet another verse of the same song.

I don’t know about you, but there’s no way I’m memorizing a 24,862,048-digit number. Instead, I’m going to memorize an easier 82,589,933-digit number using the magic of binary.

The newest prime is a Mersenne prime, meaning it is one less than a power of two. In binary, numbers are written using only the digits 0 and 1. One is 1, two is 10, three is 11, four is 100, five is 101, and so on. Any power of two is a 1 followed by some number of zeroes. We saw that two is 10 and four is 100. The pattern continues: eight is 1000, sixteen is 10000, and so on. In base ten, if you subtract 1 from a 1 followed by a bunch of zeroes, you get a bunch of nines. (E.g. 1,000–1=999.) In base two, 1000–1=111. Any number one less than a power of two is a string of 1’s.

■ **New prime number**

The new prime number is 282,589,933-1. In binary, that is a string of 82,589,933 ones. The difficult part of memorizing it is keeping track of how many ones there are. Buckle up because I have some ideas for that, too.

In the first place, we do need to memorize the number of binary digits this number has. That’s 82,589,933. Try this handy phrase: “Cabbages in April besmirch Sep-



tember asparagus. And how!” The number of letters in the word correspond to the digits of the number, and it’s easy to remember because April cabbages are indeed better than September asparagus (in the northern hemisphere).

Now that we’ve memorized the number of digits, it would be nice to find a way to keep track of where we are in the digits as we start writing or reciting ones. The word TWENTY NINE is made from 29 straight line segments. Thus, it is an elaborate way to write the number 29 in tally marks. I decided to expand on the idea. First, I looked for famous poems or phrases that use no round capital letters.

The Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, “The Waste Land,” and “The Jabberwocky” all disappointed me immediately. It was clear: I had to create my own. The following is a poem I wrote to help you get through it all. When written in capital letters, the poem uses 500 straight line segments (punctuation is not included).

If you wish to write the new prime number, you can write this poem in block letters 165,179 times—each straight line segment is a number 1 -- and then add 433 more ones. Alternatively, if you wish to recite the number, you can write the poem down 165,179 times while saying the word “one” with every stroke and then say “one” 433 more times.

(Source: scientificamerican.com)

## Indonesian tsunami volcano lost two-thirds of its height, research team finds

The Indonesian volcano which caused a tsunami that killed more than 400 people last week lost more than two-thirds of its height following the eruption which triggered the killer waves.

A section of Anak Krakatoa’s crater collapsed after an eruption and slid into the ocean, generating the tsunami last Saturday night.

A visual analysis by the Indonesian volcanology agency found the volcano has lost more than two-thirds of its height, an official said Saturday.

Anak Krakatoa which used to stand 338 meters (1,109 feet) high was now just 110 meters tall.

The agency estimated the volcano lost between 150 and 180 million cubic meters of material as massive amounts of rock and ash have been slowly sliding into the sea following

a series of eruptions.

■ **The observatory post**

“Anak Krakatoa is now much shorter, usually you can see the peak from the observatory post, now you can’t,” Wawan Irawan, a senior official at the agency, told AFP.

Before and after satellite images taken by Japan’s space agency showed that a two square kilometer chunk of the volcanic island had collapsed into the water.

The volcano, whose name means Child of Krakatoa, was a new island that emerged around 1928 in the crater left by Krakatoa, whose massive 1883 eruption killed at least 36,000 people.

Satellite images from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency show the changes in Anak Krakatoa (C) before and after the eruption

Satellite images from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency show the changes in Anak Krakatoa (C) before and after the eruption

The crater’s status has been raised to high alert, the second-highest warning on Indonesia four-point danger scale.

The exclusion zone has been extended from two to five kilometres (1.2 to three miles).

A week after the tsunami, thousands of Indonesian Muslims attended a mass prayer on Saturday to remember the victims and pray for the safety of their tsunami-prone hometown.

Residents of Pandeglang regency, which was hit the hardest by the disaster, gathered in the early morning, some in tears as they chanted their prayers.

(Source: phys.org)

## Residential batteries increase emissions in most cases

Another year, another reason to take the promises of residential home batteries with a grain of salt.

This month, a group of researchers from the University of California San Diego (UCSD) published a paper in *Environmental Science and Technology* reporting that there are very few cases in which operating a residential home battery reduces overall emissions — assuming that households are economically rational and trying to minimize costs.

Of course, if the battery is only discharged during periods of peak emissions and only charged when fossil fuel use is low, then a household might reduce emissions. But across 16 representative regions, operating a battery this way ended up being costly.

The results are similar to those published in *Nature Energy* in the beginning of 2017, although that study looked at a narrower region (99 homes in Texas) and modeled different battery software configurations.

The UCSD study looks at representative homes under 16 different utilities across the country. Each utility has its own emissions profile and unique demand requirements (depending on the weather in the region). The study also looked at three different configuration possibilities:

All of these configurations are a little futuristic but still representative of shifts that are happening in the electricity industry today. While most people don’t have time-of-use pricing, it’s becoming more common (this author’s household is charged time-of-use pricing) and it will become the mandatory rate structure for many households in California in 2019.

While most solar panel owners prefer not to maximize self-consumption because it’s more cost-efficient to sell electricity back to utilities under net metering, utilities have been pushing back on requirements to buy back solar power from residential customers. The energy arbitrage configuration is the most futuristic, and “reflects the vision of advocates of decentralized energy management,” according to the researchers.

(Source: arstechnica.com)

## Sleeping sickness parasite uses multiple metabolic pathways

Parasitic protozoa called trypanosomes synthesize sugars using an unexpected metabolic pathway called gluconeogenesis, according to a study published December 27 in the open-access journal *PLOS Pathogens* by David Horn of the University of Dundee in the UK, and colleagues.

The authors note that this metabolic flexibility may be essential for adaptation to environmental conditions and survival in mammalian host tissues.

Trypanosomes cause human sleeping sickness and animal African trypanosomiasis, which are a range of devastating but neglected tropical diseases affecting cattle, other livestock and horses. The mammalian stage of the parasite circulates in the bloodstream, a nutrient-rich environment with constant temperature and pH and high glucose concentration.

Bloodstream-form African trypanosomes are thought to rely exclusively upon a metabolic pathway called glycolysis, using glucose as a substrate, for ATP production.

In contrast to this view, Horn and colleagues show that bloodstream-form trypanosomes can use glycerol for ATP production and for gluconeogenesis—a metabolic pathway that results in the generation of glucose from non-carbohydrate carbon substrates.

The authors showed that even wild-type parasites, grown in the presence of glucose and glycerol, use both substrates and have active gluconeogenesis.

Moreover, mammalian-infective parasites assemble a dense surface glycoprotein coat, the glycan components of which incorporate carbons from glycerol.

(Source: phys.org)

## A journey into the Solar System’s outer reaches, seeking new worlds to explore

NASA’s New Horizons spacecraft will visit a tiny and mysterious object in the Kuiper belt on Tuesday, seeking clues to the formation of our cosmic neighborhood.

In 2015, a NASA spacecraft snapped spectacular photographs of Pluto, forever changing humanity’s view of that world. On Tuesday that same probe, New Horizons, will provide a closeup of the farthest object ever visited.

New Horizons will speed past an object nicknamed Ultima Thule at 31,500 miles per hour and pass within 2,200 miles of the surface, seeking clues to the earliest days of the Solar System. Ultima Thule is four billion miles from the sun, in an area where many astronomers within recent memory believed there wouldn’t be much that was worthy of study.



It was once a common view that all of the solar system’s big, interesting things — the sun and the nine planets — had been found. When NASA’s Pioneer 10 spacecraft crossed the orbit of Neptune in June 1983, some newspaper headlines declared that it had left the Solar System. (Pluto was still a planet then, but it was at the innermost part of its orbit and closer to the sun than Neptune.)

Thirty-five years later, the Kuiper belt — the region Pioneer 10 was just entering and that New Horizons continues to explore — and the spaces beyond are perhaps the most fascinating parts of the Solar System. In their vast, icy reaches are clues about how the sun and planets, including ours, coalesced out of gas and dust 4.5 billion years ago.

As more of these tiny, icy worlds were found, Pluto no longer seemed strange. Instead it was just another inhabitant of what became known as the Kuiper belt, named after Gerard Kuiper, an astronomer who had speculated about the existence of a ring of debris beyond Neptune in 1951.

(Source: The NYT)

## IIC Wins Top Trophy in 5th National Annual Festival of Best Iranian Firms

The 5th National Annual Festival of Iran Best Companies dubbed “TOPEX” wrapped up its work with granting trophy to the Iran Insurance Company (Public Joint Stock) and other selected companies in the relevant field, the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

In the award-granting ceremony, Mohammad Zahednia Deputy Chief of Iran Insurance Company (IIC) for Technical Affairs

emphasized on the key and vital role Iran Insurance Company in insurance industry of the country since its establishment and expounded on the policies devised by the company in outlining different types of insurance policies and requirements of insurance industry, development of life insurance, expansion of reinsurance packages both inside and outside the country.

In addition, Zahednia urged industrial

and production units to identify, classify and prioritize their risks and selected the best possible insurance industry for the provision of security and safety.

Once each of industrial and production units face problem with regard to the type of insurance risk, research and development (R&D) unit of the Iran Insurance Company (IIC) is ready to devise packages for them in order to solve their problems, he maintained.

At the initiative taken by Iran International Industrial Research Institute, this prestigious festival was held at the venue of Persian Gulf Conference Hall at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Sun. Dec. 30 in the presence of top 100 domestic companies with the centrality of “targeting export, generating employment and training expert manpower”, the Public Relations Dept. of the company concluded.



## Adela Raz new Afghan ambassador to UN

President Ashraf Ghani has appointed economic secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) Adela Raz as Afghanistan's permanent representative to the United Nations.

A well-placed source on the condition of anonymity, told Pajhwok Afghan News that Adela Raz would replace the current permanent representative Mahmood Saikal.

Adela Raz will be the first Afghan woman ambassador to UN.

She had previously served as the chief of staff at the administrative office of the former president and currently as the economic secretary of MoFA.

(Source: MENAFN)

## RECIPE OF THE WEEK

### New Year's Eve chicken wings

"I make these chicken wings every year for my family on New Year's Eve and they go crazy for them! The cooking method is what makes them so fantastic."

#### Ingredients:



Cooking spray  
2 quarts vegetable oil for frying  
5 pounds chicken wings, separated at joints, tips discarded  
1 cup hot wing sauce  
1 pound carrots, cut into sticks  
6 ribs celery, cut into sticks  
2 cups blue cheese salad dressing

#### Directions:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C). Spray a baking sheet with cooking spray.

Heat vegetable oil in a large pot or deep fryer to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).

Rinse wings in a colander and pat very dry with paper towels. Deep-fry wings in batches of 5 or 6 until partially cooked, about 10 minutes; drain on paper towels and let wings cool slightly. Return wings to the hot oil and fry a second time until golden brown, 6 to 8 minutes per batch. Drain on paper towels.

Transfer wings to a large mixing bowl and toss with hot wing sauce to coat. Use tongs to transfer wings to prepared baking sheet in a single layer. Brush wings with any leftover wing sauce.

Bake in the preheated oven until surface of wings is nearly dry, about 15 minutes. Serve on platters with carrot sticks, celery sticks, and blue cheese dressing.

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Purchasing Manager

A: Good morning, Angela, how have you been lately?

B: Morning, Michael. I've been very busy lately. One of our other vendors is going out of business and I've been searching for a **suitable** replacement.

A: Well, **rest assured** that you can count on us to be here for the **long run**, sit down. Coffee?

B: No, thanks. I've been trying to **cut down** on the caffeine.

A: Haha, I could never do that. I'd be a zombie if I didn't have my morning coffee fix. Let's get down to business then.

B: Yes, I've come to talk with you about ordering the eight megapixel cameras for our new MePhone. The demand for phone cameras is growing, and Pear has been falling behind in the market.

A: That's great! I'm glad to hear that Pear has finally jumped on the bandwagon. Right now our **contract** is for the five megapixel cameras. Is Pear still interested in having those?

B: No, we're changing all the cameras to eight megapixels. We were hoping that by making your company our **sole supplier** for cameras we could **negotiate** a better deal.

A: Surely. Let's get started by drafting a new contract.

#### Key vocabulary

**suitable**: having the right qualities

**rest assured (that)**: used to tell someone not to worry, because what you say about a situation is true

**long run**: phrase used to express a long period of time

**cut down**: to reduce the amount of something

**contract**: a formal written agreement between two or more people

**sole**: unique, one and only

**supplier**: person or company who sells you goods

**negotiate**: to reach an agreement on money, terms, etc.

#### Supplementary vocabulary

**lead time**: time needed to ship or manufacture goods

**payment terms**: terms or conditions for payment

**backorder**: order which cannot be taken or filled now

**wholesale**: sale of goods and services to retailers

**buyer**: professional purchase specializing in a specific group of materials, goods, or services

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Every action has a reaction. We have one planet; one chance.

# MOU signed for improving water, energy consumption

**W O M E N d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Vice President for Women's and Family Affairs Masoumeh Ebtekar and Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian signed here on Sunday a memorandum of understanding (MOU), pivoting on improving water and energy consumption.

The MOU was designed to plan, organize and improve the goals of women's empowerment in order to coordinate cultural, educational and research activities for optimal consumption of water, electricity and energy.

Women should be the leading group of society in "improvement of consumption pattern" IRNA quoted Ebtekar as saying.

"This social activity helps improving the economy of the family and the society as well as environment preservation," she added.

About 30 percent of foods is being wasted in Iran, which means 30 percent of water resources used in agricultural sections are lost, the official noted.

Several plans including training rural and farmer women are on the agenda in order to modify the water consumption pattern, the female VP stated.

"Training girl students residing near Urmia Lake, northwestern Iran, is among the plans to change and improve the attitude and manner of next generation about water consumption and the environment."



## Infrastructures prepared for women's presence at stadiums: minister

**W O M E N d e s k** **TEHRAN** — All infrastructures and cultural and religious conditions are provided for Iranian women's presence at stadiums, said Masoud Soltanifar, minister for Sports and Youth Affairs.

Since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018) coordination has been made for women's presence in some international events and now all infrastructures are provided for women to enter the stadiums from separate entrance gates, ISNA quoted Soltanifar as saying.

Before the victory of Islamic Revolution (1979), women participated only in seven sports international events, but now women are active in 49 international fields, noted the



## Two more female ambassadors to be likely appointed

**W O M E N d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Two more female ambassadors to foreign countries are to be probably appointed, MP Hamideh Zarabadi said on Sunday quoting Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif as saying.

In the past, the Foreign Ministry was male-oriented, however, several measures have now been taken to pave the ground for more women presence in the ministry, Zarif said in a meeting with members of the Women's Fraction of the Majlis (Iranian parliament).

minister.

Currently, 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.

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.

## First global women's disability award aims to break stereotypes

**LONDON (Thomson Reuters Foundation)** — The first global award recognizing the achievements of women with disabilities aims to break through stereotypes to show their skills as leaders and problem solvers, its founder said on Monday.

A filmmaker, a political campaigner and a public health expert were named the first winners of the Her Ability awards, which were announced to coincide with World Disability Day.

Its founder, Ethiopian campaigner Yetnebersh Nigusie, said she wanted to put a spotlight on disabled women's achievements to combat the idea that they are passive victims.

"We really wanted to change that image and cherish their abilities and their victories," Nigusie, who lost her sight at age



five, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"In order to change things, people need to really see our abilities and our problem-solving skills that we have developed through life by overcoming attitudinal as well as physical and policy barriers everywhere."

More than a billion people - about 15 percent of the world's population - have

some form of disability, according to the World Health Organization.

Women with disabilities have been recognized as doubly vulnerable by experts, who say they face additional barriers.

The first winners of the awards, which were set up by Nigusie and the global disability organization Light for the World, all came from the developing world.

They included Toyin Janet Aderemi, the first Nigerian wheelchair-user to study and practice pharmacy, who was recognized for her work on disability-inclusive health and as a lobbyist for disability rights.

She lost the ability to walk due to a childhood bout of polio and had to be carried on her mother's back until she got her first wheelchair at age 15.

"Winning this award showcases what is

possible and how society starts to benefit when you are able to educate a girl child with a disability," said Aderemi.

"Attitudes are changing but very slowly ... We are just starting to educate our people to rid their minds of the misconceptions they have about disability."

Ashrafun Nahar, who founded the Women with Disabilities Development Foundation in Bangladesh, won in the rights award category for her campaigns for inclusive policy and equal opportunities in education and work.

The arts winner was Zambian film-maker Musola Cathrine Kaseketi, who suffered paralysis to a leg in childhood and now works to highlight social issues affecting women with disabilities both through her films and education work.

## Women-only tours are on the increase in the Middle East

It seems like this is the year of the solo women traveler — with more women than ever deciding to head out on the road for transformative life experiences, without having to deal with spouses, lovers or BFFs in tow.

Small group travel outfit, Intrepid has heeded the call of this energetic and enthusiastic travel demographic, announcing it will expand its women-only tours, following significant customer interest and bookings in 2018. This well-respected brand launched a limited-number of women-only tours in the Middle East this year, with itineraries — guided by female tour leaders — aimed at breaking down cultural barriers in the destinations visited — Morocco, Iran and Jordan.

There are many places in the world that are considered difficult for women to travel in, but as with any generaliza-

tion, the truth is always more nuanced. Intrepid's tours offer women travelers insights into the traditions and routines of fellow women in each destination.

Jenny Gray, regional product manager for Africa and the Middle East told Lonely Planet Travel News: "each country within the Middle East region comes with its own unique cultural and societal norms which can make genuine, local interaction challenging and complex for mixed gender groups. The consequence can be a genuine misunderstanding of women in the region. 60% of our travelers are female and these travelers genuinely want to understand women in their day-to-day lives in these countries. We see this as an exciting opportunity for female travelers to go behind closed doors and learn about customs, food, challenges

and the lives of other women across the globe."

Women travelers on these tours are given access to areas that wouldn't be possible with men in the group, places where women can meet and talk together like the beauty salon, female-only train carriages, a traditional hammam or a female-only park. Originally launched as just five departures, Intrepid has now expanded to 25 trips across the three countries, with tours departing all the way through to 2020. Iran in particular has proved particularly popular with travelers.

Intrepid Travel's commitment to equality extends beyond its Women's Expeditions; the company is committed to diversity and inclusion across its business. The ultimate goal is doubling its female tour leaders globally by 2020.

(Source: Lonely Planet)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → €

### Next year's school renovation budget predicted to be tripled

The budget projected for school renovation for the next fiscal year (starting March 21, 2019) within the framework of the budget bill is predicted to be tripled, director of schools renovation, development and equipment organization has said.

In the current Iranian calendar year (March 2018-March 2019) the budget for school renovation and retrofitting amounted to 5.77 trillion rials (nearly \$137 million), ISNA news agency quoted Mehroллаh Rakhshanimehr as saying on Friday. Moreover, next year government will also allocated budget for completion of projects which are completed by 30 to 50 percent by philanthropist, Rakhshanimehr added.

## PREFIX/SUFFIX

### “equi-”

■ **Meaning:** equal

■ **For example:** The city is *equidistant* between London and Glasgow.

## PHRASAL VERB

### Zip up

■ **Meaning:** to fasten something using a zip, or to become fastened using a zip

■ **For example:** He was zipping up a small brown suitcase.

## IDIOM

### Out of the woods

■ **Explanation:** free of a difficult or hazardous situation; in a position of safety or security

■ **For example:** The project has been given funding for another year, but it's not out of the woods yet.



# 'Assad has decisively won war in Syria'

**➡** According to the Guardian, these developments come five months after the Syrian army made arguably its most consequential gain against terrorists since the foreign-backed war erupted, when it took control of Dara'a in the southwest.

Dara'a, the birthplace of foreign-backed sedition, had been the last stronghold of militants. Its return to the government fold removed any viable threat against the state, either politically or militarily, near the capital. "Taken together, the military and diplomatic developments over the past six months leave no room for doubt: Assad has decisively won the conflict," the Guardian wrote.

After the surrender of militants in the south, two regions had remained outside the government's control and both were under the protection of foreign powers, namely Turkey in the north and the U.S. in the east.

The two NATO countries had arrangements with Russia about operating in those zones to avoid confrontation, which meant that any further military advances had to be approved by Moscow.

Damascus and its allies saw these areas as sanctuaries for hostile forces that could become entrenched, and whose mandate could change to fighting the state.

"Trump's sudden decision has ended that problem," the Guardian said. The Syrian government "no longer faces the threat of an indefinite American presence in eastern Syria," the paper said.



Last week, residents of Manbij appealed to the Assad government to retake the city near the Turkish border after the U.S. withdrawal and by Friday Syria's military had arrived at the frontline in the predominantly Arab town west of the Euphrates river.

Under the U.S. protection, YPG militants used to control the city but Turkey is concerned about continued dominance of the Kurdish group near its borders.

Turkish officials have frequently stated that they would welcome a government

takeover of YPG-controlled areas if that involved removing the militants from those areas. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday that Turkey would have "no business in Manbij if the YPG terrorists leave".

On the diplomatic front, the UAE proposed normalizing ties with Damascus in 2016, but that plan was snubbed by the Trump administration. According to the Guardian, senior Emirati officials began to refloat the idea of restoring ties with Assad earlier this year, encouraging its Saudi and Bahraini

allies to do the same.

"The nature of this conflict, then, has changed drastically, with influential Arab countries now using their diplomatic capital to enable the regime to restore control over Syria," the paper said.

"Countries that once funded the opposition fighting against Assad are working hard to strengthen him in the hope that he becomes less reliant on their rivals," it added. Jordan has already reopened its borders with Syria, meaning that Damascus now has trade ties with all its neighbors except Turkey.

"Trump's withdrawal has ended any potential threat originating from an indefinite American presence inside Syria's borders. It has also effectively killed off any political challenge to Assad through the political process in Geneva – once an objective of the U.S. presence in the country," the Guardian wrote.

"Restoration of ties with Arab neighbors will consolidate the military gains made over the past six months," it added.

According to the Guardian, since the government took over Aleppo in late 2016, few have questioned Assad's recovery, but until recently many still doubted his ability to re-emerge as a regional player with normalized relations with other countries.

"The past year now suggests that he has a real chance of doing just that. There will be many people in the region – and beyond – willing to help," the paper said.

(Source: Guardian)

## Bangladesh's PM Hasina wins third straight term; opposition cries foul

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has won a third straight term, sealing a landslide with almost all the seats in parliament, officials said on Monday, while the opposition rejected the result as rigged and called for a fresh vote.

Hasina's win in Sunday's general election follows a decade in power in which she has been credited with improving the economy and promoting development, while being accused of rights abuses, a crackdown on media and suppressing dissent.

The government rejects those accusations.

An alliance led by Hasina's Awami League won 287 of the 298 seats for which results have been declared, the Election Commission said, though it added it was investigating allegations of vote rigging from "across the country."

The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which had boycotted the last general election in 2014 saying it would not be fair, won just six seats this time.

BNP leader Khaleda Zia - Hasina's arch rival and a former prime minister - was jailed in February on corruption charges she says were politically motivated. This was the first election in which the BNP campaigned without her.

The rivalry between the two women - both related to former leaders - has largely defined Bangladeshi politics for decades.

Raising minimum wages for workers in Bangladesh's robust garments industry, the world's second-biggest after China's, could be one of Hasina's first tasks, party leaders have said.

Hasina and opposition parties were due to hold separate news conferences on Monday.

Opposition leader Kamal Hossain said their alliance, the National Unity Front, led by the BNP, had called on the Election Commission to order a fresh vote under a neutral administration "as soon as possible," saying the vote was flawed.

The government has rejected similar opposition demands in the past, and was likely to dismiss this one too.

At least 17 people were killed during the vote, police said, after a violent campaign in which the opposition alleged the government denied it a level playing field.

"We've had bad elections in the past but I must say that it is unprecedented how bad this particular election was," 82-year-old Hossain told Reuters late on Sunday.

Candidates reported witnessing ballot-stuffing and vote-rigging by ruling party activists, who also barred opposition polling agents from voting centers, Hossain said. "The minimum requirements of free and fair election are absent," he said.

Hossain said he would meet opposition alliance members on Monday to decide their next step.

However, Sajeeb Wazed, Hasina's son and an Awami League member, told Reuters no one was intimidated into voting for the party and accused the BNP of pre-election violence.

"Overall, there were long lines at polling stations and voting was peaceful ... democracy is stable and flourishing," Wazed said by email.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi telephoned Hasina to pass on his congratulations, his government said.

"India warmly congratulates the people of Bangladesh for reaffirming their faith in democracy, development," India said, adding that Hasina had thanked Modi for India's "consistent and generous" support on development.

Hasina is the longest-serving leader in the history of the Muslim-majority country of 165 million people.

Most international observers, including some from the United States - which had expressed concern over campaign violence - have not commented on the result.

"Certainly, the Awami League enjoys strong constituencies and has support and it can get votes, but for any party to win

more than 90 percent of the seats is simply too suspicious," said Michael Kugelman, South Asia senior associate at the Washington-based Wilson Center think-tank.

"I fear that this election result signifies that Bangladesh has really become something very closely approximating a one-party state."

Human Rights Watch also expressed concern over the election's credibility, while Amnesty International called for an impartial investigation of "deeply disturbing" election violence.

Hundreds of opposition workers were arrested in the months before the election on charges that the opposition said were "fictitious." Many said they were attacked by ruling party activists, crippling their ability to campaign.

Hasina's government has denied the accusations and her party says many of its own workers were hurt by the opposition.

Voter turn-out appeared to be thin. The Election Commission is due to declare figures late on Monday.

The commission has said it would hold a fresh vote for one seat where the poll was marred by violence. Another constituency, where a candidate died days before the vote, will also go to the polls in the next few days.

Wazed said on Saturday the next government would try to lift growth to 10 percent, from 7.8 percent in the 2017/18 financial year.

He also said minimum wages in the garments industry, which with sales of more than \$30.6 billion generates about 83 percent of exports, would be raised.

Wazed said the government wanted to diversify into electronics.

India helped Bangladesh win independence from Pakistan in 1971 but Wazed said China, its other top investor, had been "very proactive" about investment.

(Source: Reuters)

## India, Iran to maintain trade level amid sanctions

**➡** A \$10 per barrel change in crude results in 50 basis points current account deficit and 30 basis point impact on inflation, reported Kotak Institutional Equities in its August report.

Therefore, it is to the interest of both countries not to disrupt the bilateral trade. Global oil trade is conducted in U.S. dollars. To bypass the 2012 sanctions imposed by former U.S. President Barack Obama Administration, the two countries continued business in rupees and barter. It is imperative that a similar arrangement be organized again in order to continue bilateral trade.

### North-South Corridor

The 7,200km International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), starting from Mumbai and extending to Astrakhan, Moscow, Baku and further north will require India-Iran bilateral cooperation. Chabahar Port development, which has also received a waiver from Washington, is the sole Iranian deep sea port and the only one directly facing the Indian Ocean.

During an interview with the Tehran Times in January 2017, I had the pleasure of meeting Indian Ambassador to Iran Saurabh Kumar, who will be ending his term in Iran in the near future. He emphasized that "Chabahar is a very important symbol of cooperation between India and Iran. It is a very important issue of connectivity between India, Iran and Afghanistan as well as the Central Asia region," adding the Indian private sector will be the major investor.

The first phase of the strategic Iranian port was inaugurated by President Hassan Rouhani last year. The opening of the first phase of Shahid Beheshti Port, as part of Chabahar Port, has tripled its capacity to 8.5 million tons. The agreement for leasing the operational control of this port was signed during Rouhani's visit to New Delhi



*A meeting themed "India, a Window Beyond Sanctions" was held Dec. 5 at the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture. The summit was attended by business leaders from both sides and the Indian Ambassador Saurabh Kumar.*

in February 2018.

The operational control of Shahid Beheshti port was formally leased to Indian Ports Global Ltd. (IPGL) for a temporary period of 18 months, IRNA quoted Behrouz Aqaei, director general of Sistan-Baluchestan Ports and Maritime Organization, as saying. IPGL's major tasks include loading and unloading operations, procurement, and marketing.

Emphasizing advantages of the International North-South Transport Corridor, Russian economy expert Leonid Khazanov told Trend news agency that the route from Baltic countries to India will reduce time and cost of delivery of goods by 35-40 percent. He added that for practical implementation of the project it is not only necessary to develop the ports of the Caspian Sea, but also accelerate customs clearance.

### Pharmacy industry

Global Summit on Maternal and Child Health care was held in India in December with the presence of a large number of health ministers and Indian pharmaceutical companies. Iranian Minister of Health and Medical Education Hassan Qazizadeh Hashemi attended the three-day summit and pointed out that Tehran must change

its traditional approach of leaning towards European and U.S. companies for buying medicinal drugs.

Referring to India's pharmaceutical capabilities, he said: "A major part of the European and U.S. markets is dominated by Indian pharmaceutical companies." He added that New Delhi is one of the major powers in the field of medicine, raw materials and vaccines.

Qazizadeh Hashemi said constructive talks were exchanged with Indian health minister and CEOs of pharmacy companies in relevant field.

As per the six-month waiver granted by Washington, Indian can buy 300,000 bpd of crude from Iran for the next six months. Iranian oil export funds will now be locked up in escrow accounts that can only be approved for humanitarian purposes including basic commodities and medicine.

### Payment mechanism

In order to make a long-term arrangement both countries need to embark on a mechanism similar to the previous one in 2012, i.e. a rupee/barter trade arrangement.

Quoting sources, Bloomberg reported last month that an alternative mechanism

in India will use escrow accounts of five Iranian banks held with the state owned United Commercial Bank (UCO Ltd.) to deposit money for oil purchases to overcome U.S. sanctions. The payment mechanism will allow India to continue oil purchases despite sanctions as it fulfills Trump's goal to choke money going directly to Iran.

UCO Ltd. Bank Managing Director Atul Kumar Goel on December 18 said: "We already have 15 Iranian bank accounts, out of these five have come under secondary sanctions." He said the remaining 10 are eligible for bilateral trade between India and Iran. A similar arrangement was made in 2012 when 45 percent of the dues were paid into escrow accounts in India of Iranian banks and the remaining settled in euros through an overseas bank.

According to the Financial Tribune, Mohammad Hussein Bani Asadi, director for the Indian Section at the Iranian Foreign Ministry, said following bilateral talks India's Finance Ministry will send a directive to the UCO bank to make the payment mechanism active. The announcement was made on December 19 at the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture with the theme of "India, a Widow Beyond Sanctions". It was attended by the Indian Ambassador Saurabh Kumar and business leaders from the two countries.

Sanctions is nothing new for Islamic Republic's forty year history. Hardship has been one of the characteristics during the post-revolution era. Muslims from all over the world, whether Sunni or Shi'ite, have admired the resilience of the Islamic Republic and the general public during this time.

While President Rouhani presented next year's budget bill to the parliament, he admitted that the "unjust" U.S. sanctions will affect country's lives and growth, but will not bring Iran "to its knees."

## Iraqi PM sheds light on Trump visit after criticism

**➡** According to Abdul-Mahdi, the Americans said the schedule was impossible to change, proposing a phone discussion between the two leaders.

"Iraq's dealing of the U.S. president's visit was based on a principled policy rooted in the will of Baghdad and respect for friendly relations between the two sides," he said.

"Some people are talking about the the existence of a status of forces agreement or SOFA between the United States and Iraq, while we do not have such an agreement with the United States or with any other country on the basis of which the head of a government or commander of the armed forces can visit their base on Iraqi soil [without coordination or permit]," he added.

Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi also touched on the presence of U.S. troops in his country, saying they were there on the request of the Iraqi government.

The Iraqi premier, however, rejected the presence of American bases in Iraq. "Some people have said Trump came to an American military base in Iraq, but that is not the case.

"The United States has no military bases in Iraq. All the military bases are Iraqi. However, American and non-American forces have a presence in some sections of these bases," he added.

(Source: Press TV)

## Video shows bags believed to contain Khashoggi's remains: report

Video footage leaked to Turkish media shows a Saudi hit team in Istanbul carrying bags reportedly containing the remains of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, whose murder sparked an international outcry and jeopardised the kingdom's relations with its Western allies.



The video shows the arrival of some of the members of the team at the Saudi consul-general's residence in Istanbul on the day Khashoggi was killed inside the Saudi consulate, several hundred metres from the residence.

One of the hit team members is seen carrying bags, which according to the Turkish media, may contain body parts of the journalist, who was a critic of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, also known as MBS.

Khashoggi entered the Saudi consulate on October 2 to obtain documents certifying he divorced his ex-wife so he could remarry. He was killed and dismembered inside the consulate, in what Turkey called a "premeditated murder" orchestrated by the Saudi government.

Saudi officials have countered that claim, insisting Khashoggi was killed in a "rogue operation", after initially claiming he had left the building before vanishing. Turkey said the killing was ordered at the highest level of Saudi leadership, implying Prince Mohammed was behind the murder. The kingdom has maintained MBS had no knowledge of the killing.

Saudi authorities last month requested the death penalty for five unnamed suspects in Khashoggi's murder, while 11 suspects were indicted and referred to trial.

Al Jazeera's Sinem Koseoglu, reporting from Istanbul, said the video first aired on Turkish news channel A Haber, which sourced the footage through Ferhat Unlu, a journalist with the investigation unit of the Daily Sabah newspaper.

The publication is known for its close ties to Turkish intelligence and has in the past reported on a series of leaks from the Turkish investigation into the murder of Khashoggi.

The journalist recently released a co-authored book about the killing, titled Diplomatic Atrocity: The Dark Secrets of the Khashoggi Murder. "The reporter said there is no evidence that the luggage carried by the hit team was taken out of the consul's residence. Therefore, we are facing new questions," Koseoglu reported late on Sunday.

"The consul-general's residence was searched, but there was a well that the Saudis did not let the Turkish investigators search properly. These new pictures have changed the course of the investigation," Koseoglu added.

Khalil Jahshan, executive director of the Arab Center Washington, DC, called the release of the video "very significant".

"It adds another layer of the complexity to the continuing investigation in the murder of Khashoggi, in the sense that there is one significant remaining question: where is the body?" he told Al Jazeera.

"Now we have direct evidence showing that a van left the consulate office building, went to the nearby consul-general's house, and you see staff or members of the killing team unloading body bags or black bags of some sort. So, it leaves the impression that Khashoggi's body ended up at the consular's residence and that's what the investigation should focus now, what happened to it there."

On Sunday evening, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu had a phone call with Adel al-Jubeir, Saudi Arabia's former foreign minister and current state minister in charge of foreign affairs. It is not yet clear what was discussed during the call.

Last week, Saudi King Salman replaced Jubeir with Ibrahim al-Assaf, a former finance minister, in the first cabinet reshuffle since the killing of Khashoggi.

"Most probably, the Saudi side would hope that this recent cabinet reshuffle puts an end to the case and relieves Saudi Arabia from this pressure by the Turks and the international community looking for some answers - but it is clear judging from these pictures and judging from the new book that was released just a couple of days ago in Turkey ... that the case is not disappearing, shuffling the cabinet or not shuffling the cabinet," Jahshan said.

"Saudi Arabia needs to come clean, needs to explain the legal process, needs to prove that the people who have been dismissed from office because of their implication in this crime have actually been arrested and are being indicted on charges of murder."

Saudi authorities have said that all members of the hit squad were arrested after returning to the kingdom, but the recently released book cites an unnamed source as saying that Salah al-Tubaigy, the forensic doctor who allegedly dismembered Khashoggi's body, escaped any action.

(Source: al Jazeera)



## Premier League searches for new boss after Dinnage u-turn

Susanna Dinnage, who was due to take charge as new chief executive of the Premier League, has changed her mind and will not be replacing Richard Scudamore after all, the league said on Sunday.

“Despite her commitment to the Premier League in early November, Susanna Dinnage has now advised the Nominations Committee that she will not be taking up the position of Chief Executive,” read the statement.

“The Committee has reconvened its search and is talking to candidates. There will be no further comment until an appointment is made,” concluded the statement.

Executive chairman Scudamore will relinquish his duties at the end of 2018. The Premier League has decided to split his role, with Dinnage lined up to take over as chief executive before her change of heart. Dinnage is currently the global president for Animal Planet at media organisation Discovery Inc. She has previously worked as president for Discovery Networks UK and Ireland.

(Source: Reuters)

## Fulham to take action over Kamara racist abuse

Fulham have vowed to take the “strongest possible action” after striker Aboubakar Kamara was racially abused on social media following his penalty miss against Huddersfield on Saturday.

The Frenchman was strongly criticised by his manager Claudio Ranieri for disobeying orders to hand over penalty duties to Aleksandar Mitrovic. “It is unbelievable, he did not respect me, the club, the team and crowd. I spoke with him, it is not right. I want to kill him,” said Ranieri, despite Mitrovic’s stoppage time winner in a 1-0 victory for the Premier League strugglers.

However, Fulham have promised to support Kamara after he was abused online. “The club will provide all necessary support to Aboubakar and will take the strongest possible action against those identified and responsible for these posts,” a club spokesman said in a statement.

(Source: AFP)

## Lewandowski envisages ending career at Bayern



Bayern Munich forward Robert Lewandowski says he envisages finishing his career with the Bavarian club after this summer’s talk of a possible transfer for the prolific Pole.

“I’m not thinking of changing club. I admit it, this summer it could have been a subject for debate but that’s now all finished,” Lewandowski said in an interview with German sports daily Bild.

“It’s very likely that I’ll stay here for a long time. I identify totally with Bayern,” added the 30-year-old who joined Bayern in 2014 but who was on the radar of both Real Madrid and Chelsea in the summer. Bayern bosses, however, averted a transfer, insisting that last season’s top Bundesliga scorer, with 29 goals, was not for sale. “I have the feeling that since all these rumours and problems were buried, I am once again with all my heart with Bayern, at 100 percent.”

Lewandowski, however, did urge Bayern to sign up some stars to help their bid for a first Champions League trophy since 2013.

The German champions have been linked with a big money move for French World Cup-winning defender Lucas Hernandez from Atletico Madrid.

“It would help us more if one or two world class players join us rather than five good-level players,” he said.

Bayern face a tough draw in Champions League last 16, where they will play Premier League leaders Liverpool, away on February 19 and home on March 13.

(Source: France24)

## Sharapova campaign off to tough start in Shenzhen

Five-time Grand Slam champion Maria Sharapova had a tough start to her 2019 tennis season Monday at the Shenzhen Open, edging out Switzerland’s Timea Bacsinszky 6-2, 7-6 (7/3).

In a battle of former Top 10 players, Sharapova’s serve faltered early in the match but she regained composure to take the first set, cheered on by the spirited crowd at the Shenzhen Longgang Sports Center.

Bacsinszky put up a strong fight in the second set, claiming the first two games and forcing Sharapova to step up her game.

The Russian powered through to take the match in one hour 42 minutes. “It’s been a few months since I’ve been out of playing competitively,” Sharapova said in a post-match interview, calling Shenzhen a “warm-up tournament” for next month’s Australian Open. “Considering the opponent and everything I had to go through today I think it was a great practice for me.”

Sharapova, who won the last of her five Slams at Roland Garros in 2014, has endured a disappointing return to the majors since the end of her drugs ban in April of 2017.

She will next face 17-year-old Chinese wild card Wang Xinyu. Meanwhile, France’s Caroline Garcia lost in straight sets to Serbia’s Ivana Jorovic 6-4, 6-2.

The tournament, which runs until Saturday, will see players battling for \$750,000 in prize money.

(Source: Eurosport)

# Federer and Williams to play against each other for the first time

Tennis greats Roger Federer and Serena Williams will meet on court for the first time at the Hopman Cup on Tuesday when Switzerland face the USA in Perth.

They will play in men’s and women’s singles rubbers before meeting in the mixed doubles alongside partners Belinda Bencic and Frances Tiafoe.

Federer and Williams, both 37, have won a combined 43 Grand Slam titles.

“It is very exciting for both of us and I hope a lot of tennis fans tune in and watch it,” said Federer.

Williams said it was “like a dream come true”. She added: “I have been looking forward to it. This is so cool.”

The match has been described as the most anticipated contest involving a male and female player since the ‘Battle of the Sexes’ in 1973, when 39-time Grand Slam champion Billie Jean King beat former men’s world number one Bobby Riggs in straight sets.

Despite their concurrent careers, Federer said it would be an “exaggeration” to say he knew Williams well.

“I admire everything she’s done on and



off the court, we are both fierce competitors and we always want to win,” he said.

“It is going to be one time, probably never again. She is one of the biggest champions in our sport ever - men and women combined - so it is great to be playing against her.”



The Hopman Cup comprises two singles and a mixed doubles match between nations in a round-robin format with two groups of four. The winners of each group will contest Saturday’s final.

Federer and Bencic beat Britain’s Cameron

Norrie and Katie Boulter in their opening round-robin tie, while the USA lost to Greece on Monday despite Williams winning her singles tie.

Switzerland are the defending champions, Federer and Bencic having won the event in Perth in January 2018.

Meanwhile, organisers have announced that prize money at next month’s Australian Open will rise by 14% to AUSS\$62.5m (£\$34.5m).

There will be a 25% increase for those who lose in the first round: players who reach the main draw are now guaranteed at least AUSS\$75,000 (£41,400).

The singles’ champions will each take home \$4.1m (£2.26m).

The total prize fund has increased by 89% over the past five years.

“We have a responsibility to improve the conditions for all the players, and ensure tennis offers a viable career path, and this means increasing prize money as well as easing the costs associated with playing the Australian Open,” said Australian Open chief Craig Tiley.

(Source: BBC)

## France to extradite African football chief to war crimes tribunal



France will transfer Patrice-Edouard Ngaissona, a member of Africa’s top footballing body, to the International Criminal Court in The Hague where he faces war crimes charges, a court ruled Monday.

Ngaissona, who is from the Central African Republic and sits on the board of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), has been in a jail near Paris since his arrest on December 12.

The one-time sports minister, who is head of the Central African Republic’s football association, was controversially elected to the executive board of the CAF general assembly in February.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued a warrant in December for Ngaissona for allegedly coordinating so-called anti-Balaka militias which emerged after civil war broke out in the Central African Republic in 2013.

The militias, set up to defend Christian communities from mostly Muslim rebels, are accused of a host of human rights abuses including mass killings and mutilations.

The arrest came just weeks after another suspected militia leader -- Alfred Yekatom, known as Rambo -- was detained in the Central African Republic (CAR) and transferred to The Hague.

The decision to extradite Ngaissona was made by magistrates at the court of appeal in Paris.

“I was a spokesman who brought peace to the Central African Republic and not a warlord,” Ngaissona told the court during

a hearing on December 19.

France, the former colonial power, sent 2,000 troops to help stabilise the conflict-torn CAR in 2013 and attempted to detain Ngaissona a year later during an operation in his fiefdom in the north of the capital Bangui.

The ICC considers Ngaissona the “most senior leader and the ‘National General Coordinator’ of the anti-Balaka” and therefore responsible for crimes in several parts of the country.

The alleged crimes include murder, torture, mutilation, intentionally targeting and displacing civilians, pillaging and enlisting child soldiers.

In 2015, Ngaissona was barred from running in presidential elections over concerns about his role in the violence, but has previously said that “everything I’ve done has been for the good of my country”.

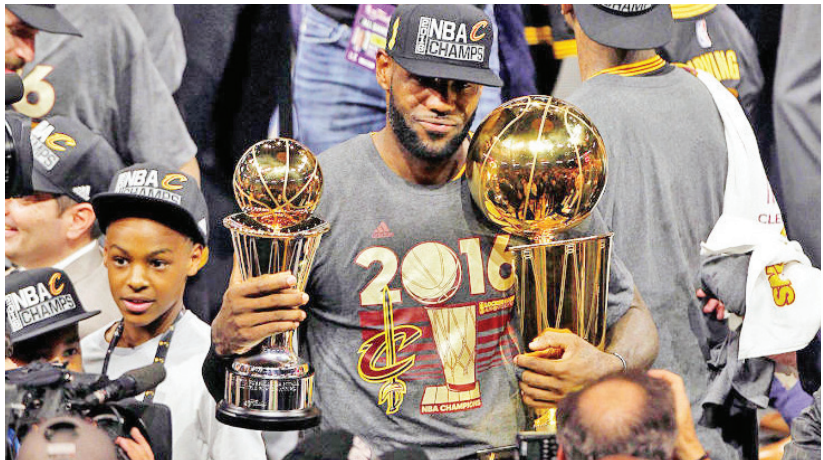
In February, he was elected to the CAF board seat representing eight central African nations. The CAF said his candidacy respected “strict statutory criteria” but noted the body did not have an ethics committee.

“If the allegations were true, I wouldn’t be here today,” Ngaissona told AFP in February, saying he didn’t want “to mix politics and sport”.

The ICC has launched investigations into at least eight African countries since its establishment in 2002, including several into the violence in CAR.

Jean-Pierre Bemba, former vice president of the Democratic Republic of Congo,

## LeBron James declares himself ‘the greatest player of all time’



Basketball’s GOAT debate may still rage on in think pieces, debate shows and bar conversations on a near daily basis, but it’s settled in LeBron James’ head ... and it has been for a few years now.

LeBron is the greatest of all time, according to LeBron.

James apparently came to that conclusion after the 2016 NBA Finals, which were won by his Cleveland Cavaliers. After falling into a three-games-to-one series hole against the mighty Golden State Warriors, LeBron led the Cavs to three straight wins (two of them coming on the road) and recorded a triple-double in the decisive Game 7.

He was the unanimous Finals MVP and, more importantly, he delivered on his promise of bringing a championship to his hometown Cavaliers -- their first in franchise history.

At that point, LeBron was ready to call himself the best ever.

“That one right there made me the greatest player of all time ... that’s what I felt,” LeBron told business partners Maverick Carter, Randy Mims and Rich Paul during an episode of ESPN’s “More Than An Athlete” series that aired Sunday night.

“I was super, super ecstatic to win one for Cleveland because of the 52-year drought. ... The first wave of emotion was when everyone saw me crying, like, that was all for 52 years of everything in sports that’s gone on in Cleveland. And

then after I stopped, I was like -- that one right there made you the greatest player of all time.

“Everybody was just talking -- how [the Warriors] were the greatest team of all time, like it was the greatest team ever assembled,” he said. “And for us to come back, you know, the way we came back in that fashion, I was like, ‘You did, you did something special.’

That’s probably one of the only times in my career I felt like, oh, s---, like you did something special. I haven’t had, really had time, to really, like, sit back and think, but that ... that was a moment.”

LeBron has long been discussed as a candidate to dethrone Michael Jordan as basketball’s greatest of all time, but never before has James himself come out and said that he has surpassed MJ ... until now. Knowing how much LeBron admires and respects Jordan -- he wears No. 23 because of Jordan -- that’s a pretty significant statement.

Of course, it’s one that many people will likely continue to disagree with despite a closing gap in regards to stats and accomplishments.

Jordan still holds the edge in MVP awards (five to LeBron’s four) and, more importantly, NBA titles (six to three) but LeBron has Jordan beat in some other categories -- including All-NBA selections -- and will likely soon pass MJ on the NBA’s all-time scoring leaderboard.

(Source: ESPN)

# Why Liverpool must relish going from hunter to hunted

Liverpool have gone from being the hunter to the hunted and when you get in front you have to enjoy it, not be looking over your shoulder.

There are only two players in the current Liverpool team that have won the Premier League - Daniel Sturridge with Chelsea in 2009-10 and James Milner twice with Manchester City - and experience helps in situations like these, but in Jurgen Klopp they have a manager who is a winner and that is where he will take charge.

Players like defender Virgil van Dijk are at that point in their careers where they are taking ownership for what is ahead for them. They are desperate to win major trophies. After surprise back-to-back defeats against Crystal Palace and Leicester, it was a timely return to form for Manchester City in Sunday’s 3-1 victory at Southampton.

Having the important Fernandinho back in the side after the Brazilian missed those losses is key to them. It felt like City had fallen off a cliff with their form but when you want to reach perfection, that can suddenly happen.

The players have not had to go into the dressing room and run through a defeat for many months and then you have three in four games. It will have hurt them but they have bounced back.

Manager Pep Guardiola spoke about his players being “heroes” before the game, so he has not fallen out with them and understands they can look back on the year and be pleased and proud of what they have achieved.



City needed to beat Southampton and they did that. On 37 minutes when Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg equalised to make it 1-1 the title race was on a knife edge. If City had lost their third game in a row, it would have needed the same to happen to Liverpool for City to get back into it.

There was a little bit more luck for City against Southampton - you have to be a lucky team to be a winning team. They have been hit by thunderbolt goals scored by Andros Townsend for Palace and Ricardo Pereira for Leicester and have not taken their own chances.

But if they can beat Liverpool at Etihad Stadium on Thursday and let them feel the power and the quality they

have, and make them feel second best, that might affect the Merseysiders psychologically in a very big way.

At seven points behind, they are not out of the Premier League title race but they have to win that game.

■ **‘Liverpool have not achieved anything yet’**

Liverpool have started the season superbly, winning 17 and drawing three of their opening 20 league games and conceding just eight goals in that run.

The danger for the Reds is that all these pats on the back and the accolades that come with going top of the table can go to your head a little bit. You become unknowingly complacent. After thrashing Arsenal 5-1, they have to focus their minds on the City clash. They have not got time to get too carried away. Liverpool have not achieved anything yet.

It is about going game to game. I know that sounds boring but that is all you can do, win your battles, the individual duels. The competition from within at Liverpool for starting places is really high. That in itself will concentrate their minds.

Looking at how emphatic Liverpool were against Arsenal on Saturday, it is hard to back against them with the togetherness and belief that was shown by everyone. But we were saying that about City two or three months ago and look what happened then.

I have been in a group at Arsenal when people were saying, ‘you are going to win it’, but within the group there is not the same certainty and there is a feeling of insecurity.

(Source: BBC)



# The first game always the most difficult, says Queiroz

Abu Dhabi: Carlos Queiroz will lead tournament favourites the Islamic Republic of Iran into the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 having instructed his players to focus on winning one game at a time as the nation aims to end a 43-year drought at the Continental championship.

The Portuguese coach leads a squad that leans heavily on the one that represented the country at the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia in the summer, with 18 of the players who impressed against Morocco, Spain and Portugal slated to make the trip to the UAE.

But while the strength in depth of Queiroz's squad has the Iranians marked out as one of the nations fancied to win the title, the former Real Madrid coach claims his focus is solely on his side's opening game against Yemen on January 7 in Abu Dhabi.

"It's the first game and there are no small teams in the first game," Queiroz told the-AFC.com. "Everyone's hopes are open and the challenge is in front of everybody in the first game."

"The first game is always the most difficult game in these kind of competitions because it's everything for the winner and almost nothing for the loser in a short competition of three games. It is a game we need to win, like always. It's a crucial game."

Iran go into the clash as Asia's No. 1 ranked side while Yemen are 26th in Asia and 135th in the world, but Queiroz is wary of the threat posed by Jan Kocian's team and knows his players must be fully focused on the task at hand.

"I was checking the results of the Iran national team in different competitions, at under 17s, under 20s, and never has Iran beaten Yemen in any official competition," he said. "There's a reason for that: Yemen might draw or lose, but Yemen are a tough team to beat."

"When the game starts against Yemen, we need to get rid of the frustrations we have around the team and focus on ourselves. It's about the 11 boys on the pitch that start the game against the Yemen team. It's about the coaching staff, it's about ourselves and we need to go for it."

"We cannot start a game like this in the Asian Cup and think about anything else. It's 90 minutes to play for the people, 90 minutes to play for the joy and happiness and pride of Iran."

Iran have not won the AFC Asian Cup since the third of three consecutive titles in 1976, but the country remains one of the Continent's strongest, with Queiroz leading the nation to back-to-back appearances at the FIFA World Cup for the first time in 2014 and 2018.

And although the country's status among the elite of Asian football is undisputed, the 65-year-old continues



to warn his players against complacency.

"Of course, it is well known and recognised and well appreciated that the Iran national team have made fantastic progress in terms of attitude, organisation and discipline but the biggest mistake that happens around teams is that when you have good moments some people think that it's enough, that we don't need to do anything more," he said.

"They have the wrong perceptions that the other competitors are just sitting at home and watching us, but this is a completely wrong impression because Qatar is working hard, UAE, Saudi Arabia."

"They're working harder because they saw the progress of Iran and they have put huge efforts into coming from behind. Palestine, all these teams, Vietnam. People think this competition is easy, but Vietnam have made fantastic progress over the last few years. They have a great mood in this moment because they have just won an important competition in Southeast Asia."

"We cannot follow on this track, where some peo-

ple think that things are easy for us. It's the opposite, because the people who want to think things are easy in football are just trying to jeopardise our hopes. We will be humble, respect all of our opponents and try to do our best."

With that in mind, Queiroz stresses that it is Yemen rather than who Iran might face at any other stage of the tournament – including the final in Abu Dhabi on February 1 – is uppermost in his mind.

"In these kind of competitions there is no tomorrow if we don't win the present and first of all our Asian Cup final is against Yemen," he said. "I don't care about anything else around us."

"And when we finish the game against Yemen, then it's time to think about Vietnam and after that Iraq. For the moment I want to develop this kind of instinct in my team, to keep all of our energy so that it explodes in the 90 minutes against Yemen. All the rest doesn't count for us."

(Source: the-afc)

## Iran end 2018 as beach soccer second team



**S P O R T S TEHRAN** — Iran national beach soccer team remained in the second place of the World Ranking.

The top five remained unchanged as Brazil still lead the charge, despite Iran closing the gap with last month's success in the Intercontinental Beach Soccer Cup in Dubai, where the Persians won the title after beating Russia.

Behind them Portugal sit in third, with Russia in fourth and Italy remaining in fifth.

Marco Octavio's men are second with 2568 points behind Brazil (3800).

Portugal are in third with 2450 points. Senegal climbed into the top ten to claim 2018's last Movers of the Month title with triumph on the African continent.

Their success in Sharm El Sheikh saw them qualify for the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup 2019 in Paraguay, alongside fellow finalists, Nigeria, who moved up eight places in the World Ranking, ending 2018 in 16th place.

## Iran looking to be among top 10 at 2020 Paralympic Games: official



**S P O R T S TEHRAN** — President of Iran's National Paralympic Committee (NPC) Mahmoud Khosravi Vafa says they are going to be among the top 10 countries in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

Iran delegation finished in 11th place in the 2012 Paralympic Games in London but came 15th at the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio.

After finishing third in the 2018 Asian Para Games, Khosravi Vafa says they are

going to be among the top 10 countries in the next Paralympics.

"We are going to book a place among top 10 countries in Tokyo. Our Para athletes won eight gold medals in Rio and we will be among the top 10 countries if we win 14 gold medals," Khosravi Vafa, who has been president of NPC Iran from 2001, said.

"NPC Iran has no financial problem and we must manage it," he added.

## Asian Cup factbox

**Dec 31 (Reuters)** — Factbox on the 17th Asian Cup tournament, to be held in the United Arab Emirates from Jan.

- The Asian Cup is the pre-eminent football tournament in the vast continent, although it had inauspicious beginnings in 1956 when four teams played a round-robin tournament in Hong Kong, two years after the Asian Football Confederation was formed.

- Hong Kong's Chang Chi Kong scored the competition's first goal in front of 30,000 spectators against Israel, who won the game 3-2. South Korea went on to win the title ahead of Israel with the hosts third and South Vietnam fourth.

- It is the second oldest continental football tournament in the world behind South America's Copa America, which began in 1916.

- The tournament has been dominated by the traditional powerhouses of Asian football with Japan having won the most titles – their fourth coming in a 1-0 victory over Australia in 2011.

- Israel won the title in 1964 and finished third in 1968 but did not take part in Asian competition after 1974 due to political issues with Arab nations. It moved to UEFA in 1994.

- South Korea won the first two tournaments and were losing finalists in 2015.

- Iran won three successive titles from 1968-1976 – their only victories in the competition – and are still the only side to win three successive tournaments. They finished third in 1980.



- Saudi Arabia won successive titles in 1984 and 1988 but were beaten 1-0 by hosts Japan in the 1992 final. The Saudis then won the 1996 title on penalties against hosts UAE.

- Brazil's 1994 World Cup winning coach Carlos Alberto Perreira has won the tournament twice, with Kuwait in 1980 and Saudi Arabia in 1988, and is the only coach to win two titles. UAE coach Alberto Zaccheroni could match him in 2019 having led Japan to their 2011 triumph.

- Iran center forward Ali Daei holds the record for most goals in the tournament, scoring eight times in 1996, four of which were in the 6-2 demolition of South Korea in the quarter-finals. Daei also holds the career record of 14 goals.

## Khademalsharieh claims silver at World Blitz Championship

**S P O R T S TEHRAN** — Sarasadat Khademalsharieh d e s k from Iran claimed a silver medal at the World Blitz Championship on Sunday.

Russian Kateryna Lagno won the Women's Section and repeated her success of 2010. She collected 13.5 points.

Khademalsharieh took the silver with 13 points and the bronze medal went to Chinese Lei Tingjie who scored 12.5 points.

The players with the best combined score also received special rewards. Magnus Carlsen won the prize in the Open Section and Sarasadat Khademalsharieh got it in the Women's Section.

The Iranian chess player had already won a silver medal in the World Rapid Championship on Saturday.

The 2018 King Salman FIDE World Rapid and Blitz Championships took place in St. Petersburg, Russia from December 26th to 30th.

The format was a 21-round Swiss open.

Khademalsharieh won a total of USD 90,000 cash prize in the competitions.



## Team Melli come to Asian Cup with specific motive

Fresh off the back of a second successive FIFA World Cup appearance, Iran will look to start 2019 with a trophy. 'Team Melli' are the second most successful side in the AFC Asian Cup history with three championships and will look to lift their fourth one after a 43-year wait.

With a FIFA top 30 ranking, and two back-to-back World Cup appearances in hand, Iran are one of the best sides in Asia.

Led by former-Real Madrid and Portugal manager Carlos Queiroz, Team Melli almost achieved a historical feat at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia.

Drawn alongside heavyweights Portugal, Spain, and Morocco, Iran were faced with a tough challenge. In the end, the Asian giants finished third in the group, accruing 4 points from their 3 games. Both Portugal and Spain finished just 1 point above Iran to seal their places in the knockout stages of the competition.

Nevertheless, Team Melli is coming into the AFC Asian Cup with a specific motive, to win their fourth championship for which they have had to wait for 43 years. Iran last won the Cup in 1976, when they themselves were the hosts.

To do that, however, Iran will have to face one of their closest rivals Iraq, rising Southeast Asian giants Vietnam, and surprise package Yemen.

(Source: Fox Sports Asia)

## Futsal Awards 2018 announces winners

**MNA** — The 2018 edition of Umbro Futsal Awards announced winners of all 10 categories on early Monday.

Iran had nominees in all ten categories but none managed to achieve most points from international votes.

This was the 19th edition of the most traditional and recognized futsal prizes released by Futsalplanet.com. Futsal experts from all around the world started voting for the nominees from December 10 to 30.

Portugal's Ricardo Filipe da Silva Braga, better known as "Ricardinho", gained a total point of 677 and was named the Best Player in the World. Iran's Hossein Tayebi earned 196 points and ranked 5th.

In the Best National Team category, Iran came 4th with 260 points while Portugal (503), Brazil (411) and Spain (370) stood top.

## Dynamo Kiev eye Iran's Beiranvand: report

**TASNIM** — Ukrainian football club Dynamo Kiev have reportedly shown interest in signing Iran national football team and Persepolis goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand.

Dynamo Kiev wanted to sign Beiranvand in July but the goalkeeper opted to stay since the Iranian giant was banned from signing players until January.

Now, Beiranvand, whose contract with Persepolis runs until 2021, is weighing up his offers in the January transfer window.

Beiranvand represented Iran in three matches in the 2018 World Cup and blocked a penalty kick from Cristiano Ronaldo to deny Portugal a 2-0 lead in Group B.

Beiranvand had also been linked with a move to the professional Turkish football club Caykur Rizespor Kulubu in the country's Super Lig.

He currently is in Iran's training camp in Doha, Qatar to prepare for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup.

## Iran ranks third in West Asia Weightlifting Champs

**IRNA** — Iranian army team ranked third in the West Asia Weightlifting Championship which was held in Bahrain from 29 to 31 December.

The event was held in three categories of youths, juniors and seniors adults in Manama.

Iranian athletes received nine medals in youth category and 8 gold, three silver and one bronze medals in the adult category.

Some 181 athletes from Bahrain, Jordan, Gaza, Palestine, Yemen, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq and Syria participated in the event.

Weightlifting is an athletic discipline in the modern Olympic program in which the athlete attempts a maximum-weight single lift of a barbell loaded with weight plates.



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The insight and judgment of clear-sighted old men in peace is to my mind better and worthier than the patience and steadiness of young and valiant warriors in war.

Imam Ali (AS)

## FIAP execs to hold workshops in Tehran

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Riccardo Busi, the president of the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP) and his assistant Freddy Van Gilbergen will hold workshops in Tehran on January 11.



A combination photo shows FIAP President Riccardo Busi (R), his assistant Freddy Van Gilbergen, and Focus Photo Club director Ali Samei.

The workshops will be organized on selecting and judging photos during international events at the Iranian Academy of Arts, the Focus Photo Club, Iran's branch of FIAP, announced in a press release published on Monday.

Ali Samei, the president of the club Focus Photo Club, is also scheduled to hold a workshop on the same subject.

## Iranian films line up for Dhaka festival

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** – A lineup of 29 Iranian feature and short films are scheduled to go on screen in various sections of the 17th Dhaka International Film Festival, which will be held in the Bangladeshi capital from January 10 to 18.



Saeid pursamimi acts in a scene from "Leaf of Life" by Ebrahim Mokhtari.

"Dressage" by Puya Badkubeh, "Appendix" by Hossein Namazi, "A Bigger Game" by Abbas Namazdust, "Old Road" by Manijeh Hekmat and "Leaf of Life" by Ebrahim Mokhtari are among the films.

The lineup also includes "Azar" by Mohammad Hamzei, "Endless" by Maryam Zahirimehr, "Lina" by Ramin Rasuli, "Hunting Season" by Dariush Yari and "In the Mist" by Pegah Arzi.

"Difference" by Ali Asadollahi, "Buddha's Shame" by Morteza Atash Zamzam and "One Kilogram of Fly's Wings" by Reza Sobhani will also compete in the short film section.

## Luca Novelli's "Hi, I Am Robot" published for Persian readers

**C U L T U R E d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Iran's Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA) announced on Monday that it has published Italian children's book writer Luca Novelli's "Hi, I Am Robot - Hi, I Am" (Ciao, Sono Robot - Ciao, Sono) in Persian.

The IIDCYA has previously acquired the copyright to the book, which translated into Persian by Ali Khakbazan.

The book is the true story of a small robot from a new generation of automata. It has a computer for its brain and is able to see in the dark, do his homework, tidy up the room, protect the house, win chess and even walk on Mars.

The book, which has been released with its original illustrations by Novelli, has been created for children between 9 and 12, the IIDCYA noted.

"Hi, I Am Robot" is one of Novelli's quartet, which includes "Ciao sono Zero", "Ciao, sono Gea", and "Ciao, sono Futura", all published in Persian by the IIDCYA.

# Iranian artists top at Germany's EXILE cartoon contest

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Iranian cartoonists Saman Torabi and Abbas Nasserri took the first and third places respectively at the EXILE International Cartoon Contest in Essen, Germany, the organizers announced on Sunday.

Torabi received the prize for his "Hello Europe" created in 2015.

Anne Derenne from Spain won second prize in the contest, which is also known as A place. Somewhere -

International Cartoon Competition.

The contest is organized on refugees and migrants every year by EXILE-Kulturkoordination – a non-profit organization for intercultural and international projects in the fields of education and culture.

The organization holds the competition in collaboration with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and several other institutions, including Engagement Global, a German non-profit limited organization that supports and strengthens the developmental commitment of the civil society.

The winners were selected from among 671 submissions by 319 cartoonists from 64 countries.

A selection of the works will put on display in a traveling exhibition.

Photo: Iranian cartoonist Saman Torabi's "Hello Europe" won first prize at the EXILE International Cartoon Contest in Essen, Germany.



A poster for Book City's program "A Day with Salinger".

## Iran's Ammar filmfest honors jailed Nigerian Shia leader Ibrahim Zakzaky

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Jailed Nigerian Shia leader Ibrahim Zakzaky was honored during the opening ceremony of the 9th Ammar Popular Film Festival (APFF) at Tehran's Andisheh Hall on Sunday.

A Zakzaky's daughter attended the ceremony and received a Golden Lantern of the event on behalf of her father after screening the video "The Khomeini of Africa" about the leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria who has been jailed since 2015.

She received the award from filmmaker Nader Talebzadeh who is the president of the festival, which was established by a number of Iranian revolutionary figures to take a global view of cultural, socio-economic, environmental and political issues that may endanger peace, freedom and



Daughter of Nigerian Shia leader Ibrahim Zakzaky holds a Golden Lantern she received from the 9th Ammar Popular Film Festival (APFF) on behalf of her father at Tehran's Andisheh Hall on December 30, 2018. (Mehr/Asghar Khamseh)

## "Aquaman" stays strong with \$51.5 million in second weekend

**LOS ANGELES (Variety)** — "Aquaman" easily retained its reign in North America for the second weekend in a row, dominating box office charts with \$51.5 million from 4,125 locations.

That marks a decline of just 24 percent from its opening weekend of \$72 million and brings the DC superhero tentpole past \$188 million in the states. Since it's a busy time of year for moviegoing, "Aquaman" will likely cross \$200 million by New Year's and could become Warner Bros.' biggest film of 2018. Overseas, the movie, directed by James Wan and starring Jason Momoa, has surpassed \$560 million.

There was enough holiday cheer at multiplexes to spread the wealth. Disney's "Mary Poppins Returns" held the No. 2 spot with \$28 million, a solid uptick of 28 percent to take ticket sales just shy of \$100 million. Globally, the musical has amassed \$173 million.

Paramount's "Bumblebee" landed in third place again, picking up \$21 million from 3,550 venues, a small 3 percent drop. The "Transformers" origin story with Hailee Steinfeld has made \$67 million through Sunday.

Meanwhile, a pair of Christmas Day releases — "Vice" and "Holmes and Watson" — are neck in neck for sixth place. The former, Adam McKay's Dick Cheney biopic, generated \$7.8 million for a domestic haul of \$17.7 million. That's a middling result for

a movie that cost Annapurna \$60 million to produce before accounting for marketing costs. The latter, "Holmes and Watson," a comedy starring Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly, brought in \$7.3 million during the three-day stretch and \$19.8 million since Tuesday. The good news, for the comedy at least, is its Rotten Tomatoes score has jumped from 0 percent to 9 percent. The bad news is Columbia Pictures shelled out \$42 million to make the absurd take on Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

Not falling far behind is STX and Jennifer Lopez's "Second Act." The romantic comedy saw a gain this weekend, up 11% with \$7.2 million for a domestic cume of \$21.7 million.

DreamWorks and Universal's "Welcome to Marwen" continues to have a bleak holiday, dropping to No. 14 with \$2.23 million in its second outing. Robert Zemeckis directed the drama starring Steve Carell as a man who attempts to overcome his PTSD. It's made just \$7.7 million, branding it as one of this year's biggest flops. The movie, based on the 2010 documentary "Marwencol," carries a \$40 million price tag and stands to lose the studio over \$45 million when marketing and distribution costs are considered.

A number of holdovers rounded out the top five. Sony's "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse" nabbed fourth place, amassing \$18 million in its third week of release. The latest big-screen adaptation

of Marvel's web-slinging hero, which has received high praise from critics and fans alike, just crossed the \$100 million mark in North America.

Fifth place went to Warner Bros.' "The Mule" with \$11.7 million from 2,787 theaters for a domestic tally of \$60 million. Clint Eastwood directed and starred in the drama, which saw a 24 percent hike this weekend.

At the specialty box office, Participant Media's "On the Basis Of Sex" pocketed \$690,000 from 33 screens. Felicity Jones portrays a young Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the biopic, which launched on Christmas Day and has since made \$1.5 million. It secured the best screen-average of the weekend with \$20,877 per venue. The studio plans to expand to 100 theaters next weekend.

"Audiences across the country truly love the movie — exit polls are in the mid-90s — clearly showing the film's sheer entertainment power," said Lisa Bunnell, Focus Features' president of distribution. "As a woman heading up a studio's distribution team, a part of our industry that has traditionally been filled by men for decades. I can't help but watch this film and know that Ruth's work help make that possible."

Annapurna and Nicole Kidman's "Destroyer" also debuted on Christmas Day and took in \$58,472 from three locations for a domestic total of \$116,000. It scored the second-biggest screen average of the

weekend with \$19,491.

Elsewhere, Sony Pictures Classics' "Stan and Ollie," a biographical drama about comedic duo Stan Laurel and Ollie Hardy, brought in \$79,674 million from five screens for an average of \$15,935.

A handful of awards hopefuls got a boost over the holiday frame. Annapurna's "If Beale Street Could Talk" earned \$759,579 when it added 60 locations. Barry Jenkins wrote and directed the film based on James Baldwin's book, and it's made \$1.9 million in its platform release.

Focus Features' "Mary Queen of Scots" also saw an increase in ticket sales with \$2.6 million from 841 theaters in its fourth outing for a North American haul of \$9 million.

Another royal costumed drama, "The Favourite," brought in \$2.4 million from 809 locations. Yorgos Lanthimos directed the Fox Searchlight film starring Olivia Colman, Emma Stone, and Rachel Weisz. It just crossed \$15 million at the domestic box office.

Revenues in North America dropped 5.2 percent compared to the same weekend in 2017, according to Comscore, though that's because last year benefited from the release of "Star Wars: The Last Jedi." Even so, the domestic market is up almost 7 percent from last year and over 4 percent from 2016's record bounty. As of this weekend, ticket sales have surpassed \$11.8 billion.



Nov. 16, 2017 file photo of Dame June Whitfield after she was made a dame. British actress and comedic star June Whitfield, whose long career included memorable roles in TV series "Absolutely Fabulous" and "Terry and June," has died. She was 93. (Jonathan Brady/PA Wire/PA via AP, File)

boozy character Edina introduced Whitfield to fans who hadn't been born when she started on radio decades earlier.

Fellow "Ab Fab" stars Saunders and Joanna Lumley praised Whitfield for the warmth and wit she brought to the hugely popular show.

"I will always be grateful that she agreed to be in Ab Fab and even more grateful that she became a dear friend," Saunders said in a statement. "She lived and worked with an extraordinary grace."

Lumley said she was "heartbroken to lose such a darling friend."

Whitfield's father was a telephone company executive and her mother an amateur actress. She once told The Telegraph newspaper she knew very early

in life she wanted to be a performer.

"There was never one moment when I decided," she said. "I went to dancing classes and elocution classes and the appeal was simply that I loved it all."

She trained at London's renowned Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and started her career in radio comedy in the 1950s, moving into TV as the new medium eclipsed radio.

She received dozens of honors, including being made a "Dame," the female equivalent of a knighthood. She received the honor from Prince Charles in a Buckingham Palace ceremony in 2017.

Her husband Tim Aitchison died in 2001. She is survived by their daughter, the actress Suzy Aitchison.